

Gwen Wright: Our final story explores the myth and reality surrounding the most feared Native American warrior of all. A 29-year-old Apache returned from a trading expedition to find his mother, wife, and three children murdered by Spanish troops from Mexico. His name was Geronimo, and from that day forward, he set out on a nearly 30-year guerrilla war against soldiers and settlers in the U.S. and Mexico. Some say that he was determined to exact blood revenge for the loss of his family; others say that he was simply defending the rights of his people to live in freedom. One thing is for certain: in the Southwest territories, Geronimo's name struck fear into the hearts of the miners, ranchers, and soldiers flooding into his tribe's ancestral lands. We would never expect him to have many friends among the white settlers. But this woman in Walton, Kentucky, believes that Geronimo might have spent time on her ancestor's ranch in New Mexico, and she thinks she has proof.

Robin: I believe the photograph looks real to me, but I also think it looks real to me perhaps because my mother has told me it's real. I would say that the photograph is a very big mystery in our family, yes.

Gwen: I'm Gwen Wright, and I'm paying Robin a visit. I want to take a look at her photograph and hear the rest of her story.

Robin: Nice to meet you, Gwen.

Gwen: Very nice to meet you.

Robin: Come on in.

Gwen: Oh, this is so intriguing. You can see all the prairie grass in the front and then there in the distance all of these fellows on horseback. And there's an inscription on the back: "Geronimo saluting a crowd of 100,000 people and surrounded by U.S. soldiers at Ranch 101, June 12, 1905."

Gwen: A hundred thousand people? If this caption is at all correct, that was a huge crowd, but I'm only seeing about eight or ten people.

Robin: I know.

Gwen: Well, tell me exactly what you'd like to find out.

Robin: Okay, I would really like to know if the photograph is authentic; if it's dated properly. I'd like to know if that really is Geronimo.

Gwen: What do you have for me to go on? Do you know anything about the family who was there?

Robin: Well, my great-great-grandfather was Lieutenant Governor and Acting Governor of the territory of New Mexico before it became a state.

Gwen: M-hmm. And what was his name?

Robin: His last name was Ritch, r-i-t-c-h.

Gwen: And you know his first name?

Robin: I only know his first initial is "W."

Gwen: Hmm, well, that's something. Do you know where the ranch was located in New Mexico?

Robin: Well, I know it was in the southeast part of the -- of the state.

Gwen: There are so many interesting questions in this story that I'm really eager to find out myself; what could have been going on here? If this photo was a keepsake of the relationship between Robin's great-great-grandfather and Geronimo, it could be a really fascinating find. The first thing I want to do is get in touch with my colleague, Wes Cowan, who's out in California on another History Detectives investigation. He recently sold an authenticated picture of Geronimo from the same time period, so I wonder what he thinks about Robin's picture.

Wes: So, does it look period to you? Tell me what it looks like.

Gwen: It's a sepia-gray color. It's not great resolution. I would say it's three by three inches square.

Wes: Okay, so pretty small.

Gwen: Six guys on horseback who are surrounding this figure who Robin and her family think might be Geronimo.

Wes: Well, I tell you, it sounds like a period photograph of Geronimo that I sold in an auction last year or so. Let me do this. Let me get a digital image of that photograph and fire one off to you, okay?

Gwen: Sounds great. Thanks, Wes. I need to find out more about Geronimo's connection to the southwest and his relationship with white settlers. I invite David Martine, Director of the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center, for a visit. David's ancestors were Apache, and he has an intimate understanding of Geronimo's struggle to safeguard the land of his people.

David Martine: He felt that the land was a part of his life. He may have never thought for a minute that that it was something that could be bartered away. They were very individualistic and determined people, and they -- they could -- could not see the idea of an outside force coming in and telling them that they cannot continue to live where they'd always lived. As any other people would, they -- they resisted that.

Gwen: But what about the specific territory of southeast New Mexico, were Robin's great-great-grandfather, W. Ritch, built his ranch? Was Geronimo ever known to frequent that area after it was settled by ranchers?

David: Geronimo didn't recognize political boundaries. He felt that he was perfectly within his rights to travel and come and go as he pleased. For hundreds of years, they freely travelled from the southwest down into the, um, the mountains of northern Mexico.

Gwen: So Geronimo considered New Mexico to be part of his homeland, and that's where Robin's ancestor had his land. So I'm starting my investigation in Santa Fe. I'm bringing the photo to Eugenia Parry, a photographic historian who has written about and taught photography for the past 30 years. I'm hoping she can tell me if Robin's photograph could be from 1905. Here, I'll show you the photograph. Now, what's your take? When do you think that could have been taken?

Eugenia Parry: Well, this is a gelatin silver print. In terms of the color, which is a soft

gray-brown, it doesn't exclude it at all from around 1900. This is very typical of that period. And also I would say that this was made with a handheld camera and not on a tripod.

Gwen: Mmm-hmm.

Eugenia: It has a distinctive snapshot look to me. A camera like this, which would have been held at the waist and looked down into, this would have produced the kind of image that I see here, where things look a little bit far away, and there's a lot of material in the foreground that doesn't focus well. The Brownie 3 was a very popular camera at the turn of the century among amateur photographers, so that's a good clue that Robin's photograph may be period.

Gwen: Did you get the scan I sent you?

Eugenia: Yes, I did; it's on my computer. Let's take a look. We're hoping to pull a little more detail out of the image to try and identify Geronimo.

Gwen: Can you blow it up?

Eugenia: Well, the bigger it gets, the less you see. It just has the impression of something: a place, a time, a time of day, but nothing specific. This looks like a Native American with some feathers sticking out of his head.

Gwen: There's no real detail on the face, is there? You can't say that this is Geronimo.

Eugenia: I couldn't. As I scan this image, I am not getting any more detail from these figures that would help me identify Geronimo or any of the accompanying men on horseback. In fact, this could really be an image of actors in a Wild West show. I think, to augment our knowledge, we're going to need information from other sources.

Gwen: So at least the photograph seems to be from the right era. Now I need to find out if there was a connection between Geronimo and Robin's great-great-grandfather, W. Ritch. Robin told me he was Lieutenant Governor of the New Mexico territory. If that's true, he lived here at the Palace of the Governors in old Santa Fe. I'll check their library's computer catalog to see if he's mentioned. Here it is, the Ritch family papers. So Robin was right. I've been given special access to an un-cataloged collection of Ritch's papers. These are all original documents from when he was running the territory of New Mexico. Here's a photograph of Ritch taken around 1900. Now I'm putting a face to the name and these documents tell me his first name was William. But I still need to find something that might connect him to Geronimo. Here's something specific about Ritch: a circular from the Executive Office, Territory of New Mexico, May 21, 1880, signed by W.G. Ritch. A circular was basically an early form of a press release. It's a copy of a letter Ritch wrote to the daily New Mexican newspaper. He's defending himself against an accusation of being soft on the Apaches. In defense, he says that he, "as acting Governor, has repeatedly represented the hostile conditions of affairs in the south to military headquarters, and have repeatedly sought for and asked additional protection from the hostiles." The hostiles, of course, being the Apaches. I'm not sure what to make of this. If Ritch was in some way soft on the Apaches, maybe that's what led to Geronimo spending time on his ranch 25 years later. Robin said her mother remembered visiting a ranch in southeast New Mexico. Was that Ranch 101? I'm looking for the answer in records of Ritch's landholdings. This is a copy of the deed for Ritch's ranch land. "Date of sale: June 19, 1894. Name of purchaser: William G. Ritch." But, there's nothing here about Ranch 101. The same is true of this land patent. There's no mention anywhere here of Ritch's land being called Ranch 101. That's a big problem in Robin's story.

Gwen: Back at my hotel I check my correspondence and see that an e-mail has come in from Wes.

"Gwen, here's the photograph of Geronimo I sold. I think things look promising for yours. Re: the 101 Ranch. I'd suggest calling Michael Wallis in Tulsa. He can tell you everything you ever wanted to know about it. Have fun in Oklahoma. Regards, Wes."

Gwen: Well, let me see the photograph. Oh, my! These are very similar, only his is much closer, much better detail. We have exactly the same clothes, the same build, the same horse, the same blaze in the front, and the same headdress. So, this is clearly Geronimo. But what is the event being photographed here? And what's the connection to Oklahoma? I'd better get hold of this Michael Wallis in Tulsa.

Gwen: Oklahoma: here too, Native Americans once roamed free. Then white ranchers settled these plains and filled them with cattle and fences. I've come to the Woolaroc Ranch and Museum in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, to meet Michael Wallis, best-selling author and western historian. It turns out that the 101 Ranch is not at all what I expected. For starters, it was here in Oklahoma, not New Mexico like Robin thought, and it played a role in American history that none of us anticipated.

Michael Wallis: The 101 Ranch is where the west of reality and the west of myth collided. It was a working ranch, it was a diversified farm, and it was an entertainment center founded by George Washington Miller and his trio of lusty sons. The millers knew that by 1880 the western frontier was all but gone -- swallowed up by white settlements. But people all over the country still wanted to believe in the Wild West, so that's what the Miller Brothers gave them. The Millers were the genuine article. They had worked the range, they had driven cattle, they had pulled some shenanigans as well, but they wanted to keep this Wild West -- so-called Wild West alive. They were little boys at heart. So they're having a rodeo in a sense, that they're showing cowboys with all the skills that it takes to be handling these animals. Not only cowboys but cowboys and Indians and even outlaws. They recruited real people, and many of them went on to be big Hollywood stars: Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, Yakima Canutt, and so many more. Well, you see the West of the cowboys.

Gwen: What about the Indians? Could Geronimo have been part of this?

Michael: Oh, indeed. Geronimo was very much a part of it. This photograph shows Geronimo at the 101 Ranch skinning a bison. It was supposed to be his last buffalo killed. In fact, it was his first. The Chiricahua Apache hadn't hunted buffalo since before Geronimo was born. Geronimo was the main attraction of a huge Wild West show held over several days in June, 1905. Tens of thousands of people flocked to the 101 Ranch to see what's known today as "the Buffalo Chase."

Gwen: How could Geronimo, who had been this famous warrior, how could he play into this kind of game about the wonderful Wild West?

Michael: He had no choice. Geronimo was a prisoner of war, and he had been a prisoner of war for some time. After he surrendered in 1886, the U.S. government once again promised Geronimo fair treatment. Instead, he spent the rest of his life as a prisoner of war. They brought him up in chains with soldier guards and had him perform. He was like a dancing bear.

Gwen: It must have been incredibly humiliating to this old man.

Michael: Geronimo shot the buffalo from this moving motorcar wearing a top hat. With everything else taken away from him, including his freedom, the only way Geronimo could support his family was to perform in shows like this one.



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Gwen: Well, let me show you the photograph I'm trying to connect into this. Could this have been that same event? Michael's answer provided the final piece of evidence I needed to complete my investigation. Now it's time to let Robin know what I've discovered. I've planned a little surprise. We've flown her to Oklahoma, and now I'm taking Robin to the location of the 101 Ranch.

Gwen: Robin, I can see from your reaction that you realize this was the 101 Ranch in Oklahoma.

Robin: Uh-huh. I -- and I suppose there's not a 101 Ranch down in New Mexico.

Gwen: Well, your great-great-grandfather did have a ranch down there. We don't know if it even had a name, but it wasn't called the 101.

Robin: Okay.

Gwen: Michael Wallis helped us answer your question.

Flashback to Michael Wallis

Michael: This is definitely the grasslands of the 101 Ranch, and that is Geronimo and I theorize that those soldier guards are getting ready to take Geronimo back to Fort Sill on June 12, 1905.

Gwen: And that's what your photograph shows: his leaving at the end of the event.

Robin: So, basically the soldiers were the -- were the guards for him then?

Gwen: Exactly.

Robin: Oh, okay. Well, thank you so much, Gwen. I appreciate this, although I'm disappointed it wasn't my family's ranch, but --

Gwen: Well, 100,000 people at your family's ranch may have been an event that they weren't quite ready for.

Robin: Exactly. [laughs]

Gwen: Even today, the story of Geronimo's life remains complex and elusive. A victim of colonization, he was also a heroic icon for the continuity and survival of Native American culture.

Robin: From my family's point of view, we always admired Geronimo because he had a -- a great determination to hold his prior way of life, his traditional lifestyle, and we always admire great leadership in that regard.

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