

PLACES OF INTEREST

Seven Hundred Springs: Source of the South Llano has rich history

By Frederica Wyatt

Seven Hundred Springs is one of the most breath-taking areas in Texas, indeed, in the world. Though access to the beautiful site is not available to the public, once a year the current owner opens his property to the public as part of a presentation by Kimble County historian Frederica Wyatt. The following is some of that area's history.

Some historians believe Seven Hundred Springs marks the site of Mission San Clemente. More than three centuries have elapsed since Captain Juan deMendoza supposedly discovered the mighty springs.

According to the 1984 volume, *A History of Edwards County*, deMendoza and his party moved, on March 15, 1638, to the South Llano River about 20 miles southwest of present-day Junction. The Spaniards camped for six weeks along the "glorious San Clemente," deMendoza's name for the beautiful stream.

During their sojourn at this site, the Spaniards, under the leadership of deMendoza, established the first mission east of the Pecos River.

Nineteen Indian "nations" followed the Spaniards there and made their camp along the river. Baptism was administered to many neophyte Indians — undoubtedly, the baptismal font was the living waters of Seven Hundred Springs.



Local historian Frederica Wyatt addresses the annual gather at 700 Springs.

For the most part, these Indians were the Jumanos, who eventually became associated with the Lipan Apache tribes. Historians tell of the killing of many buffalo in order to feed the missionaries and Indians during their encampment along the river.

More than a century after deMendoza's venture, another Spaniard and his troops traveled to the site. In 1764, King Charles III of Spain appointed Marquis deRubi, a field marshal in the Spanish army, to inspect the frontiers of New Spain. With deRubi on his trip across the wide expanses of Texas was an able and meticulous engineer, Don Nicholas de la Fora, who kept a diary of the inspection tour of this area of Texas.

The engineer wrote, in July of 1767, "on the 22nd we traveled ten leagues, principally north, until reaching the descent to the Los Chanes River. On the banks of this river, the Chanes Nation formerly lived. We forded the stream three times and camped on its bank near a hill thickly covered with trees where there was a spring of very good water."

De la Fora told of a variety of trees in the area — walnut, wild plum, liveoak, chaparral, mesquite, cedar, but he made no mention of pecan along the Rio de los Chanes (the stream we know today as the "South Llano").

The Chanes Indians were an elusive people, friendly with the Spaniards but hostile toward the Tejas, the friendly Indians. The Chanes eventually drifted into the present San Marcos and San Antonio areas and, for a time, used the Mission Valera (Alamo) as a refuge. They became associated with the Tonkawa tribes, who were hated by fellow-Indians and Anglos alike, as Tonkawas were known to be cannibalistic.

Eight decades after deRubi's trek across Texas, the merchants of San Antonio embarked upon a quest to

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establish a direct western trade route to El Paso and capture a portion of the Chihuahua trade then going to Santa Fe and St. Louis.

The San Antonio businessmen accumulated a fund of \$800 and secured the services of John Coffey "Jack" Hays. Hays then employed Captain Samuel Highsmith to command about 35 rangers and 10 Delaware Indian guides. (During the War with Mexico, an entire company was made up of these Indians, who were recruited at San Antonio in 1846 to fight for the United States. It is believed these Indian guides traveled through this part of Texas during the War.)

Samuel Maverick agreed to accompany Highsmith, and on Aug. 27, 1848, the party set out from San Antonio. By Sept. 8, they camped about three miles below the present city of Junction. On the 9th, they reached a location they called "the lake," and the following day, made camp upstream about six miles at Paint Rock Springs near the present "Guthrie Crossing."

One of the earliest Anglo settlers in this valley of the Llanos was George W. Ragsdill, a native of Arkansas who had moved to Texas in 1845. He served with the Rangers under Captain George Erath during the Civil War, and some of his travels brought him west to what is now

Kimble and Edwards counties.

In 1872, he moved his family to the Seven Hundred Springs area, where he engaged in sheep ranching. There was frequent trouble with the Indians on this frontier, and after being completely burned out by the Comanches, the Ragsdill family sought a safer locale, and moved into Junction City in 1875.

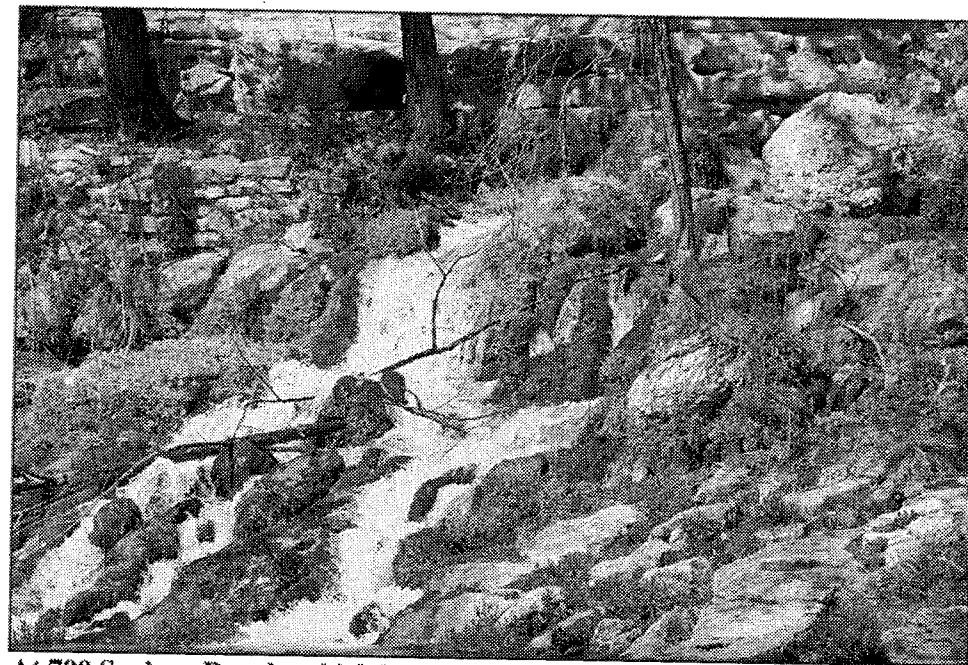
G. W. Ragsdill dreamed of harnessing the waters of the South Llano and was instrumental in building a dam for irrigation and milling purposes nearer the settlement of Junction. Alas, he realized too late that the river had a mind of its own, as it still does. Man has never been successful in his attempt to conquer the waters of the mighty South Llano River.

In 1879, another frontiersman, Middleton Moore Bradford (said to be a descendant of William Bradford of the Mayflower and Plymouth Colony) came to this area from Goliad with 2,000 head of cattle.

He "took up" land at Seven Hundred Springs and ran his cattle on the range there. There were no fences; consequently, the cattle ranged all the way to the Rio Grande.

After a few years, the Bradfords sold this ranch and moved a few miles farther upstream to "Contrary Creek", a unique stream that joins the South Llano. Its name derives from the fact it flows upstream before uniting with the larger stream.

The late Frank Patterson once related



At 700 Springs Ranch, which is privately owned, water gushes into the South Llano River from a series of springs in the side of a cliff.

that camels from old Camp Verde in Kerr County were brought here for field training. Years later, H. C. "Lum" Allsup discovered a large tooth in a nearby cave, and it has since been identified as a camel's tooth. Perhaps some wild animal dragged the head of one of those camels into the cave, for it is illogical to believe one of the "ships of the desert" could enter the small opening of the cavern.

Among the earliest settlers in this region was L. K. "Lem" Henderson,

who came to this part of Texas in 1880 and settled at the mouth of Contrary Creek near Paint Rock Springs. There were many Indian pictographs on the bluffs above those Springs, and it was near here the huge Indian known as "Big Foot" was killed.

Since there were no fences in those days, all cattle were run on open range. Henderson at one time recalled that there

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had been a very bad blizzard, and the stock from the plains of North Texas streamed by his cabin for three days on their way to the breaks of the Nueces River.

Frank S. Gray wrote a wonderful little book, *Pioneering in Southwest Texas*, and recalled "in about 1880 our range (in San Saba County) became so overstocked, we boys decided to move our cattle, some 1,500 head, counting calves, to unorganized Edwards County. It was before barbed wire fences, but it was a long difficult drive over unworked roads. When we reached Junction City, we had to drive our slow-moving herd up the meandering stream of the South Llano River with its narrow canyons and short grass. Our tired cattle had to ford that flush running stream of clear water and deep crossings twelve times between Junction City and the headwater of the South Llano. The cattle were worn out, and as we urged the exhausted, weary herd along, we had trouble making them take the river at deep crossings."

Another early pioneer was Henry Baldwin, a native of Travis County. He married Effa Pepper, and the couple built a cabin at Seven Hundred Springs. The setting was near sandstone cliffs where there were actually 700 springs, as Henry Baldwin counted over 600 him-

self. During their early marriage, the couple killed wild hogs in the river bottom and cured the razorbacks, selling the bacon for two cents per pound and hams for two and one-half cents per pound.

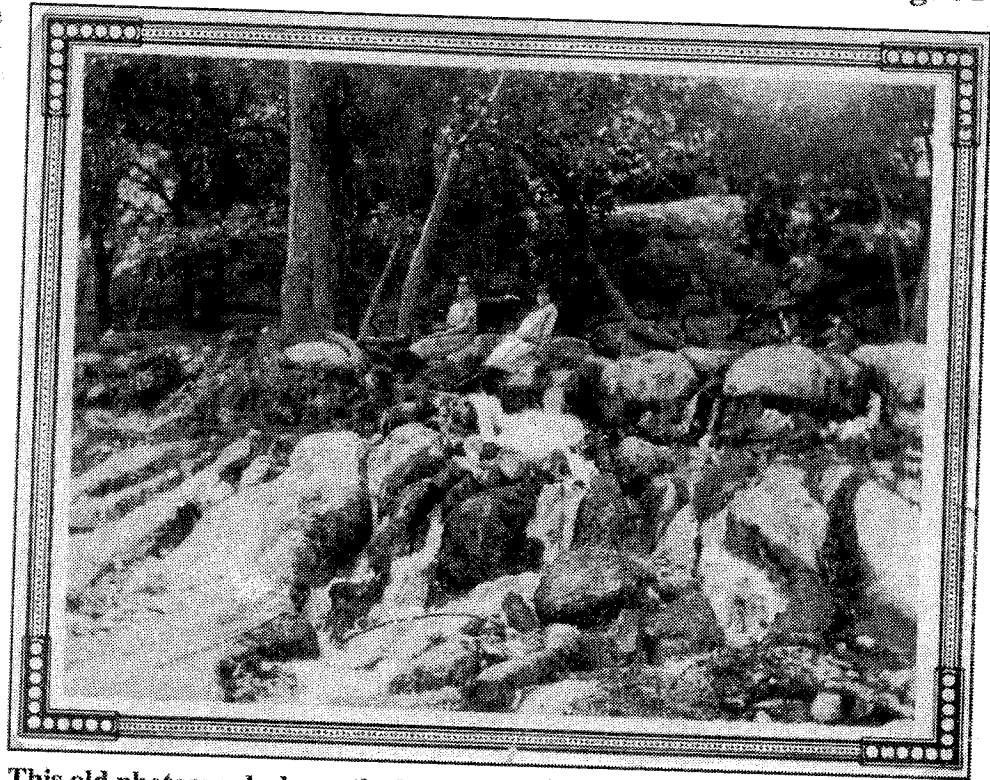
Later, a banker bought 6,000 sheep and turned them over to Baldwin on a 50-50 basis. He had six shepherders, who each took care of 1,000 of the stubborn creatures. Henry sheared sheep at three cents each and could shear as many as 60 sheep in a day's time.

The Baldwins used to hunt wild turkey, but the birds feasted on chile piquin berries. Effa cooked the turkeys but gave them to the Mexican herders because the meat was too hot for the Baldwins' taste.

Their three-year old son, Stephen Baldwin, died from the effects of a rattlesnake bite and was buried in the Pepper-Thomas cemetery, now on the property of the South Llano River State Park.

The S. H. Guthries moved their stock from the Burnet-Llano area and stayed at the Springs for a year or so. It was there one of their sons, Samuel Thomas Guthrie, was born on the first day of March, 1888. The Guthrie family moved on up the river to Paint Rock Springs, and members of the family have been ranching at the same site for more than a century.

In his recollections contained within the pages of *The Newton Boys. Portrait of an Outlaw Gang*, written by Claude



This old photograph shows the late Gussie Watson and an unidentified woman at Seven Hundred Springs many years ago.

Stanush and David Middleton, one of the Newton brothers remembered, "We come down through Menard to Junction City and was there in town Christmas Day. From there it was about fifteen mile up the river to Seven Hundred Springs. That's where my grandmother used to have her sheep back in the 70s and 80s. Joe can tell you about that water, how it

had just washed trenches in the rocks, it had run through there so long. When we got to those seven hundred springs at the head of the Llano River, that was the most beautiful sight I ever saw. There was a big, long mountain there and it was literally covered with big springs of

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water shooting out four, five feet from the bank some of them real big, some little ones. I never seen so many in my life. It was the most beautiful thing you ever saw, all shooting out of the side of that mountain, and that was what made the Llano River. If you go to see it today, there's still some springs there, but not near so many."

An early deed dated 10 December 1900 transferred title of the Seven Hundred Springs property from Walter and Rachel Wallace to C. C. Barrett and W. M. Stephenson of Edwards County. Walter Wallace was a builder of the Four-Mile Dam some miles downstream, but that venture, too, failed when the flood waters of the Llano washed away the structures.

After four years of ownership of the Springs property, Barrett and Stephenson sold to W. J. "Jinx" Coleman on the first day of September, 1904. Coleman, a native of Mississippi, and his wife, Edith, along with their seven children

moved to the ranch from McCulloch County. Two more children were born at Seven Hundred Springs. The Coleman children, as well as other neighborhood youngsters, attended the Paint Creek School, two miles downstream on the famous Paint Creek Ranch owned by the Taylor family.

On Feb. 24, 1919, the Colemans were grantors in a deed to Charlie P. Bruce, grantee. The Bruce family had moved to Kimble from San Saba County in the winter of 1908. The Bruces set about rebuilding and enlarging the ranch home. The ranch ran many cattle and goats.

At that time, the road up the South Llano was only a wagon track up the river bottom, crossing at shallow places 21 times between Junction and Seven Hundred Springs. After the advent of the automobile, the gravel crossings were impassable unless repaired by the local residents. Work was imperative following each flood.

C. P. Bruce was a trustee of Paint Creek School, and in 1922, the old one-room building was replaced by a larger structure. The school, sometimes known as the County Line School, disbanded in 1923, and the Deats School was established some distance upstream.

On the 11th day of June, 1924, C. P. and Carrie Bruce sold the property to L. Holland.

For decades, the public road to Rockspring led past the Springs, and many a weary traveler paused to camp

overnight under the spreading arbor of the native pecan trees. It was a favorite gathering place for picnics and outings for people from miles around the Springs area. Family reunions, club meetings, and school picnics were often enjoyed.

Bessie Allsup Burt recalled a tragic incident that occurred there on June 30, 1921. A family from near Fort Worth was camped on the Main Llano and opted to spend a day on the South Llano at the renowned springs. The small son, George Siebert, was bitten by a rattlesnake, and Britt Allsup, who was enjoying a day at the Springs, wanted to lance the bite area and try to siphon the poison. The Sieberts were not familiar with the effects of the rattlesnake bite and refused aid, thinking Britt was overreacting to the situation. Consequently, the lad died from the venom secreted by the deadly snake.

The next deed of record to the land where the Springs are located was dated November 4, 1925, when L. B. and Berta Holland transferred title to Sarah F. Orth. The Springs area continued to be a favorite campsite for tourists, as well as residents of Kimble and Edwards Counties.

An item in the September 17, 1931, edition of the Junction weekly newspaper related, "Lions Club plans joint barbecue with Rocksprings Club at Seven

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An unidentified man stands at the natural wonder of Seven Hundred Springs

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Springs

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Hundred Springs." One of the civic projects of the Junction Lions Club was the building of walking bridges over the springs for the convenience of those wanting a closer view of the magnificent beauty.

Watercress, ferns, and other flora were in abundance, and many albums contain pictures of families and friends enjoying a day at the famous Seven Hundred Springs on the Llano.

An article entitled, "The Day I Met the Real Bonnie and Clyde" appeared in the *Family Weekly* of April 29, 1973. The account was authored by Marge Turman Livingston of Kimble County. She told of a warm Sunday afternoon in 1934 when the desperadoes appeared at her home. When she realized the identity of the couple, she was numb with fear especially when they inquired if they could make camp along the Livingston's river property.

In the meantime, Marge's husband, J. M. Livingston, had arrived back home, and he informed the strangers of a public camping spot "just up the river from here that suits your needs perfectly." Parker and Barrow drove right to the

Springs and set up camp. After they left the Livingston home, Marge told her husband who the couple were (She had just seen their photograph on the front page of a San Antonio newspaper.), and he immediately sought help from law officials, but to no avail.

When J. M. motored to the campsite, the car was still there, a tea towel covering the license plates. A camp fire was brightly burning near the car. The rancher then drove to his brother's house, but when the two returned to the Seven Hundred Springs (about three miles from the Livingston home) the car and its occupants had made a hasty departure. Three weeks later Bonnie and Clyde were dead, killed by Ranger Captain Frank Hamer, a former resident of Kimble County.

The Junction Eagle, on October 10, 1935, reported: "Improvement on Highway 29 up the South Llano valley is going forward. Judge J. B. Randolph says the highway will leave its present right-of-way at Telegraph and go along the west side of the river to 700 Springs." Thus, the highway was diverted up Telegraph Hill but did not bypass the site of the Springs until later.

On the first day of December, 1941, just six days before Pearl Harbor, Mrs. Orth and her husband, W. L., sold the Seven Hundred

Springs property to Charles Schreiner, Jr. The Schreiners built a home overlooking the scenic area and owned the property for the next two decades.

Pierce Hoggett leased the ranch from 1952 until 1961, and although the seven-year drought did not break until 1957, Pierce later related the springs always flowed strongly, even during the dry years of the 1950s.

During World War II, soldiers camped there while in the area on military maneuvers.

The main road to Rocksprings was diverted from the river bottom and rerouted to higher ground in the late 1940s while the ranch was owned by the Schreiners. In the past, motorists were often stranded when the South Llano River went on rampages and inundated the roadways south of Junction.

Charles Schreiner, Jr. executed a deed to L. B. French, Jr. of Midland in 1961. French owned the Springs less than two years before selling to Sharpstown Realty in 1963.

It was during the Sharpstown ownership that an item appeared in the December 1965 issue of the local historical newsletter, "Stanley Brite, postmaster at Telegraph, enjoyed a short visit with

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In verse:

The following descriptive verses of Seven Hundred Springs were penned by the late J. E. Grinstead in 1916:

*"Sometime, in ages long forgot,
The pale snow lay, above the timberline,
Upon the crest of mountains far away
To glint the cold moon's slow decline.
And Nature said, 'what shall I do with this,
When e'er the Sun bends his hot rays
Athwart the plain, and sunbeams kiss
These cold and icy ways?'
Then Nature shook the world and spoke,
Her angry banners all unfurled,
The staybolts of the universe were broken,
And seams rent in the underworld.
And lo! The sun fell on the snowing peaks,
While icy streams ran down a mountainside
The bottom of the lakes began to leak,
And water through the rocky caves to glide.
Anon, the stream a devious way had run,
Since melted from a snow drift cold and pale
By burning, scorching, western sun
It broke the lock of rockbound jail.
It gushed with joy, to see the glinting light,
It warbled as a songbird sings,
It made a river with its might,
Below the Seven Hundred Springs."*



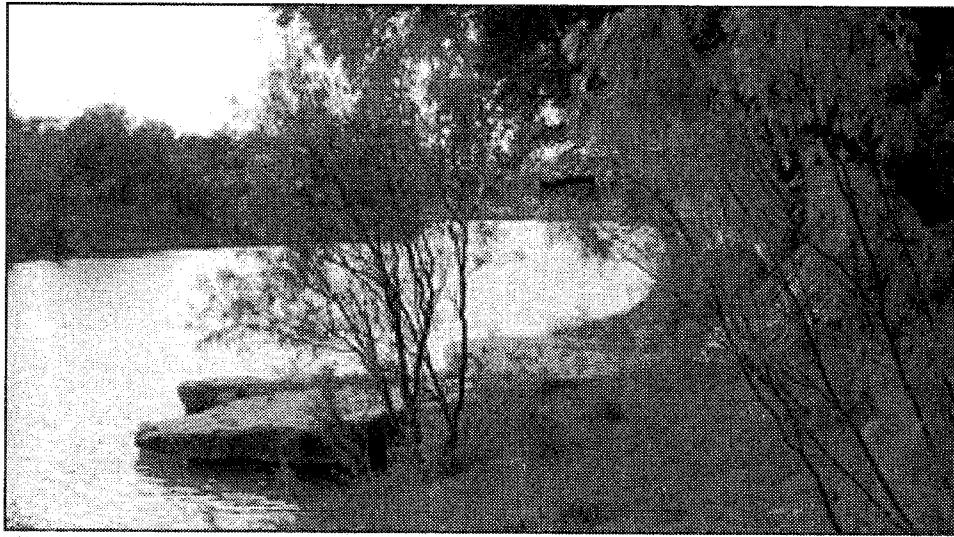
A place where you're partners
with Mother Nature
& Father Time.

A place
in passion to future
generations.

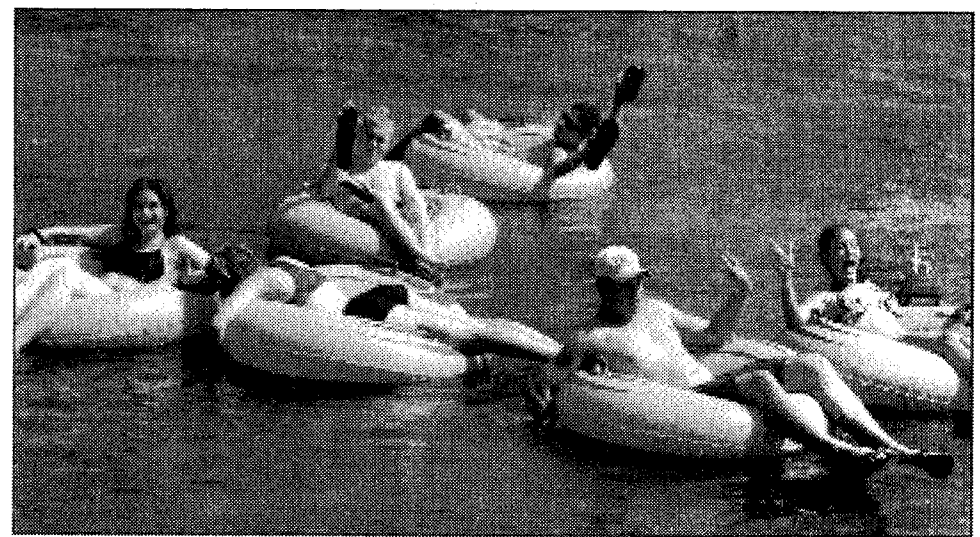
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Springs

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Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy when the latter and a group of hunters stopped by Telegraph Store Saturday. Among others in the party was Claude Hooten of Houston, well known by Brite and a former Harvard classmate of Senator Kennedy. Arriving at the Junction airport Friday, the group hunted on the Seven Hundred Springs ranch until Sunday."

Oak Forest Center Corporation of

Houston acquired the property from Sharpstown Realty in 1970. Joe E. Schero of Houston was the next owner, being grantee in a deed in 1971. Joe Schero, who founded a large fried chicken enterprise, was a member of Bear Bryant's much-publicized football squad who came to Texas A&M Adjunct in Junction for summer training in 1954. He was one of the "survivors" of the training and went on to become a member of the 1956 Southwest Conference championship team.

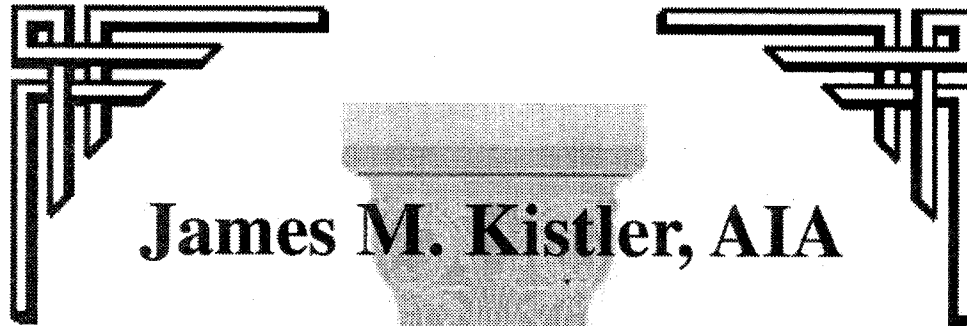
For a number of years the Springs property was in the hands of

Houstonites. Floyd A. Cailloux received title from Joe Schero in 1980. Cailloux, in turn, deeded the property in 1980 to Centre Development Company.

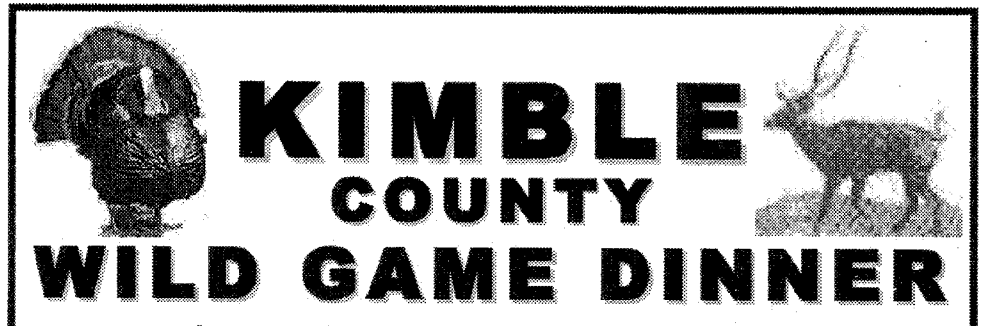
On the first day of January, 1982, Seven Hundred Springs was again owned by a West Texan, Addison Lee Pfluger of San Angelo.

When surveying the beauty of the spot, one is reminded of a writer who, in 1923, described the streams in the valley of the Llanos. "They are cut through the mountains, in fern-clad gorges, presenting a gem of a thousand facets in beautiful scenery of jagged bluffs and crystal

streams. One magnificent thing, in particular, is the famous Seven Hundred Springs. The water is evidently thrown up with great force from a fountainhead in the Rockies, until it breaks out of its rocky prison and gushes down the worn face of a huge bluff, making a river at once. Ages ago the water began its labor of forcing a way through the crevices of stone, and now a great number of rivulets from the springs have worn channels in all kinds of fantastic shapes across the flat rock between the base of the bluff and the river."



James M. Kistler, AIA



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Saturday, November 26, 2005