

FLORESVILLE'S PHANTOM VAQUERA

Texas's first *vaquera* (cowgirl) was Doña María del Carmen Calvillo, born in San Antonio de Béxar, New Spain, in 1765, grandchild of a Canary Island family sent by the Spanish king to settle and civilize Texas. She was raised on a ranch of the Mission San Juan Capistrano, a day's ride south of the mission near present-day Floresville.

It is said that she could ride like a man, her long raven hair flowing behind her in the wind as she rode her white horse. And she could swing a lasso, too.

After her father was murdered, she became head of the family and head of the ranch. She married, but when her husband declared himself opposed to Spanish rule, she denounced him, even though she secretly held the same political view! Doña María petitioned for title to her own property—and a few extra *varas* of land to boot. Later, when the political winds changed, she sheltered families from the Alamo battle area and hosted returning veterans of San Jacinto.

It is also said, that, to this very day, a ghost may be sometimes seen, a woman riding a white horse among the hills along the San Antonio River, her long raven hair flowing behind her in the wind.

Handbook of Texas; ITC vertical files; ITC "The Other Cowboys" files.
© Institute of Texan Cultures, 1997