



John A. Carranza // "A man who didn't have much faith in Don Pedrito as a healer asked him for a remedy for the malady from which he suffered. The curandero gave him such a simple prescription that the man doubted his power still more. He asked him, 'Are you sure this remedy will cure me?'/Don Pedrito assured him, 'I am as sure that this remedy will cure you as I am that you are wearing borrowed shoes.'/The man was convinced because he *was* wearing borrowed shoes. And all doubt left him when the remedy took effect."

Don Pedro Jaramillo was a Mexican faith healer, or curandero, born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. He moved from his home in Mexico to Texas in 1881, where he settled on the Los Olmos Ranch. Don Pedro, one day, cured an ailment to his nose by burying his face in the mud near a pool of water. That night he was awoken by a voice that bestowed on him the ability to cure from God. Almost immediately he began to heal his closest neighbors before traveling extensively to other parts of Texas.[1]

Over the next three decades, Don Pedro would garner much success and notoriety in South Texas because of his ability to heal the northern Mexican population, as well as the Mexican- and Anglo-American citizens of the United States. At the time that Don Pedro practiced, the political border between the U.S. and Mexico was relatively fluid, and most could travel unencumbered between both nations. Despite the presence of numerous railroad companies throughout the nineteenth century, many did not bring trained physicians from the urban centers where medical schools trained doctors in medicine based on emerging scientific facts. Because he lived during a time in which society and medicine were in flux, Don Pedro's story deserves to be recounted. His particular brand of medicine fostered a community based on faith and ritual, which led to him being acknowledged as a saint among those he served and gave back to.[2]

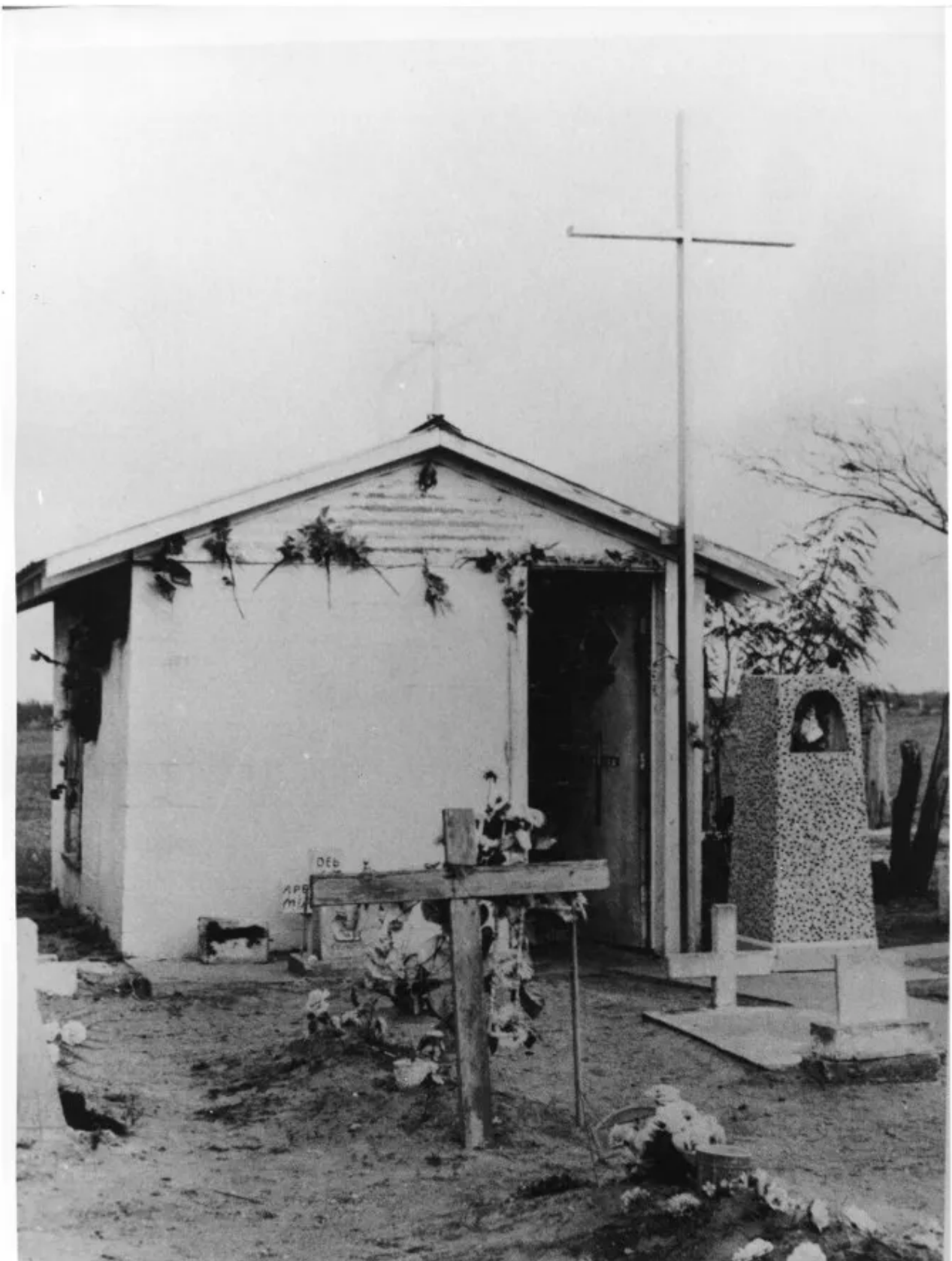
The marvelous abilities of Don Pedrito, as he was more commonly known, were believed by he and his followers to have been bestowed upon him by God. There are relatively few sources that document the cures he performed, but what we do know come from influential folklorists and historians such as Ruth Dodson. In Dodson's *The Healer of Los Olmos and Other Mexican Lore*, the reader is provided insight into how faith, the use of plants, and what we would call hydrotherapy were used to treat patients. With the absence of biomedicine, which was still in its infancy, many Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Anglo-Americans in South Texas relied on his treatments to cure their maladies. The success of Don Pedrito's practice of medicine relied as much on the mystical qualities that he portrayed and the faith that those who came to him for help had, as his knowledge of the land around him for treating illness. If a potential patient came to Don Pedrito for help, they needed to have faith in his ability to know what was best for them. However, if they did not have faith, the patient would not be cured or suffer a harmful fate that Don Pedrito foresaw. The healer did not charge exorbitant rates for his services, but instead took meager offerings of food and other goods. On the few occasions that he did take money, he distributed the excess among individuals that needed it.[3]

In one telling of Don Pedrito's capacity to heal, Salomé Ramírez recounted to Dodson how a man who was slowly losing his vision stayed with his family on his way to visit the curandero. Salomé was later surprised to see that on his way back, the man had regained his vision. The Ramírez family benefited from the prescriptions that Don Pedrito handed out as well:

The mother, Doña Mariana, was cured of a pain in her side with a poultice made of canned tomatoes. At another time she fell and hurt her leg; this injury was cured with nine baths. Someone else in the family was cured with half a cup of coffee and a tablespoon of whisky.

When Salomé also became very ill, he was cured when he slept with his feet to the door, each of which had half of a roasted lemon placed on them. In Salomé Ramírez's recounting, the primacy of community is highlighted with word of mouth and seeing cures performed helped to inform whether a family would use Don Pedrito's prescriptions. This story also highlights the extent to which food and water were used to treat patients.[4]

Not all of Don Pedrito's cures worked. Señora Rosa Zamora recounted that on a trip to attain a remedy for her daughter that she and others witnessed a woman having a seizure. Don Pedrito attempted to rub chocolate on her teeth, but had no success and so he left her on the bed to help the other patients. Believing the seizure to be witchcraft, Señora Zamora quickly left with the others, but later heard that the woman died after falling into a fire following another seizure. The story recounts no legal or communal sanctions against Don Pedrito and his failure to cure the woman with seizures, but instead concludes with the success of the remedy he gave to Señora Zamora for her daughter.[5]



Shrine to Don Pedro Jaramillo at the Los Olmos cemetery. Image courtesy of the Marfa Public Library, and accessed through The Portal to Texas History.

By the time Don Pedrito died on July 3, 1907, his cures and renown throughout the South Texas region had attained him status as a saint. *The Galveston Daily News* ran the headline: "Saint Don Pedrito. A Mexican Nonogenarian Creating Great Excitement in San Antonio," for a story about the curandero's visit to San Antonio. The article spoke highly of Don Pedrito by mention the thousands of people that visited him for cures. He even met with local physicians who left in awe of his ability to cure. Six years after his death, in 1913, T. Puente & Son, ran an advertisement in the newspaper *El Regidor* that promoted marble statues of *Santos Mexicanos*, or Mexican saints, that included Don Pedrito Jaramillo among others known to the Mexican community. These newspapers are just some of the evidence that shows that while Don Pedro Jaramillo's stories might be dismissed today

as simple folk medicine and superstition, it is important to remember his story for how his brand of medicine incorporated an understanding of, and respect for, the community that he served.[6]

[1] *Handbook of Texas Online*, Agnes G. Grimm, "JARAMILLO, PEDRO," accessed November 18, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fja24>.

[2] Ira Rutkow, *Seeking the Cure: A History of Medicine in America* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 80-84.

[3] *Handbook of Texas Online*, Agnes G. Grimm, "DODSON, VIOLA RUTH," accessed November 18, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fdoo6>.

[4] Ruth Dodson, *The Healer of Los Olmos and Other Mexican Lore*, ed. Wilson M. Hudson (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1951), 33-34.

[5] *Ibid.*, 25-27.

[6] "Saint Don Pedrito. A Mexican Nonogenarian Creating Great Excitement in San Antonio," *The Galveston Daily News* (Galveston, TX), April 22, 1894; "T. Puente & Son," *El Regidor* (San Antonio, TX), July 31, 1913.

*Feature photo courtesy of the Star of the Republic Museum, and was accessed through The Portal to Texas History.