
CLARA CARDONA CARDONA

El Espiritismo de las mujeres puertorriqueñas:
De las extraordinarias pioneras a sus herederas
contemporáneas

2020

Biography of Clara Cardona Cardona

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Recommended Citation

Román-Odio, PhD, Clara, "Biography of Clara Cardona Cardona" (2020). *CLARA CARDONA CARDONA*. Paper 2.
https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_claracardona/2

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Clara Cardona Cardona (1906-1990)

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Clara Cardona Cardona, a spiritist, businesswoman, and municipal councilwoman from San Sebastián, was born on June 1, 1906. The third child of Juan Antonio Cardona y Lugo and Vitalia Cardona Genister, she was raised in a large catholic family that lived from agriculture.¹ She married Juan Gregorio Román Santiago II, a farmer and businessman. They had eight children and adopted six.² A multitasking and entrepreneurial woman, she successfully founded a sewing and embroidery business at a time the industry was flourishing on the Island,³ and she established one of her town's first supermarkets, the Superete Hostos, although it was destroyed in a fire in 1970.⁴ When she was widowed in 1964, she became in charge of the property that her husband, Juan Gregorio, had managed before, fields of sugar cane and various fruits. Clara Cardona practiced Spiritism for more than forty years, integrating an emancipating and egalitarian vision of the human being, nourished by mediumship and spiritist morals.

Fig. 1: Photography of Clara Cardona Cardona.⁵

Elected councilwoman under the administration of Arcadio (Cayo) Estrada Linares, Mrs. Clara served in that position for twelve years, from 1944 to 1956, along with the distinguished gentlemen Gerardo Cebollero, Antonio Mayol, Gerardo Quintana, Edelmiro Toledo, Millo Velázquez, Andrés Velázquez, among others. "It is not because I was councilwoman under the administration of Mr. Cayo that I consider him the best mayor, but rather because he was a friend

¹ <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LRH2-T58/clara-cardona-cardona-1906-1990> accedido el 27 de agosto de 2020.

² *Anuario Fiestas Patronales San Sebastián Mártir*, "Doña Clara Cardona Cardona: Mujer Polifacética," 13 de enero 1989, Imprenta San Rafael, Quebradillas, p. 62.

³ Helen Icken Safa, *De mantenidas a proveedoras: Mujeres e industrialización en el Caribe*, Editorial UPR, 1998.

⁴ *Programa para las Fiestas Patronales de San Sebastián Mártir*, 9 de enero de 1971, "Lo que el viento se llevó".

⁵ Thanks to Mrs. Lidia Román, daughter of Clara Cardona Cardona, for granting us access and use of these photographs and other materials.

to all and, furthermore, because he showed various spiritist qualities,” she noted in an interview.⁶ Very aware of domestic politics and an active participant in local government, she addressed the defeat of the Popular Party in 1976 with clarity and frankness: “Hernández Colón was very violent. The people do not like arrogant politicians,” and later: “when Muñoz Marín dies the future will be for the independence movement. The Popular Party is not in the hands of yesterday’s leaders.”⁷ Regarding local politics, she proclaimed: “the division of leaders, not for ideals but rather for private interests, seriously threatens the future of our party within the nation.”⁸



Fig. 2: Members of the Municipal Council of San Sebastián. From left to the right (seated) Mrs. Clara Cardona and Mr. Antonio Mayol.⁹

In 1990, the municipal government of San Sebastián unanimously passed Resolution 47 that pronounced Clara Cardona Cardona “distinguished woman” of the town of San Sebastián. The document states:

Therefore: May this Honorable Municipal Council of San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, resolve the following:

⁶ Eulogio Cardona y Beltrán, *Palique*, “Clara Cardona: Luchar y Servir, su Aspiración en la Vida”, Año II, Núm. 11, octubre 1978, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁹ Document of the Municipal Historical Archive of San Sebastián, gift of Mr. Axel Toro, June 2018.

Section III: Declare Mrs. Clara Cardona Cardona Vda. de Román distinguished woman of this town of San Sebastián, Puerto Rico.

The description of the Resolution points to the quality of her character and her public service:

Insofar as: Her spirit of advocacy and service for the benefit of her fellow citizens brought her to cross the borders of this, her town.

Insofar as: The Municipal Administration of San Sebastián and this Council, in recognition of her honorable civic and political service, want to publicly recognize it as such.

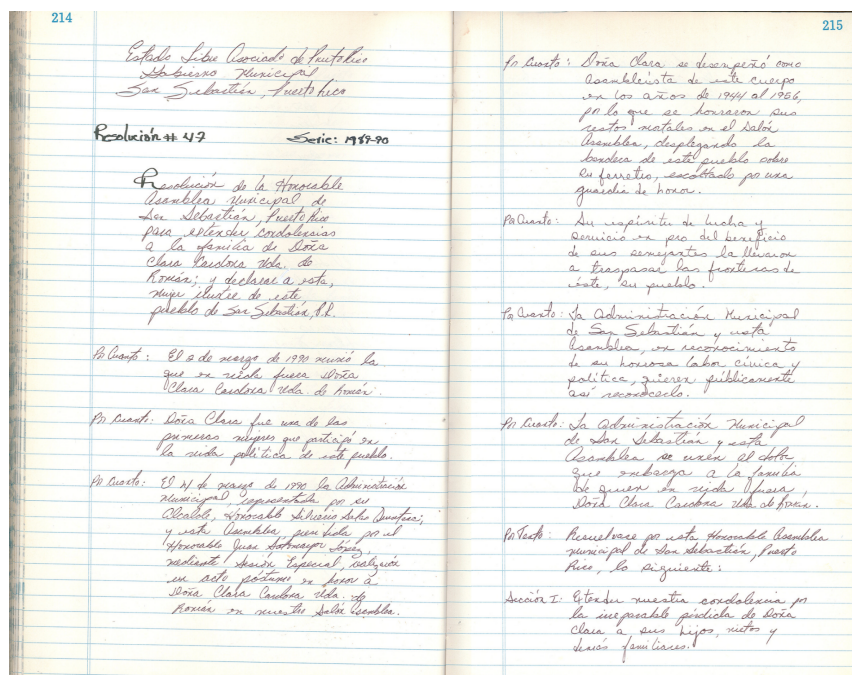


Fig. 3: Resolution #47 of the Municipal Government of San Sebastián, P.R. Series 1989-1990.¹⁰

In 1978, Eulogio Cardona y Beltrán shared his experience interviewing her:

A woman of strong character, at the age of seventy, she is a pillar of our town, ready to fearlessly share her experiences of her life's journey. Stable, enthusiastic, and at peace, she watches very closely the work of her town, with a large desire to see a healthier and more fair society, one where people think more about their community than about themselves.¹¹

As a life philosophy, Spiritism oriented Mrs. Clara's life from a very young age. In Puerto Rico, Spiritism started to seep into various sectors of the Island during the second half of the

¹⁰ I am extremely grateful to Mr. Axel Toro of the Municipal Archive of San Sebastián for granting me access to and use of this Resolution and other materials regarding Clara Cardona Cardona's civic service.

¹¹ Cardona y Beltrán, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

nineteenth century, secretly at first, under the Spanish regime, and later more openly under the United States colonial government.¹² Mrs. Clara's spiritist writing was not recorded in the official history of San Sebastián, a mainly Catholic town and, for that reason, particularly suspicious of



Fig. 4: Clara and Juan Gregorio Román II.¹⁶

Spiritism.¹³ However, the experiences of the hundreds of people who benefited from her spiritist work of more than forty years was recorded in the memory of those who knew her.¹⁴ Oral history offers us a glimpse into the personal alliances that are absent from historical records. A source of new knowledge and new perspectives, it documents the people's mentality, the strategies employed in difficult circumstances, and changes in power dynamics.¹⁵ The interviewees share profoundly personal stories that tell what official documents do not. Oral history also benefits us by summarizing Mrs. Clara's spiritist experience.

Mediumship came into Mrs. Clara's life at the age of fifteen, as her younger daughter Lidia Román Cardona explains.¹⁷ At age fifteen, she showed symptoms of being mentally incoherent and her parents, in order to make medical visits easier for the doctor, moved her in with an aunt. She spent a period of three years there, where she met Juan Gregorio, who insisted that there was a problem of malnutrition. One day, Mrs. Clara's spiritual guide presented itself to Juan Gregorio by means of Mrs. Clara, since she was a *speaking* medium. As Allan Kardec explains in *The Medium's Book (Le Livre des Médiums)*,

... in them the Spirit acts through the organs of speech, just as it acts through the hand of writing mediums. The Spirit, wanting to communicate, uses the organ that it finds most compliant in the medium; for some it uses the hand, for others speech, and for others the ear. The speaking medium expresses herself, generally,

¹² Gerardo A. Hernández Aponte, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico: 1860-1907*, San Juan P.R., Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2015, pp. 114-191. Sandra A. Enríquez Seiders, *El espiritismo en Utuado: La historia de las hermanas Baldoni*, San Juan, P.R., Biblio Services, 2011, pp. 21-46. Néstor A. Rodríguez Escudero. *Historia del espiritismo en Puerto Rico*, 2da edición ampliada y corregida., Quebradillas, P.R., Imprenta San Rafael, 1991.

¹³ Gerardo A. Hernández Aponte, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-253.

¹⁴ Some of these stories are gathered in the interviews of Lidia Cardona Fuentes, Aida Cardona Vélez, and Lidia Román Cardona in the archives on Digital Kenyon <https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo/>.

¹⁵ Linda Shopes, "What is Oral History" *History Matters: The U.S. Survey on the Web*, Making Sense of Evidence Series, pp.1-23 located at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu>.

¹⁶ Photography of the collection of the Román Cardona family. I am incredibly grateful to the granddaughter of Mrs. Clara, Neidi Román Rivera, for granting me access to her collection of family photographs.

¹⁷ Lidia Román Cardona. Oral History, 29 July 2019 with Clara Román-Odio, in the home of Lidia Román Cardona in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. The records of the interview and the transcription can be found on Digital Kenyon https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_cardona/.

without being aware of what she says, and many times she says things outside of her habitual ideas, knowledge, and even her reach of intelligence. Although she is entirely awake in a normal state, she rarely conserves the memory of what she says; I will say it again, speech is the instrument that the Spirit uses.¹⁸

In the case of Mrs. Clara, by recommendation of her Spirit guide, Juan Gregorio brought her a glass of water, and when Clara drank it, she recovered awareness of herself. She did not know where she was or what had happened to her. She did not remember anything at all. Since then, her spiritual guide continued to manifest itself and Mrs. Clara began her spiritist work, first at her house in the Guajataca vicinity and later at her Center, which was constructed years later in the same neighborhood. Her life was divided between family responsibilities, civic activities, and spiritist work. We must not overlook the crucial role played by her husband, Juan Gregorio. During a time when Puerto Rican women had barely any rights of action or decision, Mrs. Clara could, with the support of Juan Gregorio, visit many people's homes in order to resolve problems that were not her own. She was able to sacrifice family time because the couple had accepted, with full awareness and responsibility, the mission of charity proposed by her spiritual guide. The commitment of gender equality posed by Spiritism firmly empowered their family.



Fig. 5: Mrs. Clara, Juan Gregorio, and their youngest son, Iván Rafael, feeding the chickens.¹⁹

¹⁸ Allan Kardec. *El libro de los médiums*. Traducción de autor desconocido, revisada y corregida por Salvador Gentile y Alipio González Hernández, 11a edición, Brasil, Instituto de Difusão Espírita, 2004, p. 186.

¹⁹ Photography of the collection of the Román Cardona family. I am incredibly grateful to the granddaughter of Mrs. Clara, Neidi Román Rivera, for granting me access to her collection of family photographs.

Numerous witnesses of Mrs. Clara's spiritist work affirm that her greatest mission was to heal the sick. Such is summarized by her daughter-in-law Aida Cardona Vélez:

That was her great mission. She healed many sick people, since she was a very dedicated person, very humble in Spirit. I will tell a story of some people that she brought to her home because they could not be at their own homes. They were too depressed and suffered greatly. One of them was a young woman named Patria Paoli. She would cry and cry and the relationships in her home were tense and she could not take it any longer. Mrs. Clara asked her "Do you want to come live with me for a few days?" And so she went with Mrs. Clara. Eventually, with prayers, magnetic energy, and counseling, Mrs. Clara helped her, little by little, and eventually she was able to return to her home healthy.²⁰

The healing power of water and magnetic energy alluded to here is explained by Allan Kardec in Chapter 8, item 131 of *The Medium's Book (Le Livre des Médioms)*:

This theory gives us the solution of a very well known fact in magnetism that has been unexplainable until now; the change of the properties of water by human will. The Spirit that acts is the magnetizer, most frequently assisted by a foreign Spirit; it operates a transmutation with help from magnetic fluid, which as explained, is the substance that gets closest to cosmic material, the universal element. If it can operate a modification in the properties of water, it can also produce an analogous phenomenon over the fluids of an organism, and from that the healing effect of the magnetic action that is well directed.²¹

The topic of healing power from prayers is also addressed by Kardec in one of the responses that the Spirits offered him.

8. Can one be healed by prayer alone?

*Yes, sometimes, if God allows it; but it might be the case that the sick person could yet benefit further from continued illness and, thus, you may think that the prayer was not heard.*²²

In other cases, Mrs. Clara's Spirit guide would refer patients to a doctor or a pharmacist in the town of Lares, Mr. Lumen Méndez, who prepared the prescriptions that Mrs. Clara transcribed, since as Kardec explains, "the medium is the instrument of a strange intelligence; she is passive and what she says does not come from her."²³ Nevertheless, her younger daughter remembers the actions that constituted her mother's spiritist work:

²⁰ Aida Cardona Vélez. Oral History, July 29, 2019 with Clara Román-Odio, in the home of Aida Cardona Vélez in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. The records of the interview and the transcription are found on Digital Kenyon. https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_aidacardona/.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²² Kardec, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

²³ *Op. Cit.*, p. 191.

Taking care of necessities, doing what is good, giving people the knowledge of cause and effect, healing, breaking bread with the poor, and at the same time taking part in the Catholic community of Guajataca. She would spend time with children, teach them, and built a very close relationship with Father Aponte. She would bring the children to be baptized; not one child was left without having been baptized. She would take care of pregnant women and bring them to doctors.²⁴

This testimony alludes to Mrs. Clara's profoundly humanitarian work, in which she gave herself completely to those in need. In addition to iconic stories like these, what the interviewees mainly remember is the gratitude of those who benefited from her spiritist work. One of them summarizes: "What I remember is people's gratitude, because all of those that Mrs. Clara and Mr. Kardec treated prospered and resolved difficult things in their lives. Thus, there was a genuine gratitude for the work that she did."²⁵ It comes to light here that the name of Mrs. Clara's Spirit guide was Kardec. It is not surprising, since, as Allan Kardec himself explains in *The Book of Spirits (Le Livre des Médiums)*, Spirits "refer to themselves by any name, which tends to be allegorical or characteristic."²⁶ Of course the important thing is not their name, but rather the value revealed in the testimonies of those who benefited from their works.

Mrs. Clara lived a long and fruitful life alongside her fourteen children, forty-three grandchildren, and eighty-eight great-grandchildren. She spent her final days with a woman named Juana, who arrived at her house during a storm seeking shelter. Living under the moral laws of Christian Kardecian Spiritism, Mrs. Clara served her community with humility and dedication and she showed us the tools for building a life of hope, love, and charity. She died on March 2, 1990, but her teachings live on in all of us, those whom she loved and helped.

²⁴ Lidia Román Cardona. Oral History, July 29, 2019 with Clara Román-Odio, in the home of Lidia Román Cardona in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. The records of the interview and the transcription are found on Digital Kenyon https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_cardona/.

²⁵ Aida Cardona Vélez. Oral History, July 29, 2019 with Clara Román-Odio, in the home of Aida Cardona Vélez in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. The records of the interview and the transcription are found on Digital Kenyon. https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_aidacardona/.

²⁶ Allan Kardec. *El libro de los Espíritus*, 2nda edición, Brasilia, Brasil, Consejo Espírita Internacional, 2011, p. 49.