

Venezuelan lady of Lebanese descent Sumaya Youssef Assaf donates artifacts to LERC
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Reported by Elie Nabhan

Mrs. Sumaya Youssef Assaf, Venezuelan national and Lebanese return migrant, paid a visit to the Lebanese Emigration Research Center at Notre Dame University, accompanied by her cousin, Mrs. Nadia Talhouk-Assaf.

Mrs. Talhouk Assaf has become a friend of LERC, having visited the Center as one of *Les Amis du Portugal* in May 2009. She was so impressed with the range of materials collected by LERC for its electronic archives and for the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU that she returned with her brother, Mr. Toufik Talhouk, to donate over fifty original photos of their late father Mr. Melhem Talhouk (see <http://electra.ndu.edu.lb/Lerc/News/mig-sib.htm> for full report). She has also introduced LERC to Mrs. Salma Pualuan (BouAlwan), a Lebanese born in Chile, who also donated photos, documents and a painting related to her family's migration.

Mrs. Talhouk-Assaf did not come empty handed; she brought a copy of the original letter sent by A. Alison, Lieut-General, Commandant in Egypt, to Mr. Abdel Ghani Abdel Malak thanking him for his service as an interpreter.

LERC took this opportunity to show Mrs. Nadia Talhouk-Assaf the collections she and her brother had donated prominently displayed in the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU. Needless to say that she was delighted and spent some time with Mrs. Sumaya Youssef Assaf carefully examining the collection.



Mrs. Nadia Talhouk Assaf stands by the Sheikh Melhem Ibrahim Talhouk and Najla Abdelmalek Talhouk Collection she helped to donate to LERC (Oct 2009).

Carrying on in the same spirit, Mrs. Sumaya Youssef Assaf gave permission to the Lebanese Emigration Archives Database to make a digitized copy of documents relating to the tenure in Venezuela of her father, Mr. José S. Assaf.

These include his transcript from the National Delegation of Primary Education, Venezuela, in learning Spanish, his Venezuelan naturalization card granted in 1946, his World Lebanese Cultural Union membership card and his Lebanese identity card, which he always kept in safe keeping, as well as a photo of her late father placing a wreath in Simon Bolivar's Memorial Place in Maracaibo on the occasion of Lebanon's Independence Day, 22nd November 1958.

Mrs. Sumaya Assaf's father Youssef migrated from Lebanon in 1927 to Maracaibo, a city in Western Venezuela second only to the capital Caracas, where he first traded, as a peddler, in the textile business. While learning Spanish he worked hard and his business grew. Soon enough he was importing high quality textiles into Venezuela.

In 1946, Mr. Youssef Assaf, now known as José, returned to Lebanon to get married. His five children were born in Venezuela and became citizens by birth. Mr. Youssef Assaf became the Honorary Consul for Lebanon in Venezuela and was recognized as a writer, being published in the Spanish-language *Panorama* newspaper.

Mr. Assaf, however, always knew he would come back with the family to Lebanon, constantly preparing his family for this. In 1958, the family returned to Lebanon, where the children were enrolled in schools to learn Arabic, French and English while their father travelled to and fro for business. He returned permanently to Lebanon in 1962.



Mrs. Sumaya Youssef Assaf (left) with Mrs. Nadia Talhouk Assaf at the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU (Oct 2009).

After being given a presentation of LERC's electronic archives by Mrs. Liliane Haddad Mrs. Sumaya Assaf praised LERC for its efforts, wishing it every success.

As a former emigrant herself, Mrs. Sumaya Assaf pointed out how warmly the Lebanese had been welcomed in the receiving countries particularly in Venezuela. She hoped to write a book, she said, that would tell the story of her father and his life as an emigrant. She also promised to search for more artifacts related to her family's migration and to share them with LERC.