

## Creeks in Hallettsville As Recalled by Don Minear

The original Hallettsville townsite is situated in a bowl. It is bordered on two sides by creeks and on a third by the Lavaca River. Additionally, there was, at one time, a fourth waterway that partially bisected the town. And while not a part of the original town there is an additional slue now located in the city limits that runs northeast to southwest from city park to the river. It will not be addressed here. While not an ideal spot for a town it was most likely chosen because of the ready water supply.

Thigpen Branch—I think this had another name originally. Maybe something beginning with K. It starts in the golf course, property willed to the City by the late Philip Rothschild. This headwater was not in the original site. It would have started just outside of the Hallet league. This creek flows south roughly parallel to La Grange and Texana Streets. It is behind the present Dairy Queen which was originally the site of a cotton gin. At one time Ford Street crossed the property and exited on Texana. There was a low water crossing because the creek bisected the property.

John Liebknecht operated the gin. He and his family lived in the house on La Grange opposite the gin. A property transaction reported in the March 15, 1912 issue of the *Hallettsville New Era* indicates that on November 22, 1911 a transaction was recorded whereby Liebknecht and wife sold to F. A. Treptow 2 ½ acres that included the gin and mill for \$5000. The April 2, 1912 edition stated that “The new house for the Liebknecht gin, now owned by F.W. Treptow, has been completed...The machinery for the gin will be installed soon, the mill machinery being already in running order.” After his death his wife and daughter, Nellie, moved across the street and into a house on the south side of the branch. Later owners of the property included G. H. Gerdes and Cecil Boyd. Boyd later moved to the valley and managed gins in Mexico and/or Central America. It is thought that his brother, Marvin Boyd of Port Lavaca, was the last to operate the in the 1960's.

To the south of the gin and across the road was a building in which O. B. Sokol stored peanuts that he purchased from growers. In the early 1950's, at noon on a hot Sunday summer day, the building burned under mysterious circumstances. The building and inventory were a total loss. The branch turns west in about that location where Lavaca Abstract is now. From there it crosses La Grange Street separating property that was owned by Mrs. Liebknecht on the south and to the north, property once owned by Frank Buschermihle. Miss Nellie Liebknecht managed Elkins 5 & 10 Store (Ben Franklin) for many years. Mr. Bushermihle worked for Weingarten's for many years. One day, in the 1980's, while parking his car on the square he had a stroke and drove up the wall separating Ben Franklin from Gindlers. The waterway continues west and crosses Main Street. On the Main Street side, it is bordered on the north by what at one time was Thigpin property. The two story Thigpin house was torn down when Terrell Mullins built his house. Next to the creek (before it belonged to Mullins) Mr. Wallace erected a building and operated a laundry. His son was Squay Wallace, and I think that Squay sold the property to Mullins. After crossing Main, the creek continues past the old jail on its way to the river. There may be a creek on the west riverbank that enters at about the same place.

November 27, 1897, the *Hallettsville Herald* reported “that when the question of locating the courthouse was before the court the citizens of Hallettsville agreed to buy a block of ground close to the square to be used for a free camp yard and hitching ground. The property...was just a block from the northwest corner of the square, what is known as the Rabb barn property.” It was just over two acres and two-thirds were “level and covered

with grass.” The city council appointed a committee to look into permanent improvements, “making the place an ideal hitching and camp yard....The work has been done...Nearly two and a quarter acres are under a good fence, a building has been provided for shelter, numerous hitching post have been put up with feeding boxes attached , and the well has been cleaned and put in good repair for supplying water to both horses and campers...The trees offer protection against the sun, and the deep ravine offers a good camping place during blizzards.”

The *Hallettsville Herald*, for April 19, 1912, stated “Work will begin in a few days on the concrete bridge to be built by the city across the ravine near the county jail.”

### Reckaway Branch

Reckaway/May Branch starts several miles northeast of town. It crosses both the Golsch and Leopold properties behind the cemetery and works its way past the public school. It crosses Highway 90A going south. Next it crosses the low water crossing on south La Grange Street, where the railroad bridge once stood, and winds its way to the river. (Look at a map to see where it goes. I don't know when the name was changed from May to Reckaway.)

### Lost Branch

Next is the creek that bisected the town just off the south side of the square. If it had a name, I don't know what it was. I just refer to it as “my creek” as it is the one that I know the most about. Additional research using the Sanborn maps and newspapers from the late 1890's through the 1920's could possibly reveal answers not found here. Such as a name and when the creek was filled. It had to have been filled before T. Y. Hill built his hardware store in the late 1890's.

It began toward the east side of where Hallettsville Communication is located. Ty Hill owned that block and had that building constructed. It was the original site of Hill's Hallettsville Hardware Store. The Hill building would have been built on top of the creek bed. (Ca. 1900?) The Hallettsville Herald was located on the east side of that block facing Third Street. It was here, on the street, that Editor W. R. Beaumier was shot and killed by his wife. According to the Sanborn Fire Maps the headwaters of the creek were behind this building.

I am most familiar with its course across the block that my building, the New Era, is on. The buildings on the square would have backed up to the bank. There was an alley that has since been closed that would have included the bank and waterway. It was most likely filled in at the time the water and sewer lines were laid. Every building had an outdoor toilet connected to that line. J. E. Timm told me once that it was so deep that a man wearing a hat and on horseback could ride up it and not be seen. He also told me that when, as a boy, he would come to town on Saturday with his family in a horse drawn buggy they would park under a building that was located across the street from the present New Era building. I was also told on several occasions that there had been an amphitheater in the creek bed where the New Era stands. Picture shows, probably magic lantern shows, there and there were benches for the patrons to sit on. I have also been told that there was a picture show about where the C. R. Hrcnir service station was located one block west. This is most likely there same place but in the wrong location as I only heard mention of this location once.

During my lifetime the central portion of my block has been built up. But earlier, prior to the 1950s when the highway department did drainage improvements, whenever there was heavy rain the run-off would cross the highway in the 100 block of South Texana. It would then continue its course across South La Grange and across South Main Street on its way to the river.

The alley on my block was very sandy and lined with non-bearing Mulberry trees. There was a live spring that seeped into the basement of the Kocian (Rosenberg) building that requires a sump pump. Several years ago, a sinkhole opened on south Main exposing the utility pipes and how deep the creek had been. There has also been a smaller opening at the south-east corner of the Kocian annex that reveals a deep hole.

When Hubbard Wyatt bought the vacant lot on the corner of La Grange and Fourth Streets in the 1960's the City "jumped up" the property taxes. He forced the City to show him the valuation of the Allen property across the street. The Allen property was valued at a fraction of what they were going to charge him. And the Allen property still had buildings on it at that time. When Scott Hill owned the Wyatt property, where the City Hotel had once been located, he deeded the City a right-away for an alley across the property with the stipulation that the alley could never be closed. If it was closed the agreement would be null and void. In the 1960's the city council allowed the Gindlers, who owned the property at that time, to close the west end of the alley to build an annex. Judge Paul C. Boethel later told me that he regretted having ruled that the alley could be closed. In the 1970's when People State Bank purchased the Wyatt property the City demanded a portion of the sale price saying that it owned the alley. They lost because of the fact the alley had been closed.

When the H. J. Heye building was expanded in 1914 a sub-basement was added incorporating a portion of the creek bed. As previously mentioned until the closing of the alley it still acted as a waterway. The New Era building was erected on top of the filled creek in 1923. Before that time the New Era was located just to the south of the present location. Until the warehouse on the east end of the building was built and the drainage issues were addressed the water run-off would attempt to come through the back door if not blocked. Even diverted it would still go down the alley, through the front doors of Klimitchek Grocery and Feed Store and out the back.

Toward the west side of the block the creek split into several "fingers". The Burkett house on Front Street is built over one of them. Looking at the rear of the house from the Lavaca River bridge it is possible to see it. Viola Burkett once told me, when I asked about the location of her father's saloon, that as children they had to cross a bridge to get to it. As I recall she said that the saloon was located in the Elstner building on the corner of Third Street and La Grange. On the corner next to Burkett's house, I was told there had been a "beer joint" frequented by several "ladies". (I digress)

Across Fourth Street, on the corner where Tumis Service Station is located, Johnny Picka had a "filling" station that had been built on top on another offshoot of the branch. According to Hubbard Wyatt there was a still under the station and it was possible to drive under the building and pick up your "home brew." When A. D. Voskamp bought the property south of Tumis; he filled the in the rest of the branch and built his auto body shop on it. Prior to that, whenever the river went on a rise the water would back up and close Front Street at that location.

This is my recollection of this and the other waterways. Any mistakes are mine but that is the way I remember that it was or the way it was told to me by others.

