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NEW CLAIM IS MADE TO RIFLE THAT BOWIE USED IN ALAMO

By Sam Kindrick

Helen Pellegrin of Laredo met with determined opposition Friday in her attempt to gain possession of Jim Bowie's old squirrel rifle.

Miss Connie Garcia, a Bexar County Jail clerk for 25 years, served notice that she is entitled to the gun and will contest Mrs. Pellegrin in court for possession.

Mrs. Pellegrin filed suit in District Court here earlier Friday in an attempt to gain sole custody of the relic.

Records show the rifle was taken from Bowie's hands by a Mexican soldier, Juan Hinojosa, after Bowie died in the fall of the Alamo in 1836.

The rifle was acquired from Hinojosa by Jose Maria Garcia Villareal, who reportedly passed it on to a grandson, Alfredo Garcia Pellegrin.

Pellegrin was Mrs. Pellegrin's husband. He loaned the gun to the Alamo.

Miss Garcia claims to be the blood granddaughter of Jose Garcia Villareal.

"I have more right to the rifle than Mrs. Pellegrin," Miss Garcia said. "And I have three sisters and a brother who also have more rights than her, Mrs. Pellegrin was only married to my cousin."

Through her attorney, Maxwell Burket, Miss Garcia has notified everyone concerned that she will file a suit of intervention which will contest Mrs. Pellegrin's claim of ownership.

The diminutive jail clerk said that if she gains custody of the gun she may return it to the Alamo.

"The final decision would come after I talk with my sisters and brother," she said. "We have a proud heritage. Our great-grandfather, Juan Leal, led the first 16 settler families to San Antonio."

Attorney Stanley Banks, who represents the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, present keepers of the gun, said the DRT will file an answer to Mrs. Pellegrin's suit asking that decision of final ownership be left up to the courts.

Banks Friday disclosed that a sister-in-law of Mrs. Pellegrin's in Shreveport, La., has

retained local legal counsel and will probably make a bid for the rifle.

"We take the position that the rifle should go to the rightful owners," Banks said. "If it must be taken from the Alamo, then it should go to the persons who legally own it."

In her suit Friday, Mrs. Pellegrin names Mrs. Philip W. Harral, authorized agent of the DRT; Mrs. Jacqueline Espey, curator of the Alamo, and the DRT, a corporation with Mrs. Robert F. Hallock as president.

Here is how Miss Garcia explains the family connections and the obvious conflict of last names:

"Jose Maria Garcia Villareal had two sons, Jose Maria Garcia Villareal Jr., and Benjamin Garcia. Miss Garcia is the daughter of Villareal Jr., and Mrs. Pellegrin's late husband was the son of Benjamin Garcia.

"My father retained the last name of his father," she said. "Benjamin Garcia, took his mother's maiden name. And so did Pellegrin. It's an old Spanish custom. Some do and some don't."

When Villareal died, he passed the gun to the Pellegrins, but Miss Garcia feels that she and her sisters and brothers now have more rights to the weapon than Mrs. Pellegrin.

"We feel this should be determined in court," she said.

Her sisters are Mrs. Lena Dilts of Detroit, Mich., and Mrs. C. T. Edwards and Mrs. E. M. Chavez, both of San Antonio. Her brother is Arthur L. Garcia, also of San Antonio.

In her suit, Mrs. Pellegrin contends "the defendants wrongful detained from the plaintiff, and still wrongly detain from the plaintiff, certain personal property; James Bowie's long, cap and ball rifle, marked on the barrel, JHB."

Mrs. Hallock, the DRT president, took exception Friday:

"We have not kept the rifle from her. She has never come in the Alamo to get it. We told her by telephone that if she could prove ownership, she could have the rifle."

Mrs. Pellegrin has said that if she gets the gun she intends to sell it for \$15,000 to a wealthy and prominent San Antonio man.

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