

# HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA\*

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*Abstract: Despite the significance of the Panama Canal in the maritime economy, the Republic of Panama has not yet been studied adequately, particularly its domestic archives. After a critique of existing historical writing on major Panamanian topics, problems, and deficiencies, this research note provides a brief history of the national archives in Panama and the most significant private collections. The coverage identifies the contents, subdivisions, and shortcomings of these archives as well as finding aids and catalogues. It also describes the most relevant published sources on the history of the Isthmian Republic, including government publications, periodicals and newspapers, and compilations.*

Sometime during the latter days of Columbian rule, Dr. Belisario Porras, a lawyer, watched from the window of his office in Panama City as documents were flung from a government building into the sea. These old documents were considered useless. For the government official who committed these papers to the deep, it was good riddance and a relief. Porras observed that he went about his task “¡Tranquilamente! ¡Alegremente! ¡Buenamente!”<sup>1</sup>

Years later, after Porras had reached the highest office that the newly founded Republic of Panama could bestow, one of his first official acts as president was to introduce a bill establishing the Panamanian Archivos Nacionales. It was passed into law by the Asamblea Nacional in December 1912. These first efforts enabled Panama to begin to collect, sort, and make available to posterity the history of its political development.

## PANAMA IN HISTORICAL WRITINGS

The persisting view that Panamanian history has been largely neglected can no longer be fully justified. An abundance of historical publi-

\*This research note was translated from German by Christel K. Converse.

1. Belisario Porras, “Los Archivos Nacionales” in Porras, *Trozos de vida: Impresiones* (Panama City: Editora de la Nación, 1975; first edition, San José, C.R.: 1931), 148.

cations testifies to Panamanians' determination to explore their history.<sup>2</sup> Noticeable gaps in historical research remain, however.

Many Panamanian studies have lamented Panama's complete political and economic dependence on the United States without addressing the contributing factors of national policies (foreign, economic, and internal), and they consequently have added little to general understanding of the history of the country. This is especially true of studies that fail to raise questions as to what extent, in which ways, and toward what ends such foreign control was exercised. Panamanian historiography has also tended toward normative debates in analyzing its national history, a result of the discipline's affinity for practical politics. Political positioning gains here at the expense of analytical keenness.<sup>3</sup> Even well-known Panamanian historians prefer secondary sources to research in local archives.<sup>4</sup>

As a rule, U.S. historiography is more balanced and more reliable in its sources than the Panamanian body of work. But U.S.-based studies of Panamanian history tend, with few exceptions,<sup>5</sup> to be outsiders' views that hardly consider the Panamanian perspective. It is precisely here that questions should be raised about the endogenous factors of the dependent relationship, the interests of the elites and their factions, and public opinion.

In examining the historical literature, it also becomes obvious that U.S. historians often ignore Spanish-language documents and literature.<sup>6</sup>

2. Eleanor DeSelms Langstaff, *Panama*, World Bibliography Series no. 14 (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Clio, 1982). See also Thomas M. Leonard, *Panama, the Canal, and the United States: A Guide to Issues and References* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina, 1993). The numerous historical theses (*tesis de licenciatura*) completed at the Universidad Nacional de Panamá vary in quality but are often helpful to researchers using newspaper archives or government publications. The theses' shortcoming is their inaccessibility. Copies are available only in the Sala de Tesis of the Universidad de Panamá.

3. Ernesto Castellero Pimentel, *Política exterior de Panamá: Los objetivos de nuestra política exterior, los instrumentos o medios para lograrlos y las bases generales del nuevo tratado que debe la República de Panamá negociar con los Estados Unidos de América*, 3d ed. (Panama City: privately printed, 1972). For major references, see also Xabier Gorostiaga, *Geopolítica de la crisis regional: Apuntes sobre el marco estratégico de la alternativa regional para Centroamérica y el Caribe* (Managua: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales, 1984). On economic history, see David Turner Morales, *Estructura económica de Panamá: El problema del Canal* (Mexico City: América Nueva, 1958).

4. See, for example, Ernesto Castellero Pimentel, *Panamá y los Estados Unidos, 1903–1953* (Panama City: Humanidad, 1953); Jorge Conte Porras, *Requiem por la revolución* (Panama City: Imprenta LIL, 1990); and Celestino Andrés Araúz, *Panamá y sus relaciones internacionales*, 2 vols.: (Panama City: Editorial Universitaria, 1994).

5. Such exceptions are John and Mavis Biesanz, *The People of Panama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), which stresses the phase after the coup of 1968; and Steve C. Ropp, *Panamanian Politics: From Guarded Nation to National Guard* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982).

6. An example is the study by John Major, *Prize Possession: The United States and the Panama Canal, 1903–1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Conversely, Panamanian authors tend to use only the foreign literature that has been translated into Spanish. It is not surprising that historians in both groups talk past each other because they ignore each other's work. Research on Panama requires synthesis, which should also include the European literature on the country.

#### ARCHIVES ON THE HISTORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

A considerable portion of the sources on Panamanian history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is stored in archives in the United States, particularly in the National Archives. Spread throughout various Record Groups, the major holdings are found in the National Archives at the Washington, D.C., location in the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) and the Military Intelligence Division (MID) as well as in the National Archives facility in College Park, Maryland. The latter contain diplomatic correspondence<sup>7</sup> and military archival holdings.<sup>8</sup>

Additional materials can be found in the Manuscript Division of the U.S. Library of Congress. For example, the Bunau Varilla Papers are stored next to microfilm collections of the Presidential Papers (the originals of which are distributed throughout the United States). These documents have been little used, although they are occasionally mentioned in bibliographical references.

Other holdings in the United States will be not be discussed here. But the work of John Major should be mentioned. He spent ten years examining U.S. sources on Panama, which he used in writing *Prize Possession: The United States and the Panama Canal, 1904–1979*. The appendix of his opus magnum details the sources and their locations.

The single general report on the historical sources housed in the Republic of Panama is now obsolete to some degree and should be updated.<sup>9</sup> The present overview, however, does not claim completeness because numerous Panamanian holdings of documents are in private hands, a situation that impedes access. Moreover, the unclassified condition of the documents makes effective research impossible within a limited period.

7. Available on microfilm are the *U.S. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Panama, 1910–1929*, on which the National Archives provide a detailed pamphlet. Corresponding film series also exist for 1930–1940 and 1940–1950. Less extensive are the Records of the U.S. Department of State on political relations between the United States and Panama and Records of the U.S. Department of State on political relations between Panama and other states.

8. A publication listing holdings on Latin America is *Guide to Materials on Latin America in the National Archives of the United States*, compiled by George S. Ulibarri and John P. Harrison (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1974), reprinted in 1987. Unfortunately, the section on Panama is not very informative.

9. Christopher Ward and Richard J. Junkins, "Panamanian Historical Sources," *LARR* 21, no. 3 (1986):129–36.

*The Archivos Nacionales*

Three goals were established in 1912 for the new Archivos Nacionales: centralization of the holdings of national documents, administration of them in an accessible manner, and preservation of the materials. The last goal was paramount in a tropical climate with high humidity and excellent conditions for mildew.

President Porras, in one of his last official acts, dedicated the building currently housing the Archivos Nacionales on 15 August 1924.<sup>10</sup> As has been pointed out, it was the first archive on the American continent built for the sole purpose of serving as a national archive.<sup>11</sup>

In the absence of a complete inventory of the holdings, a rudimentary archival guide is available in the reading room.<sup>12</sup> In 1941 the administration of President Arnulfo Arias regulated the extant organization of the holdings by means of a law.<sup>13</sup> Three sections were retained, the first being the Dirección General. The second section, Sección Jurídica, contains the Archivos de la Corte Suprema, the Archivos de los Tribunales Superiores, the Archivos de los Juzgados, and the Archivos de las Notarías. The third section is the Sección Administrativa, which contains the records of the ministries and those of national, provincial, and municipal administrations.

Incoming material was arranged according to its origin, which resulted in corresponding subclassifications. For example, in the Sección Jurídica, the following four subsections were established:

El Grupo Civil on civil law covers records of marriages, divorces, and employment, including more than 125,000 *expedientes* (files) from the years prior to 1916.

El Grupo Penal covers criminal law, with total holdings prior to 1958 estimated at 56,000 records.

El Grupo Notarías of notary records has more than 100,000 notary protocols in 3,500 volumes for just the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

El Grupo Tierras is apparently the contents of land registers, including more than 12,000 *expedientes* dating from 1919 to 1958.

In the Sección Administrativa, the following three subsections were set up:

El Grupo Papeles de la Epoca Colonial contains primarily typed and handwritten copies as well as photocopies and a few original documents.

10. The Archivo Nacional is located at Apartado 6618, Panamá 5, República de Panamá.

11. "Inauguración de los Archivos Nacionales," *Revista Lotería* (published in Panama City), no. 51 (Aug. 1945):12–14.

12. Guadalupe Velarde de Espósito and Oscar A. Velarde B., "El Archivo Nacional de Panamá, Panama City," tesis de licenciatura, Universidad de Panamá, 1969–1970.

13. Ley 16 of 20 Feb. 1941. This law also contains the change of name from the plural Archivos Nacionales to the singular Archivo Nacional.

14. Velarde and Velarde, "Archivo Nacional," 91.

These papers resulted from various historical research missions in the Spanish archives in Seville and Simancas, efforts initiated by the government of Panama. But the copied holdings from the Archivo General de Indias in Seville<sup>15</sup> are incomplete and subject to mistakes in transcription.<sup>16</sup>

El Grupo Archivo del Período Colombiano, consisting of volumes of records numbered from 1 to 3,300 but without obvious criteria as to their order.<sup>17</sup> They total more than half a million documents.

El Grupo Archivo de la Presidencia, continuous holdings of the documents of the presidents of the republic.<sup>18</sup> This section, established in 1959 during a reorganization, offers a mimeographed finding aid (*guía*). But the total holdings of the papers of the various Panamanian presidents are little more than a hodgepodge of leftovers from the presidential offices and the ministries, with inexplicable gaps for the early period of the republic. A single *legajo* exists for the first president of the republic, Manuel Amador Guerrero (1904–1908), and none for his successors in office prior to 1920. Only two *legajos* exist for two presidential administrations during the following decade. The holdings do not increase until the 1930s. One cannot truly speak of a presidential archive in the Sección Administrativa until the early 1940s.<sup>19</sup> The heads of state, with one exception,<sup>20</sup> considered their official papers to be their personal property and never turned them over to a public archive, usually for definite reasons. In fortunate cases, the papers passed into the hands of a member of the family. Panamanian historical studies have utilized these private holdings only sporadically. No inventories have been created, nor have researchers urged that the documents be transferred to the national archive. In this respect, the historians of the Republic of Panama have not fulfilled their obligation to the national historical project.

The Dirección General contains 22 *legajos* of material on Panama's

15. The first document originated during the period of exploration: "Obligación juramento y pleito-homenaje que se mandó hacer a Pedrarias Dávila cuando fué proveído para Castilla del Oro, Valladolid, 18 de agosto 1513." For the AGI collections, see the government publication entitled "Panamá en el Archivo de Indias," *Memoria del Secretario de Gobierno y Justicia, año 1926* (Panama City: Imprenta Nacional, 1926), 301–28.

16. Velarde and Velarde, "Archivo Nacional," 66. For an internal guide to these holdings, see Juan B. Sosa, "Índice de documentos del Archivo de Indias de Sevilla referentes a la historia de Panamá (1513–1818)," manuscript.

17. Velarde and Velarde criticize the collection as "sin método o plan alguno definido," in "Archivo Nacional," 61. But they also note a four-volume "utilísimo inventario" for locating documents.

18. For this group, there is the "Guía del Archivo de la Presidencia de la República."

19. The presidential papers of Arnulfo Arias are extensive but rather disorganized. He served as president of his country three times (in 1940–1941, 1949–1951, and 1968). Each time he was overthrown and given no chance to secure his presidential papers, which is the reason that they ended up in the Archivo Nacional.

20. The exception is jurist Ricardo J. Alfaro. But because no other president at the time wanted to follow his example, the director of the archive, Juan Antonio Susto, returned everything to Alfaro.

independence.<sup>21</sup> In addition, one finds records of Panamanian consulates, several protocols of debates of the Asamblea Nacional, and ministerial material. Also included is an inventory of *tomos* of bound documents for the twentieth century, especially the first decade.<sup>22</sup> Some of them concern the armed forces during the first year of independence. Less important records in national politics include the correspondence of *alcaldes* or local officials.

Thanks to the extremely active director of the archive, historian Patricia Pizzurno de Araúz, the institution experienced a resurgence in the early 1990s. Several valuable projects were begun: a newspaper archive (*hemeroteca*), microfilming (for which the German Embassy provided the equipment), and other plans for modernization. They unfortunately languished after the director left because of lack of official support.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Archivo Porras*

Belisario Porras, the father of the national archive, was well aware of the deficiencies of state administration of the archives and had no confidence in the very institution that he had created. He kept original documents that passed through his hands or made copies for his private archive. After his death in 1942, his papers remained in the possession of his widow for many years until a young historian named Manuel Octavio Sisnett<sup>24</sup> used this archive to write a biography of President Porras. Sisnett also undertook transferring the complete archive to the library of the Universidad de Panamá. The rudimentary thematic and chronological classification initiated by Porras was retained.

After Sisnett became dean of the Facultad de Humanidades of the Universidad de Panamá, he supervised the archive personally. In the Escuela de Geografía e Historia, he assigned several dozen undergraduate theses (*tesis de licenciatura*) to students that required them to research thematically and chronologically limited areas of the Porras Papers. His goal was to generate synopses of the various documents based on systematic guidelines. Most of the politically significant areas have now been catalogued. Even so, use of these synopses, while time-saving in individual cases, cannot substitute for looking through the originals themselves. Sis-

21. Velarde and Velarde, "Archivo Nacional," 126.

22. Archivo Nacional, "Inventario de los documentos del período republicano, 1903/04 en adelante," typescript, Panama City, 1989.

23. Patricia Pizzurno de Araúz, *Guía del Archivo Nacional de Panamá* (Panama City: Imprenta Nacional, [1991]), 6. Under her direction, the Instituto Nacional de Cultura (INAC) also issued *Consulta: Órgano Informativo del Archivo Nacional*, a periodical that appeared for three years but was discontinued after she retired.

24. Manuel Octavio Sisnett, *Belisario Porras o la vocación de la nacionalidad*, 2d ed. (Panama City: Imprenta Nacional, 1972). This work is the only biography of a Panamanian president written thus far that meets the criteria of historical research.

nett's students lacked archival experience and the ability to read English and sometimes had only limited historical training. They therefore could not always determine the historically correct chronological placement of a document. At times the context of a subject was misunderstood, to be expected if the student organizer checked only the foreign policy documents of a specific year during Porras's presidency.

The Archivo Porras, attached to the busy Instituto del Canal de Panamá y Estudios Internacionales of the Universidad de Panamá, has been organized in thematic series based on their origin in the various ministries. Subordinated departments are usually separated into further subseries.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Archivo Ricardo J. Alfaro*

Another important presidential archive is the Archivo Ricardo J. Alfaro.<sup>26</sup> The archive contains almost exclusively the papers of Ricardo Alfaro, who played significant roles in the history of Panama as government secretary, foreign minister, ambassador to the United States for many years, and acting president (1931–1932). He was also a jurist, a linguist, a journalist, and a historian.<sup>27</sup> At present, Alfaro's archival legacy is being arranged and catalogued to conform to modern international standards, although still based on the criteria of classification set by the meticulous jurist Alfaro. Even in this intermediate condition, the Archivo Alfaro is already one of the best in the country.<sup>28</sup>

Establishment of this archive was preceded by a prolonged struggle among various members of the Alfaro family. The branch of the family living in the United States wanted to leave the papers to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The Panamanian branch of the family countered in the political arena and, after several attempts, succeeded in having leg-

25. For example, there is a special section entitled "Guerra con Costa Rica," consisting of twelve volumes. See Instituto del Canal de Panamá y Estudios Internacionales, Universidad de Panamá, Archivo Porras, Secretaría de Gobierno y Justicia, series 5–04, a unique documentary basis for a yet-to-be-written monograph on the Coto War in 1921. The archive provides a useful albeit incomplete index of persons, locations, and subjects based on the licenciatura theses.

26. Although the collection of documents is formally part of the Archivo Nacional, it remains in the Edificio Hispania, Calle Colombia y Calle 44, Apartamento 4. This building is the former residence of R. J. Alfaro, located across from the Parque Urraca. The curator is Iván Alfaro, son of the former president. The address is Apartado 4537, Panamá 5, República de Panamá.

27. See "Curriculum vitae, Dr. Ricardo J. Alfaro, 1882–1971," *Revista Lotería*, no. 317 (Aug. 1982):3–30. It features a biographical appendix on Alfaro with 266 entries, a list that does not claim to be complete.

28. A mimeographed report on the history, holdings, and classification of the archive provides useful information. See "Archivo Ricardo J. Alfaro," edited by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura (INAC) and the Fundación Ricardo J. Alfaro, 1995.

isolation passed declaring the legacy to be *patrimonio nacional* that could not be removed from Panama.<sup>29</sup>

The holdings of the Archivo Alfaro are divided into sixteen series, with the material in each one arranged chronologically. The archive contains in bound volumes Alfaro's personal documents (series 1) and correspondence (series 2) as well as the records of his presidency from 1931 to 1932 (series 3). Another significant series concerns Alfaro's presidential candidacy in 1940 and his defeat by government candidate Arnulfo Arias (series 4). Material pertaining to diplomatic treaties with the United States is deposited in series 5 (the original documents are part of the archive of the foreign ministry). Also of importance are the records of Alfaro's activities in the United Nations and the Organization of American States as well as his collected writings.

#### *The Archivo Harmodio Arias*

The private archive of President Harmodio Arias Madrid (1932–1936) contains approximately one hundred volumes, most of them focusing on his presidency.<sup>30</sup> The archive is part of the family estate. Despite its large size, the archive is incomplete except for the last year of his presidency (October 1935 to September 1936). The president's correspondence with his ministries, the provinces, and the officials of the Canal Zone seems to be complete from September 1934 to the end of his term two years later.

Events at the beginning of Arias's presidential term remain obscure, and his role in the coup of 2 January 1931 cannot be ascertained from these documents. For these topics, one must rely on the surviving collection of newspaper clippings. In contrast, the records of the Arias visit to Washington (in October 1933) as well as President Franklin Roosevelt's visit in Panama (in July 1934) document these events in great detail.

In addition to President Arias's private and official correspondence, there are two nearly complete volumes of cabinet papers (1935–1936). Similarly, the Archivo Harmodio Arias furnishes documentation of the negotiations with the United States that led to the Treaty of 1936, an issue of utmost priority for Arias.

#### *The Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores*

Housed since 1995 in its new building, this archive is situated in a picturesque area of the former Canal Zone (*area revertida*).<sup>31</sup> In comparison

29. Ley 29, 19 Dec. 1994. See also INAC, *Archivo Ricardo J. Alfaro*, vi–vii.

30. The collection is administered by Francisco Arias G., great-grandson of the former head of state and a partner in his renowned law firm Arias, Fábrega & Fábrega.

31. The address is Edificio #107, C/ Amador, Amador, República de Panamá.

with the Archivo Nacional, it is fairly well organized and provides some useful finding aids. The archive possesses the apparently complete collection of correspondence of the Panamanian foreign ministry with the U.S. legation (later the embassy), as well as complete holdings of correspondence of Panama's legation and embassy in Washington. Historians will find evidence of the shifting influences exerted on the political development of the isthmian republic.

Material central to Panama's relations with the United States includes Legación de Panamá en Washington; Legación de los EEUU en Panamá (with an index for the years 1919 to 1939–1940); and the Comisión del Canal. Additional material permits, with some difficulty, historical reconstruction of Panama's relations with European nations. The emphasis is on France, Great Britain, and Spain to a lesser extent. Relations with Germany were never close. With the exception of Cuba, Panama maintained few close relations with its neighbors. The voluminous records on the "Controversia con Costa Rica sobre límites" document a dispute persisting from early colonial times to the 1940s, one leading to repeated confrontations and even armed conflict in 1921.

As a rule, the records are bound in *tomos* or *carpetas*. There is no guide for the complete holdings, although indexes exist for some series. The first page of each volume often consists of a typed table of contents.

There is no waiting period for access to material. After each change of government, the archive evidently receives a wealth of documentary material that is open to examination as soon as it is organized. At the present, documents of the early 1990s are already accessible to the public. Yet one rarely finds historians researching documents in the archive. Until now, the Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores has not been sufficiently utilized, not even the materials covering the controversial independence period. The surviving records of cables sent between Bunau Varilla and the revolutionary junta still hold surprises.

The Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores contains a small library with some unsystematically collected works on international diplomatic relations and treaties. A catalogue arranged by keywords is provided for partial holdings. Facilities for copying are available. Because of the recent move, the original layout of the holdings in the archival room has changed, making it difficult to find specific documents. The inadequate size of the rooms suggests the necessity of another move within the next decade.

According to information given to the author, the complete archive of the Panamanian Congress (the Asamblea Nacional) was destroyed, supposedly due to a political crisis in the early 1970s. Only the printed records of the legislative branch (on laws and selected debates) remain. Thus the possibility of a quantitative analysis of Panamanian political elites within the framework of social history research and statistical inquiry has become almost impossible.

Evidently, there is no complete collection of protocols of the cabinets, at least none that the author could find, even after consulting the office of the president. Occasionally one finds carbon copies of specific issues in the presidential papers in the Archivo Nacional, but only randomly. Neither the Archivo Porras nor the Archivo Alfaro includes such materials. The two volumes (for 1935–1936) in the Archivo Harmodio Arias constitute a fortunate exception.

*Instituto del Canal de Panamá y Estudios Internacionales*

This institute is significant for the initial phase of researching the history of the Panama Canal from its inception to its present status.<sup>32</sup> Here one finds the microfilmed records of the U.S. Department of State relating to the internal affairs of Panama from the U.S. National Archives (1910–1929). Also, an indexed collection of numerous documents covers the negotiations between President Jimmy Carter and President Omar Torrijos in the 1970s.

*Other Archives*

The Archives of the Panama Canal Commission (Archivos de la Comisión del Canal de Panamá) contain historical records emphasizing the U.S. administration of the canal.<sup>33</sup> The sizable amount of material concerning the civilian and military presence of the United States in the Canal Zone during three-quarters of a century still awaits historiographic analysis.<sup>34</sup>

The Oficina de Alternativas, a subsection of the foreign ministry, houses interesting material relating to canal planning.<sup>35</sup> This is the office where projects concerning the areas revertidas, the future of the canal, and further trans-isthmian possibilities are currently being developed, improved, and rejected. A multitude of unpublished studies can be found on the shelves, starting with projects of pure fantasy from the past to specific possibilities for the future. The historical component is not excluded but is not of major relevance to this office.

Panamanian holdings concerning the Catholic Church have already

32. The Instituto del Canal de Panamá y Estudios Internacionales of the Universidad de Panamá is located at Apartado 9069, Panamá 6, República de Panamá.

33. The Comisión del Canal de Panamá, Oficina de Relaciones Públicas y Prensa, is located in Balboa, República de Panamá. The library of this institution is administered by the Technical Resources Branch, while the archive is under the Records Management.

34. See Major, *Prize Possession*, p. ix. The author originally intended to utilize these records for his extensive study of the Panama Canal. But he soon gave up because of the overwhelming quantity of material.

35. The Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores is located in Edificio no. 107, C/ Amador, Amador, República de Panamá.

been listed by Christopher Ward and Richard Junkins.<sup>36</sup> The central archive is located in the cathedral in Panama City. The records have been organized in sections, starting in 1871, according to the terms of office of the bishops and archbishops (in the latter case, since the promotion of the Panama Diocese to Archdiocese in 1925).

University students have catalogued an abundance of church records in Panama City, as well as a number of provincial church records. These catalogues were created as licenciatura theses, now shelved in the Sala de Tesis at the Universidad de Panamá.<sup>37</sup>

The Contraloría General is responsible for census data and statistical information on demographic development and social and economic conditions.<sup>38</sup> The results of the respective official surveys are usually published.

A central archive for electoral material did not exist, at least not until the mid 1950s. In efforts to cover up irregularities, boards of election have usually burned the election records after elections were completed.<sup>39</sup>

#### PUBLISHED SOURCES

The most complete collection of periodical government publications, newspapers, and journals is the Hemeroteca of the Universidad de Panamá. Catalogues and microfilm indexes facilitate research.<sup>40</sup> Further locations for published sources include the *Gaceta Oficial* (official government gazette containing decrees, laws, and resolutions); the Archivo Nacional, microfilmed until 1930 and after that date in bound volumes; and the library of the Comisión del Canal (the years 1915 to 1950 on microfilm).

A significant and ongoing source on the history of Panama consists of the *Memorias* published by the various ministries. These reports to Congress have appeared biannually since 1906, as required by law. The *Memorias* always reflect the official version. The accomplishments of the government are highly praised and documented, while conflicts are minimized or not mentioned at all in the *Memorias*, especially during Belisario Porras's presidencies.

The extent and quality of the *Memorias* fluctuate considerably over

36. See Ward and Junkins, "Panamanian Historical Sources," 131–32.

37. Except for variations, the titles of these theses de licenciatura are similar, "Índice cronológico de bautizos/ matrimonios/ defunciones del archivo parroquial de NN."

38. The Contraloría General de la República is part of the Dirección de Estadísticas y Censo of the Departamento de Información y Divulgación, located at Apartado 5213, Panamá 5, República de Panamá.

39. José Antonio Moncada Luna, "Filosofía e historia de las elecciones políticas en la República de Panamá," tesis de licenciatura, Universidad de Panamá, 1956, iv.

40. A mimeographed list was compiled by Francisco Sevillano Colom, "Materiales microfilmados en la Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá, en el Archivo Nacional de Panamá y en la Biblioteca de la Universidad," in 1957–1958. Due to its age, it is almost useless.

time. Sometimes they contain detailed and extensive reports from the ministries, at others they are a pure compilation of documents. An almost complete collection of the *Memorias* of all ministries can be found in the Hemeroteca of the Universidad de Panamá. A fragmentary collection is housed in the library of the Archivo Nacional, and partial holdings are in the Hemeroteca of the Biblioteca Nacional.<sup>41</sup> Even the library of the Comisión del Canal has a set. All the *Memorias del Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores* are housed in the archive of the foreign ministry.

The most important periodical publication on issues related to the Panama Canal is the *Annual Report of the Governor of the Panama Canal Zone for the Fiscal Year . . .*, published annually since 1904.<sup>42</sup> The archive of the Panamanian foreign ministry contains a largely complete set.

Back files of *La Estrella de Panamá* / *Star and Herald*, a daily newspaper founded in 1853, can be located in various collections: in the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; in the library of the Comisión del Canal;<sup>43</sup> in the microfilm collection in the newspaper archive of *La Estrella de Panamá*; and in the Hemeroteca of the Universidad de Panamá. Back files of *El Panamá América* / *The Panama American*, founded in 1925, can be found in the newspaper archive of *El Panamá América* and in the Hemeroteca of the Universidad de Panamá.

## CONCLUSION

The main problem in researching the historical archives of the Republic of Panama is the lack of congruence among sources. Documents of the Asamblea Nacional are found only sporadically in various locations. A genuine national collection of the cabinet papers evidently does not exist. And the holdings of the ministries in the Archivo Nacional are not organized. Sufficient sources on specific events from their inception to decision and implementation are rarely available. This situation also applies to some degree to holdings of the presidential papers that exist. Such incompleteness impedes a prosopographic approach and also limits the possibilities for quantitative analyses of surveys of statistical data.

The absence of accessible Panamanian presidential records for several terms, especially the early phase of the republic, dictates reliance almost exclusively on published or foreign sources for that period. The lack of Panamanian material makes holdings in the United States highly sig-

41. The Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero R. is located in Apartado 7906, Panamá 9, República de Panamá.

42. From 1904 to 1914, it was published under the title *Annual Report of the Isthmian Canal Commission*.

43. According to Ward and Junkins, the former Canal Zone library "also contains the most complete collection of Panamanian and Canal Zone newspapers in the world." See "Panamanian Historical Sources," 132.

nificant, if not the dominant sources for historians. But U.S. interests and traditional perspectives often preclude an unbiased view. Consequently, the reports of European diplomats in Panama become more important, although they have been rarely used thus far.<sup>44</sup> Reliance solely on U.S. material because it is plentiful and easily available would inevitably reinforce the biases and stereotypes that still characterize the image of Panama to this day.

44. In the United Kingdom, see Public Record Office (PRO), London: Foreign Office (FO) 110, General Correspondence-Panama (1–5; 1904–1905); FO 371 Political Departments, General Correspondence from 1906 (Panama and Costa Rica); FO 288 Embassy and Consular Archives, Panama, Correspondence; FO 369 Consular Department, General Correspondence from 1906; FO 420 Confidential Print (South and Central America); and FO 93 Protocols of Treaties. In France, see Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archives Diplomatiques (MAE AD), Paris, Correspondance politique et commerciale, 1914 à 1940, B. Amérique 1918–1940, Centre Amérique, vols. 85–104; MAE AD, Amérique 1918–1940, Dossiers généraux; MAE AD, Nouvelle Série Panama, Politique Intérieure; and MAE AD, Nouvelle Série, Panama, Politique étrangère. In Spain, see Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Archivo General (MAE AG), Madrid, Archivo Histórico, serie Política Exterior, H 2573 (Panamá, 1880–1911); MAE AG, serie Correspondencia de Embajadas y Legaciones, H 1674; and MAE AG, serie Política Exterior, H 2574. In Germany, see Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn: Abteilung III, Deutsche Gesandtschaft für Mittelamerika und Panama, vols. R 79750–R 79790.

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