

RPPC of the Mexico-N. Laredo highway.
Tarjetas postales fotográficas de la Carretera México-Laredo.

William F. Manger.

Investigador independiente sobre cultura material,
Natchitoches, LA, EUA
bmanger@gmail.com

Mayra Uribe Eguiluz,

Facultad de Artes y Diseño, Plantel Taxco, Gro, México
muribeluz@yahoo.com.mx

Fernando J. Elizondo Garza.

UANL-FIME / SOFIRREY. Monterrey, N.L., México.
fjelizon@hotmail.com

Abstract:

Although the idea of a Pan-American Highway to unite the entire Western Hemisphere is not yet fully complete, Mexico began the first section of the highway on its own in 1925. Originally referred to as the Mexico-N.Laredo highway it was a major step by Mexico to connect its various regions and promote nationalism following the tumult of the Mexican Revolution. The 1228 kilometer long highway was officially inaugurated on July 1, 1936, although over 80 kilometers of difficult mountainous terrain in the south was still in the process of completion. Despite this, the highway offered a significant reduction in travel time between the U.S. border and the Mexican capital.

The construction of the Mexico-N.Laredo highway presented an important economic opportunity for photographers who produced RPPC postcards during this era due to their popularity as a collector's item and the increased growth of automobile ownership and leisure time. The RPPCs these photographers took are also historically significant because they documented the major engineering works constructed by Mexico across some extremely difficult territory, small and medium-sized population centers, and the early infrastructure built to encourage automobile tourism along the highway. Due to subsequent technological advances in communication and the mountainous nature of the southern half of the highway, however, approximately 80 percent of the Mexico-Monterrey stretch of the highway has been virtually abandoned by international tourist traffic.

This paper addresses the development of the Mexico-N.Laredo highway and focuses on the photographers and producers of RPPCs and the subjects and places that they chose to photograph. Finally, we provide a tour of the highway during the height of its popularity, which due to its novelty and importance represented a significant market for postcard producers.

Resumen:

Aunque la idea de una carretera Panamericana para unir a todo el hemisferio occidental todavía no está completa, México comenzó la primera sección de la carretera por su cuenta en 1925. La originalmente denominada carretera México-N.Laredo fue un paso importante de México para conectar sus distintas regiones y promover el nacionalismo tras la compleja Revolución Mexicana.

La carretera de 1,228 Km oficialmente fue inaugurado el 1º. de julio de 1936, aunque más de 80 kilómetros en el difícil terreno montañoso en el sur del trayecto estaba todavía en el proceso de construcción. A pesar de esto, la autopista ofrecía una reducción significativa en el tiempo de viaje entre la frontera de Estados Unidos y la capital mexicana.

La construcción de la autopista México-N.Laredo presentó una importante oportunidad económica para los fotógrafos que producían tarjetas postales fotográficas durante esta época debido a su popularidad como una pieza de coleccionista y al crecimiento del número de propietarios de autos y un mayor tiempo vacacional y de ocio de la población tanto en Estados Unidos como en México.

Estos fotógrafos, y las postales fotográficas que produjeron, son también históricamente importantes porque documentaron las principales obras de ingeniería civil construidas por México, a través de un territorio extremadamente difícil, para unir centros de población pequeños y medianos, y promover el turismo de automóvil a lo largo de la carretera incluso desde los Estados Unidos.

Debido a posteriores avances en las opciones de comunicación carretera y a la naturaleza montañoso de la mitad sur de la carretera, aproximadamente el 80 por ciento de la autopista, el tramo México-Monterrey ha sido prácticamente abandonada por el tráfico de turistas y comercio internacionales.

Este documento aborda el desarrollo de la Carretera México-N.Laredo y se centra en los fotógrafos y productores de tarjetas postales fotográficas y en los temas y lugares que eligieron para fotografiar. Por último, se ofrece un recorrido por la carretera durante el apogeo de su popularidad, que debido a su novedad y su importancia representa un mercado importante para los fotógrafos y productores de tarjetas postales.

I. A Pan-American highway project.

The idea of linking North and South America by a land route goes back to the Spanish colonial period, but gained political impetus in the U.S. Congress in 1884 with the proposal for the construction of a “Pan-American Railroad” to connect the Western Hemisphere. With the automobile becoming increasingly common, however, the Fifth Conference of American States, which met in Santiago Chile in 1923, proposed a conference to discuss the construction of a highway system to connect the Americas. As a result, the first Pan-American Highway Conference was held in 1925 in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Dept. of Transportation, 1976: 521).

Officially, the United States promoted a Pan American highway to improve “bonds of friendship” between the countries of the Americas (Ingraham, 1961: 6). At the same time, with the rapidly increasing use of automobiles, auto companies and parts manufacturers began to look for new markets to sell their cars, trucks, and parts. Because there were few roads south of the border the auto industry therefore also strongly backed a Pan-American Highway to expand their markets (Stephens, 1948). With the start of World War II, the highway took on a strategic importance, as the United States needed access to the natural resources of Latin America.

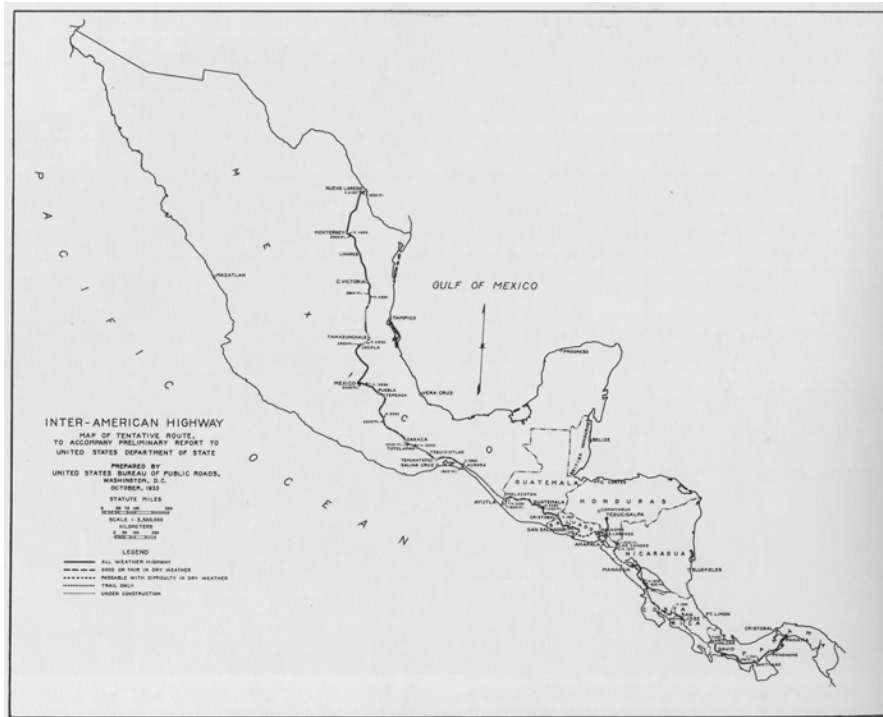


Fig. 1. Map of the tentative route of an Inter-American Highway through Mexico and Central America proposed by the United States Bureau of Public Roads in October 1933.

Transportation infrastructure before the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway.

Prior to the construction of the Mexico-Laredo highway travelers could take railroads from the United States to the interior of Mexico. Steamships also sailed to the major coastal ports along the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico. The “Laredo Route” to Mexico City was 1292 kilometers long and took approximately 30 hours to complete. This rail line was operated by Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico and originated in Nuevo Laredo and subsequently passed through Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, San Luis Postosí, Guanajuato, Querétaro, and Hidalgo on its way to Mexico City (Terry, 1923).

Although the roads in the Mexico City area, and those between the larger cities of Central Mexico, were described as being from “good” to “excellent” in condition by the early 1920s it was advised that drivers who traveled into the interior should take into account the quality of the roads and the more limited access to gasoline (Terry, 1923).

Before 1925, according to one guide book, the Mexican road system could be described as follows:

“In 1925 Mexico was inaccessible as Australia to the American motorist. Excepting a few short drives through the suburbs of Mexico City, there was hardly a mile of paved highway in the country. The half-dozen rocky, dusty trails that crossed the Río Grande or the border farther west, were termed roads only by the severest strain on both courtesy and imagination; and these came to an end in their first dispirited effort to climb the low-lying northern hills of the Sierra Madres. Beyond these lay a half-million square miles of magnificent mountains, tropical valleys, temperate plateaus, broad rivers, historic cities and colorful villages that had been isolated from the United States—even from one another—for centuries” (Scully & Scully, 1933: 3).

As late as 1934, the Mexican government reported that there were only 3,400 kilometers of state roads and 1,500 kilometers of federal highways in existence, the majority of which consisted of dirt roads (terracerías) (Fulwider, 2009: 44). Furthermore until 1925, many of these roads were built during the colonial period (Brandenburg, 1964: 298).



Fig. 2. The Pan American Highway on the way to Mexico City under construction c.1932. Source: Franck and Lanks, 1940.

2.- Nationalizing the Pan-American highway project.

The plan for what became the Mexico-Laredo Highway grew out of a proposal by President Calles in 1925 for the development of a national highway system to connect Mexico with its state capitals, international port cities, and the border (Scully and Scully, 1933: 4; Fulwider, 2009: 39). The goal was to modernize and unite Mexico following the social and economic upheaval of the Mexican revolution (Scully and Scully, 1934: 4). To achieve these goals, the Comisión Nacional de Caminos was established in 1925 for the purpose of establishing a national road building program (Fulwider 2009: 37). The first highway developed as part of this plan was the Mexico-Laredo Highway (Stephens, 1948: 15). Three potential routes in the western, central and eastern part of the country were originally surveyed, before the Mexico-Laredo route was chosen based on its lower cost, potential traffic, and the availability of services (Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 19).

The construction of the highway began at its southern and northern fringes. The Mexico City to Pachuca and the Laredo to Monterrey sections were started in 1925. The former section was opened to traffic in 1926 and fully completed by 1927 (Comisión Nacional de Caminos, 1931: 21-23). By the early 1930s, the route from Laredo to Ciudad Victoria was accessible to automobile traffic. And in 1933, approximately 482.8 kilometers of the 1228 kilometer long highway was paved. The remainder of the road consisted of some 531 kilometers of gravel road,

127.7 kilometers of volcanic rock, and 133.5 kilometers of the road between Ciudad Mante and Ciudad Valles was still under construction and closed to traffic during the rainy season (Scully and Scully, 1933: 4-5). Although passable by this time, the highway lacked adequate accommodations for travelers for several years afterwards (Berger, 2006).

While the United States provided the countries of Central America, with the exception of El Salvador, funds to help construct their sections of the Pan American highway, Mexico chose to construct the highway on its own for nationalistic reasons (Ingraham, 1961: 7). Most of the national road system constructed following 1925 was built “on a contract basis” and required that all companies and individuals given contracts had to be “considered a Mexican citizen under the law” (Fulwider, 2009: 40). Mexico lacked much of the technology and skills needed to construct modern highways at the start of the program, however, and the first contract was given to the Byrnes Brother firm, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. By the latter part of the 1920s, however, Mexican companies dominated road building. To pay for road construction the government instituted a gasoline tax and relied partly on foreign loans and expertise (Brandenburg, 1964: 298). States within Mexico were also encouraged to build roads, but the overall percentage of state financing of road construction between 1926-1933, averaged only 3.5 percent (Fulwider, 2009).

The roads constructed in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s were part of a national endeavor to help modernize and link the various regions of the country. The first section of the highway was constructed between Mexico City and Nuevo Laredo and was initially referred to as the Mexico-Laredo Highway. Although that term continued to be used to designate that stretch of the road in postcards well into the 1960s, by July 1937 its name was “officially” changed to the Pan-American Highway (Berger, 2006: 54). The postal stamps displayed below to commemorate the inauguration of the highway attest to the nationalism that drove that project forward (Figs. 3 and 4).



Fig. 3. The commemorative 5¢ stamp of the highway above symbolically depicts the highway as a Mexican project that terminates in Nuevo Laredo. Talleres de Estampillas y Valores, Mexico. 1936.



Fig. 4. The commemorative stamps of the highway above highlight the engineering feats accomplished by Mexican technicians during the construction of the highway. Talleres de Estampillas y Valores, Mexico. 1936.

3.- Characterization of the Mexico-N. Laredo highway.

The Mexican government hoped to complete the Mexico-Nuevo Laredo highway by 1933, but final completion was held up by financial difficulties (Berger, 2006: 35). The 1228 kilometer long highway thus took eleven years to complete from the planning stage in 1925 until its official inauguration on July 1, 1936. In May 1950, Mexico completed its entire section of the Pan American highway from Nuevo Laredo to Guatemala (Pan American Union, 1964: 7).

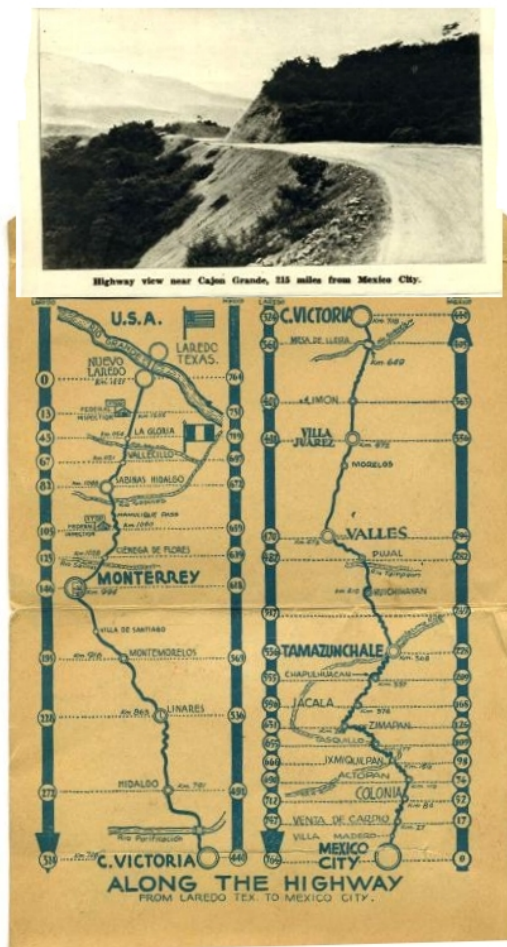


Fig. 5. The route of the Mexico-Laredo Highway as shown in a folded postcards booklet, c., 1930's.

The travel advantages of the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway.

In 1933, two travel guide book authors drove the highway from San Antonio, Texas to Mexico City in three days (or 36 hours of total driving time). The authors suggested, however, that motorists might want to wait until the following year for a more “comfortable” drive when a greater proportion of the road would be completed and more sufficient accommodations for tourists would be available (Fig. 6). Most small towns, they further noted, had only basic accommodations available for travelers, but that tourist courts and inns were increasingly being constructed along the route. Lastly, early automobile tourists had to take into account that gas stations along the highway were located an average of 40 to 80 kilometers apart (Scully and Scully, 1933).

According to Power’s Guide to Mexico, from 1936 to the early 1940s the 236 kilometer drive from Laredo to Monterrey took approximately three hours to complete. The 994 kilometers separating Monterrey and Mexico City, on the other hand, took an average of 15 hours to drive, due to the more mountainous terrain, and it was recommended that drivers take two days to complete that part of the journey (Power, 1936; Power, 1941). Following the inauguration of the highway, three bridges were also not yet completed and it was thus necessary to cross two of them by ferry and the third by a pontoon bridge (Power, 1936).

By 1937 the highway was completely paved, except for an 80 kilometer section of mountains south of Tamazunchale (Power, 1937). By the following year, however, the highway was entirely paved and the mountainous section of the highway was provided with a solid, “double-railed, heavy steel road-guard” for the protection of drivers (Pan American Union, 1938). By the early 1940s, the trip from Laredo to Mexico City was described as “an easy two day drive” (Power, 1941: 4). Today the trip can be done in approximately 12 hours and 15 minutes.



Fig. 6. Road connections between San Antonio, TX and Mexico City. New York Times, 1936b)

Technical challenges of constructing the Highway.

Mexico faced many challenges in the construction of the Mexico-Laredo Highway. To begin with, Mexico lacked the capital and technological expertise needed to construct a modern highway. To overcome the financial challenges the government established a gasoline tax, eventually pushed states to become involved in road construction, and borrowed in a limited manner (Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 13). Because Calles was unwilling to let foreign companies have a direct role in road building and restricted foreign borrowing, however, it reduced the amount of road construction possible (Fulwider, 2009: 45). Secondly, the highway traverses a variety of climate zones (from semi-arid to tropical to temperate), topography, and rock material. The heavy rains characteristic of the tropical regions resulted in higher costs due to occasional landslides and the dust of the semi-arid region to the north clogged the engines of machinery from time to time (Fulwider, 2009).

The road located 100 kilometers south of Tamazunchale presented particular challenges because it traverses the Sierra Madre Oriental and rises in elevation from a little more than 1086 kilometers above sea level in the tropics to 12070 kilometers on the Central Plateau. Furthermore, on parts of the highway from Colonia to Tamazunchale engineers had to overcome hard rock material, mountainous terrain, canyons, and river crossings (Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936; Inagraham, 1961).

Although modern equipment such as steam shovels and road-rollers were utilized to construct the road, it should also be recognized that much of the work was performed by manual laborers using “pick and shovel, wheelbarrow and crowbar” (Francks and Lanks, 1940: 15). Despite challenges and setbacks, however, the Mexican technicians eventually acquired the skills and machinery to complete the highway (Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 12-13).



Fig. 7. A photo from the Chicago Tribune from December, 1935 that shows the narrow cuts carved through the mountains.

By June 1936, a month before the official inauguration of the Mexico-N. Laredo Highway, the Mexican Dirección Nacional de Caminos indicated that the following work had been completed (Tables 1 and 2):

En Tierra:	5.739,798.63 m ³
En R. suelta	2.856,055.77 m ³
En R. fija	2.930,184.07 m ³
Total	11.526,038.47 m ³

Source: Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 95

	Número	Longitude
Alcantarillas de losa	615 con	1,371.45 m
Alcantarillas de bóvedas	110 con	209.00 m
Alcantarillas de tubos	2,250 con	31,365.00 m
Total	2,975 con	32,945.45 m

Source: Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 95

Due to the difficult terrain a total of 168 bridges were also constructed along the highway. (Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 95)

Costs of Highway Construction.

Contracts for the construction of the highway were given to several different private companies. The cost of construction, as of June 1936, amounted to \$61,772,451.00 pesos (approximately \$17 million U.S. dollars) and was distributed as follows (Table 3):

	Importe	Porcientos	Avances	Costo Km.
Localización..\$	976,503.00	1.58	1.225,740	796.66
Terracerías	30.002,329.00	48.57	1.207,840	24,839.66
Obras de Arte	11.990,762.00	19.41	1.207,840	9,927.44
Revestimiento	11.164,066.00	18.07	1.207,840	9,243.00
Petrolización	7.638,791.00	18	1.096,440	6,966.90
Total	\$61.772,451.00	100		51,733.66

Table 3: Cost of Highway Construction (Source: Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 105)

The topographic profile of the highway shown below demonstrates the mountainous nature of the southern section of the highway which rises from approximately 50 m above sea level at Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, to approximately 2,500 m near Colonia, Hidalgo. Constructing this section of the highway involved not only great engineering skill, but increased costs for the Mexican government.



Fig. 8. Topographic profile of the Mexico-N.Laredo highway published in a travel guide in the 1930s.

Inauguration of the highway.

With completion of the highway looming, Mexico's National Road Commission arranged for the formal opening of the highway and invited U.S. officials to participate in dedication ceremonies at the middle of the international bridge between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo where U.S. Vice President Garner and the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, General Eduardo Hay shook hands to commemorate the linking of the two countries by a modern highway on July 1, 1936 (Laredo Times, 1936: 1). It was a particularly significant occasion because it celebrated the first international highway to link Mexico and the United States. The highway officially extends from the U.S. Mexican border to the central door of the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City (Dirección Nacional de Caminos, 1936: 73).

The inauguration of the highway consisted of a four-day ceremony in which Mexican and U.S. delegates toured the road as far as Mexico City and returned to Nuevo Laredo on July 4th by special train (Berger, 2006: 45). In a survey of accommodations at that time, however, it was noted that, with the exception of Ciudad Valles, most cities along the route had only one or two hotels available for travelers (Berger, 2006: 52).



Fig. 9. Vice President John N Garner (right) welcomes General Eduardo Hay (left), of the Mexican Foreign Ministry at the official opening of the Mexico-Laredo Highway (New York Times, 1936d).



Fig. 10. Two travelers who claim to have been the first to drive the length of the Mexico-Laredo Highway proudly pose for newspaper photographers in the 1930s.

Source: <http://antiguo-morelos.blogspot.com/2009/09/blog-post.htm>



Fig. 11. “Del camino real a la carretera.” Photos from *Jueves de Excelsior* magazine that highlight the progress made on the new highway (July 6, 1936).

4.- Photographers that produced postcards that mention they are specifically of the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway.

Of the more than 1,700 postcards in our collection that show places and locations between Mexico City and Nuevo Laredo, that are along or near the highway, 216 (12.5%) explicitly state that they are of the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway.

The table below indicates that postcard makers used few other names to identify the highway. The term Pan-American Highway proved to be the second most frequently used name for the highway, but it appears to have been more often used on sections of the highway located south of Mexico City. As many guide books used maps that listed locations based on kilometers from Mexico City to Nuevo Laredo or from Nuevo Laredo to Mexico City, postcards in a number of instance listed the names of locales with their distance in kilometers between the two cities. It was also common for distances in kilometers to be included on postcards described as being along the Mexico-Laredo Highway (Table 4).

Table #4: Other Terms Employed to Describe the Highway on Postcards.	
Pan-American Highway	11
Kilometers	5
On Laredo Highway	3
Carretera Nacional	2
Carretera Internacional	1
On Highway to Mexico	1
Carretera	1
Maps of Highway on postcards (by hotels):	3

Postcards Types.

A variety of postcard types were sold along the Mexico-Laredo Highway. Over 81 percent, however, consisted of Real Photo Postcards (RPPCs). RPPCs are photographs with postcard backs and were especially popular from 1900 to 1930, although they were still produced in the U.S. and Mexico through the 1950s (Arreola, 2013: 47). This was followed by Black and White and Color and Print Postcards that were mass-produced during the same time period. All of the postcards in the collection were taken between the second half of the 1930s to the 1960s when the highway was most used by tourists, prior to the arrival of modern aviation and alternative transportation routes (Table 5 and Fig. 12).

Table #5: TYPES OF POSTCARDS	
Real Photo Postcards	176
Black & White Print Postcards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Unknown: ca. 1940s-1950s: 13 ●Unknown: ca. late 1930s-40s: 1 	14
Color Print Postcards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Unkown: Ca. 1940s-50s: 4 	4
Linen Postcards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Ca. 1940s: 2 	2
Chrome Postcards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Tarjeta Postal Photo Color: Ca. 1950s-1960s: 2 ●Dexter: late 1950s-early 1960s: 10 ●Unknown: Ca. 1950s-60s: 8 	20
Source: The Manger collection	

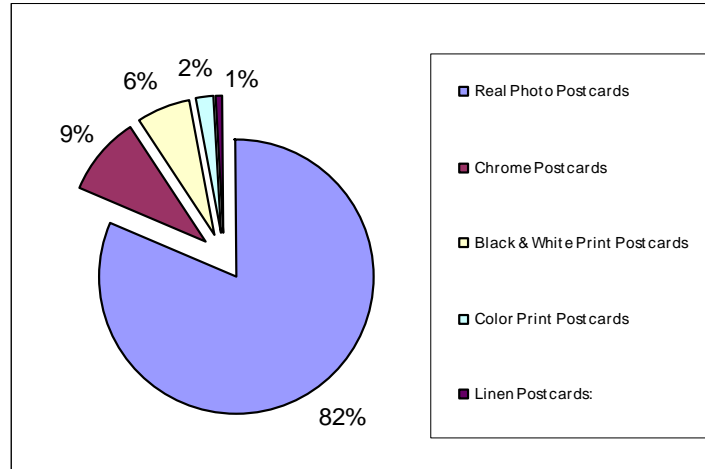


Fig 12: Pie Chart of Postcard Types

Photographers and producer of Real Photo Postcards.

According to Bogdan and Weseloh (2006), most photo postcards “were made in small lots by local commercial photographers who sold them directly or wholesaled them to local merchants, hotel owners, and roadside businesses”. In addition, several large companies such as the Compañía México Fotográfico (MF) produced scores of postcards in which they hired a variety of different photographers (Uribe Eguiluz, 2011). In the case of the Mexico-Laredo Highway, two-thirds of RPPCs were produced by companies or individual entrepreneurs from outside the region who recognized the potential profit for postcards taken along the highway following its completion and the expected rise in tourism (Table 6). Approximately one-third of the RPPCs of the highway were taken by unknown photographers. Based on the similarity of handwriting on the front of several of these postcards it is obvious that they were taken by the same photographer, but since they left no signature it is not possible to ascertain whether they were local or outside entrepreneurs. While postcard companies and individual entrepreneurs profited from the popularity of postcards at that time, they also served as a source of income for local business, advertisement for roadside establishments, and mementos for tourists.

Producers / Photographers	Time. c.	# of PCs
●Marín	Late 1920s-1940s	46
●MF	late 1930s-1950	36
●Posta	late 1930s-1940s	14
●Desentis	1940s-1950	10
●E. E. Barros	late 1930s-1940s	3
●Brehme	1930s-1940s	2
●M.M. López	1940s	3
●Foto Violeta	1940s	5
●C. Alvarado	late 1930s-1940s	2
●Cabrera Foto	1925-1940s	1
●Unkown Photographers	late 1930s-1960s:	54
Total		176

Source: The Manger collection.

5.- Thematic focus of postcards along the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway.

Of the 216 postcards identified as having been taken along the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway several themes stand out. The majority of postcards showed views of the highway itself. This includes many harrowing stretches of mountainous terrain that lacked guard rails and bridge and river crossings. On the reverse side of many postcards, for example, tourists who mailed postcards back home to family and friends frequently noted the challenges they faced driving the section of the highway south of Tamazunchale. Other postcards in this category demonstrate the engineering feats accomplished in the construction of the highway, from extreme curves (i.e., Mamulique) to modern bridges (i.e., Tasquillo).

The second most prominent theme was that of roadside businesses that catered to tourists. While many shops sold postcards due to their great popularity at the time, based on the reverse side of postcards, many tourist-related businesses provided postcards of their enterprises to customers as a form of advertisement. Surprisingly, local scenes of cities and towns, buildings and people were the least common. This may be due to the fact that the goal of many travelers was to arrive at a particular destination, particularly Monterrey or Mexico City. At the same time, there are many postcards of places and people along the highway, but they do not state that they are from along the Mexico-Laredo Highway.

Highway sections:	78
Hotels/Tourist camps/Auto Courts/Motels:	72
Bridges and rivers crossings:	21
Cities and towns:	19
Vehicles on the highway:	7
Restaurants and tourist stops:	7
Typical people:	6
Churches and houses:	6
Total:	216

Source: The Manger collection.

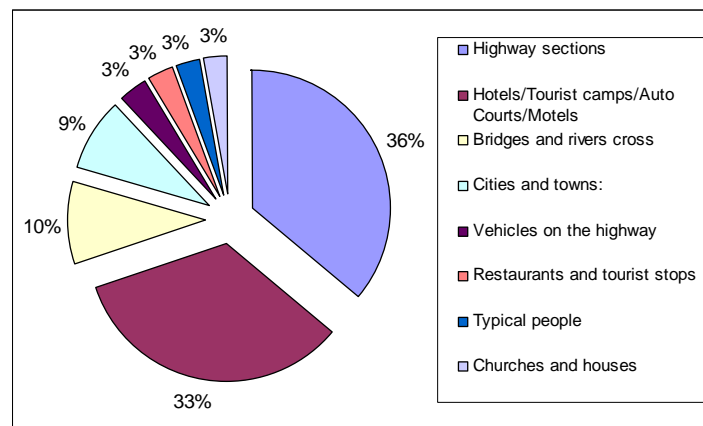


Fig. 13: Pie Chart of the Thematic Focus of Postcards along the Mexico-N. Laredo Highway

Places.

The postcards taken of particular places along the highway that state they are located along the Mexico-Laredo Highway are very diverse. Only a few towns stood out as particularly popular for postcard producers. These are the towns of Cd. Valles (38), Zimapan (29), Tamazunchale (20), and Jacala (18). Each of these towns is located between Monterrey and Mexico City and following the construction of the highway it was recommended that motorists take two days to make the trip between those two cities due to the difficulty of the terrain (Power, 1936). In addition, as attested to by postcards and early travel guides, those towns had hotels that specifically catered to tourists traveling by automobile. A number of business people thus took advantage of their geographical location and built the infrastructure required to attract tourists. In addition, postcards of Tamazunchale and Jacala were also very popular because the surrounding terrain in those towns provided photographers vantage points to take very dramatic photographs.

In the table #8 is indicated the number of post cards in the Manger collection by place along the highway.

General	13
Sabinas Hidalgo, NL	1
Rio Guayalejo	2
Cuesta de Mamulique	11
Monterrey	7
Linares	1
Villagrán	1
Tramo de Jacalillo-Tamazunchale	2
Cd. Victoria	7
El Abra	2
Cd. Valles	38
Puente Comoca	4
El Bañito	3
Huichihuaya	1
El Pujal	2
Puente Sobre Río Axtla	2
Matlapa-Tamazunchale	2
Río Moctezuma-Tamazunchale	1
Tamazunchale	20
Tramo de San Vincente	5
Tamazunchale-Jacala	5
Sierra del Purgatorio	7
Tamán	4
Chapulhuacan	3
Tramo Zacate Grande	1
Puerto Oscuro	1
Puerto del Gavilán	2
Palo Semita	1
Puerto del Tambor	3
Santa Ana de Allende	1

Puerto de la Culebra	2
Rancho Viejo	4
Puerto Piedra	1
Jacala	18
Los Mármoles	1
Zimapán	29
Tasquillo	6
Ixmiquilpan	1
Actopan	1
Total	216

Source: The Manger collection

6.- A Visual Tour of the Mexico-N.Laredo Highway through Postcards.

Finally, in this presentation, we will provide a visual postcard tour of the hotels, highway infrastructure, people, and vistas photographed along the Mexico-Laredo Highway.

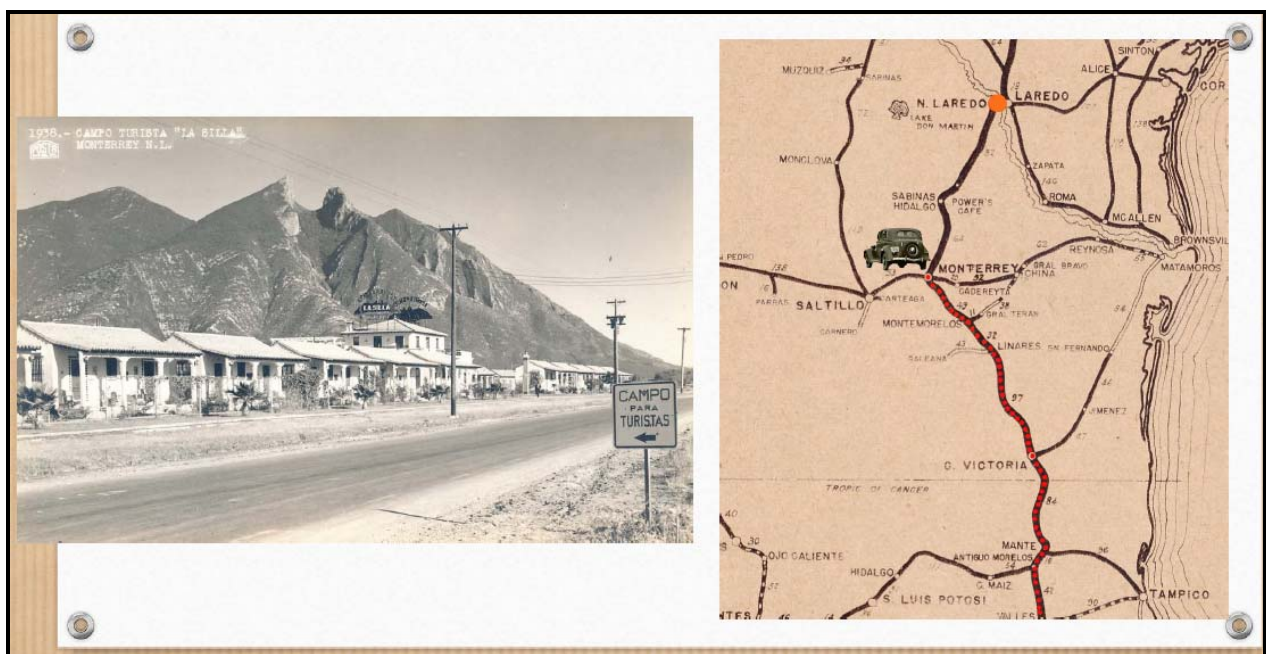


Fig. 14. Slide of the presentation of the postcards of different points along the highway. After. Manger–Uribe–Elizondo. 2014.

7. Final comment.

As the first modern international highway in Mexico, the Mexico-Laredo highway was a great symbolic success for the Mexican government. Following its construction it served as the main transportation corridor of the country and a network of secondary paved roads were later attached to it making it possible to visit all parts of Mexico and create a national market (Pan American Union, 1964; Fulwider, 2009). The highway also encouraged tourism to Mexico and the tourist

sector became the leading source of foreign exchange for a time (Pan American Union, 1964). Between 1935 and 1937, for example, the number of American tourist who entered Mexico by automobile grew over 50 percent from 14,500 to 29,000 (Berger, 2006: 46). By the late 1940s over 100,000 tourist vehicles traveled the Mexico-Laredo Highway. In addition, by that time, inexpensive bus service was made available by some twenty bus companies that provided daily service between the two cities with a travel time of approximately 29 hours (Stephens, 1948). As Berger noted (2006: 46), the increase in motor tourists also reflected the rapid growth of automobile ownership in the U.S. where 27 million private automobiles were registered by 1940. And by World War II, Mexico was one of the major tourist destinations in the world (Berger, 2006: 46-47).

Mexico City enjoyed the greatest benefit from the growth in tourism and was extensively “made over” beginning in the mid-1930s with the construction of new hotels and the renovation of older ones (Goolsby, 1936: 11). Other smaller towns that were able to take advantage of their location between Nuevo Laredo and Monterrey and Monterrey and Mexico City also saw increased growth with the building of hotels, motor courts and restaurants. Following the completion of a secondary road from Monterrey to Saltillo (Fed 40) in the 1940s, however, many travelers began to utilize that road because it connected to Federal Highway 57 and provided a safer alternative path to Mexico City. That route takes more time to traverse, but it is flatter and lacks the steep mountainous terrain of the southern part of the Mexico-Laredo Highway. As a result, today approximately 80 percent of the Mexico to Monterrey portion of the highway has been virtually abandoned by international traffic. With increased technological innovations in aviation after World War II, airlines also became increasingly more important and lessened the importance of the Mexico-Laredo Highway for automobile tourism.

The construction of the highway was a market opportunity for photographers and producers of postcards, most of them regionalists, that cover all important places, technological challenges, and infrastructure for tourism, and, at the same time, generate an historical image documentation of the process and results of the construction of the Mexico-N.Laredo highway.

Bibliography and Files

Arreola, Daniel D. 2013. *Postcards from the Río Bravo Border: Picturing the Place, Placing the Picture, 1900s-1950s.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Asociación Mexicana Automovilística. *Anuario 1938*, Asociación Mexicana Automovilística, AMA, México D.F.

Berger, Dina. 2006. *The Development of Mexico’s Tourist Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bogdan, Robert and Weseloh, Todd. 2006. *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People’s Photography.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Brandenburg, Frank. 1964. *The Making of Modern Mexico.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Comision Nacional de Caminos. 1931. *Anuario, Enero de 1931.* Mexico, D.F.: Comision Nacional de Caminos.

Dirección Nacional de Caminos. 1936. *Memoria sobre el camino Mexico-Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Juio de 1936.* Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Pública.

Elizondo-Garza, Fernando J. Photo and postcards of Mexico archives.

Franck, Harry A. and Lanks, Herbert C. 1940. *The Pan American Highway: From the Rio Grande to the Canal Zone.* New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Company.

Fulwider, Benjamin. 2009. *Driving the Nation: Road Transportation and the Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1925-1960. Dissertation of Philosophy.* Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University.

Goolsby, William Berlin. 1936. *Guide to Mexico for the Motorist.* Dallas, TX: The Pan-American Press.

Ingraham, Joseph. 1961. *Friendship Road: The Challenge of the Pan American Highway.* New York: Coward-McCann, Inc.

Jueves de Excélsior, 1936. *Del camino real a la carretera,* Jueves de Excélsior, junio 6, 1936. México D.F.

Manger, William F. Photo, postcards and documents archives.

New York Times. 1936a. Mexico Announces Highway Ceremonies. New York Times, June 14, 1936: 25.

New York Times. 1936b. Mexico's Scenic Highway Ready. New York Times. June 28, 1936: 21.

New York Times. 1936c. *Garner Helps Open Mexican Highway.* New York Times, July 2, 1936: 23.

New York Times. 1936d. *At Opening of New Highway to Mexico.* New York Times, July 4, 1936: 4.

Pan American Union. 1938. *Motoring to Mexico.* Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union.

Pan American Union. 1964. *The Pan American Highway System.* Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union.

Pan American Union. 1967. *Motoring in Mexico for the Motorist.* Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union.

Power, T.S. 1936. *Power's Guide to Mexico for the Motorist*. Laredo, TX: Pan American Tourist Bureau.

Power, T.S. 1937. *Power's Guide to Mexico*. Laredo, TX: Pan American Tourist Bureau.

Power, T.S. 1938. *Power's Guide to Mexico*. Laredo, TX: Pan American Tourist Bureau.

Power, T.S. 1940. *Power's Guide to Mexico*. Laredo, TX: Pan American Tourist Bureau.

Power, T.S. 1941. *Power's Guide to Mexico*. Laredo, TX: Pan American Tourist Bureau.

Power, T.S. 1947. *Power's Guide to Mexico*. San Antonio, TX: Alvin L. Huth.

Scully, Michael and Scully, Virginia. 1933. *Motorists' Guide to Mexico*. Dallas, TX: The South-West Press.

Stephens, Roger. 1948. *Down that Pan American Highway*. New York: Roger Stephens, Publisher, Inc.

Terry, T. Philip. 1923. *Terry's Guide to Mexico*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Time Magazine. 1936. Inter-American. *Time Magazine*, July 6, 1936. Source: <http://www.time.com>.

Uribe Eguluz, Mayra N. 2011. *Una Aproximación a La Compañía Mexico Fotográfico y La Promoción del Turismo a Finales de los Años Veinte*. Tesis en Historia del Arte. Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.