

The following application was submitted by the Bastrop Historical Landmark Commission to the City Council on July 16, 2008. The City Council approved action to be taken by the City Planning Department to have the Bastrop Springs designated as a Historically Significant Landmark. This designation will be the first step in an initiative to restore the springs and provide interpretive signage. The springs are located in the River Walk at the base of the stairs leading down from Main Street by the bank.

Bastrop Springs The Journey of a Lifetime

Located behind City Hall at the foot of the stairway leading to the River Walk, bubbles the best kept secret in Bastrop. For many years Bastrop Springs flowed unobstructed from the river bank into the mighty Colorado. When the alley behind City Hall was paved and parking lots were added, one tributary of the Springs was filled in, effectively terminating its flow. When our incredible River Walk was constructed, the other tributary was channeled *under* the walkway so it could continue its flow to the Colorado River.

These determined little Springs have not been content to journey underground, out-of-sight, out-of-mind. During abundant water times, they seep above and across the River Walk, sometimes creating a green algae-type area which has created much conversation and contemplation by visitors as to what exactly this “seepage” might be. Everything from a broken water pipe to a possible sewage leak has been debated, mostly with distain, for years. Many have wondered, complained, and detoured around the unsightly little puddle – remaining uniformed as to its true nature and significance.

My two little dogs and I passed this site every day for years, often pausing at the small adjacent vertical storm drain nearby to listen to the delightful sound of “falling” water – still with no clue as to its origin.

Having always been enchanted by waterfalls and springs, I was delighted to discover a wonderful reference book, “Springs of Texas” by Gunnar Brune. I immediately turned to the section on Bastrop County and

was rewarded with information on the city's own "Bastrop Springs". After consulting with Mike Fisher, who was the City Water & Wastewater Director at the time of the River Walk construction, he affirmed this was indeed the Bastrop Springs referred to by Brune. [*"Bastrop Springs, at the foot of Pine Street in Bastrop also flow from terrace gravels at 0.31 liter per second. The Old Camino Real or King's Highway, which was hacked out of the wilderness soon after Teran's exploration (referring to Domingo Teran de los Rios – 1691 trek through Bastrop- see attached map) , crossed the river at these springs. Many very early travelers must have made a refreshing stop here. When Stephen F. Austin's colony settled at Bastrop (then called Mina) in about 1827, the springs were its chief source of water."*]

Brune also commented on the Blue Springs, three kilometers southeast of Bastrop. [*"In the Pine Forest development surrounding the springs, thousands of Indian artifacts have been found, including Paleo-Indian Plainview flint points, scrapers, punches, drills, corner-tang knives, tomahawks, and grinding stones. It is likely that these ancient people found this a very desirable place in which to live."*] I refer to these nearby springs only because of the recent-day finds of ancient artifacts in that relatively undisturbed location offering proof of very early habitation in our area since the Bastrop Springs area experienced much early development, thus eliminating or greatly reducing modern-day archeological discoveries along the river bank. We do know the Tonkawa Indians favored our area for many years. Brune also states: [*"Bastrop County appears to have been much favored by early Americans, at least 9,000 years ago, as indicated by the many Plainview spear points and other artifacts found near several springs. By protohistoric times the very fleet and nimble, although slightly small, hunting and gathering **Tonkawa Indians** were using the springs. In 1691 the Spanish expedition headed by Domingo Teran de los Rios, looking for a more direct route from the interior of Mexico to the mission at Nacogdoches, passed through the county. He is believed to have reached the Colorado River about at the Travis County line, followed the river down to Smithville, and crossed it there."*]

Recent research of the Bastrop City Council Minutes done by Robbie Sanders turned up several references to the "Public Springs" in minutes from 1839, 1840, 1853, with the most interesting being from Dec 28, 1844 – "Stephen Davis be permitted to fence up his lot #10 on the West end of Diagonal and to close up Spring Street on the West for five years –

Providing he leaves open the Spring paths and providing also the said Stephen Davis makes a good road leading to and from the Ferry, about-opposite the Ferry.” (pg 123)

While many springs in the Bastrop area have dried up due to development and over-pumping of the water table, Bastrop Springs have persevered in their tenacious efforts to complete their lifetime journey to the Gulf of Mexico. Even though other springs exist along our riverbanks, these Springs are the most visible and easily accessible. We know they were a chief source of drinking water for early settlers. Their proximity to the historic “Ferry Crossing”, El Camino Real and the Main Street Corridor make them a candidate for historic recognition. In the future, it is hoped that several interested groups (some of those being Environmental Stewardship, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Lost Pines Master Naturalists) partnering with the City of Bastrop Parks Department will combine efforts and funds to restore Bastrop Springs so they may “daylight” via a small catch basin with falls so that all who visit, may delight in the sight and sound of this pristine water source on its journey of a lifetime.

I enthusiastically request that Bastrop Springs be preserved as a City of Bastrop Historic Landmark thereby honoring and recognizing its significant contribution to Bastrop’s past, present and future.

Sincerely,

Susan B. Long
Board Member – Bastrop Historic Landmark Commission
Bastrop Springs Advocate

July 16, 2008