

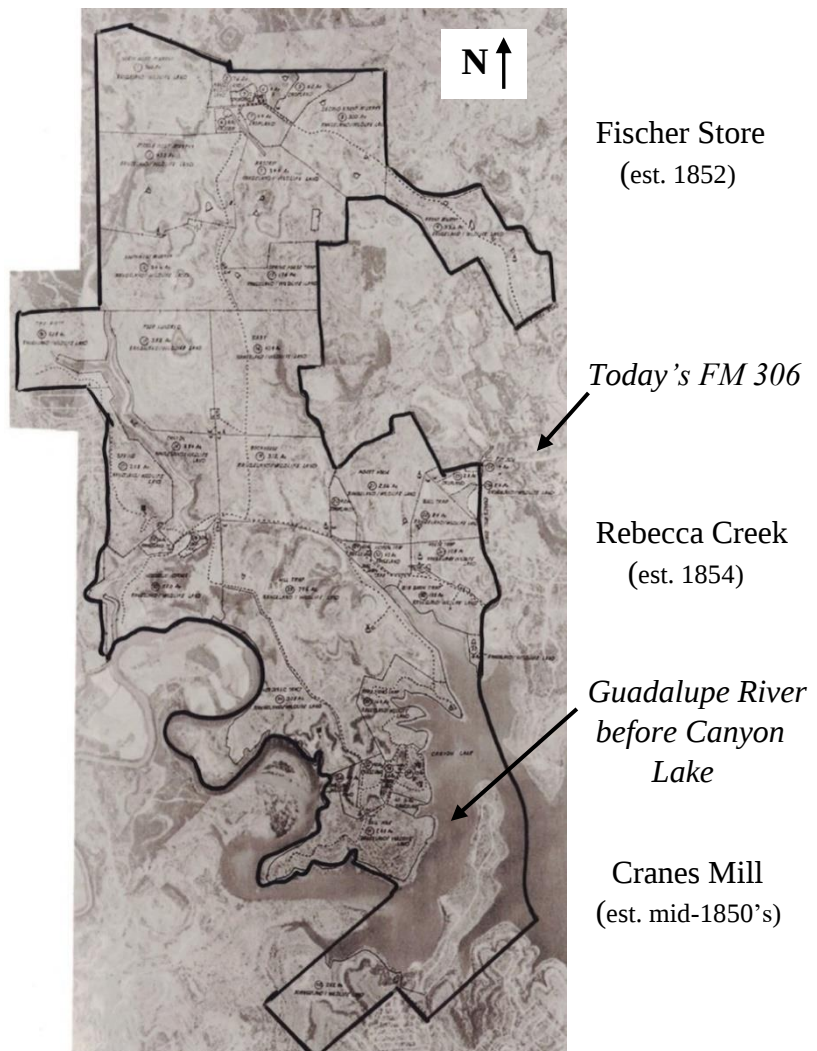
The 711 Ranch

I. CONTEXT

L.A. and Pearl Nordan, of San Antonio, established the 711 Ranch in Comal County in 1949 along the Guadalupe River 18 miles northwest of New Braunfels, Texas. Between 1949 and 1966, the Nordans purchased 51 parcels of property rooted in 35 individual land grants awarded between 1837 and 1888. Acreage of the 711 Ranch extended from North Cranes Mill Road west to Devil's Hollow and from the Guadalupe River over 7.5 miles northward. The land of the 711 Ranch was the foundation of the Mystic Shores subdivision in 2000.

The Nordans created a world-class ranching operation. Their 711 Ranch in Comal County produced prize-winning livestock, particularly Santa Gertrudis cattle. At the 711 Ranch, conservation, wildlife preservation and education were governing themes. The 711 Ranch was a significant area employer.

In the early days of the Republic of Texas, the Nordans' land was claimed by heroes of the republic, railway companies, land promoters, and German and Swiss homesteaders. Over time, this area became an integral part of the Fischer Store (1852), Rebecca Creek (1854) and Cranes Mill (mid-1850's) settlements.



The lands of the 711 Ranch were rooted in the histories of Fischer Store, Rebecca Creek and Cranes Mill settlements

U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Map

Courtesy of Paula Rieker

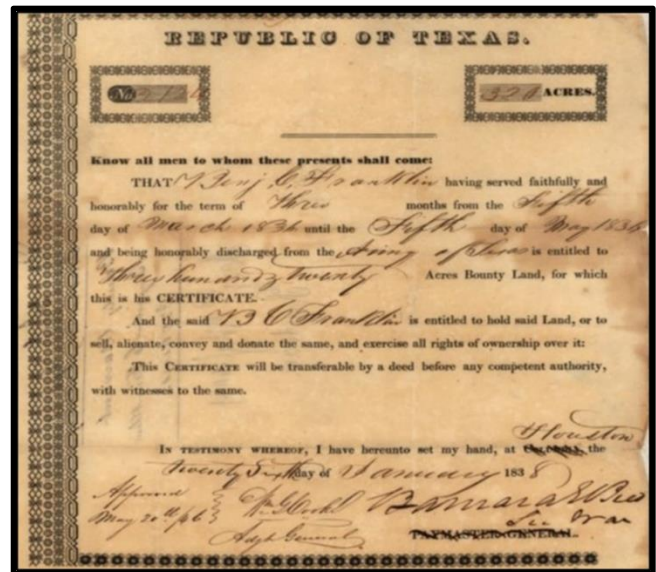
II. OVERVIEW

Old land records of the early Republic of Texas and the State of Texas reveal much about the history of the lands of the 711 Ranch.

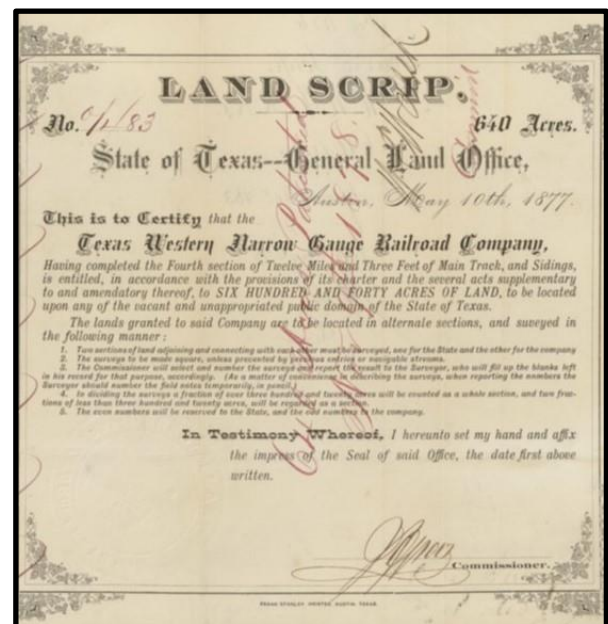
Early Land Owners

Numerous land grants in the area were originally owned by heroes of the Republic of Texas. Ten such grants were awarded between 1837 and 1860 on this land.¹ These heroes fought at the Battle of San Antonio, the Battle of Goliad, the Battle of San Jacinto and the Meir Expedition and served as early mounted Texas Rangers protecting the western frontier. Some men received the grants for their military service. Others received grants as Texas settlers before serving for the republic. These heroes later served in various roles for the young republic, including as Secretary of War under President Sam Houston, as the man chosen to accompany General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna to meet with U.S. President Andrew Jackson after the Battle of San Jacinto, as the first district judge, as a congressman and as a senator.

Texas railroad companies were awarded land grants for completing rail track in Texas. Three companies claimed land between 1877 and 1888 on the lands of the 711 Ranch, including a company where former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant served on the company's board of directors. For each parcel of land claimed by a railroad



Certificate of Land Grant to Benjamin C. Franklin dated January 26, 1838 for his military service for the Republic of Texas, March 5, 1836 – May 5, 1836; Land claimed became part of the 711 Ranch
Texas General Land Office



Certificate of Land Grant to the Texas Western Narrow Gauge Railroad dated May 10, 1877 for completing 12 ¼ miles of track and sidings; 320 acres became part of the 711 Ranch
Texas General Land Office

company, an adjacent parcel was sold to benefit the Texas Public School Fund.

Two grants on the lands of the 711 Ranch were awarded to Mexicans who qualified for grants as Texas settlers. The Mexicans each immediately sold their rights to land promoters and received payments. The promoters profited when they sold the grant or the land.

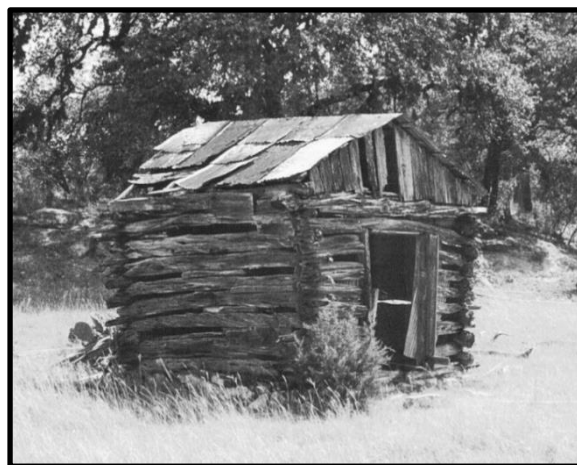
Significant land was claimed by German and Swiss settlers. These hardy immigrants scratched out a living on the land here. They yearned for independence, security and prosperity by their own hands. Early families, including the Haas, Kaderli, Bremer, Engel, Suche, Rauch and Flugrath families, settled between 1865 and 1887 on the lands to be the 711 Ranch. These settlers built homes, raised families, suffered tragedies, built schools, formed social organizations, and served as community leaders.

Early Settlers

At the 711 Ranch, the Nordans respected the histories of the homesteading families.

The family cemetery of the Karl Haas family is preserved. It has recently been designated as a Texas Historical Cemetery. In 1865, Karl Haas and his family became the first immigrants to settle on these lands.²

The rock home ruins and cemetery of the Julius Bremer family also remain. Julius Bremer is the son of a “first founder” of New Braunfels, Heinrich Conrad Friedrich Christian Bremer. Julius came to these lands in 1866. He was a butcher and rancher. The Bremer home was once a two-story stone home for the family of eleven. Julius deeded 5.4 acres of his homestead property for the Rebecca Creek School, for which he was a founding trustee. The building and teacherage of the one-room school were on the lands until at least 1949. What



Log Cabin of Carl Haas
Courtesy of Michael Haas, 2018



Remains of the Julius Bremer home
Courtesy of Paula Rieker, 2015



Remains of the Benedict Kaderli home
Courtesy of Paula Rieker, 2018

became of these two buildings before the land was owned by the Nordans is not known.

The two-story stone home of the Benedict Kaderli family, a barn and hand-stacked stone fences still stand. The unique open artesian well inside the home reflects the settlers' lingering fear of native American Indians that continued in the early 1880's.

In a location near Suche Creek, research has yielded remains of a stone foundation, a hand-dug well, and buckets of broken window pane glass, square-headed nails, buttons, slate, ceramic and glass pieces, iron stove legs, utensils and hardware. Deeper excavation has revealed ancient artifacts of daily life. Stone darts, spear points and chert dating back several thousand years have been recovered and are in the process of being professionally researched and dated.

The land that is now Cranes Mill Park was part of the 711 Ranch before 1,982 acres of the ranch were taken by eminent domain for the construction of Canyon Lake. This property was the home of Pastor August Engel and family. The travelling minister and wife Katherine settled at Cranes Mill in 1872. Together, they served families throughout the region for births, baptisms, weddings, and undertaking and funeral services. Pastor Engel was the Cranes Mill postmaster, general store merchant and school teacher. The Nordans preserved the homestead structures, but the



The Engel home.
The home is now below the water's edge of Cranes Mill Park
Courtesy of Olive Marcel George Hofheinz, 2012

structures were lost when the U.S. Corps of Engineers impounded water into Canyon Lake.

L.A. and Pearl Nordan

L.A. and Pearl Nordan established their 711 Ranch in Comal County in 1949.

Both Nordans were raised in Alabama. L.A. was born on September 3, 1896 in Jefferson County, Alabama in or near Warrior, Alabama. Pearl "Pearl" Neugent was born on August 19, 1896 in Garden City, Alabama. After L.A.'s infantry service during World War I, the couple married on July 19, 1919. They spent a few years in Wichita Falls, Texas, where L.A. was attracted to the oil boom associated with the Burkburnett area oil fields. While in Wichita Falls, the Nordans were blessed with two daughters, Anita Fay, born on Jan. 27, 1921, and Marian Olivia, born on Jan. 1, 1924.

By 1929, the Nordans moved to San Antonio for a new job in the oil and gas business. They then moved to Laredo during the early development of the oilfields in South Texas. By 1938, business brought the family back to San Antonio. Nordan became a successful independent oil and gas producer in South Texas. Nordan was one of the leaders who helped develop the oil and gas industry in South Texas to its present importance.

Nordan was committed to philanthropic efforts. He was appointed to the Texas State Parks Board on May 22, 1951. During the time Nordan served, Texas suffered the most severe drought in Texas history. But the Texas parks endured and, in fact, the groundwork



L.A. and Pearl Nordan
Courtesy of Central Christian Church, San Antonio

was laid for a stronger park system despite the 1950's drought.

The Nordans actively supported the Central Christian Church in downtown San Antonio. They were instrumental in funding, designing and constructing the new sanctuary there in 1948, including an expansive tower with carillon bells. The Nordans also contributed to build the University Christian Church in Austin. They were major supporters of the San Antonio Symphony Society and Opera Association, including serving on the board and as president of the society. In 1965, the Nordans established the Nordan Fine Arts Scholarship Fund at Texas Christian University. Nordan was associated with the San Antonio Livestock Exposition since its inception, including as a long-time director and serving on the executive committee.



Texas State Parks Board, 1954. Left to right: Wendell Mayes, Raymond L. Dillard, L.A. Nordan, Frank D. Quinn (chair), Maurice E. Turner, and Lonnie C. Fuller (vice-chair)
Texas Parks & Wildlife Administrative Records, Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives

The Nordans established the Nordan Colon Cancer Laboratory at the Cancer Therapy Research Center of San Antonio's University of Texas Health Science Center. The Nordans also contributed to the Kleberg South Texas Heritage Museum at the Witte Museum in San Antonio.

The Nordans began the 711 Ranch in Kendall County, Texas in 1946 and the 711 Ranch in Comal County, Texas in 1949. L.A. Nordan retired from the active management of his oil and gas operations by 1952. After that, he characterized himself as a rancher.

L.A. Nordan died in San Antonio at age 73 on February 5, 1969, just a few months shy of celebrating fifty years of marriage to Pearl. Pearl died in Bexar County on October 30, 1994 at the age of 98. She outlived her husband by 25 years.

711 Ranch in Comal County

When the Nordans established the 711 Ranch in Comal County in 1949, they called it the "711 Ranch - Fischer Store", given the proximity to Fischer, Texas. After Canyon Lake was formed, the ranch was called the 711 Ranch - Comal. (All references of "711 Ranch" hereafter

refer to the 711 Ranch – Comal.)

In total, the Nordans purchased 8,680 acres for their 711 Ranch. Between 1949 and 1951, the Nordans assembled a ranch totaling 6,116 acres. Between 1961 and 1963, 1,982 acres were taken by the U.S. Corps of Engineers for the Canyon Lake reservoir. In 1966, the Nordans purchased 2,560 acres on the north side of the ranch to re-establish the ranch at 6,695 acres. In later years, small parcels were purchased or sold. In 1999, 6,820 acres of the 711 Ranch were sold to Bluegreen Southwest One, L.P.

Nordan was a leading breeder of Santa Gertrudis cattle and Columbia sheep, both “American” breeds. At the 711 Ranch, Nordan established a herd of prize-winning Santa Gertrudis cattle that were exhibited and sold across the nation. His Columbia sheep produced such consistent wool that Nordan developed a very efficient, specially adapted wool grading system enabling the 711 Ranch wool to be sold over the telephone.

Nordan’s 711 Ranch was a site of constant conservation effort aimed at more efficient range operations. The ranch was known for successful re-seeding, resulting in good grass stands on caliche hills. The ranch also developed a reputation for efficient use of rainfall and for brush control.

The Nordans and the 711 Ranch actively promoted ranch education. They participated with Texas Christian University in a Ranch Training Program for those pursuing the ranching profession. Nordan further supported agricultural research and education by gifting to Texas A & M University his prize-winning Columbia sheep herd. He also gifted a starter herd of Columbia sheep to Texas Tech University.

Nordan supported the ranch livestock industry as a charter member of the Alamo Santa Gertrudis Association, Inc. and as a member and leader of the Pioneer Santa Gertrudis Breeders, the Texas International Wool and Mohair Show, and the Columbia Sheep Breeders Association of America.

Immediately following the death of L.A. Nordan, an editorial in the San Antonio Express summed up Mr. Nordan’s impact on Texas ranching saying, “Nordan was an important influence in Texas ranching, making his places [ranches] demonstration projects for good range management and breeding practices. These interests were geared to improving the future of people and projects he touched. Thus did L.A. Nordan project his influence long beyond his lifetime.”

711 Ranch Name and Brand

Nordan asked his office staff for suggestions for a ranch name. The name he selected was inspired by his office in Suite 711 of the Milam Building in San Antonio.

The 711 brand is a block style font. All Nordan livestock bore this brand. The brand was registered in Boerne and Comal counties. The brand also adorned all the gates on the 711 Ranch.

RECORD OF MARKS AND BRANDS						
Form 372--The Stock Company, Austin, Texas						
Date of Registration	NAME OF OWNER	RESIDENCE	TO WHOM SOLD RESIDENCE DATE OF SALE	KIND OF ANIMAL R MARK L	BRAND	LOCATION OF BRAND
Month Day Year						
Nov 10 1949	Nordan L.A.	711 Milam Bldg. San Antonio			711	left hip
Nov 10 1949	Nordan L.A.	711 Milam Bldg. San Antonio			7-11	left hip
May 11 1950	Niemann H.H.	Rt. Seguin Texas			n	left hip
Nov 13 1949	Nordan L.A.	711 Milam Bldg. San Antonio			711	left side

The first, second and fourth entries are on behalf of L.A.

Nordan starting November 10, 1949 with an address of 711 Milam, San Antonio Mark and Brand Records, Comal County

Ranch Employees

The Nordans hired skilled and reliable employees for various ranch functions, such as fence construction, hay production, water well and windmill construction, stone work, dirt work, cedar clearing, two-way radio operations, control of predator animals, and cowboy work such as herding cattle, rotating pastures and searching for lost livestock, grooming show cattle, breeding cattle including artificial insemination, and treating injured and sick livestock. A few employees were college educated with specialty training in animal husbandry. Some workers trained at other ranches, and others learned on-the-job. Several employees worked over twenty years at the 711 Ranch. Many local men from Fischer and Canyon Lake



Pepe Gutierrez (right), a 40-year 711 Ranch employee from the King Ranch with son, Adolfo, who was raised on the 711 Ranch

Courtesy of Jim Rieker

worked seasonally at the ranch. The families living on the ranch developed deep, lifelong relationships with one another and with the Nordans.

Cedar Clearing and Grass Management

The Nordans emphasized conservation. Programs included controlling cedar growth and expanding native grasses. Dense mature cedar groves were preserved as habitat for the Golden-cheeked Warbler. Abundant cedar re-growth was removed. Clearing cedar re-growth conserves water, as the cedar limbs absorb much rainfall and prevents water from reaching the grasses. Without native grasses, excess rainfall then runs off and is not absorbed into the ground.

Pastures were planted with King Ranch Bluestem due to its seeding qualities, rapid growth, high germination and ability to withstand drought. The bluestem seeds were usually planted from horseback on windy days. The riders would ride the higher ridges of the ranch and throw the seed into the air, letting the wind scatter the extremely light seed.

Pastures

The 711 Ranch was fenced into 41 separate pastures, called traps, each with a water source. Livestock was systematically rotated through the pastures to prevent overgrazing.

The names of multiple pastures came from prior owners of the land. Several pastures included the Murphy name, after Howard R. Murphy, formerly of the William K. Holt Machinery Company. The Hill Trap was named after Willard D. Hill, a prior owner of Nordan land, a landowner at the nearby Demijohn Bend of the Guadalupe River and owner of the Ol'Bossy Dairy in New Braunfels. The Wunderlich Traps were named after a neighboring family. Kerderlic Korner was a misspelled offtake from the Kaderli family, also prior owners of Nordan land and landowners at the Demijohn Bend.

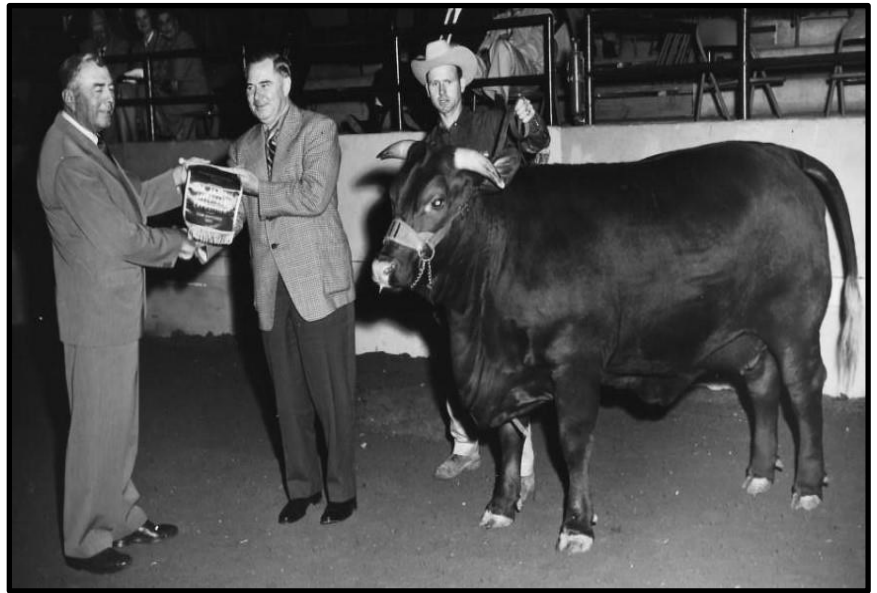
Other pastures were named based on features or nostalgia. The Spring House Trap was named after the first Benedict Kaderli home, built with an interior spring well. The land of today's Rebecca Creek Elementary School was called Albert's Pasture, after the long-time ranch manager, Albert Blankenship, who lived nearby. The Rock House Pasture was named after the Julius Bremer home remains. The Homestead Trap was named after the Nordan homestead. The Bull Hole Pasture was named after a bull fell in a big water hole and had to be pulled out with a crane! The Spring Pasture name was inspired by the prolific annual bluebonnets.

Santa Gertrudis Cattle

Santa Gertrudis cattle were named after the land grant where Captain Richard King founded the legendary King Ranch. Starting in about 1910, the new Santa Gertrudis breed was successfully established to thrive in the brushy, dry land of South Texas. The breed became known as American's first "beef breed".

In 1949, Nordan made his first purchase of Santa Gertrudis cattle. His favorite Santa Gertrudis bull came from the King Ranch - called Bull Number 12, and Nordan renamed it "King".

The 711 Ranch supported about 200 cows, serviced by six to eight bulls. The ranch excelled in matching cows to bulls for the best breeding outcomes. The ranch also had a successful artificial insemination operation, used to both selectively breed Nordan's own Santa Gertrudis cattle and breed cattle from other ranches.



L.A. Nordan (middle) and a Prize Winning Heifer, with 711 Ranch employee Albert Blankenship (right)
Courtesy of Mary Ann Vallad

Nordan's Santa Gertrudis cattle won many awards. In 1954 at San Antonio's first Santa Gertrudis show competition, Nordan's Santa Gertrudis cow named Pearl won the Reserve Grand Champion award at the San Antonio Livestock Exposition. In 1957, Nordan's bull Duke, the second generation offspring of King, won five Grand Champion prizes at major showings, including the Dallas State Fair and livestock shows in Houston, San Antonio and Tulsa. Other awards included first place for the Aged Bull, the Aged Cow, the Senior Heifer Calf and the Champion Female at the 1958 San Antonio Livestock Show. In 1959, Nordan's heifer "Baroness" won the Reserve Champion prize at the Houston Fat Stock Show and awards for the Junior Champion Bull and the Reserve Senior Champion Female at the San Antonio Stock Show. In 1960, a Nordan Santa Gertrudis female won the Grand Champion award at the Houston Fat Stock Show.³ In 1962, a Nordan Santa Gertrudis bull won the Grand Champion

Bull award at the Dallas State Fair's Pan American Livestock Exposition. The prizes and awards translated into record-breaking sales prices for the cattle of the 711 Ranch.

Columbia Sheep

The Columbia sheep were the first breed of sheep to be developed in America. Nordan participated in programs to yield a better breed and better wool, resulting in a larger animal with more wool.

At the 711 Ranch, the Columbia sheep were wild and not groomed for show. When they needed to be corralled, the ranch hands went out on horseback to rope and wrangle them.



Free Range Rams of the 711 Ranch
Courtesy of Sabas and Billie Martinez

Ranch Headquarters

The original 711 Ranch headquarters and family home were located at the site of today's Mystic Shores Lakeside Park. Main access to the complex was north of the Guadalupe River off North Cranes Mill Road near the old Cranes Mill Bridge, now under the water of Canyon Lake. Part of the area was taken by the U.S. Corps of Engineers for the Canyon Lake reservoir. Some foundations of old structures are visible in the easement of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. A new headquarters and family home were built in about 1965 on the waterfront of Canyon Lake in what is today's Peninsula At Mystic Shores subdivision. The home and associated structures are now a private residence.



Stone and concrete foundation ruins of one of the guest houses at the original 711 Ranch headquarters
Courtesy of Paula Rieker

Off the tip of today's Mystic Shores Lakeside Park near the original headquarters is the area once known as Gum Spring. The powerful spring is in the location cited for the cypress log mill of J.B. Crain on the Guadalupe River in the 1850's. The spring is now under the water of Canyon Lake.

FM 306

FM 306 has long been a primary route from New Braunfels west towards Fischer and Blanco. For years, FM 306 terminated at North Cranes Mill Road. On July 27, 1978, Pearl Nordan transferred 49 acres to the State of Texas, clearing the way for FM 306 to be constructed beyond North Cranes Mill Road through the ranch to U.S. Highway 281.

Two massive culverts were installed under FM 306 to facilitate access for 711 Ranch livestock, workers and vehicles between the north and south sections of the ranch. One culvert remains at Devil's Hollow and measures 36 feet in diameter.



Culvert in Devil's Holland under FM 306
Courtesy of Paula Rieker, 2017

Residential Development of the 711 Ranch

Bluegreen Southwest One, L.P. purchased the land of the 711 Ranch on October 13, 1999 from the Nordan family interests. Bluegreen branded their new residential development “Mystic Shores”. All things “711” were removed from gates, fences, signs, and structures, but the aura of the 711 Ranch land could not be erased. Once again, the same features that brought soldiers, settlers and ranchers here before attracted new residential owners.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Historical recognition of the 711 Ranch in Comal County, Texas will honor the legacy of an important family and a notable ranch. L.A. and Pearl Nordan were blessed with talents and prosperity that they shared with their employees and workers through their business enterprises and with the community through their philanthropic interests.

At the 711 Ranch, the Nordans aggregated many parcels of land under a single ownership. They respected and preserved the histories of the settling families. They provided opportunity, dignity and livelihoods for numerous employees, workers, and families. Their prize-winning livestock and ranch conservation programs garnered the respect of universities, Texas ranchers and area residents.

At the time of its development, Mystic Shores was the largest subdivision in Comal

County, Texas. The subdivision consists of over 7,000 acres and 2,200 home sites. Most new owners come from large metropolitan areas with little knowledge of the rich history of the area. Few traces of the early settlers or the 711 Ranch remain. The area is rapidly changing to a more suburban environment. Unless intentionally preserved, important history can be easily lost or forgotten.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paula Rieker authored this narrative. Appreciation is extended to Jim Rieker and members of the Comal County Historical Commission for reviews and comments. Photography contributors are noted in captions.
