



Courtesy of Cine33 Pictures

Porvenir

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Juan B. Flores

By the time Elida met her great-uncle, Juan Bonilla Flores, he was living in Odessa, Texas. He was 95, and Elida was afraid he would be too old and infirm to be of much help. Instead, she found a man surprisingly strong and alert for his age. She asked him if the tragic story was true.

“He said, ‘Oh yes, it’s true.’ And he told us all about it.” He was only a boy of 12 or 13 at the time, when a neighbor insisted he be spared.

“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.” He watched as his relatives and friends were slain. Later, he was called upon to identify the bodies.

Decades later — with no trace of the village surviving and the state having buried the shameful memory — even Flores’ own family members thought the story was far-fetched.

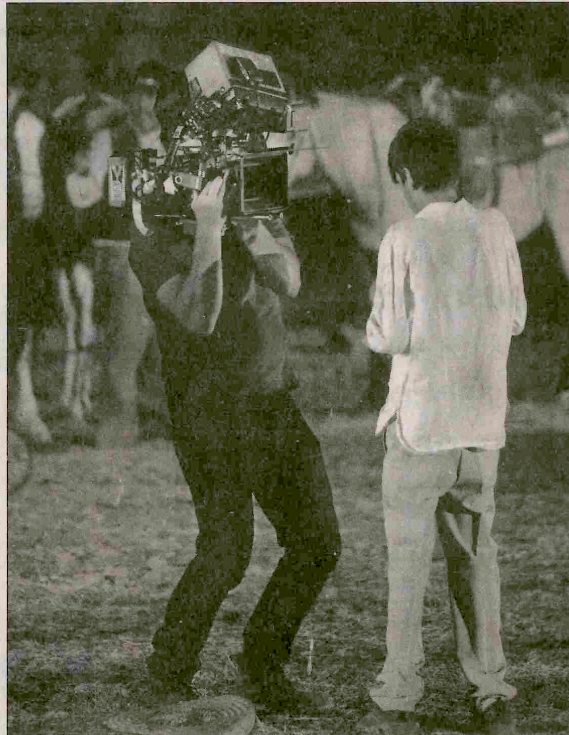
“I asked him, ‘Does your family know about this?’” Elida recalled. “And he said no.” She said he explained, “Well, I tried to tell them, but they didn’t believe me.” Elida said she then approached his family members and told them, “You’d better listen to him, because it’s true.”

The El Paso Times reported, “While it is one of the most well-documented atrocities of this period in Texas history, details of the massacre have been shrouded in mystery for decades. Many federal government documents about the killing were classified and the state refused to publish transcripts of the investigation until the late 1970s.”

At the centennial event in January, the state of Texas offered an apology, of sorts. There were state Senate proclamations and state House resolutions vowing Texans would never forget.

Preserving a difficult memory

But the once-verdant village of Porvenir is gone; it’s uninhabited, remote and desolate to this



Courtesy of Cine33 Pictures

Top, Porvenir residents are pictured in a scene from the upcoming documentary film “Porvenir, Texas.” Above, a cameraman moves for a close-up shot of an actor for the documentary film planned for a 2019 release. | Learn more about the upcoming documentary film at porvenirtexas.com

day, Elida said. “It’s basically back to dust.”

Shapter, director of the documentary, said the crew couldn’t film at the exact village site because it’s so far from running water, electricity and other amenities essential to a movie set.

“There are still people in Presidio (County, Texas) who say, ‘This didn’t happen,’” Elida said. Supporters of a historical marker are opposed by those who question that it even occurred, she said.

Shapter said he’s trying to make a film that’s not just a dramatization but that also investigates, shares new facts and sheds new light on the tragedy.

“Our story is how a group of people came together to change history. And it takes a village to change history. And it takes a lot to change history, especially history that’s been written for 100 years. I know there is an ambition on the part of the

descendants to have (the village site) memorialized as best as possible. ... They’ve got a lot of energy and they’re not going to stop.

“If it can become some sort of historical site, I think that would be a victory for them,” Shapter continued. “They haven’t achieved it yet, and they have a lot of work to do. But we hope the film itself will help them get their history, and their version of history, told.”

Shapter, a native Texan, is a big fan of the Texas Rangers baseball team.

“I’m not trying to disparage my state history. I think it would bode well for any Texan to want history as fact to be known by as many people as possible.

“... We’re not trying to disparage the Rangers; that’s not what this is about. This is about giving these families a chance to get their history on the record.”