

The following thumbnail biography is from
NEW MEXICO: A BRIEF MULTI-HISTORY
by Rubén Sáez Márquez.
www.HistoryNoHype.com



MR. SOUTHWEST: Manuel Antonio Chaves
October 18, 1818: **Manuel Antonio Chaves** is born to Julián Chaves
and María Luz García (de Noriega) Chaves at Atrisco, New Mexico.

1827: The Chaves family relocates to the village of Cebolleta (Seboyeta) on the Navajo frontier. Manuel grows up helping the family in small-scale farming and stock raising. He also works at mastering the use of weapons like the knife, rifle, bow and arrows, etc., and especially horsemanship (at which New Mexicans are described as undisputed masters).

1832(?): Julián Chaves dies. The following year María de la Luz marries José Antonio Baca. In time a son, **Román Antonio Baca**, Manuel's half-brother, is born. Manuel and Román become true brothers in every sense of the word.

1835(?): Manuel joins a trading expedition into Navajo country. The Navajos attack the expedition in the area of Canyon de Chelly. Manuel is wounded seven times and the rest of the Cebolletanos are wiped out in the attack. Miraculously, Manuel makes his way back to Cebolleta which is nearly 200 miles away.

1837(?): Manuel goes to visit his grandmother in Atrisco. He hires on as an arriero with a group of German merchants who are going to New Orleans. After a few months in New Orleans Manuel returns to Atrisco.

1839: Chaves enters his prized horse, *Malcreado*, in a contest against a racer owned by Governor Armijo. Malcreado is winning easily when he suddenly drops dead. Rumor has it that Malcreado was poisoned and Manuel resolves to make Armijo pay. But the Governor puts a price on Manuel's head so Chaves flees to Missouri, settling in St. Louis.

1840: Manuel forms a partnership with a young Cuban named Alfonso Fernández in the operation of a fruit store. The enterprise does well until Fernández absconds with all the money. Chaves pursues him to New York and then to Cuba but can't catch up with him so he returns to St. Louis. Manuel is now completely literate in English as well as Spanish.

1841: Governor Armijo sends word to Manuel that he has been "pardoned" and asks him to return to New Mexico to help combat an invasion from Texas. Uncle Mariano Chávez guarantees his safety so Manuel returns to Santa Fe.

June 19, 1841: President Lamar of the slave Republic of Texas sends an armed invading force of 321 men, known as the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition, to New Mexico. The hapless Texans get lost because they don't know the country and lose battles to hostile Indians. They are easily captured by Governor Armijo and his New Mexican militiamen. Manuel serves as secretary and interpreter for the New Mexican forces.

1843(?): Chaves builds a large home in Santa Fe. Manuel is soft-spoken, has chestnut colored hair, fair complexion, grey eyes, is five-foot-seven-inches tall and weighs around 140 pounds.

1844: Manuel Chaves marries **M. Vicenta Labadie** of Tomé. Vicenta's family is descended from the French fur traders who came to N.M. and became Hispanicized citizens of Mexico.

August 18, 1846: The Army of the West enters Santa Fe and takes New Mexico (which also includes Arizona) for the USA. General Kearny proclaims that everyone is now a citizen of the USA and that anyone who fights his army will be executed.

December 1846: Manuel Chaves, a citizen of Mexico, is jailed on a charge of treason against the United States. The matter is taken before a military tribunal. Captain Angney, a lawyer from Missouri, is assigned to defend Manuel. Angney orates that war between the USA and Mexico is still raging, Chaves is still a citizen of Mexico and if he took part in defending his country he should be commended as a patriot, that the United States would be forever disgraced if it executed a man for defending his country in a time of need. Chaves is acquitted and released. He makes a formal oath of allegiance to the United States.

May, 1848: Manuel works at building a livestock business. He forms a partnership with his brother-in-law Lorenzo Labadie. They are involved in the Indian trade as well as commerce to Chihuahua.

1849: Daughter **Perfilia** is born. In time **Amado** and **Irineo** are born.

1851: Manuel begins to take part in military campaigns against hostile Indians. As his reputation grows, more and more American army commanders as well as N.M. citizens seek him out for help against raiders because of his coolness under fire, familiarity with Indian warfare and its tactics, and his knowledge of trails and terrain. He becomes famous in the N.M. of his day because of his exploits.

Spring, 1851: Manuel leads an expedition against the Navajos.

1852: Chaves drives sheep to California.

1854: Manuel and Lorenzo borrow \$6,200 from Miguel Pino in order to start a large-scale ranching operation.

1855: Manuel is commissioned a Captain to lead one of the six companies during the Ute-Jicarilla War. Twenty-one-year-old **Román Baca**, Manuel's half-brother, is a second lieutenant in the same company.

1857: Manuel is *Chief of Scouts* for the Gila Expedition against the Mogollón, Gila, and Coyotero Apaches. With him are Román Baca, Lorenzo Labadie, and Jesús Chaves. (Military troopers under Colonel Loring become so fatigued they start falling asleep in their saddles in an effort to keep up with the New Mexican scouts.)

1858(?): Chaves clashes with **Bishop Lamy** over the boundary that separates his Santa Fe land from that of Guadalupe Chapel. When Manuel fences "his" land, Lamy threatens him and his family with excommunication. Chaves denounces any attempted excommunication on the grounds that it would "*break my wife's heart.*"

The writ of excommunication is scheduled to be read the following Sunday at Guadalupe Chapel. The church is packed with only one bench remaining at the front where Manuel, Román, and a close friend go to sit, all heavily armed with rifles. When the priest [Machebeuf?] mounts the pulpit and pulls out a roll of parchment from his sleeve the three men seated on the bench cock their rifles as if waiting for the reading. The sounds of the weapons being readied to fire are heard clearly by all present. The priest descends from the pulpit and continues the service without any readings.

Summer, 1858: Manuel Chaves is in Mesilla when citizens ask him to lead the rescue mission of E.J. White, his wife and little baby. With Manuel is also the celebrated guide Jesús Armijo when the group hits the trail in pursuit of the raiders and their captives. At dusk the rescuers enter an oasis of a valley where they find the baby lanced through and through by spears. The enemy camp is discovered but Manuel forbids an immediate attack because he knows all captives will be killed at the first sound of battle. After nightfall the rescuers get close enough to pounce on the kidnapers for a sudden attack but despite their desperate efforts Mrs. White is killed instantly upon the sound of gunfire.

1859(?): Manuel moves his family to the **Ojuelos Ranch** on the eastern edge of the Tomé land grant. On one occasion an Apache warrior is thundering out of the yard with little Irineo under his arm. Manuel shoots the warrior dead and Irineo drops to the ground. He is unconscious from the fall but otherwise all right.

1860: Manuel is in a fight against the Apaches at Salada, one of his lambing camps. His son Amado witnesses the battle.

Summer, 1860: Juan Cristóbal Armijo sends word to Manuel at Ojuelos that a war party of some 20 Apaches is headed his way with 200 stolen mules. Something must be done immediately so he rides out alone to meet the war party. At a timbered ridge south of the ranch Manuel confronts the warriors and "by waving to his men to come join him in battle" he bluffs them into thinking he has many men in the forest. The warriors retreat at a gallop, leaving the stolen stock behind.

September, 1860: Manuel holds the rank of Lt.-Col. but actually functions as field commander of an expedition against the Navajos which goes as far west as the Hopi pueblos.

August 8, 1861: Chaves is placed in command of Fort Fauntleroy. A contested horse race between Dr. Kavenuagh's thoroughbred and a Navajo sorrel pony results in almost ending Manuel's military career because of the heavy betting going on.

1861: The Civil War comes to New Mexico. A militia regiment is led by Col. Miguel Pino and Lt.-Col. Manuel Chaves.

March 28, 1862: Manuel leads Chivington's Colorado troops, known as "Pike's Peakers," behind Confederate lines. All Confederate supplies are destroyed, causing the Texan army to hightail it back to Texas since they have no supplies. The Civil War is over in N.M. (though people of the day had no way of knowing another attack would not be launched from Texas).

Manuel receives notice that Navajo raiders have driven off 11,000 of his sheep from his Ojuelos ranch.

1863(?):

Conditions in N.M. are severe because of the destructive fighting during the Civil War. Confederate and Union forces alike have confiscated, pillaged, stolen, or burned whatever they wished. Territorial officials have no money with which to pay soldiers or volunteers. There is open antagonism between Union and Confederate sympathizers. Hostile Indians prey on ranches and small villages. Men want to get home and plant crops to avoid hunger during the winter.

Manuel Antonio Chaves is honorably discharged from military duties. He returns to his ranch to learn that the Navajo have taken virtually all his stock, including 30,000 sheep. [He files a claim against the government; a relief bill is introduced in Congress by 1876 but it isn't approved until after Manuel's death.] He decides to move his operation eastward toward the Pecos River country but before he moves he receives an appeal for help from settlers living by Socorro: more than 100 Navajos are raiding ranches in the vicinity, killing shepherds and taking huge numbers of stock. Matías Contreras, one of the most distinguished residents of the area, is going after the raiding war party because it has made off with his young son. Manuel takes eight men with him, confers with Contreras at his hacienda and with another six men the 14 ride in pursuit immediately after sending a messenger to Fort Craig asking for assistance.

The trail is followed to the foothills of the San Mateo mountains and as the 14 approach *Ojo de la Mónica* (Monica Spring) they see signs that the Navajos are very near. But the war party's rear guard discovers their pursuers and all warriors are signaled to come join the battle. The warriors form a battle line, confident that the small group of *Nakai* can be taken on the first charge.

Manuel Chaves directs his men to take cover among the junipers and the battle is joined by all combatants, Manuel wearing a conspicuous red kerchief around his neck and firing his single-shot Hawkins throughout the afternoon and early evening until only he, Matías Contreras, and Tomás Baca, who is suffering from a serious wound in the leg, remain alive.

At dawn the next morning Manuel finds three bullets left for his Hawkins, which he had fired some eighty times during the fight. He realizes one more charge will be the end. But as sun rays flood the land and junipers the Navajos are not to be found, having abandoned the battlefield. The seriously wounded Tomás Baca is carried on a litter back toward the Río Grande. The rescue detail of Román Baca and soldiers from Ft. Craig are met on the trail.

[Tomás Baca lost his leg but lived for many years in Socorro County. Matías Contreras, who later served in the territorial legislature, found and ransomed his son within a few months. Manuel Chaves, who admired courage, later said the *Ojo de la Mónica* fight was his greatest because the Navajos, though well armed with rifles, had shown tremendous courage in their attacks and had the Hispanics possessed any less, none would have lived to tell about it. Chaves was later to say Ojo de la Mónica was his finest hour because if the warriors had attacked one more time they would have found him with only three bullets left for his single-shot Hawkins.)

1864(?): Román Baca and scores of *Cebolletanos* found the village of San Mateo on the other side of the mountain from Cebolleta.

1865-1875: Manuel's life is relatively free of combat.

1874: Chaves sells his Santa Fe house situated behind the Guadalupe Chapel.

1876: Manuel relocates to San Mateo and builds an hacienda.

1882: Amado Chaves travels to Washington, D.C. on behalf of the claimants of the Cebolleta land grant.

1888: **Charles F. Lummis** visits Manuel in San Mateo. The now elderly New Mexican knight is suffering intensely from his many wounds, his vision is no longer clear, and he weighs less than 100 pounds. But all is borne stoically and he enjoys his extended family living in his hacienda.

While on a journey to Tucson, Archbishop Lamy stops at the Chaves hacienda long enough to bless the chapel. (It would appear that the old dispute over land by the Guadalupe Chapel had been forgotten.)

January, 1889: Manuel Antonio Chaves, *El Leoncito*, dies. He is laid to rest beneath the altar of his chapel. His wife, Vicenta, follows him six years later and is buried beside him.

Perhaps the description by Charles F. Lummis best describes New Mexico's valiant Hispanic knight: "*Manuel Antonio Chaves was a courtly Spanish gentleman, brave as a lion, tender as a woman, spotless of honor, and modest as heroic.*"