

Presentation for Marker Dedication

Archeological surveys have shown that prehistoric Texans camped along San Felipe Creek for thousands of years, maybe 10,000 years. Even during historic times Indian groups, Comanche and Apache, made use of the waters now flowing behind us. While no Spanish settlements were established here, a number of explorers passed this way beginning with Gaspar Castaño de Sosa's 1590 expedition to New Mexico. Recorded visits to the Creek were few and usually made by people traveling elsewhere.

Continuous documentation did not happen until the 1800s. In 1848 John Coffee Hays led an expedition from San Antonio west to test a proposal of establishing trade between San Antonio and El Paso. Beginning in 1849 U.S. Army expeditions camped along the Creek. During that year a couple of lieutenants explored the countryside in an effort to identify a road between the two cities. Another, much larger Army expedition confirmed the route in 1850. Once the road was marked, merchants, travelers, mail carriers and soldiers rested along the banks of San Felipe Creek during their journeys to El Paso, New Mexico, California and to Chihuahua City, Mexico.

The waters of this creek were so plentiful and other west Texas water sources so sparse that many westbound wagon trains, including the camel caravans and Civil War soldiers heading for New Mexico Territory, would rest here and then split into smaller companies when leaving the Creek. No other water source could take care of the large trains of men and livestock. Repeatedly, visitors noted that San Felipe Creek was the most attractive creek in western Texas.

The city of Del Rio, first called San Felipe del Rio, originated in 1868 with the diversion of the Creek's waters into canals. Cattlemen sometimes grazed their livestock in the area. Among them were Del Rio's first family -- James and Paula Losoya Taylor -- whose home downstream from here became the community's center in those early years. The creek-fed canal system created farmland in the midst of West Texas desert. In subsequent years the U.S. Army established Camp San Felipe, an 1870s outpost of Fort Clark, to protect the young community. A gristmill to grind grain into meal was built near Academy Street; the mill operations were eventually expanded into the first icehouse and first electrical power plant.

In 1882 the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railroad tracks were built across San Felipe Creek bringing quick, regular transportation to Southwest Texas. The railroad transformed the town and built Del Rio's first water system using the water from San Felipe Springs. (The municipal city water continues to use the same waters.) The Creek also brought the Army to Del Rio again in the form of the World War I post named Camp Michie. The municipal water supply is still here at the top of the Creek, and a number of city parks cool our summer months.

The growth of the city has been tied to this creek. It has provided us with food and water, with jobs and recreation. With all of this history it seems most appropriate that the first City of Del Rio Historical Marker would be established for San Felipe Creek.