

MY RIVER OF INNOCENCE

In the fall of 1915 I follered a wagin load of stovewood from Wimberley to town and got lost an' couldn't find my way back home. My daddy come down a week or so later looking for me and got a job at the ole Normal School and I've been sitting here on the bank of this river ever since. And I seen it all a-comin'.

The San Marcos River, namesake of a patron saint, our *River of Innocence*, an ecological jewel unsurpassed in her pristine state - used, abused, debauched and prostituted by her benefactors, her custodians, her guardians, zealous do-gooders, pedantic theorist and those worthy parasites of our society who just don't give a damn.

Created through eons of time *Innocence* remained unscathed through the centuries of the Red man's day, though they gathered about her headwaters in great numbers they left but a gentle mark upon the land.

To wit: While the lower reaches of the golf course with the extending grounds to the shore of Aquarena and the area about the old sewer plant (now upper portion of City Park) were corn patches, those fields while under cultivation, revealed a wealth of Indian artifacts to be plundered by a horde of amateur collectors the likes of Sloppy Coner and I. We gathered only the perfect spears and arrowheads, including exquisitely beautiful, very small points we dubbed "bird arrows" and among the broken arrows and shards of flint we left there lays an archeological treasure of tools fashioned from flint essential to the Indian's way of life.

Before the honorable respect for government property began to wane, the office building of the Federal Fish Hatchery held a museum of sorts. Displayed on open shelves and tables for public view there was an elaborate collection of Indian artifacts gathered during the construction of the plant; also, a grand collection of marine specimens gathered from the San Marcos River with the blind white salamander who made his way to hatchery via the flow of the artesian well. After the thieving fingers of good honest citizens had about depleted the arrowhead collection, Superintendent O. N. Baldwin opened the office doors one morning to discover all bottles and containers holding the marine specimens including the giant freshwater prawn's flask had been drained of their fluids and the carboy of grain alcohol had been emptied of its contents and graciously refilled with water: H 2 O.

Unconfirmed rumor held chemistry student or students responsible for the theft and a flow of some fishy booze in the general area of the campus - Hogwash.

You would have to house several loose marbles to think any professional skills or training were involved in the production of the bootleg whiskey available in San Marcos during the prohibition era.

Any charcoal burning cedar hacker worth his snuff could blow off a batch of the stuff without washing his hands.

The Normal School had become a teacher's college and Chataqua Hill was known as The Hill or College Hill when my father Rufus Wimberley, while clearing a construction site discovered an arced limestone ledge pocked with mortar holes where the Indians had pounded their acorns and possibly maize into meals. Nuff sed for the Indians.

With little more than two centuries of White man's culture foisted upon her, much of the *Innocence* is gone from our river and likened to a painted lady she now reflects the ravages of man's continuous attack upon our natural environment and vast inroads made upon the water resources.

And I witnessed the finale of her degradation as the curtain of disaster began to fall.

With a bow to John Graves, my layman's goodbye to our *River of Innocence*, an adieu burdened with awkward detours to travel the lanes of memories past littered with bits of soapbox climbs.

In addition to being a historic site the old dam at "Peppers at the Falls" holds an unusual feature for dams in general. By impounding the waters of Spring Lake this dam did little to affect the delicate ecological balance of the river and created a sanctuary for *Innocence's* final stand.

Before A.B.Rogers' dream of turning his Diamond in the Rock (hillside shores of Spring Lake) into a tourist mecca began to crystallize, Spring Lake was a natural botanical garden unsurpassed, and supported a food chain which produced more pounds of fish per acre foot of water than any other body of water in Texas.

Ed and Ied Ezell could fish these waters nine days a week to supply their white collar customers with more bream, rock bass, goggle-eyed perch and black bass than they could eat or give away to neighbors and friends without affecting the fish population one iota.

And the River Rat crew of John Tom Dailey, Prunes Coner, Wayne Lewis, Logan Roberts, Pottie Leffingwell, my brother Pot and I could bust the market for bullhead polly cats and eels in Katy Town (Cheatham Street area below the M.K.& T. tracks) at our discretion.

If blue or shovelhead catfish were your choice, better you start at Coy Devine's place and try luck downstream past Thompson's Island towards Martindale. The point where the tailrace from Cape's gin empties into the river was always good for a rock bass or two and several goggle-eyes if the likes of Jack Warner and Bill Mooney hadn't beat you to the draw.

Wheybellied perch, the moniker John Tom Dailey gave the sunfish and in doing so gained the same for himself, were so plentiful in the river and Spring Lake that any novice on his first foray to these wilds usually returned home with a string he was anxious to show his folks.

And Logan Roberts and I threw most of the good gravels off the road along the hillside at the mud hens and diadappers (grebe) swimming in Spring

Lake. I seldom created a splash close enough to frighten our feathered friends while Logan began to develop an arm which held the potentials of giving the baseball fans another Dizzy Dean when he was killed in Italy in WW II.

While the waters of Spring Lake remain under the gentle reign of *Innocence*, the shallows along the muddy banks were filled with a healthy growth of bullrushes and a tall broad leafed river grass peculiar to the area. And the north bank of the slough area was a broad swampland dominated by bullrushes with intermittent stands of tassel-topped, rapier shaped reeds and bordered by a jungle mass of sedges, marshland grasses and weeds.

This was the haunt of the stealthy swamp rabbit which few people knew existed in the area. Logan and I knew they were there, but we were surprised at the great numbers of them when the does migrated to the hilltops (now Rogers Hill) to bear their young in a woodlands already populated with cottontails at about the ratio of one rabbit to the bush and two to the quickly pear bunch.

This hill, Hofheinz Garden and the hills ranging towards Ragsdale's slaughter pens, was the hunting grounds for "Rabbit" one of those humble souled negro characters of that era everyone seemed to know and like.

With the approach of evening time ole "Rabbit" could often be seen headed for his hunting grounds carrying an old Long Tom single barrelled 12 gauge shotgun in one hand and a large woven cane basket in the other. And at dusky dark he would be seen headed towards his home and market place in Katy Town with the old Long Tom unbreached, and basket filled with bunny carcasses drawn and ready for the kitchen.

The slough bullrushes also served as the winter roosting grounds for thousand upon thousands of blackbirds and starlings who, of an evening in long flights, forever sinuously shifting in unison while changing flight patterns as they winged their way in from the prairie lands to lay the bullrushes low to the water by the sheer weight of their numbers.

To hunt these pesky birds for trap bait and such we developed a sport all our very own.

When high northers forced these flocks to fly at heights low to the ground we would be laying in wait at the old sewer field to rise and throw short pieces of heavy wire twirling end-over-end into their midst bringing down a bird or two for the effort. But Wayne Lewis brought this sport to an abrupt halt by throwing a short length of small concrete reinforcing steel into the air to land across the hot wires of a power line causing an electrical storm of transformers to explode in fiery displays down the streets across the river as all the motors in the sewer plant died creating one helluva mess followed by a bushel of troubles for all.

In predawn light, wave after wave of blackbirds took flight from the slough's bullrushes to wing their way down river to the blackland feed grounds where flocks shift from field to field covering a broad area of the prairie lands.

By day migrant hawks from northern climes soared the skies, at times fanned the air with flapping wings to hang in place, searching the rushes for any stragglers or cripples that may have been left behind. And I once saw a big bullfrog attack and swallow a crippled bird and figured the old rascal would suffer one king-sized bellyache in digesting his feathered prey.

Sheltered by the rushes there were two low-lying islets where moccasins and water snakes often lay among the willow roots to sun themselves. While Deadeye Coner caught rattlers for the newly established anti-venom serum plant in San Antonio, he and I visited these islets to catch moccasins just for the hell of it.

Roping a rattlesnake is child's play compared to latching onto a crusty cottonmouth moccasin, for he is one mean, tough customer. If you fail to place your loop quite properly behind its head, a task not easily accomplished, the moccasin will go into such a fury of contortions as to often free its head, no matter how firm you grip the pole and hold the line. Then you have three short seconds to deal with him before he climbs into the boat dead set upon hanging his fangs in you.

And there are instances when you are about to complete a perfect catch, the moccasin will twist in the noose with such strength as to break its neck, (a courageous give me life or give me death struggle). But in my opinion a fitting and proper death for any reptile that strikes its victim with venom, or his sorry cousin who swallows a living prey.

It is a sorry scene to discover a big frog being slowly swallowed with head and forelegs struggling to be free as the flesh is being slowly digested away from the bones of its feet and hind legs.

Contrary to conservationist teachings I contend we no longer need the services of the carnivorous predator to help man keep nature's balance tilted towards extinction, except the cockroach, coyote and his useless collection of dogs and house cats.

About half way up the south bank of the slough a small building housed a 5 foot high centrifugal pump with its 10 or 12 inch intake pipe housed in the slough. This was the last tangible evidence of an early day grand effort to turn the dryland cotton and cornfields down river into irrigated farmlands.

Up Sink Hollow, standpipes of yellow brick in the vicinity of the Edward Burleson home (the home of Robert and Minnie Knispel) mark the ruins of a similar irrigation project where the water was pumped from Sink Springs. Though it was a familiar sight, I have only vague memories of visiting the ruins of General Burleson's home on the hillside above the main springs.

On the point where the slough emptied into Spring Lake Uncle Jack Edwards and Spokey Forsyth's cabin and boat landing was headquarters where white-collar businessmen gathered to have fish fry's and drink home brew beer brewed in a little one room shed stilted above floodline, in the brush about 20 yards from the cabin.

And this was the scene for some unusual events.

On one occasion Spokey ran from the back door holding a frying pan overflowing with a bubbling froth, seems poor-sighted Uncle Jack had sliced a bar of P & G laundry soap with the Irish potatoes he was preparing for the pan.

But the real fun began when Spokey, in an effort to protect his clients' privacy and the Johnson grass infested watermelon patch before the cabin (SWT softball court) declared the point off limits to towhead fishermen under the age of 21.

With the two old near-blind codgers to enforce their trespass rule, we had no trouble in walking the riverbank as usual until one of our crew got too bold and was ordered off the premises with most unkind words.

First move, we baited the hooks on the cane fishing poles their fishermen would leave leaning about the trunk of a big oak behind the cabin. After numerous hens struggled about the place dragging fishing poles had gone to the pot, Spokey demanded all fishermen remove the hooks from their lines before storing them under the oak.

Then one night while standing on Logan Robert's and my shoulders, Prunes Coner reached through an air hole on the wall of the stilted shed to add a chunk of laundry soap to the home brew fermenting in each of the 20 gallon crocks on the floor.

And Spokey's clients tapped one batch of home brew that, on being uncapped, spewed forth in a stream of suds 'til the bottle was empty.

Then, I believe it was my brother Pot, Wayne Lewis and, maybe Pottie Leffingwell, who were crawling along, each pushing a watermelon ahead of him through the tall grass towards the woodlands along the slough, when Spokey spied the movement among the grass, shouted at the top of his lungs and left his rocking chair on the front porch carrying his shotgun with both hands.

The boys flushed from the Johnson grass like a covey of quail and were gone up slough's woodland before Spokey could get within shotgun range.

Blundering through the woodland Spokey came upon a negro woman with her little girl standing beside her while she fished in the slough. Thinking he had overtaken one of his watermelon thieves, Spokey jammed the barrel of his shotgun to her back.

Before he could open his mouth, she looked over her shoulder, squawked and leaped to land waist deep in the water.

Realizing his mistake, Spokey set about to explain his error to the lady as he tried to help her ashore.

Paying no heed to his words or his shotgun, and refusing his assistance, the lady waded ashore and, as soon as she had gained her footing, set about beating Spokey with her fishing pole with such fury as to send him racing to the safety of his cabin with her thrashing his back while the daughter brought up the rear, shouting all the while, "Hit him, Mama! Hit him Mama!" Mama seldom missed. Spokey couldn't run very fast.

Anhingas and cormantis fished the waters of the slough while bittern

secreted themselves in the rushes and cranes and herons often visited all the lake's shorelines.

The still waters, the eddies and rushes along the shoreline, were bordered by a covering pad of water lettuce, Nile water cabbage if you will. Buoyant with roots suspended in clear water, the flat leafed lettuce heads multiplied on fragile stems in growing pads to spread across the waters. With ample space between the heads for the sun's rays to filter through, they had no ill effects upon the water beneath them and when they overextended themselves, the wind or water currents tore sections of them free to send them floating downstream to uncharted destinies.

And the galinule could often be seen, flittering about atop these pads nailing tidbits as they made their way from one station to another in the bullrushes. While during the darkness of night bullfrogs groaned, the tree frog hummed, and the whole family of smaller frogs joined the chorus.

Beneath the lake's surface there lay an underwater fairyland of aquatic plant life in living color from red to amber green in leafy displays supported by cattailed mosses in all shades and tints of green. In species with long botanical handles I can't spell, too numerous to be listed here, they left no dull chambers within the bounds of the lake.

To my untrained eye the hornwort was the most interesting of the lot. Pluming up from the depths of the lake, this plant blanketed a surface area with the habitat for the richest collections of marine creatures I believe to exist in any of this state's bodies of fresh water and in some respects comparable to the planktons of the seas.

The hornwort's crown was covered with green mosses hosting innumerable minuscule forms of plant life where the waters about were constantly astir by the potgut minnows feeding upon them - potgut, a surface feeding minnow birthing their young and I presume to be San Marcos gambusia.

In any event, while gathering fish bait from your boat you could plunge your dip net deep into hornwort's crown and lift it filled with a mass of mosses seething and fluttering with marine creatures - crawfish, fresh water shrimp, daphnia, the little black salamander, potgut minnows and small fishes galore with a grand assortment of water bugs, nymphs, and larvae of many strange species.

Before infringement by Aquarena the main spring flowed from a fissure in the old river bed at a volume to create a fountainhead cresting several inches above the lake's surface. About the spring the roiled waters maintained a wide clear chamber surrounded by all manner of aquatic plants wavering in their reaches towards the sun.

In dives from a boat while holding onto a heavy rock we were able to make brief visits to the depths about the spring. Though my rock might arrive on target without me aboard, you were always glad to reach the surface to find your good buddy manning the boat nearby.

But Wayne Lewis remedied the matter. After several "Rube Goldberg"

attempts he fashioned a diving helmet from the top of a used water heater, complete with tarred-in viewing window, air supplied by a triple-barreled automobile tire pump, several lengths of garden hose with the old type brass innertube stem serving as the check valve at the top. With a steady hand at the pump you could walk about beneath water at an upright position with water lapping at your chin. But should you bend too far forward the air would escape from the helmet in a bubbling fiasco.

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~~After~~ testing in Riverside and Giesens (tailrace at Ice Plant) Wayne made several dives to the depths of the springs in Spring Lake and to the first bench in Jacob's Well in Wimberley. I usually remained a topside-hand during most of these events - not all.

While the slough arm of Spring Lake was an entity of the Federal Fish Hatchery serving as a fish sanctuary, according to my way of thinking a series of bureaucratic blunders was in the making.

In the late 1920's a cutterboat powered by a "T" Model Ford engine was assembled in the Fish Hatchery shops to be launched into Spring Lake where it cleared much of the lake's surface, making it look mighty pretty to look at while sending 90 % of the fishes' food chain floating down the river.

In a stupid effort to improve upon perfection the Rio Grande perch and the African mouthraiser were introduced to the lake; invaders capable in groups to tear the biggest hard shell crawfish to shreds, flush fish twice their size from their spawning ground, bully everything in sight and reluctantly give ground to the loggerhead turtle. And then another small fish was introduced to feed upon the small snail who did janitorial work cleaning the algae off the surfaces of rock and leaves of underwater plants.

Inadvertently Aquarena contributed the pin-nosed gar. Quite an accomplishment for our Bureau of Fisheries and guardians of the lake.

While several species of aquatic plants were being gathered from the lake and river to be marketed across the nation for decorative use in aquariums, the underwater flowering cabomba, with other marketable species, were introduced to these waters and, with them again inadvertently, the hydrilla with other noxious species invaded perfection. But it was left to the devout do-gooders to present the most destructive invader to these waters, the water hyacinth.

Blossoming beautifully in season this hyacinth replaced the water lettuce along the shorelines, inundated the slough waters, giving us our first extinct species of these waters in the same sense you can no longer find a horned toad on the streets or hills of San Marcos.

With root system adaptable to wet soil or water the hyacinth stagnated the waters beneath them where most life forms vanished and in dense growths harbored insects and their maggot-like larvae in a mess of contamination comparable to those found in a wet garbage pit.

And before Aquarena gained its political clout, a dense cover of hyacinth in the mouth of the slough did yeoman service blocking the fisherman

my river of innocence part 2

By C. W. WIMBERLEY

Special to the Daily Record

NOTE: This is the second in a four-part series which constitutes one man's meditation upon the San Marcos River—its past, its present, its future. San Marcos resident C. W. Wimberley is the author of *Cedar Whacker: Stories of the Texas Hill Country*, published in 1988 by the Eakin Press.

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With root system adaptable to wet soil or water, the hyacinths stagnated the waters beneath them where most life forms vanished, and in dense growths they harbored insects and their maggot-like larvae in a mess of contamination comparable to that found in a wet garbage pit.

And before Aquarena gained its political clout, a dense cover of hyacinth in the mouth of the slough did yeoman service blocking the fisherman from his last avenue to fish in the state-owned waters of the lake, a public domain.

A belated arrival was a species of elephant ear plant which, aided by the nutria's efforts, proceeded to replace the bullrushes, reeds, and all forms of river grasses, sedges, and weeds growing along the shoreline and river banks.

But I do hold our "out of sight, out of mind" logic responsible for the fatal ingredient causing Innocence's downfall - pollution - a theorem. In this matter our society is about as sophisticated as the old range cow making her way to her watering hole in an earthen tank on a hot summer's day. Fighting flies all along, she wades out into the pool, noses the green scum aside to drink long and deep, then pauses to "let fly with both barrels" before wading ashore and on her way.

With the same intent and purpose we make our way to rest rooms to repeat the old cow's performance, different only in the finesse with which we dilute our body wastes with four or five gallons of water before dumping them into our water supply.

The green scum grows thick upon our waterhole as the pool runs low and the herd increases.

The old "Chick Sale" two-holer privies lingered for decades in San Marcos. Replacing them with fashionable models with hinged lids to cover the holes perched high above a concrete-lined pit became one of the W.P.A.'s favorite projects during the early Roosevelt era.

The ruins of Prof Greene's W.P.A. one-holer can still be seen on Chestnut Street, a site overlooked by our Hysterical Chapter.

As the water closet gained popularity, the residents living on the limestone escarpments extending from Sink Hollow to Westover Addition beside Purgatory Creek were left to their own resources to dispose of their sewage, resulting in some

novel, revolting methods. Some sewer lines extended some distance from the house to drain down the hillside, while some emptied into the numerous crevices and small caves found in the area, and in one bold effort, a well was drilled to serve that purpose. But the old standard of the day was to construct a septic of your own design, creating cesspools of pollution disaster.

Had these tanks been constructed to the designs and maintained in accordance with the teachings of Prof H. A. Nelson, as taught in a classroom of SWT of old, the effects upon the environment would have been minimal.

True to the grand old American tradition of making a mess of things, most of these so-called septic tanks were pits blasted into the porous limestone, most often walled before being topped with concrete, with laterals - drains installed in ditches dug in the same manner.

Without bacterial action, a growing seething mass of sludge would seal the whole system as effectively as drillers' clay within a period of 20 years or less, sending brackish blue effluent to the ground's surface. Then the tank would be pumped to resume the same action in shorter spans of time.

Meanwhile, with increasing flow the liquids and water soluble contents of these sludges percolated through the porous limestone into a growing field of pollutants, seeping into the aquafield and feeding the surface springs along the rocky shores of Spring Lake.

With the effects of a creeping cancerous growth, the fecal and cyclamate content of the pollutants fertilized the dark sewage algae to slowly envelope all plant life beneath the water, sending the little black salamander to seek the shelter of algae-free mosses wavering about the springs and turning the potgut minnow's diner into a potage of vegetative slops.

"In trying to develop a new way of testing pollution, Bobby Hill caught fish at three points in the San Marcos River, Spring Lake, City Park and just below Interstate 35. He gutted the fish, removed the fecal materials, and with this ran pour plate cultures to count the bacteria. He found that pollution definitively affected fish that live in the polluted environment.

"His research showed that the pollution count gained from the insides of fish coincided with pollution counts taken from water tests - and got worse at each point down-

stream."

Bobby Hill studied pollution in the San Marcos River and won more honors than any San Marcos student in history at the Regional Science Fair held April 2, 1970. His second grand prize enabled him to advance to the International Science Fair in Baltimore.

The above account was published in the *San Marcos Record* Thursday April 9, 1970.

But our sacred cow, Aquarena, has met the problem head-on by installing a chlorinator on the big pump supplementing the main spring's flow into the Underwater Theater to free it of algae growth while giving the aquamaids and Ralph a septic stage for their performances, unmindful of the ash of dead algae covering the aquatic growth downstream with the unmeasured effects of chlorine upon the remains of a delicate ecosystem.

Concerning our *River of Innocence*, Yankee Trooper H. H. McConnell wrote this 1896 view of our river:

"One evening we camped on the San Marcos River - one of the most beautiful streams in Texas. At the point where we crossed, it was perhaps ten yards wide and two or three feet deep, as clear as crystal and cold as if drawn from a shaded well, although the vertical rays of the July sun shone on it.

"The latter was a surprise to us, until we learned that the source of the stream was only a hundred yards distant on the mountain side. In the cool of evening I strolled out to see the springs from whence it flowed, and found them high on the hillside, thousands of them at least, forming a good sized pond, overhung by gigantic trees, whose thick foliage eluded the sunlight. From the pond the San Marcos emerged a full-fledged and mature river without going through the intermediate stages of rivulet or brook."

From this pond, *Innocence* once flowed unimpeded across the prairie lands over a mud bottom, banked by blackland soils with few rocks or stones present, and no gravel or sand bed diversions until reaching the confluence with the Blanco River where much of her unique identity was lost.

During rain or flood season her dry creek tributaries dropped their burden of rocks on leaving the hills, and carried only silts and organic matter as they emptied into the river. In accordance with nature's will, these would move down the river beds unobstructed to make their contributions to the brackish waters of the coastal lowlands.

Dampened by dams and such, used as a storm sewer with each

heavy rain, the river's natural mud bottom has been covered with layer upon layer of gravel and dirt mix washed from the streets and construction sites, accompanied by street sludges laden with a fair share of our Now Society's overabundance of garbage wastes - plus a stiff shot of raw sewage when manholes flip their covers in response to the extra charge of drainage water, and ailing sewer lifts make their contributions near the bridge.

And we sat on our cans and allowed it to happen.

Now that it's time to pay the piper, self-interest groups join hands with the worthies seeking media limelight to lead the chorus of woe, getting out the Girl Scouts to rescue beer bottles and trashfood containers that should bear a tax sufficient to allow the litterbug to pay for his privilege, and causing Mayor Pollyanna to dispatch firemen and police to correct the matter with hand-tools and feet.

All this fuss and feathers about the river grass, botanists' wild rice, with learned profs riding shotgun on the matter, reminds me of the antics of an old country doctor who, sans hospital care for his terminal patient, bones up on the latest medical journals, then runs family and friends from his patient's home so he can sit bedside alone, issuing his bulletins on his notions, as he watches his lost patient slowly die.

While Spring Lake remained an open range to fishermen, man and boy, on the clay bluff side of the lake there was an opening between rushes on the shoreline where a fisherman might land his boat or stand knee deep to fish the deep hole before him.

When we could get a boat, from this point we fished the lake by day or night and, sometimes, during the dark of the moon, searched the shadowed shoreline of the slough gigging bullfrogs and bigmouthed bass caught in the beams of my carbide headlight. And when the Game Warden's watchful eye kept us honest, I would walk the dam and shorelines swatting bullfrogs with a mesquite root club I dubbed "Excalibur."

While boating alone, I would often allow the boat to drift slowly with the current across the deep pool while I searched for a lone stand of river grass wavering its long leaves up to me near the pool's edge from a depth where its stems could never reach the surface to seed in tufts of short green leaves. Below this pool, the current flowing to the grilled intake at the ice plant, a solid stand of river grass - wild rice, if you please - filled the water to cover the surface

with a mass of wavering, ribbon-like leaves in lengths of 16 feet or more (a "guesstimate.")

Gene Phillips' father was nightman at the ice plant when, one night, I stood watching as he raked the intake grill to the turbine chambers, cleaning it of debris. In one sweep he pulled a great mass of mosses onto the deck where, to our amazement, a little eel no longer than six inches wriggled its way from the moss onto the deck. It was the smallest eel either of us had seen, but we would have been more amazed had we known this little fellow had made his way to the San Marcos from the eel's spawning grounds in the great depths of the Atlantic where he had parted company with his European cousins headed, perhaps, for the Thames.

Below Giesen's where the river spread to form a wide, shallow pool, stools of watergrass grew in the narrow approaches to the old San Antonio Austin highway bridge, a low-water wooden structure at a junction where history revolved.

With proper respects to our Hysterical Society, for my own use, the little creek emptying into the river below Pepper's at the Falls will be referred to as Vogelsang's Hollow in honor of Peter Vogelsang who loved this river no end and was a worthy representative of a fine pioneer family.

While city-bred saddle horses and teams rumbled across the wooden bridge at a trot, their country-bred cousins would spook at the bridge and have to use the water crossing above the bridge, where in my early days there were enough of these teams about to keep the gravel and rock filled crossing clean as a pin.

While the stage coaches used this crossing to ford the river, the tract of land lying west of Vogelsang's Hollow along the old stage road was a pioneer campground where state troops, Confederate, and Yankee soldiers bivouaced in their historic order.

In 1890, at the behest of Mark Riley, Congress authorized that the first Federal Fish Hatchery west of the Mississippi be built at this site. And I got to see this grand old man while he continued to serve as the first superintendent of this Federal Fish Hatchery, and I have fond memories of watching his buggy horses and milch cows graze about the hatchery grounds and the banana trees which grew about the artesian well where the blind white salamander appeared each spring and fall. And when the valved head was closed, a slow task, the water would emerge from each side in streams reaching through the banana plants to fall on grounds above

the basin.

In my time, the travelers' campgrounds across the river between the dam and the highway were known to some as the Gypsy Campgrounds where they, with their horse-drawn vans and travelers of similar stripe, spent days or weeks beneath the tall willows beside the river.

I was on hand when the trainer emerged from one of the tents across the river leading five bears by their leashes. On reaching the river, he released his charges to frolic and splash about in the water. Tiring of their sport, they were lying about in the water when the driver of a buggy coaxed his horse into the crossing from my side of the river, and the show was on.

Sensing the bears' presence, the horse bolted, splashing his way upstream, exiting the river to cross the back lawn of the ice factory, headed yonder.

In their turn the bears panicked from the water to take refuge in the treetops of the highest willows in the campground, and from my ring-side seat the show continued.

Ignoring their trainer below, the bears spent the night clinging to their high perches while he spent the night below beside a small fire and I spent the night sneaking in and out of my bed to keep my ring-side seat warm.

At dawn the show was over. Clambering down to have their breakfast, the bears submitted to having their leashes again attached to their collars.

Later Peter Vogelsang built San Marcos's first and finest tourist court, appropriately labeling each cabin with a songbird name. Mindful of the flood water reaches, he perched his cabins with back wall atop the ridge with front facing the river supported by concrete piers. For he had seen flood waters reach over the incline into the Fish Hatchery, flooding the basin ponds to drown an alligator in its net wire-enclosed pool while its buddy escaped through a hole in the cover.

With hopes of gracing his motel grounds with an artesian pool on the order of the Fish Hatchery's, Mr. Vogelsang drilled a 12-inch well only to strike a brackish, sulfur water which stank to the high heavens and gave him considerable trouble in getting the well capped.

And in my turn, I hand-fished the prawn holes along the east bank of Vogelsang Hollow to a small pond where the SWT Freeman Building now spans this creek.

Sometimes while catching my string of perch I could feel a prawn's head, only to have it scoot deeper into its caverns, in some of which

flowed clear spring water. The best I could do was get some whiskers and a great claw from the prawn that got away.

In one of the lower pools where the fronds of tree roots screened the prawn holes, I once ran to the opposite bank dragging a big loggerhead by his tail, and on another occasion fled to that shore with an angry cottonmouth moccasin in hot pursuit.

As for the few prawn I was able to catch by other means, I used their white meat for fish bait not realizing I was trading a gourmet delight for fish.

In early day San Marcos, a little Miss Ida Vogelsang and other little Misses came from town to picnic in the shade of the big pecan trees and wade in the clear pools of this creek.

When the Texas Highway Department replaced the wooden bridge with a concrete structure, the contract to built the earthen approaches was awarded a contractor using big Missouri mules in brass-studded double-breeching harness with long red and yellow tassels attached to either side of their blind-bridles.

It was here that I saw the best and among the last performances of the muleskinners' art.

With two four-hitch teams in line pulling the rooter plow, and four-hitch pulling the fresno scrapers, these muleskinners put their teams through their paces with military precision. Shouting and cursing over wads of tobacco, they snapped the long end of their reins with a rifle pop close enough to burn any laggard's heels with bits of leather, keeping things running smoothly with all shoulders tight to the collar at a steady pace.

my river of innocence part 3

Pepper's at the Falls is the most glamorous enterprise of the lot to be housed in the old building at the end of the dam which, in itself, reflects the sturdy quality of many pioneer structures built from the raw materials on hand.

This old relic of the past is worth your study - to see big cedar log piling angled across the river basin, boarded with smaller heart cedar logs fronted by a rock-filled barrier above their height at the width of a country lane, then sloped to ground level, covered with heavy and light gravels to fill the holes between these rocks, topped with clay hauled from the clay bluff beside Spring Lake to seal the top and slope of the structure. And then cottonwood trees were planted along its crest with a growing root system to reinforce the old structure so that it could withstand the torrents of the floodwaters to come.

A shallow spillway at the far end of the dam allowed water to form a small stream to join the river below Giesen's. We had a jungle islet behind the dam filled with small pools where crawfish hid under rocks, and in one of the larger pools where the still waters were filled with green algae moss, bullfrogs had their nursery for their giant-size tadpoles. Accompanied by the small fry species, they seemed to have this pool to themselves. The willows and the bushes were shared by the green tree frogs and chameleons.

And when the great floods came roaring over the dam, the slate was cleaned behind it and the stranded stream behind the dam would collect in a slow swirling mass below the ice plant in the corner behind the old turbine chamber and spillway.

After one of these floods Logan Roberts, Prunes Coner, and I were standing a-top the idle turbine chamber busy catching bucketsfuls of these bream by holding our fishing poles nearly straight down to nag one with wasp grub baited hook on each try - nearly, that is, until Prunes grew tired of the sport and went fuddling behind the dam to come back carrying a big red soft-shelled crawdad as big as they grew.

Over our protest, he hooked his perch hook through the crawdad's tail and dropped it into the water among the bream.

As the crawdad began to scoot about in the water, the biggest black ass any of us had ever seen darted from under the turbine to charge and swallow the crawdad with one

big-mouthed gulp. Then he closed his gills to hang motionless in place, fanning his pectoral fins to give us a good look at him before slowly returning to his chamber beneath the turbines, snapping Prune's #8 carpet thread line without breaking stride.

This monstrous bass must remain in his chamber to this day, for he never again showed the slightest interest in soft-shelled crawdads, the Blanco's redbreast minnows and silversides, the big shiner minnows, goldfish, gobbs of cave crickets, night crawlers, or any dangled bait to cross our minds. Oh, perish the thought he may have fallen for some dude's rod-and-reeled artificial lure.

In one of the more recent floods, the water hyacinths' growth blanketing the slough's waters was lifted to be deposited in the Malone tailrace beside Coy Deviney's place. But, as demonstrated by the flood of '54, the "clear water" or "backwards" floods on this river were the most disconcerting of the lot.

Prolonged torrential rains on the upper reaches of the Blanco sent a growing torrent of flood waters down its course, inundating the low lands along the way. On reaching its confluence with the San Marcos, these flood waters moved up the San Marcos to a point near the Malone dam - creating a clear water flood above that point, with the usual muddy flood downstream.

During this flood, minnows and perch could be seen swimming about the lawn in clear water at Riverside Park, and the falls at the old ice plant didn't have too far to fall. But, according to Jack Warner, the most distracting feature lay in the wake of the flood. Down towards the Blanco, contradicting the usual flow of the river, the trees and bushes were left leaning upstream.

During the big one, in '27 I believe, I stood on the walk behind Old Main to see the Blanco and the San Marcos join hands before reaching their usual confluence (Dew Drop Inn, at that time) while Purgatory and Sink Hollow inundated Katy Town.

Cotton bales were floated from the platform at the compress while the night agent at the Katy Depot was kept busy fighting with broom handles to keep the Purgatory rattlesnakes from crawling onto the loading platform where the water level had near reached its heights.

Must have been the morning Ed Beidler found himself stranded in the old ice plant and had to paddle his boat up the street (now Sessom)

to Peques where he tied the boat to H. A. Nelson's garden fence to walk the remainder of his way home.

Mr. Beidler was a good man marked with deep sorrows. While he worked at the ice plant building, the water turbines there were still in use to generate electric power for San Marcos. And during his tenure there, tragedy struck this good man without mercy.

First, his alternate and good friend on night duty slipped and fell into the open-topped turbine chamber where he clung to the revolving shaft while screaming for help.

On finding him there, his assistant panicked. Instead of closing the intake fins on the turbine, he lowered the watergate to the chamber where, as the waters drained through the turbine blades, its victim was chopped into bits to be recovered piece by piece down river the next day. A fisherman, while fishing below Giesen's, found an arm several days later.

While the turbines were used to generate electric power, a wooden-cogged crown gear atop each of them was geared to the power shaft leading into the plant's building where a two-story high flywheel was used to increase the RPM as it turned the small pulley on the electric generator. In lieu of the usual leather belting, the tall flywheel and pulley were grooved to accommodate several 3-inch endless ropes to transport the power.

One morning, while searching the plant for his father to deliver a forgotten lunch pail, Mr. Beidler's young son fell onto these 3-inch drive ropes to be delivered to the huge flywheel. His body revolved about this wheel to fall again among the ropes and repeat the process, until Mr. Beidler rushed to the scene and witnessed in horror his son's final trip about this wheel. Then the mangled lifeless small body fell from the ropes to the floor.

In an age when elderly Mexican women might sedately smoke the "Mary Jane" in quiet retreat, and only members of the jailhouse society would indulge themselves with the use of hard drugs, Crawfish Beidler, Mr. Ed's eldest son, was the only young person from a respectable family we knew to get involved with the drug scene.

Day's Work chewing tobacco was stimulant enough for John Tom and me, and I guess at one time or another, each of the crew got wild and sick on vintage home brew or bootleg rot-gut whiskey. And, on rare occasions, drank a lean share from

Uncle Willie Schneider's mustang grape wine jug. A lean one, mind you. And I still wonder why anyone would waste good peaches to make brandy firewater.

My history of the old building now housing Pepper's at the Falls begins with an old tintype.

In the tintype, the tall smokestack and boiler room extended from the far end of this building, and according to oldtimers' faded memories, these boilers were used to power and supply hot water for a steam laundry. The water turbines were used to generate electricity to flood the town's streets with the incandescent bulb's light in the street lamps.

If there were other enterprises in operation at this site at that time, their existence has been lost to history along with all those located there before that period.

In my early day, fine Percheron teams pulled the ice wagons across San Marcos delivering ice to iceboxes in the kitchens of customers' homes along their routes #1, 2, and 3.

On the porched platform fronting this plant, an ice sawing machine grooved each side of the 300-pound blocks of ice so that you might get any size block of ice you pleased, day or night.

It was from this platform the River Rats crew gathered ice chips to supply the old hand-cranked ice cream freezer in their clubhouse dug in a creek bank up the draw from old Evans Field.

In preparation of the cooked custard for these ice cream suppers, we had milked all the gentle milch cows pastured in Hofheinz Garden during the evening, borrowed some sugar from each member's home, and there were always enough eggs about my home to fill the order. When money was available, it was banana cream, otherwise it was plain vanilla.

The ice wagons were stored at night and the horses were stalled in a barn with lots located across the river from Riverside Park.

While the water turbines were used to generate electric power for the growing town, the lights began to flicker during the nights when the power lines across town were overloaded by the motors of new electric-operated contraptions. To remedy this matter, a new red tile room was extended from the west wall of this building to house a diesel engine with six two-foot diameter pistons. This engine powered a generator which supplemented the water turbine power when needed, which was most of the time. When this six-cylinder giant roared into action with the delicacy

of a freight train passing through your living room to let everyone across town know where their electric power came from, you may have reconsidered the simple life when you could blow out the lamp, let the cat out, and get a good quiet night's sleep.

The big engine ceased to roar, the turbines ground to a halt, and the river's energy was wasted to create falls at the spillway when the L.C.R.A. bought the power plant and dam, kit and kaboodle, from the T.P. & L.

And you should have been around to witness the more recent history of this old site first hand.

Oldtimers sometime told tales about their great flood when the water reached the corner of the court house square, but that water rose a foot a year as those old codgers retold their tales.

The best I can do in this field is to recall the day I discovered the first green automobile inner tube I had ever seen, tangled in a cultivator where a kitchen table, quilt, and other flood debris had been deposited at the end of the rows in a cotton patch on a little high ground near the Blanco. Red inner tubes I had seen, but most of them were black as Mr. Henry's model T, as I figured they ought to be.

Below the bridge past the College's Riverside Park, the river grass dominated the river's swift waters around the bend to Black Pipe.

About midway of the bend were several decaying pilings, holding in place where a 60-foot wooden waterwheel had stood to lift water from the river and dump it into a flume which reached across the road to service the pond in the Federal Fish Hatchery. And my dad told me of sitting beside his father with feet dangling from the wagon seat when they passed beneath this flume as they traveled the original route to Wimberley - Sink Hollow, Sowell Pond, Spoke Pike Hill, Brooks Crossing.

Black Pipe was the usual name given the little bridge (now in City Park) supporting the sewer main which lead to the plant across the river.

The space beneath this bridge on the sewer plant side of the river was the usual site for a floating crap game on Saturday evenings, interrupted only near election time when the good ole boy sheriff would have to get of his fanny at the county courthouse to make a few perfunctory arrests in order to secure the Baptist sisters' vote.

One time Grunt Bolton was among the hapless group to face the J.P. Court. On a plea of "not guilty

by reason of being a spectator and not a gambler" at the game, he received a \$32.50 fine, a sum twice plus 50 cents above that of the gamblers.

In another game, the man holding the dice had thrown so many passes that the blanket was covered with come-be! monies far surpassing the pot. He gathered the dice, and while rattling them above his head in his right hand threw a deuce five seven from the left.

There was a brief awestruck pause before he fled down the river hotly pursued by his bosom pals, except for cousin Milton who, with one look at the money-covered blanket, gathered it under an arm and left the scene post-haste in a new direction.

Beneath Black Pipe, as usual at bridge sites, there was a break in plant growth where the water swirled about the pilings. Below Black Pipe a good growth of river grass grew in the swift part of the stream 'til reaching the I. & G.N. trestle.

At this juncture my memories run amuck.

At a site lost to the railroad when the first track reached San Marcos in 1882, my Great Grandfather William Branch Adare, late trooper of the 32nd Texas Cavalry C.S.A., my grand old unreconstructed veteran of THE WAR, worked for his Uncle Billy Moon in a blacksmith shop near the river at the end of San Antonio Street.

He and his wife, Mary Virginia O'Banion, daughter of San Jacinto Veteran Jennings O'Banion, lived in a little house on the lot where the Hofheinz Hotel portion of the County Courthouse Annex now stands, and this is where my Granny Lawrence was born March 8, 1871.

While in the twilight years of her life, Granny Lawrence recalled a brief childhood memory for me in which she stood at the end of Hopkins Street looking across the river where a big building stood near its banks, fascinated by the round window near the top of its gabled wall. Though she did agree the building may have been a mill, the round window represented the limits of her memory. This is a matter which continues to haunt my mind, for I have never been able to attach any history to this building, and its location is another site lost to the railroad.

My dad was chief engineer at the SWTTC power plant when the Charles Cock house on the last block of Hopkins was, briefly, the center for a prospective oil boom.

After the resident of this house had continued to draw water from the dug well with increasing

amounts of oil atop the bucket, an oil which proved to be a Texas crude, the rumor mill began to spin and the property owner was besieged with wildcat speculators' bids to lease his land.

When these activities reached my dad's ears, he hurried down Moon Street towards Hopkins where he busted the bubble of an oil boom in San Marcos.

At that time, the boilers in the college power plant were fired with Beaumont Oil, clean crude, which was pumped from an oil tank car on a siding on the I. & G.N., through a three-inch pipe leading up Moon to cross the hill and empty into the concrete cisterns behind the power plant.

It did not take Dad much time to find and fix the leak in the three-inch line while the owner still awaited a more lucrative lease on his property.

And I was a youngster when an old portable power unit, a model often depicted powering the thrasher in the Kansas wheat fields of yore, stood at the end of Hopkins Street near the river above the I. & G.N. trestle.

This museum-worthy relic, a horizontal boiler and steam engine mounted on an iron-wheeled float, stood with its smoke stack askew, minus gauges, flywheel, whistle, and the glories of the past gone as it rusted in the sun awaiting the scrap metal drive in one of our nation's future wars.

And in that day a passenger-train engine, baggage coach, and passenger car were stationed at the I. & G.N. depot for a daily round trip to Smithville, but we walked the tracks to the Blanco to swim in the warm water and knock wasp nests for fish bait.

Before crossing the I. & G.N. tracks, we paused for the special passenger train with whistle blowing and banners waving which slowed down to allow General John J. Pershing to wave to all the flag-waving townspeople who lined the tracks at the depot, anxiously awaiting for a glimpse of their WWI hero as he passed through on his way to San Antonio and Fort Sam Houston.

And on another day, a similar crowd was gathered there to watch an army tank waddle off a flatcar at a siding, roar away toward Purgatory Creek, and lay waste to tall weeds, willows, and brush in a fine display of military might that fell flat when our hero decided to flatten a big pecan tree.

Billowing smoke and fire, kicking up dust and dirt, the Yankee-built invincible war machine nosed its way up the trunk of the stubborn

pecan until it reached a steep angle where it stalled and sat on its tail, unable to climb any higher or back away from its Southern foe. And the crowd left wondering what would have happened if there had been as many pecan trees in Germany as there were in Texas.

Below the I. & G.N. trestle the riverbed spreads to form a wide juncture where, to the right, a small slough extends up Purgatory Creek and the flow of the river swings sharply to the left.

Straight ahead there was a minor flow down a channel creating a swampy island. This channel was originally dug in an illogical effort to increase the river's flow to the Malone pump station below the dam now at City Park, originally built to serve a grand try at winter gardening in the area between this river and the Blanco. The concrete piers which held the irrigation flumes above the passing teams may still be in that farmland.

Though onions and such were successfully grown in these gardens, the fields had to be returned to cotton and corn when the produce and citrus fruits of the Rio Grande Valley took over the market.

At the juncture below the I. & G.N. trestle, the river flowed with a fast current to follow a wide half circle past the swampy island before straightening out to pass beneath the Katy trestle.

From the I. & G.N. to Katy there was a well beaten path through a wide band of trees and bloodweeds lying between the river and the farmlands.

On leaving the I. & G.N. you entered the Hobo Jungle where the "Knights of the Railroad" rested among the bloodweeds, cooked their Mulligan stew in five-gallon cans, ate handouts, chewed Cooper's day-old bread, for Leslie Cooper was an easy touch to any man he deemed to be hungry. A big tree leaned low over the swift water where they bathed and washed their clothes. And during the Great Depression, many a good man was lost to this jungle life.

At the other side of the circle we had Katy Hole where pore white, Negro, and Mexican kids shared the right to swim naked in the first integrated place in San Marcos and, maybe, Texas. The lower end of the pool served as a bath place for older men.

Often carrying bundles under their arms, ancient Mexican men would silently come to the lower reaches of Katy Hole where they would bathe and rinse their clothes, then sit quietly on their haunches, smoking their wisp of a cigarette while their clothes dried atop the

bushes. They looked with benevolent eyes upon the young generation cavorting in and out of the water at a respectful distance.

And when you wanted to demonstrate your swimming prowess - s show off - all you had to do was to run up the path to the hobo's leaning tree; jump in, and swim back to Katy Hole through the leaves of the river grass with no exits through bullrushes at either side.

Dog-piddling in the rivulets between the stools of river grass, you dragged your feet for fear of getting them tangled in long leaves - an event which could cause an underwater struggle to free your feet in lung-testing dives.

Though hard times and rough living were the rule of the day, any kid - black, white, or brown - could walk the path from the I. & G.N. to the Katy, hobo jungle, and the whole nine yards with no more qualms than in taking the short-cut through the vacant lot beside a friendly neighbor's home.

Seems we have suffered a loss in the quality of both streams, our lives and the river of those days.

And of course there were times when some clown tied your clothes in knot while you swam. After having to use my teeth to remove some of these knots which a spoilsport had thoughtfully soaked in mud, I continue to entertain some nasty thoughts for him wherever he may be.

Below the Katy trestle, Roger's Park offered swims, trolley splashes into the river, and man-size hamburgers to fill a hungry kid for a dime, while Mrs. Warner kept order by shouting orders from her second-story office across the confines of the park.

And the festivities of the Fourth of July celebration were capped by Curley Doyle's daredevil dive into the river from the top of a boxcar as the freight train moved across the trestle.

To be concluded next Sunday.

riverend the final part

By C. W. WIMBERLEY
Special to the Daily Record

The old dam which impounds the water at Roger's Park and the Malone water station continue to intrigue me.

With its millrace nearly filled with rubble, the building razed, and the penstock gutted of its machinery, the ruins of this old site give you the feeling of discovering the skeletal remains of a living creature that has been allowed to return to the good earth without burial or ceremony.

Scattered about the empty penstock in the shadows of tall timbers lie century-old mechanical products of the Industrial Revolution of the 1850s -- water turbines, wooden-cogged crown-gears, drive shafts and pulleys -- engulfed by invading plant life foreign to their era, as they fade into the oblivion of our forgotten past.

Though it has deteriorated to a state little better than the water station, the old dam at this site is very much alive today.

City Hall, in its usual good form, failed to purchase or come to terms with the owner of this dam as an integral part of the properties necessary to the operation of a park. Now, after private interests have purchased this dam with intent to use it and the waters of the lake it impounds as a part of their water sport arena, we find (no doubt after political clout had run amuck from many sources) it has been ruled that the dam lies across a state-owned riverbed. According to Texas law, this makes the dam and the waters it impounds public domain, denying the owner any control of these properties.

Now, if this matter stirs you with any wild notions of visiting the head of the river without paying a fee to see the old public domain from a glass-bottomed boat or skyride, forget it.

Above that dam we have a horse of another color.

Spring Lake, as it exists today, is the very private moat of our sacred cow, Aquarena, and a marvel reflecting the power of good ole boy politics. Carrying considerable clout in city hall, the county courthouse, and the state legislature, seems they can do whatever they please with the head of the river except control the flow of the Edwards Aquifer.

But after considering the manner

in which the general public treats their remaining enclaves on this river, it's sort of nice to have one place where the shores and the water are not littered with beer cans, throwaway bottles, trashfood containers, and plastic bags of home garbage. And, so, back on track to the river I once knew.

Down the river past the bridge on the old Martindale road and around the bend, the conservationists saved a gravel bar about as natural to the river's environment as its content of beer cans and bottles.

Beyond this bar we find a swimming hole Johnny Hancock shared with us. About mid-afternoon each day, the bottom of this swimming hole glowed with a reflective gloom that was about to grow into a legend until one of Johnny's older brothers stymied its growth. By a series of long dives he recovered a section of a model T's windshield that had been embedded in the muddy depths, and the glow was gone.

Below Johnny's, the tailrace from the Malone waterwheel empties into the river from the opposite side where we find Coy Deviney's domain. Coy's father truck-farmed a small tract with a little sure-footed mule that could move through small plants without stepping on one with the grace of a ballet dancer. He also raised sugar cane which, in addition to being cooked into syrup and making baluncies, was sold by the stalk for me and the Mexican population to chew and enjoy its sweet juices.

On the lower side of this tract a dry creek formed a wide, low basin as it approached the river. A short distance from the river, a line of fence post lay across this basin from bank to bank with a roll of poultry netting tied to the first post.

After muddy floodwaters had filled the basin, Coy, Trig, and their father unrolled the netting along this line of post.

After the flood waters had receded, the net wire sagged with the weight of mosses, leaves, and fishes of all sorts.

From Coy's it's but a short distance to Cape's Dam where most of the river's flow is diverted into the millrace leading to their gin. The clean mud bottom of this millrace affords the river grass its finest seed bed to be found along the San Marcos, for from the dam to the gin the water grass grew to clog the millrace in one dense stand.

Much of the water flows over and through the rocks and gravel-covered structure of the dam to follow the river's true course in an arc,

forming an island where the river passes the tailrace of Cape's Gin.

This island was known as Thompson's Island, for the Thompsons once operated a gin and grist mill a short distance above the rattletrap bridge on Hays County 295 which crosses this island via Cape's Gin.

A buhrstone from Thompson's Mill lay in the shallow water before the foundation ruins when I was a kid.

While there were forays downriver past Martindale to fish for blue cats with hooks baited with gobs of cave crickets, hunt squirrel from a boat floating downstream by day, possums and coons at night with ole Shep, the tailrace behind Cape's Gin was the limit of my claim to the San Marcos River.

Though we walked every place to scour the hills past Wimberley, we didn't cotton much to the open prairie land. After Wayne Lewis had rescued a busted-block junker from the scrap dealer's heap, with gas priced at 18 cents and 20 cents per gallon, we paid visits to my Uncle Willie Schneider's place above Wimberley on the Blanco, or Johnny Howell's race horse and goat ranch in Little Arkansas below Wimberley -- whenever there was enough money in the kitty to purchase .22 shells, Day's Work chewing tobacco, fishhooks, some grub, and gas for the round trip.

There were always enough fish and fried squirrel, supplemented with eggs from hen nests, at either site for a stay of several days if you didn't run out of coffee too danged quick and took it easy on the supply of 15 cent loaves of light bread.

But when my dad visited us at either site, there was always a plenty of good skillet-and-lid cornbread or biscuits served with squirrel stew laden with the best sop gravy you ever slapped your tongue to.

I was about big enough to get in the way when the town's people joined hands with the Normal School's forces to clear the riverside tract of land the school had acquired from whatever name the Federal Bureau of Fisheries operated under at that time. And I remember the pageantry of the torch-lighted show staged to celebrate the completion of this job, the first in the long road to develop the SWT Riverside recreation park and swimming pool.

With Prexy Evans in command, Froggy Sewell supervisor, and my dad straw boss (a job he shared at times with Ab Clayton), Riverside

became a reality.

First, the river banks were lined with cedar post pilings supporting a boardwalk with ladders extending into the water, a shallow duck pond lined with gravel for the beginners, diving boards, and a rope hanging from the limb of a tall pecan tree where you could swing to take high dives into the river.

I remember the time a student, one of the red-haired Lumpkins, was sporting black-eye bruises from chin to eyebrows, with front teeth missing where a college mule had rewarded him with a solid kick in the mouth for having its rear prodded with a sharp stick. This brave lost his grip on the rope as it swung to its heights over land, where he suffered a fall and broke both arms above the elbow. And he was the worst looking sad sack to walk the campus of old SWT.

To clear the river of moss and river grass, two farm spiked harrows were laced together on channel irons, looped at each side with chains where long cables were attached. With mule teams stationed on either side of the river, this contraption was dragged back and forth across the river bottom freeing it of all plant growth in roiled clouds of silt and wastes, doing a poor job of substituting for nature's floods which clean house by the periodic unhampered flushing of debris from its rivers.

With increased stipends from the state legislature, often in response to Prexy Evans' pleas, the college bought one of Henry Ford's first farm tractors, this one turned into a dragline of sorts by a firm in Oklahoma.

Equipped with a spool of cable on each rear axle, this machine could drag the river from all angles with a 12-foot length of I-beam laced with gin augers on either side. In proper hands, this operation did no harm to the river's natural black soil basin, but unfortunately could only stir the gravel, sand, and rocks man had placed there regardless of the route they traveled to get there. Dredging with "mudbucket" is an entirely different matter.

And while this Fordson tractor rig set a long service record cleaning Riverside, it was often called upon to do other public services.

On one occasion, Dad and I took it to New Braunfels to clean a section of the Comal River above Landa Park. In the process of clearing the river bed of its mosses and river grass, the I-beam drag would often uproot big walnut logs with an end-over-end splash as they returned to the river's depths where they had been stored to season while waiting their turn at the sawmill. These logs

remain in those depths today.

While cleaning the pool below Giesen's, the I-beam uncovered sawmill scraps of lumber and butt ends from sawtimbers embedded in the silts.

This, with the remains of a string of pilings below the dam, indicate that Burleson's sawmill may have been located on the east side of the river above this pool.

The remains of his grist mill were uncovered in Riverside -- parts of a water turbine chamber and an octagon shaft, all hewn from walnut timber.

Keeping the river clean in those days was a constant chore, for within a very short time the river grass and mosses were again in place waving at you from the riverbed.

In my unbiased opinion this dragging operation has proven to be the only practical, available means of flushing the river of its burden of waste, especially during the drought flow from the Edwards Aquifer.

Be that as it may, with city hall an adjunct of Old Main, it was easy enough for a learned prof to stop the dragging operation by invoking the rhetorical term "plowing the river" -- branding this operation with all the sins attributed to the old moldboard plow for destroying the virgin turfs of the Great Plains and prairie land of the U.S. Repeatedly I have seen the riverbed spring to life, wild rice and all, after being dragged free of the mess we have helped to create.

The millrace at Cape's Gin is a fine example. Before ginning time, Mr. Cape would make arrangements for Dad and me to use the college tractor to clear the millrace clogged with river grass.

The first run was a stubborn job to free the millrace of river grass, and about halfway down the race I took note of a Mexican lady heavy with child doing her wash surrounded by Muchachos beneath the shade of a pecan tree.

On each pre-fall season trip to Cape's millrace we found it clogged with a new solid growth of our Prof's wild rice and the Mexican lady again heavy with child, doing the diapers beneath the same tree.

In my opinion, dragging the river properly can be a contributing factor in restoring the natural habitat of the vanishing species and safeguarding some facets of the unique splendor of the river before the Edwards Aquifer runs dry or the time arrives when we must attack the problem with dredge and mudbucket. Then -- it's a final goodbye to the San Marcos as our *River of Innocence*.

But good memories live on -- the time Wheybelly Dailey and I sat in a boat to night-fish the lake for catfish and eels while listening to The Hokum Kings play "Shine on, Shine on Harvest Moon" atop Roger's Hotel. Dailey usually caught the first fish and when they were biting, never knew when to quit and go home. Sell what you can't eat in Katy Town was his motto.

And to the doubters of my word, a Baron Munchausen "Vas you dere, Charlie?" salute, for now I must return to my abacus to determine, once all the waters of this world are dead, the exact number of eons to pass before they are again the source of life for the barren planet Earth. And my fingers are sore.

EPILOGUE

The way I see it, Prexy Evans and Froggy Sewell developed Riverside Park and kept the swimming hole clean while Miss Brogden maintained a proper decorum. Today this portion of the river has gone to pot, filled with a sludge laden with debris from campus building sites, while the University Prexies are kept busy ingratiating themselves to the Governor or getting fired; Froggy Sewell's counterpart is out chasing wild rice; and the deans, if any exist, have been placed on an inactive status for the past 20 years, a mild blemish on the gleam of our institution of higher learning.

And as our town has grown to become a small city, Vogelsang Hollow has, at an alarming rate, increased its delivery of man's waste materials to the river, where the only measures taken to correct the matter have been for the city to acquire a state permit to recover their street gravels at this creek's confluence with the river, and send teams searching for sewer leaks when the fecal count at this point exceeds "acceptable levels."

In a society where everybody expects someone else to mind the store and hold his finger in the dike of disaster, in my declining years I pine to have seen my Texas when the tall grasses dragged at your saddle stirrups and the rivers flowed clear, clean waters to the coastal shoreline.

Small wonder Texas has attracted the tall men of history from sister states to our rivers while growing native sons to sit tall in the saddle through yesteryear's history to date.

Austin to the Brazos, Burleson to the San Marcos, Houston to the Colorado, Mackenzie to the Concho, Mr. Sam Rayburn from his Bonham on Bois D'Arc Creek, L.B.J., alumnus of S.W.T. from the Pedernales -- this list thumbnails my point and

ends the theorem.