

On September 24, 1915, two women, Epigmenia Trevino Bazan, 65, and her daughter Antonia Bazan Longoria, 38, were widowed when their husbands were shot and killed under suspicious circumstances. The men were Jesus Bazan Villarreal, 67, and his son-in-law, Antonio L. Longoria, 48. They were peaceful, respectable, well-known land owners and ranchers whose ownership of their family's lands can be documented and traced to the original Spanish land grants. Antonio had been postmaster at San Ramon ranch 1901-1906 and in 1908, appointed a deputy sheriff of Hidalgo County on January 30, 1899, and had been granted two-year teaching certificates for Hidalgo County public schools in 1898 and in 1902. In 1899 he was also commissioned as a school trustee of the Havana School District (in the La Joya area).

It was clearly known by the family and the people of the surrounding ranches of the community in the area that is now known as Puerto Rico, Texas in northern Hidalgo County, as well as by law enforcement agents, that Texas Rangers stationed on a nearby ranch were involved in the killings. Local law enforcement agents never investigated, explained or reported the murders. There is no official record of the murders. Neither are there death certificates in existence. No witnesses ever came forth at the time of the murders. The Texas Rangers did not allow family members to recover the bodies for burial. Several days later a family friend and neighbor buried the decomposing bodies where they had been killed with the help of ranch workers from the Sam Lane Ranch where the Texas Rangers were stationed.

Given the attitude and animosity that was directed at Mexican Texans during this hostile and dangerous period of the Rio Grande Valley, it is understandable that two very strong, but nevertheless vulnerable, women chose to undertake a code of silence regarding the fate of their husbands. Whether this code of silence was borne out of sorrow, or self-imposed to protect themselves and their children from harm, or as a means of continuing with their lives as all women of every generation and culture have done, or a combination of all three possibilities, is indeterminate. Epigmenia and Antonia did what they had to do to survive, not only for themselves but especially for their children .

Antonia, in particular, was in a highly precarious situation. Both her husband and her father were dead, and her brothers' lives were also in peril simply because they were related to Jesus and Antonio. Her youngest brother was in his teens and the others already had young families of their own to care for and protect. Antonia's six children ranged in age from one to seventeen. If Antonio and Jesus, well-known, law-abiding, respectable landowners, were murdered by Texas Rangers without any retribution from other local law enforcement officers, how could the rest of the family be safe?

The code of silence remained intact for outsiders, and if Antonia or anyone else in the family or the community knew the true motive for the killings, they chose to take that knowledge with them to their graves. Unfortunately the silence on the part of the family and the community gave credence and perpetuity to the myth that the Rangers were "above the law". Under the circumstances of the times, anyone who would dare to confront the Rangers and accuse them of murder would be placing his or her own life in peril. It was eminently known that "the Rangers, out of tradition, history and the emotions of the times, 'shot first and investigated afterward.'"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fehrenbach, T.R. *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1968, 1985

