



## **Crossing the Frontera**

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If your ancestor crossed the U.S. border from Mexico between 1903 and 1957, you may want to try searching for him or her in Border Crossing records. This class will give you a little background information about the records and their content. It will also show you how they can be used to identify your ancestor's hometown in Mexico. The class includes a case study and important search tips and techniques.

### **WHAT ARE BORDER CROSSING RECORDS?**

These are records of non-U.S. citizens, or in some cases, persons who appeared to not be U.S. citizens, crossing the border from Mexico into the United States. They can range in dates from 1895 to 1957. The best records are after 1910. These records are not extant and those who may have crossed illegally will not be found.

### **HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS**

On 2 March 1819 the Steerage Act was passed requiring all incoming passengers to the United States to be recorded.

The southern borders between the United States and Mexico were delineated in two important events. In 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which put an end to the Mexican-American War and in 1853 with the Gadsden Purchase which gave the United States a small portion along the borders of Arizona and New Mexico.

In the 1890s the borders of the United States began to patrol the borders.

In 1906 Mexican nationals and other non-U.S. citizens began to be inspected at the border and some record keeping began. In 1908 a card system was begun. Prior to the 1930s, it was possible that those who were staying less than six months were not recorded.

In 1910 Immigration Services began in border towns. In 1929 and up to the early 1930s, during the Great Depression, due to the crush on resources, many "poor" Mexican immigrants were forced to leave the United States. Some of these immigrants were actually U.S. citizens and can be found returning to U.S. later as U.S. citizens.

### **WHERE TO FIND THEM?**

- Indexes and images on FamilySearch.org
- Indexes and images on Ancestry.com
- The better search engine is found on Ancestry.com

## INDEX ORGANIZATION

Hispanics typically use a double surname system with the first last name being their paternal surname and the second surname is the mother's maiden surname. When they come to the United States, they typically move the second, maternal, surname to the position of a middle name. Here are some tips for searching the indexes.

- Similar-sounding surnames may be filed together
- Within a surname, first names that start with the same letter may be filed together
- Within a surname, there may have been no attempt to alphabetize by first name

## TYPES OF RECORDS

There are many different types of records. These are the types you might typically find and the information they usually contain.

### ***FORM 548, 548-B, OR FORM I-448, MANIFEST***

- Name, Age, Marital status, Place of birth
- Physical description
- Occupation
- Ability to read and write and in what language
- Place of last permanent residence
- Destination
- Purpose for entering U.S.
- Intention of becoming a U.S. citizen or of returning to country of previous residence
- Head tax status
- Previous citizenships
- Name and address of the friend or relative whom the alien intended to join
- Persons accompanying the alien
- Name and address of the alien's nearest relative or friend in the country from which he or she came
- If the alien had ever been in the U.S. in the past, the dates and places of such residence or visitation are indicated.

### ***FORM SPL. 259, STATISTICAL (INDEX CARD)***

- Name, Age, Sex, Race
- Citizenship ("nationality")
- Last place of residence
- Destination
- Port and date of admission
- Status as immigrant or non immigrant.

### ***FORM SPL. 442, NONSTATISTICAL (INDEX CARD)***

- Name, Age, Sex, Marital status
- Occupation
- Ability to read and write

- Place of last permanent residence
- Destination
- Persons accompanying the alien
- Amount of money the alien carried
- If he or she had ever been in the U.S. in the past.
- The reverse side of some cards may be annotated with dates of subsequent admissions to the U.S., destination, and purpose for visiting, such as "6 days to Mission, TX, visiting."

## IMPORTANT TIPS

- Always look for the long form – manifest!
- If you find your ancestor crossing the border, check to see who else crossed the same day at the same place. You may find other relatives.
- Always look at the images because you might find photos!

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

"Early Immigrant Inspection along the US/Mexican Border" (Online: <http://www.minorityjobs.net/article/218/Early-Immigrant-Inspection-Along-the-USMexican-Border-Early-Immigrant-Inspection-Along-the-USMexican-Border.html>, accessed February 2012). Originally found on the INS website but no longer available there.

"Mexican Border Crossing Records" (Online: National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/border-mexico.html>, accessed January 2012).

Schmal, John and Donna Morales. *Mexican-American Genealogical Research: Following the Paper Trail to Mexico* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 2002). [FHL INTL Book 972 D27s](#)

Ryskamp, George and Peggy. *Finding your Mexican Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide* (Provo, UT: Ancestry Publishing, 2007). [FHL INTL Book 972 D27r](#).

See also the FamilySearch Research Wiki [US Immigration Mexican Border Crossings](#) and [Border Crossings from Mexico to the United States \(FamilySearch Historical Records\)](#)