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Houston Press Columnist Sigman Byrd, a Mid-Century Chronicler of Houston People and Places Long Gone

Tag: Texcoco Inn – on Preston Ave

Texcoco's Lady in White Is A Phantom, Not a Waitress

THE STROLLER

Texcoco's Lady in White Is A Phantom, Not a Waitress

By Sigman Byrd

"I do not agree all the way with the lady on Glaser Place who says there are no brujas," said Don Pedro Aralza, the legless proprietor of the Texcoco Inn, on Vinegar Hill. "Certainly there are such things as fantasmas. This I know, because my own cafe is haunted."

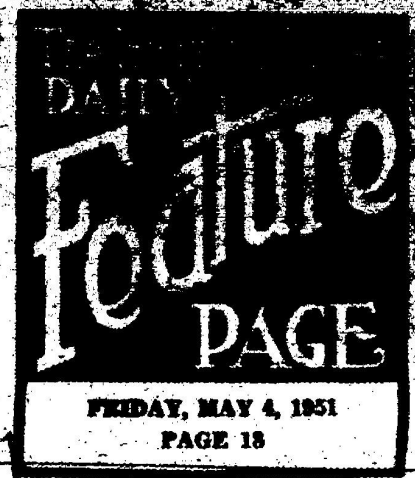
We were sitting in the little barroom of the Texcoco, which occupies a small building separated from the main house. The Inn proper has five dining rooms and fills the big old-fashioned house that stands where Preston Ave. climbs the hill to the corner of Cushman Pl. Don Pedro sat in his wheelchair before the cash register. The pretty waitress, Concepcion Villa, was serving cerveza to a pair of truckers, and Don Pedro's wife, Dona Elena, who knew the late Pancho Villa, was in the kitchen of the big house, grinding chiles in an ancient black molcajete with a stone tejolote.

"You mean," I said in astonishment, "the Texcoco Inn is really haunted?"

Stop the Music

"Seriousmente," said Don Pedro. "If you do not believe, you can ask my wife. That is why we moved away. That house was our home for 19 years. But in 1934 we moved out and now it is just a cafe. I remember the first time something strange happened, many years ago. I had a new juke box in the room where a young boy slept who was working for me.

"In the night I heard a terrific crash, and the boy came run-



ring out in terror. Something had picked up the machine and dropped it to the floor, smashing it to pieces. The boy left me, and after that I began to hear the inside doorknobs turning in the night, and footsteps. But there was nobody there.

Through the rear screened door of the barroom I could see the entrance to the house, and it looked completely innocent. It is a fine old house with green shutters, leaded-glass doorlights, and a wide hallway handsomely ornamented with gingerbread and scrollwork. "But did you ever actually SEE anything?" I asked.

"No," he admitted, "but I once had a dishwasher who saw a woman in white with no face walk down the hall and into the kitchen and then vanish like smoke."

Ghost Pranks

"Where is the dishwasher now?" I asked.

Don Pedro shrugged. "Quit? He quit and went back to Mexico. Many waitresses and cooks and dishwashers have quit in past years. There is a girl named Juanita, who now works in the Southern Pacific Depot cafe, who used to work for me. One day she came running from the house, saying the spirits were opening and shutting the doors. She never went back into the house.

"One of the strangest things was when an Italian from Produce Row was eating lunch in that front dining room. In those days I kept the water glasses in a chifferobe in that room. All at once something picked up the chifferobe and dropped it to the floor, throwing glasses all over the room and breaking them. That Italian was a good customer. I hated to lose him."

I was skeptical. Encouraging myself, I went into the main house. The dining rooms were empty, the tables covered with fresh linen. I found Dona Elena in the kitchen grinding chiles and supervising the work of two cocineras.

Night Owls

"Yes, Don Sigismundo," she said, "what Pete tells you is true. The Texcoco is haunted. It is not now so bad as when we lived here, but I remember one night I was standing right here, making carbons on mangro, when the knob in that pantry door began rattling.

"That was before Pete lost his legs. I ran out to the bar and told him to come. He came and looked at the rattling, and then he opened the door. But nobody was there. You see, it is never open but the spirits run to people that the strange things happen. It is only late and night, when everything is quiet.

"Sometimes on the west end, when we stay open until 2 o'clock in the morning, the girls say they hear footsteps in the empty rooms, but we pay no attention. We are used to the fantasmal things."

Everything was pretty quiet then, but I heard no footsteps, no door-knobs rattling, and no apparitions whatever. I thanked Dona Elena and went back to the bar.

"You see," Don Pedro said smiling, "I was right. Did I ever tell you about the haunted house in San Antonio where I lived as a young man?"

Icy Fingers

It was a good story. The house

was on Main Lane where in the West Side. Don Pedro was the only son of a former San Luis Potosi policeman who once could lift 250 pounds over his head with one hand, but who wasted away from tuberculosis in San Antonio and died in 1917.

One day Pedro pried a board off the wall of the house and found an old letter signed JUAN COVARRUBIAS. Juan said he was going away to the Spanish-American War, and was burying his gold under the mesquite tree on the north side of the house.

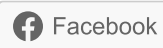
Pete dug a hole nine feet deep, but found nothing. Later, from the landlord, he learned that the tree had not been there at the time of the Spanish-American War. There was an old mesquite stump nearer the house, but before Pete could dig there, the Spaniards began tormenting him, moving his bed about the room at night, clanking his ankles with cold fetters. So he and his mother moved out.

As Don Pedro spoke, the screen door behind the bar opened slowly, then closed. "Look!" I exclaimed, pointing.

Concepcion Villa, the waitress, opening a door, said: "It is only the wind."

But there was no wind blowing.

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May 4, 2019 / Image / Needs Rescanning, Needs Transcribing / Concepcion Villa - waitress at the Texcoco Inn, Cushman Place – "(6th ward)—1st w(est) of Buffalo bayou - begins Preston - ext(end)s 1 bl(oc)k to Artesian Place", Dona Elena - wife of Pedro Ariza, Pedro Ariza – owner of the Texcoco Inn, Texcoco Inn – on Preston Ave / Leave a comment

How Seniorita Rodriguez Met The 'Liberator' of Satallo

Thursday, January 25, 1951

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THE STROLLER**How Senorita Rodriguez Met
The 'Liberator' of Saltillo****By Sigman Byrd**

"Why do you call your cafe the Texcoco Inn?" I asked Pedro Ariza.

Mr. Ariza is 59, and he has no legs. He was sitting in a wheelchair behind the cash register. "This place is named for Texcoco Lake," he said, "where the Aztec emperor Cihuateotl threw the treasure of Montezuma. The Spaniards boiled his feet in oil, trying to make him tell them the place where he threw the treasure in, but he died without telling them. Many years later the government drained the lake, but the treasure was lost in the deep quicksand."

"And this cafe is your treasure, buried in the quicksand of Preston Avenue?"

Mr. Ariza smiled "That is very good. But no. My wife, Elena, and my children are my treasure. No es verdad, mi querida?"

Behind the counter, Elena Rodriguez-Ariza smiled too. She is a sweet-faced woman with neatly coiled long gray hair, the mother of seven, grandmother of 14. "Vaya!" she said, lowering her eyes.

"Would you believe it?" asked Mr. Triza. "She once danced with Pancho Villa."

No Dancer

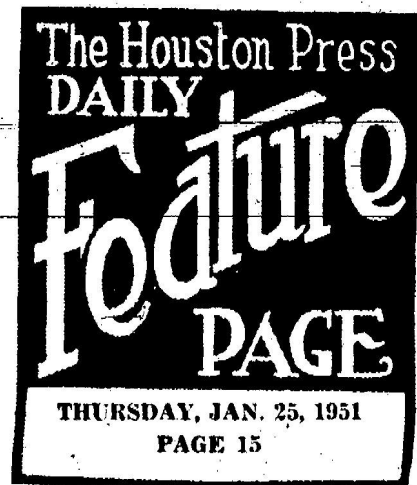
"That is not true," said M. s. Ariza. "I just spoke to him and shook hands with him. General Villa did not dance. You see, I was a lay-teacher at the escuela normal of the Asilo Trinidad Narro Maas, in Saltillo. When the Villistas captured the city they drove the sisters who ran the orphan asylum out of the convent.

"There were five lay-teachers, and the Villistas told us we must give a baile for the general if we wished to live. We were very frightened. We held a gran baile and invited Pancho Villa. I was shaking with fright when I went up to him and said, 'Le felicitamos, General Villa,' but he only said, 'Gracias, senorita,' and did not even ask me to dance."

"Then Pancho Villa was a fool," said Mr. Ariza. "To dance with my Elena would have been the crowning achievement of his mis-spent life. Do you remember, mi querida, how we danced that night in Saltillo?"

"I remember more than that," she said. "I remember the first time I saw you, when we were children, at the Plaza de Toros. I did not like you then. But then you went away to the United States of the North, and the next time I saw you was at the pasear in the Plaza Mayor.

"You know how it is in Mexico, Don Sigismundo; every evening the girls walk around the plaza in one direction, and the boys walk in the other direction, and they make songs to each other with the eyes. When I saw Pedro I said to my little friend, 'Who is that handsome man dressed like a gringo?' My friend said, 'Oh, that is Pepe Ariza, who went to San Antonio, Tejas, and got rich working in a fine cafe.' So the next time around the plaza I smiled at him . . .



~~Oh, yes. I remember how we danced that night."~~

A Rico

"I was not really rich," Mr. Ariza explained. "But I could have been rich. In 1917 I worked for a German named Borge, who owned the Bismark Cafe, next door to the Opera House in Alamo Plaza. One day Mr. Borge sent me to his house to get a fur coat out of a trunk.

"When I took the coat out I saw that the bottom of the trunk was full of money. I tell you, I was scared. I locked the trunk and ran all the way back to the Bismark."

"Did you think about helping yourself to some of the money?"

"No. There are two temptations that I have never known. One is to steal, and the other is to divorce my wife and marry a young woman, two things that are very bad according to our holy faith. Sometimes, though, I wish I could dance again." He looked down at the stumps of his legs and smiled.

"You aren't bitter about your legs, though?"

"Oh, no. I had them for 50 years, until diabetes ruined them, and the doctors had to take them off. Fifty years is a long time to dance. In my heart I have offered up my legs to heaven. A very poor thing to offer, but maybe I will receive some little grace in return."

Ghost Story

"Since Don Sigismundo is a reporter," suggested Mrs. Ariza, "maybe he would like to hear the story of the periodista from the City of Mexico who found the murdered woman in the house with the roses."

"Well," said Mr. Ariza, "this reporter, his sister and a man friend were driving on a road not far from the City of Mexico when they saw a house on a hill surrounded by many beautiful roses in bloom. The reporter's sister asked her brother to stop and let her pick some roses.

"She climbed the hill and knocked on the door, but no one answered. So she picked an armload of roses, then knocked on the door again. The door came open, and lying on the floor was the body of a beautiful woman with a knife in her breast.

The girl dropped the roses and ran to the car, screaming. Her brother went up to the house, knelt beside the woman, got blood on his trousers and saw that she was dead. Then he got into the car and drove to a village for the police.

"The police chief laughed. He went back to the house with the reporter, but this time the house was empty. The dead woman was gone, and there was no more blood on the floor—only the roses the reporter's sister had dropped in the dust. But the reporter never got the bloodstains out of his trousers.

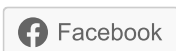
"You see, señor," the police chief explained, "the woman was murdered there 50 years ago. What you saw was only a ghost."

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