

UNTANGLING YOUR HISPANIC ANCESTRAL ROOTS
A Genealogy Primer
By Patricia Sanchez Rau

Where do I come from? I wonder who my ancestors are? Any one of those questions indicates that you've been infected by the genealogy bug. It starts out as a simple question, but that is how your search begins. You might ask your parents or a relative what they know about their ancestors, which in most cases isn't very much (so they say). You then begin either looking up genealogy on a Web site or stopping at your local Public Library to see what resources are available.

I was infected a few years ago, when my mother would pose questions about her ancestors. I remember her telling me that her grandmothers were all related through the Ortiz family. She had such a desire to find out about her ancestors that everywhere she went, funerals, weddings, or even visiting relatives she would find the oldest 'viejito' or 'viejita' and start asking questions. As I was living in Chicago, at first I didn't pay much attention. Then she gave me a gift for Christmas, "The Origins of New Mexico Families" by Fray Angelico Chavez and then I became infected with the genealogy virus. I read the book from cover to cover and started wondering....I wonder if that could be my ancestor.... Oh here's another Sanchez, could this be the one?.....

That summer when I came home for vacation I started by interviewing my mother, but I actually made a chart of the names and information she gave me. I went back to Chicago and tried the Mormon Genealogy Library but only found a small amount of information so I got discouraged and put it away. Occasionally I would get out the information and try again but it wasn't until my mother passed away and that I moved back to Colorado that the search began in earnest. I spent a few months "spinning my wheels" until I hit on a method that has really worked for me. I'd like to share this with you.

1. Begin by interviewing your parents and/or the older members of your family. Ask pointed questions. When and where were you born? What are the names and birth dates of your brothers and sisters? What are your parents' names (remember maiden names become very important). Where and when were they born? Get as much information as possible. Go back as far as possible. Get a good map of the area you are going to be searching in. Sometimes the records you need may be in a nearby community or county seat.
2. Ask for any newspaper copies of wedding stories, obituaries or Mass cards your ancestor might have in his/her possession. Then write down all that information being sure to include all the new information such as children, brothers, sisters or where they were from. Does your ancestor have any baptismal records or marriage certificates, check those out too and if possible take a copy of them (front & back).
3. Old Photo Albums - Ask to see the old photo albums and ask questions as you look. Many times, your parent may think they don't remember but seeing the old photos will jog their memories. If possible, write down the names of the people on the back of the picture, either by putting a label on or

writing lightly (Be careful not to damage the picture permanently). I never did and when I went back after my parents' death there were a number of pictures that I couldn't identify. My parents were the last of their generation and now there is no one who can identify the pictures.

4. Organize your material in file folders. I started out with one for each family group I had found and put all my information pertaining to that family in the folder. That meant that I had a hard copy of the material at hand. I then drew a fan chart and put in all the names that I knew.

5. If you have a computer, purchase a good Family Tree Program. We started with one, and found that it was not satisfactory so we finally purchased Family Tree Maker,[®] which has been an excellent choice. If purchasing a software program, look for one that prints fan or vertical family trees, prints source information and imports pictures. Put in all your information, even if you don't have last names.

6. Check the resources you have available in your hometown. Does your library have a genealogy section? What resources do they have from New Mexico, Colorado, etc. Is there Mormon Church in your locale? Do they have a Family History Center? Can you order films from other places? What resources do they have on hand, microfilm, books, etc. If you are just getting started and don't have too much information, your best bet is your local church records. If you're on the Internet, then check the forums, and the resources they offer. I will list some web site address at the end of the article that have been most beneficial.

A. Marriage Records provide the best information because they generally list the parents of the bride and groom so that gives you the previous generation. This also keeps you on the right track. As you get further and further back in your search you will need to look for Marriage Diligencias. These were records obtained by the local priest to make sure that the bride and groom were not too closely related because of the small number of people in New Mexico at the time. These are separate records and may be out of date sequence with the actual marriage record and you may have to go to the Archives at Santa Fe to find them.

B. Birth Records. One of the reasons I urge you to look at the baptismal records for as many children as you can find is because oftentimes they have hidden clues. A middle name for your ancestor, or in some instances a first name. Your 'Antonio' may become "Jose Antonio." On one of my families my 'Garcia' became "Garcia de Noriega" and my 'Vigil' became "Montes Vigil."

Okay..., you've listed all the children you can find, but what does that mean? Then if you haven't found the marriage record, start looking backwards from the birth of the first child. If they stayed in the same place, you can hope to find the marriage record within a couple of years from the birth of the first child.

The birth records may also present you with another challenge. You will be going along and...OOPS your great grandfather is listed with a different spouse. This usually indicates the death of the spouse. Again keep writing down the information and then that means that you have to go back to the marriage records to see if you can locate the new marriage record.

There is one other problem that your searching may uncover, that is two people with the same name... In some instances you find two individuals with the same name having families at the same time. I have one ancestor where I have that problem. There are two Pedro Ignacio Sanchez living in the same area and the same time frame. I know which one my ancestor is but I am having difficulty finding his parents. I have another ancestor who uses two names interchangeably. On most of the records he is listed as Manuel Romero but on several records he is listed as Manuel Marques, then his children use the two last names as well. I have yet to unravel that mystery.

Last but not least, some of the birth records might list both the maternal and paternal grandparents. Hooray!!! another link.

C. Compadrazgo Connections What in heaven's name is that? Well, in most of the families, there were cousins, brothers and sisters as well as close friends. When you have your children baptized, do you choose strangers or do you choose family members? Generally your first choice will be a brother or sister, followed by friends. The same thinking took place when getting married. Most of our ancestors would rather choose a spouse for the daughter from someone they knew as opposed to strangers and as most marriages were arranged, the spouse was selected from family or close friends.

D. Name Similarities - Look for habits in the naming of children. In my family there is a child every generation baptized with the name of the grandparent.

E. OTHER RESOURCES

1. **Census Records** - Not sure where your ancestor may have lived? Check the census records from the era when he lived and try to locate him in "Santa Fe" or wherever. Some of the census information gives the names of the whole family group and ages of the children (that's another reason to try to find the names of the children, especially if there is one with a unique first name). The ages may not be entirely correct, sometimes the children didn't age much between censuses. Another thing that I found interesting is something my father told me... The Spanish people did not start counting your age when you were born, they started counting when you were a year old. So many of the people I was looking for were at least a year or so older.
2. **Resource Books** -

- “Origins of New Mexico Families” by Fray Angelico Chavez is still a good book to have in your library even though there have been corrections and additions since the first edition.
 - “The Spanish Re-colonization of New Mexico” by Jose Esquibel & John Colligan is an excellent resource to have because of the more current records found in this book.
 - Church Records - If you can locate where a large portion of your family is from, you might consider purchasing the birth records and marriage records from that church if they are in print. I can't tell you how many times I have reviewed Volume 3 of the Santa Cruz Baptisms.
 - “Place names of New Mexico” by Robert Julyan. I have found that several of the places where I was searching for records no longer appeared on the map. “Atrisco” had become a suburb of Albuquerque. This book lists the names of places and where they are located as well as various names for the same places. That's why you also need a good map of the area where you are searching.
3. **Legal Records** If you are fortunate enough to live close to where your ancestors came from check the courthouse for land records and for wills.
 4. **Death Records/Cemeteries** Check and see if there are any death records in your area. Many times they will list parents. Take a ride to the cemeteries. Some of them can still yield valuable clues. If you find a headstone for a family member. Take a picture of it.
 5. **Genealogy Societies** - If at all possible join a genealogy society in the area where you are looking. They have access to resource materials that you, as an individual may not have. I have purchased back issues of their quarterly magazines for information on certain families.
 6. **Spanish Archives of New Mexico** – If you can schedule a trip to New Mexico include a trip to the Spanish Archives of New Mexico Library located in Santa Fe. This is the researcher's 'dream come true' – as you can find books, wills, land grant material, newspapers and microfilm from the sources all over New Mexico which might yield your lost information.
 7. **Internet Genealogy Sources** -
 - **The Hispanic Genealogy Research Data Base** has been the most helpful in providing resources. The first day I found it, I looked up my great grandparents and lo and behold, there they were on the database with an ancestral tree to go along with them. A huge time saver. You can find them at <http://hgrc-nm.org>
 - **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints** has a web site where you can do look-ups. I have found that it is best to put in only one name and then when you get a list of people look them up individually. That's because our ancestors did not always use the

same name every time they baptized a child. This web address is:

<http://www.familysearch.org/default.asp>

- **Family Tree Maker** has a web site with access to lots of names and information. You can also access GenForum from this site as well. Then they have a list of last names where you can post messages. **<http://genforum.familytreemaker.com>**
- **New Mexico GenWeb Project** - Some of the counties are helpful, others do not respond, but it is still a good source to try. **<http://www.nmgenweb.us/>**
- **Links** - When you do get to a web site that looks helpful, be sure to look at the Links - For example the Hispanic Genealogy Resource Center has a portion on their web site that lists Other Genealogical Resources - Be sure to check them out. Jose Esquibel has one of the best web pages, always chock full of new material. I don't pass a month without looking at his web site for new articles. His web site is **http://pages.prodigy.net/bluemountain1/beyond_origins.htm**

Helpful Hints

1. Remember '**DO THE MATH**'- If there is too much time between the person you are researching and the previous generation - it is very possible you have skipped a generation.
2. Don't assume that all the sources you have found are totally correct. On my great grandmother's birth record it shows her mother and grandmother's name as the same. My mother had information in several places that listed the parents & grandparents. I confirmed this with the birth record of another child. Therefore, the priest who wrote the information made a mistake.
3. Take copies of extracts where possible. That means you have accurate information at your fingertips. Be sure to list and document resources. When I started I was so excited I didn't list anything and then found I had to go back and confirm all those sources.
4. Reach a Dead End??? Go back to the drawing board. Recheck the data bases, the books, etc. and then network, maybe someone else has found significant information that will help you.
5. Network & Write Queries This has enabled me to find "cousins" who are searching for the same information so we have pooled our resources and our time and have been able to find more information.

After a few years of researching I find that my circle of ancestors is almost complete however, I still have a bad case of the genealogy virus.....so....are there any "primos" who need help???

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