RESEARCH GUIDE

Mexican Research on Ancestry®

Updated 10/12/2023

Search our **Mexico records** on Ancestry® >

There are many different strategies and types of records on Ancestry® to document Mexican families, both in the U.S. and in Mexico. This guide walks you through the types of documents you can find on Ancestry, important details to look for in the records, and how you can use DNA for more discoveries.

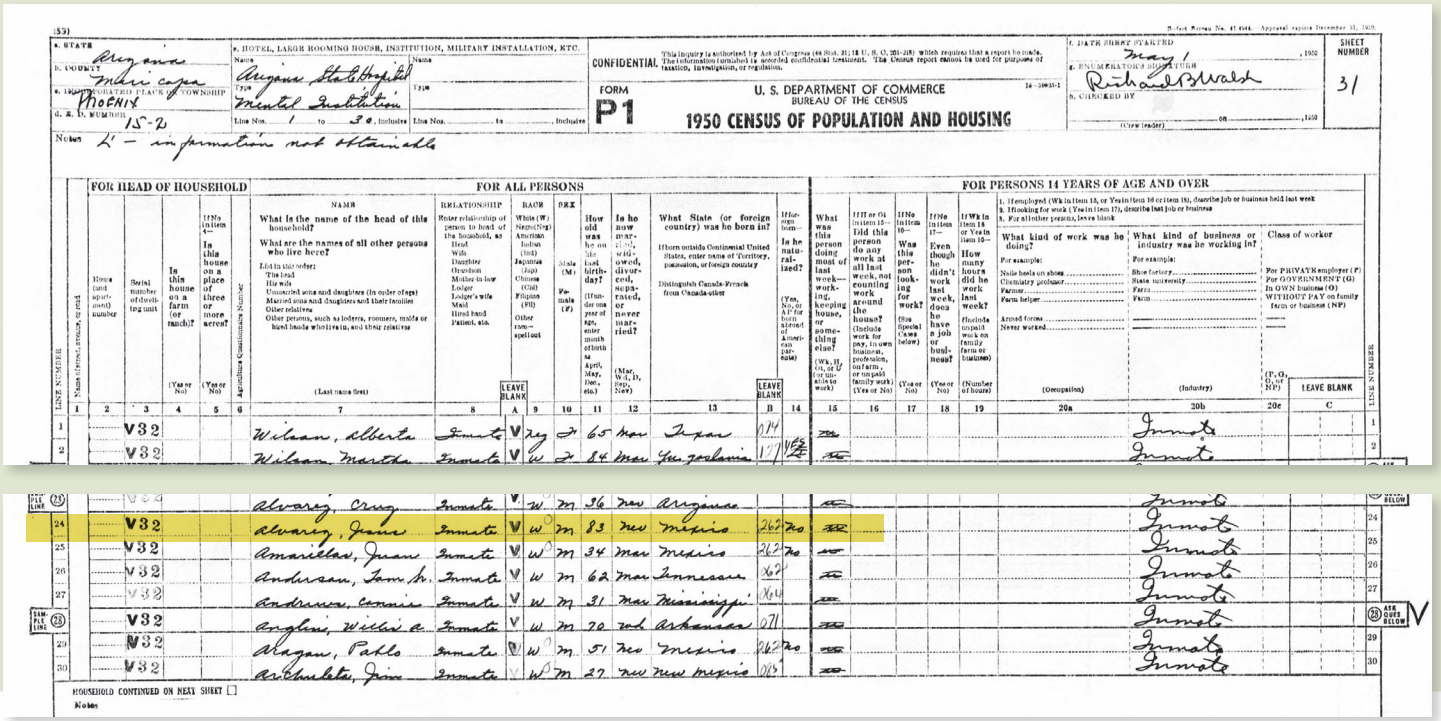
MEXICANS IN THE USA

Mexico declared independence from Spain in 1821. At that time, Mexico's land included the modern-day U.S. states of California, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Between 1836 and 1853, each of these became a state or territory of the United States, and Mexican immigration to them has continued ever since. Many Mexican families have lived in the United States for generations, while others may be first-generation immigrants.

There are many records available online that document Mexican ancestors. One important point to remember is that many of these people spoke Spanish and many of the officials creating the records did not, so there can often be spelling errors in the documents.

1847 Map of Mexico

This map was one of several produced by the S. Augustus Mitchell & Co. during the United States' war with Mexico. It shows much of the land that became part of the United States after the war.



1950 U.S. Census entry for Juan Alvarez

U.S. Census Records

The U.S. federal government has taken a census every decade since 1790, and these are available on Ancestry. The most useful census years for Mexican Americans will be post-1850, since they name every member of the household and include birthplaces. Census records may also contain mistakes, depending on who provided the information, whether there was a language barrier, or if the person misremembered a date or place.

Beyond identifying family members, ages, and birthplaces, various censuses can provide other clues:

- The 1900 census gives a person's month and year of birth.
- The 1900 and 1910 censuses indicate the number of years married.
- The 1900 and 1910 censuses also list the number of children born to each woman and how many were still living.
- The 1900-1930 censuses give the person's immigration year to the United States and naturalization status (1920 gives the naturalization year).
- The 1880-1930 censuses provide the person's parents' birthplaces.

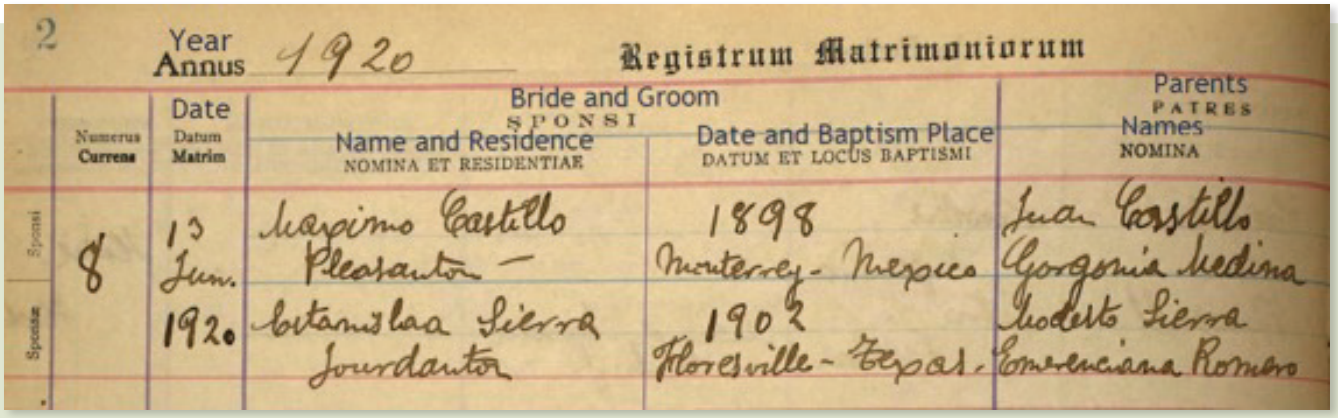
Try to find your ancestors in each census that they were living in the U.S., beginning with the 1950 census and working back to 1940, then 1930, and so on to learn as much as you can about their lives and origins.

U.S. Catholic Records

Most Mexicans were Catholic, and their sacramental records and other documents often contain important details. Catholic marriage records are the most helpful because they will often name both sets of parents and sometimes indicate where the couple was born/baptized. Baptism records can sometimes also name grandparents.

Burial records usually contain less information, but they can sometimes name parents or a spouse.

Find the closest Catholic parish to where your ancestors lived and see if they made their sacraments there. Catholic churches in the U.S. often use books with columns or rows and you may find brief phrases written in Latin.



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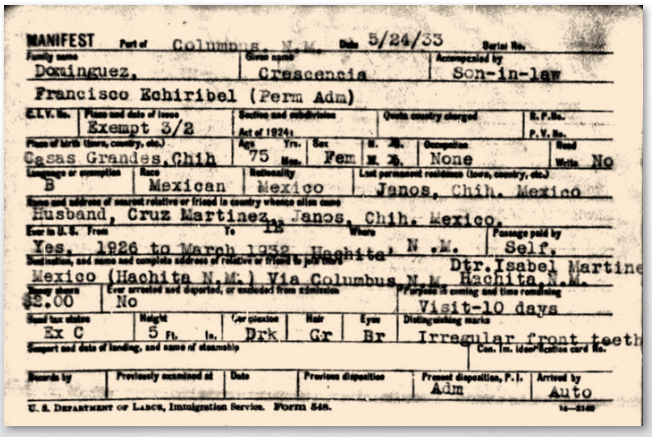
Year Annus 1920 — Registrum Matrimoniorum

Numerus Currens	Date Datum Matrim	Bride and Groom SPONSI — Name and Residence NOMINA ET RESIDENTIAE	Date and Baptism Place DATUM ET LOCUS BAPTISMI	Parents PATRES Names NOMINA
Sponsi 8	13 Jun.	Maximo Castillo Pleasanton —	1898 Monterrey - Mexico	Juan Castillo Gorgonia Medina
Sponsa	1920	Estanislaa Sierra Jourdanton	1902 Floresville - Texas	Isodoro Sierra Emerenciana Romero

The Texas, U.S., Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio Sacramental Records, 1700-1996 database is a great resource if your ancestors lived within the San Antonio Archdiocese.

U.S. Immigration Records

There are three main types of immigration records to look for: border crossings, naturalizations, and passport applications. Every time someone crossed the U.S.-Mexico border at an official crossing station, a record was created. Once established in the U.S., an individual could begin the naturalization process through a Declaration of Intention, followed by a Petition for Naturalization, then eventually receive their Certificate of Naturalization. Immigration records can provide birthplaces, last residences in Mexico, family members' names, immigration dates, and even photographs.



MANIFEST Part of Columbus, N.M. Date 5/24/33

Dominguez, Crescencia, Son-in-law

Francisco Echiribel (Perm Adm)

Exempt 3/2

Casas Grandes, Chih. Age 75 Yrs. Sex Fem. None No

B Mexican Mexico Janos, Chih. Mexico

Husband, Cruz Martinez, Janos, Chih. Mexico.

Yes. 1926 to March 1932 Hachita, N.M. Self.

Mexico (Hachita N.M.) Via Columbus, N.M. Hachita, N.M. Dtr. Isabel Martine

$8.00 No Visit-10 days

Ex C 5 Ft. In. Drk Gr Br Irregular front teeth

Previously examined at Adm Auto

U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration Service. Form 546.

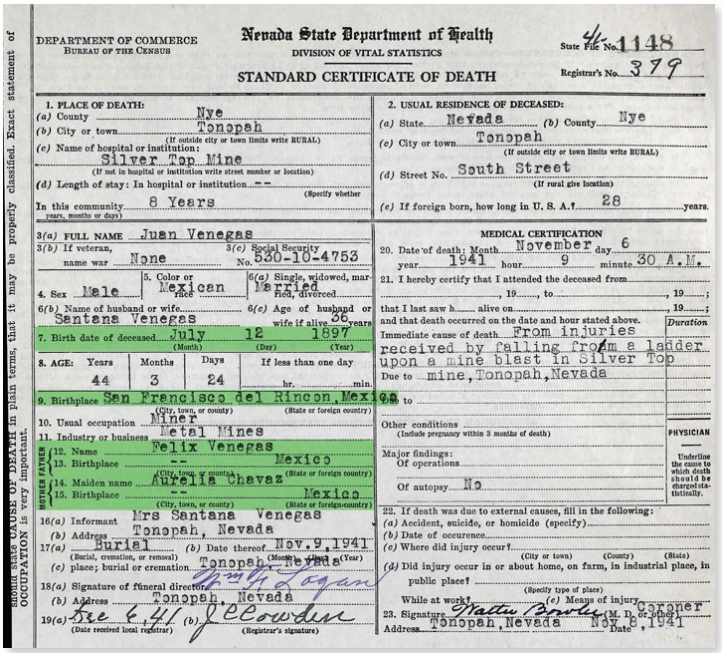
U.S. border crossing record

U.S. Vital Records

A vital record is a government document that contains information about a person's important life events, such as a birth, marriage, or death. A birth, marriage, or death certificate can include parents' names and birthplaces, as well as details about the individual.

The information these documents provide varies by state and county. For example, Texas county marriage certificates rarely provide parents' names.

The U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007 database can also be helpful for tracing Mexican immigrants because people were asked to record their birthplace and parents' names when applying for a Social Security number. If you know your ancestor had a Social Security number, but you cannot find them in the index or their entry contains only limited information, you may need to order the original document from the Social Security Administration.



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Nevada State Department of Health
DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS
STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

State File No. 4-1148
Registrar's No. 379

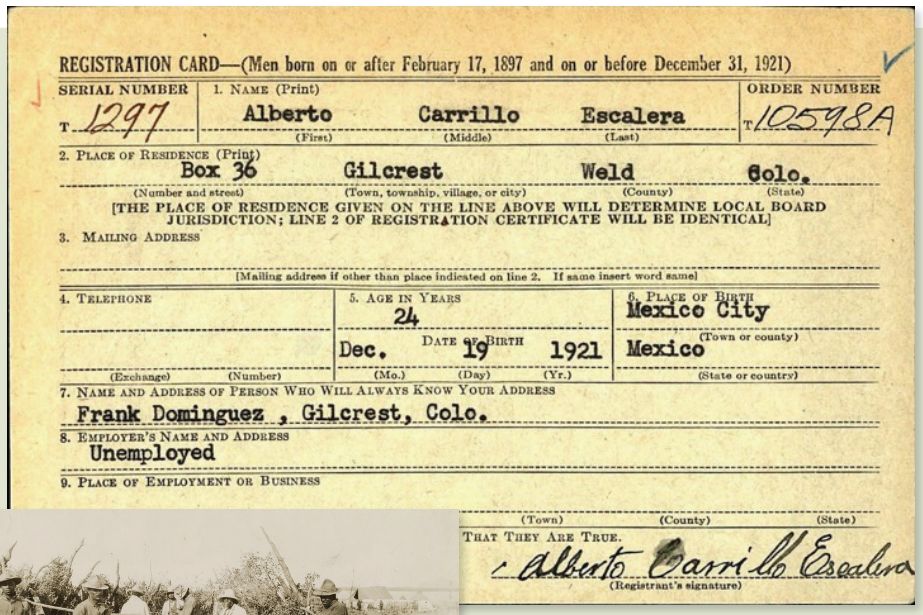
1. PLACE OF DEATH:
(a) County: Nye
(b) City or town: Tonopah (If outside city or town limits write RURAL)
(c) Name of hospital or institution: Silver Top Mine (If not in hospital or institution write street number or location)
(d) Length of stay: In hospital or institution -- (Specify whether years, months or days)
In this community: 8 Years

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED:
(a) State: Nevada (b) County: Nye
(c) City or town: Tonopah (If outside city or town limits write RURAL)
(d) Street No.: South Street (If rural give location)
(e) If foreign born, how long in U. S. A.? 28 years.

3(a) FULL NAME: Juan Venegas
3(b) If veteran, name war: None
3(c) Social Security No.: 530-10-4753
4. Sex: Male
5. Color or race: Mexican
6(a) Single, widowed, married, divorced: Married
6(b) Name of husband or wife: Santana Venegas
6(c) Age of husband or wife if alive: 56 years
7. Birth date of deceased: July (Month) 12 (Day) 1897 (Year)
8. AGE: Years 44 Months 3 Days 24 If less than one day: hr. min.
9. Birthplace: San Francisco del Rincon, Mexico (City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)
10. Usual occupation: Miner
11. Industry or business: Metal Mines
BORN MEXICO
12. Name: Felix Venegas
13. Birthplace: -- Mexico (City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)
14. Maiden name: Aurelia Chavez
15. Birthplace: -- Mexico (City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)
16(a) Informant: Mrs Santana Venegas
(b) Address: Tonopah, Nevada
17(a) Burial (Burial, cremation, or removal) (b) Date thereof: Nov. 9, 1941 (Month) (Day) (Year)
(c) place; burial or cremation: Tonopah, Nevada
18(a) Signature of funeral director: Mary E. Logan
(b) Address: Tonopah, Nevada
19(a) Nov 6 41 (Date received local registrar) (b) J. C. Cowden (Registrar's signature)

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION
20. Date of death: Month November day 6 year 1941 hour 9 minute 30 A.M.
21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from ..., 19..., to ..., 19...; that I last saw h... alive on ..., 19...; and that death occurred on the date and hour stated above.
Immediate cause of death: From injuries received by falling from a ladder upon a mine blast in Silver Top
Due to mine, Tonopah, Nevada
Duration
Other conditions (Include pregnancy within 3 months of death)
PHYSICIAN
Major findings:
Of operations
Of autopsy No
Underline the cause to which death should be charged statistically.
22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following:
(a) Accident, suicide, or homicide (specify)
(b) Date of occurence
(c) Where did injury occur? (City or town) (County) (State)
(d) Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place? (Specify type of place)
While at work? (e) Means of injury
23. Signature: Walter Bowler (M. D. or Other) Coroner
Address: Tonopah, Nevada Nov 6, 1941 Date

Nevada death certificate



REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)

SERIAL NUMBER T 1297 | 1. NAME (Print): Alberto (First) Carrillo (Middle) Escalera (Last) | ORDER NUMBER T 10598A

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print): Box 36 (Number and street) Gilcrest (Town, township, village, or city) Weld (County) Colo. (State)
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]

4. TELEPHONE (Exchange) (Number)

5. AGE IN YEARS: 24
DATE OF BIRTH: Dec. (Mo.) 19 (Day) 1921 (Yr.)

6. PLACE OF BIRTH: Mexico City (Town or county) Mexico (State or country)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS: Frank Dominguez , Gilcrest, Colo.

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Unemployed

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS

(Town) (County) (State)

THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

Alberto Carrillo Escalera
(Registrant's signature)

World War I draft registration card

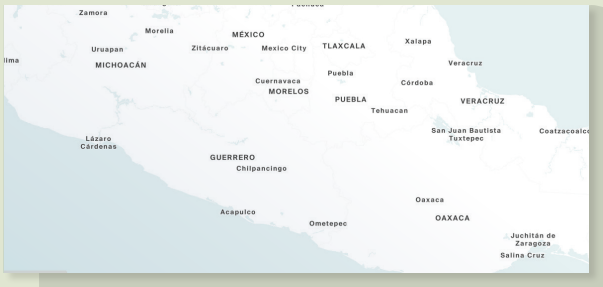
U.S. Military Records

The two most common sources for U.S. military records are the World War I and World War II draft registration records. The federal government required all men aged 21 to 45 to register, and individuals often reported their birth dates and places. Sometimes they would just say Mexico, but often they gave the state or even city in Mexico. These registration cards can also include the names of close relatives and usually give the person's race, height, weight, eye color, hair color, complexion, and other physical characteristics.

RECORDS IN MEXICO

Mexico has 33 states and it's important to research the state(s) where your ancestors lived to discover what records exist and the information they contain.

Mexico as seen on Ancestry.com



Working with Mexican Records

As you do research in Mexican records, keep these facts in mind.

Naming Patterns

Beginning in the 19th century, people in Mexico appear in official records with multiple surnames. These can include both parents' surnames and sometimes grandparents' surnames as well. For example, José Mateo, son of Juan García Hernández and María López Barrera, would be known as José Mateo García López. Online databases will sometimes include both surnames, just one, or no surname, depending on how the information was indexed. Mexican Americans may have their maternal surname listed as their middle name in official documents.

As you research, you may find that one or both of your ancestor's surnames is a composite surname. This occurs when the paternal or maternal surname was separated by a *y* or *de*, often because the first was their family name, and the second could be an aristocratic name or a geographical identifier. This carried over into Mexico until the late 1700s, when individuals began to shorten their surname to include only one of them. For example, Lope Ruiz de Esparza was the son of Lope Ruiz de Esparza and Ana Díaz de Eguinoa. The surnames Ruiz and Díaz were family names, while Esparza and Eguinoa referred to where their family was from. Eventually, descendants of Lope Ruiz de Esparza only kept the Esparza name, but some decided to use the Ruiz surname.

Another way this joint surname happened is when an ancestor decided to pass down their paternal and maternal surname together as a single surname. For example, Melchor Gutiérrez and Ysabel Lara have a son whose name is Nicolás Gutiérrez de Lara. Nicolás marries Clara Treviño and they have a son whose full name is Antonio Gutiérrez de Lara Treviño. This was also a common practice in Mexico in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

Tracking Ethnic Roots with Descriptors

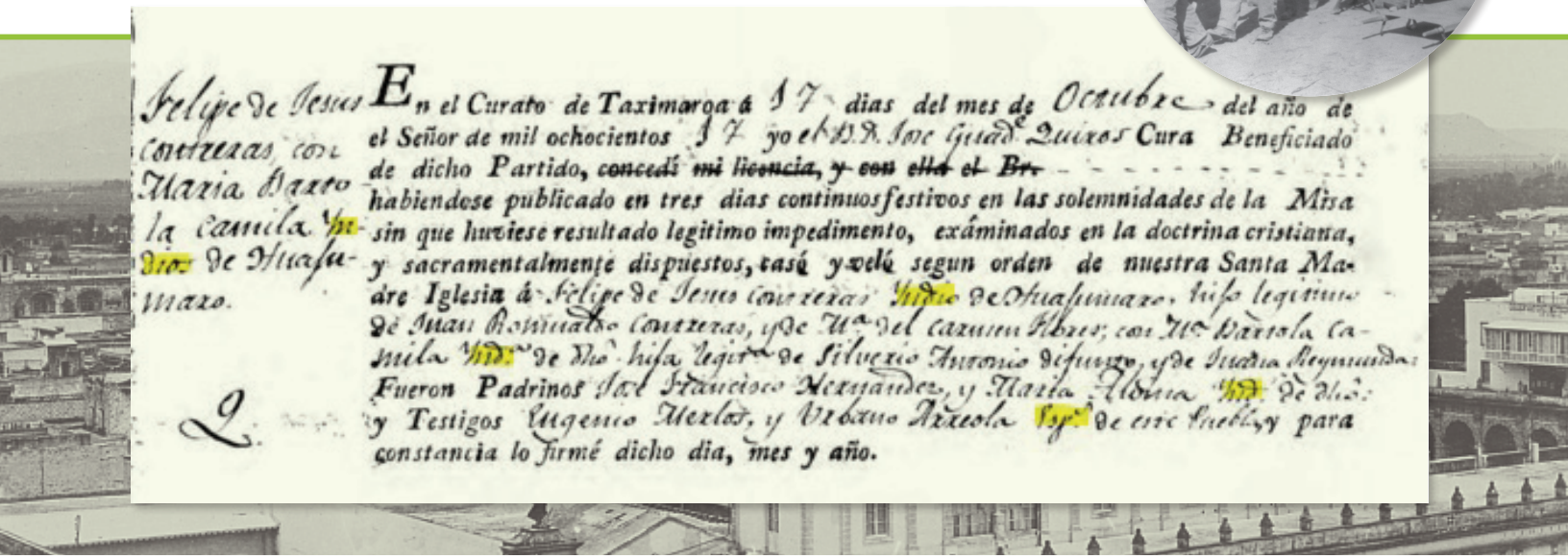
Tracing ethnic roots in Mexican records is both straightforward and complex. Prior to Mexico's independence in 1821, and sometimes after, clerks and Catholic clergy often identified individuals by physical or ethnic descriptors. Some of the common physical descriptors include *negro; indio; mulato, mestizo, coyote, lobo, morisco, or castizo; and español*, which correspond to "Black," "Indian," "mixed," and "white." You may also stumble upon cultural and ethnic descriptors like Ladino, Congo, Mozambique, Senegal, Yaqui, Apache, Comanche, or Chichimeca, which point to very specific ethnic heritage or culture but not to one's physique. And sometimes you'll see both together, for example a *negro Congo* or an *indio Apache*. Comparatively speaking, Indigenous and African ethnic descriptors appear far less frequently in the records than physical descriptors, but this can vary depending on the region of Mexico.

The physical descriptors are complex because these terms were very fluid in Mexico. They came at the discretion of the recorder and could be based upon one's genealogy, physique, or social status. A single individual might have been identified by any number of them in their lifetime: baptized *indio*, married *mulato*, purchased property *mestizo*, buried *español*. This also means that full siblings are sometimes described differently from one another and also from their parents. Changes sometimes reflected a person's rise through the ranks of local society or the military.

Records in Mexico show that *mulatos* could be the children of two Native Americans, two mulattoes, or any other combination. Although *español* means "Spaniard" when applied to a person, in practice, in Mexican records it is synonymous with *blanco*, or "white." Therefore, *español* does not mean that the person is from Spain, the child of Spaniards, or is only or mostly of Spanish descent. Don't discount these descriptors, but keep in mind that they can change and were based on the interpretation of the person recording the information.

Besides physical and ethnic descriptors, you may also come across some pertaining to status. Sometimes records noted whether a *mulato* or negro was free, emancipated, or enslaved using the descriptors *libre, libertos,* or *esclavo*. A few additional descriptors you may find include *laborio* for laborer, *pasajero* for migratory, or *Ladino* for Native Americans and Africans who had adopted colonial Spanish culture and values.

Below: *Yndio (Indio)* is both written out and abbreviated. *Esps.* is the abbreviation for *Españoles.*

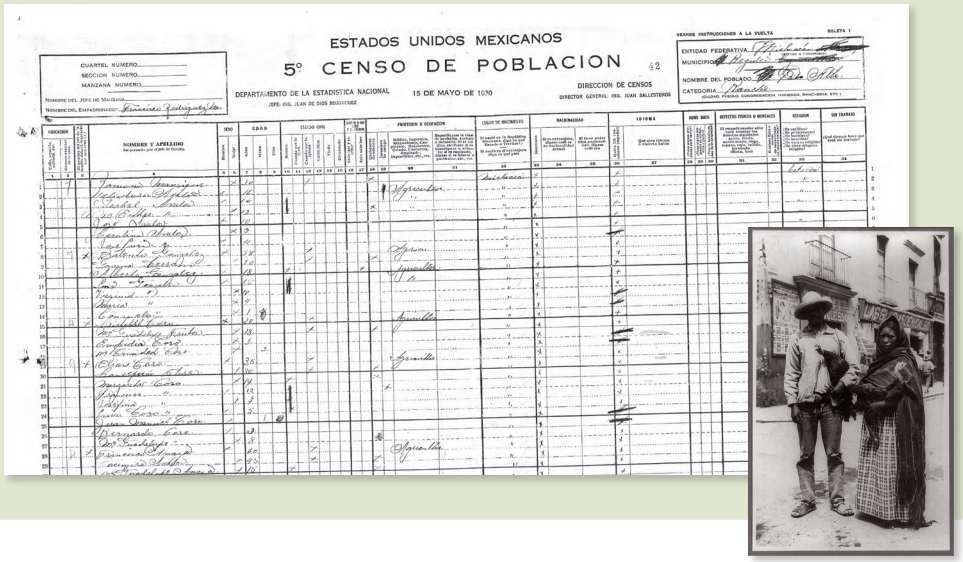


Felipe de Jesus Conteras con Maria Basto la Camila Yndias de Huasumazo.

En el Curato de Taximaroa á 17 dias del mes de Octubre del año de el Señor de mil ochocientos 17 yo el D.D. Jose Guad.e Quiros Cura Beneficiado de dicho Partido, ~~concedí mi licencia, y con ella el Br.~~ habiendose publicado en tres dias continuos festivos en las solemnidades de la Misa sin que hubiese resultado legitimo impedimento, exáminados en la doctrina cristiana, y sacramentalmente dispuestos, casé y velé segun orden de nuestra Santa Madre Iglesia á Felipe de Jesus Conteras Yndio de Huasumazo, hijo legitimo de Juan Bonifacio Conteras, y de Ma.a del Carmen Ribes; con Ma.a Basila Camila Yndia de Mo. hija legit.a de Silverio Antonio difunto, y de Judia Reymundas. Fueron Padrinos Jph. Francisco Hernandez, y Maria Albina Yndias de dho. y Testigos Eugenio Merlos, y Urbano Arzola Esp.s de este Pueblo, y para constancia lo firmé dicho dia, mes y año.

1930 Mexico Census

The only publicly available national census for Mexico is the 1930 Census, which is free to search on Ancestry. Similar to a U.S. census, it provides names, relationships, ages, marital status, birthplaces, etc. Census records for Mexico City were not filmed, however, so Mexico City residents cannot be found in the online database.



Catholic Records

When the Spanish conquered what is now Mexico, they established Catholic dioceses and parishes and began to record sacraments such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and burials. They also recorded marriage dispensations, engagements, and investigations, as well as parish censuses called *padrones*. These records begin in the 16th century, though record loss in some cities can create challenges in your research. Since most Mexicans are Catholic, these records form the bedrock of historical and genealogical research before civil registration began. Ancestry has Catholic databases for nearly all of Mexico's 33 states, and there are also general databases for Mexico baptisms, marriages, and deaths.

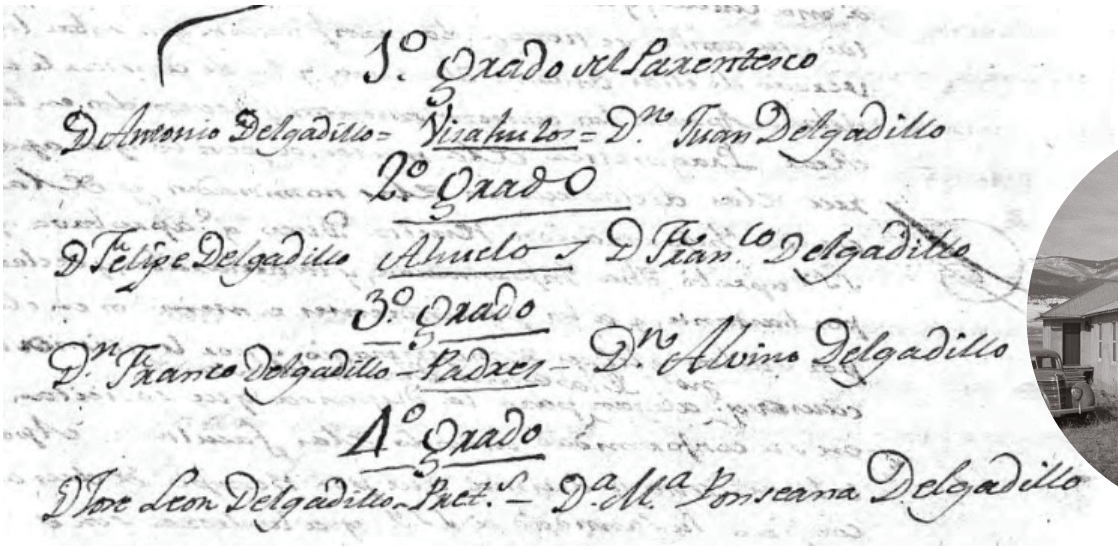
Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials

Typically, parents, guardians, or relatives had a child baptized at their local Catholic parish anywhere from the child's birthday to months later. The information on the record could include the child's baptism date, birth date, birthplace, full name, whether they were legitimate or natural (illegitimate) children, parents' names, godparents, and sometimes even the grandparents' names. The priest may also have used a descriptor for the child, its parents, and sponsors or witnesses. *(If a child was considered illegitimate due to being born out of wedlock, the father's name may not appear in the record.)*

Couples typically married in the bride's home parish, and a record could include names, ages, places of residence and origin, parents' names, sponsors/witnesses, and physical or ethnic descriptors. Burial records could include name, age, cause of death, marital status, parents' names, burial place, witnesses, and ethnic descriptor.

Información Matrimonial (Marriage Investigation)

Clergy opened an *información matrimonial* a few weeks before a marriage. This was an opportunity for the church to conduct a marriage investigation to ensure that the couple should be married. The church, based on its canon laws at the time, wanted to confirm three things: the bride and groom needed to be of age (and if not, have permission from a parent or guardian), not be too closely related (no closer than first cousins), and not currently be married to someone else. These records usually include names, ages, birthplaces, parents' names, physical or ethnic descriptors, and two or three witnesses to corroborate the information. Be sure to check whether the parish where your ancestors married has *información matrimonial* records available because not every parish has them online or even offline.



An example of a *dispensas matrimoniales*

A Catholic church in Eagle Nest, New Mexico

Dispensas Matrimoniales (Marriage Dispensations)

Bishops and archbishops issued *dispensas matrimoniales*, or marriage dispensations, to couples who needed special permission from the diocese to marry, usually because they were closely related. These records contain names, ages, birthplaces, parents' names, physical or ethnic descriptors, and witnesses. They also often include a diagram or paragraph explaining exactly how the bride and groom were related. When they were closely related on multiple lines, clergy demonstrated those linkages as well. These are great documents for quickly identifying ancestors for each spouse over multiple generations. Dispensations, with their relationship charts, can be especially important when the sacramental registers for the couple's parish no longer exist.

Padrones (Parochial censuses)

These are parochial censuses of parishioners in specific churches. They can be found in the local church's archives or at the diocesan level. Not all parishes conducted these, and those that did took them only sporadically. Some of the oldest *padrones* go back to the 16th century, while others date to the 19th and 20th centuries. They are usually not tabulated like national censuses and do not contain as much information but are arranged by family or household, listing names, ages, occupations, and sometimes relationships. You can find examples of these in the Jalisco, Mexico, Catholic Church Records, 1590-1995, database under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Guadalajara.

Civil Registration

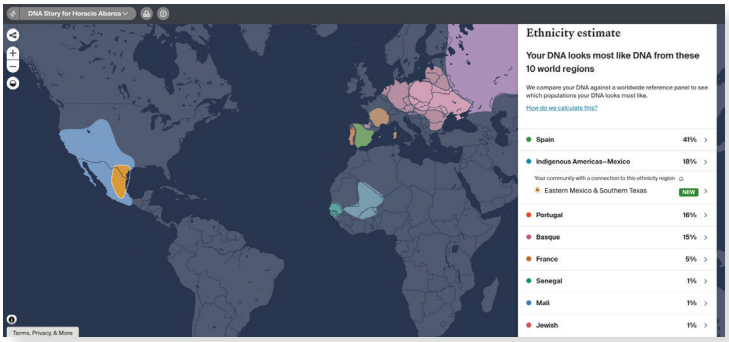
Starting in 1859, civil authorities in Mexico began to record births, marriages, and deaths on a municipal level, but when each municipality and state actually began registration varies. These registrations contain information similar to the Catholic sacramental records. You will sometimes find individuals recorded only in Catholic records, only in civil records, or in both. Ancestry has civil birth, marriage, and death databases for nearly all of Mexico's 33 states.

AncestryDNA®

DNA testing is a great way to learn more about your Mexican origins, especially when historical records don't have the answers. As of 2022, AncestryDNA® tests can be purchased in Mexico.

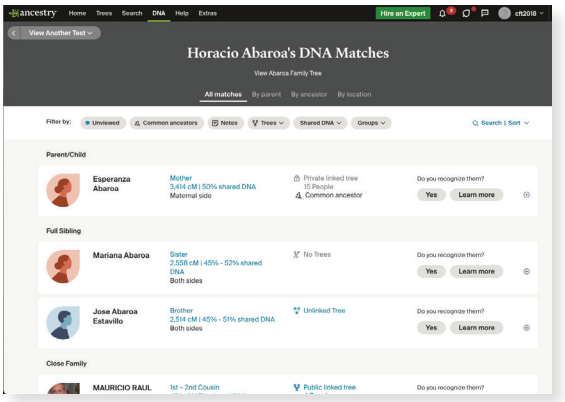
Ethnicity Estimates

Your ethnicity estimate shows geographic locations where your ancestors may have lived based on a comparison to Ancestry's reference panel. Most Mexicans will see a mix of Indigenous American regions, the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), and west and northern Africa. You may also see ethnicities like Basque and Jewish.



Matches

DNA matches are individuals who share DNA with you because you share close or distant common ancestors. The relationship is calculated through a measurement called centimorgans (cM), and the more cM you share, the closer the relationship. You can reach out to matches to compare family trees, determine how you are related, and find lost family members.



Communities

DNA communities are groups of DNA matches who share DNA because they had relatives who lived in the same place at the same time at some point within the past 300 years. Communities can show you places where your ancestors may have lived, what day-to-day life was like, and movements from place to place. This information can help you know where to search for records.