When, how and why F. Z. Bishop became interested in Harlingen perhaps will never be known. We can surmise that Bishop found a kindred spirit in Lon C. Hill. Both were ambitious men of vision and both would be founders of communities.

Bishop had, in 1910, established the town of Bishop between Corpus Christi and Kingsville along the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad route. The area in 1904 was called Julia or Julia Siding when it was a cattle-loading siding on the Driscoll Ranch. Julia was the name of Robert Driscoll Sr.’s wife. Bishop had purchased over 80,000 acres of the ranchland. The waxy soil of the prairie would now be subdivided and farmed. It was ideally suited for cotton.

He laid out a model town with all the necessary infrastructure before commencing to sell lots in the townsite at the end of May 1910. He then sold the surrounding land for farming. By 1912 more than 40,000 acres had been sold and in the next two years an amount equal to this had been marketed. Tom Lea believed that Bishop was an agent working for the King Ranch's manager Robert Kleburg rather than an independent promoter.

In footnotes of his book *The King Ranch*, Tom Lea quotes an anecdote about Bishop from Theodore F. Koch, Jr., successful banker and land colonizer from St. Paul, Minnesota. It relates: Bishop was one of the more colorful promoters. A story is told that one day he had a prospect out showing him a stretch of land. While they were talking, a messenger arrived from town with a telegram which had been arranged for previously. Bishop excused himself while he read the message, then he exclaimed "Why, there's old J. P. Morgan after me again!" He waved the telegram at the land across the road, "Old J. P.’s been trying to buy that land for a long time and he won't give me my price." Then, of course, he named a price in the vicinity of what he had been quoting his prospect.

This insurance agent turned real estate developer had a sense of adventure as attested in Corpus Christi Caller articles of 8/3 and 8/4/11.

The Wright Brothers Company had come to town to conduct a public exhibition on North Beach and entice people to purchase airplanes. This was but a short eight years after the Wright brothers’ first successful flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

At the Corpus Christi demonstration, pioneer aviator, Oscar Brindley, asked for a volunteer from the audience. The volunteer who stepped forward was real estate agent F. Z. Bishop. The pilot wanted another volunteer because Bishop weighted about 230 lbs., but he finally agreed to let him fly. Bishop climbed into one of the dual cockpits of the bi-plane and said, “Real estate is going up.”

The following day the Caller headlined: F. Z. Bishop Heaviest Passenger Ever Handled in Flying Machine.” It noted that Brindley set a world record for taking a man of that weight up to a dizzying altitude of 2,500 feet.
Bishop was asked if he had been afraid. His reply was quoted as: “Danger?”, he said, “There wasn’t any. The trip was as easy as sleeping on a feathered bed.”

Real estate prices apparently did not go up fast enough nor did sales. Bishop declared bankruptcy in 1916. Somehow he had hidden reserves or was able to attract or borrow new funding.
By June of 1919 he had established the F. Z. Bishop Lumber yard in Harlingen at the northwest corner of Hidalgo (later E Street) and W. Jackson Avenue.

Perhaps looking for new worlds to conquer, he saw the potential for growth in Harlingen. He purchased parcels of land within the townsite and elsewhere in the next few years. One source notes that he acquired 1100 town lots. At the time most lots had 50 feet of frontage and 160 feet depth. If service alleys are also factored in, and they were platted in the subdivisions, then Bishop bought around 240 acres. To enhance his investment in the townsite, he approached the city fathers and offered one-half the costs of grading streets and installing galvanized drains and would even furnish the engineer to lay out the work. The city agreed to take him up on his offer as reported in the Brownsville Herald of 8/23/19. After rains, quagmire conditions in the streets of Harlingen, and elsewhere in other Valley towns too, was one of the least fond memories of pioneer settlers.

On 1/17/20 the paper noted that Bishop was having constructed a $25,000 three-storied hotel. This Knight of Pythias and Elk would spend several months of each year in Chicago.

Bishop had also acquired land presently west of Hand Road and north of Roosevelt road between Harlingen and Combes. His most ambitious plans, however, were for his large parcel south of Harlingen and south of what is now FM800 and between FM1479 and FM509. He planned to establish on this 1,900 acres or nearly three square miles tract one of the world’s largest citrus groves. This did not come to pass for any number of reasons.

Bishop is still around in 1926, this time with a Harlingen office as general agent for the Amarillo Townsite and Land Company. He advertises "The safest investment in the face of the earth—they are increasing in Values DAILY. We have City Property, Irrigated and Unirrigated Lands."

Bishop moved on to other ventures. He soon was established in San Antonio as the F. Z. Bishop Land Company of San Antonio. One major promotion of this company was the establishment in 1923 of Los Angeles in La Salle County in central Texas. This town 13 miles east of Cotulla never became a sizeable entity although many of its early settlers were hardworking German transmigrants from Williamson County.

F. Z. Bishop came to Texas from Tennessee. He was born there in Mulberry Gap in June 1880 and received his education there. In the 1910 US Census taken on May 2 his wife Ada is noted to be 25 and their Texas-born daughter Annette 5. This would indicate that
he was in Texas at least by 1905. He noted his occupation to be "real estate." He was buried in his namesake city of Bishop in 1950.

Compiled by Norman Rozeff, Historical Resources Survey Committee
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