

La Escuelita: Antonio's Legacy

By Norma L. Rodriguez

Antonio Longoria (1867-1915), my grandfather, was a rancher and farmer in Hidalgo County, Texas. Through the years he took on the additional roles of schoolteacher, postmaster, deputy sheriff and school board member. He took an active interest in education and politics to better serve the needs and improve the rights of the disenfranchised.



In 1896, 1898, 1900 and 1902 Antonio was certified to teach the primary grades in Hidalgo County. For a schoolhouse to teach his children and those of the ranch community, he used a storeroom adjacent to the homestead that he had built for his wife, Antonia. Both buildings were constructed by Antonio from *sillar* (mixture of lime and clay).

For over a century the little schoolhouse has been referred to as *la escuelita* by family members. According to Antonio's daughter Adela (1900-1986), when people asked Antonio if he was going to continue teaching, he answered, "Voy a

dar clases aquí hasta que venga alguien que verdaderamente sepa lo que esta haciendo.” (I am going to continue teaching here until someone comes along who really knows what he or she is doing.)

In 2003 Richard Martínez, Antonio’s grandson, restored the homestead and schoolhouse. While visiting the homestead, I am drawn to *la escuelita*. As I cross the threshold, I imagine I hear children’s voices. In my mind’s eye, I see the schoolchildren in *la escuelita*. They are seated around a long wooden table as Antonio teaches the three R’s. The younger children recite the alphabet. The older read from their readers, solve arithmetic problems, write spelling words or practice penmanship on slates. He works patiently with each pupil. What an idyllic place this must have been in the early 1900’s.

Tragically, in 1915 this pastoral lifestyle came to an end when Antonio and his father-in-law, Jesús Bazán (1847- 1915) were murdered on the Bazán Ranch by Texas Rangers in an atrocious act of violence. With much fortitude and faith, Antonia and her mother, Epigmenia, and other family members gave the children the love and support to overcome the struggles they faced without a loving father and grandfather. Despite the great loss in their lives, and harsh economic times, the children forged ahead and eventually became highly regarded citizens who gave back to their communities in myriad ways. They encouraged the next generation to embrace education, as have succeeding generations, thus fulfilling Antonio’s legacy.

This literary *ofrenda* is dedicated to Richard Martínez, a good steward of the land and its historic structures, who today maintains the restored homestead, where his mother was born, and *la escuelita* on his ranch in memory of our ancestors.