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The Thurms

Early German Settlers on Bull Creek

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In conjunction with Ladd Pattillo (descendant), Patricia Woolery-Price, (deed research), and The Bull Creek Foundation

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I. CONTEXT

There is a hike and bike trail on the City of Austin's Upper Bull Creek Greenbelt, with entry just off Old Spicewood Springs Road.¹ On the greenbelt are a set of ruins. In 2004 an archeological review² of the area was done in preparation for building the hike and bike trail. The archeological report said of the ruins: "*The historic farmstead that makes up [this site] is recommended as potentially eligible for listing in the National Register [of Historic Places]*". Unfortunately, the historical research of the site only traced the history of the ruins back to the Smith / Stenis family that bought the property in 1941 for recreational use, later sold to the City of Austin. The ruins were existent when the Smiths bought the property; the Smiths did no development on the property other than gardening. Since the 1980s and a conversation with a Mr. Wade Preece, who was 80+ at the time, it was suspected the ruins were tied to his ancestors who were some of the earliest settlers on Bull Creek; he is descended from Richard Lincoln Preece, Republic Era Texas Ranger whose papers are kept at the Briscoe Center for American History.

Considering the unique geographical and cultural aspect of the Bull Creek Valley in Austin and Travis County history, and considering the lack of *any* representation of Bull Creek history in terms of Texas historical markers, a marker is proposed at the site of the home of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable, the ruins of which make-up the "historic farmstead" referenced in the archeological report, a possible candidate for

¹ Entrance is near postal address 5479 Old Spicewood Springs Rd, Austin, TX 78759

² See references, Archeological Survey of the Stenis Tract Hike and Bike Trail. This is a recorded archeological site; trinomial has been withheld in this document but is available in the report.

the National Register of Historic Places. Interpretive signage is already in place at the ruins discussing the Smith family's use for recreation and gardening in the 1940s but provides no information to the true historic origin of the ruins.

Discussions about an official state marker to correctly identify the historical significance of the site have already started with the Bull Creek Foundation, and with Kevin Thuesen, Environmental Conservation Program Manager, City of Austin (the property is owned by the City of Austin).



Figure 1 Interpretive signage is already in place at site of the ruins of the Isaac and Tena Venable homestead but does not recognize the true origins as those of some of Bull Creek's earliest settlers.

II. OVERVIEW

William Thurm came from Germany in 1850 with his wife, Caroline, and two young daughters; a third soon born in Texas. Arriving in Galveston they were among the first settlers along Bull Creek in 1855 on land purchased from Josiah Fisk, namesake of Fiskville. The family lived in a log cabin at the base of “Thurm Hill”, the steep hill down which today’s Spicewood Springs Road descends east of 360. Additional land purchases from Fisk in 1873 and 1874 expanded holdings to 340 acres along Bull Creek.

Geographic and cultural similarities between Bull Creek Valley and Appalachia have been made, and the early families that settled the valley, like Thurm, Venable, Waechter, Preece, and Boatright, formed a clan-like, close knit community. Early settlers to Bull Creek chose the area for the abundance of springs and rich farm land. The isolation of Bull Creek from Austin bred a self-reliant, independent people. The isolation meant that old traditions persisted longer than in fast growing Austin. Marriages were often between families in the valley of Bull Creek further preserving the culture; two Thurm daughters married into other early families in the Bull Creek Valley. These people often identified themselves as mountain people, a unique culture to the otherwise prairie like culture of Austin. Outsiders often derisively labeled them “hillbillies”. Indeed, parallels between the people of the Appalachian Mountains and early settlers of Bull Creek have been made, and it has been suggested that many settled the Bull Creek Valley because it reminded them of the mountains, hills and hollows from which they came.

The eldest daughter, Louise Thurm, married August Waechter in 1866 settling on upper Bull Creek south of Oak Grove Cemetery, near the former site of Oak Grove School. The youngest daughter, Bettie Thurm, never married, lived with her parents, and inherited the Thurm homestead after Caroline, the mother, passed.

During the Civil War Isaac Venable served in the 1st Tennessee Light Artillery, US Army, and had not yet moved to Texas. After the war, Richards (p.3) says "*It is not known just what brought him [Isaac Venable] to Texas but his sister and mother followed him to Bull Creek and the sister married M.H. Hays, for whom the hill at the upper end of the valley, Mack Hays Hill, is named*"³

As to why Isaac Venable came to settle in Bull Creek, as a Unionist during Reconstruction, Bull Creek's Unionist sentiments may have played into the decision to settle there. The Unionist sentiment of Bull Creek, including armed resistance against the confederacy, is part of what makes its history unique.⁴

In 1872 Tena Thurm married Isaac Venable, then a teacher at Oak Grove School, first established in 1864.⁵ It is the ruins of their homestead that are referenced in the archeology report.

³ See Figure 20 Hand drawn map of Bull Creek from Richards' *Valley of Cascade Creek*

⁴ In references see Cox (2005), Preece (1964) and "West Travis County", article on Austin History Center website

⁵ See references, Barkley p. 153

The Thurm and Venable homesteads were referenced landmarks in Travis County, the former used for defining Travis County voting precincts No. 14 and 15, the latter a landmark used in defining county roads and appears on Travis County road maps. As with other historic homes in Austin, like Edward Zimmerman's near Fiskville, the Thurm and Venable houses may have been built from lumber milled at nearby Walden mill south on Bull Creek.⁶

Upon Tena Thurm Venable's death in 1921 heirs sold the house and land to a Dorothy Duvall in 1935. Materials from the Venable house are said to have been used in the construction of the Duvall house on a hill 300' west across today's Spicewood Springs Road. Dorothy Duvall was still living in that house when she sold the Venable tract of land in 1941 to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Irving Smith. The ruins of the Duvall homestead are now located in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.

The original Thurm homestead was probably located along today's Old Spicewood Springs Road, east of Loop 360, in what is now Bull Creek District Park. Unfortunately, during construction of Loop 360 the historical significance of the Thurm homestead was not recognized and the property was razed.

Find A Grave shows William Thurm to be buried in Oak Grove Cemetery on upper Bull Creek along Spicewood Springs Road. He appears to have died in 1887. Per Ancestry.com, Caroline (wife of William Thurm) was Johanne Christiane Caroline Hoff. Born 1816-1819. Died December 1897. Caroline was buried in Pleasant Valley

⁶ The mill is also a recorded archeological site.

Cemetery, AKA Walden Cemetery, AKA Bull Creek Cemetery, in the 7600 block of Creekbluff Drive, now a front yard off Loop 360, Austin.

Find A Grave provides a list of daughters, all buried in Oakwood Cemetery Annex

- Louise M Thurm Waechter (1841 - 1922)
- Tena M Thurm Venable (1847 - 1921) (May also appear as Tina; Clementine).
- Bettie Thurm (1854 - 1934) (Never married; appears also in some deeds as Elisabeth).

III. SIGNIFIGANCE

Bull Creek represents a unique part of Austin and Travis County history. That history includes its geology; archeology; cultural similarities to Appalachia; moonshine production; Mormon settlements; early water powered mills that fueled construction; Unionist resistance during the Civil War; its use in promoting Austin; the role of cedar chopping and charcoal in fueling the growth of building and railroads in Austin; recollections of Janet Long Fish as a destination for recreation including R&R for soldiers during WW II; Camp Wooten.⁷ Despite this rich history there are no historical markers addressing Bull Creek history; an untold story that needs to be addressed. A good place to begin telling this story would be with its early settlement.

The ruins of the Isaac and Tena Venable's homestead are one of a few remnants of early settlement on Bull Creek and backed with an archeological report saying, "*The historic farmstead that makes up [this site] is recommended as potentially eligible for listing in the National Register [of Historic Places]*". Yet despite this, the true origin of the site as the homestead of some of Bull Creek's earliest settlers remains undocumented even in the archeological report.

The Venable site ties in with the broader story of the Thurm family, German immigrants, who like so many Germans entered Texas through Galveston. The

⁷ See references for Austin Statesman (1923); Barkley; Cantell; Camp Tom Wooten on Bull Creek; Cox (2005); Cullick; Jackson; Preece (1964); Richards; Sitton (2000, a&b); Upton; Vance; Views in Austin, Texas (1880); West Travis County, article on Austin History Center website; Zelade; Zimmerman Home, Historic Marker Application

Thurm family were among the very first settlers to Bull Creek. As noted in the application for the historical marker for Fiskville, according to land records in Travis County Court House, Josiah Fisk purchased many acres of land around Bull Creek from people owning headrights and sold the land to settlers. This too is a part of the Thurm story.

The original Thurm homestead and daughter Tena Thurm Venable's homestead were referenced landmarks in Travis County, the former used for defining Travis County voting precincts No. 14 and 15, the latter a landmark used in defining county roads and appears on Travis County road maps. The Thurm homestead gave rise to the name "Thurm Hill" still known to many "old timers" in the Bull Creek area and referenced by authors such as Jackson and Richards in detailing the early history of Bull Creek. This is today the steep hill down which Spicewood Springs Road descends. A piece of geographic history that will soon be lost if not documented.

Like the historic Edward Zimmerman home, both homes may have used lumber milled from the nearby historic Walden mill (another recorded archeological site).

The history of Venable homestead also feeds into another historic homestead, that of Dorothy Duvall, the ruins of which still exist a short distance away in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and should be recorded in the THC site atlas. Doing so will require reference to the Venable homestead.

In conclusion, we have historic properties existing inside City of Austin parkland that have not been properly documented, or recognized. The original Thurm homestead

appears to have been razed as part of the construction of Loop 360, but subsurface remains may exist. Additional Loop 360 construction is already being planned; having the Thurm story properly documented with a historic marker may help preserve whatever subsurface remains exist.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

Chronology of the Thurm Family's Settlement on Bull Creek

1850 Thurm Family Comes to Texas

In or about 1850 William Thurm came from Germany with his wife and three daughters.⁸ Family archives (Ladd Pattillo, of Austin, Texas is a descendant; Wade Preece was an uncle) show they entered Texas through Galveston. They lived for a while in Fredericksburg, then moved to Austin.

Find A Grave shows William Thurm to be buried in Oak Grove Cemetery on upper Bull Creek along Spicewood Springs Road. He appears to have died in 1887.

Per Ancestry.com, Caroline (wife of William Thurm) was Johanne Christiane Caroline Hoff. Born 1816-1819. Died December, 1897. Caroline was buried in Pleasant Valley Cemetery, AKA Walden Cemetery or Bull Creek Cemetery, 7600 block of Creekbluff Drive in a front yard off of Loop 360, Austin.

Find A Grave provides a list of daughters, all buried in Oakwood Cemetery Annex

- Louise M Thurm Waechter (1841 - 1922)

⁸ Richards says all three daughters were born in Germany. Bettie's death certificate says she was 87 years old at death in 1934, providing a birthdate of 1847. But her tombstone lists a birth date of 1954 after the family moved to Texas. Census data also variously cites family origin as Germany and Prussia.

- Tena M Thurm Venable (1847 - 1921) (May also appear as Tina; Clementine).
- Bettie Thurm (1854 - 1934) (Never married; appears also in some deeds as Elisabeth).

1855 William Thurm buys land from Josiah Fisk

As noted in the application for the historical marker for Fiskville, according to land records in Travis County Court House, Josiah Fisk purchased many acres of land around Bull Creek from people owning headrights and sold the land to settlers. This was the case with William Thurm.

1855 Josiah Fisk sells land (about 80 acres) to William Thurm on Bull Creek, part of the James Coleman headright grant. As a reference in a future deed conveyance shows, this is the parcel of land on which the Thurm family lived; this agrees with Richards⁹ who says they settled on Bull Creek in a three room log cabin at the foot of what was known as "Thurm Hill", the steep hill at the bottom of which today's Spicewood Springs Road meets up with 360. Jackson¹⁰ also alludes to Thurm Hill, the Thurm family, and to the Venables living in this area. Jackson says the Thurms and her ancestors, the Waldens, settled on Bull Creek about the same time.

James Coleman GLO link:

<http://gisweb.glo.texas.gov/cfGIS/glomap/basefile.cfm?SdeNum=484530642>

⁹ See references

¹⁰ See references

1855, Travis County Deed Records: Deed Record K, p. 91-92

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph746155/m1/101/>

1860 Census; Thurm Family on Bull Creek

In the 1860 census the Thurm family shows up, but with some typical census mysteries. The initials don't match the daughters, and one daughter shows as being a male, but ages are approximate, and the presence of Waldens and "Nitches" points to this being the Bull Creek area. Walden of course is associated with the Walden mill on Bull Creek; and Nitche shows up in other documents as having owned a mill on Bull Creek (see below).

1		J. Walden	11	F				Texas		1
2		M. Walden	9	F				"		1
3		S. Walden	7	M.				"		1
4		S. Walden	5	F				"		1
5		R. Walden	12	M.				"		1
6	1444	1444	C. A. Nitche	26	M.	Carpenter	1570	4.10	Germany	
7			E. M. Nitche	24	F	Wife	X		England	
8			Wm. Nitche	17	M.				Germany	
9			C. J. Nitche	13	M.				"	1
10			M. Nitche	12	F				Missouri	1
11			C. O. Nitche	9	M.				"	1
12			E. M. Nitche	7	F				Texas	1
13			A. A. Nitche	2	F				"	
14			C. Nitche	12	M.				"	
15	1445	1445	H. Thurm	52	M.	Farmer	1200	1.00	Germany	
16			J. A. Thurm	10	F	Wife	X		"	
17			S. Thurm	16	F				"	1
18			S. Thurm	13	F				"	1
19			R. Thurm	12	M.				"	1

Figure 2 1860 Census

A newspaper article from 1861 references a “Nitchkie’s” mill on Bull Creek. The newspaper spelling was more likely correct than the census taker’s. We know from Jackson that the Waldens operated a mill on Bull Creek. It is not clear if these are separate mills or the same in different ownership over time.

The Portal to Texas History

State Gazette (Austin, Tex.) Vol. 12, No. 34, Ed 1 Saturday, March 30, 1861 - (Magnified)

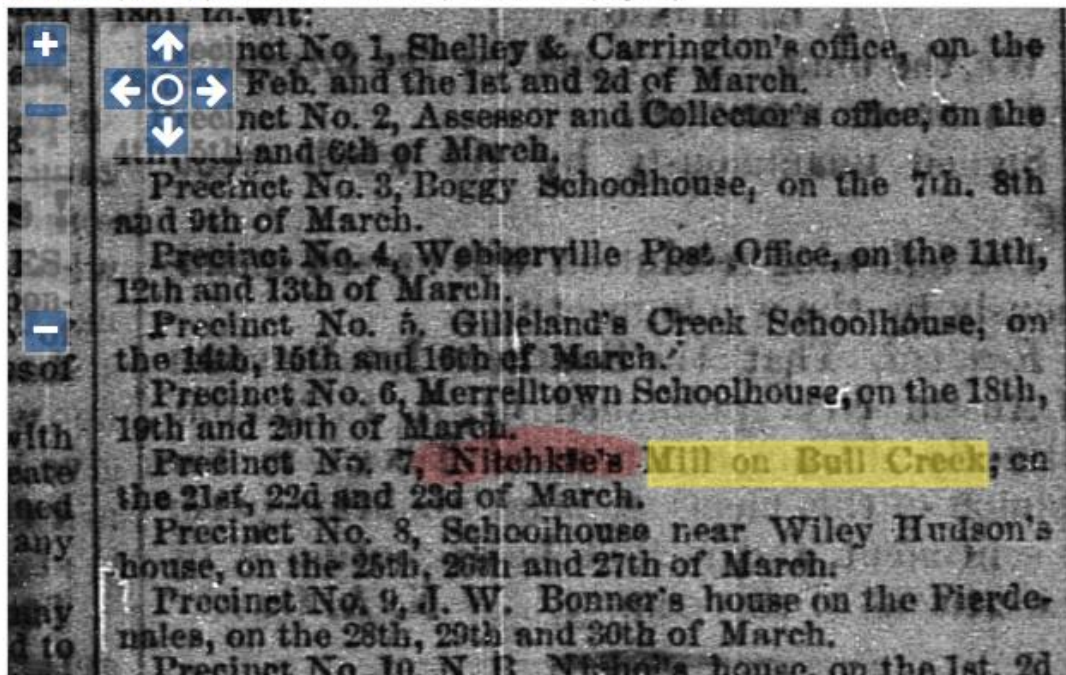


Figure 3 Article from State Gazette (Austin, TX) 1861 with reference to Nitchkie’s mill (Thurm’s neighbors) on Bull Creek

Ca. 1865 Isaac Venable Civil War; A Previous Marriage?

During the Civil War Isaac Venable served in the 1st Tennessee Light Artillery, US Army, and had not yet moved to Texas. After the war, Richards (p.3) says "*It is not known just what brought him [Isaac Venable] to Texas but his sister and mother*

followed him to Bull Creek and the sister married M.H. Hays, for whom the hill at the upper end of the valley, Mack Hays Hill, is named"^{11,12}

Isaac probably had a previous marriage ca. 1865-1866. In the 1880 census, Isaac and Tena Thurm, married at that time, show a son 14 years old which suggest he was born in 1866. But in the 1870 census Tena is still living at home with her parents William and Caroline on the Thurm homestead; and marriage records show Isaac and Tena not marrying until 1872.

1866 Louise Thurm Marries August Waechter

In 1866 Louise Thurm and August Waechter marry. An article in the Southern Intelligencer, Austin, TX, Thursday, March 1, 1866, announced the marriage, and that the marriage takes place at the home of the bride on Bull Creek, i.e. at the home of William Thurm. This would be the first of Williams daughters to wed.

¹¹ See Figure 20 Hand drawn map of Bull Creek from Richards' *Valley of Cascade Creek*

¹² As to why Isaac Venable came to settle in Bull Creek, as a Unionist during Reconstruction, Bull Creek's Unionist sentiments may have played into the decision to settle there.

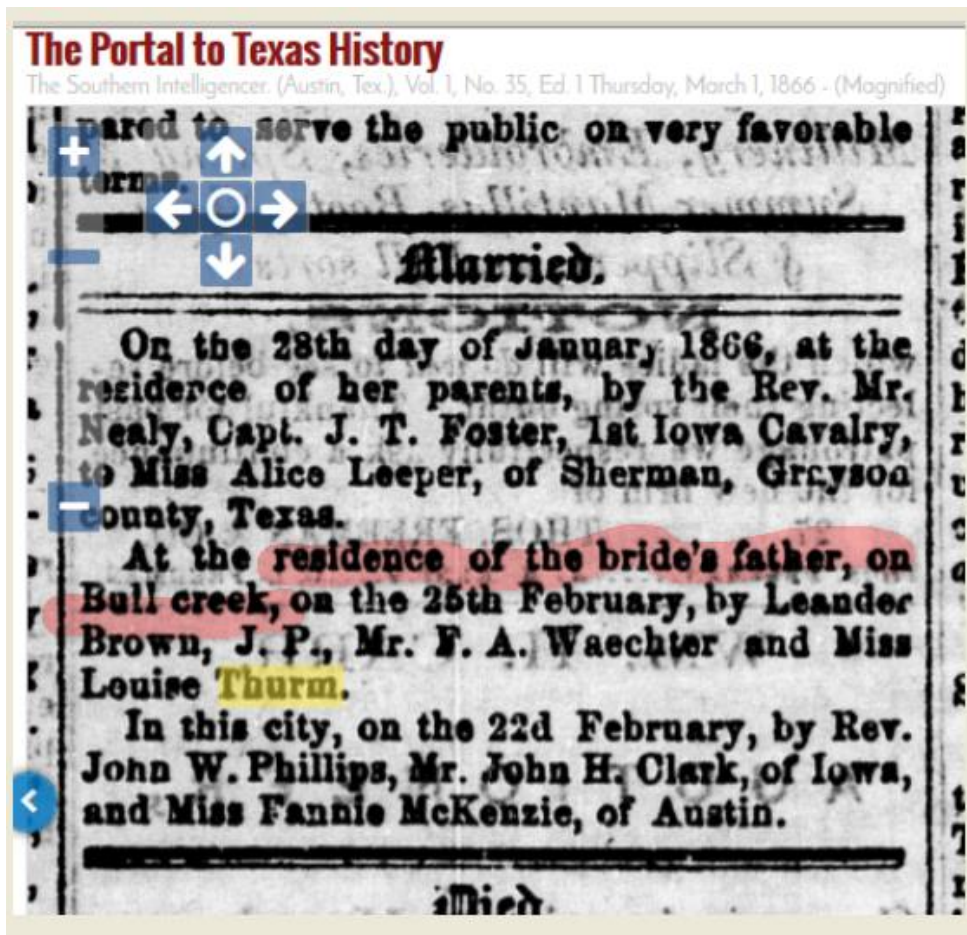


Figure 4 Article from Southern Intelligencer (Austin), 1866, announcing marriage of Louise Thurm to Mr. F. A. Waechter

1870 Census, Louise Thurm Waechter

After their marriage in 1866, August and Louise Thurm Waechter appear in the 1870 census as house number #461.

8	461	503	Waechter August	43	male	farmer	\$100	Prussia	1	1
9			" Louise	28	female	keeping house		"	1	1
10			" August	1	male	at home		Texas	1	1
11			" Robert	75	male	farmer		Prussia	1	1

Figure 5 August and Louise Waechter in the 1870 census

This snippet (below) from Richards would suggest that Louise and August were at this time already living on land William Thurm deeded to them, would later be deeded to them, or which Louise would later inherit. But the Waechter homestead, located on the upper section of Bull Creek south of Oak Grove Church and Cemetery, does not appear to have been on the James Coleman grant; all land purchases made by William Thurm were on the Coleman grant. Conclusion: Richards was in error on this point.

Louise Thurm Waechter and her family lived for many years in a log cabin on the land she had received from her father. As the family expanded, there was need for a larger, better house. About 1871 her husband, August, brought a German rock mason to live on the place and build a house for them. The rock was quarried from a vein

Figure 6 Snippet from Richard's *Valley of Cascade Creek*, Austin History Center



PICA04928

Rock house built by August and Louise Waechter in 1871.
The frame portion was added by their son, Louis J. Waechter.
This photograph was taken in 1941. The frame part has
since been removed and four rock rooms have been added.

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Figure 7 Page from Richard's *Valley of Cascade Creek* showing the Waechter home in 1941

1870 Census; Tena & Bettie Thurm still at home

The Thurms also appear in the 1870 census; William (“Wilhelm”) Thurm, his wife Caroline, Bettie (“Bertha”), and Tena (“Clementine”). As noted previously Bettie’s true place of birth is in question. Richards says the family all came from Germany; this census says they all came from Prussia; and Bettie’s year of birth as per her tombstone, 1854, would suggest she was actually born in Texas.

Household	Role	Gender	Age	Birthplace
Wilhelm Thurm		M	60	Prussia
Caroline Thurm		F	54	Prussia
Clementine Thurm	(Tena)	F	24	Prussia
Bertha Thurm	(Bettie)	F	21	Prussia

Figure 8 Thurm family in the 1870 Census

1872 Isaac Venable and Tena Thurm marry

July 19, 1872 Tena Thurm marries Isaac Venable. And to this marriage Isaac brings a son from a previous marriage, James, 6 years old, who later in the 1880 census shows up as 14 years old.

Travis County Marriage Records, 1846 to 1882, Austin Genealogical Society

<http://www.austintxgensoc.org/records/travis-county-marriages-1846-1882/groom-m-z-index/>

Richards says that Isaac Venable was a school teacher at Oak Grove School on upper Bull Creek (when they married). The school was located near the location of today's Oak Grove Cemetery, 7923 Spicewood Springs Rd, Austin, TX 78759.

Barkley (p. 153) says the school was started in 1864. Richards (pp.5-6) says "*The old oak Grove School building was a twenty by twenty foot frame room with one teacher. At times as many as sixty children attended, and there was a great feeling of relief when the Methodist Church sold their abandoned building to the school trustees (sic) .. The new school was much larger, more centrally located and served as a church on Sundays. In 1950 this building was sold and moved to a nearby pasture where it is now a home.*"

1873 William Thurm Buys More Land; Venable House Built

In 1873 William Thurm buys more land, about 60 acres, from Josiah Fisk (again out of the James Coleman headright).

1873 Travis County Deed Records: Deed Record Z. See p.65-66.

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph787627/m1/75/>

This deed contains two historical references of note: the mill on Bull Creek, and the location of the original Thurm homestead: "*..Beginning at a stone mound, the corner of a tract formerly sold by me [by Fisk, in 1855] to W. Thurm on the East bank of*

Bull Creek a little above the old mill dam, where the branches of Bull Creek come together.¹³ Thence down said creek with (sic) Thurm's (sic) live..”

From Richards (pp.10-11) “*Isaac Venable built a frame house for his wife on the land her father gave them..”*. This purchase of land in 1873 appears to be the land on which the Venables built their home; the house whose ruins now reside on the Upper Bull Creek Greenbelt. Richards describes the house in some detail: “*The house contained two large rooms, one fourteen feet square and the other one sixteen by fourteen feet in size. Behind these rooms were two smaller rooms, one the kitchen and the other a bedroom. The hall which divided these rooms was twelve feet wide and twenty feet long. It was here that Mrs. Venable placed her dining table. The house faced east and a long porch ran the length of the house on the front. Mrs. Venable had a well drilled at the edge of the porch so that she had only to step to the bannister and dip the well bucket to have water in the house. After the well was complete, the water was found to be unsatisfactory for household purposes, so a second well was drilled.*”

¹³ Note the reference: “where the branches of Bull Creek come together”. This reference will appear later in 1935 when the heirs of Tena Thurm Venable sell tracts of land to Dorothy Duvall; specifically tract #3 of that deed (Travis County Deed Records, April 10th, 1935, vol. 517, pp. 357-357). In that deed tracts #1 and #2 sold to Duvall were purchased by the Venables in 1904; I think this leaves little doubt the house was built on tract #3, which appears to be the 1873 tract William Thurm purchased from Josiah Fisk. William Thurm may well have purchased this tract as a place for his expanding family to settle on. And as we’ll see later, the Venable homestead was only about .2 miles distant from where the Thurm homestead was probably located.

While we don't have an exact date of construction, the marriage of Isaac and Tena, plus its placement on this deed of land, puts the date sometime after 1873.



Figure 9 Photo of the Venable homestead well. It is covered to protect both the well and from people falling in. Photo courtesy Kevin Thuesen, Environmental Conservation Program Manager, City of Austin



Figure 10 Photo inside the Venable well. Photo courtesy Kevin Thuesen, Environmental Conservation Program Manager, City of Austin. This well is mentioned in the interview with the Smith Children.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Sitton (a)



Figure 11 "The Old Mill in Bull Creek" by H.B. Hillyer, variously dated 1869 or 1875¹⁵. This is likely the mill on Bull Creek referenced in the 1873 deed. This mill is discussed in Jackson, and is referred to as the Walden mill. This may have been the mill lumber from which was used in the construction of the historick Zimmerman home near Fiskville.¹⁶

¹⁵ Photo purchased by Richard Denney with permission for use from DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University. <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/jtx/id/686>

¹⁶ See Texas Historical marker # 15021, "The Old Zimmerman Home"

1873 Thurm Homestead as Landmark for Defining Voting Precincts

That the Thurm homestead was a landmark for Bull Creek is evident in the fact that it was used in defining voting precincts. The snippet below from the Daily Democratic Statesman, 1873, uses the Thurm homestead as a landmark for defining voting precincts No. 14 and No. 15. Later, in section Review of Aerial Photos; Location of Thurm Cabin, this description will help in identifying a house in aerial photos from 1937-1967 that was likely the Thurm home.

14. Precinct No. 14, commencing at the fork of the upper and lower Georgetown road near Austin, thence up the Mount Bonnell road to the river, thence up the river to the mouth of Bull creek, thence up Bull creek to Mr. Wm. Term's place, thence along the road to Burditt Spring, and thence along the same road to Fiskville, thence along the road to the beginning, at E. Tegsner's school house, August 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

15. Precinct No. 15, to commence at Wm. Term's place, thence up Bull creek to N. Hay's place, thence on a direct course to the county line, by way of Mrs. Tharp's, thence along the county line to the lower Georgetown road, thence along said road to Fiskville, thence along the Burditt Spring road to Term's place on Bull creek, at Bird's store, August 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Figure 12 REGISTRATION NOTICE, Daily Democratic Statesman, 1873, describes voting precincts in terms of Wm. Thurm's ("Term" sic) house.

1874 William Thurm Buys More Land From Josiah Fisk

In 1874 William buys additional land, about 200 acres, from Fisk. This is the last purchase of land made by William on Bull Creek bringing his total holdings to about 340 acres.

Travis County Deed Records: Deed Record 26

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph787624/m1/455/>

1880 Census; Isaac and Tena Thurm Living Near Original Thurm Homestead

Per the 1880 census, by 1880 Isaac Venable and Tena (“Tina”) Thurm have married and have four children; James the oldest is assumed to be from a previous marriage of Isaac’s.

They are listed as house #15 in the census. House #16 is William Thurm (“Terms” (sic) spelled like it is pronounced), wife Caroline, and daughter Bettie. Bettie never marries and lives with her parents the rest of their lives. After her mother passes, Bettie inherits the homestead (see Caroline’s will 1890) and lives the rest of her life there, passing there in 1934.

This house #15 of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable is the house whose ruins now reside on the Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper. That the Venable house and William Thurm house are close to one another jives with where the Thurm cabin is said to have been located (base of Thurm Hill), and where the ruins of the Venable house are located on the greenbelt: only about .2 miles separation. This will be discussed more in section Review of Aerial Photos; Location of Thurm Cabin.

96	15	15	15	Venable Isaac M.	M.	M.	39	1	1.	Farmer	✓
97				Tena	M.	F.	45	-	Wife	Keeping House	
98				James C.	M.	M.	14	Son	1.	At School	
99				Mary E.	M.	F.	6	Daughter	1.	At School	
30				Rebecca	M.	F.	5	Daughter	1.		
31				W. H.	M.	M.	2	Son	1.		
32	16	16	16	Terms William	M.	M.	71	-	1. 1.	Farmer	✓
33				Caroline	M.	F.	62	-	Wife	Keeping House	
34				Bettie	M.	F.	29	Daughter	1.	Farming	✓
35											

Figure 13 1880 census. House #15 is that of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable, the house whose ruins now reside on the Upper Bull Creek Greenbelt. House #16 is William Thurm ("Terms" (sic) spelled like it is pronounced), wife Caroline, and daughter Bettie.

1887 - 1897 William Thurm Dies; Daughters Deed Land; Caroline Writes Her Will; Caroline Thurm Dies

William Thurm passed away in 1887. Searching the deed index from 1842-1890 no listing(s) are to be found for deeds from William Thurm to any of the daughters. And while we did not as part of this research look for a will, activity after his death suggests that William died intestate and his land holdings on Bull Creek were divided among the heirs – Caroline, his wife, and three daughters – by probate court.

After Williams death, there is deed-activity taking place that would indicate the family is taking actions to re-distribute the estate after its division by probate court; probably an attempt by Tena and sister Louise to make sure that their now widowed mother, Caroline, and unmarried younger sister, Bettie (still living with her mother at the original Thurm homestead), would be taken care of.¹⁷

Finally, at this same time, Caroline writes her will, dated August 6th, 1890. Per the will, everything in Caroline's estate is left to "Elisabeth" Bettie Thurm. The Thurms are getting the estate back in order following the death of William Thurm. And ten

¹⁷ Deed records, Travis County Clerk, 1889-90, vol. 98. Pages 584-587 refer to a deed of conveyance from Isaac & Tena Thurm Venable to Caroline Thurm, Bettie Thurm, and August & Louise Thurm Waechter; pages 536-538 refer to a deed of conveyance from August & Louise Thurm Waechter to Caroline, Bettie, and Isaac & Tena Venable.

years after William's death, Caroline passes, December 1897, at her home, the old Thurm homestead, leaving about 230 acres of land to "Elisabeth" (Bettie) Thurm.

Caroline Thurm, Travis County Wills and Probate Records, 1833-1974, pp. 356-357
<http://www.ancestry.com/sharing/10216633?h=aff6d8>

Caroline was buried in Pleasant Valley Cemetery, also known as Walden Cemetery or Bull Creek Cemetery. This cemetery is in the 7600 block of Creekbluff Drive, Lakewood subdivision, now the front yard of a home. In the Texas Historic Commission's Site Atlas, it is listed as cemetery TV-C182.

There is a listing for this cemetery on the Austin Genealogical Society website:
<http://www.austintxgensoc.org/cemeteries/pleasant-valley-cemetery/>

The dates for Caroline on this website, however, born 1805, died 1888, don't jive with census data on age, or County Clerk data on wills and probate records. But a newspaper article, "FORGOTTEN: Subdivision embraces, uses old graveyard, adding loved one's ashes", Monday, January 9, 2006 in the Austin American-Statesman mentions this cemetery, and in particular mentions her grave, and includes a photo of the tombstone which says she died "Jan. 11, 1898, at age 83". That is much closer to the census and County Clerk records on wills and probates. The cemetery is in bad shape; my guess is the dates (born 1805, died 1888) are simply an error from transcription of the tombstone or elsewhere. I'm confident this is the right Caroline Thurm.

Her burial here does however raise the question as to why she was buried here, rather than in Oak Grove where William Thurm is buried. One possible explanation: Bull Creek was in flood stage. By one record, the October before Caroline died, Austin had a whopping almost 8" of rain, then that December of her death another 2.5".¹⁸ The road from the Thurms up to Oak Grove Cemetery crosses Bull Creek about 6-7 times, parallels the creek -- and back in the day was in the creek -- a good bit of the way. It could well have been that after her death they simply could not reach Oak Grove Cemetery and opted for Pleasant Valley – Walden Cemetery which is on a high bluff out of the creek.

As an aside on this; based on Jackson's book, the Thurms and the Waldens -- neighbors -- were apparently good friends. Here's a quote from her book; it's easy to see how, if when Caroline passed they were unable to get her body up to Oak Grove, the Walden family would likely have welcomed her in their cemetery (p.39):

There was a family of German people by the name of Thurm that settled on Bull Creek about the same time my Grandfather Walden did. They came over from Germany and were broke and couldn't speak English. My grandmother could speak the German language so she helped and befriended them, so to this day [1966] the Thurms' descendants tell of how their grandparents told them of my Grandmother Walden --how she divided with them and waited on them when they were sick. They would knock any one down to hear any ill word of the Waldens.

¹⁸ NOAA data retrieved 03/05/2017. <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/Image/ewx/aus/attmonrain.pdf>



Figure 14 Caroline Thurm's grave. Photo from Austin American Statesman

1898-1902 Venable Home Used as Landmark in Defining Travis County Road

That the Venable home was a recognized landmark is evidenced by the fact that it is used in defining Travis County roads: both Spicewood Springs Road and Bull Creek Road use the home as a landmark in their definitions in Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, book, 1898/1902.¹⁹ The way it is referenced may indicate that Isaac had passed by this time; the reference is done to Tena Venable's home.

¹⁹ See references, Travis County Clerk Records

1921, Tena Thurm Venable Passes; 1935, Venable Homestead Is Sold to Dorothy Duvall; 1941, Dorothy Sells to Matthew Irving Smith

Isaac Venable apparently proceeded Tena's death (date as yet unknown; she is buried in Oakwood Annex, unable to find him thus far). In 1921 Tena passed. Deed records²⁰ indicate that in 1935 an heir of Tena, Dolly Venable Prewitt²¹ and husband Jesse Prewitt, sold the property to Dorothy Duvall. Richards (p.11) says the original Venable house "*was torn down to provide lumber for a new house being erected above the old home*".

Then in 1941 Dorothy Duvall sold 40 acres of her land to Matthew Irving Smith and Hazeline Ingram Smith. This is the current Upper Bull Creek Greenbelt (sometimes called the Stenis or Smith-Stenis Hike and Bike Trail) with entry off Old Spicewood Springs Road, Austin, TX. In an interview conducted with the Smith children in 2000 they were asked who was living in the area when their father bought this tract of land from Dorothy Duvall in the 1940s. Here's a snippet from the transcript; underscores are mine:²²

²⁰ Travis County Deed Records, April 10th, 1935, vol. 517, pp. 357-357

²¹ Note from descendant Ladd Pattillo: "Dolly Venable Prewitt was the twin sister of my maternal grandmother, Paralee Venable. Her given name was Oralee. They were born on 27 July 1883, to Isaac Melvin Venable and Clementine Matilda (Tena) Thurm." Dolly Venable Prewitt and husband are buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery.

²² See references, Sitton (a)

ROWENA [SMITH] STENIS: Well, I know Dorothy Duval²³ (sic) still lived out there. She had a house across Spicewood Springs Road from us.

LLEWELLYN SMITH: Her mother had had a house further down the road here—let me get my bearings here (looking at map)—down the road here. Dorothy Duval was right there—she and her mother moved in together later; but her mother’s house was down here.

ROWENA [SMITH] STENIS: I think Dorothy was there about where the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company is.

LLEWELLYN SMITH: Yeah, right next to it.

This leaves little doubt that the ruins across Spicewood Springs Road on the hill, directly next to the AT&T²⁴ building, now part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), belonged to Dorothy Duvall, and suggests that Dorothy Duvall’s house is the one for which materials from the old Venable home were used in construction.²⁵

The Duvall property was eventually purchased by a developer with the intent of building a housing development, but went bankrupt. Then the Savings and Loan that held the note was declared insolvent. The Federal government took control of the land via the Resolution Trust Corporation and soon after (1992) sold the land to the City as

²³ Deed records show the name as “Dorothy E. Duvall” (double “l”). The transcription recorded the name as simply “Duval”.

²⁴ Southwestern Bell Corp. bought AT&T and retained the AT&T brand.

²⁵ See references, Cantwell (2017). He also verified Duvall’s house.

a preserve.²⁶ Aerial photos from 1973 show the house with a roof at that time, but members of the Travis County Historical Commission visited the ruins of the Duvall house March 15th, 2017; there was evidence the house had probably burned, and there was no roof. The Smith children interview²⁷ indicates that Duvall’s mother had a house “down the road”; there is another house now located east of Loop 360 in the Bull Creek District Park that may well have been hers (that has not been established).



Figure 15 Ruins of Dorothy Duvall house; Venable home was located across Spicewood Springs Road. Google Maps, 2017. Aerial photos from 1973 show the house still had a roof at that time.

²⁶ Personal correspondence with Mark Sanders with the City of Austin’s Balcones Canyonland Preserve

²⁷ References Sitton (a)



Figure 16 Back of Dorothy Duvall during inspection by Travis County Historical Commission, 03-15-2017



Figure 17 Southern facing side of Dorothy Duvall house. Front of house to right. 03-15-2017

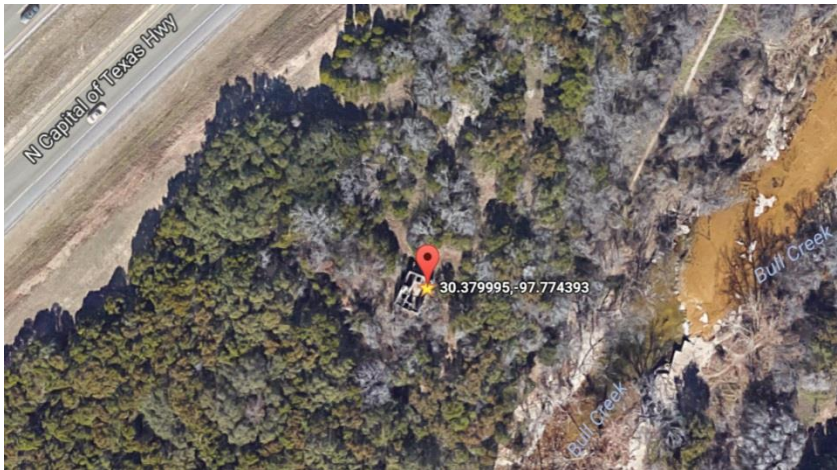


Figure 18 Google image of ruins of house that may have belonged to the mother of Dorothy Duvall (unproven). 2017



Figure 19 Ruins of house in photo above.

1990s Smith Children Sell to City of Austin; 2017 Descendant Of Venables Located

In the 1990s the children of Matthew Irving Smith and Hazeline Ingram Smith wished to sell the property their parents had purchased in 1941, but also wanted it preserved. A bond election in 1998 authorized the purchase of the property by the City of Austin. An archeological survey²⁸ was done in preparation for constructing a planned hike and bike trail; the survey included interviews with the Smith children mentioned previously.

The archeological report referenced the ruins that are on the property: “*The historic farmstead that makes up [this site] is recommended as potentially eligible for listing in the National Register [of Historic Places]*”. Unfortunately, the historical research did not identify the origin of the ruins, only tracing the history of the land back to the Smith family that bought the property in 1941 for recreational use.

Then in 2016-2017 as part of general research on Bull Creek on behalf of the Bull Creek Foundation, documents at the Austin History Center, in particular Richards’ *Valley of Cascade Creek* and Jackson’s *The Walden home in the valley*, coupled with reviews of Travis County road maps, indicated the ruins on the Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper were those of the Venable homestead.

This was then corroborated when we were able to contact descendants of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable that still live here in Austin. Ladd Pattillo, whose uncle was

²⁸ See references, Archeological Survey of the Stenis Tract Hike and Bike Trail, Bull Creek Watershed

Wade Preece, the gentleman I spoke with back in the 1980s, confirmed that family history places the house of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable, his great grandparents, on the property that is now Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper. This was also corroborated in an interview with Floyd Cantwell, an early resident of Bull Creek and Spicewood Springs area.²⁹

Finally deed searches were performed, as documented here, to ensure chain of title of the land on which the Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable homestead was located. In summary, the chain of title for the land on which the ruins of the Venable home are located, is, starting with Josiah Fisk:

Josiah Fisk -> William Thurm -> Tena Thurm Venable -> Dolly Venable Prewitt -> Dorothy Duvall -> Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Irving Smith -> City of Austin

²⁹ See references, Cantwell (2017)

Maps, Aerial Photos, Location of Original Thurm Cabin

Map from Richards' *Valley of Cascade Creek*

Below is a hand drawn map from Richards's *Valley of Cascade Creek*. Note locations of Thurm cabin, Venable home, Waechter home place, and the Walden mill, referenced in deeds.

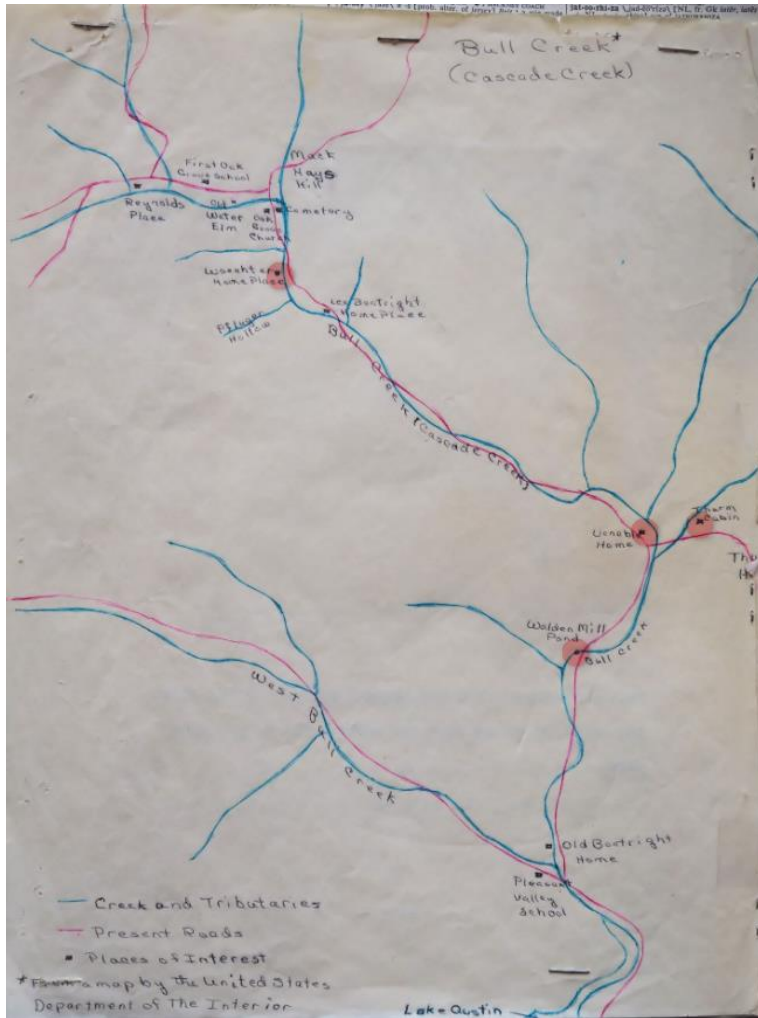


Figure 20 Hand drawn map of Bull Creek from Richards' *Valley of Cascade Creek*

1898 Travis County Roads Map

Below is a snippet from 1898 Travis county roads, master map precincts 1-4. Note “L. Wachter” (sic) which is Louise Thurm Waechter; Venable which is Tena Thurm Venable. The red square the shows general location of where I believe the original William Thurm cabin was located. A review of aerial photos in the last section will help pin-point this location in today’s landscape.

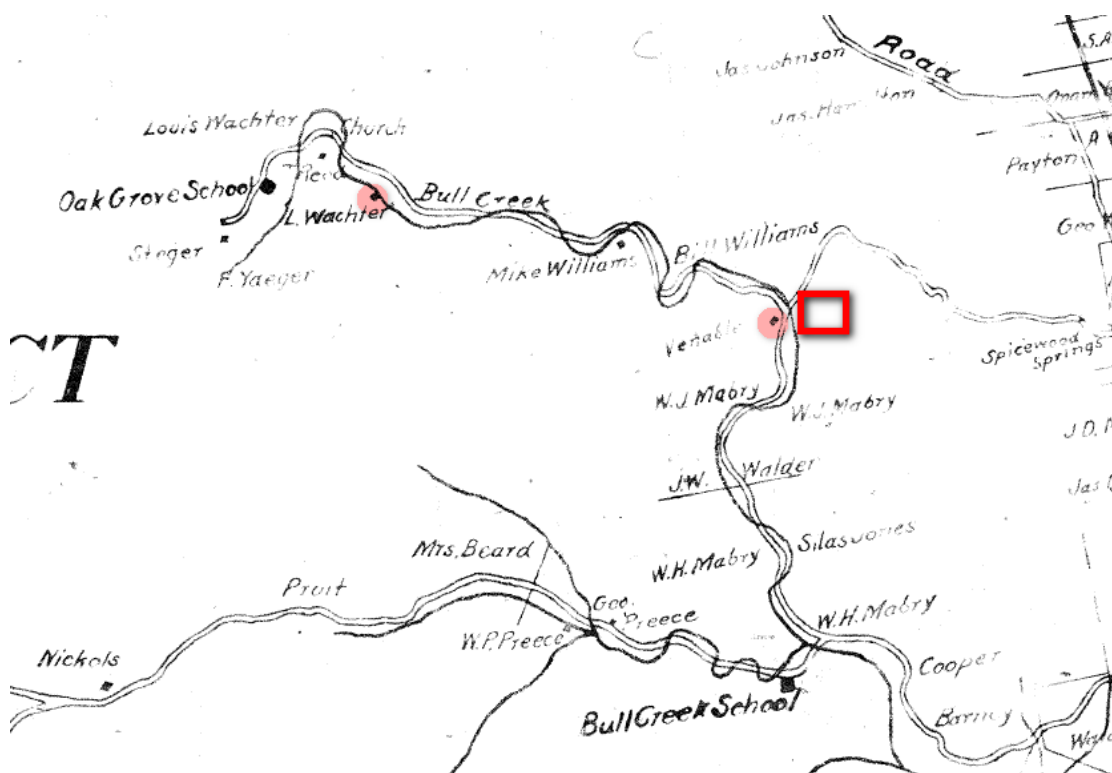


Figure 21 Travis County Roads master map Precincts 1-4. Copies of this map are available at the Austin History Center, AHC – Map # O-9(OS)

Travis County Road Books 1898-1902

A couple of maps from Travis County (Tex.). Clerk's Office. Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, 1898-1902. The road (known as Bull Creek Road then; Spicewood Springs north of Loop 360 now) shown here ran east of the Venable house, closer to Bull Creek. As the Smith children interviews allude to (also Walden and others), in the days before modern roads wagons often ran up the creeks themselves; wagon ruts in Bull Creek are a reminder of these times. Today's Spicewood Springs Road runs just behind (west) of the Venable house. The 1937 aerial photo shows the road running east of the house as shown here.

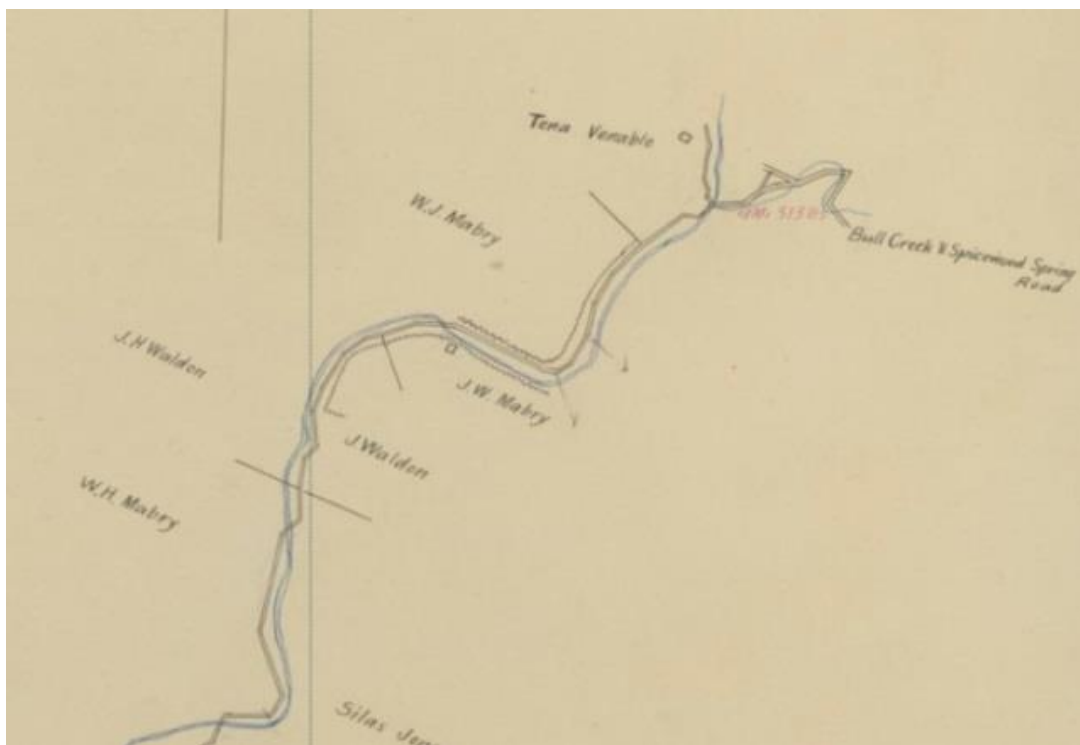


Figure 22 Map showing Tena Venable home

Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, p. 356

<http://bit.ly/2rj6XPx>

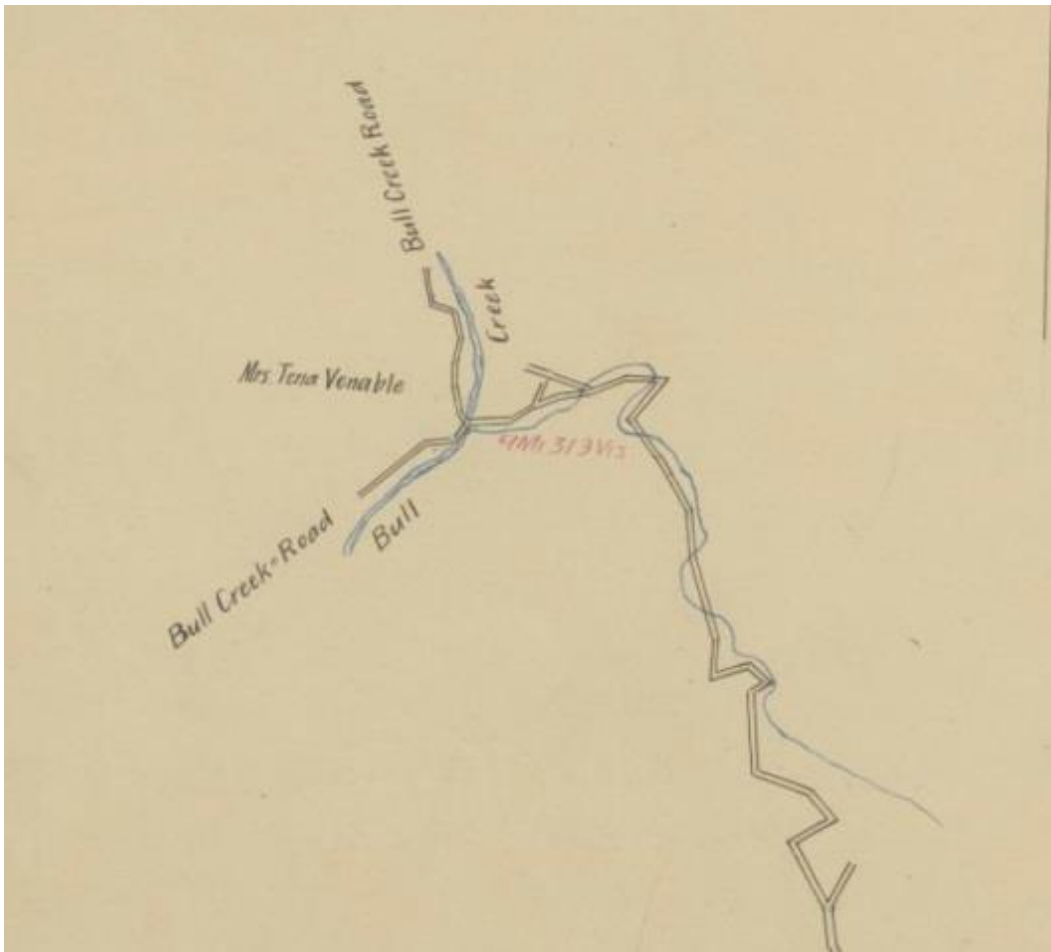


Figure 23 Map showing home of Mrs. Tena Venable; the section of current Spicewood Springs Road north of today's 360 was formerly known as Bull Creek Road, as was 2222 and the road off 2222 running to meet Spicewood Springs Road.

Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, p. 354

<http://bit.ly/2qJRvvh>

Map & Table from *1941 Springs & Wells of Travis County*

Map and data from publication *1941 Springs & Wells of Travis Co.* By 1941 the Venable property belonged to Dorothy Duvall. Well #418 is the old Venable home's well. Well #420 is the well drilled for the Dorothy Duvall home; date shown is estimated at 1938 which jives with the date of purchase of the land, 1935.

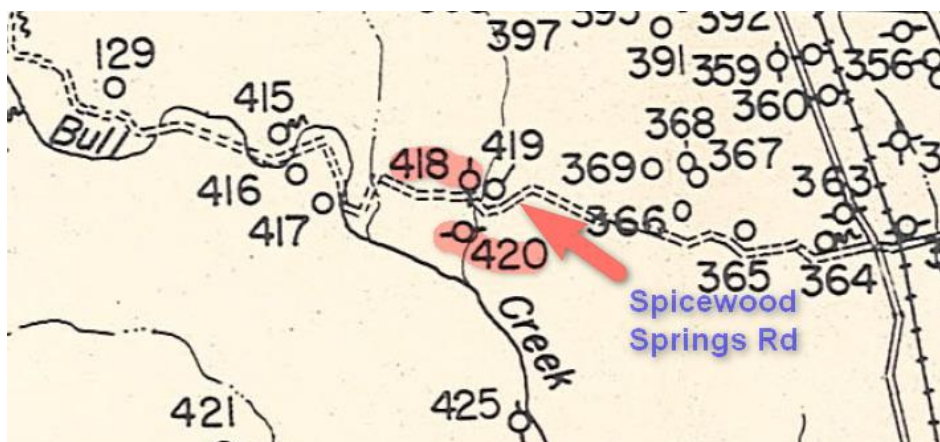


Figure 24 Map from *1941 Springs & Wells of Travis County*; #418 is the old Venable well; #420 is located at the Dorothy Duvall home.³⁰

³⁰ The location of Bull Creek on this map is off. Spicewood Springs Road appears correct, but the course of Bull Creek is off. Bull Creek is east of the Venable home. In fact, the map is showing Bull Creek running *over* the hill on which the Duvall house is built.

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Records of wells and springs in Travis County--Continued								
No.	Distance from State Capitol	Owner	Driller	Topographic situation	Date completed	Depth of well (ft.)	Diameter of well (in.)	Height of measuring point above ground (ft.) a/
418	7 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles northwest	Mrs. -- Duval	--	Creek valley	Old	23	60	1.2
419	do.	H. O. Simons	-- Daniels	do.	1929	112	6	2.0
420	do.	Mrs. -- Duval	--	Hill-side	1938?	100+	--	--

Figure 25 Table from 1941 Springs & Wells of Travis County. Note #420 is on a Hill-side, where the ruins of the Dorothy Duvall house are now located. Well #418, the Venable well, is in the “Creek Valley” and marked as an “old” well (from the 1870s). Also note well #419 belonging to H.O. Simon; Simon is referenced in the interview of the Smith children.³¹

Review of Aerial Photos; Location of Thurm Cabin

To conclude, in this section I’ll review aerial photos from 1937, 1967, 1973, and present day, reviewing the locations of three homestead sites mentioned in this application: the Thurm homestead built ca. 1855; the Venable homestead built ca. 1873; and the Duvall homestead built ca. 1935. One of the goals is to try to establish the location of the original Thurm homestead in today’s landscape.

³¹ See references, Sitton (a)

1967 Aerial Photo

Below is an aerial photo³² from 1967 showing from left to right the homestead sites of Dorothy Duvall, Isaac & Tena Thurm Venable, and a third I believe is the original Thurm homestead of William and Caroline.

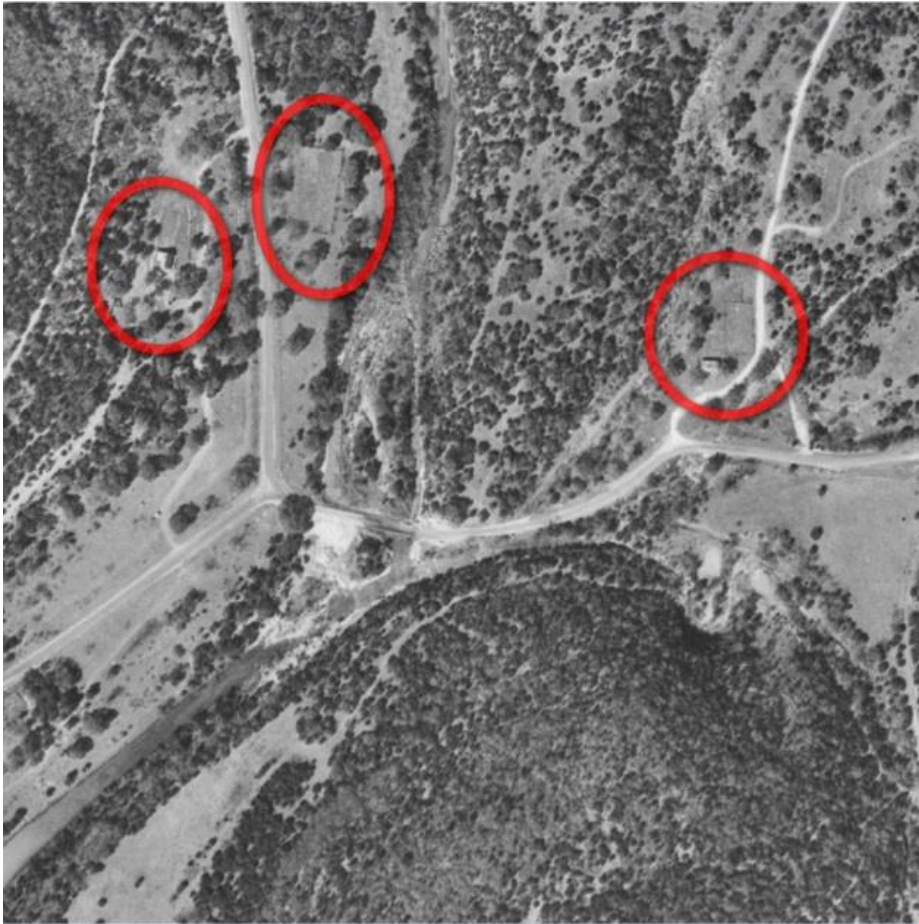


Figure 26 Aerial photo from 1967 of (left to right) Duvall, Venable, and what is thought to be the Thurm homestead

³² Purchased from HistoricAerials.com

Let me review reasons for believing the third house shown in the 1967 photo is the Thurm homestead originally built ca. 1855

- First, the house is located on land deeded to William Thurm in 1855. Bettie Thurm never married, lived her life at the Thurm homestead with her parents and inherited the homestead after Caroline, the mother, passed. The first aerial photo of this area is one from 1937 shortly after Bettie's death in 1934³³. The photo shows the Duvall house, the Venable house, and a third house. Since this is very shortly after Bettie's death, unless the heirs somehow quickly tore down the old homestead and erected a new house on this spot (not likely; besides given she had no children the house was probably still in probate in 1937), then this third house (coupled with the evidence below) is surely where Bettie was living, or in her possession, when she passed; there simply are no other candidate houses visible in 1937. And while the 1937 photo is not as clear as the 1967 photo, it seems clear they are the same house. This house appears in this same spot in all aerials reviewed from 1937 (the Tobin photo) through 1967 (Historic Aerials).
- The house visible in the 1937-1967 aerials appears in the same location as the "Thurm cabin" marked on Richards' map from Valley of Cascade Creek. That paper was written in 1961, the map was hand drawn. If indeed the house in the 1967 aerial was the Thurm house, or some remodeling thereof, she would have clearly been able to locate it on the map she drew in 1961.

³³ Photo purchased from Tobin Imagery, <http://www.p2energysolutions.com/>

- Associated with the house in all aerials reviewed is what appears to be a stone wall similar to the one associated with the Venable house and whose remains are still extant. Such dry stacked stone walls were constructed in the days before barbed wire as a way to keep cattle and other livestock out of the crops. These walls are common throughout the Texas Hill Country, including Bull Creek and the Balcones Canyonlands, and are generally associated with German settlers, which the Thurms of course were.³⁴ A famous demonstration on Alamo Plaza in San Antonio was conducted in 1876 in which barbed wire was used to restrain a herd of longhorn cattle; it was not until after that time that its' use in Texas became widespread. This argues the wall associated with the house was built before 1876.
- The Thurm home was located at the base of "Thurm Hill", as is this house; a point made by both Richards and Jackson. Keeping in mind that Spicewood Springs Road did not originally go straight on to Loop 360 (that was added as part of Loop 360), but rather curved onto what is now Old Spicewood Springs Road, this house would have indeed been at the very base of the hill on what was then Spicewood Springs Road (now Old Spicewood Springs Road).³⁵
- In the 1880 census the Venable and Thurm houses are in close proximity to one another as they were census house visits #15 and #16. The house shown in aerial photos from 1937-1967 is about .2 miles from the Venable house.
- A newspaper article from 1873 describing voter registration precincts #14 & #15 using Wm. Thurm's house (spelled "Term" like it is pronounced) would

³⁴ See e.g. Cox (2008).

³⁵ My interview with Floyd Cantwell reaffirmed the name "Thurm Hill"; see Cantwell 2017

indicate it was a) at the intersection of Bull Creek and Spicewood Springs Road (the latter being the road that led to Fiskville), as is this house; b) Thurm's house was at the south end of upper Bull Creek Road (what is now called Spicewood Springs Road north of 360) that ran north to the Hay's place on the north end of the creek (shown on Richards' map). Again, this house matches that description.³⁶

- Finally, quite simply by a process of elimination, the aerial photos from 1937 to 1967 show there is just no other candidate homestead that matches all the above criteria.

³⁶ See Morris in references

14. Precinct No. 14. commencing at the fork of the upper and lower Georgetown road near Austin, thence up the Mount Bonnell road to the river, thence up the river to the mouth of Bull creek, thence up Bull creek to Mr. Wm. Term's place, thence along the road to Burditt Spring, and thence along the same road to Fiskville, thence along the road to the beginning, at E. Tegsner's school house, August 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

15. Precinct No. 15. to commence at Wm. Term's place, thence up Bull creek to N. Hay's place, thence on a direct course to the county line, by way of Mrs. Tharp's, thence along the county line to the lower Georgetown road, thence along said road to Fiskville, thence along the Burditt Spring road to Term's place on Bull creek, at Bird's store, August 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Figure 27 REGISTRATION NOTICE, Daily Democratic Statesman, 1873, describes voting precincts in terms of Wm. Thurm's ("Term" as pronounced) house.

THURM—Miss Bettie Thurm, 57, a native Texan, died at her ranch home in the Bull creek sector, Tuesday night at 9 o'clock. She is survived by five nephews, August, L. J., P. J., and Gus Waechter and Fritz Waechter Pampa, Tex.; three nieces, Mrs. Lena Edwards, Mrs. J. M. Preece and Mrs. Dollie Prewitt, all of Austin.

Funeral services will be held from the Pelphrey mortuary Wednesday afternoon at 1 o'clock with Rev. John Bonnett officiating. Interment in Oakwood cemetery.

Figure 28 Bettie Thurm's obituary, The Austin Statesman, Sep 19, 1934

TEXAS STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
1. PLACE OF DEATH STATE OF TEXAS	
COUNTY OF <u>Travis</u>	Registrar's No. <u>7</u> <u>12719</u>
CITY OR TOWN <u>Austin</u>	Street <u>Bull Creek Road,</u>
If in an institution, give name of institution instead of Street and No.	
Length of residence in city where death occurred <u>life</u> mos. days ? How long in U. S. if foreign born? yrs. mos. days	
2. FULL NAME OF DECEASED <u>MISS BETTIE THURM,</u>	
Residence: No. <u>Bull Creek Road,</u>	
If non-residence give city, or town and state	
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS	
3. SEX <u>Female</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>
5. Single Married Widowed Divorced (Write the word) <u>Single</u>	
6a. If married, widowed, or divorced HUSBAND of (or) WIFE of <u>*****</u>	
6. DATE OF BIRTH (month, day, and year) <u>Unknown</u>	
7. AGE <u>87</u> Years * Months * Days	If LESS than 1 1 day, hrs. or min.
8. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as spinner, sawyer, bookkeeper, etc. <u>Retired</u>	
9. Industry or business in which work was done, as silk mill, saw mill, bank, etc.	
10. Date deceased last worked at this occupation (month and year)	11. Total time (years) spent in this occupation
12. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) <u>Texas.</u>	
13. NAME <u>William Thurm.</u>	
14. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) <u>Germany.</u>	
15. MAIDEN NAME <u>No record.</u>	
16. BIRTHPLACE (City or town) (State or county) <u>No record.</u>	
17. INFORMANT <u>L. J. Wachter,</u> <u>3501 Mc Donald Street, Austin, Texas.</u> (Address)	
18. BURIAL, CREMATION, OR REMOVAL Place <u>CLAYWOOD CEM.</u> Date <u>9-18-1934</u>	
19. UNDERTAKER <u>Pelphrey Mortuary, 1200 Lavaca Street,</u> <u>Austin, Texas.</u>	
20. FILE DATE AND SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR <u>9-19-1934</u> <u>J. Johnson</u>	
MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
21. DATE OF DEATH (month, day, and year) <u>September 18, 1934</u>	
22. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from 19. to <u>Sept. 18, 1934</u>	
I last saw him alive on <u>March 1, 1934</u> death is said to have occurred on the date stated above, at <u>9 P.M.</u> m. Date of onset	
The principal cause of death and related causes of importance were as follows: <u>Cerebral Hemorrhage - Tumor</u> <u>1930</u>	
Other contributory causes of importance: <u>Senile Exhaustion</u>	
Name of operation..... date of.....	
What test confirmed diagnosis?..... Was there an autopsy?.....	
23. If death was due to external causes (violence) fill in also the following: Accident, suicide, or homicide? <u>no</u>	
Date of injury..... 19.....	
Where did injury occur?..... (Specify city or town, county, and State)	
Specify whether injury occurred in in- dustry, in home, or in public place.	
Manner of injury <u>none</u>	
Nature of injury.....	
24. Was disease or injury in any way related to occupation of deceased? <u>no</u>	
If so, specify <u>Ben J. Jones.</u>	
(Signed) <u>Dr. Ben Jones, Norwood Bldg., Austin,</u> M. D. (Address) <u>Texas.</u>	

Figure 29 Bettie Thurms Death Certificate

Bettie Thurm inherited the original Thurm homestead upon the death of Caroline Thurm. But did Bettie live there until her death in 1934? In my interview with Floyd Cantwell he suggested that at her passing she was living on what is now the property of Spicewood Farms, 6607 Spicewood Springs Rd. That road was formerly called Bull Creek Road, which jives with her death certificate. Her age, between 80 (based on her tombstone) to 87 (death certificate) would beg the question of whether at some point

she might indeed have needed to move off the original homestead in later years for additional assistance. Never the less, deed research would seem to indicate the structure in aerial photos reviewed here was still under ownership of Bettie Thurm and likely the original homestead.

1937 Aerial Photo

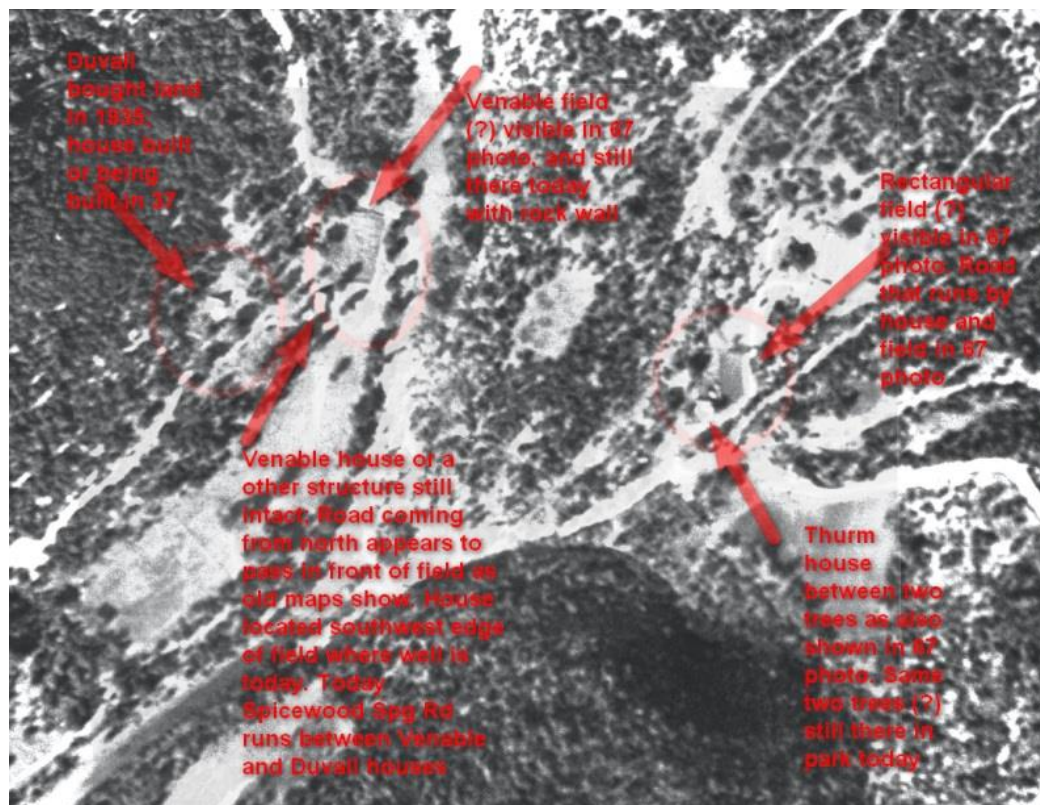


Figure 30 1937 aerial photo³⁷

Figure 30 shows a 1937 aerial photo. The Thurm homestead in the 1937 photo appears in the same location as it does in the 1967 photo, apparently nestled between two clumps of trees (which appear to still exist today in Bull Creek District Park), adjacent to the field that is so apparent in the 1967 photo, and next to the a road that runs by the house off Spicewood Springs Road (now Old Spicewood Spring Road).

³⁷ Photo purchased from Tobin Imagery, <http://www.p2energysolutions.com/>

Light red circles are georeferenced to the red circles in the 1967 photo showing (left to right) the Duvall homestead, Venable homestead, and probable Thurm homestead.

The 1937 map is also useful to illustrate a point made earlier; the location of the Thurm house as a landmark is defining voting precincts (refer back to Figure 27). As shown in Figure 31 (north is down), in 1873 voting precincts 14 and 15 were defined in terms of the Thurm's house location at the intersection of a line from the mouth of Bull Creek up to Spicewood Springs Road (which was the road to Fiskville, referenced in defining the precinct), and also the point at which Bull Creek then turns north to "Hays place" at the upper end of Bull Creek. The circle on this map shows the location of the house thought to be the Thurm's; it fits the bill as a landmark for the precinct definitions perfectly.

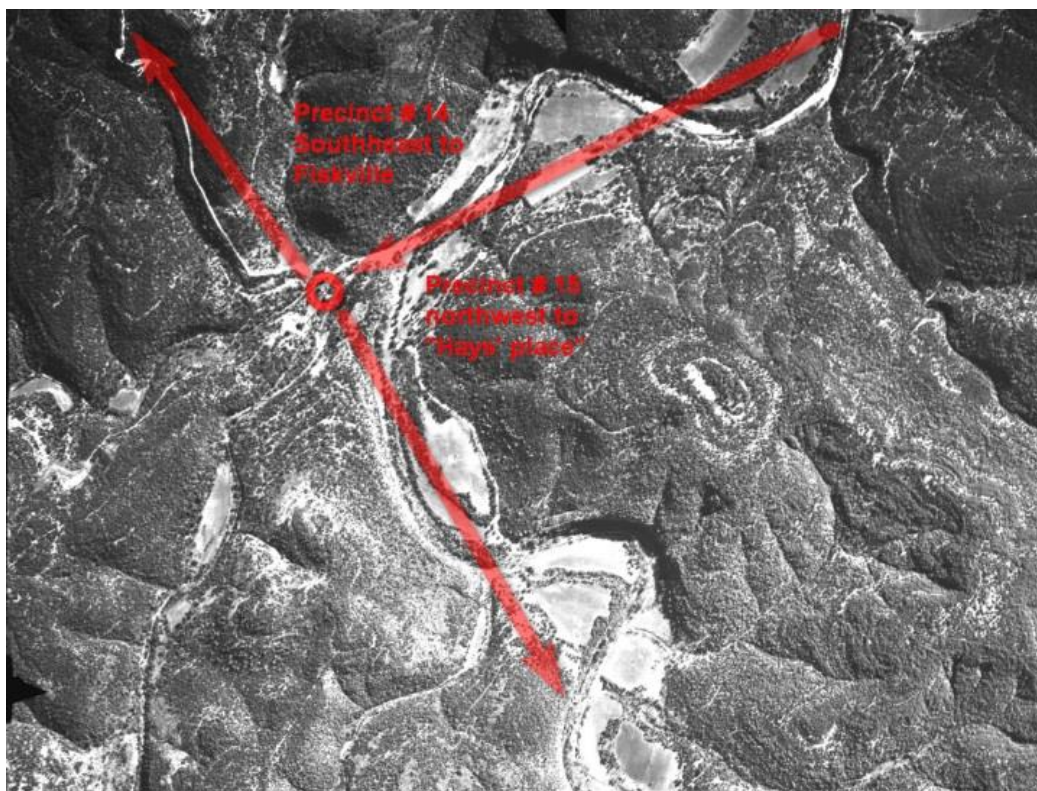


Figure 31 1937 aerial photo illustrating location of Thurm homestead in defining voting precincts in 1873; north is down on this map.

Other notes of interest from the 1937 aerial photo. Duvall bought the Venable property in 1935 (after Tena's death in 1921) from the heirs. It would appear that her house was built or under construction when this 1937 photo was taken. So we are getting a look at her house, and what is left of the Venable house. While Richards says the Venable house was “torn down to provide lumber for a new house” (Duvall’s), the Venable house seems to be somewhat intact in the aerial photo.

The photo clearly shows the location of the Venable house in relation to the rocky area that is there today; the house is at the southwest corner of the rocky field,

which is where the well is today. The other thing it shows about the Venable house, how Spicewood Springs Road has changed course since 1937. Older maps (e.g. 1898 Travis County) show the road running in front of the Venable house. As is shown in the 1937 photo, if you look at Spicewood Springs Road coming in from the north, it jogs EAST of the rock wall field, about where the hike and bike trail passes today. The road did indeed run in front of the house as old maps show. Today Spicewood Springs Road runs behind (WEST) of the house and wall, in between the Venable house and the Duvall house. Doing an overlay of the 1937 photo on today's maps, the Venable house appears to have been very near what is today Spicewood Springs Road.

1973 Aerial Photo

The 1967 aerial photo is the last, best photo of the Thurm homestead. Soon after, the construction of Loop 360 obliterated the homestead as shown in the aerial photo in Figure 32. Again, circles left to right are the Duvall and Venable homesteads, and where the house believed to be the Thurm homestead had been. Notice in this photo the two trees; the house appears from earlier photos to have been located between these two trees.



Figure 32 1973 aerial photo showing the Thurm homestead obliterated by Loop 360 construction³⁸

³⁸ Photo purchased from Historic Aerials

Location Today

Assuming the house in the 1937 - 1967 aerial photos is indeed the original Thurm home, where was it located in terms of today's landscape? By geo-referencing the 1937 map on top of the 1967 aerial, and then the 1967 aerial on top of today's maps, the Thurm home appears to have been in what is now part of Bull Creek District Park, north side of Old Spicewood Springs Rd, near postal address 5344 Old Spicewood Springs Rd, Austin, Texas. Lat/long 30.383513, -97.768351.

The photo below shows key bits of corresponding geography today compared with the 1967 photo: the Duvall house; Venable home site; location of Thurm home site. Notice in the 1967 photo turning north off what was then Spicewood Springs Road (now Old Spicewood Springs Road) a road that ran by the Thurm cabin then on north. Remnants of that road are still visible post Loop 360, both on the south side in what is now a part of Bull Creek District Park, and on the north side running under today's Bluffstone Drive. Even trees around the house visible in the 1967 photo appear to correspond to trees in the Bull Creek District Park location today.



Figure 33 Modern topography relating location of Thurm home to photo from 1967; photos of road traced in orange are shown below.



Figure 34 Remnant of old road in aerial photos shown running by Thurm home; photo is at probable location of Thurm home in today's Bull Creek District Park, south of Loop 360, looking north



Figure 35 Remnant of same old road on north side of Loop 360 looking south; Loop 360 at top of ridge



Figure 36 Asphalt on road north of 360 seems to match remnants found next to Thurm home; Loop 360 at top of ridge

In conclusion, the structure visible in aerial photos from 1937 through 1967 is a viable candidate for the original Thurm homestead or some modification of the original. As with other old log cabins it might certainly have undergone changes through time. What Richards calls the Reynolds cabin, AKA Jaeger cabin, has from recent discussions with residents of upper Spicewood Springs road been incorporated into a more modern home off what is now Old Lampasas Trail; see Figure 37. Such modifications might explain why during the construction of Loop 360 the Thurm structure was razed without recognizing the historical significance. Alternatively, as Richards alludes to with respect to Louise Thurm Waechter, her family eventually replaced their log cabin with a house built by a "German rock mason" (photo in Figure 7); this could well have been done with the original Thurm log cabin. In my conversation with Floyd Cantwell, he remembered the house having a rock exterior with a tin roof (although I'm not entirely certain he was clear which house I was asking about). Regardless, the structure shown in aerial photos probably marks the location of the original Thurm homestead, and sub surface remains of that building may still exist in Bull Creek District Park.



Figure 37 The old Reynolds cabin, shown here in 1941, is today incorporated into a modern home off Old Lampasas Trail.

References

Archeological Survey of the Stenis Tract Hike and Bike Trail, Bull Creek Watershed, Travis County, Texas, by Gemma Mehalchick, Douglas Kevin Boyd, Prewitt and Associates, and the Texas Antiquities Committee, published by Prewitt and Associates, 2004. The report which says the *“historic farmstead that makes up [this site] is recommended as potentially eligible for listing in the National Register [of Historic Places]”*. The report unfortunately did not push the history back to the farmstead back to the original settlers, Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable.

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Barkley, Mary Starr (1963). History of Travis County and Austin, 1839-1899. Waco, TX: Texian Press. p. 266 discusses early construction of mills by Mormons on Bull Creek.

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Cash, Elizabeth A. and Suzanne B. Deaderick, *Austin's Pemberton Heights (Images of America)*, 2012. Discusses Janet Long Fish's work in preserving the "Comanche Trail", today's Shoal Creek Greenbelt Trail. Janet Long Fish then speculates on that trails connection to Bull Creek in Sitton (2000 (b)).

Camp Tom Wooten on Bull Creek, 1934 - 1983. From an archival website, retrieved 03/01/2017: *"Camp Tom Wooten, overlooking Bull Creek and Lake Austin, will be remembered by thousands of Scouts as their 'summer camp.' The land was purchased by Dr. Goodall H. Wooten, an Austin physician, for \$5,000, and presented to the Capitol Area Council in 1934 for a Boy Scout Camp. The original purchase was for 125 acres but he later gave more land. The council constructed cabins, buildings and a water system. The camp was named Camp Tom Wooten after Dr. Wooten's only son who had died at the age of 21. The camp was south of FM 2222 just across Bull Creek from the Bull Creek Lodge, a favorite watering hole for hamburgers, drinks, and renting canoes. Bull Creek Lodge is now known as 'The County Line on the Lake.'*

<http://westtexasscoutinghistory.net/CTW/index.html>

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Also: "She Recalls Bull Creek, Oak Grove of Long Ago!". *The American-Statesman*, Sunday, August 14, 1966.

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Preece, Harold (1964). "My Grandfather, Dick Preece". *Real West*. VII (38): 22. Story of Richard Lincoln Preece, AKA Dick Preece, as a Republic era Texas Ranger fighting Comanches. Later a member of the Mountain Eagles, a Unionist guerilla outfit fighting the Confederacy from Bull Creek. "*Time and time again .. Confederate irregulars invaded the hills looking for boys to conscript .. and stock to be requisitioned for [the Confederacy]. Time and time again, Grandfather, the southern-born chieftain of Unionist irregulars, blocked him .. [the Confederates] never conquered that detached, un-surrendering patch of the United States which was Bull Creek*".

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Sitton, Thad (a) Oral history transcript of interview with children of Matthew Irving Smith and Hazeline Ingram Smith. July 10, 2000. Austin History Center.

Sitton, Thad (b) Oral history transcript of interview with Janet Long Fish about Bull Creek history. July 20, 2000. Austin History Center.

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Upton, Elsie. The Austin Hill Folk. Dobie, J. Frank (editor), 1888-1964. Texian Stomping Grounds, book, 1941; Dallas, Texas.

(texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc67663/; accessed February 23, 2017),

University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History,

texashistory.unt.edu; crediting UNT Press. Upton uses the term "Hill Folks" and

"Mountaineers" to describe the early settlers of locals such as Bull Creek: (p.1) *In the past hundred years Austin has grown from a village of three or four hundred people into a modern city of 100,000; out in the Hills .. the people depend for their water supply on the natural springs or creeks, speak a mountain dialect, and depend for their education on a short term in a one-room school. Although there has been much interest in recent years in the folk-lore of the mountain folk of the South .. [e.g. Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas] .. these Americans of the oldest stock with their special culture and customs, are to be found also, an intact community, in the Texas hills near Austin.* On moonshine, Upton (p.47) says *During prohibition days moonshining became a profitable business in the Hills.*

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Views in Austin, Texas. The Daily Graphic on Wednesday, June 30, 1880. Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. The page features 10 printed sketches of various scenes touting Austin. Of the 10, two are from Bull Creek, illustrating the romance associated with Bull Creek from Austin's founding.

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brought their mountain culture with them. They scraped a living from the rugged hill country by cutting cedar, building stone walls and fences, and making charcoal and moonshine. Derisively called "cedar choppers" or "charcoal burners," they were a proud, independent, reclusive people who moved from place to place wherever there was work. From 1870 to 1940, the cedar brakes provided work because cedar logs were in high demand for railroad ties, foundation piers, stove wood, charcoal, and fence posts. In 1875 alone, over 30,000 cedar logs were shipped from Austin. Competition for the wood became so intense that between 1870 and 1890 several confrontations called the 'Cedar Wars' occurred in the hill country over conflicting territorial claims of cedar brakes."

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