

Personal Life

Private Life

It is a Cuban tradition to name your child after a saint, so Gerardo Machado takes his name from St. Gerardo. The true date of Machado's birth seems obscure, but it is celebrated on his Saint's Day, September 24, 1871.¹ Machado grew up in Santa Clara (Las Villas province). His parents were born in Cuba and were not well educated or wealthy. He had a younger brother and an older sister. Machado's ancestors came from Portugal, but no one remembers when or why. They lived in an old colonial home, and had little schooling. Machado never attended college. He spoke only Spanish, and constantly encouraged his grandchildren to learn French and English. As a child, Machado had problems with his lungs, and his family sent him to the United States to recuperate from this illness. His surviving granddaughter has a picture of Machado at this camp or infirmary, and there is a sign in the background that reads "Liberty," in English. Machado did not stay long enough to learn any English.

Machado married young, and had three daughters. He received no inheritance from his father. Parts of his home in Santa Clara were never finished because their family did not have the money necessary to complete it. He was ambitious and started a variety of businesses with some failing and some succeeding. He started the

¹ James E- Brown, Jr., Secretary of the American Legation, to the US Secretary of State, November 21, 1934, 837.001 M 18/164.

first electric plant in Santa Clara, and also owned a sugar mill. Later in Havana, he developed a suburban housing area called Rancho Boyeros, near the airport. The development included small houses for workers, larger ones for professional people, a theater, a paint factory, a shoe factory, and a technical-industrial trade school.

When the War of Independence broke out in 1895, he attached himself to the anti-Spanish army contingent from Santa Clara province, and eventually became a general's aide. He was shot in battle and lost his left middle finger. Later on, he would delight his grandchildren with stories about his missing finger and how they cut it off without any anesthetic.

During the republican era, Machado was active in the Liberal Party and acquired significant military postings under the Liberal administration of José Miguel Gomez between 1909 and 1912. He was the leader of the Liberal Party in Las Villas province and had served as inspector general of the Army under Gomez (1909-1912).

When the Conservative government of President Mario Menocal (1913 - 1920) fraudulently kept itself in power when it lost the 1916 election, the Liberals, including Machado, revolted. Because of Machado's relatively high standing in Cuban society, he was not punished when the 1917 rebellion failed.

When Machado became president, his family moved into the palace with him, including all five of his granddaughters. The eldest granddaughter, Maria,² remembers watching her grandfather in the mornings being shaved while another

² Maria Grau Machado de Santeiro is the oldest surviving descendant of Machado and the source for much of this information. She was interviewed in her home in Miami on

servant read the newspaper to him. He used to take the girls for walks and rides in the car, and was very interested in their education. He acquired a finca near Havana, in Santiago de las Vegas, after becoming president, and named it after Maria, whom he used to call Nenita. Finca de Nenita was burned and destroyed in the days after he fled Cuba.

Machado enjoyed playing cards, and the company of beautiful women. After hosting a party at the palace he would tell his family stories about how awfully the ladies danced. Every year he opened up the palace for all Cubans to come in and visit. He would stand in line and greet them, and would remember the names and circumstances of ordinary Cubans who had visited the year before. Machado's friendly charismatic ways endeared him even to his political enemies.

Machado's life in Cuba ended with his ouster in the summer of 1933. Machado had hoped to reach Nassau, Bahamas before dark, but the earlier delays postponed the flight so late that they were unable to make it that far. So, they landed on Andros Island, and spent the night surrounded by small fishing boats while the locals sold them salted fish and fruit. The next morning they left for Nassau, arriving on August 13, 1933 at daylight.³

The Governor of the Bahamas received them and offered them the protection of the British flag. Soon, Machado and his group received newspapers from Miami and elsewhere informing of events in Cuba. Since they had been out of contact for

November 11, 1997. She was born in 1921, and fled Cuba in 1933, just before her twelfth birthday.

³ John P. Hurley to Secretary of State, August 13, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3644.

over a day, they were quite anxious for anything they could learn, especially in light of the riotous conditions engulfing Havana at the time of their departure. Among the news were unfounded reports of how Machado had robbed the Republic of Cuba upon his departure and fled with suitcases of gold and silver bars.⁴ Disheartened at this news, Machado immediately requested that the British governor inspect all of their baggage as witness of their innocence. Diplomatically assuring the former president that a gentleman's word was all he required, the Governor declined the request. Though his opponents would continue to hound him and accuse him of theft, it is doubtful he left office with bags of gold.

Machado's party left Nassau on the steamship *Lady Rodney* on August 26, 1933 for Bermuda, and then on to Montreal.⁵ The American Consul in the Bahamas reported that Machado felt a trip to Miami would be too dangerous, therefore the ex-President chose to move on to Canada.⁶

Machado's immediate family remained at Varadero when Machado fled and the Cuban gunboat "Juan Bruno Zayas" sailed from Havana to Varadero Beach to take Machado's family to Key West, Florida. When the Cuban naval vessel arrived off of Varadero, they met the Presidential yacht with Machado's family aboard. The gunboat picked up Señora Elvira Machado (President Machado's wife), Jose Emilio Obregon (President Machado's son-in-law) with his wife (Machado's daughter) and children, Rafael Jorge Sanchez with his wife (who was Machado's daughter) and their

⁴ Machado Collection, XVIII-10.

⁵ John P. Hurley to Secretary of State, August 27, 1933, Nassau, 837.00/3721.

⁶ John P. Hurley to Secretary of State, August 25, 1933, Nassau, 837.00/3723.

children; and Baldomero Grau, another son in law and his wife (another of Machado's daughters).⁷ From there, the family was transported to Key West, and then they took a train north toward New York City. They decided to stop in Philadelphia because they heard the press had stirred up quite a story about them in New York City. After a brief stay, they continued on to New York.

While his family was traveling through the United States, Machado traveled to Montreal and stayed for a while because he did not know how the American government would react to his presence in the United States. The United States had actively worked to undermine his government, and the Cuban government was presently trying to prosecute him. The family came and visited him in Montreal, and then returned to New York without him. Later, Machado also moved to New York.

Machado in Exile

On November 11, 1933, Machado left Montreal for Bermuda, and then on November 18, he traveled to the Dominican Republic.⁸ He could not stay in the Dominican Republic for long because there were innumerable attempts to kidnap and assassinate him.⁹ Eventually, because of the pressures exerted by would be assassins, and official requests for extradition of Machado, the Dominican Republic asked Machado to leave. Cuba tried to extradite him on formal charges, and threatened a breach in formal relations with Dominican Republic President Raphael Trujillo's government if he was not turned over to Cuban authorities. Assassination

⁷ Welles to Secretary of State, August 13, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3637.

⁸ 837.001 M 18/112 (RG 59 Dept of State, Decimal File 1930-1939).

⁹ Numerous references throughout RG 59, Box 5925, Decimal File 1930-39.

attempts continued, even to the point of bombing the home of the Dominican Minister of Foreign Affairs on October 4, 1934.¹⁰

European Exile

Machado's traveling companion, Alberto Lamar Schweyer, his former press secretary, traveled back to Bermuda from France with the exiled former president and then traveled on to Cuba (in February of 1936), where he was arrested, detained, dispossessed of his luggage, and booted out of Cuba.¹¹ In March of 1936, the Cuban Secretary of Government issued an order forbidding the publication and circulation in national territory any books, pamphlets, or newspaper articles of the memoirs of Gerardo Machado.¹² This was partly because the government believed that Schweyer came to Cuba for the purpose of telling Machado's side of the story and indeed Schweyer eventually wrote a book defending Machado. Machado traveled from Bermuda, back to Montreal arriving on July 19, 1936. He left again for Bermuda on November 12, 1936.¹³

In 1935, Machado was warned by someone in the Cuban consulate that the United States was preparing to extradite him and send him back to Cuba. He left his home disguised, and spent a few days in the city incognito. He fled to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic where Rafael L. Trujillo, the President of the Dominican Republic and a friend of Machado's, allowed him to stay for awhile.

¹⁰ James W. Gautenbeim, Secretary of the American Legation in Cuba, to the US Secretary of State, November 7, 1934, 837.001 M 18/157.

¹¹ Matthews to Secretary of State, February 19, 1936, Havana, 837.001 M 18/179 LH.

¹² H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, March 5, 1936, Havana, 837.001 M 18/182.

¹³ Homer M. Boyington, American Consul General, to Secretary of State, November 12, 1936, Montreal, Canada, 837.001 M 18/194 LH.

Trujillo had warned Machado when he was still the president of Cuba that the Americans had sent Sumner Welles to Cuba to get him out of office. But after a few months, Trujillo told him that he had to leave, and Machado traveled to Europe. Germany refused to allow him in their country, and the Italians kicked him out of their country, so he moved on to Paris. The French extended him every courtesy because they had awarded him the Legion of Honor in recognition of his great works in the restoration of Cuba's economy and internal development. They even assigned him a personal guard, but did not, according to his granddaughter, subsidize him financially.

He returned to the United States later, and died in Saint Francis hospital on Miami Beach, Florida in 1939. His wife, Elvira, passed away in 1969 and they are entombed in the chapel mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery in Miami.¹⁴

Machado's immediate surviving family members returned to Cuba for the first time in 1938, and then settled there in 1940. They left again in 1960 a year after Fidel Castro came to power. The home they had purchased in Manhattan¹⁵ was sold in 1962 because they could not afford to pay the taxes. The surviving family members live in Miami and Palm Beach, Florida.

Machado's Wealth and Properties

While the American embassy tracked Cuba's finances and reported anomalies to Washington, they found some activity with members of Machado's cabinet, but not Machado himself. Sumner Welles reported that Orestes Ferrara, Cuba's Secretary of State from June 1933 to August 1933, arranged a transfer of \$50,000.00 from the

¹⁴ Woodlawn Park Cemetery North, 3260 SW Eighth Street; Miami, FL 33135.

¹⁵ At 15 East 82nd Street, between 5th and Madison Avenue.

Sugar Stabilization Institute to his (not so secret) Citibank account in New York.¹⁶ Perhaps Ferrara anticipated the end since he was in London from May until three days before Machado resigned on August 6, 1933 and wished to secure a bit of financial security in the face of a decidedly insecure political future.¹⁷

Machado acquired significant real estate holdings in Cuba. He had one finca in Santa Clara, three in Bejucal, and two more in Mariano, and possibly some land in Florida. Court proceedings against his properties while he was in exile were tracked by the American embassy.¹⁸ One finca, Pancho Perez in Calabazar, was valued at 28,223 pesos. Finca Mercedes (known to Machado's family as Finca Neñita) in Santiago de las Vegas was valued at 12,400 pesos.¹⁹ Santa Isabel, near Rancho Boyers, was valued at 29,700 pesos.²⁰ Dos Hermanos, a finca in Santa Clara was valued at 109,773.37 pesos. Raphael Iturralde, one of Machado's opponents, sued Machado's estate for shutting down his law firm when Machado was president. He purchased Dos Hermanos to satisfy a judgment rendered against Machado.²¹ In April

¹⁶ Welles to Secretary of State, August 17, 1933, Havana, LC 837.002/161.

¹⁷ Ferrara left for London for the World Economic Congress. Welles to Secretary of State, May 29, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3527.

¹⁸ H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, February 26, 1936, Havana, 837.001 M 18/181.

¹⁹ H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, April 1, 1936, Havana, 837.001 M 18/184 LH.

²⁰ H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, August 20, 1936, Havana, 837.001 M 18/189 LH.

²¹ H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, May 22, 1936, Havana, 837.001 M 18/185.

of 1937, Machado filed a futile appeal to have his case reopened, defending himself from the forfeiture of his fincas to Rafael Iturralde.²²

Post Mortem

Machado passed away in a Miami Beach hospital on March 29, 1939 at the age of 70.²³ José Garcia Montes, Secretary of Agriculture in Cuba called Machado's first term "one of constructive peace and great efficiency" and the second as one of battle which ended in his flight.²⁴ Senator Ramon Vasconcelos (who had been an ally of Mendieta's in 1924²⁵), said upon Machado's death in 1939

It is too early to judge him. His name, however, belongs now to history. Some day he will be cold-bloodedly analyzed and we shall know finally and definitely what was his real stature, but in any case, comparing him with some of his successors in office he will appear as a giant in a Lilliputian world . . . all of his errors, some involuntary, some committed by force of circumstances, have been reproduced without any justification whatsoever. In five years, all of those who stoned him have broken down in their attempt at actions which they had previously censored."²⁶

²² H. Freeman Matthews to Secretary of State, April 19, 1937, Havana, 837.001 M 18/195 LH.

²³ Williard L. Beaulac, First Secretary of the American Embassy, to Secretary of State, April 20, 1939, Havana, 837.001 M 18/199 LH.

²⁴ Beaulac to Secretary of State, March 31, 1939, Havana, 837.001 M 18/198.

²⁵ Ramon Vasconcelos was a friend of Carlos Mendieta's as far back as 1924 when he chose to support Mendieta against Machado despite Machado's election wins in the Liberal Party. Engbert to Secretary of State, July 18, 1924, Havana, 837.00/2525.

²⁶ Beaulac to Secretary of State, March 31, 1939, Havana, 837.001 M 18/198.