

# History

## The Search for Col. Peter Bean And His Final Resting Place In Banderilla, Veracruz

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Photographs and Text by John Todd, Jr.

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### Note:

Last year, I came across the story of Peter Bean, one of the great personalities of early Texas history on the great page of [Sons of Dewitt Colony](#). This is one of the most comprehensive and well organized web sites about the details of Texas history on the internet. The story of Bean is a fascinating story of a time when there were few national boundaries and not much of a local population.

Texas history is thoroughly researched and well organized, yet in Mexico, despite the abundance of information, it is not well organized and you have to do a lot of homework and field travel on your own. Because of the language barrier and the lack of time to do some real digging, not many researchers have spent much time in Mexico digging through the monumental amount of original information that often goes back to the times of Hernan Cortes in 1521.

Between looking for jobs, I like to travel the countryside and meet the people of the small towns in the area around Veracruz, like a historical detective, digging up the stories and legends the old people tell those who have time to listen. Then I try to back up the legend by digging through the archives here in Veracruz. The information is here, but it takes a lot of digging.

A year or two ago, when I first read the story about Peter Bean and his Mexican wife who prayed and waited for her American husband, I was inspired more about her own life and where she lived. I took a trip to Banderilla, which is about 5 miles north of Xalapa, and wrote [The Miracle of Doña Magdalena Falfán](#). I wanted to see where she actually lived and the church that had given her the faith and determination to wait 25 years for her husband. I guess people were stronger back in those days.

On the trip last year, the car broke down as soon as I got to Banderilla, and I spent most of the day with the mechanic, fearful I wouldn't be able to get back to Veracruz by nightfall. I wasn't in any state of mind to continue any historical explorations and talk to many people about a old love story that was forgotten.

I had wanted to research the church records and try to find some of the older people in town and listen to the legends of the past. At the mayors office I was told the Casa de la Cultura would be a good place to start. That day the church office didn't open until 4PM and the Casa de la Cultura was closed. I asked about the cemetery but was told it was about 8 blocks away. Since I was on foot, I decided to get back home to Veracruz as soon as possible and schedule a trip for another day.

Another year passed and I remembered the discomfort of the previous trip. My car had to be in good shape. So, one Sunday in July, the weather was clear I invited Gilberto, the son of a friend along on another exploration trip to Banderilla.

I wanted to at least talk to someone at the Casa de la Cultura, find the cemetery, and if I was lucky talk to some people at the local church. This is the story of my second trip to Banderilla.

[More About Banderilla](#)



How to Get There

The small town is very old and is a key spot along the old Aztec trading routes.

It is said that through this pass that runners brought fresh fish to the emperor Moctezuma in a kind of relay race.

Since the Aztec civilization is one of the fairly new civilizations, the town that today is called Banderilla goes back to the dawn of civilization in Mexico.

Later the town grew along the old Camino Real as a rest stop for fresh water for both horses and travellers. Later, in the 20th century the government built a bypass, so most people don't know that Banderilla even exists.

With the new toll road to Xalapa it's now an easy 1 hour drive from Veracruz.

It is also the cross roads to the northern coast of Veracruz towards Naolinco, Misantla, and Nautla.



How to Get There

### Chicharrones

It was a beautiful sunny day as we climbed into the mountains from the Gulf Coast. I like the area around Xalapa because it is so different.





**Chicharrones**

We turned left off the Camino Nacional and headed the 4 or 5 blocks into the old town of Banderilla.

On the previous trip, the people had told me Banderilla was famous for it's tender chicharrones or pork cracklings.

They taste like crunchy juicy bacon and smelled delicious in the cool mountain air.



**La Casa de la Cultura**

We passed a few tables along the sidewalk and decided we'd buy a half kilo for the ride back home.

**La Casa de la Cultura**

Our first task was to find the Casa de la Cultura, and saw it half way up the hill a couple of blocks away from the church.

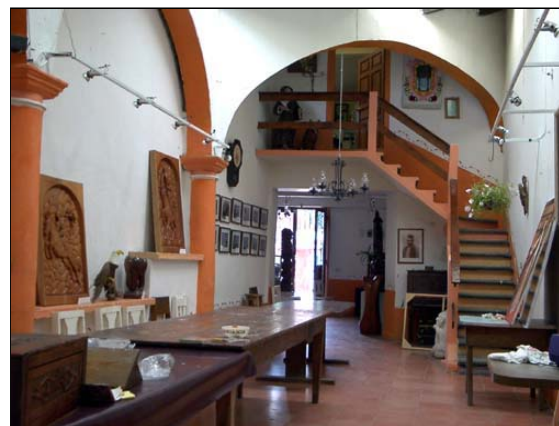
For a Sunday, parking was easy to find a block or two away. The sign on the front announced the dates of different classes in music and art.

From the outside, it didn't look like much, but like many very old homes in Mexico, the inside is much different. The homes in the mountain areas of Veracruz are cozy, cheerful, and attractive and built for the cool evenings when it rains.

As soon as we entered the front door, we felt at home. It was quiet, as if we were in an old hacienda, a refuge from the 21st century.



**The Main Room**



**The Main Room**



**Doña Yolanda Hernández Jimenez**

### **Doña Yolanda Hernández Jimenez**

We were immediately greeted by Doña Yolanda Hernández Jimenez, the Director of the Casa de la Cultura. She is also the owner of the home.

We got right to the point. We told her we had come from Veracruz and were looking for information about Peter Ellis Bean.

At that point, something in her eyes lit up, and she invited us to sit down in one of the comfortable orange plastic chairs.

Then, she called to a girl and asked her to bring us a refresco. Soon, the girl returned with a 2 liter bottle of Peñafiel orange drink and two plates with triple layered jello on with silver forks on porcelain plates.

Doña Yolanda told us that she is from one of the very old families in Banderilla. When her great grandfather bought this house it was called La Hacienda "La Violeta". The original house had 44 rooms.



**The Stairs**

As a result of inheritances over the years, her portion has been reduced to this house.

### **Her Own "Bean Project"**

One of her passionate projects for many years has been the story of Peter Bean and Doña Magdalena.

From her own investigations she has learned a lot about Bean Magdalena from her neighbors who are descendents of the family.

She has investigated the story from the Mexican side and since her English isn't good, she told me she didn't know much about his activity in the United States and the Republic of Texas.

She doesn't have an email address and hasn't done any investigations on the internet.

She said that she was fascinated by the local versions of his story.

We talked for a long time. I had brought along a short printed version of the story from the [Sons of Dewitt Colony](#) web site along with Bean's picture.

Doña Yolanda had seen the picture somewhere before and recognized his photo.





**Original Church in Old Banderilla with Spanish Troops**

### **The Hacienda in front of the Church**

After exchanging stories, she told me that Doña Magdalena lived with her sister for many years in the hacienda "La Banderilla" which was across the street in front of the church.

The house is no longer there.



**Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz**

This would have made it easy for her to spend time in the church each day to pray for the safe return of Peter Bean.

A "hacienda" in those days in this area probably covered a city block or two.

### **Doña Magdalena's Final Resting Place**

She said Doña Magdalena is buried inside the church, perhaps because she donated land to the church.

However, sometime since they have cemented over the floor in the church and you can't find the tombstone.

### **The Search for Bean's Resting Place**

Doña Yolanda told me that for many years she has worked many years looking for the final resting place of Peter Bean and hasn't found it yet.

I suggested she check with the church records to see if there might be a notation on his death records. I told her I was interested in finding the date of death of Doña Magdalena.

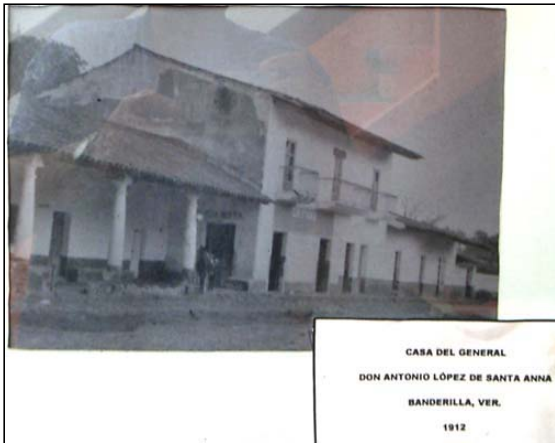
She said she hadn't thought about checking the church records and said the office is closed today.

Next week she would walk down the street and talk to the people at the church and would get back to me with the results of her visit.

### **"Godo", not "de los Godos"**

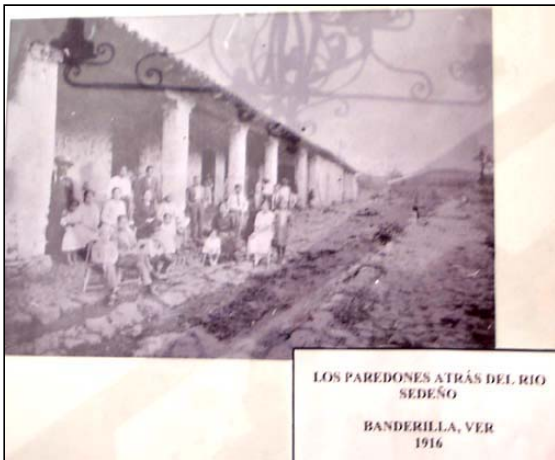
At this time she clarified the correct last name for Doña Magdalena is "Godo" and not "de los Godos".

This is interesting because in all of the writings I've



**Santa Ana's House in Banderilla**

seen about Bean the last name is written "de los Godos". Another lead to follow up on.



**Photo from 1916**

### **Bean and the Highway Bandits**

Doña Yolanda asked me if I'd heard about the story of Peter Bean and the Highway Bandits?

Then she told us a story about Peter Bean which must have occurred during the first time he lived in Banderilla.

It probably happened before December of 1815, when Bean's mentor José Morelos y Pavón was killed by a Spanish firing squad.



**Wood Carving**

She told me that Banderilla Pass towards Mexico City had always been infested with bandits and highway robbers who stole from the travellers along the Camino Real to Mexico City.

One day Magdalena hanging out the wash, and Bean was out front talking to some travellers along the road.

Then some riders came up with horses with saddlebags. They were highway robbers.

Apparently they had some words with Peter Bean and tried to kill him. He ran up the forested hill behind the church to escape them.

The men ran after him leaving their horse behind.

Doña Magdalena thought quickly and went through the men's saddle bags and found them full of gold.



**The Refreshments are Finished**

Hastily, she took the gold and hid it in the bottom of here laundry basket.

The men didn't catch Bean, and came back to their horses empty handed.

They didn't notice their saddlebags were empty, or maybe Doña Magdalena filled them with rocks.

Bean came back safely that evening to an unexpected surprise.



**Wall Hanging**

It must have been a small fortune, and was probably a nice nest egg to leave with Doña Magdalena when he had to flee for the States after the death of Morelos.

To this day there are rumors of bandit treasure still being found in the many caves not far from Banderilla.

### **Time to Go**

We had finished our refresco and jello, and we could see that Doña Yolanda had other things to attend to in her busy household.



We had enjoyed our afternoon conversation with Doña Yolanda about Peter Bean and Doña Magdalena Godos. There were new leads to follow, and several questions had been answered.

On our next trip, we want to see if there is any new information in the local church records and talk more with Doña Yolanda about the legends of Banderilla.

### **Seek Out the Elderly**

Standing out on the sidewalk back in the 21st century, Doña Yolanda told us, we must preserve our history and our cultures.

Many times this is preserved in the stories of the old people. When you go to the small villages and ranchos, seek out the old people and listen to their stories.

They will tell you the truth about the fascinating history



## Final Hand Shakes



**A Table of Chicharrones**

of Mexico.

### Fresh Cooked Chicharrones

Walking the streets of the small town of Banderilla, Veracruz is fun.

We could imagine we were walking the same streets along the Camino Real where travellers had been for centuries.

The mountain air was fresh and cool, a wonderful change for us who live on the hot coastal plains. It seems to clear the mind.

We passed the first table of fresh cooked chicharrones and resisted the temptation to stop.

When we passed the second one, it was impossible.

Gilberto was hungry so we stopped to take a look at the carnitas and chicharrones.

The man said the chicharrones cost \$60 pesos a kilo, and handed us a little plastic pan and a pair of tongs.



**Cut to Size**

I had \$60 pesos and started selecting the crunchiest morsels. I realized I was hungry too, and a little bag would be good for snack for the hour long drive back to Veracruz.

We filled a small bag and we went inside the butcher's shop to weigh in.

It was a little over a half kilo. \$34 pesos.

When we paid the butcher, he threw in a little plastic bag of green chile sauce.

### A Stop by the Cemetery

Fortunately, I didn't have any car problems and it was a beautiful day. We stopped by the Pemex gas station for some canned cokes.

Off to the left, Gilberto said, "Look! There's the cemetery. Let's go take a look."

So, we pulled off the road and drove a couple of blocks to the town cemetery.

We were the only ones there, and we looked for the





**Selecting the Best**

oldest section. Many of the earliest monuments were from the 1890's.



**Snacks for the Road**

We realized we weren't going to find Peter Ellis Bean here.

The present day church in Banderilla was probably the church that belonged to the Hacienda Banderilla. He is probably buried in the now cemented over church yard.

### **The Drive Back**

We drove back into the hot coastal plain munching the chicharrones and were glad we had bought some cokes because they were salty.

For the next couple of weeks, I am planning to go back to the little town of Banderilla for another visit with Doña Yolanda.

Maybe she can find some new information about Peter Bean from the church records.

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