Alfred Tamm was born in Finland, December 6, 1881. His father was from Finland; his mother from Sweden. He immigrated to the United States in 1908. He married Daisy M., born in Canada, January 3, 1888. Her parents were both from Ireland. They had at least two children, Marion Anna, born July 28, 1913, in Cameron County, Texas, and Alma, born 1917 in the same county. This indicates that they were in the Valley by at least 1913.

A correspondence dated 7/27/1920 to Mr. Tamm in Harlingen from the F. Z. Bishop land sales company may indicate his association with the Water District by this time.

The family is listed in the 1920 US Census of Harlingen.

February 1921 Alfred and Daisy Tamm are among the ten individuals who organize an Episcopal Mission in Harlingen. In June 1924 it will be organized into St. Alban’s Episcopal Church. Some time prior to 1921 Tamm has taken a position as engineer with the Cameron County Water and Improvement District No. 1 while also doing private civil engineering and surveying work. While we have no documentation on Tamm's professional education or on-the-job training, it must have been enough to satisfy state, city and the water district's requirements.

On Cameron County Water Improvement District Number One letterhead of 8/13/23 A. Tamm is listed as an officer with the position of engineer.

Spring 1924 To an American Society of Civil Engineers group meeting in Brownsville, Tamm offers a paper titled “Engineers, Part of the Development of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas”. It touches upon the first surveys in the area made in 1767 then goes on to talk of the various irrigation canals. It provided valuable data on the status of water districts at that time.

In 1930 Tamm lists himself as a civil engineer in the telephone directory. In a classified ad he offers engineers’ and architects’ supplies, blueprints and photostating. He is operating out of the Irrigation District Office at 209 ½ W. Jackson, Harlingen. He is also the city engineer. He and his wife Daisy live at 205 E. Tyler. Their house of more than 40 years is no more as it was torn down to make way for the now drive-in facilities of Bank of America.

By 1935 his daughters Alice and Marion Anna are old enough to have their own telephone listings.

By 1937 Tamm will relocate his business office to 107 S. 1st Street. This year his classified ad will note “drafting of plans and maps.”
In 1941 he is to take on an associate, N. M. Fitzgerald and lists the firm as Tamm and Fitzgerald, consulting engineers. He advertises “Valley, County Irrigation District, and City Maps for sale.” By 1944 Fitzgerald is gone, perhaps to military service. He is no longer listed in the phone directory.

All through the years Tamm remains as Harlingen City Engineer until he relinquishes the position between 1948 and 1949.

In 1948 Tamm relocates his office to 216 E. Van Buren. He continues to advertise himself as a “consulting engineer” and works until 1960. In 1961 he is retired.

In October 1949 Mr. Tamm was elected vice president of the Texas Water Conservation Association. This group was dedicated to defending the state water rights as opposed to federal controls.

His last Harlingen telephone book listing is for 1972. He died May 13, 1973 in Austin, Travis County, Texas. His wife Daisy died December 1973 in Tomball, Harris County, Texas.

Mr. Tamm’s signature is to be encountered on numerous subdivision plat maps submitted to Cameron County. He was very active in this regard.

Tamm Lane, a long country road which runs north-south, is on the west side of Harlingen and marks the east boundary of the Adams Gardens subdivision which Tamm laid out.

Tamm is referenced in the Cameron County Historical Commission website essays on “Adams Gardens” and “Diary of a Boundary Dispute.”

Following is an excerpt from the forthcoming book titled Sugarcane and the Development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1875-1922:

On May 1, 1922 came the first of several telegraph reports to the lower Valley. It warns of a rise in the river. Six days later predictions were made for San Juan River flooding. Nothing immediate comes to pass, but these warnings were a harbinger of things to come. Northern Mexico had been saturated by heavy rains. On June 17 the Monterey section received a second series of high precipitation storms. The U.S. Weather Service issued warnings for the Valley, especially applicable after Camargo and Mier were evacuated. Mission to Alamo farmers took action by moving stock and equipment to higher ground.¹

By 6/24 the floodwaters were well upon the Valley. All businesses closed in Mercedes so everyone could work to shore up the levees in the vicinity. “Water Wins at Mercedes – South Levee Breaks” headlined the paper the following day. The water at the railroad depot at Mercedes reached 42" above the building’s foundation. The water then pushed on past Mercedes toward Sebastian and Lyford.²
On June 25 the river level reached its maximum. Breaks on the Mexico side ameliorated U.S. flooding, especially for Brownsville. Matamoros, as had been the case numerous times before, was a disaster when waters turned the city into a lake.

In the Harlingen area, flood fighters had also been galvanized into action. Alfred Tamm, the engineer in charge of the Harlingen Water District; H. A. Beckwith, water engineer; and C. P. Bobo, manager of the district were leaders of efforts to shore up the levees south of the city. Their efforts succeeded in keeping farmland from being flooded as well as the pumping station. The cost was $3,100 of which the city picked up $506. The city gave them a vote of thanks on 7/2. iii

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i Brownsville Herald, 5/1/22, 5/7/22, 6/12/22, 6/17/22.
iIbid., 6/24/22, 6/25/22.
iii Ibid., 7/2/22.