

## **Sandstone rocks used as building materials in La Vernia, Stockdale, and Sutherland Springs**

This document was compiled by the La Vernia Historical Association, the Sutherland Springs Historical Museum, and Allen and Regina Kosub. September 6, 2020.

We asked local historians, Allen and Regina Kosub, about the sandstone structures found in Wilson County, particularly Sutherland Springs, La Vernia, and the “bathhouse” structures built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) near Stockdale. This is their reply:

Until the Suttles on the Cibolo and others like Nelson Mackey on the San Antonio River began making bricks, the main building materials in the area were native sandstone and post oak timbers. There are few post oak timber buildings left due to rot and insects. Native sandstone structures have disappeared as people recycled their attractive stones.

In Wilson County we have identified three types of sandstone: red sandstone (**Brahan Lodge**), yellow sandstone (**Applewhite** ruins by the Finch Funeral Home in La Vernia), and white sandstone (**Beauregard Ranch** compound in far southeast Wilson County). Most old water wells in the area are lined with sandstone. Sandstone has good compressive strength and is great for building walls and other structures.

Joseph B. Polley in the early 1900s wrote this about Rancho Paistle across the Cibolo from the Polley homestead:

*"About 1850 the walls tumbled down, and the rock of which they were composed was hauled away and put into chimneys. Today two or three piles of pulverized sandstone are all that is left to identify the exact site of the old mission."*

From this, we know that the sandstone structures were recycled in later forms. Gray Jones Houston's home at the intersection of CR 342 (the original Road to Chihuahua and Indianola) and Hwy 87 (just above Sutherland Springs) was a two-story structure made of sandstone (burned down in the early 1900s).

Both the Polley house and the Houston house were built in the mid-1800s (near the site of Rancho Paistle) and probably contain the rancho's recycled stone. Mary Maverick, in her memoir, wrote this about Dr. Houston's house related to an Indian raid in 1855 (the same attack that killed the slave girl Lucy, and Jewet McGee in Lavernia):

*"Dr. Houston's house was a large and substantial stone building, and the people from miles around crowded there. We fortified the house, and most of us kept awake the whole night. We dubbed the place in its fortified condition Sebastapol, which indicated our intention to defend ourselves to the last."*

From early Spanish maps, it is clear there were several ranchos along the Cibolo from Sutherland Springs down to the San Antonio River...the structures (if any) were likely recycled.

The yellow sandstone that we have encountered seem to occur in scattered fields from east Bexar County into Wilson County. We have diaries from the settlers of East Bexar County recording that they collected these stones from their fields to build structures.

The red and white sandstone appears in formations that may be quarried. The Beauregard Ranch has its

own quarry. Ewald Koepp, Jr., in a visit a few weeks before he passed, mentioned that he believed the sandstone used for the Brahan Lodge was quarried in the vicinity of his property. Please respect property rights.

Regarding Stockdale's WPA structures: Former Wilson County Judge Marvin Quinney expressed a desire to research bathhouse structures built by the WPA on the Cibolo near Stockdale. We contacted the National Archives for information regarding WPA structures in Wilson County. The response indicated structures in Stockdale were likely authorized on the local level with no specific records on file with the National Archives. Those bathhouses (which we have never seen) could be historical treasures.

Another question arises when discussing stone building materials: **"What was the source of the lime used in the mortar?"**

From the best we can tell, the earliest builders burned the shells of mussels and other shellfish from local waterways to create lime. After the Civil War, the soft limestone quarry in San Antonio (Japanese Sunken Gardens) was the main source of lime.

*We appreciate the information shared with us by Allen and Regina Kosub. We continue to add information to our archives about this topic and many more.*

*--The La Vernia Historical Association and the Sutherland Springs Historical Museum*



*Brahan Masonic Lodge, La Vernia. An example of red sandstone. Photo courtesy of the La Vernia Historical Association.*

*Located on private property.*



*An example of yellow sandstone. Far Southeast Wilson County.  
Photo courtesy Allen and Regina Kosub. Located on private property.  
Photo taken with permission of the property owners.*



*Beauregard Ranch out-building. Example of white sandstone. Photo by Allen Kosub.  
Located on private property. Photo taken with permission of the property owners.*





*Andis Applewhite at the Applewhite ruins in La Vernia in 2011. An example of yellow sandstone. Located on private property. Photo courtesy of the La Vernia Historical Association.*



*Red rock wall built in the 1940s along Chihuahua Street in La Vernia. Photo courtesy of the La Vernia Historical Association. Located on private property.*



*Red sandstone rock chimney on the Suhre Store built in the 1800s in La Vernia. Located on private property. Photo courtesy of the La Vernia Historical Assn.*

**All properties mentioned in this narrative are located on private property. Trespassing is strictly prohibited.**

**Additional information is available in the archives of the**

**La Vernia Historical Association - [LaVerniaHistory.com](http://LaVerniaHistory.com)  
Sutherland Springs Historical Museum – [SSMuseum.org](http://SSMuseum.org)  
Wilson County Historical Society – [WilsonCountyHistory.org](http://WilsonCountyHistory.org)**