

# Museum News

## Pedro Saenz

### Indian captive and Preacher Man



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie.

### *Pedro and Rosa Bravo Saenz*

From 1846 to 1848 the United States was engaged in a war with Mexico. After the final defeat of Santa Ana and his government, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded Upper California and New Mexico to the US, for a "purchase" fee of \$15,000,000. The "Mexican Cession" included Arizona and New Mexico and parts of Utah, Nevada, and Colorado, as well as forcing Mexico to relinquish all claims to Texas and set the

Rio Grande as the southern boundary of the United States. A boundary survey determined the official border and that agreement was ratified in 1853. In one agreement thousands of square miles and thousands of Mexican citizens suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of the border.

This is the world that Pedro Saenz was born into in 1865. In that year the US was consumed with civil war, but the



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie.

### **Rosa Bravo Saenz and her children, shortly before her death in 1965.**

people of San Elizario, Texas, near El Paso, were consumed with making a living and protecting themselves from marauding bands of Apaches.

Periodic raids not only resulted in the loss of livestock and material, it also resulted in kidnappings. Women and children were captured and spirited away into the desert, some never to be seen or heard from again.

It was just such a raid, about 1876, that tore eleven-year-old Pedro from his family. The youngest of Ignacio and Andrea Manriquez Saenz's four children, Pedro disappeared into the wilderness and was thought lost forever. As happened in many cases, youngsters were absorbed into the tribe and became "Indians" themselves, often refusing repatriation to their old families.

But, apparently, such was not the case with young Pedro. Years later, and with the help of his new Indian wife, Pedro escaped back to civilization. Shortly after his return his wife died suddenly and he was left alone once again.

But he had a new-found faith to carry him through. During his captivity Baptist missionaries worked with the tribe and young Pedro became interested. He converted from his former church and eventually became a Baptist preacher, an avocation he followed for years.

He remarried several times, and eventually arrived in Sanderson, Texas, in 1905, where his sister Catarina lived with her husband, Juan Moreno. Pedro set up shop as a barber and preached on

the weekends.

In 1911, Pedro courted young Rosa Bravo, an émigré from Mexico and daughter of Ignacio and Monica Rivas Bravo. He was thirty years her senior, but he was a well respected man and was a prize catch for Rosa. They were married and began a long, happy life of wedded bliss.

That same year Pedro's brother-in-law, Juan Moreno, was found dead, killed by food poisoning, as first thought. Moreno was a tough character and a traveling salesman, and was found at his camp out on the road. When Pedro and other family members and friends went out to pick up his body they also were poisoned by bread made with tainted flour or baking powder. Pedro recognized what was happening and began to eat large quantities of lard, which helped save his life.

Rosa's father, Ignacio Bravo, was one of the victims, and the community was shaken to its core by the tragedy. It was a very infamous story that made headlines around the US.

The incident did not, however, stop Pedro and Rosa from producing a family of eleven children, who survived to adulthood, and many of their descendants still live in the Sanderson area.

Pedro continued to work and preach, but his preaching days came to an end



after an incident in Big Spring, Texas. A man there was in jail, wrongfully accused of a crime. No one would believe him but Pedro, who tried to argue his case with area preachers in an effort to gain support. When the preachers rejected his arguments and pleas and the man died while in custody, Pedro became disgusted with organized religion and left the ministry.

In 1942 Pedro passed away at the age of 77. He led a very colorful life and produced a fine family.

His widow, Rosa, lived on until 1965. She became a naturalized citizen a few years before her death and she went to her eternal rest with the reputation of being an excellent mother, grandmother and great grandmother.

#### Refences

*Teaching With Documents: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, retrieved from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/guadalupe-hidalgo/>

*Terrell County, Its Past, Its People*, Alice Evans Downie. Sanderson, Texas: Terrell County Heritage Commission, 1978

"Pedro Saenz," *1912 Terrell County Poll Tax Book Pct. 1*, Terrell County Memorial Museum collection

"Prominent Mexican Citizen of Sanderson Found Dead on Ranch," *The El Paso Herald* (El Paso, Tex.), Sunday, October 1, 1911

"Six Men Killed With Poison," *Urbana Daily Courier*, Oct 3, 1911

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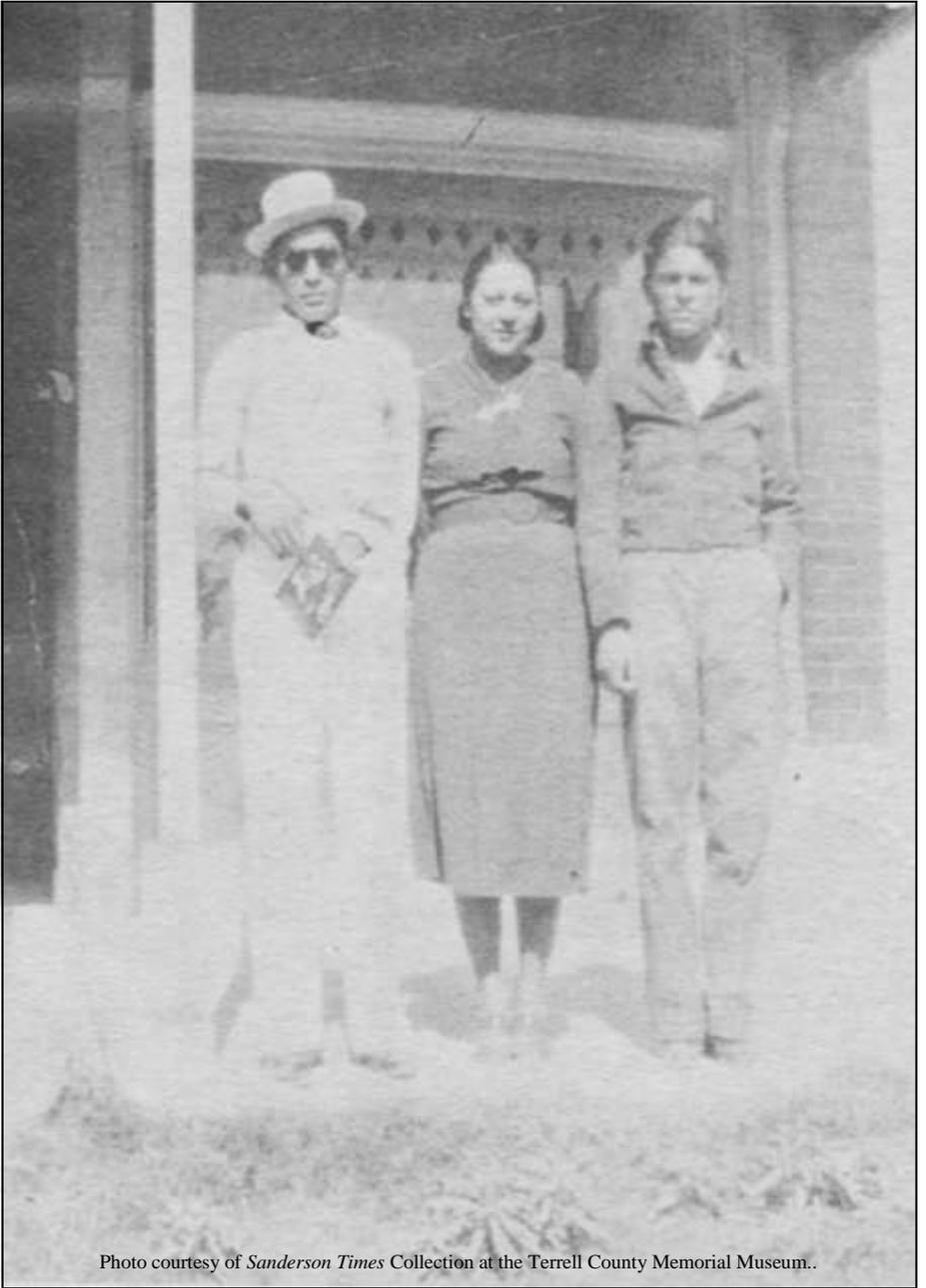


Photo courtesy of *Sanderson Times* Collection at the Terrell County Memorial Museum..

**In an undated photo, Santiago Flores, Sr., Raquel Moreno Perez and Robert Calzada are pictured in front of the McLymont Drug Store, a fine brick building that used to sit at the corner of First and Oak St., but long ago was demolished. The photo probably dates from the late 1940s.**