

The Lady in Blue Meets City Council

By Brit Macias

Legend has it, a Jumano Indian Tribe in West Texas had a mysterious visitor come to their village in the early 1600's—many moons before San Antonio or even El Paso were founded.

The mystical woman wore a long, blue cape as she traveled the village caring for the sick and broken, and teaching the Jumanos her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. She taught them the importance of baptism and a group of the Jumanos traveled all the way to a monastery in Isleta, New Mexico to inquire about being just that—baptized.



The Spanish priests followed the band of Jumanos—whom had been living where the Concho Rivers merge—to present day San Angelo. One of those that came with the Jumano tribe to their village, Fra Alonzo de Benavides, found the tale and description of the mysterious Lady in Blue eerily similar to that of a nun he knew of in Agreda, Spain.

This Franciscan nun, Sister Maria de Jesus—born Maria Coronel y de Arana—was known for her deep spiritual prayer life and a particular fondness of a blue cape. During her prayer time, Sister Maria claimed on multiple accounts to have translated to other places, especially the New World, where she instructed the natives of the land, though she never once left her monastery. What is referred to as her “bilocation,” took place in West Texas and New Mexico, as well as some parts of her own native land of Spain.

Sister Maria’s description of lands she’d never physically set foot on before was astounding to those who heard her stories. She had over 500 visits in such a manner, crediting God for the ability to communicate with people who spoke a language she never learned.

A fascinating piece of San Angelo’s history, indeed.

An anonymous donor approached Tilly Chandler desiring to see a monument to this chapter of San Angelo’s history erected along the Concho River. Chandler set out to form a committee to accomplish their mission to “celebrate the

history of our community's earliest inhabitants dwelling along the Concho River."



The committee compiled a plan of purpose, design, location, and cost (fully funded by the anonymous donor) and presented it to City Council on July 12th for conceptual approval.

The presentation of the concept included a slide presentation of a proposed statue idea of The Lady in Blue with a young Jumano child surrounded by

bluebonnets, and a Jumano Brave surrounded by rocks with Jumano paintings on them.

The concept was met with excitement to begin with, followed by concerns and an extensive discussion.



Harry Thomas was the first to comment on the proposed project, stating, "I think this really is a great concept for the history of San Angelo and I want people to understand that this was before the Fort or any of the buildings downtown, so this is really something that will draw more visitors to the area. I want to say also, who could ever say no to Tilly?"

Charlotte Farmer followed suit, "I agree with Harry that this is a win-win situation to bring more tourists to San Angelo, but also to bring the sayings (paintings) of Paint Rock... "I don't see this as being of any denomination of anything... we have a vision of what we want our river to be and what we want to include in its history to tell the people a story, to realize how really wonderful it is to live here in San Angelo. There is so much to offer and the Indians were long before the Fort (Concho) and to tell the story of the Jumanos and the teachings they were giving of the Good Lord is a wonderful thing."

“I agree with the other two council people,” SMD4 representative Lucy Gonzales stated. “This is a great thing for San Angelo and it’s wonderful the fact that it’s more historic than anything.”

Mayor Morrison, however, had his concerns about the project. “If this were on private land, I would be 100% for it. But I do see this as a religious thing and it concerns me that we are having a religious artifact placed on public lands because we do have the separation of church and state.”

Morrison directed his legal question on the matter to City Attorney, Theresa James. “If we allow the Catholic faith to put this up along the river on public property, what happens when the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons or the Baptists or anyone else, even non-Christian religions, come forward and ask for the same thing? What are we going to be able to say except we’ve already opened the floodgates? “

James explained to Morrison, “I’m less concerned about it because it does deal with the history of the area. If it were purely a religious statue or some sort of display that deals strictly with religion, that would be a concern. But because there is a historical aspect to this, I think that is what the difference is.”

“I don’t want to get us in trouble and I don’t want to open the floodgates because once the floodgates are open, we can’t close them,” Mayor Morrison responded.

“That’s true. I don’t have that concern,” James reiterated.

“If any other religion in the world wants to come down to the banks of the river and build their own monument next to this one there’s not a thing we can say except yes because we’ve already allowed this. I would feel much, much better about this were it on private land somewhere rather than public land, that’s my only concern... I have no problem with the concept or the history; I just have a problem with the location,” Mayor Morrison continued.

Harry Thomas spoke up again in response to the Mayor’s concerns, “I just want to make sure that the public knows this really is not a religious symbol as much as it is a historic symbol and I think the history portion of this...the Lady in Blue certainly comes from Catholicism back in Europe, but that is not the reason for this. This is from the Jumano Indians and the historic portion of San Angelo’s beginnings, long before the Fort and downtown. From my perspective, from the public’s perspective, putting it on land that belongs to the city really has nothing to do with religion, it has to do with history.”

Charlotte Farmer agreed with Harry Thomas and made a motion to approve the concept of the plan, which was then seconded by Thomas.

Bill Richardson spoke up before the vote could be called, saying, "If you go across the country, you'll find that some of the government sponsored museums have religious paintings and artifacts on display, so I don't think that this is a religious issue, I think it's a historic issue."

Mayor Morrison reiterated, "I don't have one problem with the concept. I only have a problem with the location... I'm afraid of this and I'm going to go on record as being (so). I'm not going to support it because of the location and I think we're opening ourselves up to some serious things because we could have 100 people in here next week wanting to put up a monument to their religion. It worries me."

Tilly Chandler came forward to assure the Mayor, "There is nothing Catholic in our endeavor. If someone steps forward and wants to put up a monument and they can document 12,000 years of the history, then that's what San Angelo is about."

The call for public comment brought about some valid points concerning the religious vs. historical debate.

Author, Gus Clemens, came forward stating, "I've written about this history for 35 years. If you eliminate religion from history, you wipe out all of history. This isn't even about the Lady in Blue. This is about 'why were there Spanish Missionaries at this spot in 1629, a year before the city of Boston was founded?' That is what this piece is about. It is not proselytizing the Catholic religion, it is just pointing out a fact of history that is completely backed up by documentation."

Citizen Michael Baird commented, "There were some questions about the Establishment Clause, but the First Amendment also has a Free Exercise clause and I think at this point the major concern is not an establishment issue, and I'm not a Constitutional Lawyer, but if this project is quashed because a particular historical figure happened to have a religion, I think that we might more be dealing with a free exercise issue." To which Mayor Morrison responded, "That's a very good point, thank you."

Elizabeth Flores, a Jumano from Abilene, came forward to explain how large their family is and how many of them the project would bring to San Angelo to visit and spend their money eating, shopping, etc. "It's something we will belong to and encourage our members and our children to come to."

Before the final call for a vote, Mayor Morrison announced once more, "I am not opposed to this. I'm opposed to the location... I'm not opposed to what you're doing. And I did sit up most of my night thinking about this. It concerns me."

The final vote for the concept as presented came out to 6-1, the only “nay” being the Mayor, with one final statement. “I am *only* against this because of location. Location, location, location. I’m not against anything else. If this was on private ground, I never would have said a word.”

Until Next Time...

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