

Leon Springs Short History

The Rim multi-use entertainment, retail and residential complex is being built north east of IH-10 and 1604. This development is being built in an old rock quarry. Unlike other developers who mow down gigantic oaks to build, this site began about as it looks now - a big sandy hole in the ground. Across the way is Fiesta Texas, a much older quarry site. San Antonio-Aransas Pass RR line was brought into this area to ship the good hard rock from this escarpment down across the many miles of sandier land to build the seawalls of Port Aransas and Corpus Christi. Martin-Marietta-Materials is still in the quarry business with a functioning railroad running into the quarry just over the hill to the east.

The hill at the southeast corner of Old Camp Bullis Rd. had a very prestigious dinner/dance club named Mountain Top. It was one of the South's swankiest nightclubs, where big name musicians of the 40s entertained. Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, magician Harry Otto. Master of Ceremonies, after his day job in training at Camp Bullis was a very young Joey Bishop.

We are very fortunate to have Marlene Richardson collecting oral histories, newspaper, military and TxDOT documentation of this Leon Springs, Camp Bullis & Camp Stanley area. Most of this information is from notes Marlene is making as she and Jeanne Dixon work on a book of the history of Leon Springs.

Camp Stanley was the first US officer training school with Dwight Eisenhower as supply officer. Camp Bullis is still a very large active outdoor training facility. In 1911 Benjamin Foulois made the first "cross-country air flight" from Ft. Sam Houston to Leon Springs in a Wright Scout. In 1926 Hollywood invaded Leon Springs with Gary Cooper and Clara Bow to film "Wings", which won the first academy award for best picture. From Ft. Sam Houston 5,000 troops marched to Camp Stanley for 3 months of filming. A French Village was constructed and for the climatic sequence 165 planes (every plane the Army owned) were used. The film "Rough Riders" was being filmed at the same time. A hill was stripped of vegetation and planted with banana and palm trees to serve as San Juan Hill for Teddy Roosevelt's charge.

As Leon Springs is entered from the south on Old Fredericksburg Rd, the first log cabin on the right was the Max Aue grocery store and post office established in the 1850s. Soon after, the stone Aue hotel was built. Their log cabin dogrun house is also standing just behind the store. It was not too many years ago that the one room log school, blacksmith shop etc. were removed from Leon Springs. This was a very lively place during the great world war with all the soldiers being trained at Camp Stanley. Between the store and hotel was a refrigerated cooler large enough to hold a train car of beer. Altho' for sale, the Dancehall is still standing to the north of the new school and old Presbyterian Church.

The large building between the stone Aue hotel and Rudy's Bar-B-Q was the original Macaroni's Grill. Others nationwide were built in a similar manner. You can see the tin ceiling of the original overhang to Rudy's filling station. The OST leaves Old Fredericksburg Rd. in Rudy's parking lot and follows Boerne Stage Road west and then north into Kendall County. Just beyond IH-10 on the south side of Boerne Stage Rd., down the white fenced lane is a previous home of past San Antonio Mayor and present Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolfe. The springs that brought settlers to the community of Leon Springs flows from a hillside beyond the house. Owners of The Lodge assisted living home now in the long white ivy-covered house have given permission for OST tourists to quietly drive down the lane to view the home, and spring fed creek.

A bit further, still on the south side of the road are the log and rock cabins of the von Plehwe family. They settled in Leon Springs in the 1840s; the Prussian army lieutenant and his wife, who had been raised in the palace of Elizabeth of Bavaria. They are buried under one of those larger oak trees. Marlene is in e-mail contact with their genealogist descendants now in London. She is also working with a newly formed San Antonio Conservation Society Farm and Ranch committee, to designate these dwellings historic before George Straight sells them to a land developer who may remove them.

Further west, near the sign announcing the turn to Breeze Oak, the county changed the route of the roadbed when the new bridge was built. Young trees show the old roadbed, along the north fenceline, between larger old cedars and oaks. Below the Judge Reeves bridge are remnants of the old road and low-water-crossing showing on the north side in the creek. Just out of sight along the creek is a Texas archeological sight with Indian fire rings and artifacts. Luckily this land to the north belongs to Concept Therapy Institute, ahead of its time when opened in the 1930s to help folks calm their lives with new programs.

Boerne Stage Rd. makes a sharp right at the Scenic Loop/Toutant Beauregard stop sign, continues past stables, farms, deer, livestock, beautiful fences and gates and rocky terrain of the hill country. One of San Antonio's very early Mayors was Sam Maverick. His name became the word used for those who don't always follow the crowd. He was quite into the political aspect of creating a civilized community in Texas and didn't take much time to pay attention to the branding of his cattle. As drovers would round up their stock for trail drives to market, any with no brand would be noted as belonging to Maverick and not collected, left to wander off again, to become a maverick, not part of the herd. The wooden gate to the Maverick Ranch is on the west side of the road. We are fortunate to have these few hills belonging to that family saved as cedar and oak covered areas, not to be developed.

At the Dos Cerros (Two Hills) intersection is another property on which OST100 is working with the owner and the Conservation Society to have preserved and designated historic. Unlike the Aue and von Plehwe dwellings built of wood, these are all built of square cut stone. One of them even has instead of windows, gun slits for openings. This road has the name Boerne Stage Rd. because it truly was the stage route from San Antonio to Boerne and then on west all the way to California. The significance of these stone buildings is their placement halfway between Leon Springs and Boerne in the middle of Indian country. Even past the Civil War there were Indian uprisings in the areas between here and Fredericksburg.

The Bexar/Kendall County line was the first large project of the 1920s OST Beautification Department. The 32-mile "Headquarters Section" of the OST from San Antonio to Boerne was the model for other counties and states to follow. Architectural drawings would be sent for the suggested city, county or state line markers, stone or concrete gateways or columns. Balcones Creek Park was created by the joint efforts of civic organizations from San Antonio and Boerne; land, work, material and monetary donations. The stone caretaker's house was built to oversee the park of stone tables, benches and fences. Altho' flooding, utility and road construction has removed many enhancements, parts of the county line marker on the east side of the road, north of the creek and the stone walls and restored caretaker's house south of the creek remain, now under private ownership. OST100 is working with the Bexar County Medical Society Auxiliary who spearheaded the building of this park in 1927 to again find a way to share it with tourists who will become interested in such areas as centennial preparations spread across the whole eight states.

Charlotte Kahl 2006