

down to sleep under the portal of Señor Ulibarri's residence and others were standing about the fires, they were suddenly attacked by a company of soldier's from Hatch's Ranch.* At the first volley, one woman was instantly killed and two others wounded, one mortally. In the disabling terror and surprise attending the attack, the Indians secured themselves as well as they could by retreating into the house. The attack lasted but a few minutes and the soldiers disappeared into the night. The Indians quickly assembled themselves and left carrying nothing but a few of their weapons.

Next morning the soldiers returned. They gathered the Indian saddles and other goods and burned them. The mules were sold a few days later in Las Vegas at public auction.

* In 1853, Alexander Hatch took possession of a large tract of land below Chaperito. The property was part of a land grant given to Don Miguel Jaramillo in 1845. Hatch made a living providing the government with grain, beef, and horses. He employed a large number of herders and farm hands from the nearby settlements along the Gallinas River below Las Vegas. A small detachment of Dragoons (mounted riflemen) and later a company of the Third Infantry were stationed at his ranch as "protection" for the Eastern Frontier. It was apparent that the military and Anglo settlers' relationship with the Comanches was not at all friendly as was the case between the Comanches and Hispanic New Mexicans. The unprovoked and cold-blooded attack was later condemned by many unprejudiced and upright folks in the Territory.

A week later, the Comanches avenged the losses sustained. They drove off about 460 beef cattle of the government herd on the Conchas about thirty miles east of the military post at Hatch's ranch. They did not harm the New Mexican herders. Troops were sent to recover the stolen cattle and were on scout several days. However, they returned to the post empty-handed.¹

On May 13, 1861, J.L. Collins, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for New Mexico, and Captain R. A. Wainwright met with Puertas and five other Comanche chiefs at Alamogordo Creek between present Fort Sumner and Puerto de Luna to arrange a

truce.²

As usual, the conditions of the truce were stacked against the Indians and favorable to the Whites. Under these conditions, the Indians were to return to the buffalo country; not molest the wagon trains or mails and keep away from these roads; and leave the settlements "and when we desire to talk to the authorities or trade, we will go to Ft. Union". The Whites only agreed to "meet again in ninety days to make a treaty of peace".

However, on May 29th, instead of returning to the buffalo country, three of the chiefs, Puertas, Paracaigua, and Esaguipa (Wolf Shoulder) with about one hundred of their people, mostly women and children, rode by Hatch's ranch on their way to Chaperito.

They were intercepted by a small detail of soldiers led by Captain Thomas Duncan. Duncan told the Comanches to return to their country and if they should attempt to go into town or any other settlement, he would be bound in pursuance of orders, to follow and attack them.

They paid no attention to Captain Duncan but continued directly for the plaza of Chaperito. Captain Duncan then rode off for reinforcements. The soldiers caught up with the Indians before they reached the town and attacked. Again, they killed and wounded some of the Indians as they fled and scattered in all directions through the woods. The soldiers took two women prisoners and captured ten mules and ponies.

As they had done the previous Fall, the Comanches retaliated in the days that followed. They killed and/or carried off cattle from different herds including about 100 from Hatch. They also took the camp equipage at each camp they came to including provisions, blankets, arms, burros, and the clothing of the herders. Again, they did not harm the herders.

In 1863 the government established a fort on New Mexico's eastern frontier. It was located on the Rio Colorado (Canadian River) about fifteen miles north of present Tucumcari. The fort was at first called Camp Easton but was later named Ft. Bascom in honor of Captain George N. Bascom who was killed at the battle of Valverde February 21, 1862.

The small fort served to guard the eastern approach into New Mexico from possible invasion from Texas during the Civil War. It also served to supposedly keep the hostile Comanches and Kiowas in check. Bascom was a lonely outpost with very few comforts. Officers and enlisted men were not fond of duty there. Desertions and even suicides were not uncommon.

During the mid 1860s, soldiers from Ft. Bascom provided escort for government and civilian wagon trains traveling between New Mexico and Ft. Larned, Kansas. The Plains tribes, especially the Kiowas, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes, frequently attacked the wagon trains killing the drovers and running off the stock. The Comanches mostly raided settlements in Texas and northern Mexico from where they stole cattle and kidnapped women and children. They also conducted raids into New Mexico against the Navajos.

News concerning the Comanches came mostly from New Mexican comancheros who sometimes stopped at the post. On May 6, 1865, an unidentified source wrote the Santa Fe Weekly Gazette from Ft. Bascom. The source mentioned that Comanche traders Lorenzo Valdez of Chaperito and another man named Herrera from Las Vegas had recently stopped at the post on their way from the Comanche Country.⁴

Valdez and fifteen men had passed through Ft. Bascom in February on their way to the plains supposedly to rescue three American children held captives by the Comanches. Valdez had a letter from General Carlton to the commanding officer of Ft. Bascom. No mention was made as to the fate of the children. The comancheros probably used the rescue of the captives as an excuse to obtain official permission to trade with the Indians.

Valdez and Herrera reported having seen Puertas and Quajipe (Chewing Elk) who told them the Comanches "are a separate and distinct tribe from those which have been committing depredations on the Plains." Valdez added that "these two chiefs and their bands desired to remain at peace with the people of New Mexico."

Apparently for a while in 1867, a small detachment of the 125th U. S. Colored Infantry was stationed at Ft. Bascom along with a company of the 3rd Cavalry. Captain John DuBois, com-

manding Ft. Bascom, wrote Major Cyrus De Forrest in Santa Fe on May 24, 1867: The Comanches will not come in to talk. The last reports say they believe this post in charge of Negro troops only. The Comanches will not kill Negroes; they have many Negroes among them. In consequence, this is a bad place to use Negro troops. I think the Comanches hostile.⁵

On September 28, 1866, A. B. Norton, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for New Mexico, sent a report to D. N. Cooley, his superior in Washington. It included the following information: "With regard to the Comanches, the most wild, treacherous, warlike, and brutal of all other Indians, there is a large body of them (about 2000) continually occupying the eastern portion of this territory. The names of the different chiefs and number of lodges which were given me by a reliable and intelligent man, who has lived and traded with them for years are as follows VIZ: Puertas, 30 lodges, about 150 souls; Parna-Caiua, 60 lodges, about 275 souls; Quajipe, 120 lodges, about 500 souls; Maue (Mow-Way) 260 lodges, about 1,075 souls.⁶

PUERTAS' PREMONITION

The morning of September 15, 1867 was a beautiful one and Santa Fe was filled with activity. Boys leading burros laden with wood weaved their way through the narrow streets and alleys past women in black shawls on their way to church. Industrious Pueblo Indians, their carretas overflowing with fresh-cut corn, melons chile verde, and squash, were busily selling and bartering their produce.

In the piñon-covered hills surrounding Santa Fe, there was an abundant crop of piñon nuts that year. They too were selling well although it was early in the season. A good crop of piñon nuts comes about every seven years. New Mexicans once believed the year of the nut harvest to be a lucky one and expected an increase in flocks and families. It was also a belief that a life of good fortune would follow those born or married during nutting time.

There was also much excitement in Santa Fe that day. During

the morning, eleven Navajo warriors headed by the great chief Barboncito, had arrived from the Bosque Redondo Reservation under military escort to arrange some matters relating to their tribe.⁷

The old Comanche chief, El Puertas, was also in town. He and five others of his tribe had come to trade with some of the merchants and to see Superintendent of Indian Affairs A. B. Norton relative to Indian Agent Lorenzo Labadie's mission to the Comanche Country in July. Labadie had been sent there to secure the release of a white youth name Rudolf Fisher and others who were being held captive and persuade the Comanches to make a treaty of peace with the government.⁸

At this meeting Puertas promised Norton that upon his arrival back to his home, he would gather together all the chiefs and principal men and go with them to take the captives they held to the peace council at Fort Larned and deliver them up as promised to Agent Labadie. In addition, Puertas promised Superintendent Norton to make a treaty of peace with the government. "We desire nothing else", he said.⁹

With the Comanches and Navajos in town, Superintendent Norton took advantage of the situation and arranged a "pow wow" between the two traditional enemies. The comanches had lately been sending raiding parties against the unfortunate Navajos being held prisoners of war by the army at the Bosque Redondo on the Pecos. Consequently, the Navajos were in a deplorable condition and destitute of arms and ammunition with which to defend themselves against their enemies.

The Comanches had stolen much of the Navajos' stock, carried off many of their women and children, and killed many of their men, among them, one of Chief Ganado Mucho's sons.¹⁰ It was hoped that Puertas would be induced to return to his people and persuade them to cease from harassing the Navajos.

An English surveyor, William Bell, was in Santa Fe that day and recorded the "pow wow" between El Puertas, who he did not mention by name but who undoubtedly was the old Comanche chief, and Barboncito who he called Ben-hor-cita.¹¹

And so the meeting began. All the warriors were brightly

painted and fantastically dressed. They sat around the large room both sides doing much talking. Puertas' Mexican wife being the general interpreter, was spokesmen for both sides. Finally, after much talking, a peace was agreed upon and the chiefs promised to return to their own people and persuade them to keep the peace.

The pledges were made followed by much embracing and exchanging of gifts. Hats, skins, pistols, tomahawks, quivers, and all sorts of unmentionable undergarments were exchanged between Puertas and his wife on one side and the Navajos of the other. The exchange of presents ended and all were squatted down upon the floor.

But Puertas was sullen and thoughtful. A premonition of impending evil was reflected upon his countenance. Finally he rose up, and through his wife, made a most touching and eloquent harangue. He feared, he said, that he would never reach his home to conciliate his people; that being in the minority, the others would overtake and kill him and that his great age and failing strength would not allow him to escape.

The speech so touched the Navajo chief that he rose up and put his hand over his heart and said that it grieved him that his dear brother should think so meanly of him. "May the good spirit," he said, "take my life and that of my family if I do not keep good faith with my dear brother." Then, trembling with emotion and weeping, he threw himself into the embrace of the old Comanche chief. Puertas then took off a magnificent Admiral's hat with a large shiny ornament of tin on it and placed it upon Barboncito's head. This touching scene brought the meeting to a most successful climax.¹²

The following day was probably spent by Puertas and his followers with some of their acquaintances in Santa Fe for there were many merchants there who directly and indirectly carried on trade with the "Lords of the Plains".

On the morning of the 17th, both parties mounted up and prepared to leave. They were to travel together and separate about 45 miles east of Santa Fe. As they were leaving, an express rider from Ft. Sumner arrived and brought a letter to Superintendent Norton from Agent Theodore Dodd. The Comanches had made

another raid on the Bosque. This time they had killed seven Navajos, wounded two, and taken two women captive. A large number of horses had also been driven off.

Naturally, Norton withheld this information from the two parties and hoped that they would not hear of it until their arrival at their different homes. However, a short time after they separated, the Navajos somehow heard the news of the Comanche raid and attempted to loosen themselves from their military escort to pursue and kill the Comanches. It was with great difficulty that the lieutenant in charge could prevent them from doing so.¹³

On Friday October 4th, Norton received a letter from his superiors in Washington with instructions to send Agent Labadie back to the Comanche country and proceed to the place where the Comanches had promised to meet him. Agent J.L. Leavenworth in Kansas also received similar orders. The agents were to receive the captive boys and persuade the Comanche chiefs and captains to proceed immediately to Ft. Larned, Kansas and meet the newly appointed Peace Commission which was to convene at Ft. Larned about the 15th of October.

Norton then ordered his former interpreter and now Special Agent Jesus María Sena y Baca to proceed without delay to Agua Negra (near present Santa Rosa) and accompany Agent Labadie to the Comanche country. Sena y Baca was to act as Spanish and English interpreter "for the benefit of Agent Leavenworth." The following day an army captain from Ft. Union arrived in Santa Fe and informed Norton that a party of Navajos had killed Puertass and his party.¹⁴

Sena y Baca found Labadie at his home in Agua Negra and almost immediately preparations were made for the trip. But as they started to leave, word reached them that Puertass had been killed by a party of Yutas (Utes). Labadie now considered the journey more dangerous because of the killing of Puertass and immediately sent to Chaperito for one of Puertass' wives "who had repaired there for her own safety." By taking her with him back to her country, Labadie hoped that she would inform her tribe what had befallen Puertass and of the good treatment he and his family had received from the Superintendent and people of the different

places they had visited thus dispelling any suspicion that his death had been brought about by the New Mexicans or Americans.¹⁵

If the Utes did kill Puertass, perhaps it was the same party of Utes and Jicarilla Apaches who paid a visit to Ft. Sumner the night of September 24th. They told the authorities at the post that they were in pursuit of some animals belonging to Colonel St. Vrain and supposed to have been stolen by Mescaleros.

Their appearance at first caused some alarm among the Navajos. However, they were well treated by them; so well in fact that the Navajos even took care of their horses. That night, unknown to anyone, a few of their cohorts who did not visit the post with the rest, murdered a Navajo and stole twenty horses. The murder and theft were not discovered until the Utes and Apaches had left the post.¹⁶

On October 5th, Captain George Letterman, 125th Colored Infantry, at Ft. Bascom, reported that a wounded survivor of Puertass' party had stopped at the fort and informed them that the chief had been killed by Navajos some 15 or 20 miles east of Harch's ranch.¹⁷

And so somewhere between Chaperito and Ft. Bascom, El Puertass made his stand. The premonition he had in Santa Fe came true and he never saw his beloved Llano Estacado again. Had he made it home perhaps he would have fallen victim to the dreaded cholera epidemic that was sweeping the entire Southern Plains that year like a prairie fire fanned by the wind.

Labadie and his party spent many days searching for the Comanches but could not locate them. Finally, on November 8th, they located them on the Rio Negro. They found a camp of 1200 very much affected with cholera with twenty to thirty deaths daily. They had been fleeing from point to point trying to escape the ravages of the dreadful disease. Labadie reported that on the day of their arrival, one of the principal chiefs, Puertass' old friend, Paracaigua, was seriously ill and "in about half an hour we saw him dead and witnessed the disgusting manner of Indian mourning."¹⁸

But it was said that Puertass died the kind of death desired by a brave Comanche warrior. He fought and died bravely against great

odds taking many of the enemy with him.¹⁹

1. Santa Fe Weekly Gazette, November 3, 1860.
2. Ibid., May 26, 1861
3. Ibid., June 8, 1861
4. Ibid., May 20, 1865
5. DuBois to De Forrest, May 24, 1867, Dist. of New Mex. Ft. Bascom, LS, Army Commands, RG 98, NA.
6. A. B. Norton to D. N. Cooley, September 28, 1866. N. Mex. Supt. OIA, LS, RG 75, NA.
7. William A. Bell, *New Tracks In North America*, (Albuquerque: Horn and Wallace, Publishers, 1965), p. 129
8. A. B. Norton to Lorenzo Labadie, July 3, 1867, /New Mexico Superintendency, Office of Indian Affairs, LS, RG 75, NA. Hereafter, Office of Indian Affairs will be abbreviated OIA and New Mexico Superintendency to N. Mex. Supt.
9. A. B. Norton to C. E. Mix, October 7, 1867, /N. Mex. Supt. OIA, RG 75, NA.
10. Report of A. B. Norton, July 15, 1866.
11. Bell, p. 145-148.
12. Ibid., p. 146-147.
13. Norton to Mix, October 7, 1867, /N. Mex. Supt. OIA. LS, RG 75, NA.

14. Norton to Sena y Baca, October 5, 1867, /N. Mex. Supt. OIA, LS, RG 75, NA.
15. Labadie to Norton, December, 1867, /N. Mex. Supt. OIA, LS, RG 75, NA.
16. Dodd to Norton, September 29, 1867, /N. Mex. Supt. OIA, LS, RG 75, NA.
17. George W. Letterman, Capt. 125th USC Inf. to Lt. Edward Hunter, AAA Genl. Dist. of New Mex. Santa Fe, October 5, 1867.
18. Labadie to Norton, December, 1867, /N. Mex. Supt. OIA, LS, RG 75, NA.
19. Charles F. Lummis, *A New Mexico David*, p. 100.

DOÑA ROSITA PADILLA

Doña Rosita Valdez de Padilla lived in Puerto de Luna in the home of one of her sons, José. At ninety-one years of age, she had an excellent remote memory. She spoke of those people who had long since passed away as if she had visited with them recently. Her humble home was one of the most hospitable places this writer has ever visited.

Our conversations were conducted in "good ole" New Mexico Spanish. She shared information concerning her family, friends, and old customs and traditions that some of us wish were still with us today. For example, she was very young when the family of her future husband, Ascencion Padilla, came to ask for her hand in marriage.

"In those days, a formal letter requesting a girl's hand in marriage was delivered to her parents by the young man's parents, uncle or god-parents. After fifteen days, the reply was delivered in writing. It was the custom for the girl not to be present in the same room during the visit.

"There came to our house, my future mother and father-in-law, her step-father and his wife, and one of my future husband's brothers and his wife. They spoke with my mother as my father had died when I was eight years old. About three days later, one of my aunts was asked to ask me if I wanted to get married. My answer was 'Yes'.

When my brother Hilario heard my answer, he scolded me and said, '¡Tu eres cualquier babosa!' ('You are only a silly little girl!')

"It was not not permitted to talk back to an older brother so I just bowed my head and said nothing. My mother then went into the kitchen and told one of my sisters to go get my uncle Julio.

When my uncle came in, he asked, '¿En que les puedo ayudar?' ('In what way can I be of help?')

"My mother answered, 'Estramos en un porfía aqui. Esta quiere casarse pero Hilario no quiere que se case.' ('We are in an altercation here. She wants to get married but Hilario does not want her to get married.')

"My uncle asked my brother why he was opposed to me getting married and his answer was that I was too young."

"'Were you not young once too?', my uncle asked. Before Hilario could answer, my uncle told him, 'Do not prevent her; that young man comes from a very good family.'"

"We were married on the 10th of January at Puerto de Luna by Padre Simón. (Doña Rosita did not mention the year.) Four couples were married that day. Our wedding dance was at Los Ojitos. Rafael Ronquillo and another young man named Prudencio Gallegos were the musicians. And what good musicians they were! Prudencio was about sixteen. Rafael's father was full blooded Indian and his mother was Hispanic.

"My husband and I made our home in Los Ojitos. It was a small village on the Pecos River about twenty-five miles from Ft. Sumner. We farmed and raised sheep. We lived about a mile from Señor John Gerhardt and his wife, Doña Frone. My brother Hilario was married to one of their daughters, Katy.

"Señor John had many cows and sheep. He also possessed great medical skills; he was almost a doctor. He used to cure people without charge. Señor John is buried on a *lomia* (small hill) at Los Ojitos.

Other persons mentioned by Doña Rosita were Padre Agustín Redón who baptized her; Don Juan O'cana, Indian fighter and buffalo hunter; and three Indian women who lived at Los Ojitos.

"These women were known as *Las Cautivas* (The Captives) as they had been taken captive as children and raised by Hispanic families. One of these women, Guadalupe, had been raised by the Chaves family of Seboyeta. She was married to Don Bentura Carrillo.

Doña Rosita was born August 31, 1884. Her parents were Juana Padilla from Albuquerque and Ferbonio Valdez, Son of

Antonio Valdez of Santa Fe. The Valdez family lived at Los Ojitos, also known as Cedar Springs. They farmed and raised sheep. Don Antonio had been a freighter when the Indians were being held prisoners by the government at Bosque Redondo near present Ft. Sumner. He was a good friend of one of the Indian Agents, Don Lorenzo Labadie. Doña Rosita knew Don Lorenzo and his wife, Doña Rayitos, in her younger days. This writer has collected a lot of information on Don Lorenzo and may someday do a short biography of his life. He was a very prominent man in the 1800s. Besides serving as Indian agent, he also served as sheriff in Valencia, Santa Fe, and San Miguel Counties.

The following is what Doña Rosita related concerning her husband's family:

"Ascención's father, José Dolores Padilla, was from Chilli. He was orphaned when he was very young. He went to Albuquerque where he worked at various jobs. He went to work for a rich family by the name of Elizarras. The Elizarras had twelve wagons on the road used for freighting to the states. He used to talk about those trips and how they were gone for months at a time.

"After leaving the employ of the Elizarras, he left Albuquerque and moved to Las Conchas in northeastern New Mexico. Some time during that period, he met my mother-in-law, Marcelina Castillo, a widow. She was originally from Seboyeta and had been married to a man from there. He was killed by Indians. My In-laws were married in Las Colonias. They lived in Las Conchas, Pajarito, and Revuelto before moving to Los Ojitos.

Doña Rosita recalled that her father-in-law also had oxen. She remembered the name of one of the oxen, "El Mayate".

"El Mayate era un buey barcino. Era muy manioso. 'Hoy amanecio El Mayate con los ojos al revez', Decia mi suegro."

"El Mayate was white with brown and reddish spots. He was a cunning and malicious animal and sometimes hard to handle. When this would happen, my father-in-law would say, 'El Mayate is having one of his days.'"

"We took our wool to Las Vegas in ox carts. Later we used wagons pulled by horses. The trip took several days and we would camp along the way at La Mesita de Guadalupe and near Anton

Chico. While in Las Vegas we stayed at my godparents' house. Doña Rosita related a story about a man named José Murillos. Murillos came to New Mexico from California. He lived in Los Ojitos but made his living traveling around the country peddling wares and buying and trading hides. A boy about twelve years of age traveled with him most of the time.

One morning as he was preparing to leave a village on the other side of Ft. Sumner, a woman asked him to take her to Ft. Sumner. Somewhere along the way, they were attacked by a small band of Indians. One of the two horses pulling the wagon was killed by the first volley of gunfire.

Don José told the woman and the boy to get under the hides. He jumped down from the wagon and with his rifle made his defense against his attackers. During the fight that ensued, Don José suffered several painful wounds from gunfire and arrows.

He realized he was becoming weak and that he was almost out of ammunition. The Indians must have become aware of his situation also. One of them charged on his horse to finish him off and as he did, Don José shot and killed him. A check of his rifle revealed that it was out of ammunition. He had killed the Indian with his last bullet! He thought to himself, "¡Ahora si me van a matar!" ("Now they are surely going to kill me!")

Upon seeing that their comrade had been killed, the others rushed towards him. To Don José's surprise, the Indians picked up the dead man's rifle and bow and broke them. They then placed his body on a horse and rode away.

The boy and the woman came out of hiding and did what they could for Don José. He had two arrows in his legs. He had also been shot in the throat and in one of his hands.

A while later, an Americano carrying the mail in a spring wagon came upon the scene but refused to render any kind of aid or to give the trio a ride into town. Don José then pointed his rifle at the mail carrier and told him he would kill him if he did not help them.

Though seriously wounded, Don José and his charges made it to Ft. Sumner where friends took him to the home of an old lady, a medica, where he was nursed to recovery.

Doña Rosita concluded, "Don José suffered the rest of his life from those wounds. He walked on crutches. He later owned a cantina and many sheep also. He married one of my sisters who was very young for a man his age."²*

* Interview with Doña Rosita Padilla, Puerto de Luna, New Mexico, May 23, 1975.

DON BENJAMIN BACA

On July 29, 1975, I had the privilege of meeting 86 year-old Don Benjamin Baca. He lived in Santa Rosa not far from the spacious house his grandfather built in 1869. Don Benjamin was the son of Don Crescenciano Baca, a long time butcher in Santa Rosa. Don Benjamin's uncle, Don Placido Baca, was publisher of the first Spanish language newspaper in Santa Rosa, *La Voz Publica*. Don Placido also served two terms as Sheriff of Guadalupe County.

I had gone to ask Don Benjamin about his grandfather, Don Celso Baca, and about Don Lorenzo Labadie, both very prominent men of that area in their times.

"I remember Don Lorenzo well", he said. "He and my grandfather were friends but political adversaries. Sometimes my grandfather and Don Lorenzo would get into verbal fights at political meetings and exchange insults using nick names they had for each other. Don Lorenzo had a long white beard and my grandfather had a pot belly.

"My grandfather called Don Lorenzo 'El Barbas de Chivo' (He-goat Beard) and Don Lorenzo called my grandfather 'El Barriga Duce'." * (*El Barriga Duce was a comical pot-bellied character in old New Mexico folklore.)

"My grandfather used to visit Don Lorenzo to talk politics and I would tag along. One time at a political meeting in Puerto de Luna, the two oldsters got into a heated debate that almost turned into a fist-fight. My grandfather's friends had to pull him out of that meeting through a window.

"The Republican meetings were held here in Santa Rosa in my grandfather's house. He was a Republican Representative and

political boss. What he said was done!"

"He was the one who named this town, Santa Rosa. This place was once known as Agua Negra Chiquita. My grandfather was a devotee of Santa Rosa de Lima. He had that capilla (chapel) built at his own expense. (At the time of my visit with Don Benjamin, the chapel was still standing.) He also had the statue of Santa Rosa de Lima and the chapel bell brought all the way from Chihuahua and paid for them out of his own pocket too.

"I remember the priest, Padre Redón. He used to come from Anton Chico in a buggy. He and the altar boys would stay at my grandfather's house. Padre Redón was a very nice-looking man. He was very plump and well cared for."

Other persons mentioned were Pedro Sedillo and Victor Chavez. Both had once been buffalo hunters.

"Don Victor lived near the Blue Holes; he had a little rancho there. He and Don Pedro used to talk about the buffalo hunts and how they were often gone for months at a time."

Don Benjamin was "a walking history book" of the Santa Rosa area. He related an interesting story told him many times by his grandfather concerning Billy the Kid:

"One day a man rode in from Puerto de Luna to warn my grandfather that Billy the Kid was coming to kill him. My grandfather stationed two men with rifles on the roof of the house. He stationed another outside and a fourth man inside the house. Sometime during the pre-dawn hours, a soft knock was heard.

"¿Quien es?, my grandfather asked."

"It's me, Don Celso!" the Kid answered in Spanish. 'Let me in, please!' What else could my grandfather do but open the door."

"Billy stood at the door and said, 'Don Celso, I am very hungry. Please give me something to eat now and to take with me for I must go quickly. I also wish to borrow your best horse for mine is lame. I left him tied near the capilla.'"

"After Billy ate, he asked my grandfather to please care for his horse. He also said he would return in ten or fifteen days. My grandfather ordered one of the men to get his best horse, a light-colored, almost white horse he called 'El Viborita' (The Little Viper). Billy made a remark about its color as he placed his saddle



Juan Bautista Martin, Buffalo Hunter and Miss Alice Blake, Presbyterian Missionary, ca. 1905.



Miss Alice Blake, Presbyterian Missionary, ca. 1895.



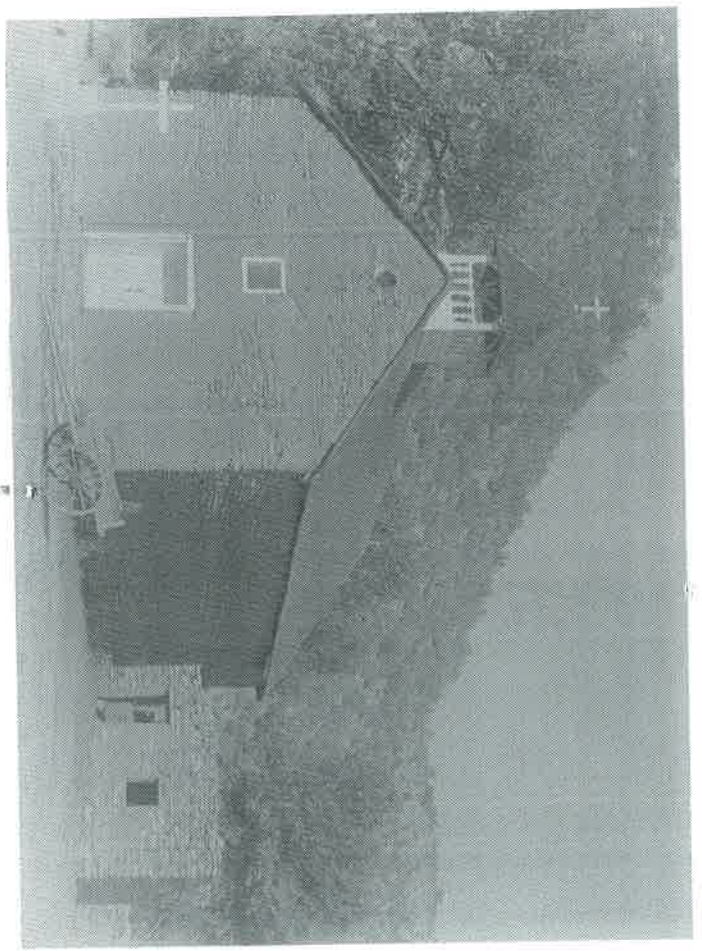
Don Felix Rodriguez. "My General's (Panc Villa) only desire was to remove the yoke of tyranny from the poor." 1979.



AL MARTIN
NAPULETANO

DRAWN ESPECIALLY FOR
AL GONZALES

Town of Trementina.



The Church at Los Valles de San Agustín.

Romolo Blea, Braulio Vialpando,
and Noberto Jaramillo celebrating
Papa Beto's Birthday.





José Cecilio Valverde, my maternal grandfather.



Felipe Montaña, 89th Infantry Division, ca. 1918.



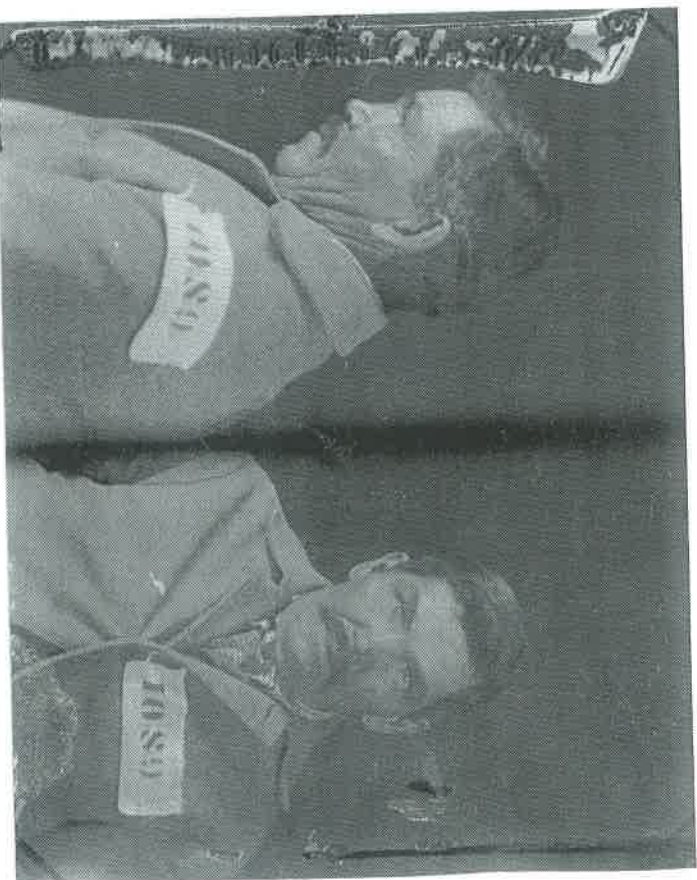
José Chavez y Chavez, taken when he entered prison in 1897.



Don Jacobo Salazar, 1980.



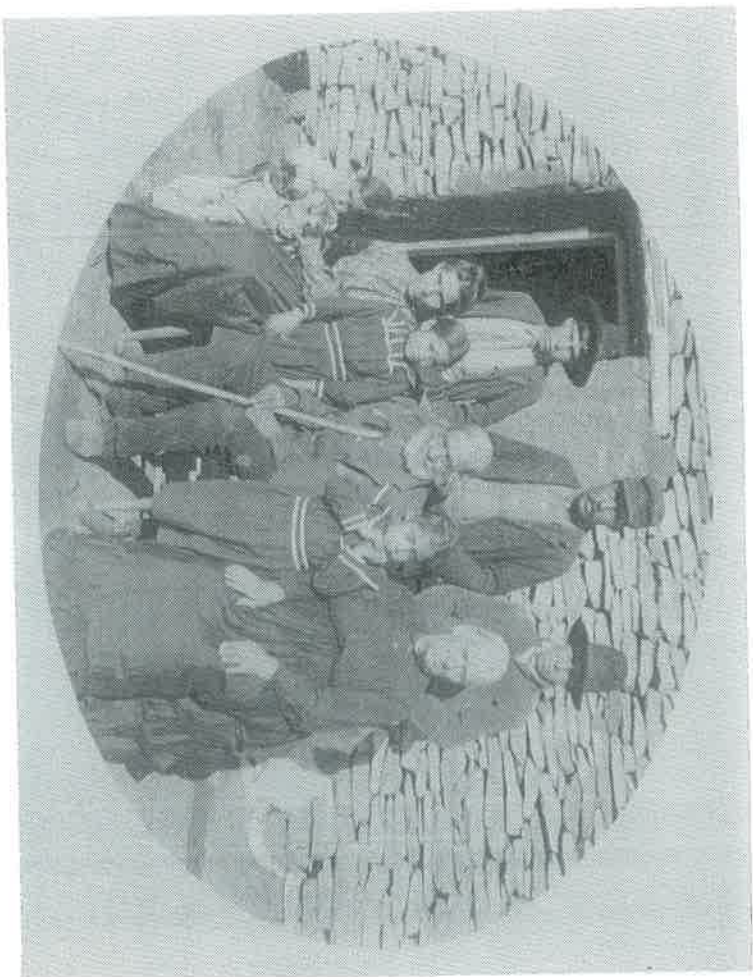
Don José A. Perca, 1977.



José Chavez y Chavez, taken when he was paroled in 1909.



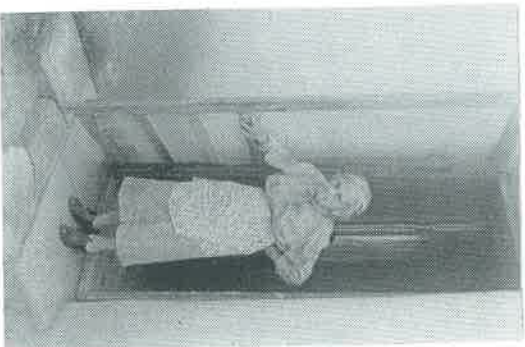
Four New Mexican soldiers in France. Left to right: Modesto Fresquez, Las Vegas; Juan Esquibel, Rosiada; Martin Gonzales, Tremenitina; Siting; Eduardo Gomez, Tierra Amarilla. 1918.



The Blea and Valverde family, Tremenitina, 1904.



Don Abel Saiz and Doña Eufelia Saiz of Santa Rosa, ca. 1976.



Doña Rosita Padilla of Puerto de Luna, ca. 1976.



on the horse but my grandfather assured him it was an excellent animal.

“I will return him to you in a few days, Don Celso, the Kid told my grandfather.”

“If you do, that is fine and if not, that is fine too”, my grandfather replied, being careful not to arouse the Kid’s displeasure.”

“Early one morning, a few days later, ‘El Viborita’ was found in the corral. Billy’s horse was gone. Later, my grandfather received a poorly written letter in Spanish from Billy thanking him and assuring him that he would never have to fear for his life or property. My grandfather kept that letter for a long time. I remember having read it but with the years, it got lost.

During another visit, Don Benjamin told me another interesting story he heard from his grandfather:

During a cattle drive to Kansas in the 1870s, Don Celso and his men arrived at a small town made up mostly of tents and sod houses. The town’s main attraction was a “show” inside a tent where a man was urging folks to “step inside and see the marvelous donkey”.

Anxious to satisfy their curiosity, Don Celso and his men paid the fifty cent fee. They stepped inside the tent only to find a burro, an animal well known and very common in their native New Mexico but almost unknown in the States.

The biggest surprise however, came when Don Celso saw his C-B brand on the donkey, evidently, one of many animals stolen from his ranch at Agua Negra Chiquita by cattle and horse thieves.

“¡Que diablos!”, he said. “¡He pagado cuatro Reales para ver lo que es mio en el primer lugar!”

“What the devil! I have paid four bits to see that which is mine in the first place!”

Our conversation then shifted to the Labadies. Don Benjamin continued, “Don Lorenzo’s wife, Doña Rayitos, was a lady held in very high esteem. The people in these parts loved her very much. She was an excellent *medica*. She always carried with her a bag in which she had all kinds of *remedios* and herbs for medicinal purposes. She would respond whenever and wherever her medical skills were needed. As a child, I almost died from typhoid fever

but she pulled me through. She was also a very beautiful lady.

"My wife was related to Doña Rayitos. My wife's name was Josefina Hinojos. She was the daughter of Don Juan Hinojos who was married to 'Mama Luz'. My wife and I were married September 13, 1909. El Padre Julio married us."

Don Benjamin also mentioned having known José Chavez y Chavez. Chavez y Chavez was a legend among the Spanish people in his own time. Chavez was a personal friend of Billy the Kid and also played a part in the Lincoln County War. He had once been a peace officer and lastly a convicted murderer and member of the notorious Silva gang of San Miguel County.

Don Benjamin said he knew Chavez after Chavez was released from the Territorial Pen. "He was living at Milagro at the time. He was a big man, grim-faced, and with Indian features. He was a bad character." "Era un hombre grandote, mal encarado, y Indiado."

THE STORY OF NICOLAS ARAGON

A few months after Elfeego Baca made his famous stand against a large number of Texans at Frisco Plaza, another Nuevo Mejicano named Nicolas Aragon battled it out with a sheriff's posse near Chaperito in southern San Miguel County. Aragon, like Baca, was originally from Socorro County, a native of Polvadera.

I first heard about Nicolas Aragon from my uncle, Nicolas Montañó. My uncle knew Aragon in the Santa Rosa area after Aragon was released from the Territorial Pen. I learned that to the Spanish-speaking people who lived along the Pecos and Gallinas Rivers in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Aragon was a legend and a hero of sorts. My uncle told me that a *corrido* (popular ballad) had been written about Aragon and his stand-off against the *Tejanos* in January, 1885.

I learned more about Aragon from some older folks living in Santa Rosa, Don Luis Duran, a retired school teacher; Don Abel Saiz, age ninety-four; and his wife, Doña Eufelia Baca de Saiz. Nicolas Aragon was originally married to Doña Eufelia's aunt, Ruperta Selgado, "mi tia Rupertita", as Doña Eufelia referred to her.

Don Abel further sparked my interest in Aragon when he sang as best he could, what he remembered of "El Corrido de Nicolas Aragon". A few lines are missing from the ballad.

"El Corrido de Nicolas Aragon"

1. Año de mil ochocientos,
Ochenta y cinco acontado,
En El Rio de Las Gallinas,
Esta trajedia a pasado,

Con Nicolas Aragon,
Y Rupertita Selgado.
Con Nicolas Aragon,
Un hombre muy determinado.

2. Sabado era el triste dia,
De mi desgraciada suerte,
Con bastante tirania,
Me vinieron a dar muerte,
Pero le pedi á Maria,
Y se les voltio la suerte.

3. El Domingo amanesi,
No me pudieron vencer,
Se valieron de las trasas,
De llamar a mi mujer,
Que me hiciera un carinito,
Y no le quise beber.

4. El Lunes en todo el dia,
Disiendo, “¿Señor, que hare?”
Y sin poderme salvar,
De el mandamiento de la ley.
Esperando un oficial,
Que viniera con las reglas,
Para poderme salvar.

5. Pero la ley que ellos traiban,
De venir con tal fieresa,
De darme la muerte,
Y cortarme la cabeza,
Para salir con honor,
Y ganar la recompensa.

6. El Martes era muy sierto,
Cerca de la madrugada,
Llego el Alguacil Mayor,
Con su gente bien armada,
Y no le hablo a Niccolas,
Porque le entro la forzada.

7. Y ayi se pasaron,
Llamo a la misma mujer,
Porque le entro desconfianza,
Para que fuera con el,
Y con ella fuera la chanza.

8. Eres Hilario Romero,
Alguacil de este condado,
Hombre de buen corazon,
Y de valor de primero,
Me entregates a ellos mismos,
Pero bien asegurado.

9. El dia que te sacaron,
Se agrando mas mi dolor,
Cuando te vide baliado,
Con el alguacil mayor.

10. Se va, se va, se va,
Se va de mala silla,
Se va, se va, se va,
A la penitenciera,
Con grillos y con cadenas,
A la penitencia un dia.

I decided I would search the 1880s newspapers to try and find something about Aragon there. I found more than I expected. The newspapers of Santa Fe, Las Vegas, and even Albuquerque, had a “hey day” with Aragon. Aragon was called “an old-time killer and member of the Billy the Kid gang”. He was accused of having

killed between five and twelve men. The *Santa Fe New Mexican Review* described Aragon as a "little wheezan-faced Mexican with a keen 'snakey' black eye whose hard face indicates abundant brute force".¹

For years Aragon had resided on a small ranch below Chaparito along the Gallinas River about thirty miles from Las Vegas. "There he has resided for a long term of years and has occasioned no little annoyance by killing cattle and stealing horses belonging to Pecos Valley settlers."²

The *Chronicle* of Las Vegas stated that Aragon was also wanted for a shooting in Puerto de Luna the previous Winter.³ In January, 1884, Aragon and one of his vecinos (neighbors), twenty-seven year-old José de la Cruz Tafoya, decided to undertake a horse-stealing expedition into neighboring Lincoln County. Tafoya was the son of José de la Piedad Tafoya, the so-called "Prince of the Comancheros" who Comanche chief Quanah Parker swore to "boil alive" during the 1870s for supposedly having revealed to the U.S. Cavalry the location of the Comanche *rancherías* at Palo Duro Canyon near present Amarillo, Texas.

Aragon and Tafoya were caught stealing horses and were placed in jail at Lincoln. At the May term of the Third District Court, Judge Bristol sentenced them to five years each at hard labor. Tafoya was almost immediately transferred to the Territorial Penitentiary but a minor technicality was raised in Aragon's case and his transfer was delayed. On May 28, 1884, Aragon broke out of jail and fled to the mountains.⁴

Five months later, Sheriff John W. Poe of Lincoln County learned that Aragon had been seen at his home near Chaparito and sent Deputy Jasper N. Corn to bring him in. A \$200 reward was offered for his re-capture. Corn gathered a small posse and they tracked Aragon to Gallinas Springs, south of Chaparito.

However, Aragon was warned of Corn's approach. When he saw the lawman coming, he snatched his rifle and crawled along a fence. According to Corn's brother-in-law and James Abercrombie, members of the deputy sheriff's posse, Aragon started to run for his horse nearby when Corn interposed between them. Aragon immediately opened fire killing his pursuer's horse

which fell on its rider and broke his leg. Aragon shot the helpless deputy who died a short time later.⁵

The November 2, 1884 *Albuquerque Morning Journal* called Deputy Corn "one of the bravest and best officers in the territory". It added that the governor had issued a proclamation offering a reward of five hundred dollars for the capture and delivery of Aragon.

The desperado disappeared from the region and no trace could be had until January, 1885 when Sheriff Poe again learned he was at his old home. Sheriff Poe, Deputies John Hurley and James Brent, and several others proceeded up to San Miguel County. The posse arrived at Aragon's house at 2:30 Sunday morning on the 25th of January and immediately surrounded the desperado's adobe hut thereby cutting off escape and at the same time keeping a respectable distance to avoid being killed by Aragon who had the reputation of being an excellent marksman.

A call was made to Aragon to surrender but he informed the posse that he was well armed and with plenty to eat and drink. He added that he would never surrender.

Twenty minutes later, Deputy John Hurley of Ft. Stanton mounted the flat roof of the hut and while digging a hole in which to deposit fire to smoke out the desperado, was shot and killed by Aragon. Hurley fell from the roof mortally wounded. Others of the posse succeeded in placing fire on the roof but it was too wet to burn.

The gunfire between the posse and Aragon was kept up until daylight. During the morning the women inside the hut were allowed to remove to a nearby house. The battle then continued. From the windows of the house, Aragon would crack away at the officers whenever he caught sight of them. He was armed with a new Winchester rifle and a Colt 45 pistol.

In an unguarded moment, Aragon exposed himself at a small window and was slightly wounded by Deputy Brent. Brent narrowly escaped death during his encounter with Aragon, a bullet grazing his cheek. Another bullet pierced his hat within an inch of his head.

Sometime early Monday morning, Aragon suffered a painful

wound in the calf of his left leg. He was also struck on the head by two bullets both of which cut the scalp and glanced off. His ammunition was also giving out. That same day, Deputy Hurley's remains were buried besides those of Deputy Corn at Hatch's ranch nearby.⁶

The following day the officers again attempted to persuade Aragon to surrender. They sent him freshly brewed coffee with his wife Ruperta, and hoped she would persuade him to give himself up.

Doña Eufelia told me that her aunt Ruperta hid ammunition on her person when she went to see her husband and that she advised him against drinking the coffee fearing it had been poisoned.

Aragon again refused to surrender. Deputy Brent then rode to Las Vegas for reinforcements and "giant powder" to explode under the building. San Miguel County Sheriff Hilario Romero and a posse went back with Brent.

On Wednesday afternoon January 28th, Sheriff Romero, accompanied by Aragon's wife, went to talk to Aragon. Aragon gave himself up to Romero who "promised him fair play".

My uncle Nicolas Montano related that the story he heard was that when Sheriff Romero came out with Aragon in custody, the men from Lincoln County demanded that he turn Aragon over to them.

"Don Hilario les dijo a los gringos, '¡Si se los entrego, pero le doy sus armas!'"

"Don Hilario told the gringos, 'Yes, I will turn him over to you, but I will give him his weapons!'"

The *Morning Journal* reported on January 29, 1885 that Deputy Sheriff Brent, apprehending violence, had not taken Aragon to Las Vegas as planned "because a mob was ready to lynch him the moment of his arrival". Instead, Brent's party went into camp in the piñon woods near San Miguel. They later placed Aragon on a train and took him to Santa Fe.

Brent's party arrived in Santa Fe the following morning and placed Aragon in jail. About two o'clock that afternoon, Dr. J.H. Sloan ripped up Aragon's pant leg as he lay on a pallet at the jail and dressed his wound in the calf of his left leg.⁷

This attention was the first Aragon had received since he was shot Monday morning. A reporter from the *Review* asked Aragon through an interpreter, "Why did you oppose the officers of the law?"

"People told me they would hang me if I submitted to arrest," he replied. "And of course, I fought for my life."

The *Review* reporter added, "A great deal of sensation has been written about this man, much of which seems to be the creation of Las Vegas Reporters. Aragon denies that he ever operated with 'Billy the Kid's' gang."

In this story lies another tragedy. Two brave and dedicated men lost their lives and yet a quarrel arose as to who should receive the reward and credit for the capture of their killer. On January 29, 1885, the *Morning Journal* reported: "sheriff Romero, who caused Aragon's surrender, gets the reward amounting to \$1300. John Hurley, the officer killed in the attack, was buried near Chaparito by Poe and Brent..."

The *Review* reported the following day: "Sheriff Poe gives these as real facts in the case saying he doesn't understand how the sheriff of San Miguel County can claim all the credit of capturing Nicolas Aragon when it is a well known fact that he has lived within twenty-five miles of Las Vegas ever since killing Corn and no attempts were made to capture him."

Aragon was eventually indicted for the murders of Corn and Hurley by a San Miguel County Grand Jury. A change of venue took the case to Santa Fe where his trial was held in July, 1885. There was great interest in the case, the courtroom being crowded to its fullest capacity during the whole time of trial.

Aragon was acquitted in the death of Hurley. However, on September 25, 1885, he was found guilty of murder in the 2nd degree in the case of Deputy Corn at a trial held in Springer. He was sentenced to imprisonment for life.⁸

On April 3, 1893, Governor Prince commuted Aragon's sentence to twenty years. However, on Christmas Eve, 1896, at 10:30 A. M., "Prisoner Number 35" walked out of the Territorial Penitentiary a free man.⁹

- 1 *Santa Fe New Mexican Review*, January 28, 1885.
- Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 9, 1885.
- Albuquerque Evening Democrat*, January 31, 1885.
- 2 *Santa Fe New Mexican Review*, January 30, 1885.
- 3 *The Chronicle*, (Las Vegas), January 31, 1885.
- 4 *The Daily New Mexican*, July 15, 1885, P-4.
- 5 *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*, July 17, 1885.
- 6 *Santa Fe New Mexican Review*, January 30, 1885.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, September 26, 1885.
- 9 Records of the Penitentiary, State Records Center, Santa Fe.

Aragon was about 43 years old when released from prison. His wife apparently left him. When my uncle knew him in Santa Rosa, Nicolas was married to a very young woman. They had two children. Don Luis Duran told me he was godfather to one of Nicolas' granddaughters.

"Don Nicolas and I referred to each other as '*Compadre*'", he said.

Aragon's wife at the time of his gunfight with the posse also re-married. She married José Chavez y Chavez. As stated before, Chavez y Chavez was also a legend among Hispanos in his time. His name was known in every household. Like Aragon, he also spent time in the Territorial Pen for murder.

Chavez is said to have been very fast and deadly with a gun.

During his lifetime, he straddled the fence between law enforcement and the lawless. Chavez served as a peace officer in Las Vegas where he degenerated into membership in the notorious Silva Gang. He participated in the murder of a young man named Gabriel Sandoval. Sandoval was killed the night of February 7, 1893. His body was thrown into the hole of an outhouse behind the sheriff's house.

Chavez evaded the law for over three years. He roamed San Miguel County helped by those who liked him and avoided by those who feared him. He was always seen carrying a Winchester rifle, a bandolier full of ammunition slung over his shoulder. Sometimes he traveled alone. Other times he was seen with other former members of the Silva gang, Jesus Vialpando, Candelario Ortiz, and another killer named Gabriel Pital, all fugitives from justice "todavía haciendo diablura y media" ("still committing all kinds of devilry"), *La Voz Del Pueblo* reported on September 29, 1894. Governor Thornton had offered a \$500 reward for Chavez y Chavez.

Murders and robberies occurred too frequently in San Miguel County during the 1890s. After two young freighters were found brutally murdered between Las Conchas and Cabra Springs, *La Voz* cried out for better law enforcement. "We, like the *Optic* ask, 'When will the effort be made to take up the trail and capture these killers? Will these murderers be allowed to escape as so many others have been allowed to do in this county? If this lawlessness continues any longer, there remains no other course but for the good citizens to arm themselves to the teeth in their own defense.'"¹

However, the law did catch up with Jesus Vialpando shortly thereafter. He and a wayward young man named Feliciano Chavez murdered a youth named Tomas Martinez near Glorietta on January 20, 1895. They were captured in Los Valles and were hanged November 19, 1895 in Santa Fe.

Vialpando told a reporter from *La Voz Del Pueblo* that when young Martinez came to the camp where he and Chavez were roasting a stolen cow, he "thought it would be convenient for his business to own another horse and he liked very much the horse