

The River That Was
A Bibliography Of Beals Creek,
Texas

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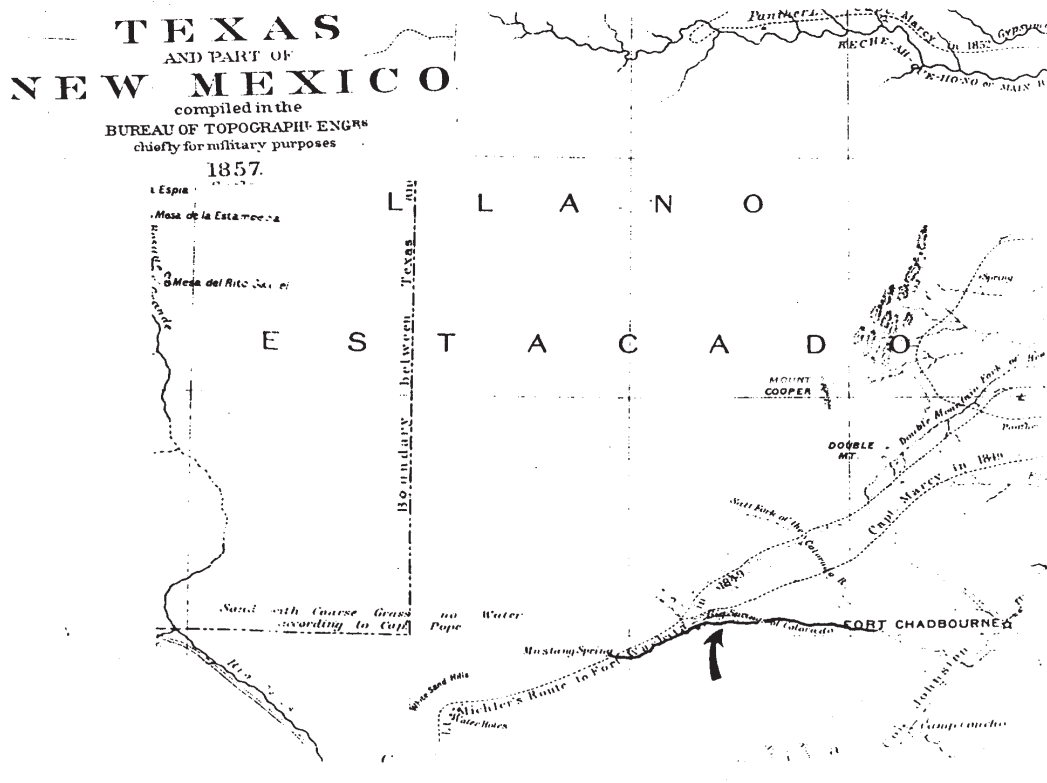
By
Ed Fisher

Composed for the Howard County History website by
Doyle Phillips 2009

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The portion of Beals Creek that runs easterly through Big Spring.



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Preface

In the 1960s the Howard County Historical Survey Committee (Joe Pickle, Mary [Cushing] Stipp, Modesta [Good] Stokes, and Ed Fisher) had the task of taking an inventory of historical and geographical facts to the area.

One topic that intrigued us was what is now named Beals Creek. The stream had other names, but why was it renamed? The Military called it the Colorado River from the 1850s to the 1880s.

Many old maps indicated springs, creek, and a river. The area had several Indian and Spanish trails. What caused these sources of water to dry up was only partially known. How long it took for the area to become semiarid, many old timers told us; but no conclusion could be reached.

We knew that there had been sources of water for the native Americans to be able to survive. We also knew that grass was stirrup high on a tall horse and many forms of wild life existed before the railroad and droves of settlers arrived.

These thoughts stayed with the writer for thirty years, and he could see that if this generation did not write on the topic, a century from now, nothing would indicate what happened to this once naturally fertile area.

What started out as a search for the origin of the names of a creek resulted as a brief summary of an environmental study.

—*Ed Fisher*

Acknowledgments

The writer is indebted to many individuals and groups for the information contained herein. Many of these are acknowledged in the footnotes. If I have overlooked some person who contributed to this study, and it is possible I did, for this I apologize.

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The history of the name changes and the demise of a river developed this writer's interest in researching this paper.

Excess water falling in the cities of Big Spring, Midland, Odessa, Hobbs, and several surrounding counties drain into an unobtrusive creek that once flowed millions of gallons of water a day. For many years it was called Pasigono Rio, South Fork (Salt Fork) of the Colorado River, Girauds (Girands) Creek, Deep (or Deep Red) Creek, Sulphur Springs Creek (Sulphur Draw), Beals Branch (Beals Creek), etc.

Decline And Then Dry

Today, were it not largely due to the effluent from the Big Spring Sewer Plant, Beals Creek would be mostly dry. There are many reasons the springs and streams ceased to flow. The major and lesser springs were fed by the Ogallala, Edwards, Antlers, Quaernary, Triassic, and Cretaceous Aquifers. These sources did not contain as much water as had been estimated by earlier explorers and military men.⁵⁸

"Captain R.B. Marcy described in 1849 mesquite trees as standing at wide intervals upon ground covered with a dense cover of verdure."⁵⁹

The Texas & Pacific Railroad opened up the area in 1881, and by the middle of July 1882, Capt. Alex S.B. Keyes, in a scouting report from Ft. Concho wrote that the country is so much settled up as to make it rare to find water without a ranch. Big Springs, Colorado City and within 30 or so miles each direction there are sheep or cattle ranches. People were continually passing to look further west.⁶⁰

The railroad came within two miles of the 'big spring'. The water was piped to the railyard. Before long, the springs did not yield enough water to meet the demands of the thirsty steam locomotives and the growing town, so around 1900 the railroad and others began drilling wells near the springs. After heavy pumping from the wells, the springs ceased to flow. By 1925 the well field around most of the springs was pumped dry."⁶¹

By August 1883, the 'big spring' had been fenced by the railroad company to protect their water needs. A dam had been built below the spring to hold water needed to pipe the water to the rail yards. Above the spring, an old gentleman was holding about 1,000 head of cattle (that is enough cattle to stock 40 square miles in a good year). "The spring is very low at the present and without rain the rate of pumping will soon exhaust the supply. The spring is at least 8 feet lower than it was in October 1875 when I was here."⁶²

After the building of the T&P Railroad in 1881, thousands of cattle and sheep were crowded on ranges, when only half the number was too many. The grasses were entirely consumed; their very roots were trampled into the dust and destroyed.⁶³

Enormous herds of buffalo had previously devoured the grasses, but they kept moving and left the damaged grass almost a year to recover before they returned. When domestic livestock were introduced, the sheep and cattle would be turned into a pasture and kept there permanently.⁶⁴

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Overgrazing and improper farm practices allowed rain water to more easily run off. Before the settlers came in, the water had fallen on a vast carpet of grass, and penetrated the surface to recharge the aquifers.

One of the worst droughts in history occurred in 1886 and 1887. Cattle died by the thousands in an area from Texas to Canada. Animals on the hoof sold for \$1 and hides for \$2 (the skinning had to be paid for).

When it did rain in 1889 and 1890, water that fell, ran off the surface into the dry creeks and caused the 1890 flood that stall-ed the trains for six days at Big Springs. The Texas and Pacific Railway tracks were covered with six feet of water.

The overgrazed land was exposed to fast growth and spread of mesquite. Thousands of animals that were brought in from other parts of the southwest and Mexico carried mesquite beans in their stomachs. The droppings of the cattle and sheep contained the undigested seeds. Manure would lie on the ground, and when it rained the seed germinated. Some plants put down roots as far as 60 feet, absorbing most of the soil moisture, so very little water remained to recharge the aquifers.

“About 1922, two Big Spring residents, Fox Stripling and J.B. Pickle per-



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formed an unscientific, but practical measurement of the water being discharged from Moss (Mossy) Spring. Using a three gallon bucket and the seconds hand on a stop watch, they estimated there was approximately 75 gallons of water per minute coming from the spring.”⁶⁵

By 1925, the ‘big spring’ was dry. Mustang Springs dried by 1914, but had a small flow in winter in the 1950s. Sulphur Springs flowed about 5 gallons per minute in 1979.⁶⁶ In 1966, the writer visited Moss Springs, only to find the Texas Historical Marker (placed in 1936) lying on its side several yards from the site of the spring. A paving contractor had earth moving equipment and a rock crusher using the limestone rock for other purposes.

As late as the 1940s, the T&P Railroad had water tank cars lined up in the rail switching yards in Big Spring. The tank cars (similar to oil tank cars, but smaller) transported water to rail stations further west that had insufficient water for the steam locomotives. When diesel locomotives replaced the steam engines, the water trains were no longer needed. Forlorn, abandoned overhead storage tanks stand as testimonials of the switch from steam to diesel power.



After heavy rains the “ditch” overflows the rail yard.

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When irrigation commenced on the Plains, it was like draining a pan with tapered sides and the first water to decrease was on the edges, where fissures fed the springs with some water.⁶⁷ But even droplets ceased coming from these springs in the 1950s.

In the span of only a few years, man in all his wisdom reduced a river of great significance into an intermittent stream.

32nd Parallel

Present day "Beals Creek is a perennial stream that begins at the confluence of Sulphur Springs Creek and Mustang Draw (about a half mile southwest of Exit 169 on Interstate 20 in Howard County). The total length of the 'creek' is approximately 70 miles." (Longitude 101 N 36' 04" and Latitude 32 112' 23").

Upstream from the confluence of Mustang Creek and Sulphur Springs Creek, the drainage pattern extends more than 120 miles to the northwest into the an area eastward of Roswell, New Mexico.²

Beals Creek runs in an easterly direction along the 32nd Parallel to where it joins the Colorado River approximately 14 miles south of Colorado City and five miles west of Texas 208 in southern Mitchell County (Latitude 32 10' 47" and Longitude 100 51' 17"). The 'creek' has a total drainage area of 10,320 square miles.³ (The City of Midland lies astride the 32nd Parallel) Beals Creek runs through the railroad-switching yards in downtown Big Spring.

Colorado River

Historian Joe Pickle in his book "Gettin' Started" wrote: It is a matter of uncertainty when the 'big spring of the Colorado' was first visited by a European. Alvar Nunez [Cabeza de Vaca] must have drunk at many springs during his journey in 1535-36, this is the only spring he mentions. It was a spring that poured out in such volume as probably would be remembered.

Professor H.E. Bolton is convinced that in 1537, Cabeza de Vaca followed the Colorado River and turned westward on Beals Creek. The terrain and flora of the area matches the description of Cabeza de Vaca. This explorer estimated the 'big spring' probably flowed at the rate of 1,000 gallons per minute (about 2.9 millions of gallons per day).⁴

Just east of the 'big spring' on South Mountain, a stone was found bearing a cross, an initial, and the date 1768. It was concluded that the executors of the plaque were probably the Spaniards who were accustomed to travel back and forth from the Gulf of Mexico to Santa Fe, New Mexico.⁵

J.H. Young compiled a map of Texas in 1837. Observing the map by latitude & longitude, the present day Colorado River is shown as Paisgono R. and Beals Creek is shown as Colorado R. The two converge at about the same junction as Beals/Colorado on today's maps.⁶

The South Fork of the Colorado received discharges from five large springs and several lesser springs. The major springs were as follows: Mustang Spring, six miles west of Stanton; Sulphur Springs, northwest of Stanton; Big Spring

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within the city limits of that city; Mossey (Moss) Spring, seven miles south of Coahoma; Rendlebrook Springs in southwestern Mitchell County.⁷

According to John R. Hutto, "The first authentic history is found in the reports of Captain R.B. Marcy, who wrote in his report dated October 3, 1849 that we found a fine spring of water which flowed from a deep chasm in the limestone rocks into an immense reservoir of some fifty feet in depth."⁸ Marcy was followed by Lt. Nathaniel Michler who said in his 1850 report to the U.S. Senate, "We encamped at the 'big springs of the Colorado'. The water is carried away in a bold running stream."⁹ General Robert E. Lee pursued Yamparika Indians to the big springs of the Colorado in 1857.¹⁰

Some older maps have many details in very fine print; it was thought by many that the 1858 Pressler Map of the State of Texas read "Beals Creek". (The original map hangs in the San Jacinto Museum of History at La Porte, Texas.) However, an expert in that museum closely examined the map and found that the 'creek' was labeled the "Salt Fork of the Colorado".¹²

In July 1880, General J.J. Byrne (a surveyor by profession) wrote his wife that he had purchased land near the 'big spring' of the Colorado. Three weeks later the General was killed by hostile Indians at Quitman Wells (El Paso County) on August 13, 1880.¹³

At some time or another, mapmakers changed the 'Salt Fork of the Colorado River' to the main stream, and the "South Fork of the Colorado" Giraud Creek and Sulphur Springs Creek. Only a few lesser springs were known in Dawson, Borden, southwestern Scurry, and northwestern Mitchell Counties.¹⁴

"Several major floods have occurred on the 'creek'. Records indicate that during the 1890 flood, trains were stalled for six days at Big Springs because the Texas & Pacific Railway tracks were covered with six feet of water. Other floods occurred in 1904, 1915, 1922, 1938, 1945, and 1962."¹⁵

Rio Pasigono

Spanish maps titled the 'creek' as Pasigono Rio, as well as Tanner's 1830 map,¹⁶ Bradford's 1835 map,¹⁷ Young's 1837 map,¹⁸ Arrowsmith's 1841 map,¹⁹ Hunt & Randel's 1835 map,²⁰ Wilson's 1845 map²¹ and others.

Note the similarity of the Comanche name "Pashhono" and Rio Pasigono. It could have been the phonetic translation from one tongue to another.

"On Oct. 6, 1849, Capt. Randolph Marcy followed Indians to a large stream which was called the main "Red Fork of the Colorado" or by the Comanche name 'Pashahono'. We found a stream of 20 yards in width, 6 feet deep and running rapidly over a rocky bed. This is the first tributary of the North branch of the Colorado we have crossed."²²

Sulphur Springs Creek

Captain John Pope exploring in 1854 for a Pacific railroad route, wrote, "that the Sulphur Springs of the Colorado, are five in number. The water from one spring tinged slightly with sulphur. The remainder contain pure and fresh

water.”²³

“In 1875, Lt. Col. W.R. Shafter from Fort Concho described Sulphur Springs as containing ‘excellent water in inexhaustible quantities’.²⁴

When platting the lands granted the railroads and schools, the Palo Pinto Land District Surveys from 1875 to 1879 show the field notes for Howard County locating tracts of land as so many miles from Sulphur Springs Creek.²⁵

The Pocket Map of the State of Texas, prepared by Charles W. Pressler & A.B. Langermann, dated 1879, shows the proposed route of the Texas & Pacific Railroad. The map lays out the lands in blocks and townships that were set aside for various railroad grants and school lands. The ‘creek’ was titled Giraud C. in Mitchell County, while it shows Sulphur C. in Howard County.²⁶

(Pressler’s 1858 Map had titled the ‘creek’ as the “Salt Fork of the Colorado”.²⁷)

It is understandable that one creek could bear a name to a certain point, and those further up stream or down creek call it by another name. This section of west Texas was very sparsely populated and to this day has only a few large ranches in Southwest Mitchell and Southeast Howard Counties.

According to old timers in Borden and Mitchell Counties, what is now named the Colorado River was an intermittent stream in the late 1880s, whereas Giraud Creek or Sulphur Springs Creek continued to flow.

Girauds (Girands) Creek

Early maps most frequently referred to Girauds Creek. “Francis M. Giraud was the Bexar District Surveyor from 1854 until the beginning of the War Between the States, served in the Confederate Army, returned to San Antonio, and was elected mayor of that city in 1873. His surveying territory extended into the Texas Panhandle and west to El Paso.”²⁸

The first instrument on record referring to Giraud Creek was made on May 20, 1861 concerning a tract of 640 acres patented by the Lavaca Navigation Company located forty-one miles N, 80 miles W of Fort Chadbourne.²⁹

Palo Pinto District Surveyors described tracts of land in Southwestern Mitchell County as so many miles from Giraud Creek or Renderbrook Creek.³⁰

Many scouting reports of the Fort Concho Archives from 1872 to 1881 record the use of Girauds (or Deep Creek). Usually the map or report titled the ‘creek’ as Giraud and in parentheses, to indicate both names were used by the Army. One certain report dated June 22, 1881 states “three days work on the crossing of Deep Creek, near Rendlebrook Creek. The channel made by this creek was ten feet deep and twenty-five feet wide in hard red clay.” The map (Map 5.5) accompanying the report shows Girauds (Deep) Creek.³¹

The name Girand Creek was made in 1919 in a publication by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The book states that “Girands Creek rises near Stanton, flows through Martin, Howard, and Mitchell Counties joins the Colorado in the southern part of Mitchell County.”³²

The same publication refers to “Sulphur Springs Creek as an intermittent stream rising in the southeast corner of Terry County; flows southeastward 65

miles into Girands Creek through Terry, Dawson and Martin Counties.”³³

Another recollection of a Francis Girand is in the San Saba County history recorded in the *Southwestern Historical Year Book*.³⁴ The article says Girand was elected Surveyor of San Saba District in 1856. The historian probably was referring to San Antonio, which was in the Bexar Surveying District. According to the Texas State Archives, there never was a San Saba Land District.³⁵

A 1922 Texas General Land Office map titles the ‘creek’ as Giraud Creek,³⁶ but the 1959 Texas General Land office map shows it as Girand Creek.³⁷

“Francis W. Girand (a relative of A.E. Stevenson, who was Vice President under Grover Cleveland) lived in Graham where he served as Clerk of the Federal Court of the Northern District of Texas. He moved to Abilene in 1893 when the Court was relocated there.”³⁸

How Girand’s name became involved and appeared in the 1919 U.S. G. S, Gazetteer and on the Texas Land Office Map of 1959, has yet to be determined. “When closely observed it is understandable that the names Girand and Giraud be confused in manuscripts because of the rounded bottom of “u” and the “n” was pointed at the bottom.”³⁹

Beals Creek (Branch)

The United States Board on Geographic Names was “unable to confirm the actual source of the name of the creek”. They did find references of John Charles Beales. A second individual mentioned was John T. Beal, a cattle rancher in Borden County in the 1880’s”.⁴⁰

The writer is personally acquainted with the Beal family of Borden County and has no recollection of their having any connection with the ‘creek’.

“Early settlers told of a stone marker found in the vicinity of the ‘big spring’ that was probably placed by A. LeGrand when he made a survey in 1833 of the Beales Royela Land Grant. Mexico had granted to Beales, an Englishman and Royela, a Mexican citizen land beginning at the intersection of the 32nd latitude with 102nd longitude for the Southwest corner. Two hundred Catholic colonists were to immigrate from Massachusetts and New York. The land grant made in 1832 expired. According to Texas General Land Office records no titles were ever issued.”⁴¹

After Texas joined the United States in 1846, there were several surveys across the South Plains made by Army Engineers seeking a convenient route for a future rail route to connect the east with the western U.S. The first of these resulted in a recommendation made in 1854 by Jefferson Davis, then U.S. Secretary of War. It was known as the ‘32nd parallel route’. An experimental camel route was set up by Secretary Davis in 1855, started at Camp Verde in Kerr County and passed through southern Mitchell County, west on to California”.⁴² The commanding officer of the Camel Corps was Lt. Edward F. Beale.⁴³

“In 1858, Charles W. Pressler published a magnificent new map of Texas, one of the truly outstanding large scale maps of Texas produced in the nineteenth century; he produced new editions of the map in 1862 and 1867.”⁴⁴

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Charles Pressler succeeded in outlining the main topographical features in their correct proportions and left for others the task of adding details.⁴⁵

In order to dismiss any thought that Pressler had labeled any 'creek' as Beals, it was thought that other maps that he compiled should be reviewed. His grandson, Herman P. Pressler was queried, and he wrote that "I have the originals of several maps of Texas made by my grandfather, Charles Pressler. I have looked in the area, but have been unable to find Beals Creek."⁴⁶

In all probability there is validity to the belief of several longtime residents and former residents of Mitchell County that Beals Creek was named for H.C. Beall, who owned and operated the White Elephant Ranch.⁴⁷ Beall's pasture was located near the convergence of the 'creek' and the Colorado River. His daughter, Susie, married D.H. "Pop" Snyder, Jr. on Sept. 2, 1903.⁴⁸ The Snyder's owned about 240 square miles of ranchland just up the 'creek'.

D.H. and J.W. Snyder established a ranch in the southern portion of Mitchell County shortly after an Indian raid in 1875.⁴⁹ "The Snyders, pressed by the 1885 panic and the drought that followed, sold part of the land on the 'creek' to Isaac Ellwood of barbed wire fame."⁵⁰

The Snyders kept part of the ranch and purchased additional land along the 'creek' in Southeastern Howard County. Much of the land is still under the ownership in the names of Susie Beall Snyder and D. H. Snyder, Jr.⁵¹

Surveyors sometime put in their field notes the common usage that a certain landmark is called by inhabitants of an area. The first known recorded instrument concerning Beals Creek was filed December 12, 1907. It is about 17.5 miles from the Mitchell County seat.⁵²

It appears that the Mitchell County usage of Beals Creek crept westward into Howard County to the western fence of the Beal-Snyder properties during the oil booms of the 1920s. (The Snyder Oil Field bears their name).

Mitchell County Surveyor, Frank Lupton, prepared a plat to determine the Mitchell-Howard County line in 1927. Beals Creek is shown as the name in both counties.⁵³

Residents of Howard County used both Beals Creek and Sulphur Draw in the 1930s to designate the stream of water running through the rail yards in the City of Big Spring. Then in 1936, the Texas Highway Department issued a Map that shows Beals Branch as their official name.⁵⁴

The U.S Army Corps of Engineers' 1954 Map shows Sulphur Draw joining Moss Creek about a mile northwest of Susie Beal Snyder's Ranch (four miles South of Coahoma and 20.5 miles east of present day maps) to become Beals Branch.⁵⁵

Finally, "in a 1960 Decision, the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, which is responsible by law for standardizing geographic name usage throughout the Federal Government, established the official name as Beals Creek, not Beal Creek, Beals Branch, Girands Creek, or Sulphur Draw."⁵⁶

The 1965 U.S.G.S. map reflected this decision by showing that Beals Creek began at the convergence of Sulphur Creek and Mustang Draw in western Howard County.⁵⁷

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MAPS

RIO PASIGONO

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R. Pasigono

Compiled by Stephen F. Austin, Map of Texas with Parts of the Adjoining States, (Published by H.S. Tanner, Philadelphia, PA, 1838). (Shows upper reaches of the Rio Colorado as R. Pasigono south branch and Muchique as the north branch of the Paisgono).

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COLORADO RIVER

Rio de San Marco ou Colorado

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Rio Colorado de Bexar

Mapa de los Estados Unidos de Mexico, (Lo Publican J. Distudrnell, 102 Broadway, Nueva York, 1847).

Colorado River

Jacob de Cordova, Map of the State of Texas, (Robert Chreezbaur, Houston, Texas, 1849). Indicates upper reaches of Colorado as "Red Fork of Colorado" and Concho River as the Southern branch.

Colorado River

Yoakum's History of Texas, (J.H. Coulton Co., 172 William St., New York, NY, 1856). (Present day Colorado R was labeled "North Branch." Big Spring of the Colorado and Mustang Spr-ing up stream & SW of the "Big Spring (SE of Stanton) ("Salt Fork of the Colorado" is shown to go through Borden & Dawson Counties).

Colorado River

Charles Pressler, Pressler's Map of the State of Texas, Galveston, Texas, 1858). (Shows the Salt Fork of the Colorado go-ing on the same path as Beals Creek today).

Colorado River

Compiled in the Bureau of Topograph Eng. (Chiefly for military purposes). Map of Texas and part of New Mexico, (Washington, D.C., 1857), (Salt Fork of Colorado R. is shown to go through Borden & Dawson Counties).

Colorado River Basin

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GIRAUDS AND GIRANDS CREEK

Girauds Creek

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The River That Was *Ed Fisher*

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Mitchell County Clerks Records, Surveyors Book B Field Notes, (Colorado City, Texas, 1891), several pages.

General Land Office Map, Texas (1959), Austin, Texas

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D.L. Cunningham, Palo Pinto Land District Surveyor,

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Sulphur Draw

U.S.G.S. Map N1 14 10, Big Spring, Texas, Washington, D.C., 1954). From Colorado River to convergence of with Moss Creek. (4 miles south of Coahoma and east to southeast Martin County).

Sulphur Creek

U.S.G.S. Big Spring Section, (U.S.G.S. Denver, CO, 1958). (Sulphur Draw from southeast Martin Co. to convergence with Moss Creek, south to Coahoma, where it became Beals Branch).

U.S.G.S. Map N1 14 10, Big Spring, Texas, (Washington, D.C., 1966. (From Colorado River to convergence of Mustang Draw and Sulphur Springs Creek).

View of the creek filled to overflowing the railroad yard.

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Upper Colorado River Basin, (Reevaluation Study, Fort Worth, Texas, 1990).

BEALS CREEK OR BEALS BRANCH

Beals Cr.

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Beals Branch

The Official Map of the Highway System of Texas, Texas Highway Dept., (Austin, Texas, 1936).

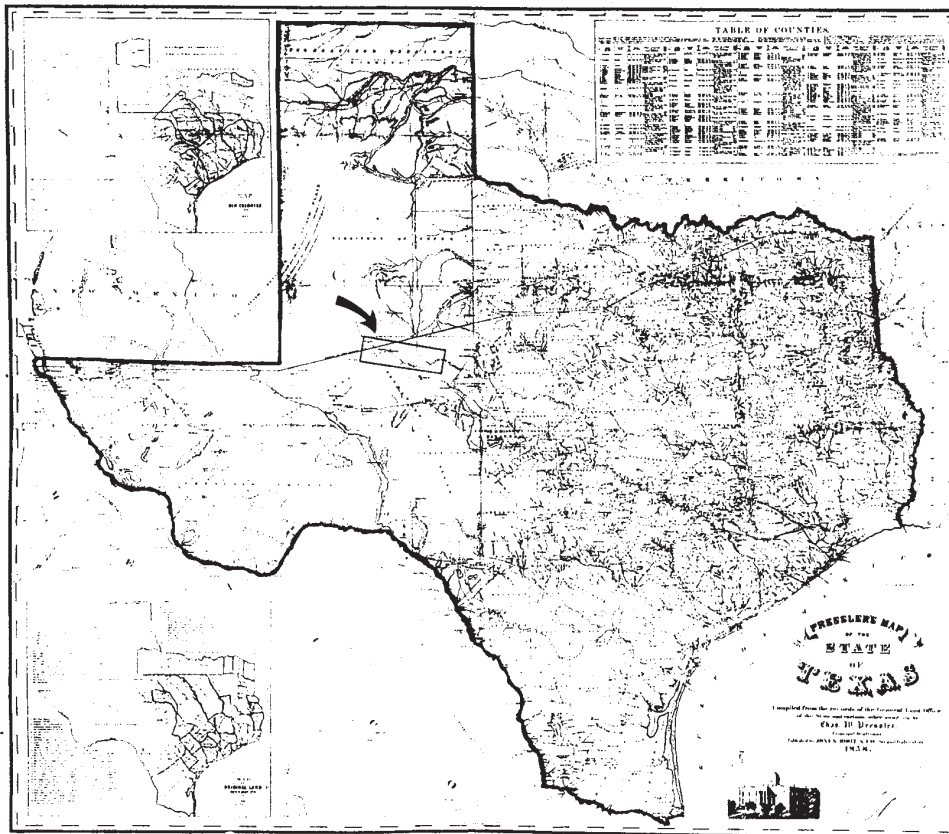
The River That Was *Ed Fisher*

Beals Branch

U.S.G.S. Map N1 1410, Big Spring, Texas, (Washington, DC, 1954). (From Colorado River to convergence of Sulphur Draw/Moss Creek, 4 miles south of Coahoma and 1 mile west of Susie Beal Snyder Ranch).

Beals Creek

U.S.G.S. Map N1 1410, Big Spring, Texas, (Washington, DC, 1966). (From Colorado River to convergence of Mustang Draw and Sulphur Springs Creek).



ED FISHER, earned his B.S. degree from Texas A & M University, his B.F.T. degree from American Graduate School of International Management, and his M.B.A. degree from Texas Tech University. He served on the faculty of Angelo State University for four years, and has been a land appraiser and business consultant in Texas and Mexico for many years.

The writer's father was born in a tent about 150 yards from the 'creek' in 1884. The writer was born in a wooden house about 500 yards from the 'creek' in 1924. This is more than a history of a perennial creek that has a watershed larger than the states of Connecticut and Vermont combined. Excess water from portions of western Texas and southeastern New Mexico including the cities of Odessa, Midland, Hobbs, Big Spring, Seminole, Andrews, etc. drain into this almost dry creek.

In the span of only a few years, man in all his wisdom reduced a river of great significance into an intermittent stream. This short concise story will be as interesting to environmentalists as well as to historians.