

Section Two

DECIPHERING PERSONAL NAMES

The best preparation for deciphering Spanish names is simply to learn as many names as you can, especially the

more common names. Make a point of memorizing any name you see or hear more than twice.



Tools for Deciphering Names

The Register

Often the same name appears in the same register several times. Usually one occurrence of the name will be more readable than others. You can use it as a key for deciphering the more illegible occurrences of the same name.

Before you begin to extract a register, scan several pages, not only to become familiar with the format of the entries, but also to familiarize yourself with the names common to that parish. Not only will the same family names occur repeatedly, but parents of the same area tended to use the same given names for their children. If later you come across a difficult or unusual name that you cannot decipher, keep going. Chances are that you will see the same name again later in the register. Then you can go back and fill in the missing name.

Names Catalog

The most useful reference tool, next to the record itself, is a names catalog. A names catalog lists possible given names and surnames alphabetically. For a list of the most common given names and surnames, see Appendix A.

Whenever you extract a name that is unfamiliar to you, you should check to see if it is in the names catalog. If it is, you can be confident it is an actual Spanish name.

No catalog has every possible name; therefore, if you do not find the name in the catalog, either as you think it is spelled in the record or under a variant spelling, it does not mean that you have extracted the name incorrectly. Perhaps it is an abbreviation of a common name. Study the name to see if there are any other possible interpretations. Then check each possibility in the names catalog.

The names catalog can help you decipher hard-to-read names. Suppose you could only read with certainty the first three letters of a surname. The names catalog can tell you what surnames begin with those letters. The name in question will probably be one of those names. Knowing what names are possible under those conditions, you could choose the most likely name and then compare letters to verify your choice. The names catalog will save you much time by considerably reducing the number of possible names.

Guidelines for Deciphering a Personal Name

To decipher an unfamiliar word which you believe is a name, use the following procedure:

1. Spell out, in writing, each possible interpretation of the name.
2. Narrow down the possible interpretations by checking each possibility against any or all of the following:
 - Appendix A: Common Surnames and Given Names
 - Appendix B: Common Abbreviations
 - Appendix C: Occupations
 - Appendix D: Racial Designations
 - Appendix E: Titles and Descriptive Terms
 - Other names found in the margin or entry.
 - Register Index: Many registers do have indexes. They may be at the beginning or end of the register and may list the principals alphabetically by surname or chronologically by event date.
3. Choose the most likely possibility.

4. Verify your choice by comparing the letters in the name with letters in other words in the record that you can read.

Self-Evaluation

Decipher the names in the record excerpt below. Record your transcriptions in the spaces provided.

1. Child's name:
2. Child's name:

Father's name:

Father's name:

Mother's name:

Mother's name:

Answers

Child's Name	Father's Name	Mother's Name
1. José Tomás	Prajedis Macías	M. ^a Petra Basurto
2. M. ^a Genoveva	Rudecindo Lanás	Andrea Castañeda

1.

In la Capilla de Nuestra Señora de Mtz. del 1861 el P.
 H. L. *José Tomás* *P. José* bautizo solemnemente *Cum Venia* *Paso*
 chi u *José* *Tomás* de 11 días de nacido h. l. de *Prajedis*
Macías y *M.^a Petra Basurto* h. p. *Gerónimo* *Macías* y *M.^a*
Benigna *Vasela* h. mt. *J.ⁿ José* *Basurto* y *M.^a Felisa*
Hernández *P.^e Jacinto* *González* y *M.^a Felisa* *Castillo*
 a quienes advierte su obligac.ⁿ y parentesco y lo firmó con
 el S. Cura = *Fr. J. de Jesús* *del 1861*

Se mandado en ayto de visita en 1882

Juan *del 1882*

2.

In la Capilla de Nuestra Señora de Mtz. del 1861 el P.
 H. L. *Genoveva* *P.^e José* bautizo solemnemente *Cum Venia* *Paso*
 chi u *Genoveva* de 2 meses de nacido h. l. de *Rudecindo*
Lanás y *Andrea* *Castañeda* h. p. *Gerónimo* *Lanás* y *M.^a*
Ascension *Lanás* h. mt. *Sebastián* *Castañeda* y *M.^a Petra*
Pérez *P.^e Leonardo* *González* y *Dorotea* *González* a quienes
 advierte su obligac.ⁿ y parentesco y lo firmó con el S.
 Cura = *Fr. J. de Jesús* *del 1861*

Se mandado en ayto de visita en 1882

Juan *del 1882*