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## Spanish Archives of Laredo (Texas USA)

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# Inventory of the Spanish Archives of Laredo (Texas USA)

Collection Number SC 19  
Blume Library Special Collections

StMU

Saint Mary's University of San Antonio  
One Camino Santa Maria  
San Antonio TX 78228-8530 USA  
Phone: 210-436-3011  
[www.stmarytx.edu](http://www.stmarytx.edu)

## Descriptive Summary

**Repository** Blume Library, Saint Mary's University of San Antonio, Texas  
**Donor** Sebron Sneed Wilcox ("Seb" Wilcox)  
**Creator** Pueblo de Laredo  
**Title** Spanish Archives of Laredo (Texas USA)  
**Inclusive Dates** 1755-1848, 1880s  
**Reference Code** SC 19  
**Languages** Spanish predominately with some English after 1848  
**Extent** 3,245 items containing 13,343 pages  
**Abstract** The Laredo archives consist of the public records of the Pueblo (later Villa) of Laredo (Texas USA) from its founding in 1755 by Don Tomas Sanchez until 1848 when it came under the jurisdiction of the United States. Subjects include: decrees of the governments of Spain and Mexico, allotment of land to settlers, boundary surveys, tax renditions, wills and probate proceedings, census reports, building a church, establishment of a school, the postal system, civil and criminal courts, Indian raids, and trade statistics (Anita Saxine, *Special Collections*, 1979).

## Administrative Information

**Restrictions to Access:** By appointment only  
**Usage Restrictions:** Originals are not available; use alternative forms  
**Alternative Forms of Material:** Microfilm; typewritten transcriptions with some translations to English; printed texts of many documents in Spanish with English translations  
Since 1936, several independent efforts by scholars have resulted in the translation of a large number of the most interesting documents. Some of these are published.  
**Custodial History:** For many years the archives of the Villa de San Augustin de Laredo dating from before 1848 were deemed to be lost, their whereabouts unknown. Owing to a personal interest in the history of Laredo, Sebron Wilcox made an effort to find them. In 1934, the county clerk's office was remodeled resulting in the reorganization of records stored there. In September of 1934, a bundle of old Spanish documents was found which proved to be only part of the archives of Laredo. The remainder was discovered later that year consisting of when orders were given to clean out the basement storage of the courthouse. Wilcox asked the janitor Pancho Ramirez to check everything taken out of the basement. He subsequently found

eight more bundles. Many of these materials were soiled and some water-damaged. Sebrin Wilcox took possession of these bundles of documents and cleaned, repaired and sorted them by date. In 1960, these documents were deposited at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, where they remain.

**Acquisitions Information:** Prior to his death on May 12, 1959, Mr. Wilcox expressed his desire to donate this collection to St. Mary's University of San Antonio. On July 14, 1959, two months after Wilcox's death, fourteen crates of documents about Laredo arrived at the university. They included the Laredo Archives, the personal papers of Mr. Wilcox and fifty documents about the abandoned frontier pueblo of Palafox. Mrs. Wilcox and her son William made a formal presentation of the archives to St. Mary's University on December 10, 1960 (*San Antonio News*, January 21, 1961). However, in October 1969, the Wilcox heirs, Mrs. Seb S. Wilcox and her daughter Genevieve, indicated that St. Mary's should purchase the archives which, according to them, had been merely loaned, not given or donated. It was also intimated that an 'eastern university' was willing to purchase them for half a million dollars. The Texas State Library and Historical Commission obtained a restraining order dated May 21, 1971, enjoining any sale. The City of Laredo also sought the documents based on the Laws of Texas of 1850. Finally on July 18, 1972, an agreement was reached among the State of Texas, St. Mary's University and the City of Laredo. The University acknowledged the ownership of the Laredo Archives by the State of Texas, however, the state agreed that St. Mary's had "exclusive and uninterrupted perpetual possession of said documents" on the conditions that it care for the documents in accordance with good archival practices and should it ever decide to dispossess the documents, "they shall be delivered to the State of Texas and no other party." The City of Laredo relinquished all its rights to the State of Texas. But in 1974 the Wilcox heirs obtained a court order demanding a reconsideration of the 1972 agreement since they had been excluded from it. The court proceedings dragged on for over five years. The 'Final Judgment,' on February 22, 1980, affirmed the decision of 1972 but stipulated the return to the Wilcox family of the so-called 'Wilcox collection' and the Palafox papers.

**Processing Information:** From 1934 to 1936, Sebron Wilcox and Father Florencio Andres separated the documents, cleaned them of dirt, dried those that were wet and mildewed, assembled them in chronological order, and group them in folders by year. Father Andres transcribed some of the documents into typescripts and translated a few. Wilcox began making public lectures using the information abstracted from them. In 1936, Thomas Sutherland of the Historical Records Commission arranged for workers from the Works Progress Administration to assist with the task of transcription. In 1940, the transcription was assumed by the State Historical Records Survey under the direction of Ricard de la Garza. In December of that same year, Juan Villasana Haggard was named to prepare the final draft of the transcriptions which were some 15,000 pages (see his *Spanish Archives Handbook*). This project completed transcriptions only for documents dated through 1836. These transcriptions followed a numbering system of box and document numbers which was retained in the microfilming of the transcriptions.

In 1958, Wilcox gave bound copies of the transcripts to the library in Laredo, the State Archives (of Texas), the University of Texas Library (Austin) and the National Archives in Washington, D. C. In the years after 1961, Carmen Perry of St. Mary's University, rehoused the documents in acid-free containers, made records of every document, and refined the chronological organization. The director of the university library, Bro. Paul Novosal, SM, had them photocopied and microfilmed. In 1993, Brother Robert Wood, SM, completed the first edition of

an index to the archives based on the chronological order imposed on them by previous processing efforts.

**Scope:** The Laredo archives are one of three similar collections preserved in Texas. The others were compiled in Bexar County and in Nacogdoches. The Laredo archives can be divided into the colonial period from the foundation of Laredo in 1755 to 1821, and then the Mexican period from 1821 to 1848. There are few documents after 1848 and these are mostly in English. The documents before 1821 are predominately royal or viceregal decrees on a wide variety of subjects. During the Mexican period the documents address the problems of frontier life: the allotment of lands to settlers, boundary surveys, tax renditions, wills and probate proceedings, census reports, the establishment of schools, the building of the church, the establishment of a postal system, civil and criminal litigations, Indian raids, trade statistics, and correspondence among civil and military officials. There are no documents from the first months of 1840 regarding the Republic of the Rio Grande, of which Laredo was the capital. Documents after 1848 are few.

**Preferred Citation:** Spanish Archives of Laredo, St. Mary's University of San Antonio

**Copyright Notice:**

**Catalog Headings:**

List all subject headings applying to the collection. These serve as access points for searches

### Related Collections:

Microfilm of the Laredo Archives is held in the Southwest Collection of Texas Tech University. In 1958 Wilcox gave bound copies of the transcripts to the library in Laredo, the State Archives (of Texas), the University of Texas Library (Austin) and the National Archives in Washington, D. C. In addition, there are Xerox copies in the Bexar County Archives made from the microfilm copies of the original manuscripts in the Library of St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Boxes 6-12.

### Administrative History of Laredo

Describe the context in which the materials were created, assembled, accumulated or maintained. It is administrative history for an institution or biography for a person.

**As Part of New Spain** – The settlement of Laredo was begun on May 15, 1755 by Don Tomas Sanchez de la Barrera y Gallardo and four families of settlers. It was intended to be a frontier *villa* such as Camargo, Revilla, Mier, and Reynosa. Laredo was then part of the Colony of Nuevo Santander that extended from the Rio Grande to the Nueces River. Its capital was San Carlos. By 1767 the population of the Laredo settlement had increased to some 200, and in June of that year the settlement received a charter by the Crown. The “Royal Commission to the Colonies of Nuevo Santander” visited in 1767 to inaugurate private land ownership (thenceforth known as the *Visita*). Six leagues in each direction around the town were marked to create political subdivisions resembling counties. Within each jurisdiction land was partitioned into individual plots (*porciones*) which were given to the individual settlers. The Royal Commission surveyed the town site and set up the municipal government. Laredo's records began the next year in 1768. In the fall, the first election was held for alcalde and councilors. The census of January 1780, reported a population of 700 composed of Spaniards, mulattos, and mestizos to which was added a congregation of 110 Carrizo Indians settled there. Forty-eight heads of families were armed with muskets and rawhide shields to repel the frequent raids by hostile Indians.

**As Part of Mexico** – After 1821, Mexico now independent of Spain, Laredo became part of the newly organized state of Tamaulipas, carved from the old province of Nuevo Santander.

Later Villa de Laredo

Various jurisdictions reflecting tumult in Mexico: province, state, department, etc.

Under Mexico, Laredo was part of the State of Tamaulipas

Seat of the Republic of the Rio Grande in 184\_

Coahuila and Texas

Raided by the Republic of Texas in 18\_\_ in retaliation for a raid on San Antonio

**As Part of Texas** Occupied by troops of the United States in 184\_

In 1848 it came under the jurisdiction of the United States

County seat of Webb County in \_\_

Up to 1880s when the archives end

## Biographical Notes

Persons having association with the arrangement of the Laredo Archives include:

**Sebron “Seb” Sneed Wilcox** – Sebron Wilcox was appointed County Clerk (court reporter) for the 49<sup>th</sup> District Court of Texas in 1911 by Judge John F. Mullaly. He took possession of the Laredo Archive in 1934. From 1936 he delivered a number of papers based on information from the Laredo Archives to various groups and organizations. He died on May 12, 1959. [See *Handbook of Texas* for more. For Wilcox’s account of the discovery of the archives see *Southwest Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (January 1946): 341.]

**Florencio Andres, OMI** – Father Florencio Andres, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), was the pastor of the Catholic parish in Laredo when Sebron Wilcox approached him for help in organizing and deciphering the documents in the Laredo Archives. Fr. Andres transcribed some of the documents into typewritten form and translated a few of these.

**Ricard de la Garza** – After 1936, a team of workers directed by Ricard de la Garza and funded by the Works Progress Administration took over the task of transcribing the documents. In 1940, de la Garza was appointed by the State Historical Records Survey as Supervisor for District 11, which included Laredo.

**Juan Villasana Haggard** – In 1940, Juan Villasana Haggard was named by the State Historical Records Survey to prepare the final draft of the 15,000 pages of the typewritten transcriptions of the Laredo Archives dated through 1836.

**Carmen Perry** – Carmen Perry was a native of Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico, and had extensive experience in translating and teaching Spanish. She earned a Master of Arts degree from the University of Texas and performed postgraduate work at the University of Madrid and the University of Mexico. Fluent in Spanish, French and German, she was the head of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library at the Alamo before joining St. Mary’s University library staff in June of 1968. After organizing the Laredo Archives chronologically she accepted a position at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

**Robert D. Wood** – Brother Wood, a member of the Society of Mary (SM), spent seventeen years in Latin America as a teacher, educational administrator and graduate student. From research at archives in both Spain and Latin America he became familiar with old Spanish script and abbreviations. He presented his PhD thesis in Spanish to the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. In 1991 he was appointed university archivist at St. Mary’s University of San Antonio. In 1993 he completed the first *Indexes* to the Laredo Archives.

## Jurisdictions, Officials and Record Types Found in the Laredo Archives

### Jurisdictions --

Colonia del Nuevo Santander  
Estado de Tamaulipas  
Departamento de Tamaulipas  
Departamento de \_\_\_\_\_  
Prefectura del Norte de Tamaulipas  
Distrito del Norte  
Ciudad Guerrero  
Villa de Laredo  
Villa de Camargo  
Villa de Candela

### Civilian Offices

The list below is an accumulation of the officials that create the records in the Laredo Archives. This is a trial arrangement.

*Prefecto* (civil governor)  
*Sub-prefecto* (for example, *Sub-prefecto del Partido dela Villa de Mier*)  
*Junta Municipal* (board, committee, commission of the town)  
*Mayor* (senior official presumably of the *junta municipal*)  
*Ayuntamiento* (town council)  
*Alcalde* (chief executive officer of town)  
*Tribunal superior* (superior court)  
*Juez* (judge)  
*Juzgado de paz* (court, justice of the peace)  
*Fiscal* (city attorney)

### Military Units and Offices

Army of the North (Ejercito del Norte)  
Comandancia Militar (at Laredo)  
Primera Compania Permanente de Tamaulipas (at Laredo)

### Record Formats – These are encountered among the holdings:

<i>Deposicion</i>	Deposition (declaration)
<i>Impuesto, -ta</i>	Tax
<i>Ramos de Fondo municipal</i>	Accounts of the municipal fund
<i>Censo</i>	Census List
<i>Libro de A__nerdos</i>	Decisions
<i>Libro de Borrador</i>	Work Book
<i>Manifiesto</i>	Manifesto
<i>Patente</i>	Patent ( <i>Patente ...-de impuesto, -de placa, -de profesional</i> )
<i>Padron, Padron electoral</i>	Register, Register of Voters
<i>Relacion</i>	Report or Account
<i>Sello</i>	Stamp; for example: <i>Sello de correos</i> (postage), <i>sello de fiscal</i>

Cuaderno

“Sello Cuarto Una Cuartilla (Quarter of one piece)  
“Sello Quinto Medio Real” (“One fifth of a half” or 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a real)  
notebook

## Subjects in the Laredo Archives

NOTE: The documents of the Laredo Archives were dismantled and arranged in strict chronological order. This made it necessary to provide users some enumeration of the subjects found in the documents. Various scholars have summaries which are included below.

### Description of the Contents According to Carmen Perry

The main body of the documents consists of:

1. Allotment of land to settlers
2. Boundary surveys
3. Building of the parish church
4. Census; civil and school
5. Civil and criminal litigations
6. Correspondence between officials of various townships and the governors both civil and military
7. Edicts and decrees from the King, the Viceroy and the Archbishop
8. Decrees from the Government of Mexico
9. Establishment of the schools
10. Indian raids
11. Laredo establishes civil and military government
12. Ordinances and local laws established
13. Postal system established
14. Probating estates and wills
15. Tax renditions
16. Trade statistics
17. Various important church and state documents of the Mexican period

The Laredo Archives do not include marriage, death or birth certificates. They do not include actual land grants. Many original documents sent from the capitol were deposited at Laredo because it was the last town in its courier chain. In the Spanish and Mexican periods mail was sent by courier (*cordillera*) and the last town in the courier chain kept the original document.

## Reconstruction of Original Order

ARRANGEMENT NOTE – Much of the Laredo Archives were historically maintained in bound volumes resembling ledgers. When the archives went out of custody of Webb County, these volumes were dis-bound and the contents mingled to make one continuous series of items in chronological order. This arrangement disguises the original series by which the records were accumulated by the municipal government of the Villa de Laredo. Several enumerations of the contents of the archives were made during historic times when there was a change of regimes.

The size, color and style of individual pages indicate which were formerly bound together in the same letter book. Among the former letter books were those of:

Jugado 1<sup>o</sup> del Ynst de C. Guer<sup>o</sup> (Ciudad Guerrero)

Jugado de Pas de Loreto

Subpref. Del Part<sup>o</sup> dela Villa de Mier

Comandancia Militar, Mier

## Collection Overview

Series One: Original Documents

Sub-series:

Sub-series:

Series Two: Alternative Forms

Sub-series: Typewritten Transcription

Sub-series: Translations

Sub-series: Microfilm

Series Three: Supporting Research

Sub-series: Historical Research

Sub-series: Biographies

Series Four: Acquisition and Processing Records

### Series One

#### Original Documents

Outline the Boxes and Folders and their chronological content

### Series Two

#### Alternative Forms

#### **Typescript Transcriptions**

The transcriptions total about 15,000 pages. (Description of form and arrangement to be created)

**Unpublished translations** – (Description to be created) they are associated with the transcripts

For assistance in translation see:

J. Villasana Haggard; *Spanish Archives Handbook*; Austin: University of Texas, 1937.

This is a typescript document prepared by the principal translator of the Laredo Archives.

J. Villasana Haggard, *Handbook for Translators of Spanish Historical Documents*; Austin:

University of Texas Archives Collections, 1941; printed by Semco Color Press, Oklahoma City.

**Published translations** – In the following titles various documents of the Laredo Archives appear in English translation:

**Thompson, Jerry**; *Laredo: A Pictorial History* by Jerry Thompson designed by Paula Hennigan Phillips edited by Penelope C. Baker and Richard A Horwege; with an introduction by Stan Green of Laredo State University; Norfolk, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 1986

**Wilkinson, J. B., (Joseph B. Wilkinson), 1902-1973**; *Laredo and the Rio Grande Frontier*; a narrative by J. B. Wilkinson, dust jacket and title page illustration by E. M. (Buck) Schiwetz, designed by Larry Smitherman; Austin, Texas: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1975

**Laredo Archives Series** – These are six volumes of documents selected from the Laredo Archives along with an index volume compiled by Brother Robert Wood, SM, in 8 ½ by 11 inch



format and distributed privately by the compiler. Volumes three to six are translations into English.

- 1) *Documentos para la Genealogia* (1998), containing documents taken verbatim from the archives (194 pages).
- 2) *Documentos referentes a los Indios/Documents on the Indians* (1998), with both the original Spanish document and Robert Wood's translation (90 pages)
- 3) *Documents for the History of Laredo* (1999), translations by R. Wood, 116 pages
- 4) *The History of Mexico 1809-1845 in the Laredo Archives* (2000), translations by R. Wood, 46 pages
- 5) *Index to the Municipal Correspondence 1825-1845 and Verbal Arbitrations and Decisions 1832-1842* (2000), translations by R. Wood, 76 pages
- 6) *Death and Taxes* (2001), translations by R. Wood, 65 pages
- 7) *Indexes* – a revised edition of the *Indexes* (2000) is in 14 x 8 ½ inch format.
- 8)

*Life in Laredo: A Documentary History of the Laredo Archives*; Number 2 in the Al Filo Mexican American Studies Series; by Robert D. Wood; Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004. This book presents translations of 477 documents in whole or in part from the Laredo Archives.

**First Microfilm Edition, 1958** – “In 1958, Dr. David Vigness of Texas Technological College (now Texas Tech University) obtained permission from Wilcox to microfilm the archives for their Southwest Collection. The documents were microfilmed as they were found in the boxes. When it was discovered that some of the end portions of the film were defective an additional roll of ‘retakes’ was made. This microfilm edition became obsolete when the documents were re-microfilmed later according to a new organization.

**Second Microfilm Edition, [1960s]** –

**Digitized Images** – The original documents were digitized through a TexTreasuries grant from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission in 2017. Digitization was done by the University of North Texas Digital Projects Lab and made available on the Portal to Texas History.

## Series Three Supporting Research

Historical Research

Biographies

### **Books and Articles**

Publications describing the recognition, organizing and interpreting of the Laredo Archives include the following:

\_\_\_\_\_; “St. Mary’s Codifies Treasured Historical Collection,” *San Antonio Express*, Friday, July 19, 1968: 2-B

\_\_\_\_\_, “Laredo Archives Analysis Is Underway,” *San Antonio Express and News*, Sunday, July 28, 1968: 18

Dunn, Ray Sylvan; article about the Southwest Collection; *The American Archivist* 28, no. 3 (July 1965): 414

Platon, Jaime; "The Spanish Archives of Laredo," *Texas Libraries* 22 (Jan.-Feb, 1960): 12-13.

Saxine, Anita C; "The Laredo Archives Now Housed at St. Mary's University," *Texas Libraries* 42, no. 4 (winter 1980): 160-64

Santos, Richard; "An Annotated Survey of the Spanish Archives of Laredo;" *Texana* 4, no. 1 (spring 1966): 41-46. This is the first published survey of the contents of the archives and it is by the Bexar County archivist.

Thompson, Jerry; *Sabers on the Rio Grande*; Austin: Presidial Press, 1974: 219-21, presents a history of the archives

Walsh, Natalie; *The Founding of Laredo and San Augustine Church* (1935); this thesis is said to be the first work based on the Laredo Archives after their discovery

Wilcox, Sebron; "The Spanish Archives of Laredo"; *Southwest Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (January 1946): 341. This article was reprinted in part as: "The Spanish Archives of Laredo," *St. Mary's University Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (October 1968): 3-8.

Wood, Robert; *Life in Laredo: A Documentary History of the Laredo Archives*; Number 2 in the Al Filo Mexican American Studies Series; by Robert D. Wood; Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004. This book presents translations of 477 documents in whole or in part from the Laredo Archives.

## Series Four Acquisition and Processing Records

(Under construction)