

Trails and Tales of Old Austin and Travis County: Isaac & Tena Thurm Venable, Early Settlers on Bull Creek

This is an expanded post of my history article for the July 2018 issue of the Northwest Austin Civic Association (NWACA) newsletter (<http://nwaca.org/newsletter/>)

In my March 2018 newsletters article, I wrote about the Thurms, early German settlers on Bull Creek. To recap, William Thurm came from Germany in 1850 with his wife, Caroline, and two young daughters; a third soon born in Texas and the family settled along Bull Creek. This is a continuation of their story.

There is a hike and bike trail on Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper, with entry just off Old Spicewood Springs Road. On the greenbelt are a set of ruins. In 2004 an environmental impact review was done in preparation for building the hike and bike trail. Unfortunately, the historical research done as part of that review only traced the history of the ruins back to the Smith family that bought the property in 1941 for recreational use. But the ruins' history is much older. The ruins are the remains of the homestead of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable; Tena was one of the three Thurm daughters.

During the Civil War, Isaac Venable served in the 1st Tennessee Light Artillery, US Army. After the war, he moved to Texas settling on Bull Creek with his sister and mother and taught school at the original Oak Grove School on Bull Creek, a one room log cabin established ca. 1864 on what is today's Old Lampasas Trail, later moved near today's Oak Grove Cemetery.

In 1872 Isaac Venable married Tena Thurm, daughter of William Thurm, and settled along Bull Creek. The ruins on Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper are those of the homestead of Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable. Richards' *Valley of Cascade Creek* 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."

Isaac Venable apparently proceeded Tena's death (date of death, burial unknown) because the homestead was later used as a landmark for defining roads, appearing on the 1892-1902 Travis County road maps as the Tena Venable house.

Tena passed in 1921 and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery Annex alongside her

Thurm sisters.

In 1935 heirs sold the property to one Dorothy Duvall (no relation to Duval as in Duval Rd.). The ruins of the house Duvall built are near the Venable homestead, across Spicewood Springs Road, on the hill next to the AT&T building, now part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. The adventures of Dorothy Duvall vs. the City of Austin are a whole 'nother story for some future article!

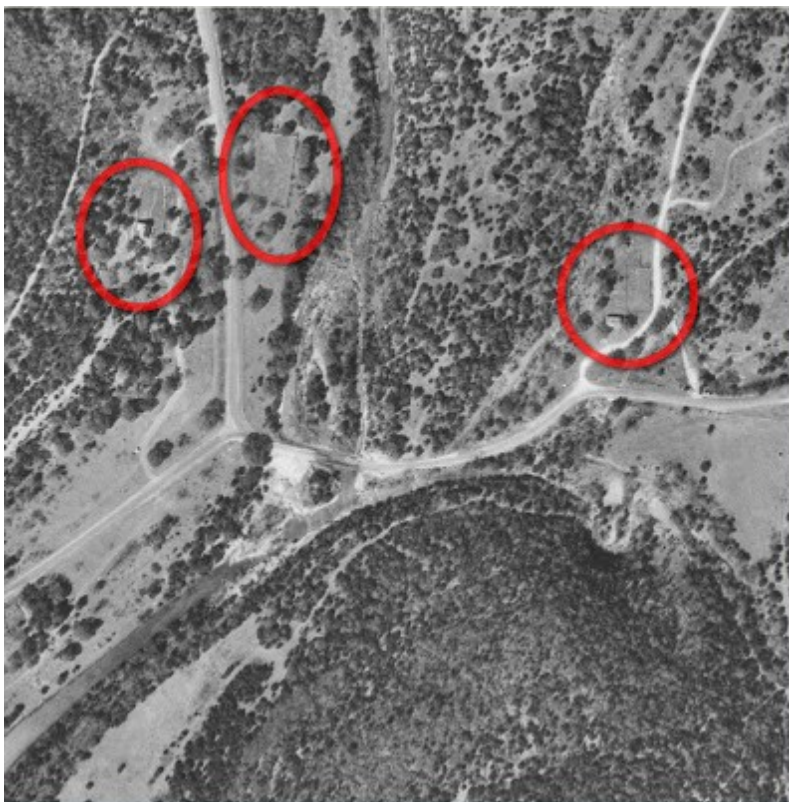
In 1941 Duvall sold 40 acres of her land to Matthew Irving Smith and Hazeline Ingram Smith whose heirs later, wishing to preserve the property, sold to the City of Austin ca. 1998, making up today's Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper.

So, lace up your hiking shoes and go hiking or biking on the trail that runs through the old Isaac and Tena Thurm Venable homestead. But please stay on the trail; remember, this was the home of pioneers.

Photos



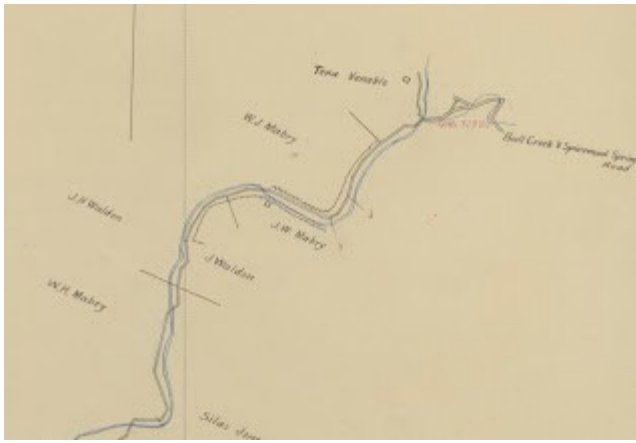
Interpretive sign on the Bull Creek Greenbelt Upper trail traces history to Smith family in the 1940s



Aerial photo from 1967 (pre Loop 360) shows, left to right, the Dorothy Duvall homestead, the remains of the Isaac & Tena Thurm Venable homestead, and the original Thurm homestead. In this photo, Spicewood Springs Road runs north between the Duvall house and Venable site. As late as 1937 maps and aerial photos show the old road, then called Bull Creek Road, ran east of the Venable homestead along, and in some places, in Bull Creek.



Map showing Mrs. Tena Venable's house. Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, book, 1898/1902



Another map showing the Tena Venable house. Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, book, 1898/1902



1898-1902, Map of Travis County Roads shows original Oak Grove School on what is now Old Lampasas Trail (was then Bull Creek Rd) and the Venable homestead.

References, More Info

Entrance to the trail is near 5479 Old Spicewood Springs Rd, Austin, TX 78759

Barkley, Mary Starr (1963). History of Travis County and Austin, 1839-1899

Richards, Cathryn. Valley of Cascade Creek. Written in 1961 but unpublished. Copy at Austin History Center.

Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, book, 1898/1902. Tena Venable home is used as reference in defining Travis County roads. See "Bull Cr & Spicewood Spr Road", p355; "Bull Creek Road", p357.

Find A Grave provides a list of the Thurm 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)



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