



2021 Conference Speaker Bios



Angel de Cervantes was born and raised in Las Vegas, NM. He attended the University of New Mexico where he obtained degrees in Political Science, History, and Business Administration. He is an anthropological genetic

genealogist and history researcher. Mr. Cervantes has done historical and genealogical research in the Archivos of Baja California, Chihuahua, Colima, Durango, Jalisco, and Zacatecas, Mexico. He has worked at the New Mexico State Archives in Santa Fe, NM, in 2001 as an Archivist. Mr. Cervantes has volunteered at the Albuquerque Family History Center, where he has assisted people with their family history and their DNA results.

In 2004, he pioneered the study of Anthropological Genetic Genealogy with the creation of the New Mexico DNA Project. The New Mexico DNA Project is the second largest Hispanic DNA database on record with more than 3,800 DNA samples. In 2006 and 2014, Mr. Cervantes participated in PBS specials that discussed Anthropological Genetic Genealogy through the DNA of the Founding Families of the Spanish New Mexico Colony. He has also been a key lecturer and speaker on the study of Anthropological Genetic Genealogy for various historical and genealogical organizations in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico.



Henrietta M. Christmas, a well-known and respected genealogical speaker has given presentations on topics related to Hispanic/Southwestern research. Engagements include keynote - New Mexico Genealogical Society, Santa Fe

Trail Association, featured at annual conferences: Texas Genealogical Society, DAR and BIA-International Conference, Legacy Family Tree webinars and an instructor at SLIG and TIGR.



Gary De Leon grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and first came to Texas in 1986. He is a social studies teacher at Canutillo High School, and has 35 years teaching experience. He made a promise to his grandmother to write a family

history book, and he started researching in 2012. He is a historian, genealogical researcher, author of a book, and internet influencer. He wrote family history e-book "History of the De Leon Family" four years ago. He also runs a FaceBook page "Descendants of the Oñate Expedition" which has over 1700 members. He has made several presentations for different genealogical groups this past year.



Jose Antonio Esquivel is a genealogical researcher, historian, and author of articles related to Spanish colonial genealogy and history, with particular regard to seventeenth-century New Mexico. He has contributed to four anthologies

on New Mexico history, served as a research consultant for the Vargas Project and El Camino Real Project, and is co-author with France V. Scholes, Eleanor B. Adams, and Marc Simmons of the book Juan Domínguez de Mendoza: Soldier and Frontiersman of the Spanish Southwest, 1629-1693 (UNM Press, 2012). In 2009, Juan Carlos II, King of Spain, admitted José Antonio to the knightly Orden de Isabel la Católica for his dedication to uncovering and preserving the history of Spain and Spanish heritage in New Mexico. He is a former Vice President of the Historical Society of New Mexico and maintains the Beyond Origins of NM Families web site.



Debbie Gurtler, AG® graduated with honors from Brigham Young University with a bachelor's degree in Family History. She worked as an intern at the New England Historic Genealogical Society. She has also made research trips

to archives in Spain, Virginia, and North Carolina. She is employed by FamilySearch where she manages the Latin America/Southern European and German/Slavic teams at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. She is fluent in Spanish. She can also read genealogical documents in Portuguese, Italian, and French. She is a member of several genealogical societies including HISPAGEN and Antzinako in Spain, the National Genealogical Society (NGS), the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), Texas State Genealogical Society, New Mexico Genealogical Society, the Cuban Genealogy Club of Miami, and the Utah Genealogical Association (UGA) in the United States. She is the President of the Utah Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogists. Debbie holds four AG® credentials. For Spain, the United States Mid-South region, Portugal, and Mexico.



Anthony Lee Martinez grew up in a Mormon family in the Espanola Valley of Northern New Mexico. He was immersed in genealogy and family history from a young age, scouring remote burial sites throughout the mountain villages in the

area. Lee's parents serviced for a time as the local LDS Family History Center librarians located in Espanola, back in the day when microfiche was a primary research resource. Now with over 40 years of family history research under his belt, Dr. Martinez directly manages 25 Y-DNA accounts, representing 14 surnames, and consults with the New Mexico Genealogical Society DNA team on Y-DNA projects.



State Historian **Rob Martínez** is a native New Mexican born and raised in Albuquerque. A graduate of the University of New Mexico with a B.B.A. in International Business Management, Rob then went on to pursue his interest in New

Mexican culture and history at U.N.M., earning an M.A. in Latin American history, with an emphasis on church, cultural, and social practices of the Spanish Colonial period in New Mexico. This included studying witch beliefs in New Mexico and the Inquisition. Rob worked for 14 years as a research historian for the Sephardic Legacy Project, scouring civil and church archives analyzing documents for a research and publishing project about the Crypto-Jewish phenomenon in New Mexico and the Caribbean.

Rob has performed musically throughout New Mexico, and on multiple occasions has presented

music and New Mexican culture at the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival in Washington, D.C., the NEA's National Heritage Fellowship Awards, and also at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.



Cindy Medina is a History Activist/Genealogist and Publicist. Her time is spent in active binational work in both the U.S. and Mexico. She is an Active RootsTech/FamilySearch Ambassador, Publicist for the book "Abraham Lincoln and

Mexico" on the Mexican-American War, U.S. Representative for the Francisco Villa Foundation, Publicist for the Pancho Villa Stash House in El Paso and has several history groups on Social Media that cover it all from Colonial New Spain History to our Cultural Pride. She makes sure she is not idle, not sitting behind a computer but actually working and facilitating our binational ties.



Professionally, **Cheri Mello** is a math teacher with degrees in psychology, sociology, human and child development, and master's in education. She became a National Board Certified Teacher, the most prestigious and highest teaching

credential in the educational world.

The genealogy bug was planted in Cheri, a South Bay native, with the 5th grade history project. Her maternal grandmother gave her some material for her project. She used it later for a Girl Scout badge and pulled out the information many times and wondered about her family and how she could learn more. Some of this material is still incorporated into her current presentations.

Cheri began her active adult research over 25 years ago, after the death of her remaining grandparents. She has done research in many states, even taking trips overseas in search of her Portuguese ancestry. Thirteen years ago, she became involved in DNA, and was recruited as the Project Administrator for the Azores DNA project. She runs five DNA projects and manages mailing lists involving Portuguese-Azorean genealogy.

Cheri lectures now not only on Portuguese and DNA topics, but a host of other topics including software programs and Find-A-Grave.



Dr. Ed A. Muñoz is an Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies in the School for Cultural and Social Transformation. In general, his research expertise deals with the Latinx experience in the Midwestern and Inter-Rocky Mountain regions of the

United States. With regards to his criminal justice research agenda, he examines how racialization processes impact criminal justice outcomes for racial/ethnic minority populations. He is currently examining the effectiveness of Salt Lake Peer Court on youth recidivism. A longer term project is a socio-historical analysis on the construction of Latinidad in the Inter-Rocky Mountain and Great Plains regions dating from the 16th century and into the 21st century.



Houston native **Joy Oria** has been a librarian at the Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research since 2015. She received a B.A. in Music from the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston and has worked as a park ranger and zoo

keeper. She completed the Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy course Advanced Hispanic Research in 2020 and has been researching for over ten years. She is currently working on transcribing padrones for the Sahuayo area of Michóacan, Mexico.



Rachel Rodriguez has been involved in family research since 2002. She was born in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, Mexico. She met her husband and married in Mexico City. In 2012, Rachel and her husband received an assignment from the LDS

church as Area Family History advisers for the Spanish speaking LDS units in Southern California.



Virginia Sánchez is an historian, author, and independent scholar living in Colorado. Her latest book, *Pleas and Petitions: Hispano Culture and Legislative Conflict in Territorial Colorado*, was published by the University of

Colorado Press (2020). She is also a contributing author to *Nación Genízara: Ethnogenesis: Place, and Identity in New Mexico*, published by the UNM Press (2019). Her first book, *Forgotten Cuchareños of the Lower Valley*, received the 2011 Miles History Award from History Colorado. Her articles have

appeared in many historical and genealogical journals.



John P. Schmal is an historian, genealogist, and lecturer. After graduating from a Los Angeles high school, John attended Loyola-Marymount University in Los Angeles and St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, where he studied

Geography, History and Earth Sciences and received two BA degrees. John specializes in the genealogical research and Indigenous history of several Mexican states, especially Chihuahua, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Jalisco and Guanajuato. In the last year, he has specialized in tracing the lineages of the California Mission Indians. He is a recipient of the 2018 Conference of California Historical Societies Award of Merit in the Scholarship Award. He was recognized for his "proliferate historic studies in the area of Mexican, Mexican-American and indigenous research."

He is a lifetime honorary member of GSHA-SC and a board member of the Society of Hispanic Historical and Ancestral Research (SHHAR). John manages IndigenousMexico.org, a one-stop resource for historical and census information about the Indigenous people of Mexico, including presentations and historical articles about 31 of Mexico's 32 states.



Dr. Allen Steele spent most of his life working in the media, radio and television, that took him to posts in Europe and the Pacific Rim. He spent 14 years in Europe: Portugal, Germany, and England. He lived on the island of Guam in the western Pacific

for seven years and in Australia for eight years. Additionally, he taught journalism at universities in Australia and Michigan. At every post he wrote extensively in his work of writing scripts for radio and television, training manuals and news articles for various publications.

He wrote a book about an exceptional year in the history of Santa Fe titled "Santa Fe 1880." He has just completed a third book: "Inn at the End of the Trail" about the Old Santa Fe Trail that is scheduled to be released early next year.

Dr. Steele lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he is a professional tour guide sharing his knowledge about New Mexico history, the life of Billy the Kid and the Spies that operated in Santa Fe for their espionage activities. He is a member of the Santa Fe Trail

Association, a life member of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland and is president of the Santa Fe Professional Tour Guides.



Shayne Sotelo and Mariachi Alegre is a unique collection of professionals who blend their skills to create quality Latin music. Shayne Sotelo, their dynamic group leader, is an Artist in Residence who performed annually as a vocal soloist with the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra.

A vibrant violinist trained classically as well as in Bluegrass and Western Swing, Shayne has also performed extensively abroad including at the notable inauguration of the Himeji Cultural Arts Center in Himeji, Japan.

As a versatile multitalented group, they have opened for names such as The Texas Tornados, Lola Beltran, Marco Antonio Solis, and Juan Gabriel.