
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

THE FUNDACION JOHN BOULTON

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The Fundación John Boulton was established in 1950 as a privately funded institution sponsored by the Casas Boulton of Caracas, Valencia, and Maracaibo. For many years, the Fundación functioned in the Villa Espalmador in El Paraíso, but it has recently moved to new quarters in Torre El Chorro, Avenida Universidad, in the center of Caracas.¹ Founded to facilitate research on the history and culture of Venezuela, the Fundación has assembled a strong collection covering the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, the collection is constantly being augmented by purchases, exchanges, and donations of additional material. The material available in the Fundación is found in the library, in the various archives, and in two museums.

The Fundación Library

The library is composed of some nine thousand volumes, with particular emphasis on historical works, culture, and the social sciences. Two special collections exist within the library: the Biblioteca Venezolanista Lord Eccles and the Biblioteca Imaginaria del Libertador. The Biblioteca Venezolanista Lord Eccles contains more than five hundred volumes, most of which relate to exploration and travel in the New World and many of which are first editions. The majority of the books were published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and concern the areas of the Caribbean and Gran Colombia. The

Biblioteca Imaginaria del Libertador is a growing collection of books, in editions of the period, that influenced the thought of Simón Bolívar. The goal of the collection is to create what might have been his personal library.

Another important part of the library is the collection of pamphlets and leaflets, particularly strong for the nineteenth century. Some four thousand items comprise this collection, and each has been carefully catalogued, although the only access for leaflets is by place of publication. The library also began a newspaper clipping file in 1965, which now includes some twenty-five thousand items from Caracas newspapers. These items are indexed by subject.

The library's periodical collection emphasizes the areas of history and culture. The newspaper holdings are of particular importance for nineteenth-century history and include more than four hundred titles, many of which were ephemeral publications. The collection includes important runs of the *Gaceta del Gobierno* (Caracas, 1829–31), the *Gaceta de Venezuela* (Caracas, 1831–47), the *Gaceta Oficial* (Caracas, 1879–), *El Porvenir* (Caracas, 1863–66), and *El Comercio* (La Guaira, 1859–60). The library also contains a complete run of the *Niles Weekly Register* (Baltimore, 1811–30) and a microfilm copy of the press clipping file of the Committee of Venezuelan Bondholders, which was made from the originals in the Guildhall Library in London.

Archives

The Fundación owns more than three hundred thousand documents dating from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. They are organized into several separate archives.

Archivo de la Casa Boulton / This collection is the mercantile archive of the various Boulton firms that are now collectively known as the Casas Boulton. Established in La Guaira in 1826 by the Englishman John Boulton, the firm specialized in the import-export trade, principally between Venezuela and the United States but with increasing European connections after 1860. Subsequent expansion of the firm (prior to 1940) brought about the establishment of branch houses in Puerto Cabello (which later moved to Valencia) and in Maracaibo.² The parent firm moved to Caracas in 1870, leaving an agency in La Guaira. This archive includes a wide variety of account books, letter books, and loose documents. They cover the period between 1841 and 1940, with some exceptions.³ The account books include journals and ledgers as well as records of sales, stocks, orders, and cash transactions. The letter books include international correspondence, correspondence between partners in the firm, and letters sent to other persons and firms in Venezu-

ela. The documents exceed fifteen thousand and include letters, credits, contracts, and loans. About two-thirds of these documents have been completely indexed, and the rest are being catalogued. The material preserved in this archive is of great interest to economic and political historians because of the leading role played by the Casa Boulton in mercantile affairs and its frequent government-related activities.

Archivo Guzmán Blanco / Antonio Guzmán Blanco, the leading political figure in Venezuela between 1870 and 1888, enjoyed significant influence as well during the 1860s. This archive contains tens of thousands of documents, dating from the late 1840s until his death in 1899. Most of the material is correspondence, but it also includes many government and business papers that illuminate the political and economic life of the country during these critical years. The collection is currently being catalogued by means of a computer, which will significantly facilitate access to the individual documents.⁴

Archivo de Sir Robert Ker Porter / The British diplomatic representative in Venezuela between 1825 and 1842, Porter was an acute observer of the Venezuelan scene who conveyed many of his observations in his copious correspondence with his sister, Jane. The seven thousand folios of his papers contribute greatly to the diplomatic, political, and social history of the period. A detailed chronological and alphabetical index exists but there is no access by subject matter.

Archivo Bolivariano / This collection includes more than five hundred documents, some originals but most copies (although a number of the copies date from the lifetime of Simón Bolívar). It also contains a wide variety of secondary material such as pamphlets.

Archivo Histórico de la Fundación John Boulton / This archive includes all manner of documentary material that has been collected or donated over the years. It contains some papers of Antonio José de Sucre, José Antonio Páez, Juan Crisóstomo Falcón, and others. It also contains a beautifully decorated document of "limpieza de sangre," hacienda deeds, and many other kinds of documents. Although arranged in files, it has not yet been catalogued.

Archivo de la Sección Venezolana del Archivo de la Gran Colombia / This archive contains some two hundred thousand documents relating to Venezuela, mainly between 1810 and 1830. The documents were micro-filmed in the Archivo Nacional de Colombia. A succinct index to the collection was published by the Fundación in 1960 and serially published in its *Boletín Histórico*.

Archivo Fotográfico / This collection, which is not yet fully organized, consists of original photographs dating from the late nineteenth century up to about 1950. It also includes photographic reproductions of a variety of Venezuelan-related art works.

Museums

The Fundación also maintains two museums that afford a different perspective on Venezuelan history and culture. The Museo Histórica de La Guaira, established in 1970, is housed in a restored colonial mansion that served as the firm's headquarters in the nineteenth century. This museum is dedicated to the history of La Guaira and is located in the colonial area of that port. The Museo de la Fundación John Boulton has just been inaugurated as an integral part of the Fundación's new quarters in Caracas. It contains paintings, porcelain, furniture, and other objects of artistic or historical value, most of which were collected by Aristides Rojas and the Boulton family. Of particular note is the area dedicated to Simón Bolívar, which features rare paintings and drawings made from life.

Publications

The Fundación has published forty-seven issues of the *Boletín Histórico* and more than thirty other works, among them *Materiales para la historia de la cultura en Venezuela (1523–1828)* by Enrique Marco Dorta; *Las perlas del Caribe: Nueva Cadiz de Cubagua* by Enrique Otte; *Política y economía en Venezuela, 1810–1976* (a collection of articles written to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Casa Boulton), and *Venezuela y los Estados Unidos (1810–1888)* by Benjamin A. Frankel, published in honor of the U.S. bicentennial. All publications have been temporarily suspended due to the relocation of the Fundación, but they are expected to resume during 1985.

Research Facilities

The Fundación provides service to its users between 7:30 A.M. and 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday. Special permission is required to consult the archival material on deposit in the Fundación. Photocopying services are provided within reason. The Fundación also continues to provide affiliation for scholars from abroad. Among the independent research projects currently being undertaken with materials in the Fundación are a study of mercantile credit from 1830 to 1870, government loans and the mercantile community in the nineteenth century, the impact of British investment in the last third of the nineteenth

century, a history of the La Guaira Harbor Corporation, and a study of the consumption and prices of wheat and bread in Caracas in the 1860s. The personnel of the Fundación will be pleased to answer specific inquiries about research materials and facilities.

NOTES

1. The mailing address of the Fundación has not changed. It remains Apartado Postal 929, Caracas 1010-A, Venezuela.
2. Most of the Maracaibo material is still in Maracaibo.
3. The post-1940 material is not available to researchers.
4. The Archivo Guzmán Blanco, which is on deposit in the Fundación, is not the complete Guzmán Blanco archive.