

## **The Quinceañera, the Commission, and a Rescue in the Night The Story of Inez Gonzales**

*Told by Gabriel Duran, Design Engineer with the International Boundary and Water Commission  
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In the mid 19th century, life in Arizona, Sonora was precarious. It was a time and place of guns, bow and arrows, swords and lances. It was a time and place where death could come as fast as arrows or bullets could fly, where, without water, life would be sucked from a person in agonizing days. A time and place where beasts of burden pulled heavy loads and when they fell and could pull no more they were abandoned on the hot desert floor. A time and place where war raged between the Mexicans, Apaches and, later, the Americans. A time and place where there were no good people or bad people . . . only survival. A time and a place where if you were Apache, your scalp was worth one hundred dollars in Sonora or if you were Mexican, Indian raids meant death to your men and slavery to your women and children. A time and a place where if you were American, you now were subjected to the fears long felt by the Mexican and the Indian.

A world away in a place of paved streets, comfortable beds and wonderful books, a scholarly man named John Russell Bartlett from Rhode Island was appointed by the President of the United States to an important post, Boundary Commissioner. He and his Mexican counterpart, General Pedro Garcia Conde, were to meet in the field and determine the new common border of each country. An important task for both men and the nations they represented, agreements made in the field were to have the same authority as if written into the treaty that ended the war between the two nations. At the time of his appointment, Bartlett lived in New York City where he was half owner of a bookstore. This particular bookstore was important because it imported works from Europe. People of higher learning and status were regular patrons of the store, novelist Edgar Allen Poe, former Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin were some of the notables. Bartlett, a tall slender man with round shoulders and grey eyes, found it increasingly hard to support his wife and four growing children with the income from the store. Since his bookstore placed him in close contact with important people in the Federal Government, he decided it was time for a career change. It is safe to say that at this time in his life John Bartlett, forty five years old, was suffering from what in modern times is known as a mid-life crisis. To be an ambassador to a European country would be a wonderful appointment, the type that would allow him to pursue one of his favorite areas of study, ethnology. As with all career changes, sometimes what is available may not be just what you had in mind. The positions of ambassador were filled; the position of Boundary Commissioner on the Mexican frontier was available only because John Fremont, the famous frontiersman and now Senator from California, did not want it. This appointment would not give Bartlett the opportunity to hob nob with European aristocracy, but it would allow him to pursue his study of ethnology. The native American Indian would be a wonderful subject, and this new job would get him out from behind the desk that he had grown tired of.

At roughly the same time, in the other world, the world of Mexicans, Indians, adobe houses and a meager existence, lived a young girl named Inez Gonzales. She also was preparing for an adventure. She lived in the Mexican frontier town of Santa Cruz located just south of present day Nogales, Arizona, a once thriving community that now was

reduced to ruin because of Indian attacks. These attacks came out of the north and flailed the village. Inez, her aunt Mercedes, her uncle Señor Pacheco, a girlfriend, and a boy named Francisco, set out with a military escort to Magdalena, a town seventy-five miles to the south. There were many reasons for going to Magdalena. There was the Fiesta de San Francisco held every year on October the 4th, where there would be good food, and games, but most importantly, she had reached her fifteenth year, her Quinceañera. A time most important in the life of a young Mexican girl, a milestone, a passing from a girl to a young lady. In the months before her trip she would have prepared by sewing new clothes, skirts of bright yellow with trimming of all the colors of the rainbow, blouses of deep red, and packing her finest shoes, combs and ribbons that she would wear during the fandangos that would be held every night. She, no doubt, would look forward to whirling on a hard mud dance floor with some handsome young man. And surely, just before Inez left, her mother would have made Inez face her, cupped her hand by placing her index finger to her thumb and made a triple sign of the cross over Inez, blessing her and saying these words, "Que Dios te bendiga en el nombre del Padre, Hijo y el Espiritu Santo." (May God Bless you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit).

The Apaches never forgot the terrible acts of cruelty practiced on them by the Mexican army or the bounty placed on their scalps by the State of Sonora or the terrible ambush by a man named Johnson. Johnson invited Indians to a trading session where he concealed a cannon underneath saddles and flour bags. When a large number of Indians were around some goods Johnson, gave an order to fire the cannon which was filled with shot and a chain. Many Apache men, women and children were killed on that terrible day. These acts and many others incised into Apache mentality the active state of war against all peoples who treaded on Apache land. The Apaches had made great advances in guerrilla warfare. Stealth was their greatest weapon. Although relatively few in number, the Apache could orchestrate their attacks over a vast expanse of territory. To gather the strength in numbers for an ambush or attack, a complex system of communication and reconnaissance by the war party would have to be in place. Of course there was the famous smoke signal, but there were others . . . more subtle . . . an overturned stone, a broken branch, a point of light in the night, bent grass patterns and many others unknown to non-Indians. This system was in place and working when Ensign Limon guided his Quinceañera party into the beautiful canyon of Coscopera, Sonora.

The El Piñal Apaches or Piñaleros were familiar with the yearly patterns of the annual fiestas and from high mountain lookouts the desert betrayed Ensign Limon and his party with the tell tale dust plume that the Mexican carreta wheels and horse hoofs beat up. The exact details of the ambush on the Quinceañera's party is not known, however, much is known about Apache strategy. The Piñaleros would have been well prepared to attack. The numbers of the Mexican party would have been known as well as a complete inventory of their goods and weapons, and of course any young children that would bring a good price from traders. The Piñaleros would not commit to an attack if there was not an excellent chance of success or if there was not a substantial opportunity for great plunder. While preparing for an attack an Apache may have oiled his body so that in the event of hand to hand combat his opponent would not be able to hold him. His blanket was made to blend in with the surroundings, enabling him to hide just feet from his

intended victim. Ensign Limon would have also been prepared for Indian attack, knowing the road to Magdalena and likely places for an ambush.

The attack would have begun at the center of the canyon where it would be too far to retreat and too far to dash ahead. A volley of silent arrows would have begun the attack, as the Quinceañera's party became disturbed and frightened, bullets would have filled the air along with hoops and screams from the war party. After the battle, the Mexican men would have been gathered and if the Indians were merciful, they would have quickly ended their lives. However, at times the Indians would hang the men upside down over a fire until their heads exploded in an agonizing death, a no-nonsense warning to keep out of Indian territory. Three soldiers managed to escape, seven were slain, also killed were Inez's uncle Señor Pacheco, and Ensign Limon. Mercedes, Inez's girlfriend, Francisco, and of course Inez were taken captive. The Quinceañera's dream had become a nightmare as she either cried with horror or was in a state of stoic shock, carried off to an Indian stronghold far from her home and away from all that was familiar to her.

Nine months later, the worlds of Inez Gonzales and John Bartlett happen to come together. The business of the Commission brought it to the Gila Wilderness, to an abandoned Mexican settlement called Santa Rita del Cobre, close to present day Silver City, New Mexico. The Commission consisted of scientists, botanists, surveyors, wagons of supplies and, of course, a military escort. This powerful new force into hostile Apache land would be challenged by the fierce Mangas Coloradas (Red Sleeves). Mangas was a tall man with a muscular body, a huge head, bright darting eyes, and great intelligence. Mangas, with his Mexican wife, had three beautiful daughters. He arranged marriages of these daughters with chiefs of other Indian tribes, giving him great influence with these other tribes. On this occasion, he used this influence to gather a large force to possibly attack and plunder the Americans and share the spoils, or at least drive these invaders from his territory. As with all events that attract a large crowd, New Mexican traders had also come, hoping to profit from the great concentration of people.

John Cremony, a reporter from the Boston Herald, was hired by the Commission to act as an interpreter. Fluent in Spanish and having fought in the Mexican war, he was familiar with the West; time would prove him of great service to the Commission. Cremony notices a strange phenomenon, growing numbers of Indians in and around the Commission's camp, and ponders the reason for the sudden inflow. In the cool forest of the Gila, on June 27, 1851, Cremony notices a new fire in an area that the Commission instructed the Indians not be in. Cremony and a companion carefully made their way to the fire where they found themselves observing a gathering of Indians and traders taking supper. Tending the cooking fire and serving the others is a beautiful young girl. She is unquestionably not Indian. Dressed in a frayed under-blouse and animal skins, she was made to serve the others with a stream of kicks and blows keeping her in submission. When she comes close to the cooking fire, from behind bushes and in a low voice Cremony asks who these Indians were. She becomes startled, the Indians are only a few yards away and if she is caught talking to strangers her punishment would be severe. She rushes off to continue her work. Cremony waits for her return and presses the question again. This time Inez places her finger over her lips, an indication to keep their voices low, and explains that she is a captive and has just been sold to the Traders and will be taken to Santa Fe. Cremony knew that this type of trade in human beings was prohibited by the treaty that ended the war between Mexico and the United States. Cremony leaves

Inez and reports his findings to Bartlett. Bartlett quickly dispatches soldiers to capture everyone engaged in this illegal trade. In typical Indian fashion, the Indians manage to flee before the soldiers arrive, Inez is freed and the traders are captured.

The traders were led by Peter Blacklaws, who was accompanied by Pedro Archeveque and Jose Faustin Valdez. The men were working out of Sante Fe and apparently had seen Inez on a previous trading session and returned to purchase her. These types of traders normally sold weapons and ammunition to the Indians, fueling the conflict between the cultures by providing the means to carry out war and encouraging the capture of slaves. The freedom of a young girl meant nothing to them and more than likely she would have been sold into prostitution in Santa Fe. Bartlett describes Inez as “quite young, artless, and interesting in appearance, prepossessing in manners, and by her deportment gave evidence that she had been carefully brought up.” After questioning the traders, who gave very conflicting accounts of their business and their possession of the young Inez, they were set free. Bartlett felt that he did not have the authority to punish them, however other members of the Commission made it known that the traders were in danger if they decided to postpone their departure.

Inez tells the Commissioner that during her captivity, no improper freedom was taken with her except her clothes were stolen and she was forced to do hard labor. She also reports that during her captivity she was in the company of twelve other female captives and many other male captives. Inez was protected within the Piñalero tribe by an old squaw who, with her sharp tongue was able to deflect the harshest treatment. She never again sees any of her companions from the terrible day of the ambush. Bartlett dispatches word to Commissioner Conde who visits with Bartlett and interviews the young girl. Conde, who, like Inez, is from the State of Sonora, discovers that he is familiar with Inez’s step father, Señor Ortiz, and recommends that she remain with the United States Commission and suggests that Bartlett repatriate the young girl and return her to her family. Bartlett, being a very proper man decides that this course of action is correct, never mind that the territory is filled with hostile Indians and never mind that no one in the Commission knows where Santa Cruz is, except in a general way. Months earlier in El Paso, Bartlett received word that his youngest daughter Leila has died. His sorrow is great and he writes “Spent a sleepless and painful night. My thoughts dwelt constantly on my distant home and family - on the loved ones I had left behind, and the deep affliction which the loss of my angel child would cause to all.” Perhaps Bartlett feels obligated to help this one young suffering girl. In the meantime, Inez is showered with gifts from members of the Commission and spends her time sewing new clothes and reading the few Spanish books the Commission possesses. For the next two months, she is given the protection of the Commission in accordance with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

After the rescue of Inez and after another stressful incident between the Americans and the Apaches, relations turn sour. The Apaches have begun to antagonize the Americans by chasing off their livestock. The Indians feel betrayed by the Americans, and if they once considered the Americans friends, no longer . . . they are enemies. Even though the Apaches have run off much of the livestock, the Commissioner is determined to inform the Mexican Commission that the survey of the boundary is ready to begin on the Rio Gila. By this time the Mexican Commission is on the Rio San Pedro close to Santa Cruz. Bartlett decides that he will combine a trip to inform the Mexican Commission of his

proposed plans and deliver Inez to her family. Taking ten days of provisions, the Commissioner moves forward with his plans. The Americans meet up with their Mexican counterparts to discover that the Mexican Commission has also had its problems with the Apaches. The Indians have run off much of their livestock as well. The trip to Santa Cruz takes twenty days longer than anticipated, the Commission becomes lost in the hot desert and tempers are to the point where some members of the Commission are ready to duel, accusing each other of being liars and drunkards, aggravated by the lack of provisions. The Commission is forced to eat purslane (a wild edible plant) and water for a number of days. When their situation is bleakest, fate would have that the Commission would come across a Mexican hunting party. To the surprise of all, one member of the party is none other than Inez's stepfather, Señor Ortiz. In fact, many of the members of the hunting party are related to Inez or know her. The hunting party rushes to where Inez is and witness something that has never known to have happened . . . the return of a female captive! Great joy is displayed by the hunting party and especially Señor Ortiz at seeing Inez. Inez was given up for dead or forever lost. The hard-bitten men of the hunting party who have experienced many years of war with the Apaches and witnessed many atrocities, as well as those of the Commission, many of whom had experienced the savagery of war felt an unusual sensation . . . tears rolling down their sunburned tough cheeks. All take turns greeting Inez and welcoming her back. When the hunting party learns of the dire situation of the Commission with regard to the lack of food, a large portion of beef is provided to them.

Three days later on September 23, 1851 the Commission, with the aid of Señor Ortiz and one of Inez's uncles, were looking over the beautiful valley of Santa Cruz. The valley is covered with rich grass resembling a park in great contrast to the dry hot desert the Commission crossed to arrive there. Bartlett sends forward John Cremony to inform Inez's mother that the young lady will be in her arms in five hours. Within two miles of Santa Cruz, the Commission is greeted by a large and joyous crowd coming out to greet Inez. The pueblo has dressed up in their most festive costumes for such a great occasion. Leading the way and ahead of the whole crowd is Inez's mother. John Cremony lowers Inez from her horse and she runs into the arms of her pining mother. Bartlett describes the scene with great eloquence;

"Words cannot express the joy manifested on this happy occasion. Their screams were painful to hear. The mother could scarcely believe what she saw; and after every embrace and gush of tears, she withdrew her arms to gaze on the face of her child. I have witnessed many scenes on the stage, of the meeting of friends after a long separation, and have read highly-wrought narratives of similar interview, but none of them approached in pathos the spontaneous burst of feelings exhibited by the mother and daughter on this occasion. "Thanks to the Almighty!" rose above all other sounds, while they remained in each other's arms, for the deliverance from captivity, and the restoration of the beloved daughter to her home and friends. Although a joyful scene, it was a painfully affecting one to the spectators, not one of whom, could restrain his tears. After several minutes of silence, the fond parent embraced me, and the other gentlemen of the party, in a ceremony which was followed by her uncle, and the others, who had by this time joined us. We then remounted our animals and proceeded towards the town in silence; and it was long before either party could compose themselves sufficiently to speak. As we journeyed on, we met other villagers coming out to meet us, and among them two little

boys from eight to twelve years of age. They were the brothers of Inez; and when they saw their sister, they sprung upon the saddle with her, clasping their little arms around her, and like their mother, bursting into tears. Releasing their embrace, Inez pointed to us, when the little fellows ran up to our horses and eagerly grasped our hands, trotting along by our sides, while the tears rolled down their cheeks. A little further, we were met by another lad about twelve years of age. He too, embraced the returning captive, and like the others, burst into tears. But those tears were excited by feelings very different from those awakened in the other boys, the brothers of Inez. They were tears of despair - of long cherished hope checked in the bud; - of disappointment - of pain of misery! This poor boy was the child of the woman who was made a captive by the Apaches, at the same time as Inez. She and Inez had left their homes together, one year ago this very day, for the fair of Magdalena, where their party was when attacked by the Apaches, and all but three killed or taken prisoners. Of the three who were made captives, no news had ever been heard; and the poor girl now returning, was the first intelligence that either was in existence. The little orphan wrung his hands with despair as he raised his eyes first to the companion of his mother, and then to us, thinking perhaps that we might have regained his parent, as well as her. I was much affected when Inez told me who this lad was, and resolved that I would make an effort for her restoration too, as soon as I could communicate the particulars to the government, as she is the person who was bought by the New Mexican traders, and taken to Santa Fe, a short time before the purchase of Inez.

As we drew near the town, numbers of the inhabitants came out to meet us, and welcome back the restored captive. When about half a mile distant, Inez wished to dismount and walk thence to the church that she might first offer up her prayers for her deliverance from captivity, before going to her home. Accordingly we all dismounted and accompanied her to the door of the church; and there she was met by many more of her friends, when they all passed forward and knelt down before the altar. We left them engaged in prayer, and waited outside the church until their devotions were concluded. They then passed out, and escorted Inez, her parents, brothers and sisters to their home.”

The story has a bittersweet ending with the disappointment of the young boy and the joyous return of Inez. There was one unconfirmed report of Inez’s girlfriend who traveled with Inez on the day of the ambush, escaping from the Apaches in the mid fifties with an Indian son. Of course the story of Inez goes on and the last we hear of Inez is that she becomes the wife of the Alcalde (Mayor) of Santa Cruz and does not lack for the wants of the world.

Illustrations: Inez, the former Apache captive, was a respectable wife and mother in her late twenties when J. Ross Browne made the likeness of her. (From *Adventures in the Apache Country*)

#### Acknowledgments:

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Sketch of doña Inez (Browne, *Adventures in the Apache Country*)