

THE JUAN SILVANO GODOI
COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

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For scholars writing a history of a “developing” country, access to pertinent unpublished personal and official sources is so limited that some prominent historical figures are inadequately represented. Juan Silvano Godoi of Paraguay is no exception.¹ Because of the inaccessibility of primary sources, publications on Paraguayan history have devoted little coverage to this major figure. To help fill this gap, the Special Collections Department of the University Library at the University of California, Riverside, has compiled an annotated list of Godoi’s personal collection.² The Godoi collection represents a crucial period of Paraguayan history, and to understand its importance, researchers must become aware of some of his activities between 1870 and 1926.

Juan Silvano Godoi was born on 12 November 1850 into the best of Paraguay’s small aristocracy in the era preceding the War of the Triple Alliance. During his long life, Godoi was a politician, a journalist, a jurist, and a historian. In the last two decades of his life, from 1902 to 1926, he served as the Director General of the Biblioteca, Museo y Archivo de la Nación.

When the War of the Triple Alliance broke out in 1865, fourteen-year-old Godoi was completing his education in Argentina and returned to his country only after the war ended. At the age of twenty, he became a prominent member of the Convención Constituyente, serving in the Congreso from 1870 to 1877 and playing an important role in drafting the constitution that remained in force until 1940.³

Two parties had emerged in Paraguay following the war, the *Colorados* and the *Liberales*. Godoi became an active member of the Liberal party. During the presidency of Juan Bautista Gill (1874–1877), Godoi

1. The name is also spelled Godoy.

2. For more information about holdings on Paraguay at the University of California, Riverside, see Thomas L. Whigham, “Paraguayan History: Manuscript Sources in the United States,” *LARR* 18, no. 1 (1983):106–8.

3. *Paraguayans of To-day*, edited by William B. Parker (Buenos Aires: Hispanic Society of America, 1920), 15.

served as a justice in the civil court and as a member of the Superior Tribunal de Justicia. In 1877, however, disillusioned with the machinations of President Gill, Godoi and other liberals helped finance a revolt. After laying the groundwork for Gill's assassination, Godoi fled to the Argentine city of Corrientes. There he was to prepare revolutionary elements to invade the country once the principal object of the conspiracy was accomplished. On the morning of 12 April, his brother Nicanor Godoi assassinated President Gill, but the revolution did not materialize. Juan Silvano Godoi took up residence in exile in Buenos Aires for the next eighteen years. Nicanor Godoi managed to escape from Paraguay, to which he never returned. After spending many years in exile in Santo Tomé, Argentina, he died in Buenos Aires at the age of ninety-four.⁴

The years of exile proved to be among the most prolific of Godoi's life. In addition to maintaining a very successful speculative business, he wrote and published books and articles and also founded two daily newspapers, *Las Provincias* and *La Discusión*.⁵ He traveled extensively in Europe and collected works of art. In Buenos Aires, Godoi became an important member of a group of Paraguayan exiles known as the *Comité Paraguayo*. His home was the center of a literary circle and the locus of exile activity. Godoi financed or was involved in nearly every attempted revolt against the ruling Colorado regime. For example, in 1879 Godoi and other Paraguayan exiles in Buenos Aires financed the purchase of an armed merchant ship, the *Galilo*, which they renamed *El Libertador* and loaded with a supply of arms and uniforms. In June 1879, Juan Silvano Godoi, his brother Nicanor, and some five hundred men sailed for Paraguay in hopes of liberating the country from the Colorados with the help of rebel sympathizers. The ship escaped detention by Argentine authorities at Rosario and Corrientes and seized control of the towns of Humaitá, Pilar, Villa Franca, and Villa Oliva but failed to take Asunción.⁶

In 1895 Godoi returned to Asunción under an amnesty granted to political exiles. From that time on, he evidently abandoned his interest in politics and never again involved himself in anti-government activities. In 1902, recognizing Godoi's contributions to intellectual and artistic spheres of Paraguayan life, President Juan Antonio Escurra created for him the position of Director General of the Biblioteca, Museo y Archivo de la Nación. Godoi's personal library of twenty thousand volumes and his important art collection formed its nucleus.⁷ In 1910 he was appointed delegate to the XVII Congress of Americanists, which met in Buenos Aires

4. Silvano Mosqueira, *Juan Silvano Godoi: su vida y su obra* (Asunción: La Colmena, 1935), 9.

5. Parker, *Paraguayans of To-day*, 17.

6. Harris G. Warren, *Rebirth of the Paraguayan Republic: The First Colorado Era, 1878-1904* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 48, 100.

7. *Ibid.*, 292.

during the commemoration of the centenary of Argentine independence. In 1911 he was sent to Rio de Janeiro as Minister Plenipotentiary.⁸ Godoi died in Asunción on 27 January 1926 at the age of seventy-five, leaving an important collection of letters, manuscripts, excerpts from various publications, his diaries, and a number of published works.

This collection was purchased by the University of California, Riverside, in 1968. It has been organized by type of material and is stored in twenty acid-free boxes. The collection is also available to users through an annotated computer list in English.⁹

The boxes are arranged in various categories. Box 1 contains Godoi's manuscripts, articles, speeches, notes, and similar materials. Boxes 2 and 3 hold his diaries written from 13 January 1897 to 31 January 1921. Boxes 4, 5, and 6 contain correspondence sent to Godoi, including letters from prominent political figures and respected scholars of the period: Dr. Facundo Machaín (1847–1877), Foreign Minister of Paraguay after the War of the Triple Alliance and a member of the commission that drafted the Constitution of 1870; Silvano Mosqueira (1867–1955), poet and diplomat, who composed poetry in Guarani; Facundo Insfrán, founder of Paraguay's medical school; Antonio C. Rivarola (1836–1879), a controversial figure who served as the first president under the provisions of the Constitution of 1870; and Emiliano J. O'Leary (1879–1968), originator in the early 1900s of the revisionist school of historical writing that glorified Francisco Solano López. Letters from library notables include those from Miguel F. Rodríguez, President of the Argentine national library (sending 478 works to the Paraguayan National Library to help establish an Argentine section); and J. D. Schwab, Yale University Librarian, requesting government and scientific publications from Paraguay and suggesting a book exchange program between the two libraries.

Godoi's own letters (mainly originals and some drafts) are found in Box 7. Some examples are a letter to the minister of justice, dated 17 December 1909, requesting a series of documents relating to Father Fidel Maíz (1833–1920), priest, journalist, and aide to Francisco Solano López during the War of the Triple Alliance; a letter to Manuel Avila, veteran of the War of the Triple Alliance, journalist, government official, and a founder of the "Partido Liberal" (written from Buenos Aires on 22 May 1890); letters to Cecilio Báez and Benigno Ferreira, participants in the Liberal Revolution of 1904; and several letters to Godoi's family, his wife, and his daughter Heidé.

Boxes 8 and 9 contain miscellaneous correspondence, including a letter from Juan B. Egusquiza to Juan Gualberto González, dated 17 April 1894. Egusquiza, who became the president of Paraguay (1894–1898),

8. Parker, *Paraguayans of To-day*, 16.

9. The list was prepared using the software dBase III Plus.

proclaims in this letter his candidacy for president of the republic and renounces his position as war minister. Another letter from José Rato Camino to the Paraguayan treasury minister, requests salary and maintenance costs for the Paraguayan consulate in Parano, Argentina. These boxes also include several resignation letters from Paraguayan ministers and government officials.

Miscellaneous biographical materials, such as photographs, financial statements, and invitation cards, are grouped in Boxes 10 and 11. Boxes 12 and 13 contain handwritten copies of archival documents. Boxes 14 and 15 hold political and legal documents, such as a decree dated 31 January 1866 creating a commemorative medal following the battle of Corrales and a ten-page legal document in which Dr. Javier Quatrefages acknowledges a legal separation from Elisa Alicia Lynch. Box 16 has copies of legal documents of the properties of Madame Lynch. Godoi was assisting Enrique Solano López, a son of Lynch and Francisco Solano López, in his efforts to lay claim to his mother's lands in Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. Box 17 holds financial documents, such as a copy of a document written in London on 27 August 1881, relating to the attempts of the Comité Paraguayo to obtain loans in Europe. Boxes 18 and 19 contain newspaper clippings covering Paraguayan politics, economics, and social life. Box 20 offers miscellaneous documents, such as minutes of a meeting of the Centro Paraguayo attended by Godoi, Enrique Parodi, Enrique Solano López, and Benigno Ferreira. This box also contains a collection of eulogies written to honor Silvio Pettrossi, father of Paraguayan aviation and winner of the International Aviation Contest at the 1915 San Francisco World Exposition, who died in an airplane accident in Buenos Aires, on 17 October 1915.

The specific items mentioned above are only a small part of the collection. For scholars of Paraguayan history, the Godoi collection represents a rich source now accessible for the first time.