



# A CONSERVATION NOTEBOOK

by Homer Stevens

## Cypress in the Hill Country

In the very first set of conservation notes, it was pointed out that much of the material would come from personal experiences here on “The Farm.” This is one of the advantages that age provides. Certainly all of the experiences may not be positive, but relating them can present considerations that others may use when planning their own endeavors.

The topic this month is Bald Cypress, the majestic trees that line many of the Hill Country’ streams. These trees are especially important not only for the shade, ambiance, and character that they provide, but for their place in the history of the Hill Country.

Bald Cypress is generally thought of as being adapted only to the banks of active waterways. However, there are two pair of these trees on this property that are growing well in distinctly upland locations. One set is directly across Pue Rd. in front of what we call Meme’s house. The other set is in front of the big party barn known as the pavilion.



photo by Greg Forest

My mother gathered seed from trees growing on the banks of the Guadalupe River behind her childhood home in Center Point. For this reason it has become customary to refer to them as Guadalupe River Bald Cypress. The planting of the then 6” seedlings in front of the pavilion can be documented as having been 1992, shortly after the first phase of the building was erected. The two in front of Meme’s house were planted significantly before that in the 1980’s shortly after that house

was built. All of these trees are now over 60’ tall, and have canopies extending out over 25’ in all directions. The very successful growth of these trees, especially the one on the North East corner of the pavilion, prompted this writing. For some time it has been noticeable that the small concrete pad in front of that door was breaking up and that a significant toe stumper had developed between the concrete add on and the dance floor. A short time ago when Albino was mowing, he pointed out to me that this was being caused by a very large root extending out from the big cypress tree. The total discernable length of this root is 42’ from the base of the tree, and the distance past the trees branching canopy is 25’.

It now becomes obvious that cypress have evolved the same wide spreading shallow root system adaptation that is characteristic of almost all of the true native trees--oaks, cedar, hackberry; etc. that have developed over thousands of years in the Texas Hill Country. These trees collect water from a wide area rather than sending down taproots in an attempt to obtain water from deep in the ground.

Knowing this adaptation explains why arborists in the hill country advise watering and fertilizing primarily around the outer canopy of the trees rather than concentrating inside the canopy close to the tree trunks. It also explains why during the ravaging flood on the Medina River of 1978 so many of the huge trees were washed down that several sawmills were erected to make lumber. The shallow root systems simply could not hold up under the torrents of water.

It was from these mills that the lumber for the outside of the rec hall, where the pool and ping pong tables are and Meme’s house was purchased. It might be added here that many of the old timers will always point out that “cypress lumber tries to go back to the river.” This is because of its tendency to warp badly. With good nails, screws, and curing time, this problem is

continued next page . . .

continued from previous page . . .

not insurmountable. It might be added that cypress lumber is very durable, almost decay proof.

The real historical significance of Bald Cypress trees in the Hill Country lies in their part in the founding industry of Bandera County. "In 1853 A.M. Milstead, Thos. Odem, and P.D. Saner, with their families, came to Bandera County and camped on the Medina River, where they engaged in making cypress shingles." This is from J. Marvin Hunter's Pioneer History of Bandera County. My grandfather, Jack Stevens, arrived in this area around 1856 and must have been involved in the cypress industry from a very early age. Evidence of this is found in the old tools on the wall of the pavilion restrooms and the lumber used in the construction of many of the original buildings. The old blacksmith shop is a prime example of cypress lumber construction, but even more significant are the boards that make up the walls of the porch and the small bandstand of the Farm Cupboard Restaurant. These boards several of which are close to 2' wide are on their fourth life on these premises. They were a part of the first home, which was under the pecan trees down on the banks of Hicks Creek.

When the house was rebuilt at its present location, they were not used in the new home (replaced by more stylish bead-board) but became part of a shearing floor in a shed that was below the bluff across Pue Road. When the grain bins were remodeled to become the swimming pool restrooms, part of the boards from that old floor were used in the rest rooms and part of them are inside the rec hall. Later after the decision was made to add on to the old house and build the restaurant porch, they were pulled out of the restrooms and used in that construction. Evidence can still be seen of the large circular saw marks that resulted from the milling equipment of the time. There are also splashes of the tar that was used to treat animal wounds.

This was a result of their life as a shearing floor. These boards were quite likely milled somewhere between 1856 and 1866 (making them over 150 years old). Thus this story of cypress could be said to extend from 1856 to 2014.

(830) 688-6061



## GOAT'S MILK SOAP

*Goats Milk Soap has a creamy smooth texture  
and is very nourishing for your skin.*

**Vanilla Bean, Lavendar, Chamomile,  
Patchouli, Baby Powder**

**\$3.75 EACH**

Ingredients:

Goat Milk, Sodium Hydroxide, Palm Oil, Coconut Oil,  
Olive Oil, Grapefruit Seed Oil & Essential Oil.

Made in  
**BANDERA, TEXAS**

Available at Western Trail Antiques and Lonesome Dove Design Studio  
200 State Highway 173 S., Bandera Tx / 306 11th St. Bandera, Tx



## APP ON THE WEB

Heart Beat is developing an app for Android phones and tablets.

Download today for the latest events and special announcements to your cell phone or portable device.

You can download the app directly into your phone by visiting our web site.

