## UNITED STATES-MEXICO BORDER CULTURE (1854-PRESENT)

### Summary of Theme

The Santa Cruz Valley spans the United States-Mexico border, a line marked by fences, patrols, and inspection stations. Despite these barriers, however, residents of the valley find their lives are entwined with people on both sides of the boundary, whether through family ties, economic interaction, or common history. The region within the proposed Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area had long been viewed by the Spanish, Mexican, and United States governments as a frontier, a landscape considered open, sparsely populated, and full of potential. Each wave of settlement initiated interaction with Native Americans and previous immigrants. The Gadsden Treaty, ratified in 1854, transferred political control of the area from Mexico to the United States. Former Mexican nationals abruptly found themselves, their land, and their property incorporated into a different nation, one which spoke another language and practiced different cultural traditions. This exchange did not result in the decline of Mexican customs, but rather, the emergence of a vibrant culture associated with the border and the region, shared by residents with diverse backgrounds. The proposed Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area will celebrate this distinctive lifeway that has been shaped by the physical and political geography of the region.

### Description of Theme

The creation of a boundary between Mexico and the United States in this area prompted new behaviors distinctive to the border. Shortly after Mexico and the United States declared an end to their hostilities, the border itself encouraged cooperation between the two nations. For example, the Apache strategy of raiding settlements and then quickly crossing the border motivated the recently adversarial nations to sign an agreement, in effect from 1882 to 1886, allowing pursuit of Apaches across the international boundary by either side. Commerce also linked the former antagonists in numerous ways. Nogales, Arizona, abuts Nogales, Sonora, on the border, and the two towns were founded together in 1882. Railroads from Guaymas in Mexico and Kansas City in the United States met in ambos (meaning both) Nogales. The cities grew together, sharing resources such as water, shops, and firefighters, and neither would have existed without the presence of the border. This cooperation extended up the Santa Cruz Valley, enabling the florescence of a border culture that embraced aspects of both Mexico and the United States.

*Economic Interaction*

Because the international boundary crosses an area that is geologically and ecologically unified by the Santa Cruz River, the Sonoran Desert, and mountain ranges, economic enterprises are also similar. Mining activity occurred on both sides on the border, with smelters processing ore from mines in both Mexico and the United States. Americans and Mexicans crossed the border to work in mines on the other side. Cattle ranching had long been practiced in the region, and Mexican vaqueros, or cowboys, remained a crucial part of ranch life in the Santa Cruz Valley of Arizona. Cattle drives routinely began in Sonora and ended in the United States. Americans bought ranches south of the border, and former Mexican nationals continued to ranch lands that had belonged to their families for generations. As cotton farming began to

flourish in the valley, Tohono O'odham workers on Anglo farms were joined by immigrants from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, and finally, by Mexicans recruited to work in the fields. These working-class, largely rural occupations are reflected in the art forms, expressive styles, food, and music of Santa Cruz Valley border culture.

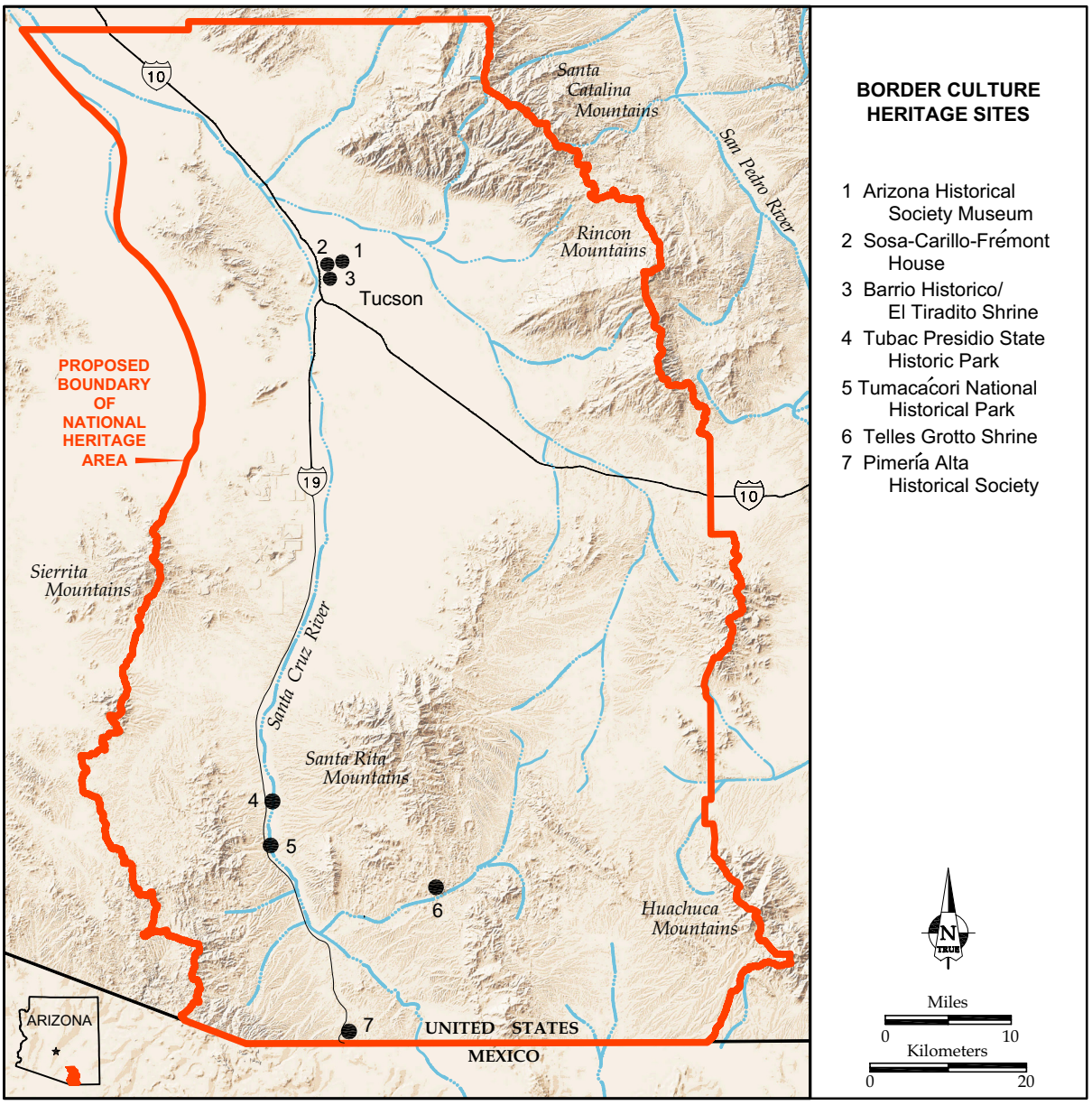
Beginning in the 1920s, Nogales became a major commercial port of entry for produce. Railcars and refrigerated trucks continue to supply the United States with fruits and vegetables in the winter months, when ambos Nogales are most lively. Products from the United States also make their way across the border. Morley Avenue in Nogales, Arizona, caters to Mexican shoppers, who comprise 80 percent of the clientele. The street features fashionable clothing and dry goods stores, which advertise in Hermosillo, 160 miles south, and Tucson. When Russian Jews and Lebanese merchants opened shops in Nogales, they learned to communicate with both Mexicans and Anglo-Americans. This commerce requires brokers who are proficient in both Spanish and English, and who are familiar with the cultural patterns of two nations. Consequently, economic interests in the region have encouraged residents of the Santa Cruz Valley to maintain language skills and social ties that span the international boundary.

*Social Interaction*

While economic interaction between people in the United States and Mexico are obvious along the border, these behaviors extend far up the Santa Cruz Valley. Unlike much of Arizona, the Santa Cruz Valley supported a nearly continuous occupation of Spanish-Mexican settlements and Native American communities. When the Gadsden Purchase was finalized, arriving Anglo-American settlers encountered residents of Tucson who could trace their connection back in the area for generations. As a result, the Santa Cruz Valley retained Hispanic and Native American traditions while other towns in Arizona took on a noticeably Anglo-American flavor. People in Phoenix and other parts of rapidly developing Arizona condescendingly referred to Tucson as a Mexican town, recognizing the distinctive cultural character of the community.

When new settlers arrived in Tucson, they found an established elite. Prominent Mexican families continued to be leaders in business and politics long after the arrival of Anglos. Tucson was the territorial capital between 1868 and 1878, and during this period, Pima County frequently elected men of Mexican descent to both houses of government, as well as their Anglo in-laws. Indeed, Anglo men who became leaders in the community had often married into important Mexican families, whose connections were crucial for newcomers. In the 1870s, almost 23 percent of marriages in Pima County were between Anglo men and Mexican women, although these numbers decreased dramatically in the next 40 years.

The children of these unions contributed to a bicultural and bilingual society in the region. Despite the fact that Anglos had much more power in the rapidly changing Santa Cruz Valley, many of the offspring of intermarriages, like Carlos Tully and Bernabé Brichta, chose to identify more strongly with the Mexican community. Their Anglo fathers had often been absorbed into Mexican society, rather than into Americanizing families of Mexican descent. Today, influential families of Mexican descent carry non-Hispanic surnames and emphasize their Mexican heritage. Unlike other areas in which intermarriage has been an agent of the eradication of previous cultural forms, in the Santa Cruz Valley, intermarriage played a role in the production of a culture that values bilingualism and biculturalism.




Border culture heritage sites in the proposed National Heritage Area.

*Length of Residence*

A related aspect of contemporary border culture in the Santa Cruz Valley can be heard in the repeated references of residents to the length of time their families have been in the area. Because the region continues to receive immigrants from other parts of the United States and from Mexico, long-term residents have turned to their heritage as a source of legitimacy. Heritage societies, such as *Los Descendientes del Presidio de Tucsón* and *Los Tubacqueños,* have formed to celebrate their long ties to the area. Those residents not of Mexican descent also follow this pattern, as the Tucson Chinese Historical Society and the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Arizona demonstrate. Politicians routinely make references to the number of

generations they have lived in the area. In Nogales, it is not uncommon to hear someone say, "I'm a newcomer—I've only lived here for 40 years." The Santa Cruz Valley, compared with the rest of Arizona and much of the United States, tends to celebrate connections to the landscape that span many generations.

A steady flow of immigrants encourages this trend, as a means of distinguishing recent arrivals from Mexico and families who have been in the region for generations. However, these same immigrants also help to maintain Mexican traditions, social ties that cross the border, and the regular use of Spanish. Family networks connect northern Mexico and communities in the Santa Cruz Valley, providing newcomers with the support they need to prosper in an unfamiliar nation.

*Neighborhoods and Border Culture*

These networks promoted the creation of distinctive neighborhoods and architectural styles. Much of this discussion will focus on Tucson because, historically, it has been the most densely populated portion of the Santa Cruz Valley. Indeed, prior to 1886, settlement away from presidios was severely constrained due to the threat of Apache attack. Even after this period, many of the Tucson neighborhoods and homes also housed the families of valley ranchers, who kept residences in town to facilitate access to school, church, and shopping.

The early Anglo-American settlers in the Santa Cruz Valley utilized Sonoran materials and architectural designs. Adobe and wood structures were economical and suitable for the climate. As the railroads allowed the acquisition of industrial materials, new homes included bricks, glass windows, and milled lumber but kept a Sonoran form. Other American changes soon followed. For example, houses began to feature a sleeping porch at the back, to access the cool night air in the extreme summer heat, rather than using a courtyard or the roof. Architecture reflected a combination of Spanish-Mexican and American traits, as did much of the population.

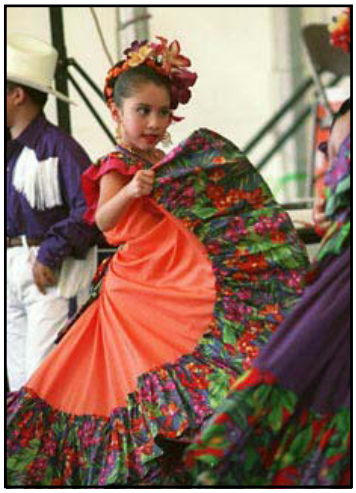
At the turn of the twentieth century, however, adobe houses were only seen in low-income, largely Mexican-origin enclaves, as Anglo turned to brick for their homes. Nonetheless, several of these early homes exist today, included in the many National Register Historic Districts in Tucson and Nogales. They stand as reminders of a persistent, vibrant border culture.

Tucson's south side continues to embrace new arrivals from Mexico. This neighborhood features carnicerías (butcher shops), tortillerías, panaderías (bakeries), and Sonoran-style restaurants. Colorful murals on buildings or fences portray symbols originating on both sides of the United States-Mexico border. Homes display religious shrines in their front yards. This neighborhood remains a place where border culture is expressed in a wide variety of forms.

*Expressive Forms of Border Culture*

The food, music, dance, and art of the Santa Cruz Valley have all been influenced by the border and the distinctive landscape and cultural mixing found in the region. For example, flour tortillas and beef dishes are particularly common in this area due to the prevalence of cattle ranching and the introduction of wheat by the Spanish. Unlike other parts of the Spanish frontier, wheat could be grown successfully in the Santa Cruz Valley, and a preference for

*This will be the first National Heritage Area to celebrate cross-border connections between the United States and Mexico.*



*Native American, Spanish, and Mexican heritages that span the border will be distinguishing themes of the National Heritage Area.*

wheat flour over corn tortillas developed. A local specialty, carne seca (literally dried beef), is also suited to the desert climate.

Norteño music, popular all along the border, is a product of Mexican inspiration on both sides of the border. Originally developed in northern Mexico—as the name implies—the style became influenced by conjunto music, a form dominant north of the border until the 1960s. Mexican immigration to the Santa Cruz Valley brought a taste for the norteño tradition, but the border transformed the music.

Another musical tradition brought by recent migrants is the mariachi band. Although the first mariachi group in Tucson was established after World War II, the city today hosts a large

annual festival celebrating the music. Another mariachi festival is held farther south in the Santa Cruz Valley, at Patagonia Lake State Park. Similarly, folklórico dancers perform in costume in the style of several Mexican states, celebrating the traditions of immigrants at festivals throughout the year.

Some of these festivals commemorate Mexican patriotic holidays, such as Cinco de Mayo and Diesiséis de Septiembre (September 16, Mexican Independence Day). Others are held in observance of Catholic religious holidays, such as el Día de San Juan, which is widely celebrated in the Santa Cruz Valley. Because this is the day of John the Baptist, water is a significant part of the celebration, and the day has special meaning in such a dry land. Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, is observed with vigor, as is Halloween. In fact, many festivals marking Mexican holidays simultaneously demonstrate strong allegiance to the United States, using flags, military processions, and American patriotic music. These events are not simply copies of Mexican events; they take on a unique character that comes from the United States-Mexico border and the Santa Cruz Valley.

Other notable art forms in the Santa Cruz Valley include piñatas, hollow papier-mâché figures filled with candy and featured at children's parties, and cascarones, decorated eggshells filled with confetti. Artificial flowers, usually made from paper, adorn high school parade floats, homes, and gravesites on the Day of the Dead. Murals frequently combine secular and religious symbols of the border region, portraying Yaqui deer dancers, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and prickly pear cactus.

The history and geography of the region have produced a vibrant culture that celebrates a deep, long-term connection to the land. Far from being a remnant of the past, United States-Mexico border culture continues to grow and transform with the economic and social interactions of different ethnic groups drawn to this area. Border culture has been embraced by residents without Hispanic roots, and Anglos in the region regularly use Spanish words, value local cuisine, and attend fiestas, claiming border culture as their own. Rather than contributing to the dilution of this distinctive cultural form, newcomers tend to enhance the richness of border culture. The proposed Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area will celebrate this theme, strengthening already existing cross-border connections.

**Distinctiveness of Theme**

Cane River National Heritage Area in Louisiana highlights the multicultural legacy of that region. However, no other National Heritage Area is on an international boundary, nor do any make border culture a theme. United States-Mexico border culture is unique as a theme among National Heritage Areas. The impact of cross-border interaction has been powerful along the entire border region, but the distinctive history of the Santa Cruz Valley has led to an especially vibrant legacy, which is active today.

Many opportunities for experiencing border culture exist in the area now, through festivals, restaurants, neighborhood tours, and museums. Heritage tourism will increase, however, as designation of a Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area boosts awareness and education about cultural events, art forms, and the distinctive character of this region.

**Related Resources**

The Santa Cruz Valley hosts numerous annual events related to the border culture theme. A partial list includes Cinco de Mayo celebrations in Nogales and Tucson, the Día de los Muertos Parade, La Fiesta de San Agustín, and the Día de San Juan Festival in Tucson, and the Fiesta Navidad in Tubac. The Folklorico Festival Extravaganza and the International Mariachi Conference and Fiesta de Garibaldi, both in Tucson, draw participants and audiences from across the United States and Mexico. The City of South Tucson holds the Norteño Music Festival, which also brings artists from around the border region.

A number of shrines built by residents of Mexican descent dot neighborhoods in Tucson—the best known being El Tiradito (The Wishing Shrine) in the Barrio Historico, which itself includes the National Register Historic Districts of Barrio El Hoyo and Barrio Libre. Barrio Historico contains examples of Sonoran architecture, discussed above. Another well-known shrine, the Telles Grotto Shrine, lies outside Patagonia.

Several museums and historical societies celebrate regional border culture. The Pimeria Alta Historical Society in Nogales houses a small museum and library. The Sosa-Carillo-Frémont House (circa 1858), on the National Register of Historic Places, is a branch museum of the Arizona Historical Society. It features period furniture and stands as an example of a Sonoran row house. Tubac Presidio State Historic Park and Tumacácori National Historical Park both include border culture in their exhibits.

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