Some years back, PBS ran a weekly series called "Connections." In it an Englishman would commence his narration about some distant and obscure event. He would then proceed to evolve a chain of events which eventually tied into the present and some significant occurrence that few viewers could conceive having any relationship with the initial event. The VMS caption on a 1927 photograph noted a large, New York City-type sign atop the Wittenbach Building with the name of realtor Sid Berly. This name sets off an exposition of far-reaching connections.

Our story begins no less distant than the early colonization of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In 1752 Rosa María Hinojosa de Ballí is born the sixth of nine children to Capt. Juan José de Hinojosa and María Antonia Inés Ballí de Benevides. Her parents are Spanish aristocrats who, because of their status of "Primitive Settlers", are given, among other things, the rights to extensive land grants. The family is to begin residence in Reynosa in 1767. Rosa will marry José María Ballí, a captain of the militia.

When both her father and husband die before the grants are finalized in 1790, Rosa María becomes heir to 55,000 acres. As a knowledgeable business woman she was able to obtain thirty –five leagues of the Las Mesteñas Grant for her brother Vicente. He repaid her by transferring to her 12 leagues of it, an area north of Harlingen to be known as the Ojo del Agua. The astute Doña Rosa managed her ranchlands well. She became known as La Patrona and the first "cattle queen" of Texas. This devout Catholic endowed churches in Reynosa, Camargo, and Matamoros. When she died in Reynosa in 1803, it was said that she had amassed over one million acres in what is now five South Texas counties.

Her La Feria Grant, which extended approximately 16 miles north of the river and was about five miles wide, was over time divided among family descendents, including the Trevinos. Don Anastacio Treviño took possession of parts of the La Feria Grant in 1843. Josiah Turner, who was born 8/10/1826, was one of the Valley's early Anglo pioneers. From Maryland, both he and his brother William had come to Texas as clerks in the commissary department of Gen. Taylor's army. In 1851 Josiah Turner married one of Treviño's daughters. She died in 1854, and he married the remaining daughter, Tomasa Treviño. In 1867 he took charge of the ranch and "controlled it as my own." This was the Rancho Galveston, later to be called the Galveston Ranch. The ranch abutted the east boundary of the La Feria Grant and from the river ran north its full length. When Don Anastacio died in 1874 he left the property to his daughter, who later deeded a half-interest to her husband. Turner then possessed for 39 years what was to be the very south portion of the Adams Gardens tract. In its August 18, 1911 issue the Brownsville Herald ran an article noting Turner's 85th birthday. In November 1913 the paper proclaimed Turner its oldest Cameron County subscriber still alive. In 1906 he sold the Adams Gardens portion of the property to three St. Louis men—Thomas W. Carter, Lemuel Carter, and Peyton T. Carr. After four years they sold it to W.T. Adams of Corinth, MI.
He was a wealthy sawmill machinery manufacturer. In the year 1910, it was 14 miles long and had 9,561 acres mostly in brush.

On January 3, 1909 W.T. and his wife Virginia J. Adams had signed a promissory note for $58,637.87 to the Frost National Bank of San Antonio. The collateral was 9,977 acres of Progreso area land in the Llano Grande Grant. When they defaulted a suit was brought. Rendered on October 6, 1914 the judgment was for a total of $132,970.25. The Adamses lost the land and because some had been resold the titles were clouded.

A February 13, 1925 letter written by Adams on company stationary has been uncovered. It deals with the effects of a freeze in the Valley and in particular the limited effects it had on citrus plantings. It noted little damage to trees that were two years of age or older with the exception of the more sensitive lemon trees. The stationery letterhead has on it: W. T. Adams Machine Company, Corinth, Miss., U.S.A., established 1879, manufacturers of automatic and throttling engines, boilers, and sawmills. These are illustrated in an engraving along with an aerial view of the very large industrial manufacturing plant alongside a railroad track with a passenger train passing by. Below the illustration of the plant is a list of particular products being manufactured. These are gas engines, planers, edgers, live rolls, pulleys, shafting equalizers, rip and cut off saws, gist mills, cotton gins, presses, elevators, mill supplies. Adams closes the letter to F. P. McElwrath of Corsicana, TX with a handwritten note extolling a new fast train that leaves San Antonio and also Houston about 7 to 8 pm in the evening and arrives in Harlingen about 7:30 the next morning. Catching this train would save a half-day in the Valley, Adams relates.


Another great tract of Valley land will come under early development as a result of the completion of a deal by which the Farm and Home Savings and Loan association of Nevada acquired title to the well known Adams tract. The huge tract, comprising a strip running 14 miles north from the river and about one and one and a half miles wide, contains 9,728.5 acres. It brought $1,700,000 including 900 acres of developed Valley land as part of the purchase price. The tract is considered one of the finest and best located pieces of land in the Valley. The greater part is sandy loam, particularly adapted to citrus growing. Leading highways of the Valley cross the tract as do the telephone, telegraph, power, and other public utility lines, making development easy.

The land is not now an irrigated tract, but if not sold soon as a block, one will be formed and the tract sold off in small parcels. A.M. McLelland is to handle the land as district manager for the company. The greater part of the area is virgin land, with only 600 acres in cultivation. The Arroyo Colorado crosses it with 2,400 acres south of the Arroyo; 1,600 acres between the Arroyo Colorado
and the Harlingen-La Feria Highway; 3,100 acres between the Harlingen Highway and the Combes Highway; and 2,400 acres north of the Combes-Santa Rosa Highway.

The deal has been pending for some time. Many rumors of the sale of the tract have been reported during the years it has been owned by the Adams family., and, in some cases, the prospective buyers have gone so far as to contract for the land before the deals fell through. It has become one of the best known of the big acreages in this section.

Hoggard brothers, W. L. Ewing, and Gerald McKenna were brokers handling the transaction.

Owners of the tract include W. T. Adams Sr. of Corinth, Mississippi, W.T. Adams Jr., Winifred Cooper Adams, Mary Kirk Adams, May Pearl Scott Adams, Robert C. Liddon, Anna Orville Liddon, Will Pate Young, Cabel Wilson Young, and Thomas Adams Young.

Seventy-six miles of roads were built after a survey. Land was cleared and citrus orchards planted, however the depression in the 1930s hurt land sales.

The remainder of Galveston Ranch was of interest to other developers. With the fortunes of sugarcane in the Valley ebbing and flowing, Donna Sugar Mill entrepreneur, Jesse C. McDowell of Pittsburgh will purchase the property in late 1919. In a bullish frame of mind he plants a 100 acre seed bed on the tract. Intentions are to expand this to 1,000 acres the next season. South Texas is no longer able to compete with world sugar producers, and the Donna mill is to close forever after the winter processing season of 1921-22.

Ironically sugarcane will once again return to Galveston Ranch. In 1980 Sam Sparks of Santa Rosa will purchase 1,800 acres of the property from the heirs of the Anderson brothers (they were the northern contractors who built Falcon Dam). South of the Military Highway, Sparks will improve the undulating terrain with considerable land leveling before putting it into cane cultivation.

It is the year 1921 that Charles F.C. Ladd comes to the Valley to work for A. J. McColl as general land agent. In the irrigated area north of Laredo he had been colonization agent for the Winter Garden Farms, Inc. He sells much McAllen and mid-Valley property. In 1931 he becomes connected with Adams Gardens, Inc., the outfit which is to subdivide the former Turner Tract. This firm is successor to the Bass Lake Company which in 1929 had offices on Bass Boulevard before losing the company in the stock market crash of October 1929. The Pendletons of Harlingen may also have had a financial interest. It then fell into the hands of the Farm and Home Saving and Loan of Nevada Missouri which hired Ladd to manage the property. The Harlingen firm, of which he is president, is called the Ladd Farm Mortgage Co. For a time Lon C. Hill, Jr. works for Ladd. Ladd also utilizes V. Stambaugh, a Florida horticulturalist, to experiment with semi-tropical trees in order to find something suitable for economic development in the area. Ladd was born 8/28/83 in Miles City, Montana. He was educated at Hutchinson, KS and Kansas City, MO. This Mason married Regina D. Welch of Kansas City on 2/28/18. By 1931 they have a son, Charles, Jr.
The main north-south road of the about one-mile wide and ten mile long Adams Gardens tract is to become Bass Boulevard, the north-south section of FM 800. The parcels were laid out by surveyor Alfred Tamm of Harlingen. Every mile, and sometimes closer, along the boulevard where the cross roads are installed, the developers erect light colored stone pillars to give the appearance of a high class country estate. These were designed by a local artist. The cross street were named for lawyers and architects connected with the project. Today some of the markers still exist (from the north side running south) at Spangler Lane Johnston Lane, Hughes Road, West Business 83 with the most impressive gates at each corner of the intersection, Sherwood Road, Levin Way, Ewing Road, and finally McLelland Road. At the latter is a capricious 20' tall castle having some petrified wood stones embedded in it. Some of the other columns also have petrified wood (probably from Starr County) in them, but most of the stones in their construction appear to be sandstone. Some had semblances of faces on them. Ladd went on to beautify and civilize the tract by planting palms, bougainvillea and exotic shrubs and trees such as kapok.

In an early map of Adams Gardens, Subdivisions A, B, & C, Charles F. C. Ladd, Developer offered for sale exclusively by Adams Gardens, Inc. with representatives throughout the United States and Canada, General Offices-Harlingen, Texas, road names are denoted.

From north (at the Wilson Tract Canal) to south they read: Stambaugh Lane, Llewellyn Road, Blum Lane, Hollowell Way, Hill Drive, Bacon Way, Ryan Road, Spangler Lane, Kelley Drive, Sparrow Way, Palis Drive, Ted Johnson Lane, Hick Hill Drive, Traxler Way (Expressway 83 would later take out the east side of Traxler Way then curve southwest and cut through Dennis Lane), Dennis Lane, Hughes Drive, Glenn Way, Amick Drive (just north and parallel to the railroad tracks and current W. Business 83), Lake Shore Drive, Regina Lane, McLelland Drive around Lake Reba Bass with Hermie Lane to its west and Sherwood Way to its east, Hoss Lane, Levens Way, Ewing Drive, Price Avenue, Trimpe Lane, Arroyo Drive intercepted by the south end of McLelland Drive at Bass Blvd., Oliver Drive, Hibiscus Lane just east of the proposed reservoir, Huisache Drive, Mesquite Road, Nopal Lane, Del Buey Avenue, North Resaca Drive just north of Resaca del Buey, South Resaca Drive, Pomelo Road and winding northeast to its east Banco Road off which runs short Chico Lane, Ebony Lane, Papaya Lane, Naranja Drive, Dunlap Drive, Sauza Road, La Palma Drive, and lastly Spiderweb Road north of and paralleling the San Benito and Rio Grande Valley Railroad tracks. Lot sizes ranged widely running from as small as 4.15 acres near the lake to the largest at 27.10 acres. A stone-veneered house for Ladd is also constructed but has since apparently disappeared. A stone-gated cottage similar to it still stands on the south side of West Business 83 just east of its intersection with Bass Blvd. It was likely the sales office which housed 10 to 12 full-time employees to handle referrals from the offices Ladd also had in Philadelphia, Chicago, Kansas City, and other locations. After the Labor Day Hurricane of 1933 which devastated the citrus plantings on the tract, Ladd went to live in the St. Anthony Hotel in San Antonio. He died in that city in 1937. After his departure Keith McKanse was named manager of the Adams Garden Land Company until Sid Berly took over.
The first home built on the tract was constructed north of the railroad tracks around 1931 by a family named Spencer. Two other longtime residents of the area were Tom and Ophelia Ashworth at ¼ S. Bass Blvd. Tom had come with his parents to La Feria on 8/20/20 from Stephenville which is near Fort Worth. Their neighbors were Frank and Mary Branson. She lived to 101, dying in late 2001. Just south of where FM 800 turns east the developers constructed about a 360 acre reservoir. A pumping plant was erected on the river on the west edge of the tract. Adams Gardens Irrigation District 19 was formed. Bass Lake just south of Business 83 and named after the first owner's wife, Reba Bass, was in the 1950s to be the venue for boat races, motor and sail, though it only averaged four feet depth. In the period 1929-1933 several tomato canning plants and a broom corn factory existed along the railroad tracks through the area.

Sid Berly was attracted to the Valley in 1920. He is a native of Mansfield, LA having been born there 8/23/96 to a father, C.J., who was a stockraiser. Berly was to marry Marion Elizabeth Walker of Lake Charles on 3/18/17. They had one daughter who was given the same name as her mother. Although he studied law for two years he never completed his studies. Instead he became a representative for the Willys-Knight Motor Co. As president and general manager of Valley Properties, Inc. located in the Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel he becomes a potent factor in the development of both agricultural and city land in the Valley, especially around Harlingen. He served as Chamber of Commerce president in 1946-47 and was a Rotary Club member. In 1952 he was president of Adams Gardens and continued to press for the exploitation of the area.

We have then come full circle in our story. What started out as a modest but progressive ranch enterprise by Doña Rosa María is, 162 years later, now experiencing a spurt of agricultural development, propelled by an entrepreneur with a vastly different makeup and goal. Berly's promotions could not have come to pass without the chain of connections that were laid over time.

By the 1990s residential housing and businesses were moving west from the Stuart Place Tract into the next large tract, that of Adams Gardens. As the area greeted the 21st Century, numerous large, expensive homes on sizeable lots were being constructed along South Bass Blvd. and somewhat less so on N. Bass Blvd. where many subdivisions featuring middle priced homes were being developed. Harlingen then annexed some of the area under its extra-jurisdictional rights. The Texas Department of Transportation was to widen Bass Boulevard in 2002 in order to handle the increase residential traffic along with that of sugarcane haul trucks.

June 2009 addition to Adams Garden story

Closed Valley Tract Brings Price of $1,700,000 Nevada Company May Open Lands for Settlement

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