

Preserving the local archives of mutual aid societies in Santiago, Chile (1853-1918)

Survey Report

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This report provides an overview of the documentary material surveyed as part of the pilot project “Preserving the local archives of mutual aid societies in Santiago, Chile (1853-1918)”, funded by the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library (EAP1283). The mutual aid societies involved are: Fermín Vivaceta, Juan Miguel Dávila Baeza, Igualdad y Trabajo, and Empleados de Comercio. These organisations were part of the golden age of Chilean mutualism, with its peak of activity and membership between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. The material we have been able to identify, and from which we have managed to digitise a small sample, corresponds precisely to those years, constituting documentation of great value due to its antiquity and, also, its precariousness.

Although Chilean mutualism experienced years of great activity and influence, its current state is critical. From the middle of the 20th century onwards, mutual aid societies began to experience a process of deterioration due to a decrease in membership and the loss of the specificity of their economic and social function, gradually taken over by the benefits provided by the Chilean state from the 1920s onwards. This deterioration has reached ever greater dimensions in recent years, where mutuals have experienced increasing material and organisational impoverishment, which the pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis have only exacerbated. In fact, the deadlines for this project have been severely affected (to this day) by the impact of these two phenomena, which caused the mutual aid societies involved in this project to go into seclusion until recently. This has made our work more difficult, but at the same time even more urgent. If the material of these organisations is not preserved soon, there is real risk of it disappearing forever, especially if there are no plans from these organisations to preserve or digitise this material.

The total of the material registered so far amounts to 20,838 pages (of which we digitised a total of 414 images), corresponding to 98 volumes (so far), covering the years 1883 to 1940 approximately. The Juan Miguel Dávila Baeza mutual aid society is the one that preserves the greatest number of sources, in the best state of conservation and organisation. In the other societies, the state of the material is much more precarious in

terms of the quantity available and its safekeeping. In general, they are found in a disorganized way, in places that are unsuitable for their conservation (with humidity, temperature variations, deposits in poor condition, abundant dust, with free access for other people), and in buildings in disuse or with sporadic use. No special care for the preservation of these documents is observed, nor are there any intentions on the part of these institutions to carry out this task. In what follows we present a summary of the material surveyed in each mutual aid society. A full description of the material can be found in the "Survey record EAP 1283" Excel file.

1. Sociedad Mutualista Fermín Vivaceta

Foundation year: December 1883

Location: Porvenir 775, Santiago, Chile

Historical background: Founded in 1883 in honour of Fermín Vivaceta, one of the most important figures of Chilean mutualism. Since the thirties and forties, because of the participation of the State in the provision of the services provided by the mutual society, its membership has been reduced.

Status and current operation of the organization: It is currently partially operational. Annual meetings are held, and a list of members and board of directors is maintained, but activities have been reduced to the organization of social events and some services, such as the provision of funeral space in the organization's mausoleum.

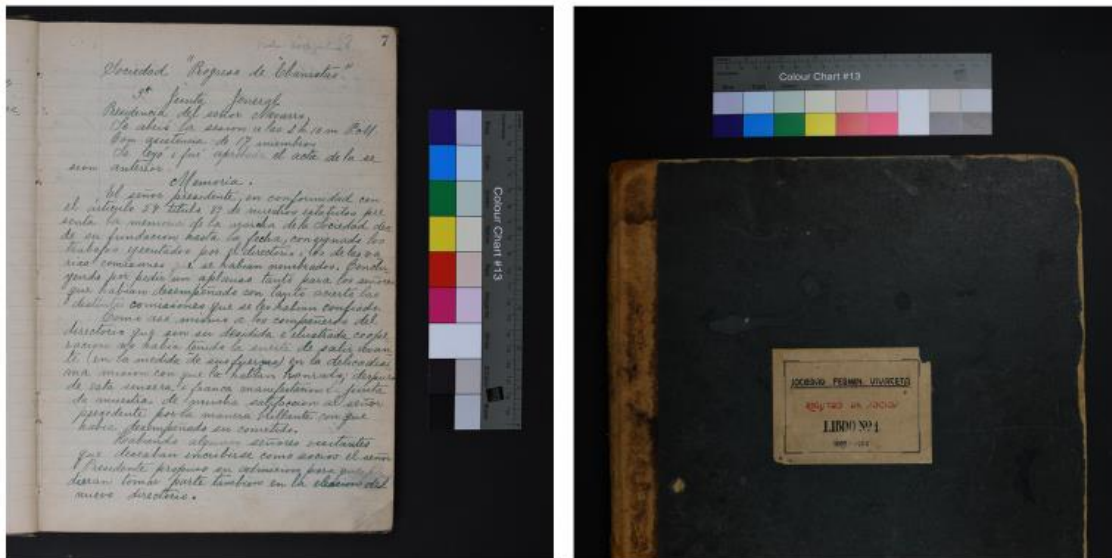
Material organization and state: there is no organization of the material, and its conservation is precarious. The material is in turn in an old building that is used only sporadically. Inadequate conditions due to humidity and temperature variation. There is also a lot of dust, and some bindings are in contact with metals and plastics. No special care is observed for the conservation of these documents.

Material of interest found:

3,119 total pages

Inventory: 17 volumes.

Digitized images: 271



2. Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos Juan Miguel Dávila Baeza

Foundation year: 1916

Location: San Francisco 668, Santiago, Chile

Historical background: Founded in 1916, in honour of the lawyer and philanthropist José Miguel Dávila Baeza, with a building for its operation and statutes since the same year. The most demanded services from the beginning were health, education and funeral services. Since the 1930s and 1940s, because of the participation of the State in the provision of the services provided by the mutual society, its members have been reduced.

Status and current operation of the organization: Currently it is partially operational, annual meetings are held and they maintain a list of members and board of directors, but the activities have been reduced to the organization of social events and some services, such as the provision of funeral spaces in the organization's mausoleum.

Material organization and state: The material is sorted and classified by the staff of the mutual society, according to their criteria. Precarious state of conservation. Inadequate conditions due to humidity and temperature variation, and abundant dust. No special care has been taken for the conservation of these documents.

Material of interest found:

15.015 pages in total

Inventory: 68 volumes

Digitized images: 32



3. Sociedad de Empleados de Comercio

Foundation year: 1887

Location: Catedral 2278, Santiago, Chile

Historical background: Founded in 1887, due to the difficult situation that the country was experiencing after the War of the Pacific, the economic conditions and the cholera epidemic. Its mission was from the beginning to improve the living conditions of the employees of the business in Santiago de Chile.

Status and current operation of the organization: It is currently one of the few mutual societies that is fully operational, with staff working daily, with periodic board meetings, with public participation and providing assistance services to its members.

Status and current operation of the organization: the material is ordered, and much of it is printed (they correspond to transcriptions of the originals, but printed the same year in which the manuscript records were made). It is located in the offices of the president, so it is open to the public. Inadequate conditions due to humidity and temperature variation. No special care is observed for the conservation of these documents.

Material of interest found:

3.204 pages in total

Inventory: 12 volumes

Digitized images: 49

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Santiago, Enero 15 de 1888

Al Sr. Presidente de la Sociedad
de Agricultores de Comodoro R. etc.

Honorable Presidente,
 He leído a satisfacción, con respecto a la forma
 de atender la propiedad del agua, con respecto
 a don Carlos Garayón V. a N. en el momento
 de su honorífica Directoria, respecto a la
 que que, desearé tener parte en las tareas
 que se disponen, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,
 He leído a satisfacción, con respecto a la
 forma de atender la propiedad del agua, con respecto
 a don Carlos Garayón V. a N. en el momento
 de su honorífica Directoria, respecto a la
 que que, desearé tener parte en las tareas
 que se disponen, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,
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 a don Carlos Garayón V. a N. en el momento
 de su honorífica Directoria, respecto a la
 que que, desearé tener parte en las tareas
 que se disponen, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,

De Ud. Sr. Presidente, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,
 Víctor J. Salcedo

Al Sr. Presidente de la
 Sociedad de Agricultores de
 Comodoro R. etc.

Mi domicilio, Comodoro R. etc.

... el primer caso mencionado, de donde
 a consecuencia de ello, el primer caso de donde
 para para la que se trata, sobre el punto
 de donde, - para luego, sobre el punto de donde,
 sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,
 He leído a satisfacción, con respecto a la
 forma de atender la propiedad del agua, con respecto
 a don Carlos Garayón V. a N. en el momento
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 de su honorífica Directoria, respecto a la
 que que, desearé tener parte en las tareas
 que se disponen, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,

De Ud. Sr. Presidente, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea, sea,
 Víctor J. Salcedo

Al Sr. Presidente de la
 Sociedad de Agricultores de
 Comodoro R. etc.

Mi domicilio, Comodoro R. etc.

4. Sociedad Mutualista Igualdad y Trabajo

Foundation year: 1894

Location: 3028 Andes, Santiago, Chile

Historical background: Society founded by railway employees who worked in the Central Railway Station neighbourhood of Santiago de Chile, in the year 1894. The initial statutes of the company correspond to these years. The most demanded services from the beginning were health, education and funeral services. It had its own building in 1910. It participated in the construction of a social neighbourhood, with the Fermín Vivaceta Society, and on March 23, 1930, it merged with the General Baquedano Mutual Society. Since the forties, and as a consequence of the participation of the State in the provision of the services provided by the mutual society, its members have been reduced.

Status and current operation of the organization: It is currently partially operational. They hold annual meetings and maintain a list of members and board of directors, but the activities have been reduced to the organization of social events and some services, such as the provision of funeral spaces in the organization's mausoleum.

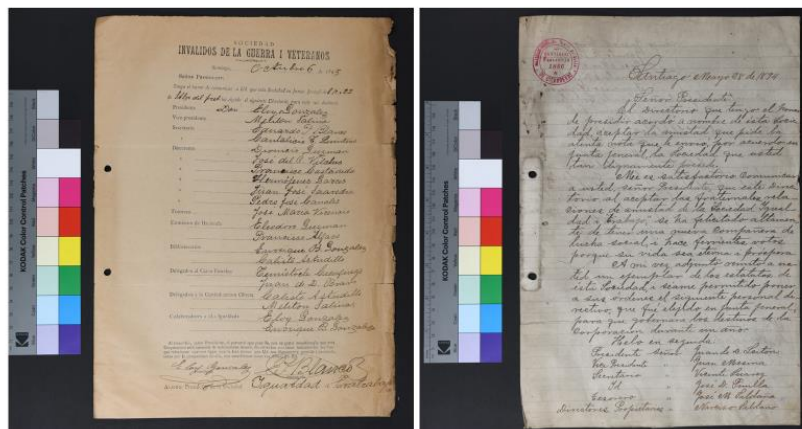
Status and current operation of the organization: as in other mutuals, there is no organization of the material, and its conservation is precarious. The material is in turn in an old building that is used only sporadically. Inadequate conditions due to humidity and temperature variation. There is also a lot of dust, and some bindings are in contact with metals and plastics. No special care is observed for the conservation of these documents.

Material of interest found:

3.527 pages in total

Inventory: 26 volumes

Digitized images: 34



Conclusions

This project was carried out in an extremely adverse context. First of all, the mutualist organizations whose material we seek to safeguard have long been in a deep crisis, marked by the impoverishment of their societies, the lack of membership renewal, the aging of their members and the deterioration of their headquarters. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the mutualists to close their establishments for months, both on the instructions of the health authorities and because most of them were at-risk populations. Their return to normality was slower than that of the rest of the population. The pandemic was followed by a severe economic crisis, which has only aggravated the material precariousness of these organizations. This scenario made it very difficult to carry out the project, delaying the start of the registration of the material, and once started, making it very irregular due to the situation of the mutualists on whom we depended to carry out our work.

In spite of all this, and thanks to the commitment of the team and the mutualist members who trusted in this project, we were able to complete it, accumulating an important record of the material remaining in some of the oldest mutualist societies in our country. In addition to the identification of the available material, a significant digitized sample of some of the most valuable documents kept by these societies has been added. The documentary heritage preserved constitutes a fundamental testimony of the history of the Chilean workers' world, as well as of their solid associative experiences. The precarious situation in which this material finds itself, however, only made us confirm the need to protect it, and the urgency of continuing with a work of digitisation in order to ensure future researchers and citizens in general, access to rich sources in the historical memory of our country.