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ARIZONA APACHES AS "GUESTS" IN FLORIDA

by **OMEGA G. EAST AND ALBERT C. MANUCY**

"Stop stealing our Apaches!" protested the lady from the West, when she learned that Geronimo's deeds are part of the story told in the old Spanish fort at St. Augustine.

But Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, a Spanish-built defense of the 1600's, has a good claim on some Apaches - as well as Seminoles, Cherokees, Kiowas, Comanches, and several other once-powerful Indian nations.

Drafted labor from the Timucua, Guale, and Apalache Indians (tribes that have been extinct some 200 years) helped to build the Spanish Castillo. The Seminole Osceola, famed as champion of his people's rights, was among the Indian prisoners of the U. S. Army here in 1837. During the 1870's, numbers of Kiowas, Comanches, Caddoes and other rebellious red men of the Oklahoma Territory were disciplined by expatriation in this Florida stronghold. And here in 1886-87 some 500 Apaches arrived for what a news reporter of the day called a "summer residence by the sea."¹ Strangely enough, however, the Apaches objected to leaving their desert wastes for the eastern vacationland. Apparently no one had told them that St. Augustine was a fashionable spa - the Riviera of America.²

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- * This paper is a resume of Mr. East's "Apache Prisoners in Fort Marion, 1886-1887" (Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, January 1951), a 109-page illustrated typescript in National Park Service files.
1. *Florida Times-Union*, April 15, 1886; see also *id.*, April 14, 1886. This paper is hereafter cited as "*Times-Union*."
 2. Sources pertaining to the removal of the Apaches from the West to Fort Marion include: W. S. Nye, *Carbine and Lance* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1943); E. C. and T. H. Whitney, *History and Capture of Geronimo and the Apache Indians* (Times-Union print, 1887); Anton Mazzanovich, *Trailing Geronimo* (Hollywood, Cal., 1931); Herbert Welsh, *Apache Prisoners in Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Florida* (Office of the Indian Rights Association, Philadelphia, 1887); Dewitt Webb, "Paper read before the Duchess County Medical Society of New York, September 1887" (St. Augustine Historical Society typescript); J. D. Edwards, "Things I Remember about St. Augustine" (Castillo de San Marcos typescript); *Times-Union*, April 14, 1886; see also *id.*, April 15, Aug. 31, Sept. 9, 18, 20, 26, 1886.

In those days, Westerners were glad to see the East "steal" their Indians. For centuries the warlike savages of the Dragoon and Chiricahua Mountains had raided the peaceful valley farms, well earning the name of Apache or "enemy people."³ Finally, with the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 and the influx of white settlers, the Apache raids in the Southwest became an Army problem, and by 1872 most of the renegade Indians were corralled on Arizona reservations.⁴

Had they stayed there, this story would never have been written. But in 1885, Chief Mangus took French leave, and for several months the Army had its hands full, chasing down the runaways. It was well into 1886 before Gen. George Crook had most of them rounded up and headed back for the reservation. Then, much of his work was undone, as a medicine man named Geronimo talked a band of warriors into slipping away with Chief Natchez and himself.⁵

Crook was succeeded by Gen. Nelson A. Miles, a 47-year-old Civil War veteran who, a decade later, was to become Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Army. As Miles dogged Geronimo's band, the whole country watched his progress. "We should be strongly in favor of court-martialing and shooting the officer or soldier who captures Geronimo," wrote one editor. "The man to be rewarded is the man who brings in his corpse."⁶

Trapping wily Geronimo was more easily done with an editorial pen than with a cavalryman's saber, but Gen. Miles constantly dogged the renegades until they were forced to terms at Skeleton Canyon on September 4, 1886. A month later, Geronimo, Natchez, Mangus, and some fourteen other ringleaders were on the way to Fort Pickens at Pensacola,

3. Thelma C. Martin, Jr., "Oklahoma Indian Tribes - Brief Historical Sketches" (Castillo de San Marcos mimeograph), see Kiowa-Apache.

4. Whitney, 12; Mazzanovich, 276.

5. Whitney, 11.

6. *Times-Union*, April 30, 1886.

Florida, while the women and children captured with them were routed to Fort Marion, as the U. S. Army called the Castillo, on the opposite coast of Florida.⁷

This was only part of the punishment meted out to the Chiricahua and Warm Spring Apaches, however. Repeated attacks on settlers in Arizona and New Mexico made it imperative to move the Chiricahua and Warm Spring Apaches out as a safety measure. And so it was that in 1886 over 500 Apaches were sent by train from Arizona to St. Augustine, to live at Fort Marion as prisoners of war.

When the first prison train arrived at Jacksonville, so many curious people thronged the station platform that the train guards were forced to leave the Indians and keep order among the whites. The onlookers were quite shocked to see that Indian boys and even some of the bucks were minus those nether garments usually considered indispensable to the male wardrobe. They were also impressed by the dignity of the captured warriors. As one observer put it, "The women carried the baggage while the men carried their dignity."⁸

Lt. Col. L. L. Langdon, the commandant at Fort Marion, estimated that he had room for about 150 prisoners. He was dismayed, to say the least, when 500 Indians put in an appearance.⁹

7. Richard Wheatley, "The Caged Tigers of Santa Rosa," *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, August 1889; Edward S. Ellis, "Geronimo," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 38, 1894, p. 617; Mazzanovich, 261; Letter Adjutant General's Office to Commanding Officer, Fort Barrancas, Fla., March 3, 1936; James D. Richardson, (ed.) *Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1901, 779; *Story of His Life, Taken Down and Edited by S. M. Barrett, Superintendent of Education, Lawton, Oklahoma* (N. Y., 1906), 177-178; George M. Brown, *Ponce de Leon Land and Florida War Record* (The Author, St. Augustine, 1902, 4th ed.); 114; Woodworth Clum, *Apache Agent; the Story of John C. Clum* (1936), 286; Letter, Sam Houser to C. R. Vinten, August 5, 1943; James W. Moffit to Katherine S. Lawson, Oct. 8, 1938; W. A. Pratt to Alberta Johnson, Aug. 30, 1943; Julien C. Yonge to Albert C. Manucky, July 15, 1950 (Castillo de San Marcos); *Daily News-Herald* (Jacksonville, Fla.) Dec. 29, 1887; *Times-Union*, April 15, May 18, 26, Sept. 9, 11, 17, 1886.

8. *Times-Union*, Sept. 20, 1886.

9. Welsh, 26.

Langdon set up housekeeping for his charges on top of the fort, in a tent city which, said a reporter, looked like "an Indian camp lifted from the mountains or plains of Arizona and transplanted intact to the narrow confines of Fort Marion."¹⁰ And indeed, the 130-odd tents, crowded with occupants, were so close together that there was little room even for the cooking fires.

While most of the sightseers who flocked to the old fort looked upon the Indians as curiosities, there were a few who felt real concern. "To corral between two and three hundred vigorous bucks, old and young, in Fort Marion, may be considered in the light of a dangerous experiment," one newspaper commented nervously. "Suppose, with their well known cunning, they take to the woods here and make their way to the camps [of the Seminoles] in the Everglades? What then? Such a thing is not an impossibility."¹¹ "Actually, there were only about a hundred bucks in the fort. But they included names that any Indian fighter of the time knew and respected: Chihuahua, Nana, Chatto, Loco and many others.

Nevertheless, confinement at the fort was not rigid. Women and children went to and fro as they pleased, and parties of men were even permitted to visit the town. According to a newspaper account of the day, the Indians were "the happiest people in our midst, with nothing to do but eat and promenade the streets. They don't look like beings that are greatly abused."¹² Indeed, the townsfolk were the abused ones, as aboriginal tomtoms beat out the rhythms for nocturnal medicine dances. "Through 'all of a stilly night'," complained an insomniac, "their incantation can be heard within the fort where they occasionally find a victim to make medicine over."¹³ The Army, however, provided Dr. Dewitt Webb, a

10. Welsh, 13.

11. *Times-Union*, April 18, 1886.

12. *Id.*, April 9, 1887.

13. Whitney, 14.

medical officer, and his efficient ministrations all but put the medicine men out of business.¹⁴

In the main, the townspeople enjoyed having the Apaches at the fort. St. Augustine's mayor considered them "a great addition to the charms of the place."¹⁵ Hundreds of people came to see them, and many took away lifelong memories of the colorful Apaches.

There was the Indian voice at sunset from the Castillo watchtower. Each evening it sang, first high and strong, then gradually dropping lower and lower until it was a lament of loneliness - a longing to return to the people in Arizona.¹⁶ And there was one old fellow who frequently had the "sulks." At such time he sought the privacy of the tower, there to stay until hunger finally drove him down to join his fellows.¹⁷

St. Augustine ladies pitied the half-clad savages, and sewed some red flannel shirts for the unfortunates. But when the good ladies made their next visit, they noticed that some of the men displayed several shirts hanging outside their trousers, while others wore none at all. It turned out that the Apache was addicted to gambling - and to the victor belong the spoils. The ladies, piqued over the turn of events, made sure that no prisoner ever again "lost his shirt" in a game.¹⁸

Other ladies bent their efforts toward more formal education of the prisoners. Mrs. Horace Caruthers and Misses Mather and Clark had worked with Capt. R. H. Pratt among the Oklahoma Indians at the fort during the 1870's. Their efforts had helped Pratt to envision the plan which grew into Carlisle Indian Training School. Again these good women

14. Webb, 1.

15. *Times-Union*, Sept. 17, 1886.

16. Josephine B. Jacobs, "Indian Prisoners at Fort Marion from 1875 to 1887," (Castillo de San Marcos typescript), 15.

17. James Calvert Smith, Paintings and accompanying titles (St. Augustine Historical Society).

18. Nina L. Duryea, February 1947 (personal statement on file at St. Augustine Historical Society).

volunteered their services, and in the fort classrooms taught the Apaches English, arithmetic, spelling and religion. The Sisters of St. Joseph contracted to help, and taught about sixty boys and girls in school classrooms. Later, more than a hundred youngsters were sent to Carlisle.¹⁹

A dozen children were born at Fort Marion, and the first of them was Geronimo's. His wife christened the child "Marion," after the fort, and a silver tag reading "Marion Geronimo, September 13, 1886," always hung from the babe's wicker cradle.²⁰ Chihuahua's youngest was also born here, and given the appropriate name of "Coquina," since the fort is made of that shellrock.²¹

The Indians made a deep impression on the St. Augustine youngsters, and taught them to use the bow and arrow. One old-timer recalls that he aimed one of his practice shots at the family doorway. "I hit the door," he said. The arrow went right through our house - and did my mother give me a licking."²²

V. D. Capo of St. Augustine still remembers his first hair-raising experience with the Apaches. "My first job," he says, "was with a butcher. The first delivery I had to make was to Fort Marion. By the time I got through the entrance, my hat began to stand up. The Indians gave a whoop and started running toward me with knives in their hands. The knives were to divide the meat. I first thought they intended to divide me."²³

Since the Indians were such a curiosity to city folk from the East, souvenir hunters were on hand to speculate in

19. Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Pratt, the Red Man's Moses* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 206; Brown, 114; Letter, Nina Pratt Hawkins to Herbert E. Kahler, March 5, 1936 (Castillo de San Marcos); Welsh, 3, 12; *Times-Union*, Sept. 9, 17, 18, Oct. 25, 30, Dec. 17, 21, 1886; *id.*, April 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 1887.

20. *Times-Union*, Sept. 19, 1886; Whitney, 11.

21. Webb, 7; Whitney, 11.

22. Jacobs, 9.

23. *St. Augustine Record*, May 8, 1944.

trinkets the prisoners had brought from Arizona. One Charley Schneur, known locally as the "king of the curiosity men," evidently managed to corner the market, garnering practically all of the Apache curiosities. In return, he generously presented each prisoner with a copy of his new "Historical Guide to St. Augustine."²⁴ Eventually, for the protection of the Indians, permission to enter the fort was restricted to clergymen, physicians, and such other persons as might benefit the prisoners.²⁵

Generally speaking, however, while the townspeople thought the Indians were a valuable tourist attraction, many of them pitied the Indians, and felt they should be moved some place where they would have more room. The Indian Rights Association investigated, and strongly recommended the removal. War Department orders for the transfer came in 1887. Mount Vernon Barracks, Ala., a reservation of 2,100 acres, was their new home.

On April 27, 1887, the Apaches left Fort Marion. "Lo! The poor Indians silently picked up their tents and stole away in the dark hours of the night for the shores of Old Alabama," rhapsodized a local newshawk, "and a feeling of relief, for many reasons, is experienced about the old city."²⁶

Two years later the prisoners at Fort Pickens joined the rest at Mount Vernon, and there they remained until 1894, when all were transferred to Fort Sill, Okla. In 1913 most of the Apaches were sent to the Mescalero Reservation in New Mexico, though a few of them preferred to stay in Oklahoma, where they lived quietly near the town of Apache. Geronimo himself died at Fort Sill in 1909.²⁷

24. *Times-Union*, Sept. 26, 1886.

25. Welsh, 15.

26. *Times-Union*, April 27, 1887; see also Alfred J. Hanna and Kathryn A. Hanna, *Florida's Golden Sands* (The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., Indianapolis, 1950), 198.

27. Letter, A.G.O. to Commanding Officer, Fort Barrancas, March 3, 1936; Nye, 298-302.