

Researching My Chavoya Ancestry

by Alma Chavoya Hernandez Rosales



Tereso and Juanita Chavoya, from The Chavoya Family Archives

The Dallas Chavoya Family

I embarked upon my ancestral research as both a curiosity about my lineage and a tribute to my mother and my grandparents. I began my research clueless about the abundance of resources that existed for those with Mexican ancestors. The more I learned about my ancestry, the more I appreciated the bold risk-taking of those who left their home countries. Their journeys resulted in us, their descendants, enjoying and prospering in our lives in the United States. In this article, I share some of the ancestral discoveries I made and some of the resources I used during my research. For a complete list of findings, citations, and resources, see the 2019 HOGAR (Hispanic Organization for Genealogy and Research) de Dallas Journal XXII article “500 Years of Ancestors.” Researchers with ancestors from Nueva Galicia (including Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, and Jalisco) and Nueva España (including Mexico City and Michoacán) will find the list of resources particularly helpful.

The Dallas Chavoya Family

My grandparents Tereso Chavoya and Juanita Cadena (Chavoya), both of whom were born in Mexico, were among the first Mexican immigrants to settle in the area of Dallas known as Little Mexico. This area, formerly a Polish-Jewish neighborhood, became a Mexican “barrio” in the 1910s as many Mexicans fled the violence in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. Little Mexico was a community where Mexican immigrants and their American-born children and grandchildren celebrated their culture and history. Tereso Chavoya was born in 1885 in Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes, and Juanita was born in 1888, in Sombrerete, Zacatecas. Juanita’s family fled the turmoil in Mexico to San Antonio, Texas, in 1911, and Tereso followed them in 1912. Tereso and Juanita were married in San Antonio in 1912. In San Antonio, Tereso worked in the oil mill industry. After the birth of their first two children in San Antonio, Tereso and Juanita moved to Dallas in 1917, where six additional children were born. Both Tereso and Juanita became well-respected leaders in Little Mexico. Tereso continued to work in the oil mill industry and worked his way into management by 1940. Tereso advocated for Mexican worker’s rights, serving as president of the Dallas chapter of the Union Fraternal Mexicana Miguel Hidalgo in the 1920s. Juanita managed the family and was active in the neighborhood church, Our Lady of Guadalupe, founded in 1925. Their children attended Cumberland Hills Elementary School and either Crozier Technical High School or North Dallas High School.

Their family prospered in Dallas. Their six sons were successful businessmen. Jesse (b. 1920) was the first Mexican American in Dallas to own a dress manufacturing company with his own clothing brand, Cactus Flower. Bob (b. 1922) owned and operated an Exxon gas station and repair shop franchise in North Dallas and won several small business awards. Rudy (b. 1925) was a district manager for John Hancock Insurance. Ernest (b. 1913) and Henry (b. 1918) were skilled auto mechanics. Henry managed a Cadillac dealership repair shop in Corsicana, Texas. Mike (b. 1920) was an expert craftsman who worked as a cabinet maker. Carmen (b. 1915) and Marie (b. 1917) were strong matriarchs of their families. Both were working mothers. Carmen (Hernandez) was an accomplished seamstress who became a sample maker for a dress designer. Marie (Vasquez Morgan) was successful in the retail business.

The Chavoya siblings came from humble beginnings, but they overcame adversity. They believed in and achieved the American dream. Five of the brothers (Henry, Mike, Bob, Jesse, and Rudy) served simultaneously in WWII. There were twenty-seven first cousins, most of who still live in the greater Dallas area. Family gatherings were frequent and fun. We learned to have a strong work ethic; we learned to treat everyone with respect; we learned a love of God, country, and family; and we learned that we must honor the family ties that bind us together.

Ancestors in the Americas

My ancestral history in the Americas began before the arrival of Spaniards in Mexico in the early 1500s. The genealogy of my Native American ancestors was not documented until the arrival of Spanish priests. When Spanish priests arrived with explorers to the New World as part of the Spanish expeditions, they began keeping meticulous records. Priests recorded births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, wills, censuses, court hearings, etc. It is their recordkeeping that provided me with most of my ancestral discoveries. My Spanish ancestors fought heroically in battles against previously unknown Native American civilizations, including the Aztecs, Purépecha, Tabasco, and Chichimeca. Some of these ancestors were nobles; some came to escape poverty; some were engineers and architects; some became magistrates in their communities; one ancestor was among the first Europeans to discover the Grand Canyon. My Spanish ancestors helped establish numerous settlements in Mexico, primarily in the Nueva España area and in the Nueva Galicia area. Many of them married Native American women because of the scarcity of Spanish women in those areas. The stories of my ancestors include heroism, patriotism, service to the crown, treason, illegitimacy, banishment, wealth, poverty, greed, devotion to the church, and strong family connections. Although I have great pride in the heroism and risk-taking of my Spanish ancestors, I am equally proud of my Native American ancestors who created vast civilizations and accomplished remarkable achievements in mathematics, medicine, astronomy, engineering, and architecture. My Chavoya family is directly descended from the Aztec emperor Moctezuma II via his daughter Leonor de Moctezuma, also known as Mariana. Moctezuma II was the ruler of the Aztecs from 1502-1520. Leonor married my Spanish ancestor, Cristobal Valderrama. Many of the encounters of my Spanish and Native American ancestors led to violent battles. Those battles and the subsequent intermarriages of my ancestors were the origins of my Chavoya family. My ancestral heritage is of both the conquered and the conqueror.

Research

I began my genealogical research with genetic DNA testing via National Geographic. Through this testing of my mitochondrial DNA (maternal DNA), I discovered that my ancestors migrated across the Bering Strait and down the Rockies over 10 000 years ago. Subsequently, I tested with Ancestry and uploaded my DNA to several genetic research websites. It was via GEDmatch (GEDmatch.com) that I made connections with fourth cousins that provided me with valuable research and collaborative assistance. My ethnicity estimate, according to Ancestry, was identified as primarily Native American (58%) and Spanish (25%). This estimate was validated by my genealogical discoveries which revealed that my ancestors were predominantly Native American and Spanish.

I relied primarily upon Mexican Catholic Church records and civil registration records available online via Ancestry.com and Familysearch.org. As discussed earlier, Spanish priests in Mexico kept meticulous records from the time they first arrived in Mexico. In 1859, the Mexican government made civil registrations mandatory. Microfiches of civil and Catholic Church records were available online via these websites. Some records (not all) were indexed; i.e., volunteers read the Mexican documents, which were in Spanish, extracted vital information from the records, and provided that information online in English. To ensure the validity of each index, I reviewed the microfiche of the original record. Some records were difficult to decipher because of the handwriting, the language used, or fading of the record. Fortunately, several individuals generously provided me with free translation assistance via the Facebook group Mexican Genealogy. I researched all hints or suggestions from any website before I included them in my family tree. On my local computer, I used Family Tree Maker to keep track of my genealogical research.

Several websites were immensely beneficial to my research. I list three of them below. The ancestral information that I found relevant in these websites was researched and validated before I incorporated it into my family tree. For a complete listing, see the HOGAR Journal cited above.

- Mexicangenealogy.info was the first Mexican genealogical research website that I discovered. It provided me with a guide to getting started on Mexican genealogy research. It also provided me with pointers to valuable resources that assisted me in pursuing that research. Many of the books and articles I relied upon were suggested on this website.
- Nuestrosranchos.com, a website for “serious genealogists” researching the genealogy of Jalisco, Zacatecas, and Aguascalientes, provided me with information specific to the Nueva Galicia area. Most contributors are expert genealogists or academic scholars who collaborate, share and exchange vital ancestral and geographical information. Most of the information posted on this website was in English. To understand those entries that were in Spanish, I used Google Translate, Google’s free translation service.
- The distant cousins I met via GEDmatch suggested I explore Wikitree.com, a collaborative genealogical website. Contributors shared information about their family trees and collaborated on larger family trees. Some Wikitree contributors, including the fourth cousins I met through GEDmatch, shared well-researched and well-documented information on this website. Their Wikitree entries included the link for the original Spanish record, the information in the record translated into English, and detailed source citations and book recommendations.

The books that assisted me in my research were either purchased by me, or they were located and ordered by my local library in Boulder, Colorado, through the Interlibrary Loan program. I learned about the books from Wikitree citations and the website, Mexicangenealogy.info. One book helped me tremendously, and that is my top recommendation for anyone researching ancestors from Nueva Galicia. *Retornos de España en la Nueva Galicia* by the well-known Mexican genealogist and historian, Mariano Gonzalez-Leal, provided me with a wealth of information. Ten books comprised the *Retornos* collection. Because the books were written in Spanish and my Spanish skills were rusty, I relied upon Google Translate. The Boulder library could only order one volume at a time, so I purchased this set of books that I used daily. Gonzalez-Leal not only chronicled names, birth, baptism, marriage, and death records, he also shared stories about the individuals and information about their geographical locations. It was the stories about my ancestors and the information about their locations that I found fascinating. Additional book recommendations are listed in the HOGAR journal.

Several Facebook groups were helpful to me. For example, members of the Mexican Genealogy Facebook Group connect, share information, answer questions, share photographs, and provide assistance in locating and translating source records. The deciphering and translating of microfiche records by Mexican Genealogy Facebook members, at no cost, was critical to my research progress. Whenever I posted a request for assistance with a particular record, I typically received several responses within thirty minutes. Facebook groups for each state in Mexico and Facebook groups for specific ancestral areas in Mexico also assisted me in my research. As a member of the Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Michoacán, and the Nueva Galicia Genealogical Society Facebook groups, I learned about the history and geography of my ancestral locations, and I connected with distant cousins.

Cultural Norms

I learned about several cultural norms that had previously created roadblocks for me. For those researching their ancestral lineages in Mexico, being aware of the following cultural norms is helpful.

Women in Mexico used their maiden names even after they were married. They did not use their husband's surname. For example, my great grandmother, Maria Felice Ybarra, never used my great grandfather's surname, Chavoya. All of Maria's records, birth through death, used her paternal surname, Ybarra.

Spanish priests used phonetic spelling. For example, my grandfather's surname was Chavoya. However, many variations of the "Chavoya" surname appeared in the Family History Library (FHL) Mexican Catholic Church records and the FHL Civil Registration Records. The variations included Chabolla, Chagoya, Chagolla, Chavolla, and one record with Chavoia. In

Tereso Chavoya's baptism record, his last name appeared as "Chabolla." But, when he immigrated to the United States in 1912, his last name appeared as "Chavoya" in his border crossing document. He continued to use the surname "Chavoya" throughout the remainder of his life. These conflicting name variations often appeared for the same individual in baptism, marriage, and death records.

Some individuals used as their surname the surname of a prominent ancestor of the family. For example, Francisca Gabay was the daughter of Luis Tiscareno and Lorenza Ruiz de Esparza. She chose to go by Francisca Gabay, the surname of her grandmother, Ana Francisca Gabay de Moctezuma. Another example was Juan Lopez de Baeza. He was the son of Diego Lopez y Fuenllana. Some of Juan Lopez's children used Lopez, some used Fuenllana, some used Lopez de Fuenllana, and some used Baeza. This variation in the choice of ancestral surnames made research challenging.

Many Spanish families practiced endogamy, marrying into other Spanish families of the same class. In the early 1600s, there were only twenty-five (25) Spanish families in Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes. These families kept marrying into each other's families. Researching my Aguascalientes ancestors, I encountered the same surnames over and over again. There were several instances of a great aunt also being a great grandmother of mine. Because the Catholic Church had strict rules about consanguinity, Spanish priests collected and published detailed information about parental lineages. This lineage information provided valuable individual and family connection information that I researched, verified, and incorporated into my family tree.

Mexico had a legal racial caste system that was complex and detailed. Priests called out the ethnicity/race of every individual in his/her baptismal record. One's caste determined one's position in society. The caste system defined three main categories of humans, Spaniards, Native Americans, and African Negroes. This system was then further broken down into sixteen (16) distinct racial subcategories, with differing names for the person's mixed-race combinatorial percentage. Everyone who was not a Spain-born Spaniard was socially inferior and legally inferior as well. At baptism, Spanish priests determined one's caste by their skin color. In some instances, a child was described as Spaniard, and other children of the same family were identified as "mestizo" (mixed Spanish and Native American). People paid careful attention to skin color because it determined one's potential opportunities. It was not until 1821 that Mexico abolished the caste system on paper.

Summary

In summary, discovering my ancestral roots was challenging but immensely rewarding. I was always proud of our Chavoya family, but I was oblivious about our family history and the abundance of available resources that could assist me in researching that history. For those

researching their Mexican genealogy, particularly in the area of Nueva Galicia, I refer you to the HOGAR journal for a complete list of resources. My genealogical research was performed in tribute to my mother, my grandparents, and all my ancestors that came before them. I thank everyone who contributed to my genealogical research and everyone who celebrated my discoveries and encouraged me to continue.

Sources

Books:

González-Leal, Mariano, 2011. *Retornos de España en la Nueva Galicia*, Secretaría General de Gobierno. Secretaría General de Gobierno, Dirección de Publicaciones, 2011, University of California. Volumes I-VII

Himmerich and Valencia, Robert, 1991. *The Encomenderos of New Spain 1521-1555*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Websites:

mexicangenealogy.info, Mexican Genealogy, Helping You Find Your Spanish Colonial and Mexican Ancestors

nuestrosranchos.com, A website "for serious genealogists actively searching for lineages in the states of Jalisco, Zacatecas and Aguascalientes of Mexico."

Facebook site: Mexican Genealogy

Note: Any inquiries about the journal should be directed to the hogardedallas.org website by clicking on the "Contact Us" tab.

*Copyright ©2021 Alma Chavoya Hernandez Rosales
Published by Dallas Genealogical Society with the author's permission*