

Inside	
• Health .....	2-5
• Classified .....	9-13

# TRI-VALLEY Dispatch

Supplement to the Casa Grande Dispatch, Coolidge Examiner, Eloy Enterprise, Florence Reminder and Blade-Tribune and San Tan Valley Sent Casa Grande, Ariz. TRI-VALLEY DISPATCH Wednesday and Thursday, March 21 and 22, 2018 — 1 PinalCent



Texas Rangers approach the border village of Porvenir in the upcoming documentary film "Porvenir, Texas."

Courtesy of Cine33 Pictures

## Tragic tale in Texas

Florence woman's song included in film about 100-year-old massacre

By MARK COWLING  
Staff Writer

**I**n 1918, a company of Texas Rangers descended on the remote border village of Porvenir and executed 15 innocent and unarmed Mexican-American men and boys ranging in age from 16 to 64. Widows and children fled for their lives, and the Rangers and others burned the village to the ground.

Since then, the state has done much to keep the shameful story hidden in the past; some today insist it never happened.

But on Jan. 28 of this year — 100 years to the day from when historians say the massacre occurred — descendants of survivors, friends and supporters held a memorial at the Texas Capitol. Among those in attendance was Brandi Tobar of Florence, who sang an original song, "Village Called Porvenir."

The director of an upcoming documentary on the massacre, tentatively titled "Porvenir, Texas," said in a phone interview he'd like to use the song in the film. It's been discussed as the music accompanying the closing credits.

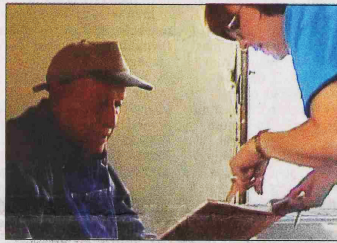
"I'm certain it's going to be in the film. It may even be in a better spot than just the credits," director Andrew Shapter said. "For a great-granddaughter of one of the victims of Porvenir to write a song, and then for it to be that good, was exceptional."

Tobar said she co-wrote the song with her aunt Arlinda Valencia, who was the organizer of the centennial observance in Austin, Texas. Tobar has written songs before, but only for herself, family and friends, and none has been published. She and her grandmother, Elida Tobar of Globe, spoke with PinalCentral at Poston Butte High School, where Brandi is a senior.

Elida heard only vague mentions of the massacre from her family. She didn't learn the full details until she visited the Texas Big Bend area to research genealogy and family history.

Elida was also privileged to meet her great-uncle, Juan Bonilla Flores, who was spared in the massacre because of his age, which was 12 or 13 at the time. Film of Flores being interviewed about the massacre, before his death in 2007, is also expected to be used in the movie, which is being prepared for a 2019 release.

Juan's father — Elida's great-grandfather — died in the massacre. Elida's grandfather, who was away buying supplies in another town, returned home to discover the atrocity.



Courtesy of Elida Tobar

Juan B. Flores, who was spared in the Porvenir, Texas, massacre of 1918, is seen in this photo from several years ago looking at a book about the massacre, during his first meeting with his great-niece Elida Tobar. Juan B. Flores died in 2007.

"He was in the lineup with all the other men, but one of them stood up and said, 'No, this is ... he's too young,' and pushed him out of the group."

— Elida Tobar  
Speaking of her great-uncle, who was spared death



Mark Cowling/PinalCentral

Brandi Tobar of Florence is pictured with her grandmother Elida Tobar.



See a video of Brandi Tobar of Florence singing her original song, "Village Called Porvenir," at <https://vimeo.com/255455026/21aa8c172f> online at [www.PinalCentral.com](http://www.PinalCentral.com).

### Enduring mystery

There's no single accepted theory of what prompted a company of Rangers to commit an act of such savagery, Elida said.

One possible explanation is that Pancho Villa was going on raids in Texas, and at least one such invasion at an area ranch turned deadly. The Rangers may have thought they were exacting revenge, Elida said.

It also could have been merely envy fueled by racism.

"It's a real remote area. But this little village, they were very prosperous," Elida said. "They knew how to irrigate, they had beautiful farmlands, and I'm thinking the ranchers and the people around there saw how prosperous they were getting, and were jealous."

"And they had lots of livestock. They were eyeing all of this. Some say it was because they were jealous of their prosperity."

Perhaps in an effort to cover up their wickedness, the Rangers, area ranchers and maybe even the U.S. Cavalry returned and burned the village. Elida's grandfather took Juan and other family members to Colorado City, Texas.

"The authorities' first reaction was to keep it under wraps. But a state representative, Jose T. Canales, pushed for justice. "He had his life threatened all the time, because it involved the Texas Rangers, and they didn't want any bad image," Elida said.

Some Rangers eventually went on trial, but their penalty mostly amounted to surrendering their badges.

"... They got fired, and that was it," Elida said. Brandi added that one was hired back. State officials kept the court records sealed for decades. "All the files were closed on it," Elida said.

But the Texas Rangers also became more ethical and accountable as a result. "They had to revamp the Texas Rangers. Because of this event, the Texas Rangers became what they are today," Elida said.