

Terrell County Memorial

October, 2017
Sanderson, Texas

Museum News

“Oh, hijos mios.”

La Llorona and other Creepy Things



Juan Salazar, like so many Sanderson folk, had quite an adventure when the town washed away in 1965. I

interviewed him for a small book of survivor stories for the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor Center in



the spring of 2015, the 50th anniversary year of that tragic event. As dramatic as his story was, it was matched by scores of other stories submitted at the time.

It seems that in times of disaster and tragedy, especially flooding, the old Mexican folktale of "La Llorona" surfaces. Although there are many variations, the basic story tells of a woman who has drowned her children and searches the earth at night looking for them. The story is at least 500 years old, dating to the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The web site, LaLlorona.com, is one of the best at telling the story.

Historically, La Malinche was a young Aztec girl who lived in the 1500s, and who was sold as a slave to the Mayans. She was bilingual in

Nahuatl, the Aztec language, and Mayan, and was the perfect translator for Hernán Cortés, the Spanish Conquistador. La Malinche, who he called Doña Marina, bore Cortés two sons. When Cortés was recalled to Spain he wanted to take his two sons and his Spanish mistress with him, leaving Doña Marina behind. She could not bear to part with her children so she took them down to Lake Tenochtitlán and stabbed them to death, throwing their bodies into the lake. Not long after her death a figure draped in white with a white veil was seen near the lake, crying out for her children, "Oh hijos míos...ya ha llegado vuestra destrucción. Donde os llevaré?" (Oh my children...your destruction has arrived. Where can I take you?) Through the centuries the

story spread through the Hispanic world, often told to children as a "boogey-man" story to keep them in line. All of the Southwest is steeped in the lore of La Llorona.

But, back to Juan Salazar.

Immediately after the flood he had a strange thing happen to him. One morning as he got ready to go to work he was in the back yard taking a shower with a garden hose...their bathroom was long gone down the creek.

As he stood there he heard a low, mournful cry, "like a woman in pain," he said. He looked around and couldn't see anything. He kept hearing it and suddenly a bone-chilling thought occurred to him...La Llorona! The old folk tale of his childhood came back to him in a flash, and the curse that is said to accompany it, that those who hear her wails are marked for death. And that was giving Juan Salazar pause...could he really be hearing La Llorona? Continuing to hear the mournful cry, he went into the house and told his wife, but she was having none of that. She was already upset enough from recent events and she didn't even want to think about it. He went outside and scanned his surroundings to see what might be making the eerie noise. Finally, he saw movement in the direction of the sounds. As he squinted against the morning sun, he saw an old hound dog across the creek, made homeless by the flood, crying softly in the ruins for a master who was no longer there.

He thought to himself, "La Llorona! Hah! Better get to work, I'll be late."

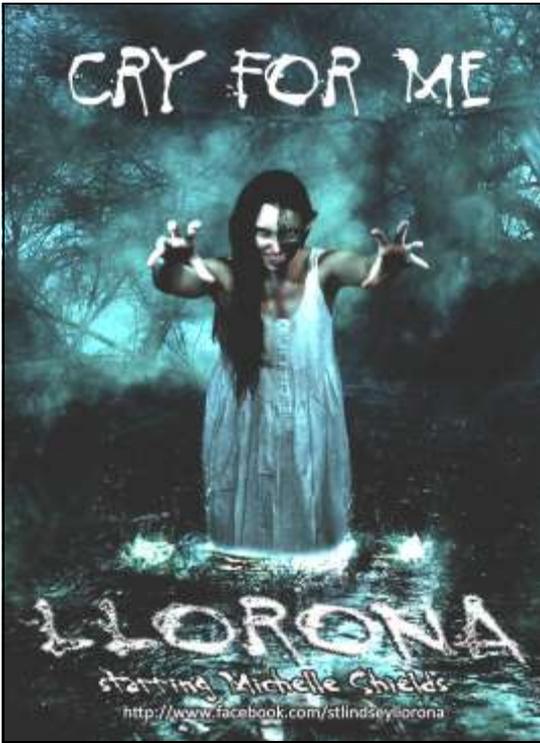
As long as we are on the subject, let me tell you about the strange goings-on at the old Lemons Homestead, the Terrell County Memorial Museum. I don't like to be in the house alone after dark. The only ghost I believe in is the Holy Ghost, so I find run-of-the-mill, standard spook stories entertaining, but nothing more than that.

HOWEVER (and that's a big however)...I am loathe to have to go into the Museum late at night. A feeling of foreboding comes over me, totally uncharacteristic of the "normal" me. As my grandfather used to say, I get the "willies" when I think about having to go down to that place at night, and for good reason.

On numerous occasions I have come into the Museum in the morning to find one or more lights turned on. I have gotten calls from folks wanting to be helpful to remind me that a light is still burning down there. So, ever mindful of the county budget, I make myself go down to make sure the lights are off.

In the beginning I thought I was just suffering from the effects of early senility. I vowed to do a better job of conserving the county coin and made it a point every day to go through the building checking for glowing orbs...er...uh...light bulbs still burning.

But still, I would come in the morning or drive by late at night and see the unfriendly glow of a lit bulb. I



have no idea what is going on, because there are only a few keys to the building and I am the only one, besides visitors, who goes there on a regular basis.

And then there is the noise problem. Almost always when I venture into the museum after dark I hear thumping noises. Sometimes as light as a footstep repeated in a walking pattern, or sometimes as pronounced as a nerve-wracking BANG!

Ever the scientist, I tell myself that it is just the house cooling off, metal and wood and plaster shrinking or expanding, but it occurs in the winter-time as well as the rest of the year.

And then, there are the creaking noises, as though someone is standing in one spot, rocking back and forth

over a noisy floor board like my kids did when they were little and we lived in old creaky houses. I have no explanation for either sound, but I guarantee that I definitely will come unhinged if I start hearing a wailing woman!

It is so easy to let your imagination run away with you. A book I often refer to is Dr. Elton Miles' "Tales of the Big Bend," (Texas A&M University Press, 1976) in which he covers all sorts of ghostly happenings and weird tales that have entered into the rich folklore of the Trans Pecos. We recognize some as

sophomoric yarns to scare the kids as we sit around the campfire telling ghost stories. But other tales are seemingly plausible, genuine enigmas...and very creepy!

In his book, Dr. Miles explores multiple variations on a theme and shows how some tales begat others, with slight differences in the characters and the places. Folk tales lend themselves to embellishment with each retelling, as I have found with local historical "facts."

That is all well and good, but what about my situation...I have to work in that place!

La Llorona, or, overactive imagination...you be the judge!