



*Puerto Rican
Genealogy Group
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Newspaper Glossary: Puerto Rican Historical Newspaper Terms

Course: Looking for Ancestors in Historical Puerto Rican Newspapers

Spanish-Language Terms in Historical Puerto Rican Newspapers

A

Alcaldía The municipal mayor's office. Official legal and tax notices in the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico* and other colonial papers often carry the heading *Alcaldía Municipal de [town name]*, indicating the notice was issued by the local government.

Alcalde Mayor. The official who signed municipal notices. The alcalde's surname sometimes appears at the bottom of official notices: *El Alcalde, [surname]*.

Anuncio A public announcement. A broad term for notices placed in newspapers by individuals, families, businesses, or government offices.

Aviso Notice or advisory. Similar to *anuncio*; used for both official and personal announcements. *Aviso al público* means “public notice.”

B

Barrio A district or neighborhood within a municipality. Puerto Rican colonial records organize people by barrio. Knowing which barrio your ancestor lived in narrows newspaper and civil record searches significantly.

C

Carta de libertad Document of freedom; a legal instrument freeing an enslaved person from enslavement. Issued before or after formal abolition in 1873 as part of the manumission process.

Cuerda A traditional Puerto Rican unit of land measurement. One cuerda equals approximately 0.97 acres (3,930 square meters). Property in colonial tax and legal notices is measured in cuerdas.

E

Edicto An official edict or legal notice. *Edictos* in colonial newspapers often concern property, debts, legal proceedings, or official appointments.

Esquela A formal death notice, typically bordered in black, published by the family to announce a death and invite the community to services. *Esquelas* frequently contain more genealogical detail than the civil death record: birthplace, occupation, parents' names, church affiliation, and a list of surviving relatives.

F

Falleció “Died” or “passed away.” Appears in death notices and obituaries. Useful search term for twentieth-century newspaper research, especially in *El Mundo*.

G

Gaceta Gazette; an official government publication. The *Gaceta de Puerto Rico* (1806–1902) was the official colonial government gazette, the most genealogically significant newspaper in Puerto Rican history.

I

Id. / Idem Latin: “the same.” Used in colonial-era printed lists and notices as an abbreviation meaning the entry refers to the same item, place, or value as the one immediately preceding it. In property lists, *id. id.* typically means “same town, same barrio” as the previous entry.

L

Liberto / Liberta Freed man / freed woman. Used in Puerto Rican records from 1873 onward to refer to persons freed from enslavement after abolition. *Libertos* appeared in newspaper notices regarding labor contracts, disputes under the patronato system, and legal proceedings.

M

Madrina Godmother. Named in baptism records and sometimes in community announcements. Godparent relationships (*compadrazgo*) were important social bonds in Puerto Rican communities.

Manumisión / Manumission The formal act of freeing an enslaved person. Manumission notices were published in the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico* and the *Boletín Mercantil* throughout the slavery period (pre-1873). OCR text often renders this word without its accent: search manumision.

Municipio Municipality; an administrative unit in Puerto Rico. Civil records and newspaper coverage are organized by municipality and barrio.

P

Padrino Godfather. The relationship between a child and their godfather (*padrino*) and godmother (*madrina*) – the *compadrazgo* network – is genealogically significant because it documents social ties between families.

Patrocinado / Patrocinada Person under the *patronato* labor contract system. After abolition in 1873, formerly enslaved persons in Puerto Rico were subject to the patronato system until 1876, which required labor contracts with former enslavers. Disputes and notices related to patrocinados appear in newspapers from 1873–1876.

Patronato The labor contract system governing freed persons in Puerto Rico from 1873 to 1876. Newspapers from this period contain notices about patronato disputes, contract terms, and freedoms granted.

Peseta The unit of currency in colonial Puerto Rico. Property values in colonial tax and legal notices are typically expressed in pesetas per cuerda.

S

Se ha fugado “Has escaped” or “has fled.” The phrase used to begin runaway slave advertisements in colonial Puerto Rican newspapers. These notices contain physical descriptions, ages, and sometimes information about the enslaved person’s origin or known associates.

Se vende “For sale.” May appear in slave sale advertisements in colonial newspapers, usually followed by a description of the enslaved person.

Sepelio Funeral or burial. Appears in death notices and obituaries. Useful search term alongside a surname when searching for obituaries.

Sucesión Estate; the legal entity representing a deceased person’s heirs before the estate is settled. Property and tax notices often list a *sucesión* rather than individual heirs when the property holder has died.

V

Viuda de “Widow of.” Used as a primary identifier for women in colonial Puerto Rican records. A woman identified as *Viuda de José Bonet* is the widow of a man named José Bonet. Searching for *viuda de* combined with a husband’s surname is one of the most effective ways to find women in colonial newspaper records.

Evidence Vocabulary Reference

The following terms follow the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) as developed by the Board for Certification of Genealogists. Use these terms when assessing any newspaper source.

Term	Category	Definition
Original	Source type	First recording of the information; contemporary to the event
Derivative	Source type	A copy, transcription, abstract, or digital image of an original
Authored	Source type	A compiled work drawing on other sources
Primary	Information quality	From a direct witness or participant with firsthand knowledge
Secondary	Information quality	From someone reporting what they heard, read, or were told
Indeterminate	Information quality	Informant’s relationship to the event is unknown
Direct	Evidence value	Explicitly answers the research question

Term	Category	Definition
Indirect	Evidence value	Implies an answer; requires inference
Negative	Evidence value	Expected information is absent from a source where it would appear if true

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