

“El Chivero”— Merejildo Grijalva

Rita Rush

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The NICKNAME given Grijalva was a misnomer, for his record as a military guide, scout and interpreter reflect a most remarkable career. Only in his early years did he tend sheep, but the name "El Chivero" remained with him all through his life and thus he was called by Apache and white man alike. Born about 1840 in Bacauchi, Sonora, of Opata parents, he spent his first ten years working with his father's herds.¹ In 1850, raiding Chiricahua Apache under the leadership of Miguel Narbona, captured the young lad Merejildo and took him to their camp in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona.²

Grijalva lived among the Apache for some eight or ten years, during which time he worked as a servant, carrying wood and water or working in the rancherias. Because captives were not highly esteemed, many were treated harshly or killed. Grijalva though, was fortunate enough to gain the friendship of the young Cochise and thus obtained a measure of protection.³ During his captivity he became well assimilated to the Apache way of life, learning their language, fighting other boys in self defense, and taking part in raids.

Sometime in 1859, he escaped from his captors. Two legends have grown up explaining why he fled. It is said that he learned of the death of five of his brothers at the hands of the Apache,⁴ or that he had fallen in love with an Apache girl. After she became his bride, irresponsible warriors abducted and killed her.⁵ He made his way to Fort Thorn on the Rio Grande, where he was employed by Dr. Steck, agent for the Apache near the Gila and Rio Grande rivers.⁶ Steck at this time had made great strides with some of the eastern Apache; arranging for overland stages to cross through Apache country without molestation, and even had some of the Apache farming near the Gila river.

Before long he was employed as a government guide and he devoted much of his energy to helping the Army track down hostile Apache. His knowledge of the Athapascan language and of the Apache ways was a great aid to the military. Newspaper accounts are plentiful which relate of his early participation in attacks on Apache rancherias. Grijalva worked out of Forts West, Bowie, Wallen and Grant. In June 1871, he was introduced to General George Crook and in the following months he and his brother, Francisco, who had also been an Apache captive, acted as guides during the Crook campaigns. After this period, during 1874, Merejildo went to San Carlos where John Clum had taken the position as Indian agent. From the agency, he and Clum went to Washington taking a group of Apache Indians for a *raree* show, with the idea of creat-

¹ Charles D. Poston, "An Historical Veteran," (Florence) *Arizona Enterprise*, Feb. 7, 1891.

² *Charles D. Poston*, "The History of Mara- jildo and Rosa," (*Tucson*) *Arizona Weekly Star*, Oct. 7, 1880.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ (*Tucson*) *Arizona Weekly Star*, Sept. 30, 1880.

⁵ James M. Barney, "Meri jildo Grijalva Noted Scout of the Apache Wars," *The Sheriff*, (Dec. 1951) p. 57.

⁶ Poston, "The History of Mara jildo and Rosa," *loc. cit.*

ing a better understanding between these people and the whites. On another occasion Clum brought some Apache to Tucson to present a war dance and *The Arizona Citizen* noted that Grijalva: "The Interpreter, was the master of ceremonies and seemed to be in perfect accord with the Indians."⁷ Grijalva remained at San Carlos about five years.

In 1867, he married Rosa Cortez in Tucson. Their first child, a boy, died. In consolation for their loss, they adopted an Apache boy and girl. The daughter, Guadalupe, later married "Nosey," who became a Chiricahua chieftain. Theirs was the first civil marriage of Indians on the White Mountain Reservation.⁸

By 1880, Grijalva had purchased a farm near Pueblo Viejo: at the same time doing some herding in a location he called: "away from the maddening crowd."⁹ For the next several years, Grijalva was restless; apparently missing the excitement and activity connected with scouting. He often found himself in trouble. In January 1880, he was fined for firing his gun and breaking windows with rocks at Solomonville.¹⁰ In October 1882, he drew his pistol and shot up the streets of Safford,¹¹ and in November 1885, it was alleged that he tried to shoot one, Leonidas Sancha, a precinct Constable at San Jose.¹² *The Arizona Weekly Star* may have been right when it earlier stated: "This faithful, fearless scout... should not [have been] ... retired."¹³

In the fall of 1887, it is known that he was at the San Carlos Indian agency again, acting as interpreter. He moved his family there to a permanent home and they were still living there in the following year. On occasion he acted as a court interpreter for he knew English, Spanish and Athapascan languages. He had always been vitally interested in the growth of the Territory and had worked hard for statehood. To aid others who were also interested, he often drove Mexican citizens to Solomonville polls in a hack.¹⁴ In August 1893 because of his capabilities he was appointed Chief of Scouts at San Carlos. During January 1900, while Chief of Indian Scouts at Fort Grant, he went back to look over his ranch and town property near Solomonville. And within a few years had moved back to the ranch where he died sometime during 1916, at the age of 75. His long years of service to the U. S. Government and his unusual ability to lead troops in pursuit of renegade Apaches have marked Merejildo Grijalva as one of the outstanding guides and scouts in the Southwest.

⁷ (*Tucson*) *The Arizona Citizen*, *May 27*, 1876.

⁸ (Kingman) *Mohave County Miner*, Aug. 5, 1893.

⁹ Poston, "An Historical Veteran," *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ *Records of the Justice Court*, Pima County (No. 9) 1879-82, p. 81 (Typescript on file at the Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society, Tucson).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.317.

¹² *The Clifton Clarion*, *Nov. 4*, 1885.

¹³ (*Tucson*) *Arizona Weekly Star*, Sept. 30, 1880.

¹⁴ (*Solomonville*) *Graham County Bulletin*, Dec. 4, 1891.

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