

BEHIND THE VIGNETTE...: Heroines of the Homeland (2)

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Returning to the sheet dedicated to ***Heroines who forged the Homeland*** (17/9/2025) (Fig.1), I have grouped the 13 Heroines displayed there into 4 groups:

- Those that in their time influenced the formation of the country (3).
- Those who participated in the Mexican Independence movement (3).**
- Those who participated in the defense of the Republic during the French intervention (2).
- Those who played a leading role in the Mexican Revolution (5).

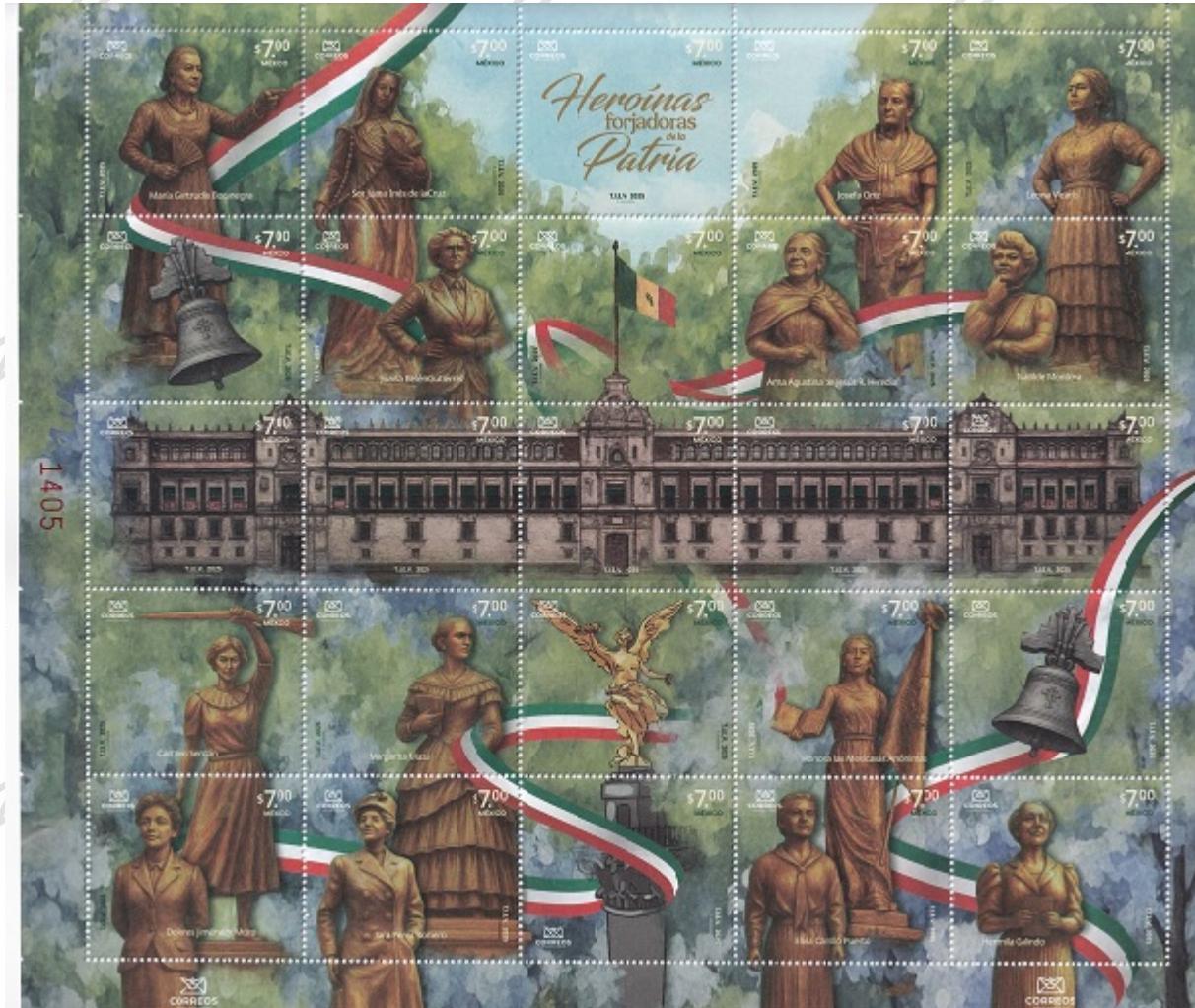


Fig.1 Heroínas forjadoras de la Patria, año 2025.

Thanks to the sculptures made of them to build the ***Paseo de las Heroínas*** (a) and the issue of these stamps, we can learn about their lives, their work and pay tribute to each of them by getting to know them and spreading their legacy to Mexico.

This time the topic is **3 outstanding Mexican women who actively participated in the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821)**.

Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez..-

(Position 4 in Fig.1) (Fig.2).

Her full name is María Josefa Crescencia Ortiz Téllez-Girón. There is no precise information regarding her birthplace; some sources indicate Valladolid, now Morelia, in the state of Michoacán, while others say it was Mexico City, nor is there any certainty about her birthdate; while some sources indicate September 8, 1768, others claim it was **April 19, 1773 (b)**. She was orphaned at the age of 16, losing her father and shortly thereafter her mother, she was a Creole (c). she was placed in the care of an older sister, who, in **1789**, arranged for her to enter, at the age of 16, the Colegio de San Ignacio de Loyola, better known as Las Vizcaínas, a boarding school run by the nuns of the Company of Mary, of an Jesuit orientation, exclusively for girls. There she received an advanced education for her time, learning reading, writing, music, poetry, religious doctrine, and handicrafts. It was at the school that she met the lawyer Miguel Domínguez, and they married in **1793 (d)**, when Josefa was 20 years old and Miguel was 37. There are also discrepancies regarding this date; some sources say they married in 1791, others in 1793. They had 14 children.

In 1802, the family moved to the city of Querétaro when her husband was appointed Corregidor. In 1808, due to the French invasion of Spain, independence movements began in New Spain, and literary gatherings were held at the Corregidores' home. The Corregidora sponsored these gatherings, which were conspiratorial in pursuit of the colony's independence; apparently, her husband tolerated them but did not participate. These meetings were attended by figures such as Ignacio Allende, Ignacio Aldama, Father Miguel Hidalgo, and the brothers Epigmenio (e) and Emeterio González; October 1, 1810, was chosen as the date to rise up against the Spanish government, however, on **September 13** of that year, **the conspiracy was denounced**. Miguel locked Josefa in a second-floor room to prevent her from becoming involved. An emblematic event then occurred that would determine Josefa's place in history: by tapping her shoe on the floor, she alerted the warden, Ignacio Pérez, and delivered a letter to warn the others involved. As a result, Father Hidalgo decided to move up the date of the start of the armed movement to the early morning of September 16.



Fig.2 Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez

Josefa and her husband were imprisoned on September 16; her husband was released shortly after due to popular pressure, and for **Josefa began a long road of humiliations**, separation from her children, and she was even accused of scandalous, seductive, and pernicious conduct.

She was first imprisoned in Querétaro at the Convent of Santa Clara, where she remained despite her advanced pregnancy, but was released to give birth to her child; she continued to be an informant for the insurgents. In 1813, she was again accused of conspiracy and transferred to Mexico City, to the Convent of Santa Teresa, there she gave birth to her last child and was held incommunicado; she was accused of providing moral and financial support to the insurgent cause and of treason against the Spanish crown, she remained there from 1814 to 1816, when she was sentenced to four years in prison and transferred to the Convent of Santa Catalina de Siena in November 1816.

Her husband Miguel went to live in Mexico City with his children. He was sick and without financial resources because he could not access a decent job, and he accepted the pardon of Viceroy Ruiz de Apodaca in June 1817 and obtained **house arrest** for his wife, because she did not accept the pardon.

Josefa and her family witnessed the consummation of Mexican Independence. She remained firm in her convictions, and when Agustín de Iturbide proclaimed himself Emperor of Mexico, his wife, the Empress, invited her to join her court, but Josefa declined. In her later years, she was associated with Freemasons and radical liberal groups. She **died on March 2, 1829**, at the **age of 56**; her husband passed away the following year.

Correos de México has issued several stamps dedicated to Doña Josefa:

- 1910, Independence or Centennial Series, SC#310. On this stamp her name appears as *Josefa Ortiz*
- 1923, Maps and Monuments Series, SC#640. The legend printed on the stamp reads: *Monument to the Corregidora*
- 1979, July 6th, 150th anniversary of his death, SC#1182
- 2008, September 15th, Bicentennial of the Independence of Mexico, SC#2583
- 2010, September 16th, Bicentennial of the Independence of Mexico, SC#2693 (souvenir sheet)

Leona Vicario.-

(Position 5 in Fig.1) (Fig.3)

María de la Soledad Leona Camila Vicario Fernández de San Salvador was born on **April 10, 1789**, in Mexico City, the only child of a Spanish merchant and a Creole mother (c), descendant of Ixtlilxóchitl, lord of Texcoco. She received a thorough education befitting her social standing, as well as training in Fine Arts and Sciences, which fostered a critical perspective on political events. After being orphaned, she was raised by her godfather, but became independent at the age of 17. It was through her godfather, a prestigious lawyer, that she met Andrés Quintana Roo, also a lawyer, a native of Mérida, Yucatán, with whom she shared ideals of freedom and independence from the Spanish crown.

Between 1812 and 1813, Leona **wrote for newspapers** sympathetic to the cause of independence and was invited to join the secret group "**Los Guadalupes**", made up of upper-class people who obtained information from royalist circles and transmitted it to the insurgents in code, also supporting them with supplies and money; and **Leona went from journalist to spy**. She was discovered and captured by the royalists, but never revealed information about her contacts. She was imprisoned in a convent, but Ignacio López Rayón did what was necessary to free her, and Leona moved to Oaxaca, apparently, that year she married Quintana Roo. The couple remained fugitives, they refused a pardon, and in one of the most emblematic events of her extraordinary life, in 1817 she gave birth to her first daughter, alone in a forest, she is denounced by two traitors to the movement and arrested again. This time she accepts a pardon and to be transferred to Spain, while the paperwork is being sorted out, inexplicably, she is released and her property is returned.



Fig.3 Leona Vicario

When Mexico achieved independence in **1821**, Leona withdrew from public life, but the press continued to mistreat her with attacks and insults. Worthy of mention is the letter Leona wrote in **1831** in response to Lucas Alamán, a minister during the government of President Anastasio Bustamante, who publicly accused her of having joined the independence cause out of "*romantic heroism*" by following Quintana Roo, some paragraphs of Leona's response are transcribed below:

"Confess, Mr. Alamán, that love is not the only motive behind women's actions: they are capable of every kind of enthusiasm, and the desire for glory and the freedom of their country are not foreign sentiments to them; rather, they often work within them with greater vigor, for women's sacrifices, whatever the cause for which they are made, are always more selfless, and it seems they seek no reward other than acceptance. [...] My actions and opinions have always been entirely free; no one has ever influenced them in the slightest. On this point, I have always acted with complete independence, without regard for the opinions of those I have esteemed. I am convinced that all women are like this, except for the very stupid, or those who, as a result of their upbringing, have acquired a servile habit. There are also many men of both kinds."

In 1827, the town of Santiago de Saltillo in Coahuila changed its name to Leona Vicario, and in 1834, when it joined with the neighboring town of San Esteban de la Nueva Tlaxcala, it resumed its name to become Saltillo.

The couple had three daughters. Her husband Andrés's contribution to public life was also extraordinary and worthy of being recounted, but that will be in a later article.

Leona Vicario **died** in Mexico City on **August 21, 1842**, at the **age of 53**. Three days later, she was declared a Meritorious Mother of the Nation. Since 1925, her remains have rested in the Independence Monument, as have those of her husband.

Correos de México has issued several stamps in homage to Leona Vicario:

- 1910**, Independence or Centennial Series, **SC#311**
- 1985**, September 15th, 175th anniversary of Mexico's Independence, **SC#1401**
- 1989**, April 20th, the 200th anniversary of his birth, **SC#1610**
- 2009**, September 16, Bicentennial of the Independence of Mexico, **SC#2629**

-2010, September 16, Bicentennial of the Independence of Mexico, SC#2693 (souvenir sheet)

-2020, September 28, Year of Leona Vicario, SC#3177

-2022, July 28, Heroines of Independence, joint issue with Ecuador, SC#3260

María Gertrudis Bocanegra.

(Position 1 in Fig.1) (Fig.4)

María Gertrudis Teodora Bocanegra Lazo Mendoza, was born in **Pátzcuaro, Michoacán**, in **1765**, to a Spanish merchant father and a mestiza mother of indigenous ancestry. Contrary to the standards of her time, Gertrudis was an avid reader of Age of Enlightenment and identified with its liberal ideology. She fell in love with a mulatto soldier, and because social conventions established castes, her father did not authorize the marriage since the young man belonged to a lower caste, however, the couple defied the situation and married in 1784, when Gertrudis was 19 years old. Finally, her father accepted the marriage, and they settled in Pátzcuaro. They had seven children.

When the fight for Independence began, Gertrudis and her family joined the movement. Her husband and one of her sons went to the front lines, while Gertrudis supported the movement with information, supplies, and financially. Both her husband and son died on January 17, 1811, in the tragic Battle of Calderón Bridge, where the insurgents were defeated. Gertrudis continued to support the insurgent cause until **1817**, when she was captured in Pátzcuaro. She and a group of insurgents were attempting to steal ammunition from the military garrison. She was subjected to harsh interrogations, but never gave any information that could have harmed her comrades. **She was tried, sentenced to death and executed** by firing squad in the Plaza de San Agustín in her hometown of Pátzcuaro at the **age of 52**.



Fig.4 María Gertrudis Bocanegra

In **1821**, her daughters María Hilaria de Jesús, María Ignacia Laureana, and María Magdalena Faustina received compensation and recognition for their mother's services in achieving the triumph of the country's Independence. Forgotten for many years, Gertrudis's heroism has been **rescued and recognized by historical memory**, and since **1993** the municipality of Pátzcuaro has awarded the *Gertrudis Bocanegra Medal* to women distinguished for their activities and social commitment.

This is the first time that **Correos de México** has featured Gertrudis Bocanegra on a postage stamp

Conclusion.-

Learning about the lives and works of these three women, born in the 18th century and who died in the first half of the 19th, reveals as a **myth** that women were insignificant in the society of their time...

And the sculpture dedicated in **Honor of Anonymous Mexican Women** (Position 19 in Fig. 1 and Fig. 5) is a fitting choice, ensuring that no one is left out due to historical amnesia; for all women, from all eras, from all walks of life, in all spheres, the everyday heroines...



Fig.5 Honor to the Anonymous Mexican Women

Notes.-

- (a) The images of each of the Heroines correspond to the statues that make up the Paseo de las Heroínas (Walk of the Heroines), located in Mexico City on Paseo de la Reforma, from the Monument to Independence to the Puerta de Los Leones (Gate of the Lions). Each statue is made of bronze, measures 1.75 meters high, 60 centimeters wide, and 63 centimeters deep. This Walk of Heroines was created during Claudia Sheinbaum's administration as Head of Government of Mexico City. The idea originated in 2020, and it was inaugurated on March 5, 2023. In the News section of this website (etiangui.com), you can find a detailed description of the topic of this editorial in the article "New Issues September 2025."
- (b) If she entered the Vizcaínas College in 1789, it must have been at the age of 16, if we take the date of 1773 as true, because if she had been born in 1768 at the time of his entry into the College she would have been 21 years old, which is not credible for that time.
- (c) The Creoles were children of Spaniards, but born in New Spain, and although they had a high social status, they were not considered to be at the same level or category as the peninsular Spaniards.
- (d) Some sources say that when he met Josefa, Miguel Domínguez was married and his wife was very ill, and that they fell in love and he impregnated Josefa, that forcing her to leave the school, and then they marriage until Miguel was widowed. However, the birth date of their first child is not specified, which would allow this version to be corroborated.
- (e) On this same page (etiangui.com) you can find an article dedicated to Epigmenio González, dated January 5, 2024.

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