

4-1-1961

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### Recommended Citation

Powers, Nellie Brown. "A Ride from Geronimo, The Apache." *New Mexico Historical Review* 36, 2 (1961).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol36/iss2/2>

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# NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW

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VOL. XXXVI

APRIL, 1961

No. 2

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## A RIDE FROM GERONIMO, THE APACHE

*By* NELLIE BROWN POWERS

NATURE'S skilled Hand never placed among the wild beauties of the far West, a lovelier spot than the little nook called the Double Spring Ranch, located in southwestern New Mexico, where my family were living in 1885. The home ranch land lay in a small basin, which was carpeted with green luxuriant grasses and studded with the most beautiful of wild flowers. Rock-ribbed mountains and towering peaks, like an irregular broken wall, shut in this lovely valley as though it were an Eden which should have been guarded forever from the foot of man.

Nearby were the Mogollón Range of mountains, and about three miles away the Gila River flowed, rushing as fast as a horse could trot, through an immense canyon, the walls of which were so high that when viewing the river from the top rim, it looked as though I could step across it.

There were two log cabins and a stockade corral on the ranch. Fred and Darius, my two older brothers, lived in the smaller of the two cabins, down near the corral. I, a young lady of eighteen years, lived with my parents, Henry and Sally Ann Brown, in the more pretentious large log cabin, which consisted of two bedrooms and a large living, cooking, and eating room.

This large room had a large open fireplace and when the evenings were cool it was a delight to pile the piñon knots into the fire and hear them crackle. There was also a piano in this room. The piano had been shipped from the east, and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad had brought it to Magdalena. It had been hauled across the plains of San

Augustine to the ranch. I loved to play the piano and the boys were good singers. After Mother and I were through for the day with the household duties of cooking, she would pick up her knitting and with a warm fire blazing on the hearth my brothers would sing while I played the piano. *Come Back to Erin*, *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny* and *Sweet Violets* were always favorites with the boys.

During the daytime Fred, Darius and father were busy with usual ranch duties. Timber was plentiful and there were numerous silver aspens and tall pines. They had built a fine stockade corral and were busy with fence building and cattle raising.

At the side of the large cabin, a cascade of water came leaping down from a large spring, throwing its crystal spray in the sunlight, until the air seemed filled with a shower of diamonds. Below the cabin, the running water met another little stream which came from a smaller spring. The two streams became a sparkling purling brook which in its onward flow filled the air with the rhythm of lapping waters. The brook, in its downward flight, became a creek which flowed a mile below us into a stupendous canyon. The two springs gave inspiration for the name of the ranch, the Double Spring.

In this year of 1885, we were about one hundred and thirty miles from a railroad, eighty miles from the nearest post-office, and fifteen miles distant from our nearest neighbors, who lived on the N-Bar Ranch, yet no thought of fear or danger ever entered my mind.

Many a day I rode on my little mustang pony and followed trails up and down from the Gila River, in places where the pony, because of the steepness of the terrain, would cross his front feet. At other times I would walk off with my faithful dog, Bringer, and with my small pearl-handled Smith and Wesson six-shooter, I would practice hitting a mark.

With the mountains, the clearest of atmospheres, the brightest of skies, and the fairest of landscapes, this place was ideal for Sunday worship. Bringer seemed to know when it was Sunday and he would start on ahead of us as we went to God's Church, the great out-of-doors, under His blue sky to

a place near the Gila River. Father would read from the Bible and there would be prayers. The Lord was Our Shepherd.

One morning, very early, I heard a horseman ride by our cabin very fast. He stopped at the little cabin below us where Fred and Darius slept. Soon after we had heard the sound of hoof beats, my brother Fred knocked urgently on our cabin door. I heard father quickly answer the knock and as Fred came in the door he said, "Get up quick, the Apaches are at the N-Bar ranch, only fifteen miles away, coming this way, and we must get out of here!"

We got up in a hurry, but our faces were white and our hands trembled as we dressed. We looked around the ranch for means of escape, but the harness for the two horses father drove with the buckboard was away at the Gila ranch and no one dared leave to go after it. The next move was to cut off the rooster's head, for Chanticleer could make no sweet music to our ears on such a morning.

It was then suggested that we all go up to the old fort, located on a high hill close by. We would build it up as best we could, take our ammunition and provisions and stay there. We set out as soon as possible for the old fort with as agile footsteps as the red-skins could have made.

We stayed at the old fort two days, keeping at all times a sharp look around. At the end of the two days, two cowboys driving a herd of cattle put in an appearance. Fred met them and told them of the horseman's story. The cowboys thought that we had listened to an unfounded rumor. They said that the Apaches were not off the reservation.

We believed the cowboys' story and went back to the cabins. The boys were soon busy chopping down trees and building fences, never stopping to think how far the ring of a woodsman's ax could be heard.

At the end of another three days Fred saddled up and packing another horse, he set out for Kingston to get the mail. One day, and the early part of another, slipped by when all at once our little valley was full of horsemen, about thirty in number. Their panting horses showed how hard they had ridden.

Fred had met the horsemen after he had traveled part way to Kingston for the mail. They told him they were glad to see that he was alive, and that they were on their way to see if the Browns were still alive, for Geronimo and his *braves* were on the warpath.

Fred's eyes streamed with tears of joy that we were alive and safe. His lips told us of the deeds of murder, blood-shed, and pillage that Geronimo and his painted demons had committed. Though greatly perturbed, Fred had thought to bring back the harness for the two horses which father drove with the buckboard.

We were almost the last settlers who had not left the country for places of safety in the towns. By this time the country was full of Indians, and there had been much speculation as to whether we at the Double Spring Ranch were among the missing ones.

With an old Indian fighter, Mr. Judge Moore, at their head, these horsemen had determined to come after us. Uncle Sam, also, had his troops scattered around, and, no doubt, if those beautiful cavalry horses could have stood the climate, Geronimo and his Indians would have been soon rounded up and captured. The U. S. Cavalry horses could not follow a trail day after day like the native pony, and they soon hobbled and numbers of them died, and I think some of the soldiers lost their lives.

"A squadron of cavalry riding slow  
Crosses the plains in search of the foe,  
Which rides ever ahead.  
The red man's trail may be plain to the eye,  
And hunters may chase as the crow doth fly—  
They will ever be led,  
For the red man rides with lightning speed.  
No rest for rider, no rest for steed—  
Till the hidden lair is won.  
The soldier in chase may tire or fall,  
Worn by the race, or struck by a ball,  
Leaving his work undone."—Anonymous

We soon had our preparations made to leave the Double

Spring. The doors and windows of the cabins were boarded up and nailed shut. An inscription, "*Look Out for Indians*" was nailed on the door, so that if any lone cowboy or prospector came that way he would be warned.

According to orders, the company was to be divided. Part of the horsemen were to go ahead, and part were to follow. Father and mother, riding in the buckboard, and I on my pony were to be in the middle of the two groups of horsemen. *No one was to shoot unless they saw an Indian.*

I turned for one last look at the beautiful peaceful little valley, in whose bosom we had started our home. I whistled for Bringer, who for some unaccountable reason could not be induced to leave the cabin door. Afterwards, I often wondered if the coyote that used to come out in the open and howl so much, knew what became of him. You would have thought there was a pack of fifty coyotes when you heard that one howl.

Our first stop after leaving the Double Spring Ranch was Indian Springs, five miles from the ranch, where we saw moccasin tracks. This place was probably the nearest they had come to us on the ranch. We went on through canyons and over hills and around rocks with but one thought in our minds, and that was to find a place of safety. We rode all day long under the turquoise sky and we saw no one. Once we ran into a heard of antelope on a mesa, but they were anxious to put space between us, and their nimble feet took them off in a hurry.

Just before sunset, we espied a little cabin off the main road, to our left. We did not intend to stop here, but the leaders of our little band decided to investigate the premises and see if there were any signs of Indian work. The signs were instantly noticeable. The owner of the little mountain home lay dead on his own woodpile. All that was left of any worth was his own gun leaning up against a large leafy pine some forty yards from the cabin. This was mute evidence that the stealthy sneak had come between the man and his only defense.

This man had been the owner of a fine time-piece, a large clock. The clock had been torn apart and most thoroughly

dissected. The clock had so intrigued the red skin that the man's gun went unnoticed or forgotten. Later we heard of an Apache who wore a long string of clock wheels for ear-rings.

It was determined that the dead man's name was Papanauh. The men dug a grave and buried the body. I wish I could forget the horror and anguish of that sad funeral. Though the Almighty seemed to breathe with us in our prayers and fears, we were shocked and terror-stricken by the murderous death.

We would not, dare not, stay there so pushed on up one slope and down another until we had crossed the Continental Divide. Soon after, we drew rein at the Adobe Ranch to rest, as best we could, through the night. The Adobe Ranch was a deserted shambles and had been torn all to pieces.

The moon came up and the night seemed almost as bright as the day. An old newspaper was handed to me, and I found I could read common print quite readily. The horses munched their feed and in the silvery gleam of moonlight we could see the landscape for miles around us. The scenery was richly colored, picturesque, and magnificent. Soon we saw a fire appear on one of the high hills and then another quite a distance away. The old Indian fighter told us these were Indian signal fires, set by the Indians as a means of communication between marauding bands. The wonder of that anxious night lives vividly in my memory, as I was most alert.

Day dawned and we saddled up and took the trail which led through Corduroy Canyon. It was thought that if any danger was to be faced, it would be in this Canyon. It was said that possibly Indians were awaiting us here. It was a likely place for an ambush, so the directions were given to ride fast. If any shots came our way, our safety would lie in the speed of a fast ride. A sense of urgency seemed to hover over us.

The clatter of the horses hooves on the solid rock of the canyon floor and the noise created by the old bake-kettle, which had broken loose in the back of the buckboard, and was rolling back and forth, back and forth, created a terrific din. While the kettle continued to roll back and forth in the back of the buckboard, and the buckboard was proceeding at full speed ahead, with father holding the reins, a shot rang out!

Immediately following the shot, the command, "To the Hills, To the Hills for your lives!" was shouted. The mustangs in the rear of the group scaled the walls of the canyon up over steep rocks where it would seem a man could scarcely climb, if on foot. The riders held their guns in their hands ready to shoot the instant an Indian was sighted. A saddle girth broke, then the pony bucked and off went his rider, saddle and all, in a heap. The bronc with head up charged away.

I leaned over and patted my pony's neck and he replied with a low neigh. I reached in my saddle pocket for the little six-shooter. My hand did not tremble now as I cocked it, for I thought, "I'm in for it, I'll fight, but I'll die game—like an American girl."

This all happened in less time than it takes to tell it, and no Indian appeared on the scene. One of our party who had ridden very fast and was far ahead, now came riding back in a rush, to tell us that his gun was discharged by accident. We began to breathe more freely.

After a hard chase, the men captured the unruly pony and gathering the procession together again, we proceeded all day without further interruption.

Away ahead of us, we saw the little mining town of Fairview appear in the distance. The people were waiting for us with that open-hearted hospitality which exists in a new country.

(Dear (?) old long-gone-Geronimo, I have always been thankful that my scalp never came to rest as an ornament for your belt. I have heard that red was your favorite color, and my hair was a lively curly red.)

A nearness of five miles to the Apaches was a plenty, and though I have since heard that Geronimo had a change of heart, I would not care to play the game of running from the Apaches, again.

I will never forget that just as the sun went down on May 28, 1885, I slid from my saddle into my brother's arms with such a sense of weariness and complete exhaustion that I fainted away. Even so, my brother Darius said, "Nell was the grittiest girl in all New Mexico Territory during the Indian raid of 1885."



*A Tribute to Geronimo*

"The grandest old pagan this continent has produced was Geronimo, the Apache, who has at last gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds, where he may expect a lot of trouble. In all the annals of the human race there is no finer picture of a brute. If there is anything in the theory of the transmigration of souls, Geronimo must have descended from a Bengal Tiger, although that seems hardly fair to the tiger.

There is nothing admirable from a civilized standpoint in the life of this man, but as an exemplification of the powers of a human being at his worst, he is an interesting study. He played the game to the limit without restrictions and, judged from his own standards of ethics, was a success, as the bleached bones of thousands of his victims testify. There need be no mock heroics over his death. He was a bad man, a worse than useless man. A man who could be spared and who ought to have been spared about eighty years ago."

*Philadelphia Enquirer*

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The story, "*A Ride from Geronimo, the Apache*," was written in February 1909, by my mother, Nellie Brown Powers. Mother was of Scotch-Irish-English descent and, after reading this *Tribute*, she was moved to put into words her own story, which is, to quote mother, "*As truly and correctly written as I could dig it up from the recesses of my memory.*"

The old Indian fighter, Mr. Judge Moore, was the oldest brother of Carrie Nation.

Isabel Powers Crutchett

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[A point of view of bygone days. Would that the Redman had written too. F.D.R.]