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## Manuel Pérez Vila (1922–1991)

JOHN V. LOMBARDI\*

Helpful, interested, creative, caring, and effective, Don Manuel Pérez Vila accumulated a remarkable scholarly record in the course of a life of service to history, historians, and his adopted country, Venezuela. Born in Catalonia, in the town of Gerona, Pérez Vila participated in the diaspora of the Spanish Civil War, moving first to France, where he began his career as a professor at the universities of Bordeaux and Toulouse. There he married Cristina Moreno. In 1948, after the close of World War II, he moved with his family to Venezuela, where he subsequently became a citizen and dedicated his intellectual life to a never-ending search for the materials and interpretations of Venezuela's history.

His accomplishments reflect the characteristics of total energy, enthusiasm, and commitment that set Don Manuel apart and identified him as one of the great contributors to our understanding of Venezuela's past. Initially captivated by the epic of independence and the early nineteenth century—critical moments for the self-definition of Venezuelan nationality—Pérez Vila collaborated with Don Vicente Lecuna, the great Bolivarian apologist and historian of the independence wars. Working with the rich documentary collections from this era accumulated by Lecuna in the Casa Natal del Libertador, Pérez Vila rapidly became one of his adopted country's best-informed students of independence documents, especially those related to the life and times of Simón Bolívar. This commitment to the maintenance, organization, and use of the nation's historic materials led Pérez Vila to the archives of José Rafael Revenga, to the Archivo Arquidiocesano of Caracas, to the Archivo General de la Nación, and then to the directorship of the Fundación John Boulton.

Not satisfied with the Venezuelan archives, Pérez Vila also reviewed

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the materials on Venezuela in the Colombian archives and published his *Sección Venezolana del Archivo de la Gran Colombia*. During his period with the Fundación Boulton he saw published not only selected materials from these archives but also a wide-ranging selection of historical studies from both Venezuelan and foreign scholars. Pérez Vila's vigorous and creative leadership made the Fundación Boulton a mecca for everyone interested in Venezuelan history. Countless students and historians from all over the world made their pilgrimage to learn from Pérez Vila how best to discover Venezuela's past through its archives.

These forays into the archives built an expertise and understanding of Venezuelan history matched by few of his contemporaries and resulted in a long sequence of publications, documents, and collaborations. Those who have benefited from his expertise will recognize most of these key works:

- 1953 *Bolívar y su época: cartas y testimonios de extranjeros notables. La Hacienda Pública de Venezuela en 1828-1830. Misión de José Rafael Revenga como Ministro de Hacienda* (with Pedro Grases).
- 1954 *La casa natal del Libertador* (with Vicente Lecuna).
- 1956 *Índice de los documentos contenidos en las memorias del general Daniel Florencio O'Leary*. 2 vols.
- 1957 *Vida de Daniel Florencio O'Leary, primer edecán del Libertador*.
- 1960 *La biblioteca del Libertador. Acotaciones bolivarianas. Decretos marginales del Libertador (1813-1830). Sección venezolana del Archivo de la Gran Colombia. Índice sucinto. Pensamiento político venezolano del siglo xix*. 15 vols. (with Pedro Grases).
- 1962 *Orígenes de la imprenta en Maracaibo (contribución a su estudio). Boletín histórico*.
- 1963 *La candidatura de Antonio Leocadio Guzmán, 1845-1846. Actas del Cabildo Eclesiástico de Caracas*. 2 vols. *Las fuerzas armadas de Venezuela durante el siglo xix*. 12 vols. (with Pedro Grases).
- 1964 "Gran Colombia: referencias relativas a la bibliografía sobre el período emancipador en los países gran colombianos (desde 1949)," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 21 (1964), 733-77 (with Pedro Grases). *Escritos del libertador*. 15 vols. (with Pedro Grases).
- 1968 *Campañas periodísticas del Libertador. Documentos apócrifos atribuidos al Libertador, 1809-1812*.
- 1969 *Los borradores del discurso de Angostura*.

*Ensayo sobre las fuentes para la historia de la diócesis de Guayana durante los períodos de la colonia y la independencia.*

1970 *Los libros en la colonia y en la independencia.*

1983 *Simón Bolívar, 1783-1830: bibliografía básica.*

Multiple articles in the popular press and historical journals in Venezuela and abroad join these studies as part of Pérez Vila's contribution to the record of Venezuela's past. Elected to a regular seat in the Venezuelan Academia Nacional de la Historia, he completed his culminating work, the *Diccionario de historia de Venezuela* (1988), a remarkable three-volume encyclopedia of Venezuelan history and a monumental work of collaboration and selfless dedication that will surely stand among the most valuable classics of Venezuelan historiography.

All of us who enjoyed his hospitality and benefited from his advice and generosity of spirit will remember with pleasure and gratitude our great friend.