¡Bienvenidos! Welcome to our class on Mexican genealogy. Finding ancestors is challenging enough, but adding a foreign language makes it seem even more daunting. Still, armed with a few useful tips, guidelines and our genealogy staff's boundless encouragement, researching your Mexican roots can be enjoyable and fruitful. ¡Vamanos!

HOW DO I BEGIN?

Start with the ancestor about whom you know the most. You need a NAME— but realize that Hispanic names are often plural and might have changed after your ancestor came to the United States. It’s important to find a BIRTH DATE (or an estimate) and the PLACE in Mexico from which your ancestor came. The key to starting your Mexican research is to find out what state (estado) your ancestor called home, then the town (pueblo) and parish (parroquia) (for church records) or municipality (municipio) and city (ciudad) (for civil records). Our goal is to get you moving in the right direction.

CLUES TO FINDING NAMES, DATES AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

Church records (b/m/d) • Civil Records (b/m/d, wills, deeds, probates, etc.) • U.S. Censuses • 1930 Mexican Census Courthouse Records • Naturalization Records • Border Crossing Records • Military Records • Obituaries • Newspaper Articles Letters • Funeral Cards • Postcards • Photographs • Older relatives • Family Bible

CHURCH RECORDS vs CIVIL RECORDS

CHURCH: Established in Mexico in 1527, the Catholic Church was Mexico’s primary record keeper until civil registration began. Dioceses usually used the same writing standard, so that information found in church records is mostly consistent. The vast majority of Mexicans were Catholic and are registered in the parish records of their local parish or diocese. These records include baptisms, confirmations, marriage information documents, marriages, deaths and burials. Often, two or sometimes even three generations are found in the registers. Records were kept at the parish, and a copy was sent to the diocesan archive.

CIVIL: Civil records in Mexico began in 1859, though enforcement throughout the country was lax until 1867. These include birth, marriage and death records. After 1859, both church and civil records should be searched, because information in one might not appear in the other. For example, the church record may only list the godparents, but the civil record might list the grandparents. Again, it all begins with a name. Next, we’ll explore those often-confusing Hispanic naming traditions.
Guidelines for deciphering Spanish names

Confusion surrounding Hispanic names leaves many researchers feeling anxious about starting Mexican genealogy research. These guidelines, while not hard and fast rules, are designed to help beginners decipher the naming traditions that govern the names of Mexican ancestors:

- Hispanic naming traditions are patronymic, meaning surnames are determined by the male line
  - The “ez” at the end of many Spanish surnames originated as a way to denote “the son of”, e.g. Fernández: son of Fernando
- In the Spanish language, apellido most closely translates to surname. Note that it does not mean LAST name
- Generally, Hispanic names:
  - Include two surnames, one from the father and one from the mother
  - In the case of illegitimate children, often both the mother’s surnames were used
  - Orphans were sometimes given surnames to reflect their home, such as Iglesias (church)
  - First names may include Saints’ names
  - First names may be used together or separately, e.g. Maria Carmen may go as Maria Carmen or Carmen

Lineage and Spanish Surnames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Second Name</th>
<th>Paternal Surname</th>
<th>Maternal Surname</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roberto Carlos Padillo Sánchez</td>
<td>Sofia Luna Pérez Cruz</td>
<td>José Luis García Rodríguez</td>
<td>María Elena Díaz Reyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel Ángel Padillo Pérez</td>
<td>Alejandra Margarita García Díaz</td>
<td>Juan Francisco García Díaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>José David Padillo y Pérez García y Díaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, married women keep their family (maiden) names. However, there are exceptions, especially in more recent generations. As a married woman, Alejandra Margarita could be known as:

1. Alejandra Margarita García Díaz (her maiden name)
2. Alejandra Margarita García Padillo (her paternal surname and her husband’s paternal surname)
3. Alejandra Margarita García de Padillo ("de" is sometimes added to identify the surname gained by marriage)
4. Alejandra Margarita García-Díaz Padillo (compound names do not require any legal documentation in Mexico)

Advantages of Spanish Surnames

- Easier to keep track of maternal lines
- A child’s name provides surnames of both paternal and maternal grandfathers
- Both the surnames of each parent can be kept together by using a “y” (translates to “and”) between the names

Complications of Spanish First Names and Surnames

- Indexers may not be familiar with naming conventions and index names under the maternal surname only
- Special characters may cause computer or publication indexing issues with surnames; Pérez may follow Pyle
- When immigrating to the U.S., some families switched the order of surnames to keep the emphasis on the paternal line

- **Pablo** Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Ruiz y **Picasso**
- Magdalena Carmen **Frida Kahlo** Calderón
- **Diego** María de la Concepción Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la **Rivera** y Barrientos Acosta y Rodríguez
WHERE CAN I FIND THOSE RECORDS?
There are two major online sources of church and civil records for Mexico

FamilySearch
Ancestry

FAMILYSEARCH

FamilySearch is FREE! It’s recommended that you sign in and create a password.

FamilySearch has many indexed records, but most records are only browseable at this time.

What may be most valuable to researchers, however, is the FamilySearch Wiki for Mexico. Let’s check it out!

Click on North America to open a new page. Then click on Mexico to open the Mexico Genealogy Wiki.
Clicking on SONORA on the map will open the page shown below. It’s a “how-to” guide to doing genealogy research in this northern Mexican state.

Let’s use FamilySearch to find an ancestor’s record. We’ll use Sonora as our state. Return to the FamilySearch homepage as seen below, and click on Records. This takes you to the map shown below. Click on Mexico (yellow) to go to the next page. Use the drop-down menu to find Sonora. Click on Sonora, and the Sonora Indexed Historical Records page appears.

We will use Arturo Figueroa as our example. He was born between 1920 and 1930. Notice that I’ve checked the box next to those dates. Click SEARCH. How many results did we get?
Now let’s use Ancestry to find records for Arturo Figueroa, born 1920-1930 in Sonora. On the homepage, click SEARCH to expose the drop-down menu. Click Card Catalog. Scroll down and use the filter (on the left of the page) to click on Mexico.

Next, scroll down to filter by location and click on Sonora.

Let’s try to find Arturo Figueroa using Sonora, Mexico, Civil Registration Births, 1866-1930, as shown by the gold arrow above. Click on that collection. The results are shown on page 6.
We’re searching for the birth of Arturo Figueroa, born between 1920 and 1930. I did not click the “Match all terms exactly” box this time, to allow for potential spelling variations. **Click SEARCH.** Our results appear below.

Unfortunately, our Arturo Figueroa can’t be located in this Sonora collection. So, we’ll use a broader approach to try to find him. Go to the Ancestry homepage and **click SEARCH**, then click All Categories. Fill in the search wells as shown below, then **click the orange SEARCH button.**

**YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO …**

**Google** names, placing them inside quotation marks - *i.e.* “Arturo Figueroa” or “José Arturo Figueroa”

**Use online digital newspapers** - *i.e.* library.arizona.edu/contentdm/mmap/ OR hndm.unam.mx

Examine **books** on our shelves for Arizona and New Mexico, as portions of them were a part of Mexico as of the early 1850s

**Peruse the bibliography** of Hispanic genealogy books in the library.