

HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND SOURCES ON EL SALVADOR*

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The recent return of peace to El Salvador is providing increasingly favorable conditions for scholarly research. This encouraging climate will help Salvadoran and guest researchers make up for years of difficult and repressive conditions. Some researchers may begin by examining contemporary questions related to the recent revolutionary process, but historical research should also be greatly facilitated.¹ Entrepreneurial searches for archival materials on the period preceding the mid-twentieth century can be surprisingly successful when one combines a national outlook with careful regional probing. This research note will provide a guide to archival and other historical materials available in the United States and El Salvador and will place these sources in the context of major questions left unanswered by the historiography covering 1700 to 1940.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

While the present state of Salvadoran historiography encourages research in previously unexplored areas, no easy transition can be made from research project to source materials.² Scholars desiring to work on El Salvador will find that access to Salvadoran archival holdings is currently hindered by skeletal staffing and problematic working conditions. Finding the desired documents consequently involves more than the usual amount of sifting through papers. In the Salvadoran context, persistence

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1. This statement does not imply that Salvadorans and others did not attempt to carry out different kinds of research during the 1980s. Particularly admirable is the work of social scientists at the Universidad Centro Americana, some of whom were brutally murdered by the Salvadoran military in 1989. A major contribution was their effort to give Salvadorans an independent voice via survey research.

2. A few researchers are working with archival materials in El Salvador. See Lindo Fuentes (1990), Lauria-Santiago (1992, n.d.), Ching (1994), Alvarenga (1994), and Suter (1993).

and patience are prerequisites for gaining access to a specific collection but also to finding useful documents within them.

Because of the paucity of historical studies on El Salvador, many aspects of the country's history require careful attention. Thus the availability of new sources provides a host of research opportunities. The three broad areas to be elaborated here are the ones for which significant archival materials exist: social and agrarian history at the regional level, politics and state formation, and micro-level studies of municipalities. Because knowledge of Salvadoran society is still sketchy, the more substantial research questions lie within broadly defined areas of agrarian social history. One topic meriting close attention is the organization and functioning of Indian and ladino communities. Another is the formation and interaction of social classes, especially peasants, artisans, and rural workers, which can be studied by using fairly extensive judicial and governors' records. Any discussion of these themes inevitably leads to the question of land and agricultural production. Available records, particularly for the years after the 1860s, provide insights into patterns of land use and agriculture at the local level. Records from local contracts and municipal books can then be integrated with departmental and national-level accounts to reconstruct the interaction between peasants and other sectors in an evolving agrarian economy.

Another important aspect of Salvadoran history that merits greater attention is the varying development of different regions. Compact as it is, El Salvador contains diverse ecosystems that lead to different crops and patterns of land use. This diversity also implies study at the local level of regional economies and the relationship between export and locally oriented production, topics that can now be researched with materials from the Ministerio de Gobernación.

While social history must be related to politics and state formation, the lack of research on El Salvador's political history calls for a range of studies that will include narrative and biographical accounts of the political actors and conflicts of the late colonial and republican periods. Even the well-traveled terrain of El Salvador's participation in the larger Central American polity during and after the Federación de la América Central (1821–1839) could benefit from empirical research and revisionary analyses based on new sources. Good biographies of nineteenth-century Salvadoran presidents and other national or factional political leaders of the era are still lacking, and scholars know even less about the social origins of their power and the regional alliances and struggles in which they participated. Formation of the national state and its policies, especially after the 1880s, is a potentially fruitful topic with many sources, as is the subject of state and society during the twentieth century. Other questions relating to peasant and artisan participation in politics remain open to fresh outlooks. Particularly important is the history of local politi-

cal conflict and organizing and how it changed between the 1890s and 1940s.

The regional dimension of state power and politics remains largely unexplored. Regional alliances and struggles in El Salvador have never been examined closely, and the classic liberal accounts of the political struggles of this period need to be compared in more detail with archival sources. Indeed, the entire dichotomy and periodization based on liberals versus conservatives needs thorough reconsideration. Moreover, although El Salvador never experienced the bipolar struggles between rival urban centers that characterized Nicaragua and Costa Rica, various Salvadoran departments and their capital cities played important roles in the political struggles, revolts, and wars of the period following independence. Regional materials available in governors' collections could help supply this regional perspective on the formation and exercise of state power.

While good reasons abound for researching national and regional history in El Salvador, historians must also remember that municipal-level studies always provide important building blocks for larger reconstructions of national history. Such contributions are especially valuable given the recent trend in the historical literature on nineteenth-century Latin America that attempts to integrate social history with politics and state formation by starting with the most local levels of all: one pueblo or one hacienda. Such studies then place local actors, often *con nombre y apellido*, in the larger context of national histories and rewrite "national history" in terms that are more consistent with the divergent and contradictory experiences of different subjects.³ Available municipal and judicial documents can provide important windows into local society and politics, at the same time that gubernatorial, ministerial, and presidential papers can be helpful in tying local history into larger patterns.

Other recent trends in the study of Latin America provide good reasons to start at the local level. Ethnicity, race, and cultural hegemony can be understood only by looking carefully at individual actors in their own setting. This kind of research should apply to any studies of collective mobilization, including the many revolts and riots occurring in El Salvador between 1740 and 1932. Studies of the experiences of indigenous communities, Indian ethnicity, and larger relations among ladinos, mestizos, whites, and *indígenas* must also commence at the local level. Any ethnic-blind social and political history, even of the years after 1932, runs the risks of dismissing a major dimension of the social history of most Salvadorans.⁴

3. For a recent example of this approach, see Mallon (1988).

4. For a recent example of this kind of research, see Gould (1993).

REFERENCE SOURCES

During the mid-1980s, researchers looking for documentary materials on the history of El Salvador had limited options. As a result, most historical monographs and articles were published without reference to or use of the country's collections. Outside researchers understandably balked at the idea of residing for long periods in a conflicted society like El Salvador in the 1980s. Salvadoran researchers have suffered from a lack of resources and official support, a situation compounded by the forced exile of many intellectuals. Government support for archival activities has never been strong in El Salvador, and researchers generally assumed that materials were either nonexistent or unavailable in a centralized location. Yet the extended conflicts occurring between 1979 and 1992 suddenly created an enormous increase in outside attention to the societies and histories of Central America. Scholars and activists alike sought to find the roots of isthmian conflicts and revolutionary movements in various dimensions, from the formation of Central American authoritarian states to class relations in the countryside. During the early 1980s, bibliographies on the region were compiled to list diverse references, historical as well as contemporary. Although these early bibliographies provided background historical sources and sometimes listed hard-to-find items, their focus was generally too broad to aid in-depth historical research.⁵ Most early compilations were written to provide resources for activists in the anti-intervention movement. Their emphasis consequently continued to be on questions of economic development, political struggles, and social movements.

A second wave of historically oriented bibliographies of greater depth appeared during the late 1980s. These works usually included materials housed in U.S. or Central American libraries or both and were intended to serve as guides to research. The best example is Ralph Woodward's volume on El Salvador in the *World Bibliographic Series* (1988), which complements similar volumes published on other Central American nations. The same year, Kenneth Grieb published a massive historical bibliography on the entire region for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Grieb 1988). Despite the fact that many of the items listed in these two bibliographies are difficult to locate, they nevertheless gave a boost to researchers launching new investigations on the region during the late 1980s. Edelberto Torres Rivas and María Eugenia Gallardo also edited a bibliographic guide to the Central American crisis that included significant historical background materials (Torres Rivas and Gallardo 1985).

5. The Latin American Studies program at California State University, Los Angeles, produced an early bibliography on the entire region (*Latin America Bibliography Series* 1981). It covers all countries in the region, including Belize and Panama. A similar effort was carried out by David Kruse and Richard Swedberg of the Central America Information Office (Kruse and Swedberg 1982).

Other important bibliographic contributions include the historical sections in Thomas Leonard's *Central America and the United States* (1985), Woodward's annotated bibliographic sections in *Central America, A Nation Divided* (1985), and his "Historiography of Modern Central America since 1960" (1987). William Griffith had already reviewed sources and historiography in "The Historiography of Central America since 1830" (1960). Finally, Carol Smith, Jefferson Boyer, and Martin Diskin provided a survey of sources in a two-part bibliography with an accompanying descriptive essay (see Smith and Boyer 1987; Smith, Boyer, and Diskin 1988). All of these bibliographies included significant materials on El Salvador, although their usefulness as guides to primary sources is limited.⁶ The most recent addition in this category is Leslie Bethell's *Central America since Independence* (1991), which includes a brief bibliographic essay discussing secondary sources on El Salvador.⁷

Published Archival Guides and U.S. Archival Holdings

More specialized publications are useful in searching for archival and other primary materials. Earlier descriptions of archival holdings on El Salvador in other countries include that by Thomas Schoonover (1975), which focused on El Salvador in the nineteenth century, and Sidney Markman's *Colonial Central America: A Bibliography* (1977). The second guide is an invaluable, meticulously annotated catalog of maps, documents, and artifacts found in various European and U.S. depositories. It also lists regional descriptions of El Salvador during the colonial period.

The most useful resource by far in this category is *Research Guide to Central America and the Caribbean* (Grieb 1985). This compilation includes topical and historiographic essays as well as descriptions by an array of specialists of twenty-eight repositories holding materials on Central America. Any student of the region would do well to examine this volume carefully. The major North American repositories for Central American materials are described in this work: the University of Texas at Austin; Yale University; McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario; Louisiana State University; Tulane University; the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of Florida; the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley; and the U.S. Library of Congress.⁸ Derek Kerr's

6. For a valuable listing of Central American government *memorias* available at the Library of Congress, see Childs (1932). See also Phillips's *A List of Books, Magazine Articles, and Maps relating to Central America, including the Republics of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Salvador 1800–1900* (published in 1902).

7. This source draws on material previously published in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*. The essay on El Salvador by Dunkerley draws on his longer work, *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America* (1988).

8. Other collections with significant holdings of Salvadoran and Central American materials are Harvard University's Widener and Tozzer Libraries and the New York Public Library.

essay in Grieb's *Research Guide* points out some of the gaps in Salvadoran historiography, for the nineteenth century in particular. He also noted the need for regional historical studies. The essay is generally helpful but omits important questions and makes misleading claims. Similarly, the volume's contribution on archival sources on El Salvador has major limitations (see López Vallecillos, Schoonover, and Woodward 1985).

Researchers interested in other guides to Salvadoran materials in the United States should first examine the useful print versions of the catalogs of major research libraries. They might also find two publications of the U.S. National Archives useful in locating microfilmed materials housed there (see U.S.NARA n.d. and 1986).⁹ *Guide to Materials on Latin America in the National Archives of the United States* (1987) is also useful, especially for the portions of the U.S. National Archive not available on microfilm. The U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Post Records from Central America from 1930 to 1945 have been published and are now available commercially on microfilm (USNA 1986).¹⁰ In addition, U.S. government documents on relations with Central America released by means of requests based on the Freedom of Information Act have been microfilmed and are available in three series covering the years from 1945 to 1959 (UPA 1986, 1986a, 1987). Blair Hydrick published a guide to these materials, all of which contain sources on El Salvador (Hydrick 1987).

Documentary Sources in Europe

No extensive reference guides to archival materials on El Salvador or Central America in European locations have been compiled, although a few researchers have made use of British, French, and German collections.¹¹ Schoonover examined collections in Germany, France, and Italy and published a series of articles indicating the kinds of materials available in those countries (see Schoonover 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1992; Schoonover and Schoonover 1989, 1990, 1991). These materials seem most useful

9. For microfilm materials that may be available through interlibrary loan or for purchase, see U.S. National Archives and Record Administration, *Microfilm Resources for Research: A Comprehensive Catalog* (n.d.). For a detailed list of diplomatic records relating to El Salvador, see National Archives and Records Administration, *Diplomatic Records: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications* (1986).

10. These State Department materials are also supplemented by other microfilm series: "OSS and State Department Intelligence and Research Reports, Latin America, 1941-1961"; "CIA Research Reports, Latin America, 1946-1976"; and "Latin America, Special Studies Series, 1962-1982," all made available by University Publications of America. See also the series *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, which includes documents from the U.S. State Department from various years.

11. I have excluded discussion of colonial materials located in Spain because I am not familiar with them. They have been utilized by a few researchers, however (see Fowler 1987, 1889, 1991; Fiehrer 1977; McCleod 1973; Wortman 1982). Other research guides also cover these collections. For example, see the essay by William Sherman and Thomas Fiehrer in Grieb (1985, 170-77).

for researching trade history, diplomatic relations, and imperialism. León Zamosc, for example, made extensive use of materials on the 1920s and 1930s held in the British Public Office archives (Zamosc 1977). Materials on Central America in British and other European collections are described briefly in the essays by Robert Naylor and Schoonover in Grieb's *Research Guide* (1985). Rodrigo Quesada also surveyed British materials on Central America (1981).

ARCHIVAL SOURCES IN EL SALVADOR

The centralized and scattered locations of documentary sources in El Salvador are described here to assist researchers in shedding more light on the many obscure aspects of El Salvador's history. This material is based on extensive research carried out between 1987 and 1990 and another visit in 1993. Centralized sites will be covered first, followed by descriptions of scattered locations.

El Archivo General Nacional

El Salvador has had a national archive intermittently since the nineteenth century, but only recently has a truly national institution been organized and begun to extend its scope. The AGN is located in the heart of downtown San Salvador, in a portion of the old Palacio Nacional. Directorship of the institution has not been stable, but most of the current personnel have at least ten years of experience and some technical training. Licenciado Salazar recently assumed the director's post and is not planning any major changes.

Given the realities of cultural and public-service institutions in Central America, researchers should expect to spend much of their time sifting through barely organized materials and perhaps contributing their own rudimentary sorting and classification. The critical issue for researchers is not technical refinement of existing classification schemes but the relationship that must be developed with the local institution in terms of some degree of exchange of resources. This approach is necessary because the AGN is neither organized nor funded well enough to be able to truly "serve" researchers. This situation is a drawback but also opens the possibility for greater direct involvement with the archive's holdings in a way that can be more fruitful and personally rewarding in the long run. Most of the holdings are boxed, and researchers should be aware that not all sections of the Archivo have achieved the same level of organization. Many new materials have been acquired in recent years, and they—along with many old materials—await thorough organization. A list of collections is presented in the appendix to this research note.

Two important oddities must be taken into account. First, AGN

personnel refer alternatively to what I am calling collections as *secciones*, *depósitos*, or *colecciones*. Different directors have created various organizational schemes for these sections but have not used their own nomenclature consistently. This variation should be taken into account when communicating with archive staff. Different names do not necessarily imply that collections described in this research note have been dissolved, although they may now form part of a different organizational hierarchy. The second major problem is that the physical location of these materials does not reflect their logical "ordering" as collections. Thus two sections that form part of one larger collection may not be found on the same shelf or in the same room.

The first national archive, located in the original Palacio Nacional, was destroyed by fire in 1889. What is not generally known is that tens of thousands of documents survived this fire.¹² These documents, currently classified as "Documentos Quemados" (in the Colección Quemados) are in fair to very bad shape and urgently need preservation. Years ago, some of the documents damaged by flames and water were classified and placed in paper sleeves and filed in cabinets (in the Colección Clasificados). A card index provides a thematic cross-listing but is neither complete nor very useful.¹³ A much larger number of these damaged documents were prepared for classification but were never indexed or ordered (see the Colección Pre-Clasificados and Por-Clasificar). They too are kept in file cabinets.

A further complicating factor is that during the 1950s, many thousands (probably most) of these surviving documents were filmed by UNESCO. Copies of the resulting thirty-five-millimeter microfilm are kept at the AGN in the Colección Documentos Microfilmados. The original microfilms are reportedly at the Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia in Mexico City. A general guide to this collection was prepared, but it does not reveal how many of the documents were filmed or allow correlating the contents of the boxes of documents with the microfilm rolls.¹⁴ Another few rolls of microfilmed documents were not listed in the guide. For all practical purposes, these sections should be treated as separate collections that could yield altogether different documents. The microfilm collection also includes other materials not available at the AGN, including documents from a few municipalities, rare books from the Biblioteca Nacional (most of the originals are now lost), and other miscellaneous items. The microfilm collection at the AGN also includes

12. *Memoria de los Actos del Poder Ejecutivo en el Ramo de Gobernación* (1890) mentions the sections that were lost or damaged and provides a list of some documents that survived. They might or might not be found within the current AGN holdings

13. A portion of these documents were cataloged in issues of *Repositorio* (1968–1976).

14. Sevillano Colóm's guide (1959) is not widely available. One copy is held by the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago.

rolls of documents on El Salvador located at the Archivo General de Centro América in Guatemala. The journal *Repositorio* (published in San Salvador from 1968 to 1972) published a list of these documents. A separate guide has been prepared by the AGN staff.¹⁵ These microfilms are in thirty-five-millimeter format, but the AGN does not have a machine that will read this size film.

A major AGN collection is the Colección Ministerios (CM). This collection holds documents that originated in various government ministries, the Asamblea Nacional, and the Supremo Poder Ejecutivo (Office of the President) between 1890 and 1940. Generally, few materials from any of these ministries exist for the 1910s, most of the papers coming from the 1920s and 1930s. The bulk of these materials originated in the Ministerio de Gobernación, including a series of *libros copiadores de telegramas*, many *libros copiadores de correspondencia*, and other books with internal memoranda and correspondence. The loose-document section of this collection (CM-MG) consists of at least three hundred boxes.¹⁶ Most of the folders in the boxes are original to the ministry's archival system. The boxes are classified into police and national guard reports, municipal requests, personal requests, municipal reports, local tax lists, electoral lists, electoral results, technical reports, and governors' reports.

In the same basement are materials from the ministries of Gobernación and Interior from the 1940s through the 1970s. Some offices of Interior left the Palacio Nacional when the new building was completed during the 1980s, leaving behind an entire basement of more recent materials. These materials cover the early 1980s and provide otherwise unavailable insights into the role of the national government in different departments between 1940 and 1980. The post-1940 materials have been boxed recently and can be identified by year and sometimes by type. Within this section are boxes from the press censorship office (which monitored and transcribed media broadcasts since at least the 1960s), materials on various earthquakes, newspaper clippings, and municipal documents sent to Interior. Also available are extensive correspondence between the ministry and departmental governors and commanders.

A significant portion of the Colección Ministerios deals with the military during the 1890s and early 1900s (CM-CM). Although most of these boxes have not been examined carefully, they are organized by year. Other materials, all boxed, originated in the ministries or *carteras* of Haci-

15. The Biblioteca Gallardo also owns a card catalog of documents relating to El Salvador located in the Guatemalan archive. For researchers interested in gaining access to the contents of the Archivo General de Centro America, see McDowell and Woodward's brief description of the microfilmed collection at McMaster University in Ontario (McDowell and Woodward 1985; see also Kerr 1985). According to the staff at McMaster, these rolls are available for copying. An older description of selected materials held in Guatemala on each province can be found in Chamberlain (1936).

16. The dimensions of the boxes are about twelve by sixteen by four inches.

enda, Agricultura, Relaciones Exteriores, and Judicial or in the offices of the Supremo Poder Ejecutivo. Among these disparate holdings are some important documents: cotton production permits from the 1950s, a survey of balsam trees, drafts of laws and resolutions from the Asamblea Nacional, and letters relating to immigration and police surveillance of political activists.

Another major collection is composed of trials from the country's courts (the Colección Judicial).¹⁷ This collection expands often, as regional courts pass their older materials on to the AGN. Its recovery of more such materials has been limited only by its lack of means of transporting them. This is the only collection for which an extensive index is routinely enlarged. The cataloging system utilized for this collection is unnecessarily obtuse.¹⁸ Going through a few hundred pages of lists, however, will save researchers much time while providing a general idea of the kinds of materials found in the still larger group of uncataloged trials and court papers. Court cases, indexed or not, are shelved according to their department of origin, usually in chronological order, with an indication on the boxes as to the municipality and whether they are civil or criminal cases. The holdings of this collection go back to the 1830s. The AGN has also been expanding its more recent holdings of notarial records: copies of all contracts and legal documents sent to the courts by Salvadoran lawyers.

Researchers willing to travel will also find that many other court cases are available in various departmental courthouses. In some instances, researchers might be able to arrange for transfer of older regional court materials to the AGN if they can coordinate the transaction and provide transportation. Another possible source to check are the holdings of the Corte Suprema de Justicia. According to Arthur Gropp, the court began to collect notarial files of deceased notaries after the original records were destroyed in the 1889 fire in the Palacio (Gropp 1941, 588). These court materials not held in the AGN have not been surveyed or utilized in any recent research.

Court papers provide important insights into Salvadoran society and history. They include numerous cases relating to land disputes and other procedures involving corporations and entrepreneurs but also peasants and workers. Such papers contain many wills and property inventories. Furthermore, they provide a crucial window into different aspects of daily life for Salvadorans of all classes and are particularly useful in research on landless workers and women, given the limited number of sources on these sectors.

17. Patricia Alvarenga, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has been working extensively with these materials during the last two years.

18. The collection is divided into four segments (A through D), each covering a different period. The cards within each segment are then ordered by department. Lately, the AGN has stopped producing cards and is relying instead on typed lists.

In the last ten years, the AGN has set up many new sections under the headings of Alcaldías and Gobernaciones. A special effort has been made to gather municipal materials from conflict-ridden zones for safe-keeping. The Colección Alcaldías (CA) includes materials from a few dozen municipalities, municipal record books for many purposes: *libros de inscripción de documentos privados*, *libros de inscripción de títulos de predios rústicos y urbanos*, *libros de actas municipales*, *libros de inscripción de títulos ejidales*, and *libros de ingresos*.¹⁹ The books rarely cover all years, however. For some important municipalities (Sonsonate, Ahuachapán, Chalchuapa), the AGN also has boxes of loose documents that include official reports, correspondence, requests to the government, and land titles or registry books. These materials typically run from 1880 to 1940.

The AGN's new Colección Gobernaciones includes materials from the governorships of San Vicente, Sonsonate, and Ahuachapán. Most of these collections are fairly extensive and have not been entirely sorted or classified. The Colección Gobernación de Sonsonate (CG-SO) consists of a selection of the most important documents found at a larger site located in the administration building in the city of Sonsonate. These papers have been sorted chronologically and by topic, with a list of documents for each box. The large collection entitled Gobernación de San Vicente (CG-SV) includes at least six hundred boxes and deserves close attention. All these sections include mostly late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century materials, with the San Vicente materials dating back to the 1830s.²⁰

Smaller but important sections of the AGN (the best organized and fully cataloged) include the Colección Tierras (CT), Colección Antigua or Colonial (CC), Colección Impresos (CI), Colección Diarios del Siglo 19 (CD-19), Colección Indiferentes (CI), Colección Barrios (CB), Colección Ezeta (CE), and Colección Federación (CF). Tierras contains many colonial and nineteenth-century titles to common lands and haciendas as well as other land-related documents. This valuable section includes many land titles, most from the eighteenth century. A few additional titles and surveys have been typed or photocopied. Tierras also holds hacienda surveys and selected documents on the partition and sale of *ejidos* and

19. The AGN holds materials from the following municipalities: Santa Catarina Mahuat, Sonsonate, Cuisnahuat, Santiago de la Frontera, El Porvenir, San Sebastián Saltrillo, Ciudad Arce (El Chilamatal), Comasagua, San Antonio del Monte, Juayua, Jayaque, La Libertad, Nejapa, San Marcos, San Luis Talar, San Pablo Tacachico, San Fernando, San Francisco Lempa, Tejutla, Chalchuapa, Armenia, Atiquizaya, Las Vueltas, San Miguel, Izalco, and Santa Ana. Materials from San Miguel and Sonsonate are drawn from what must have originally been governors' archives and therefore include papers on the entire departments.

20. Some of these departments were more extensive during portions of the nineteenth century. For example, some materials found under Sonsonate, San Miguel, or San Vicente collections might include other municipalities that later became a part of other departments. For data on the formation of Salvadoran departments, see Lardé y Larín (1950).

communal lands.²¹ This collection includes some of the land titles held in Patrimonio Cultural during the 1960s, which Browning utilized in *El Salvador: Landscape and Society* (1971).²² Other common land titles are available in municipal or governors' archives in Izalco, Ahuachapán, San Vicente, and Tepecoyo.²³

The Colección Colonial or Antigua (CC) consists of a few boxes of documents gathered from a larger collection located in the municipal building of the city of Sonsonate. These documents came from the colonial province of Sonsonate (which included portions of what is now the department of Ahuachapán), among them several local censuses and *tasaciones*. The Colección Colonial also contains documents originating in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Among them are documents on social and political movements related to the pre-independence crisis, military readiness, government finance and monopolies, and church affairs. The AGN owns a sixteen-millimeter microfilm of the Tierras and Colonial collections.²⁴ The Colección Indiferentes (CI) is a hodgepodge of important and not-so-important documents culled from the archive's other collections—about thirty boxes of documents on major political events, land, and businesses or trials involving elite families. An interesting group of documents is an agricultural census taken in 1929 on food production. These papers are not complete but list rice and bean producers by name and size of plot for dozens of municipalities.²⁵ They complement other local surveys of agriculture carried out for the national office of statistics beginning in 1913, which can be found in the collections entitled Gobernaciones and Ministerio de Gobernación.

The Colección Impresos (CImp) includes prints, handbills, bulletins, and decrees ranging from 1821 to 1900. The Colección Federación (CF) includes many decrees and notes from the Salvadoran and federal

21. A potential source on land questions, especially since the 1950s, is the Instituto Geográfico Nacional, which is worth a careful survey. Its detailed maps (on a scale of 1 to 50,000) might now be available without requiring permission from the Estado Mayor. These maps indicate the location of farms and haciendas. The Instituto also contains other data from land surveys that might be made available to a persistent researcher.

22. The Departamento de Historia of the Oficina de Patrimonio Cultural is known to have kept many documents that were never transferred to the AGN.

23. Other common land titles available in municipal or governors' archives include Izalco, Ahuachapán, San Vicente, and Tepecoyo. A few others been reprinted in now-defunct journals like *Revista Tzunpame* and *Revista del Departamento de Historia*. Indications suggest that all existing Salvadoran common land titles and related judicial cases were copied into the books of the Registro de la Propiedad during the late 1890s, but I have not been able to confirm this possibility. Copies of titles and related information also appear in judicial documents relating to land issues. These are held in the Ministerio de Gobernación section of the AGN and also in municipal or departmental gobernación sections.

24. These materials were filmed with the collaboration of Jeffrey Paige of the University of Michigan.

25. These materials were collected by the Dirección General de Estadística in collaboration with the government-sponsored Comité de Subsistencia (1929–1932).

congresses and assemblies of the 1830s and 1840s, a period neglected by historians. In particular, Federación includes a series of bound documents that once belonged to the Universidad Nacional. A detailed index of these documents was published in the *Diario Oficial* in 1917 and 1918 and reprinted in the AGN's now-defunct journal *Repositorio* (in the 1972–1974 issue). This collection is supplemented by selected papers drawn from the section of burned documents. The Colección Barrios (CB) consists of official correspondence during the rule of Gerardo Barrios (1858–1863). These letters and reports on personal and official matters form some thirty bound volumes. Many of the letters are in French. This and all the smaller collections have typed catalogs to the documents.²⁶ The Colección Diarios del Siglo 19 is composed of a few single-issue copies of short-lived and rare late-nineteenth-century newspapers.

The AGN also contains a few file drawers of papers from military trials of the 1950s and 1960s, military payroll forms from the 1980s, and a large collection of files from the Ministerio de Educación from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Some maps in the collection correspond to ejido titles held in Colección Tierras. Several hundred of these maps came from the post-1940 files from Interior and Educación held at the AGN, as did a few hundred photographs. The AGN also owns a nearly complete collection of the *Diario Oficial* since 1879 as well as incomplete runs of El Salvador's main twentieth-century dailies, which might be transferred to the Biblioteca Nacional.²⁷ Also useful is a voluminous collection of decrees, laws, and other references mostly culled from the *Diario Oficial* but organized according to presidential terms in about eighty thick typescript volumes.²⁸

The AGN is constantly short of basic resources and technical assistance. Given the politics of public administration in El Salvador, visitors from other countries can help institutions like this one gain recognition and support from their parent office. The AGN has no materials or training for preservation and barely manages to continue cataloging the larger collections of documents. The archive needs basic equipment, including a thirty-five-millimeter microfilm reader, supplies for its recently acquired photocopier, an IBM-compatible computer, and preservation materials like specialized boxes, sleeves, and folders. Preservation of the burnt documents is especially urgent, a task for which the AGN has no resources. Most of the few outside researchers who have worked at the

26. The 1970 issue of *Repositorio* published a list of documents on Gerardo Barrios that are located in the Archivo General de Centro América in Guatemala City.

27. Other partial sets of the *Diario Oficial* and its predecessors can be found at the Biblioteca del Banco Hipotecario, the Universidad Centro Americana, the Ministerio de Hacienda, and the Biblioteca de Patrimonio Cultural. This last site contains some rare volumes from the 1870s not found elsewhere. In 1993 the U.S. Library of Congress micro-filmed newspaper collections held at Salvadoran libraries, including the *Diario Oficial*.

28. These volumes were prepared under the direction of María and Freddy Leisten-schneider, who published a few of the volumes separately.

AGN for extended periods have made some kind of material contribution to the Archivo.

Other Sites in San Salvador

La Asamblea Nacional / The National Assembly of El Salvador has a library of its own. Most of what it contains is available elsewhere, but the materials relating to Salvadoran legislation are unique. For example, the library has a file of petitions made to the National Assembly since 1932, organized by legislative commission, including requests from the Ministerio de Gobernación. These files deal with taxes, subsidies, public works, and other local matters. The *Libro de Actas* of the assembly for the 1890s was at least partially reproduced in the *Diario Oficial*. Other books include an index to assembly decrees published in the *Diario Oficial* since 1890 and other miscellaneous registry books, books of copies of outgoing correspondence (1896–1935), and materials relating to discussion of an export tax on coffee in 1933.

Ministries and Other Government Offices / Most Salvadoran ministries have discarded their older records, and the AGN has never collected materials from modern ministries beyond court cases and what it took over from Interior. As a result, ministries have filed or discarded at will. Hacienda, for example, is known to have burned many “*papeles viejos*” some years ago and has no collections of documents predating the 1950s. Hacienda does have a library containing a few hard-to-find journals like the *Revista Económica*. Hacienda also contains two of the potentially most useful sources that were believed to have been lost: the records of the Juzgado General de Hacienda (part of the ministry that no longer exists), including records of earlier land registries, and the records of the income tax office, which began in 1913.²⁹

The Casa Presidencial is known to have an extensive library, perhaps even an archive, but to my knowledge, no outside researcher has been allowed to examine it. The Guardia Nacional has its own archive as do other branches of the military, including a collection held at the headquarters of the Estado Mayor. The Escuela Militar may have holdings of its own as well. The contents of these sources are a mystery, and thus far, local or visiting researchers have not attempted to gain access to these materials.³⁰

29. Some of the tax books of the Ministerio de Hacienda have been published, perhaps intended for official use only. A copy of one of these lists, without any actual monetary information, is available in the Biblioteca Gallardo under the heading “Contribuyentes matriculados 1923.” For a discussion of the tax, see Suárez (n.d.).

30. Gropp mentions the libraries of the Círculo Militar and the Policía Nacional (Gropp 1941, 565, 567).

The Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores also has its own well-organized archive.

Census Materials / A most unfortunate loss of sources during the recent war occurred when the government's Dirección de Estadística y Censo was destroyed, including records dating back to the 1929 population census. It is possible, however, that the original records of the agricultural and industrial censuses were kept in the offices of other ministries. The Instituto de Transformación Agraria (ISTA) might have some of these materials, together with land-reform materials generated since the 1970s.

The only other modern census taken in El Salvador for which unpublished data exist is the 1938–1939 coffee census. An intermediate typed summary of the 1939 census can be found at the library of the Banco Hipotecario. It reproduces data already available in the published version but also includes a breakdown of the census data by *cantón* (neighborhood), which in many cases allows researchers to identify information on individual properties. Unfortunately, the most important volume of this typescript edition is missing, the one for the department of Santa Ana.³¹ The Asociación Cafetalera, which was responsible for this census in a semi-official capacity, claims that it has no files from this period—something that needs to be confirmed by researchers interested in the coffee sector. Other older and more fragmented census data are available in the AGN and some regional archives, including portions of earlier censuses of coffee producers.

Catholic Church Archives / The extensive Archivo Eclesiástico would be useful for research on regional and national political history and on the history of church-state relations in El Salvador. Cardenal (1980) is one of the few researchers to have made extensive use of these resources. He mined priests' reports, *libros de acuerdos*, and the correspondence available in the Archivo del Arzobispado, which was established in the mid-nineteenth century.³² Other materials generated by the church can be located in individual parishes.

Registro de la Propiedad / The Registro de la Propiedad is a regional source but is included in this section because the registry has been microfilming books from its regional offices so that they can be accessed in San Salvador. This project may not be finished, but many of the earliest books in Ahuachapán and Sonsonate have been filmed. The contents are considered public domain and may be examined by researchers. The original books are available in regional offices, and each department has its own

31. This census was donated to the library by Alfonso Rochac.

32. For more details on these holdings, see López Vallecillos, Woodward, and Schoonover (1985, 129).

registro. When the registro was created as a streamlined institution, its first offices covered more than one department. The oldest books date back to 1882, when three regional registros were created (for the west, center, and east). The western registro was located in Santa Ana until 1897, when new offices were opened in other departments. Before 1860, land titles were registered by individual “*notarios*” and published in the official newspaper. After the 1860 legal code went into effect, three regional land registries were established under the Ministerio de Justicia. There seems to be no continuity between these land registries and the ones beginning in 1882, which were created to deal with titles generated by privatization of common lands during the 1880s. Many documents relating to ejidos and communal landholding were copied into these books in the 1880s and 1890s. Technically, landowners were supposed to register their existing (and thus older) titles at the registro, and thus researchers might find materials that predate formation of the registro. Another land-related institution, the Juzgado General de Hacienda, took over the tasks of resolving land disputes and selling government-owned lands from the Juzgado de Tierras. Many of the documents it inherited from this earlier office were damaged and unreadable. By 1872, however, the Juzgado General had copies of the titles to most Salvadoran haciendas. Apparently, these materials were all lost in the 1889 fire that destroyed the Palacio Nacional.

Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas / The Universidad Centroamericana has a small collection of colonial and nineteenth-century documents and manuscripts in its Colección Víctor Jerez, which was donated to the university by the Fundación de Sola. These catalogued documents include some unusual manuscripts relating to politics in the late nineteenth century. The collection also contains a few dozen valuable colonial manuscripts, including a copy of a sixteenth-century communal land title in Nahua with an accompanying Spanish version. The Colección Víctor Jerez also contains an excellent collection of books, journals, and newspapers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including some rare books on Central America. While located in the same building as the UCA library, this collection requires special permission from the director to examine it. The UCA also contains the archives of the Centro de Información y de Apoyo a la Investigación (CIDAI), which contain social science materials, primary and secondary, dealing with recent decades, especially the 1970s onward.

Biblioteca Nacional / The building housing the Biblioteca Nacional was entirely destroyed by the earthquake in 1986. The library has since resettled its main journals, reference works, and national and Central American collections in a small building on Calle Rubén Darío, not far from its

original location. These materials suffered from the earthquake and subsequent move, and thus the library cannot guarantee that it still holds every item listed in the catalog. The most important collection for researchers, that of national newspapers, was finally made available to the public only in 1990. It is now located in the Palacio Nacional, conveniently adjacent to the AGN. Because the catalogue to the collection is not considered reliable, a new one is being made but may take years to complete. The collection has extensive holdings of otherwise unavailable regional and late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century newspapers.³³ Like the AGN, the Biblioteca Nacional will be moving into the building occupied by the Banco Hipotecario, next to the Palacio Nacional, sometime in 1994.

Biblioteca Gallardo / The Biblioteca Gallardo has been described by Italo López Vallecillos, Ralph Lee Woodward, and Thomas Schoonover (1985, 129). Researchers should know that it holds unusual materials that can be found only by gaining direct access to the library's stacks. Among these materials are unpublished reports, rare books, a significant collection of nineteenth-century prints, pamphlets and handbills, typescripts and published copies of various ejido titles, hard-to-find nineteenth-century statutes and journals like the *Revista de Agricultura* (1880–1882), and documents on the history of Nueva San Salvador, where the library is located. The Biblioteca Gallardo also owns manuscript documents that have been published selectively in its multivolume publication *Papeles Históricos* (1954–1990). Researchers interested in other Central American countries are also likely to find unique items.³⁴ The existing index to the holdings of the library is mostly useless, however, because the index cards do not indicate the exact physical location of each item. A French librarian is now reorganizing and cataloging the Salvadoran portion of the library's holdings by using a system that will provide subject classifications, a project that should be completed in 1995.

Sites outside San Salvador

While many of the documents produced or received by the centralized state institutions provide insights into regional and local history, documents from local sites complement the views of national officials or institutions. Local sources also provide insights into processes not visible to outside officials. Although searching for regional materials is more arduous, it offers numerous potential rewards. Occasionally, one may

33. For a list of Salvadoran newspapers available in U.S. libraries, see Charno (1968) and U.S. Library of Congress (1973). More recently, the U.S. Library of Congress has been micro-filming Salvadoran newspapers in El Salvador and has given copies of the rolls to the Salvadoran institutions that loaned the originals.

34. The library also owns the papers of liberal, anti-imperialist writer Salvador Mendieta.

find an ejido or communal land title never seen before or documents relating to the struggles of local peasants. More often, local sites contain routine administrative records, although these too can be useful for understanding economic and political change. Tax records provide a view of the occupational structure; title registry books reveal patterns of land-ownership; and contract registry books detail a variety of commercial transactions. Also, identification of existing collections will assist AGN efforts to rescue papers of historical importance.

Municipal Materials / Municipal archives (or storehouses in many cases) contain most of the regional materials available in El Salvador. Unfortunately, many municipal sources have been lost or destroyed in revolts and wars, especially during the nineteenth century. Additional municipal buildings were destroyed during the revolutionary war of the 1980s.³⁵ Neglect and "cleaning out" have also contributed to the problem. These losses should not discourage researchers, however, because El Salvador has more than a hundred municipalities, many of which contain valuable collections.

Few municipal archives have been maintained in good shape. Most have relegated their older items to musty, dirty storerooms where the enterprise of research turns into a veritable adventure. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the AGN assisted a few municipal archives in preserving and organizing their holdings. Technicians visited the municipalities and organized their materials according to a fixed template. Typically, the municipalities benefiting from this program were the ones that already had the best materials. The few that were organized in this fashion are much easier to research. In 1993 the AGN began to work with regional municipalities again, this time gathering a detailed inventory of the holdings of the various municipal archives. So far they have completed the work for the department of Sonsonate.³⁶ Municipal archives usually contain bound books that include financial records, municipal council minutes, land titles, and contract registries.³⁷ A few municipalities have copies or originals of their ejido and communal land titles, labor-registry books, and census books. A few have collections of individual land titles and loose documents, where one may find reports from municipal administrators to higher officials, trials, correspondence, and other

35. At least forty-three municipal archives, mostly in the northeast, were partially or entirely destroyed during the war. Among the most important ones are Tejutla, San Fernando, Las Vueltas, Cojutepeque, Santa María Ostuma, Salcoatitán, Nahuizalco, San Marcos, Guazapa, Apopa, Caluco, Tenancingo, Corinto, Perquín, and Ciudad Barrios.

36. The AGN also has a survey of the contents of Western *alcaldías* that was carried out by this author.

37. The following municipalities contain larger collections that are in better shape than most: Santa Ana, Coatepeque, Chalchuapa, Juayua, Izalco, San Vicente, Nueva San Salvador, Ahuachapán, Jayaque, Nejapa, San Pablo, and Tacachico.

administrative records. Some municipalities have kept documents dating back to the early nineteenth century, but documents typically begin in the 1880s.

Sometimes municipal archives contain materials from the larger region. The municipal archive of San Miguel, only partially transferred to the AGN, has governors' materials dating back to at least the 1870s. Similarly, the municipality of Sonsonate holds two important groups of materials: governors' records from the 1820s to the 1880s as well as the country's only significant collection of regional colonial documents. A few hundred boxes arranged by decade, these documents originated in the entire western part of the country that encompassed at times the present-day departments of Ahuachapán, Sonsonate, and Santa Ana. Most of the documents come from the eighteenth century, especially the 1780s and 1790s. The oldest date back to the late 1600s, while other documents extend into the nineteenth century. About a third of these documents are court cases and *informativos*, another third includes correspondence, *bandos*, petitions, and decrees related to the administration of the region. The final third includes censuses, documents on the regional economy, tax lists, and similar items. After 1821, the documents pertain to local and national elections and political changes during the Federación de la América Central.

In 1990 the mayor of Sonsonate refused to allow the AGN to take these materials to the national building, despite the AGN's clear legal mandate. The documents have not been treated well, and their survival beyond a few more years is questionable. Many are already illegible. This collection constitutes the only group of region-specific colonial materials on El Salvador in the country. Historians interested in the local effects of Hapsburg rule would find these materials rewarding, as would historians of Central America seeking sources on the colonial economy or on Indian-Spanish and Indian-state relations. Other important topics could be researched using these materials, such as demographic changes, local effects of independence, and the crucial participation of this region in the early years of the federation. The civil and criminal cases would be particularly useful for studying state institutions and also in reconstructing the social history of the region. The only other sites containing similar materials are the Archivo General de Centro América in Guatemala City and the Spanish Archivo General de Indias in Seville.³⁸

Governors' Offices / The few existing governors' archives combine data on local municipalities with a regional and national perspective. Of all

38. For a more detailed examination of archival holdings in Spain that relate to Central America, see Sherman and Fiehrer (1985). For a discussion of an early frustrated effort at collecting materials on El Salvador in Spain and elsewhere, see Castro's "Plan para la preparación de una colección de documentos relativos a la historia de El Salvador" (1958).

fourteen departments, only three have materials predating 1950,³⁹ and only the one in Sonsonate has been cleaned and organized. It is composed of five hundred small boxes organized by period and type of document.⁴⁰ The collection begins in the 1880s but includes contemporary papers as well. Only the pre-1940 materials have been cleaned, organized, and boxed. The documents are categorized under the headings *solicitudes, militar y policía, educación, tierras, informes, correspondencia, política y elecciones, agricultura, and miscelánea*. A smaller collection of materials at the Gobernación of Ahuachapán has not been organized, but most of its important documents have been transferred to the AGN.

Private Collections / Collections or documents owned by families are the most difficult to locate but hold the greatest promise for researchers. Some local historians document what they have saved or purchased, but researchers who wish to examine these collections must work through personal contacts and maintain a certain amount of discretion. According to the assistant director of the AGN, José Antonio Gutiérrez Díaz of Santa Ana owns one of the largest private collections of documents in El Salvador. Other collectors of historical materials identified by Gropp decades ago might now be in the hands of surviving family members (see Gropp 1941, 582–84). They include Manuel Castro Ramírez, Joaquín Parada, Francisco Gavidia, Benjamin Orozco, Emetrio Oscar Salazar, Antonio E. Sol, Miguel Angel García, Manuel Lino Escamilla (Santa Ana), Carlos Orellana Hijo (Ahuachapán), and Edgar Humphrey (Cojutepeque).

Historians have rarely examined or utilized documents generated by family-owned enterprises, leaving open a wide field of possibilities for future work. It would be particularly useful to explore the history of prominent enterprises from different regions, especially their use of land and labor and their place in larger agrarian patterns. Such topics are important for the export-oriented coffee producers and for the older, more diversified grain and cattle farms predominating in many parts of the country. Research based on the holdings of any one elite family would make a great contribution to the economic and social history of El Salvador.

Access

Successful research hinges as much on developing professional and personal relations with persons in key locations as on the actual

39. I know with some certainty that the governorships in Santa Tecla, San Salvador, Cojutepeque, Chalatenango, Santa Ana, and La Unión have no "historical materials." All others reported they had no materials. The only governorship that remains to be explored is La Paz, where an explosion damaged official buildings during the early 1980s.

40. A selection of the best of these documents now forms the Colección Gobernación de Sonsonate at the AGN. Most of the materials dealing with land and agriculture are now in San Salvador. The ones remaining in Sonsonate are very valuable nonetheless.

sources one finds. This approach is particularly important in places like El Salvador, where institutional support is minimal and public-service personnel lack training and receive few rewards. In dealing with institutions with virtually no resources, one must always take local conditions into consideration and attempt to work out mutually beneficial relationships. For example, use of a researcher's copying or microfilming equipment might be very useful to archivists whose typewriters sometimes do not work. Access to unorganized materials might hinge on agreeing to leave the materials organized and purchase boxes for them. Even if the resulting classification is rudimentary, a crude chronological arrangement will help future researchers.

Access to provincial sources can be more problematic because they are rarely located in official archival repositories. Previous arrangements with central locations like an archive or university can provide the perception of official sanction to a researcher's otherwise suspicious request to look into the back rooms of an *alcaldía*. Providing travel costs plus a modest payment to archive employees might secure their assistance on such trips, leading to more likely access to remote locations as well as benefiting their home institution by alerting them to existing locations. In sum, the greatest obstacles should always be negotiated. If unresponsive local officials are not willing to give materials to the AGN, perhaps an offer to clean and provide boxes for their stacks of old papers might convince them to at least lend a few of the best boxes for copying or microfilming at another site.

CONCLUSION

This research note has attempted to provide as detailed a description of research materials for Salvadoran historiography as space allows. It should be apparent that opportunities for research for the years 1700 to 1980 are extensive, if not consistent across all regions and decades. It is my hope that this knowledge will contribute to development of a new historiography for El Salvador that will rely less on highly charged ideological assumptions and more on fresh research. If more historians and social scientists become interested in carrying out research in El Salvador, the resulting trend could help make existing materials even more accessible.

APPENDIX 1

Main Sections of the Archivo General de la Nación, San Salvador

CM	Colección Ministerios
MG	Ministerio de Gobernación
SPE	Supremo Poder Ejecutivo
AN	Asamblea Nacional
CM	Colección Militar
MA	Ministerio de Agricultura
CImp	Colección Impresos
CDM	Colección de Documentos Microfilmados
CB	Colección Barrios
CD-19	Colección Diarios Siglo 19
CQ	Colección de Documentos Quemados
CF	Colección Federación
CL	Colección Leistschneider
CPC	Colección de Documentos Pre-clasificados/Por-Clasificar
CE	Colección Ezeta
CDC	Colección Clasificados
CI	Colección Indiferentes
CT	Colección Tierras
CC	Colección Colonial
CJ	Colección Judicial
CG	Colección Gobernaciones
	SO Sonsonate
	AH Ahuachapán
	SV San Vicente
CA	Colección Alcaldías
	SO Sonsonate
	AH Ahuachapán
	SM San Miguel
	AR Armenia
	IZ Izalco
	AT Atiquizaya
	CH Chalchuapa
	SA Santa Ana
CTR	Colección Transcripciones
CP	Colección Planos
CF	Colección Fotos
CME	Colección Ministerio de Educación

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