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The Annandale Ranch - a Texas Century Ranch

by David A. Schulman

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)



I am not a native Texan. I was born in a small town in the Adirondack Mountains, a couple of hundred miles north of New York City. Hence, a Yankee. Further, by reason of my now having lived nearly half of my life here without giving any indication of leaving, I am, in the terminology of the native Texans into whose family I insinuated myself, a “damn Yankee.”

When I came to Texas, I lived for a while in Brown County, in the heart of Central Texas. My future was uncertain. I left my home in Las Vegas, had taken a leave of absence from the law school I was attending in California, and given up my plans on becoming a lawyer. That didn't last long. I discovered the value of half a law degree and decided I did not want to continue doing manual labor for the rest of my life. So, I “transferred” to Texas Tech School of Law and moved to Lubbock. The move to Austin came about 8 years later.



In the more than thirty years I have lived here, I have traveled across the length and breadth of this great State. By last count, I have made court appearances in 57 counties.

I have enjoyed visiting the numerous county courthouses built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and seeing the natural beauty that is Texas. Visits have been made to many of the “must see” Texas sites. Never, however, have I experienced the true “old” Texas, as I have in my several visits to the Annandale Ranch, in the Texas Hill Country.



The Annandale Ranch is a 15,300 acre Hill Country livestock ranch located on the Frio River in the northeast quadrant of present-day Uvalde County, just south of Concan, Texas. The Annandale is a Texas “Century” Ranch, meaning it has been in continuous operation and in the hands of the same family for more than 100 years.

In the mid-1880s, Louis Florea came to Texas from Indiana with his wife, Amanda Stone Florea, and their two daughters. “Judge” Florea had a law degree and had been a lawyer and judge in Indiana. He was admitted to the practice of law by Judge



Judge Louis Florea

George Noonan, of the 37th District Court, Bexar County, in December of 1886.



The Log Cabin

Florea and a group of businessmen purchased 50,000 acres of land northwest of Sabin. They called the venture the “Annandale Cattle Company.”¹ Sometime thereafter, Florea purchased 30,000 of the Annandale acres and retained the name. For several years, the family lived in the King William district in San Antonio. After the ranch was purchased, they divided their time between San Antonio, the ranch,

and Cuernavaca, Mexico, where Florea had interest in a silver mine.

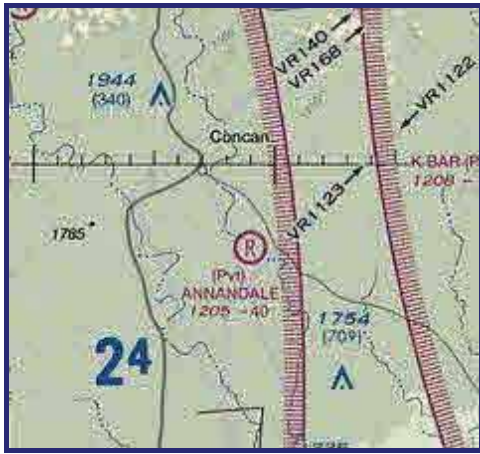
Judge Florea’s daughter, Mae, her husband, W.E. Fitzgerald, and their son, Paul Florea Fitzgerald, lived in Austin. He spent school holidays and his summers at the ranch with his grandparents in the “Big House.”

There had been an old log cabin on the north end of the ranch. In 1918, it was torn down with its logs each being marked. The logs were then floated down the Frio River and the cabin was reconstructed to the west of the “Big House.” After Paul graduated from Texas A&M in



The “Big House”

¹ “Annandale” being named after a glen in Scotland, and had was chosen by an early ranch operator named G.B. Johnson. Not surprisingly, Johnson was of Scottish ancestry.



Annandale International Airport

1936, he brought his bride, Helen Haynes, to the ranch to live and the cabin became their living quarters.

Today, fourth and sixth generation family members- the Cofers, Chapmans and McQuowns - own and manage the property. The ranch still operates as a cattle, sheep and goat operation, also generating income through hunting leases and specialized eco-tourism opportunities which offer limited public access to parts of the property for birding and bat viewing. The day-to-day operations fall on cousins Bill

Cofer, who has a house near the main entrance to the Ranch, and Bruce McQuown, who lives at the north end of the ranch, near Concan.

There are actually two landing strips on the Ranch. One, near the Big House, is an “official” airport which you will find on the FAA’s “VFR” charts. It’s located at Latitude: 29°27’8.82” - Longitude: -99°40’44.27” -- 364 meters above sea level. The other is at the north end of the ranch and accommodates Bruce’s fantastic flying machine.



Saturday Morning Flight

The Annandale is for hunters and bird watchers. It’s for hikers and everyone who enjoys nature. The beauty of the place has always impressed me and there is something for everyone. The Annandale is even a “destination wedding” location. If you like to watch the Mexican free-tailed bats leave the Congress Avenue bridge in Austin, or the Bracken Cave west of New Braunfels in Comal County, you will truly enjoy watching the 10-12 million bats do their thing at the Frio Bat Cave, which is located on



Nightly Exit from the Frio Bat Cave

the Ranch. There are “[Bat Flight](#)” guided tours every night, in season. The Frio Bat Cave is the second largest in the State.

I first went to the Annandale in July of 2000. I was a last minute add-on, so my accommodations included a bedroll and air mattress under the stars. The Annandale is more than 20 miles from either Uvalde or Sabinal, and on a clear night, the starry

sky is quite visible. The weather was perfect and I enjoyed the sleep out much more than I would have liked sleeping at a 5-star hotel. I have been fortunate to have been invited back several times -- the most recent time was the first weekend in May of this year.

The Annandale, like most of us in Texas, has been suffering through the most dramatic drought since the 1950s. The aptly named Frio River runs through the ranch for about several miles. Although the effects of the drought were apparent, there was still a delightful spring fed swimming hole at "The Big Woods." I am told that, since the ranch was founded, there has always been water at the Big Woods. The rest of the river bed, I'm afraid, was quite dry.



Swimming Hole at the Big Woods



Frio River Near the Big House - May 2014

Even today, the Annandale is a working ranch where cattle, sheep and goats are raised -- the Annandale is no "dude ranch." The numerous sheds, barns, corrals and ranch related equipment such as old pick-ups and tractors will attest to that. Even the Annandale's Model T Ford flatbed is still occasionally fired up for duty.

I am certain that, if you said "Texas Ranch" to a number of European or Asian tourist (and/or a significant number of Texas), they would say "South Fork!" As far as I know, that tourist trap, which is less than 50 years old, was never part of a working ranch. It was the "Ewing" mansion for a number of years in the 1970s and 1980s and is a hotel today, but it was never really more than an illusion. The Annandale Ranch, on the other hand, is the real deal. It's the real Texas Ranch.



Aermotor Windmill

Annandale Images



Log Cabin's Front Porch



Front from the Front Porch of the Big House



The Windmill and the Storage Tank



The Frio Bat Cave



Welcoming the Bride & Groom



The Swimming Pool

Annandale Images



The Frio Bat Cave



The John Wickert Memorial Flag



The Shed



The Workshop



The Missing Sheep



Prickly Pear

Annandale Images



Log Cabin Back Door



Old Meets New



Bell Telephone



Judge Florea's Law License



The Storage Tank



David A. Schulman, one of the founders of TIBA, has been a co-author of this report for many years. He was a member of the Court of Criminal Appeals' staff in 1991-1993, and has been lead counsel in hundreds of direct appeals and *habeas corpus* proceedings. David reviews every published criminal case from the Court of Criminal Appeals and every Court of Appeals on a daily basis. He has been Board Certified in Criminal Law since 1991 and was one of the first attorneys to become Board Certified in both Criminal Law and Criminal Appellate law. See his website at www.davidschulman.com.