

Terrell County Memorial **November, 2017**
Sanderson, Texas

Museum News

Luis Martinez

La vida es mas importante que el oro



Juana and Luis Martinez

One thing about writing stories about Terrell County...you never run out of material. Just when you think you have written about or said everything that could be said, you stumble across another story. Luis Martinez is a case in point.

There were many notorious (good and bad) men and women who came to Terrell County. The nature of the terrain makes it a difficult place to live, even today. Everyone loves the scenery, but only a few hardy souls

have the stamina and fortitude to live here, both in the old days and now. How many young Border Patrol couples have come and gone because of the lack of convenience and services? It's a fun place to visit, but how many can live here 24-7 without a Walmart, a pharmacy or a decent (or even indecent) food store? Not many, apparently.

So it is also apparent that only the hale and hearty, the rugged individualist, and the one who yearns for soli-



Luis Martinez, third from the left, was honored as one of the longest residents of Terrell County at the 1955 Celebration of 50 years as a county. The other honorees were Mrs. Anna Achterberg, Alejandro Marquez, Sr., Martinez and Nicolas Flores. Driver unidentified.

tude can live and thrive here. And that was even more true in the old days when there was absolutely nothing here.

Luis Martinez was one of those special people. He lived his life as a cowboy, working in the great outdoors for a number of ranchers. In his long years in Pecos/Terrell County he worked for the Downie, Stillwell, and Pakenham ranches, and for George Fenley, first sheriff of Terrell County. He worked for the infamous Reagan Brothers during

their Lost N____ Mine time, he was a personal friend of the hapless Mexican Negro cowboy, Seminole Bill Kelley, who discovered the gold, and he knew the general location of the mine but refused to take anybody to it in fear for his life. His reasoning was, "La vida es mas importante que el oro," life is more important than gold. How many people today have lost sight of that maxim?

Martinez was born in Laredo to Mexican emigré parents. Dates are a little shaky...one source says he was

born in 1874, his death certificate says 1883. But, death certificate information is often wrong, as it is provided by close friends or relatives and not confirmed by records. To fit the narrative best, the true date was probably the earlier one.

At about the age of 13, about 1887, Martinez decided to strike out on his own. He did not own a horse so he set out on foot to walk up north from Laredo, probably looking for work. Through a combination of walking and hopping freight trains, he rolled into Dryden around 1888 and was hired by Mr. John Doak, who was running the Pecos County Land and Cattle Company, a huge ranch. Dryden was their headquarters and most of the buildings at that time were company-owned. His first duties were feeding livestock, running errands and doing general maintenance work. After a year he was promoted to horseback and his long career as a cowboy began.

While working for Doak he made a trip driving cattle "up the trail." But, they hit a snag when they got to the Red River. On the north side of the river the Indians refused to let them cross tribal lands and they had to sell the cows locally and return home. Martinez was very young and did not recall many details about the trip, which was very uneventful anyway.

For seven years Martinez worked with some pretty famous men...John Doak, Bev Farley and others...all working fo the sprawling Pecos

County Land and Cattle Company. The ranch had 10,000 cows and 5,000 mares, all under the Swinging H brand. But in 1895, the outfit sold out and Martinez began working for other cow works.

It was a dangerous time to be alive in Terrell County. There were many murders, robberies, cattle rustling and smuggling operations being carried on. Of course, the murders stuck out in his mind. One was the murder of Juan Bueno, a cowboy for the Doak outfit. One evening Bueno and another man got into an argument as they sat around the campfire. The next morning they rode out together to check the cattle, but only the other man returned. After an extensive seach, Bueno's body was found by the trail, riddled with bullets. They couldn't prove anything, but the heated arguent the night before was fresh in everyone's mind.

In another killing a herder was found shot to death. Some men had hired him to watch the cows while they gathered them. When they were ready to take the herd away, they didn't want to pay the man, so they shot him. Martinez and one of the cowmen "found" the body, and the cowman wanted Martinez to get off his horse and check the body. Martinez was suspicious and wouldn't leave his horse and his weapon. He didn't want to end up lying beside the dead man. The sheriff was summoned and came out with rough lumber and built the man a coffin. He was buried

THE STATE OF TEXAS
 County of Terrell

To any Regularly Licensed or Ordained Minister of the Gospel, Jewish Rabbi, Judge of the District or County Court, or any Justice of the Peace, in and for State of Texas County, GREETING:

You are hereby Authorized to Solemnize the Rites of Matrimony
 Between Mr Luis Martinez and Miss Juana Basquez
 and make due return to the Clerk of the County Court of said County within sixty days thereafter, certifying your action under this License.

Witness my official signature and seal of office, at office in Sanderson
 the 8 day of April 1925

Luella Lumsden
 Clerk of County Court Terrell County.

By _____ Deputy.

I, F. C. Jordan, hereby certify that on the 7 day of April 1925
 I united in Matrimony Luis Martinez and Mrs. Juana Basquez
 the parties above named. Witness my hand this 7 day of April 1925

F. C. Jordan, Justice of Peace
Post Office Terrell Co. Texas

Returned and filed for record the 7 day of April 1925, and recorded the 8 day of April 1925
Luella Lumsden County Clerk

By _____ Deputy.

on site.

In one case, the cowboy got the upper hand. There was a dispute about a maverick calf between a cowboy and two ranchers. The first rancher pulled a gun on the cowboy, but the cowboy beat him to the draw. When the second rancher arrived, he tried the same thing, but the cowboy was too quick for him and he also ended up dead. The shootings were justified as a case of self defense.

As the years rolled by, ranches were fenced, became smaller and smaller and moved to sheep operations. Martinez would work for a few months for an outfit, then move on. He had become an expert cowboy.

In 1925 Luis Martinez married a woman named Juana Basquez, a native of Mexico, and a few years later they adopted a little girl. In later years they took in a brother and sister and helped raise them, but they had no children of their own.

In 1933 tragedy struck. Martinez was in Sanderson trying to chase down a cow on the streets and his horse fell, severely injuring his leg. He was never able to cowboy after that. It was the depth of the Depression and times were hard anyway, but losing his livelihood was difficult.

Terrell County came to the rescue. In those days, people suffering a hard time were often given a monthly stipend by the county, an early form of welfare when there was not state or federal program in operation. That, and what odd jobs he and Juana could do helped tide them over during the difficult times.

Luis Martinez passed away in 1959 and his wife in 1962. They lived a life that truly testified "La vida es mas importante que el oro." They didn't have much in the way of earthly goods, but they did have a treasure trove of golden memories of a time when Terrell County was a very interesting place to live.