

Spring Creek Watershed Landowners Summer 2013 Newsletter



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Teresita, Chouteau, Oaks Mission — Names Reflect Our History

The first European encounter of Spring Creek was most likely by Spanish explorers. Not quite fifty years after the discovery of America by Columbus, the first white men penetrated the interior of the continent as far as Oklahoma. In 1541 there were two Spanish exploring expeditions in the United States: one under De Soto threading the forests and swamps of the Mississippi Valley, and the other, under Coronado traversing the vast treeless wilderness of the Great Plains. Teresita, Spanish for "little Teresa or little sister", is a small community located where Spring Creek and Double Spring Creek join together. This suggests the Spaniards explored the creek; however, very little evidence has been found. All that remains of Teresita are the cemetery and abandoned school house.

Following the Spanish conquistadors were the French explorers. Early French records prove that French explorers had made expeditions up the Arkansas River and the valley of the Red River into the country now included in Eastern Oklahoma. Springs add a cold zip to the creek by the first



quarter of the eighteenth century. Unlike the Spanish explorers, who were always in search of gold, French explorers were seeking to expand fur trading. The French trad-

ers and trappers gave names to many of the streams and mountains in Oklahoma. For example, Neosho River to the west is also called Grand River. Neosha is Osage for "bright water" but Grande Riviere is French for "wide river." To the north of Spring Creek watershed is the Spavinaw watershed. This name is a corrupt spelling of the French words 'spee', meaning "young growth or shoots of wood," and a form of the French adjective vineux, meaning "vinous or wine colored," referring to the young, reddish colored growth of black-jack, post oak, and red oak groves in the vicinity of Spavinaw Creek in the springtime. The town of Choteau to the west, originally called Cody's Creek, was changed to Choteau after the creek that flows north of town that was named for French fur trader Augusta Pierre Choteau.

However Spring Creek was most likely named by a group of settlers who came after the French explorers. In 1801, the members of the Moravian Church from Salem in North Carolina (now Winston-Salem) decided to begin a mission to the Cherokee Indians who were then living in Georgia and Tennessee. As a result, they set up Springplace Mission in Springplace, Georgia. They continued the mission to the Cherokees until the Cherokees signed the Treaty of New Echota with the Federal Government. This forced the Cherokees and the other four civilized tribes (the Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles) to give up their homelands in the Southeastern United States and move to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Springplace Mission was forced to close its doors and move with the Cherokees to northeastern Indian Territory. Upon arri-

*Mission: to unite as citizens and
actively engage in the preservation
of the Spring Creek Watershed*

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Spring Creek History

val to Indian Territory, the Moravians selected a spot north of Tahlequah and named it New Springplace Indian Mission. The site was abundant with large oak trees and near the head-waters of a major spring-fed creek. Eventually the surrounding community was named Oaks and the stream named Spring Creek. The mission later became a local school and following several name changes is now known as the present day Oaks Indian Mission.

Summertime, Sweet Summertime — Where Can I Swim?

Children, watermelon, fishing and swimming – what could be better than summer at Spring Creek?

Did you know that the temperature of Spring Creek ranges from 50-75 degrees with the warmest temperatures in July and August? Many springs along its banks keep the water brisk and the creek flowing.



There are a few commercial places where you can picnic, swim and camp for a fee. Two long-established and popular picnic areas are Cave Springs and Littlefield's near Peggs. At Peggs on highway 82, turn north on N440 Road and go 1.7 miles. The road crosses Spring Creek at a low-water

Where Can I Swim?

bridge. Turn in at the signs, each place owned by different family members. Fees are \$10 per car for day picnicking/swimming or \$10 for overnight camping (5pm-11am) at Cave Springs; Littlefield's charges \$2 per person.

Innovative Techniques Being Used to Restore Creek Woodlands

Retired arborist Reed Holt has started a woodland restoration project for the Cherokee Cattle Company on Spring Creek. "Afforestation", the process of restoring and recreating areas of forests that may have existed long ago but were deforested or removed at some point in the past, uses a radical shift in traditional timberland management techniques.



Afforestation techniques at work

"First, we are using container-grown seedlings of adapted and native oaks rather than traditional bare-root seedlings," notes Holt. "They have the first branch well up the stem and have larger root systems. These trees attain a straight growth that ensures a higher-quality timber and early maturity. Higher limbs mean less pruning and thus less disease during growth."

Red-top (*Agrostis gigantea*) and middle Blue-stem grasses are being planted before the trees go in. "This ground cover creates a competing growth pattern at the same height as the tree

Restoring Woodlands

the first few seasons," says Holt. "This causes the trees to grow straighter and faster than with traditional forestry methods. It also lessens browsing by deer and rabbits."

This symbiotic relationship of grasses with trees has additional benefits. The grasses enhance soil fertility and also inhibit competitive growth of invasive species. Traditional techniques make heavy use of fertilizers and herbicides, chemicals which are expensive and undesirable in an area such as Spring Creek.

"My #1 goal is to restore my timberland with healthy trees," notes the landowner. "I want to restore healthy wildlife habitat. I also want to make money from my timber. I hope to be able to be a provider of young trees to the area and sell mature trees for lumber 15-20 years out."

Afforestation is a low-impact, high-return alternative to practices difficult to sustain. A productive forest can be established that is not a challenge or a threat but an enhancement to the watershed, according to Holt.

"I'm excited about this project. These radical concepts create an economically sensible and ecologically necessary effort to capitalize on the gifts we have right here in Green Country and especially Spring Creek."

Reed Holt is a resident of Spring Creek and was the 1996 Texas Forest Conservationist of the Year.

Wildflowers, History Abound at Lucky Spring

The rain didn't end until 2PM. Still, it was a light

Wildflowers and History

rain that didn't seem to dampen anyone's spirits. On Saturday, April 13, twenty five participants listened to George Kamp tell about the 1920 tornado that decimated Peggs and led to the building of the cement shelter that can be found today on his Lucky Spring property; Beulah Combs delighted all with her humorous stories of Ring Around the Rosie and other games played when she attended the Lucky one-room school house in 1934-35. Neighbor Loyd Harvey drove up in his pickup, got out to listen, then told us his father was the one who built the log cabin that exists today when Loyd was 10 in 1946.



Beulah Combs talks about school days at Lucky

Next, the group split up with the plant experts from the Oklahoma Native Plant Society and sought out Dutchman's Breeches, spiderworts, rue anemones, trout lilies, bloodroot and more. The plants were about 3 weeks later than last year, some in bloom, some about to bloom.

"It is hard to point to one area (of the outing) as our favorite because we truly enjoyed it all," said Scott and Jan Jones, soon-to-be Spring Creek Coalition members. "The history lesson was awesome."