

The Historical Narrative of San Pedro Creek

By Maria Watson Pfeiffer and David Haynes

Native Americans living along San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River 12,000 years ago were sustained by the swiftly flowing waterways that nourished a rich array of vegetation and wildlife. This virtual oasis in an arid landscape became a stopping place for Spanish expeditions that explored the area in the 17th and early 18th centuries. It was here that Governor Domingo Terán de los Ríos, accompanied by soldiers and priests, camped under cottonwood, oak, and mulberry trees in June 1691. Because it was the feast of Saint Anthony de Padua, they named the place San Antonio.¹

In April 1709 an expedition led by Captain Pedro de Aguirre, including Franciscan missionaries Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa and Fray Antonio Buenventura Olivares, visited here on the way to East Texas to determine the possibility of establishing new missions there. On April 13 Espinosa, the expedition's diarist, wrote about a lush valley with a plentiful spring. "We named it Agua de San Pedro." Nearby was a large Indian settlement and a dense growth of pecan, cottonwood, cedar elm, and mulberry trees. Espinosa recorded, "The river, which is formed by this spring, could supply not only a village, but a city, which could easily be founded here."²

When Captain Domingo Ramón visited the area in 1716, he also recommended that a settlement be established here. Within two years Viceroy Marqués de Valero directed Governor Don Martín de Alarcón to establish a presidio and settlement on the river. Alarcón, accompanied by soldiers and their families and livestock, arrived on April 25, 1718, followed by Father Olivares who was assigned the task of establishing a mission. Father Olivares founded Mission San Antonio de Valero, "near the first spring, half a league from a high ground adjoining a small thicket of live oaks."³ In a ceremony held on May 5, 1718, Alarcón formally founded Presidio San Antonio de Béjar near San Pedro Springs, naming it in honor of the Viceroy's family.⁴

The settlers constructed their temporary houses near the springs and established their fields east of the creek. These houses, like the first church built by Father Olivares, were *jacales* constructed of wood, mud, and straw—a type of construction used for many years. Later houses were built of more substantial adobe, caliche block, and stone.

Crops planted soon after the settlers arrived failed, and they then worked with indigenous people to dig an irrigation ditch to channel water from the east side of San Pedro Creek. The shallow

¹ I. Wayne Cox. *The Spanish Acequias of San Antonio*. (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2005) 10.

² Ibid.

³ Fray Francisco Celiz, *Diary of the Alarcón Expedition into Texas, 1718-1719*, trans. Fritz Leo Hoffman (Los Angeles: The Quivira Society, 1935) 318.

⁴ Celiz 49.

ditch, which was completed by early 1719, ran in a southeasterly direction and irrigated about 300 acres before flowing into the San Antonio River near today's Tobin Center.⁵

The mission's first site lacked adequate land for cultivation and grazing, so in 1719 Father Olivares selected a new location east of the river. To irrigate the extensive fields both above and below the mission, a new acequia was diverted from the river below its headwaters. (The mission would move again in 1724 to its final site on today's Alamo Plaza.)

When the Marqués de Aguayo arrived in the Presidio de Béxar in early 1722, he found that the settlement near San Pedro Springs had been burned. Aguayo ordered the presidio be moved south to a new site between the creek and river and be rebuilt in a fortress-like manner on today's Plaza de Armas. Soldiers and other settlers built houses and farmed in the surrounding area that belonged to the presidio.

The arrival of fifteen families from the Canary Islands in 1731 introduced a new community dynamic. Because land west of San Pedro Creek was at risk from ongoing Indian attacks and lacked irrigation, the colonists were settled immediately east of the presidio. In July 1732 Captain Juan Antonio Pérez de Almazán laid out the new community that included a central plaza, the *ejido* (town common), and land for grazing and farming (the *labores*). The subdivided lots were then granted to Isleños.⁶

To provide water to the Barrio del Norte (land north of the presidio), the presidio, and new villa, as well as 400 acres below the villa that were farmed by the Isleños and other settlers, an acequia was dug from San Pedro Springs south to near the creek's confluence with the San Antonio River. The four-mile long acequia was completed by 1734, and the old acequia that served the Barrio del Norte was abandoned.⁷

Under its charter from the King of Spain, the municipality received land north of the town site that was to be used to generate funds for public works. By the 1740s these *propios*, as they were called, were exhausted. To accommodate growth, land north of the *propios* was rented to generate income. Additional land for expansion became available after peace was reached with the Apaches in 1745, and the town council was able to make grants west of San Pedro Creek. During the 1760s eighteen land grants were made west of the creek. Beyond these grants to the west, early documents referred to "the woods," "uncultivated land," and the "community corral."⁸

⁵ Cox, 18. Jesus De la Teja, *San Antonio de Béxar: A Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1995) 8.

⁶ Martha Doty Freeman and Maria Watson Pfeiffer, *Intensive Archival Research on New City Blocks 248, 293, and 915 Comprising the Police Headquarters Location for the Proposed New Federal Courthouse in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas*. Miscellaneous Reports of Investigations 500. Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano (2010), 11.

⁷ Some historians have suggested it is possible that the new acequia was actually an extension of the original, 1719 San Pedro Acequia (e-mail correspondence, Kay Hindes to Maria Watson Pfeiffer, October 20, 2015).

⁸ Maria Watson Pfeiffer and Kristi Miller Ulrich, *Archaeological and Historical Background Review of the Santa Rosa Police and Fire Administration Building*, San Antonio: UTSA Center for Archaeological Research, 2010, 18.

Landmarks cited in grants included both the creek and “a road called by many names,” but known later as Laredo Street. The road was depicted on a map drawn by Luis Antonio Menchaca in 1764.⁹

A map drawn by José de Urrutia in 1767 did not show Laredo Street but did illustrate settlement clustered along the creek—primarily north and east of the presidio and villa. Farm plots of various sizes extended north of the villa, west of the creek, and from the creek east to the San Antonio River. Both maps illustrate the town still tightly clustered around the Plaza de las Armas (Military Plaza) and Plaza de las Islas (Main Plaza). The Menchaca map also illustrated roads from the Rio Grande and San Saba entering the town through the rugged landscape to the west.¹⁰

Below the plazas and west of the creek in the late 1700s there was still an ongoing threat of Indian attacks. As a result the town remained largely concentrated east of the creek near the presidio and villa. North of the villa development was closely organized around Flores Street and the San Pedro Acequia. Nonetheless, some residents petitioned for, and received, land west of the creek. Those who settled or farmed there drew water from the creek and an acequia that is referenced in deeds dating to the 1770s. The acequia, which was still in existence in the late 1850s, ran from the west side of the creek at the Perez Street crossing (now under Interstate 10) and returned to the creek near today’s Guadalupe Street.¹¹

The number of soldiers assigned to the presidio grew to eighty by 1773, the same year that residents of Los Adaes in East Texas were relocated to Béxar. The increased population further complicated limited allocations of land and water. By 1779 there were over 1,200 civilians and 270 soldiers and their family members in addition to the mission residents. Secularization of the missions, notably Mission San Antonio de Valero in 1793, resulted in an increase of land available for distribution and settlement. While some property was granted to indigenous people who had lived at the mission, more land was given to non-Indian townspeople.¹²

Governor Manuel Salcedo restructured the local government by dividing the town into barrios—the Barrio del Sur, Barrio del Norte, Barrio del Alamo, La Villita, El Portrero, and lastly, in 1809, the Barrio de Laredo. Each barrio was represented by its own commissioner. At that time the population of the Barrio de Laredo along today’s Laredo Street included 36 households of working class residents including farm hands, tailors, painters, and a laundress. Only the year before the Catholic cemetery (Campo Santo) had been established just to the north on the west side of the creek. The new cemetery, on the site of today’s Santa Rosa Hospital, replaced the small burial ground associated with San Fernando Church since the 1700s.¹³

⁹ Freeman & Pfeiffer, 12; De la Teja, 36. Laredo Street was referenced in the 1700s variously as the road leading to Mission San Jose, the Royal Road, the road to the villages south of the city, and the Camino Real.

¹⁰ De la Teja, 38. The Urrutia map misidentifies San Pedro Creek as an acequia.

¹¹ Freeman & Pfeiffer, 14; De la Teja, 39. The exact route of this acequia has not been traced. .

¹² De la Teja, 20-21.

¹³ Ibid; Steve A. Tomka, Kristi Nichols, and Christopher Murray. *Overview and Historic Context for Historic Resources Distributed Along the San Pedro Creek Improvements Project Corridor, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas*. Prepared for Pape-Dawson Engineers, Inc, San Antonio (2014), 11; Minutes of the City Council of San Antonio, Villa of San Fernando, Bexar Archives, October 28, 1808 (roll 39-190).

San Pedro Creek: 1809-1836

The town's settlement pattern changed after the devastating flood of 1819 that destroyed many homes close to the San Antonio River. Some new residents moved to the Barrio del Laredo, which counted 96 residents in 1820. Others moved to the Barrio de Villita, which was on the high bank of the San Antonio River. When Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821 and the new government initiated grants to empresarios, Anglo American settlers began to arrive and some made their way to San Antonio. Still, the town remained largely populated by Spanish-speaking residents from below the Rio Grande.¹⁴

San Antonio's population grew to almost 2,000 in the 1820s, but fell to about 1,750 in the years preceding the Texas Revolution. The economy was based on agriculture and trade. Residents raised food for their own households in small garden plots along the creek and acequias and also sold their produce in open-air public markets. Trade was conducted along roads that connected the town to East Texas and Mexico, and Laredo Street became a critical thoroughfare in this transportation network.

As late as the 1830s, the Barrio de Laredo consisted of only about twelve blocks arranged along either side of Laredo Street. Public land west and north of the barrio remained largely undeveloped. Townspeople penned their cattle in the open fields, and a public slaughterhouse was built there. The sparse development left the community unprotected from Comanches who continued to camp in the area. The Barrio de Laredo's isolation was compounded by reliance on easily eroded low water crossings and crude roads that connected the barrio to the villa to the east.¹⁵

Residents of San Antonio de Béxar, including José Antonio Navarro, Francisco Ruiz, and Samuel Augustus Maverick, who signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, were deeply involved in the politics and battles of the Texas Revolution. Many residents fled the fighting during the Siege of Bexar and subsequent Battle of the Alamo and did not return until the revolution ended with the Battle of San Jacinto in April 1836. Those who returned found that the presidio and *commandancia* (today called the Governor's Palace) were deserted. San Fernando Church, burned in 1828 and further damaged during the revolution, was in ruins, as were homes and stores.¹⁶

San Pedro Creek: 1837-1865

By December 1836 the Congress of the Republic of Texas created Bexar County, and in January 1837 Béxar, as San Antonio was called, was incorporated. Nine months elapsed before municipal elections were held on September 19, 1837. It was then that the newly elected mayor, John W. Smith, his alderman, and other officials began the work of rebuilding the town's physical and governmental infrastructure.¹⁷

¹⁴Freeman & Pfeiffer, 15; Tomka, Nichols, & Murray, 11-12.

¹⁵Freeman & Pfeiffer, 16.

¹⁶Maria Watson Pfeiffer. *School by the River: Ursuline Academy to Southwest School of Art & Craft, 1851-2001*. San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company: San Antonio, 2001, 2-3.

¹⁷Spanish Minute Books, Books 1 & 2, Journal A, September 19, 1837.

Father John Marie Odin, later the first bishop of Galveston, arrived in San Antonio as a missionary in July 1840, just four months after the Council House Fight in which over thirty Comanches were killed in Main Plaza across from San Fernando Church. He estimated the town's population included about 1800 inhabitants. These residents were soon joined by settlers from England, Continental Europe, and the eastern United States, and those who arrived in San Antonio began purchasing land from long-time owners. Among this next generation of landowners were John W. Smith and Samuel A. Maverick, both of whom served as mayor during the 1830s and 1840s and purchased land along the creek above the Plaza de Armas. South of the plaza on the east side of the creek, prominent lawyer Thomas J. Devine bought a large tract.

San Antonio's recovery proceeded slowly. When Ferdinand Roemer visited in early 1846, he described the town as having a "foreign appearance, altogether dissimilar to any other Texas city...the entire place gave the impression of decay, and apparently at one time had seen better and more brilliant days."¹⁸

During this time of community rebuilding that followed Texas's admission to the United States, officials relied on residents and landowners to repair the bridges and channels of irrigation ditches and the slaughterhouse west of San Pedro Creek, all of which were essential to community survival. The council began to discuss surveying and selling public land to finance critically needed infrastructure as early as October 1837. The town council discussed the need to "verify the public lands within the limits of said corporation which as yet are not mapped."¹⁹ The discussion continued throughout the 1840s, lawsuits were filed and tried, and it was not until 1852 that the City Council adopted François Giraud's Plat of the City Tract of San Antonio de Bexar.

Various discussions and decisions by the City Council during the 1840s provide a glimpse of development along and west of San Pedro Creek. In April 1840 the council reaffirmed that all beef must be slaughtered west of the creek or east of the Alamo Ditch and taken from those locations to the public market house (thought to have been on the north side of today's Military Plaza near the creek). The new influx of foreign residents also became an issue for those who complained that the Germans and French were taking water to which they were not entitled from the "main ditch," as the San Pedro Acequia was called at that time. The council subsequently ordered that water rights laws be published in both French and German.²⁰

Just as the road to Laredo became known as Laredo Street, the thoroughfare that ran to agricultural lands north of the town plazas was referred to as the Calle de Acequia (later Main Avenue), and the Calle de Norte was called the Calle de las Flores (Flores Street).

¹⁸Pfeiffer, 1-3.

¹⁹Spanish Minute Books 1 & 2, Journal A, October 24, 1837.

²⁰Spanish Minute Books 1 & 2, Journal A, April 23, 1840; June 22, 1844; Martha Doty Freeman, *A History and Chronology of Public Markets in San Antonio*, prepared for the San Antonio Development Agency, December 1972, 1-2. The location of a new market house constructed in 1847 is unclear. That market was replaced by another structure in 1861. The 1861 stone market house was located on Market Street east of Main Plaza.

To provide access to the residential and garden lots that lay north of the plazas between the creek and Flores Street, a new street was opened immediately east of and paralleling the creek. Called simply San Pedro Street, it appeared on the 1855 map of San Antonio by W.A. Thielepape. As an extension of Camaron Street that began at Plaza de Armas, it was later renamed.

The City Council, realizing the need to raise funds for infrastructure improvements, appointed a committee that recommended surveying and subdividing public land west of the creek in a regular grid pattern. On March 7, 1849, the council appropriated \$50 for City Surveyor Francois Giraud to survey and plat land west of the creek. Giraud’s resulting grid pattern, with some adjustments to accommodate existing claims, opened a new area for expansion and construction. The newly surveyed lots were sold by the city at auction to individuals who represented a cross section of the community including members of long-standing Hispanic families and more recently arrived Anglo, Irish, and French neighbors.²¹

The streets laid out by François Giraud west of the creek were initially given names denoting numerical order and direction (i.e. East Street and North First Street), but by the late 1860s the names had been changed. This was presumably done both to unify the designation of long, through streets (such as Houston and Commerce) as well as to reflect the neighborhood’s culture through the names of Hispanic families or towns and states in Mexico.²²

Original Name	New Name	Current Name
East Street	Santa Rosa	Santa Rosa
Center Street	Concho	Concho
West Street	San Saba	San Saba
North Fifth	Perez	Perez
North Fourth	Morales	Morales
North Third	Monterey (Lakeview)	Monterey
North Second	Salinas	Salinas
North First	Obraje	Travis
Rivas	Houston	Houston
Presidio	Commerce	Commerce
(no name)	Dolorosa/Buena Vista	Dolorosa/Buena Vista
South Third	Monterey	Monterey
South Fourth	Matamoros	Matamoros
South Fifth	Durango	Durango/Chávez
South Sixth	San Luis	San Luis
South Seventh	San Fernando	San Fernando
South Eighth	El Paso	El Paso
South Ninth	Guadalupe	Guadalupe

²¹Freeman & Pfeiffer, 19; Pfeiffer & Ulrich, 20.

²²Mooney & Morrison, *General Directory of the City of San Antonio*. (Galveston: Galveston News)1877; *Morrison and Fourmy’s Revised Map of City of San Antonio, 1883*, A. Gast & Co, St. Louis & New York ; Jules A. Appler. *Jules A. Appler’s General Directory and Blue Book of the City of San Antonio, 1903-1904*. (San Antonio: Jules A. Appler) 1903; *Jules A. Appler’s General Directory and Blue Book of the City of San Antonio, 1905-1906*. (San Antonio: Jules A. Appler) 1906; City of San Antonio: San Antonio Municipal Archives, Street Name Index.

Dolorosa Street ended at East Street before the 1880s, and a public square, later named Washington Square, interrupted the numerical street numbering.

The first sale of land surveyed by Giraud in this area west of San Pedro Creek took place in 1850, and sales continued for many years. Only two years earlier, the City Council had set aside eight acres adjoining the Campo Santo for a “public burial ground.” However, with the increased real estate development in the area, the council voted to move the public cemetery to Powderhouse Hill east of town. The council also directed that the Campo Santo be leveled and cleaned. It is not clear how the removal of these cemeteries was accomplished, but by 1853 the city was selling lots in its new cemetery and, in 1855, the Catholic Church purchased land on the city’s west side to create San Fernando Cemetery.²³

By the 1850s the neighborhood adjoining the road to Laredo (Laredo Street) had become known as Laredito. The old irrigation ditch that traversed the area, referred to by some as the “ancient irrigation ditch,” was still operating as late as 1857. The acequia crossed the grid of nine streets laid out by François Giraud and ended at the Morales property opposite the residence of Thomas Devine (today the site of the San Antonio Community College District offices). Because the ditch was badly in need of repairs, estimated to cost \$2,000, City Council recommended that property owners repair and open the ditch at their own expense. The city would pay half the cost of bridge maintenance.²⁴

San Antonio grew in population from about 3,500 in 1850 to over 8,200 in 1860. The resulting residential and commercial development affected all parts of the town including the area along and near the creek. José Antonio Navarro, who had owned land and a small house between the creek and Laredo Street since 1832, built a new house and two-story commercial building there in the 1850s.²⁵

German immigrant Frederick Klemcke began making soap in a small building on San Pedro Creek in 1849. Klemcke sold his business in 1851 to Simon Menger, who expanded the facility and operated it until the building was badly damaged by a flood. Menger then bought property north of the site along the creek, and his family operated the San Antonio Soap Works there until 1917. Just beyond the soap works near the creek and today’s Martin Street, Henry Karber operated a brewery. Another brewery was established to the south on Laredo Street near the creek by Dan Heber.²⁶

By the middle 1800s little remained of the structures that had comprised the presidio on Military Plaza. The most intact was the presidio commander’s house (commandancia) on the east bank of the creek facing the plaza, the main portion of which was constructed in 1749. Known today as the Spanish Governor’s Palace, the building was purchased in 1804 by Lt. Col. Juan Ignacio Perez, the province’s interim governor from 1816 to 1817. It remained in the Perez family, and

²³Historic East Side San Antonio Cemeteries National Register of Historic Places nomination; personal files of Maria Watson Pfeiffer.

²⁴Freeman & Pfeiffer, 22; It is unclear if this work was ever completed.

²⁵The 1850s buildings are owned in 2015 by the State of Texas and operated as a historic site by the Texas Historical Commission.

²⁶San Antonio *Express*, August 25, 1935, A-9.

after the death of Perez's son, Jose Ignacio Perez, in 1852, the building was used for commercial and residential purposes.²⁷

Military Plaza became a center of commerce and government in the years following statehood. In 1850 a building to house city and county offices was constructed at the northwest corner of the plaza. Known locally as the "Bat Cave" because of the creatures that inhabited the building's attic, the structure replaced the Casas Reales on Main Plaza, the seat of government since 1742.²⁸

It was during the 1850s and 1860s that maintenance of San Pedro Creek became a more pressing issue. Just as bathhouses, fences, and debris blocked the flow of the San Antonio River at various points, there were numerous obstructions along the creek. To remedy this problem, city ordinances were passed to deepen and widen the creek as well as define a uniform, twelve-foot-wide creek channel.²⁹

Acknowledging that population growth necessitated expansion of the town's markets, the City Council approved construction of a new market house that opened in 1861. Two market masters were elected—one for the east and one for the west sides of the river. Military Plaza, east of San Pedro Creek, became the site of a lively outdoor market where vendors gathered to sell produce, wool, hides, and birds, and "chili queens" operated food stands. Vendors also gathered west of the creek on land that became known as Paschal Square—today the site of El Mercado.³⁰

San Antonio had been an important crossroads for military expeditions, travelers, and shipment of supplies since its founding, and continued to fulfill this role during and after the Civil War. Confederate troops camped near the springs that formed the creek in today's San Pedro Springs Park. Further to the south near downtown and along Laredo Street, teamsters congregated in camp yards along both sides of the creek and loaded their wagons with cotton and other goods destined for Mexico.

Local attorney Leonardo Garza, a descendant of the town's early settlers, reminisced about the area along and west of the creek. "The people of pure Spanish descent who lived here in the early days had very few but commercial pursuits... The greatest commerce seemed to have been the traffic from Port Lavaca, bringing all the goods for the stores and also the trains that went overland to Chihuahua, to Santa Fe, and El Paso. The people employed in that traffic camped along the San Pedro Creek and formed the little village that became known as Chihuahua."³¹

San Pedro Creek: 1866-1900

Following the Civil War A.J. Mauermann drew a detailed map of the city. Completed in 1869, the map illustrated substantial

²⁷ Kenneth Hafertepe. "The Romantic Rhetoric of the Spanish Governor's Palace, San Antonio, Texas." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, October 2003, 107:2, 242-246. Lt. Col. Juan Ignacio Perez died in 1823.

²⁸ Maria Watson Pfeiffer, *The Courthouses of Bexar County, Texas*, unpublished typescript, 1999. There is evidence that the Bat Cave was attached to an older structure dating to the period of the presidio (Kay Hindes to Maria Watson Pfeiffer, October 10, 2015).

²⁹ Freeman & Pfeiffer, 22.

³⁰ Freeman, 3-5.

³¹ San Antonio *Light*, May 23, 1927, 5-A.

development along the west of the creek between Salinas and Nueva streets. On the east side of the creek, houses were still clustered close to Flores Street and the San Pedro Acequia. Development along both sides of the creek to the south was concentrated along Laredo and Flores streets.

Five years after Mauermann completed his map, Augustus Koch published the first of two bird's-eye view maps of the city. Koch's 1873 map reflected the same development pattern illustrated by Mauermann, with houses and outbuildings facing both Flores and Salinas streets. A large, undivided block extended from Kingsbury Street to Salinas, and a small footbridge connected the east side of the creek with the gridded neighborhood to the west. Larger bridges spanned the creek at all the major crossings—Salinas, Obraje (Travis), Rivas (Houston), Presidio (Commerce), Dolorosa, Nueva, and Arsenal streets

By 1873 many houses lined Laredo and East (Santa Rosa) streets west of the creek between Salinas and Nueva. Below Nueva and south to Arsenal (El Paso), houses faced Flores and Laredo and East streets on either side of the creek. The channel was lined with trees and the creek was likely used to irrigate orchards on the east bank.

Edward King, writing in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1874, described the neighborhood west of the creek as “one of the Mexican quarters of the town, sometimes called ‘Laredito.’ There the life of the seventeenth century still prevails, without any taint of modernism.”³² King also wrote about Flores Street, describing the residences as “embowered in shrubbery.”³³

When Koch's second map was published in 1886, development had encroached on the banks of the creek as far south as Fifth Street (later named Durango and today, César Chávez). The only remaining open land was along the southern reach of the creek. In the block bounded by Houston, Commerce, Camaron streets, and the creek, the waterway was no longer visible as it flowed through two industrial facilities—the San Antonio Gas Company and San Antonio Ice Factory.

The creek channel was not confined within constructed walls until the late 1880s. A photograph taken in the 1870s showed the creek in its free-flowing condition. The gas plant and what is probably the Commerce Street Bridge were also visible.

When cattle drives from Texas to Midwestern markets began in the 1870s, herds were assembled in holding pens west of the creek and the area became the center of trading and shipment. The economy of the area was further transformed when the International and Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) was completed in 1881, with an impressive station at the intersection of Commerce and Medina streets. Both the Dolorosa/Buena Vista Street right-of-way and streetcar lines were extended to the station, moving the town's edge further from San Pedro Creek. The I&GN's new rail yard became the main shipping point for freight as well as cattle being sent to Midwestern packing houses.³⁴

³²Edward King, “A Visit to San Antonio.” *Scribner's Monthly*, Volume 7, 1873-1874, 321.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Pfeiffer & Ulrich, 22-23.

Five years after the I&GN arrived in San Antonio, the San Antonio and Aransas Pass railroad (SAP) was completed to the city. The SAP constructed its rail yard on the west bank of the San Antonio River (at the site of today's Blue Star Complex), and its passenger depot at Aransas (later Alamo) and Flores streets. The railroad's tracks traversed the former agricultural fields of the Labores de Abajo along San Pedro Creek that had been farmed since the Spanish colonial era, crossing the creek on a wooden trestle near today's Cevallos Street. Further to the west the I&GN tracks crossed Alazán Creek just above its confluence with San Pedro Creek.³⁵

In 1889 ranchers seeking improved shipping routes for their cattle away from the congested city established the San Antonio Stock Yards Company, later named the Union Stock Yards of San Antonio. They chose a site on the west bank of San Pedro Creek at the junction of the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio (later a part of the Southern Pacific) and I&GN tracks and south of the SAP line. The stockyards became the main receiving point for shipment of cattle to San Antonio from South Texas, and rail remained the primary means of cattle transport until the 1930s when new highways and trucks became the preferred mode of shipping. In 1950 the stockyard was still the state's largest cattle market.³⁶

Construction of these rail connections, population growth—the town grew from about 12,250 in 1870 to 53,300 in 1900—and the resulting expansion of the business district dramatically changed the character of the neighborhoods along the creek. New commercial buildings were built along Flores and Laredo streets both north and south of downtown as well as along Camaron Street north of the business district.

On Military Plaza small colonial and post-colonial structures were replaced by multi-story brick and stone buildings in the last decades of the 19th century. The Fashion Theater and Landa Brothers store were constructed on the creek's east bank adjoining the south side of the old commandancia. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, the commandancia housed various small businesses including a feed store and a pawn shop. Adjoining the creek to the west, the three-story Laclede Hotel (later named the Continental) opened in 1898.³⁷

Produce and chili vendors who had occupied Military Plaza for many years were displaced by construction of the new City Hall and moved to Hay Market Square west of the creek near Milam Park in 1890. Hay Market Square was officially designated as an outdoor produce market in 1893, and in 1899 the City Council approved architect Alfred Giles's plans for an elaborate municipal market house on the site.³⁸

South of the municipal market along Laredo Street, also known as Los Adovitos (Little Adobes), many of the small vernacular houses that characterized the neighborhood remained standing until

³⁵The Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio and the San Antonio and Aransas Pass railroads were both later acquired by Southern Pacific.

³⁶<http://www.unionstockyardsa.com/history/> (accessed on September 9, 2015). When the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railroad (known as the M-K-T or Katy) was extended to the city in 1916, the company built a freight yard on the east side of the creek below Rehmann Street opposite the stockyards.

³⁷Hafertepe, 244-245.

³⁸Freeman, 7; Mary Carolyn Hollers Jutson. *Alfred Giles: An English Architect in Texas and Mexico*, San Antonio: Trinity University Press 1972, 124. The Giles-designed market house was torn down in the 1930s and replaced by a new building and sheds.

the early 1900s. These slowly disappeared as new commercial and industrial buildings were constructed. Will and Emma Richter built their first bakery on Laredo near Fifth Street (Durango/César Chávez) in 1887. Over thirty years later they built a new, modern plant between Laredo and San Pedro Creek, today occupied by Bill Miller Bar-B-Q.

San Pedro Creek: 1901-1945

By the early 1900s the neighborhood south of the market and west of the creek had attracted saloons and merchants who presided over small shops. These merchants included newly arrived immigrants from Italy, China, and Mexico, as well as African American residents. It also became the center of the town's well-publicized red light district that was advertised in the 1912 publication, *The Blue Book for Visitors, Tourists, and Those Seeking a Good Time While in San Antonio, Texas, 1911-1912*.³⁹

North of the red light district, market, and Milam Park, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word had relocated their infirmary from Military Plaza to Houston Street in 1875. The facility continued to grow into a multi-building complex known as Santa Rosa Hospital (now Children's Hospital of San Antonio), attracting doctors and pharmacists to the area.

By the 1920s the neighborhood between Milam Park and San Pedro Creek had become the community center for refugees fleeing the Mexican Revolution. Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals established their practices along the narrow streets. Spanish language books and newspapers were available in shops and newsstands and merchants sold produce, meat, and spices in small stores and at the nearby market. On weekends crowds gathered in Milam Park to attend political rallies, hear orators read news, and enjoy musical performances. Vaudeville houses, and later movie theaters, attracted popular entertainers and screened the latest films for their audiences.

Beyond Milam Park and Santa Rosa Hospital to the north, Franklin Square became the center of a thriving neighborhood of Hispanic and Italian families, many of whom did business at the nearby municipal market. It was there that the Christopher Columbus Italian Society, founded in 1890, purchased land to build San Francesco di Paola Church and Christopher Columbus Hall in 1927-1928.

The population density of neighborhoods near the creek increased in the first decades of the 20th century with the influx of Mexican refugees. In addition to refugees, soldiers and their families crowded the city in the years before and after World War I. The housing shortage and increase in poverty, particularly during the Great Depression, contributed to construction of *corrales*, multi-family structures built around outdoor hydrants and privies.⁴⁰

In spite of the dramatic changes to the landscape along and near San Pedro Creek as the result of the town's growth in the 1700s and 1800s, the configuration of the channel itself remained largely unaltered until the early 1900s.

³⁹ Pfeiffer & Ullrich, 24-25.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 25.

Throughout the 1900s, the creek was modified as the result of increased flooding and construction of new rail lines and modern highways. The first major change took place when the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad (known as the M-K-T or the Katy) received approval in 1914 to construct a passenger and freight terminal in the city. Though the company's freight terminal was located near Nogalitos Street, the passenger rail yard was built close to downtown on a site that spanned San Pedro Creek from Flores to Laredo streets between Durango (César Chávez) and Arsenal streets. Tracks to the passenger depot reached a dead end at Durango Street, necessitating that trains be backed into the station from the freight depot to the south.⁴¹

Construction of the rail yard and depot at Flores and Durango streets required enclosing San Pedro Creek in an underground box culvert. The project was completed and the first M-K-T train arrived on September 1, 1917. In the years following completion of the Katy "underpass," as the underground culvert was called, citizens complained that it worsened upstream flooding.

The City Council was already planning a series of projects to improve the flow of both the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek in the wake of devastating floods of the late 1800s and early 1900s. In 1919 council passed an ordinance stipulating that San Pedro Creek be altered to a channel width of sixty feet between Myrtle and Travis streets. The channel was realigned at various points and wood, stone, and concrete retaining walls were installed to stabilize the banks.

Additional straightening and channelization work was completed in the early 1930s through relief programs funded by the city, county, and state. These projects included lining the creek walls with stone to prevent collapses during flood events.⁴²

Completion of the M-K-T rail yard and depot at Flores and Durango streets transformed the properties along the creek south of the terminal. Structures that had been built years earlier on what had been the town's Labores de Abajo (lower fields) were demolished and replaced by warehouses and light manufacturing facilities connected to the main rail line by sidings. Among the businesses were Jenner Manufacturing Company, later Judson Candy Company, and Duerler Manufacturing Company on Camp Street (today's Camp Street Lofts). Further to the south along the creek, the M-K-T railroad built a freight yard on the east bank of the creek below Rehmann Street opposite the stockyards.

San Pedro Creek: 1946-2014

The development of new suburbs and highways in the years following World War II changed the face of San Antonio. Just as railroads had greatly impacted the areas adjoining San Pedro Creek in the early 1900s, the "express highway system" divided neighborhoods and created barriers between the west side and downtown in the 1940s and 1950s. First approved in 1945, portions of the west side expressway were completed by 1947, while other more expensive elevated segments were not finished until the mid-1950s.

Blocks of commercial and residential structures were cleared, and the new highway spanned San Pedro Creek south of Alamo Street. Construction of another segment of the highway, known as

⁴¹San Antonio *Light*, March 15, 1914, 1-2.

⁴²Ibid, October 14, 1942, 1-B; November 19, 1933.

the north-south expressway, necessitated moving the creek bed and channeling the waterway through an open conduit that ran between the north- and south-bound lanes.⁴³

Construction of these portions of San Antonio's Master Traffic Artery Plan spanned over a decade. By mid-1959 the system was completed to Marshall Street on the north and Herff Street on the south. This construction resulted not only in demolition of many blocks of commercial and residential structures west of the creek but also the disruption of historic street patterns.⁴⁴

Shortly after the expressway was completed, the city undertook the Central West Urban Renewal Project that resulted in the clearance of most of the structures west of the creek and south of Dolorosa Street to Guadalupe Street. Streets were realigned and land parcels packaged for redevelopment. The area north of Dolorosa was targeted by the Rosa Verde Urban Renewal Project, and beyond the expressway to the west, the Vista Verde North and Vista Verde South projects cleared most of the land as far as the Missouri Pacific railroad tracks.⁴⁵

By the late 1970s few traces remained of the area's early history. Buildings constructed on Urban Renewal parcels along the creek, both north and south of Dolorosa Street, ignored this historic waterway. These included the new Bexar County Jail, completed in 1962, San Antonio Police Headquarters, also built in the 1960s, and various apartment houses and hotels.

Other infrastructure issues significantly impacted the creek in the post-World War II years. Flooding continued to threaten property along the San Antonio River and its tributaries, including San Pedro and other west side creeks. Following the devastating 1946 flood, the United States Army Corps of Engineers completed a report on urban flood control in the San Antonio River basin. As a result of this 1951 report, the Corps and the San Antonio River Authority partnered to adopt and implement the San Antonio River Channel Improvement Project (SACIP) to address thirty-one miles of channel improvements that included San Pedro Creek. For the remainder of the 1900s, local, state, and federal funding was applied to remedy urban flooding.⁴⁶

By the mid-1970s work on the San Pedro Creek channel was largely completed. This included widening, deepening, and straightening the channel from Guadalupe Street to the creek's confluence with the San Antonio River. To the north at Five Points, the channel was rebuilt and its banks landscaped. In conjunction with Texas Highway Department work in the early 1980s, the open creek channel along the highway right-of-way was enclosed in box culverts from Quincy Street upstream to Poplar Street and topped with a landscaped median.⁴⁷

It was in 1982 that the Corps of Engineers first advanced the concept of deep underground tunnels to divert the overflow from both the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek in order to protect downtown property from devastating flooding. These projects proceeded in 1987, and the

⁴³ Ibid, August 23, 1946, 1-B.

⁴⁴ San Antonio *Express*, March 21, 1959, 10-A.

⁴⁵ Pfeiffer & Ullrich, 6-9.

⁴⁶ *San Antonio River Authority, 1937-1987*, 5-6.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 17.

San Pedro Creek flood control tunnel, with its inlet at the IH 35-IH 10 interchange and its outlet at Guadalupe Street, was completed in 1991.

Urban revitalization in the late 1900s and early 2000s continued to transform the landscape adjoining the creek. New apartment complexes were built along the northern stretch of the creek near Martin Street, and hotels were constructed on the site of the M-K-T depot and rail yard south of Durango/César Chávez Street. East of the creek the historic United States Arsenal was purchased by the H-E-B Grocery Company for its corporate headquarters. Along and east of the creek between Guadalupe and Alamo streets, industrial buildings were converted to loft-style condominiums, and the City of San Antonio built a modern administrative building. On the west side of the creek, the Union Stock Yards closed in 2001. Land opposite the stockyards east of the creek and IH 35, that was formerly occupied by the M-K-T freight yard, remained vacant.

San Pedro Creek: 2018

While the San Antonio River was transformed into a gem of urban landscape design in the late 1900s and early 2000s, San Pedro Creek, constrained in concrete channels and in some locations hidden in underground culverts, largely faded from public awareness. The San Pedro Creek Improvements Project, a collaboration of Bexar County, the San Antonio River Authority, and the City of San Antonio, is restoring the creek's aquatic environment and establishing it as a world class linear park representing the cultural identity of the community.