

1962

## "Life Among the Apaches" New Mexico Magazine, March 1962

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# LIFE AMONG THE APACHES

BY AMY PASSMORE HURT



MISS HENDRINA HOSPERS, 81-YEAR-OLD RESIDENT OF ALBUQUERQUE, WHO HAS SPENT HALF HER LIFE AS MISSIONARY TO THE CHIRICAHUA AND JICARILLA APACHES. THE PICTURE AT HER RIGHT ON THE WALL IS THAT OF THE APACHE CHIEF, GERONIMO, WHOM SHE KNEW WELL AT FORT SILL, OKLAHOMA, WHERE HE AND HIS BAND WERE INTERNED.

• So fearful of the once-fierce and marauding Chiricahua Apaches were the white Southwesterners back in 1914, that when the government freed the Apaches imprisoned at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the train bearing them to their New Mexico home at Mescalero had to be heavily guarded against threatened attack by the whites.

Aboard the train with the Apaches were two white women, both missionaries. One was Miss Hendrina Hospers, now a sprightly woman of 81 who has spent half her life among them, first at Fort Sill, Okla., then at Mescalero and, later, at Dulce. Now retired and a resident of Albuquerque, Miss Hospers went to Fort

Sill in 1905, during her early twenties, to head the only mission on the vast reservation where the Apaches, headed by the fierce old renegade, Geronimo, were interned.

"It was my first job," she said, "and my relatives back in Iowa feared for my safety. But I never felt the least bit of fear and I never carried a weapon of any sort—nor did I need to. I was sent to the Fort by the Reformed Church of America and I had as my assistants two teachers, two matrons and a laundress. In addition to the mission there was a small orphanage which had its own staff.

"The nearest clergyman," she continued, "was at



AFTER YEARS OF HORSEBACK TRAVEL, MISS HOSPERS BOUGHT A NEW MODEL T. THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN AT DULCE.

a mission for the Comanches, some miles away. He visited us when he could, otherwise I did everything from teaching to preaching. I even conducted funeral services when necessary, but I performed no weddings or baptisms, of course. I spent much time in the field, going from house to house. One cold, rainy evening when I was returning to the mission from one of the Apache villages, I saw Geronimo coming toward me on the dirt road. Contrary to popular opinion, he never rode a 'dashing stallion.' Instead, he got about in a rickety old buggy which was pulled by a skinny horse. Waving me to a stop, he asked me to buy a supply of bows and arrows he had made and which he had with him.

"I told him," Miss Hospers went on, "that I didn't have any money but that if he would return to the mission with me, I'd take his stock. He said he was in too much of a hurry and he whipped up his horse and drove on to Lawton, about two miles from the Fort. While in town he disposed of his bows and arrows and bought 'fire-water' with the money. On the way home, he fell from his buggy and lay on the wet ground all night. He died a short time later from pneumonia."

According to Miss Hospers, Geronimo was just as rebellious as he was reputed to be. She pointed to the wall of her living room where hang two pictures of the old warrior and one of his sister. His photographs show him to be a narrow-eyed, firm-lipped old man with a strong and stubborn chin.

Unlike him, many of the Apaches impounded at Fort Sill had not warred against the United States government. Many were government scouts and others joined the military forces at the Fort. Miss Hospers said that she had always considered it most unjust

that those Apaches who were friendly were confined along with the renegades.

"For instance," she said, "among those imprisoned was a wonderful old man named Chatto. An Army scout, he knew of Geronimo's hideout and was instrumental in his capture. Geronimo surrendered to General Nelson A. Miles in 1886."

After Geronimo's band had surrendered, they were sent to Florida, but the climate did not agree with them and they died by the dozen. So, in 1894, they were returned West, to the reservation at Fort Sill. In their new home the Apaches settled in individual villages—about 14 in all. Miss Hospers recalls the names of several: Geronimo's Village, Noche's Village, Chief Loco's Village.

"The Indians farmed," she said, "and raised exceptionally fine cattle. They lived in two- and three-roomed houses built for them by the government. When they were freed, they were given the choice of remaining on the reservation or going to Mescalero. About 200 men and their families left. They were permitted to take with them their stock and household goods.

"The train," she continued, "was composed of sleeping cars, box cars and cattle cars. In addition to myself and a Miss Prince, there was a Rev. Mr. Sluyter in the party, a government nurse, military men and an officer whose job it was to see that the Apaches got no liquor en route. Although we were alerted to a possible attack on the train, nothing more exciting happened than a fight between two porters!"

She committed one grave faux pax. She had been given the task of seating the Indians in the railway cars. In an endeavor to make the Apaches happy during their trip, she attempted to seat them in family



MISS HOSPERS HOLDS ONE OF HER MANY NAMESAKES AT DULCE SOME 25 YEARS AGO. WITH HER IS BABY'S MOTHER

groups. Unfortunately, she was ignorant of the old Indian taboo that a man must not look his mother-in-law in the face. As a result, some commotion resulted!

Schools were let out all along the train's route, through Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle and in eastern New Mexico, so that the school children might witness this historic event. For miles before the train reached a town and after it had passed, the tracks were lined with people.

"The funniest incident happened at the station in Tucumcari, where we stopped briefly. I was sitting by the car window with an Indian child on my lap. Outside, many people had gathered on the platform. Suddenly a man pointed to me and shouted, 'There! That's one of Geronimo's captive white women and that's their child!'"

She laughed merrily at the remembrance.

The train trip ended at Tularosa, where hundreds of wagons provided by the Mescalero Apaches awaited to transport the newcomers to the reservation.

"After the wagons were loaded and on their way, the road between Tularosa and Mescalero became a writhing mass of vehicles," Miss Hospers recalled. She added that the Indians were permitted to take their livestock but not their dogs. She was amused to learn upon arrival at Mescalero that one woman had managed to smuggle her pet in by hiding it under her blanket.

"After the rather barren hills that surrounded Fort Sill and the long ride over the monotonous, flat Texas Panhandle, it was most refreshing to enter the Mescalero Apache Reservation, for it contains some of the most beautiful mountain scenery in New Mexico," Miss Hospers said.

"And the welcome the Chiricahua Apaches receiv-

ed from their Mescalero kinsmen was heart-warming."

President Grant, in 1873, set aside for the Mescalero Apaches and other Indians a reservation in south central New Mexico that lies like a blanket over the backbone of the Sacramento Range. Embracing some 460,000 acres, it is heavily timbered in its higher elevations, with grazing lands that cover nearly 200,000 acres, while 4,000 acres lie in valleys suitable for farming. Deer and wild turkey are abundant.

"We whites who accompanied the Indians from Fort Sill and the Indians themselves spent the summer in tents," said Miss Hospers. "By fall permanent homes had been built by the government for the newcomers and I bade them good-bye to go to Dulce, where I felt I was needed more. There I assisted the Rev. J. Denton Simms and his wife establish the only mission on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation. Mr. Simms is now the assistant pastor of the Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque.

"Marked fatalism dominated the Jicarilla Apaches, for they were in dire poverty, half-starved, and dying from tuberculosis faster than their babies were born. They believed God wanted them to die, and it was our job to convince them otherwise."

Her face broke into a smile. "With financial aid from the government and with the help and understanding of Superintendent Chester E. Faris, together with the inspiration furnished them by Mr. Simms, the picture gradually changed. When I retired, 31 years later, they were a more prosperous, healthier and happier people."

As this small, dedicated woman sat and talked quietly in her living room with its many mementos of Apache life, and with her hands folded idly in her lap, it was obvious how (Continued on Page 35)

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badly she had hated leaving her beloved Apaches. That they returned her affection and devotion is attested to by the many letters and notes she receives from them. They still refer to her as "Apache et-san-y," Apache woman.

She did not return to the scene of her early missionary work until June 3, 1961, at the invitation of the Commanding General of the U. S. Army Artillery and Missile Base at Fort Sill, Major General Lewis S. Griffing. The occasion was the dedication of the historic old Apache cemeteries at the Fort, where 311 Apache men, women and children died between 1894 and 1914. The dedication represented years of endeavor on the part of the Army, the government and individual Apaches to identify and mark each grave with a white headstone. The ceremony took place near Geronimo's grave.

"I had a wonderful reunion with many of the Indians I had known, especially my Sunday School pupils and the children at the orphanage. They say Indians are undemonstrative, but they kissed and hugged me, many with tears in their eyes. Among them was Chatto's widow, now almost a hundred years old and nearly blind. The only landmark I recognized at the Fort was the old guard house, now a museum."

The most amusing incident connected with her 41 years of missionary work that Miss Hospers recalls has to do with an Indian who wanted very badly to become an elder in the Christian church. When informed that he'd have to give up one of his two wives, both of whom had borne him children, he shook his head regretfully. He loved them both, he said. He could give up neither.

Miss Hosper's blue eyes twinkled. "You know," she said, "I always rather admired the old fellow for sticking to them both!"—Amy Passmore Hurt.