

DID MARGARET GOODMAN SEE GERONIMO IN HER STORE?

By Mike and Susan Mayberry LeSueur

According to family lore, Margaret Ann Taylor Goodman held Geronimo at gunpoint in her St. David store until he either put back the items he had taken or paid for them, depending on which version of the story you hear. But is it true, and where did the story originate?

Geronimo escaped from the San Carlos Reservation the final time on March 17, 1885, the same month that William Goodman died. Margaret didn't open her store until after William died. Geronimo surrendered to General Nelson Miles at Skeleton Canyon on September 4, 1886, and was sent to Florida with the other Chiricahua. If he appeared in Margaret's store, it would have occurred during the 15 months between March 1885 and September 1886.

What was Geronimo doing during those 15 months? When he escaped from San Carlos in the middle of the night with about 35 Chiricahua Apache men, women, and children, he rode hard to the southeast, crossed into Mexico within days, and vanished into the deep canyons of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Sierra Madre. For the next 15 months, they outmaneuvered, outran, and repeatedly embarrassed General Crook's forces. Military records, Apache oral histories, and the detailed campaign logs of Crook and Miles agree on a clear picture: Geronimo stayed almost entirely in the Sierra Madre, making only fast, targeted raids into southeastern Arizona and New Mexico. His group avoided U.S. settlements—especially armed ones, and they never lingered in towns.¹

Could an Apache have ever entered the St. David Store after it opened in 1885? Possibly. Could it have been Geronimo? Not likely. A lone visit by Geronimo to a store 40 miles north of the border and close to Fort Huachuca during Crook's campaign would have: 1. Been wildly out of character and tactically reckless for Geronimo; 2. Been the talk of the Valley. 3. Made military reports and newspapers.

Additionally, nobody in the San Pedro Valley in 1885 would have recognized Geronimo by sight. No photographs of him had yet appeared in newspapers, magazines, wanted posters, or army circulars. Even many of the scouts chasing him had never seen his face.

If Margaret Goodman had a frightening encounter with a Native American, it most likely happened after the Apache Wars were over. By then, such an incident wouldn't have drawn the same public attention.

¹ Paul Andrew Hutton. *The Apache Wars: The Hunt for Geronimo, the Apache Kid, and the Captive Boy Who Started the Longest War in American History*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2016.

So, where did the “Geronimo visited the store” story originate? All the biographical sketches of Margaret’s children fail to mention it.² We found the event briefly mentioned in a family reunion presentation compiled by Max and Pat Perkins. It includes the line: “As a young girl, she (Gertie) helped her mother in the store and post office... On one occasion, she waited on the Indian Chief, Geronimo.”³ Max may have gotten the story directly from his grandmother and passed it on at a Goodman family reunion. He noted that most of the information from his “...Reunion Legacy” paper came from a slideshow presented at a Goodman family reunion, but we could not find a Geronimo reference in any other memories attached to Margaret Goodman.

According to one family historian, Gertie also claimed that Billy the Kid⁴ visited the store—another impossibility. He killed a blacksmith in Bonita in 1877, fled Arizona immediately, never returned, and died in 1881, before William and Margaret moved to Arizona.

² Family of William Nicholas Goodman and Margaret Ann Taylor, a loose-leaf of family group sheets, photos, and biographical sketches of William, Margaret, and their children and children’s spouses, compiled for a Goodman reunion sometime shortly after 1967.

³ <https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/memories/KWNP-5W2>, William Nicholas Goodman and Margaret Ann Taylor Goodman Family Reunion Legacy, page 17, contributed by Ann Town, 25 July 2018.

⁴ <https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/memories/KWZ7-X13>, Ann Gertrude Goodman. Contributed by Laurie Moon 6 July 2021.