

Hernández Family Papers MSS Collection #145

Scope & Content

The Hernández Family Papers consist of more than 675 documents, mostly personal letters in Spanish with some letters in English or French. The first document is dated 1815; the rest of the correspondence begins in 1836 and extends through 1909. The Hernández were a family of wealthy Cuban planters who, by the mid-1800s, owned multiple plantations and enslaved several hundred people. The family's main residences were in the capital region of Havana, and their coffee and sugar plantations were to the east and south in the Matanzas region. In addition to personal correspondence the Collection also contains other types of documents—contracts for the purchase and sale of properties, receipts for many types of services, boat passage tickets, bank withdrawal slips, and a few hand-drawn maps. A significant number of documents in the collection show fire damage, and some documents are incomplete or fragments.

Dates

1815-1909

Availability

The collection is open for research.

Biographical Note

The first third of the Hernandez Collection's documents is mostly letters by family and friends written to Carlos Fabián Hernández y Aloy, the son of Francisco Hernández y Linares and Francisca Aloy y Rivera. One of the peculiarities of the collection is that there are few letters from Carlos himself, so we learn about him and his life mostly from what others wrote to him and said about him. In the late 1830s Carlos married an American, Margaret Harrison, and settled in New York City with her and his growing family.

The family members pursued their private lives of courtship, marriage, and raising children while also participating in the rapid expansion of enslavement and the industrialization of plantation production in Cuba. They wrote about setting up a plantation and purchasing and managing a large, enslaved workforce. Carlos and his brother Rafael wrote about anti-Spanish sentiments among their peers in the 1830s. Many of the family members wrote about the Escalera Rebellion by enslaved workers in the mid-1840s and their letters are revealing of Cuban elites' attitudes in this period about enslavement and race.

After 1845, Carlos Hernández left his wife Margaret and went to live in Europe. The middle third of the Collection consists mostly of Margaret's correspondence with her lawyers and her in-laws in Cuba often requesting their help in supporting her and her three children. Much of the correspondence in the last third of the collection was between Margaret or her son Charlie and lawyers in Cuba involving suits trying to claim some of the inheritance from Francisca Aloy and from the Carrillo branch of the family.

Extent

3.5 linear ft.

Language of the Materials

Spanish, English, French

Arrangement

Box 1

- Series 1. To Carlos
- Series 4. To others

- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 2

- Series 1. To Carlos
- Series 3. To Margaret
- Series 4. To others
- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 3

- Series 1. To Carlos
- Series 2. Financial Documents
- Series 3. To Margaret
- Series 4. To others
- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 4

- Series 1. To Carlos
- Series 2. Financial Documents
- Series 3. To Margaret
- Series 4. To others
- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 5

- Series 2. Financial Documents
- Series 3. To Margaret
- Series 4. To others
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 6

- Series 2. Financial Documents
- Series 3. To Margaret
- Series 4. To others
- Series 5. To Carlos (the son)
- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 7

- Series 2. Financial Documents
- Series 3. To Margaret
- Series 4. To others
- Series 5. To Carlos (the son)
- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Box 8

- Series 2. Financial Documents
- Series 5. To Carlos (the son)
- Series 6. Fragments (with missing information)
- Series 7. Miscellaneous
- Series 8. Research materials

Box 9

- Series 7. Miscellaneous

Provenance

Purchased in 2006 from William Reese Company, New Haven, CT.

Processing Information

Processed by the St. Lawrence University Libraries Special Collections staff.

In 2014 Dr. Evelyn Jennings, Elizabeth Margaret Vilas Professor of Latin American History, published an essay on her research in this collection entitled “The Hernández Family: Migration, *Cubanidad*, and Transnational Identities” in the *Handbook on Cuban History, Literature, and the Arts*, edited by Mauricio Font and Araceli Tinajero. She continued her research in 2023-2024 and has plans to develop a website and a book project from the material in the collection, as well. Her work with the collection has helped to identify what is contained in the collection and details about the family, as well as identification of miscellaneous fragments.

Repository Details

Part of the St. Lawrence University Libraries manuscript collection.

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Collection Organization

Series 1 contains letters written to Carlos Hernández from family and friends, including his mother, Francisca Aloy, and siblings Rosa, Merced, Rafael, and Francisca (Pancha). Several letters were from Lúcio de Adaro and Jose M. Carrillo.

Series 2 are financial documents related to the family plantation in Havana. The series also contains receipts for furniture, clothing, and other purchases, as well as tax documents.

Series 3 includes letters written to Margaret Hernández, Carlos’ wife, from Carlos, his mother, and a lawyer named William Russell.

Series 4 is a collection of correspondence written to other members of the family including Carlos’ mother, Francisca Aloy, and his siblings. Other people represented in these letters are close friends of the family, as well as businessmen and lawyers.

Series 5 includes letters written to Carlos (Charlie) Hernández, the son of Carlos and Margaret. Letter writers include lawyers J.B. Pugh and Wetmore & Jenner, as well as members of the de Mendoza family.

Series 6 is a collection of letter fragments and correspondence where information is missing or illegible including the author and/or recipient of the letter and dates.

Series 7 contains miscellaneous items including advertisements, news clippings, hand drawn maps, poetry written by Carlos and Charlie Hernández, and a lock of Margarita's (Margaret's) hair.

Series 8 contains research materials from student Lucy Sammis (2010), as well as Professor Evelyn Powell Jennings, who has spent many hours with the documents in the collection.