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Altwein family protests pathway of Outer Loop

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By Michael Cary

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SCHUMANNSVILLE — Johann Gotthulf and Wilhelmine Altwein moved from Prussia to Texas in 1851.

They settled on a farm on the west bank of the Guadalupe River, which today is a narrow section of the waterway below Lake Dunlap dam and Lake McQueeney Dam.

An Altwein family cemetery was established in 1853 when Johann died of a heat stroke while working to clear land.

His great-grandson, Kermit, and Kermit's wife, Marilyn, obtained a historical marker for the cemetery from the Texas Historical Commission.

The Texas Department of Agriculture's Family Land Heritage Program honored the Altwein Ranch for a century or more of continuous ownership and operation as a family agricultural enterprise.

Today, the Altweins have maintained their 139-acre farm for the past 155 years. Their daughter, Susan, lives in the 1910 farmhouse with her husband, Ben Thibodeaux and their children. The Altweins and the Thibodeauxs are worried about the effect the proposed New Braunfels Outer Loop will have when it impacts their family farm.

It seems that the Texas Department of Transportation has laid out a plan for the road and a river crossing that will miss the farmhouse but will include the Altwein river bottom property.

"Taking this land in the name of progress is a travesty. The proposed route will take almost all of our river frontage," Kermit Altwein wrote to TxDOT.

The New Braunfels Outer Loop is a preliminary plan to identify a general corridor for a proposed outer loop, according to www.nbolstudy.com.

The 800-ft. wide loop may or may not be built, and it is not currently funded. The plan for funding if it is built 20 years from now will be through charging tolls to drive on it.

A meeting concerning the planned route for the New Braunfels Outer Loop is set for 6:30 p.m. today at Canyon High School in New Braunfels. Another meeting is set for 6:30 p.m. Thursday in the same location for property owners who will be affected by recent revisions to the 40-mile loop.

Marilyn and Kermit Altwein have supported the efforts of New Braunfels area property owners who formed the group Citizens Alliance for Smart Expansion.

CASE members question why an expected population of 170,000 in 30 years needs a 6-lane loop the size of San Antonio's Loop 410, which they contend was built when the population reached 600,000.

CASE meets at 5:30 p.m. every Thursday at Faith United Church, 970 N. Loop 337 (at Common Street) in New Braunfels.

The Altweins say their river bottom is sort of a bottleneck along the river, with gravel bars up and downriver of their ranch, which makes it passable only by canoe, kayak or flat-bottomed boat.

There is abundant wildlife on the property and the Altweins are participating



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in a Wildlife Management Association preservation program.

"We got the TxDOT notice about the outer loop, but we thought it was junk mail," Marilyn said.

"We've never seen a clear map of the loop," she said.

Altwein, who is the broker for Altwein Realty, said the outer loop puts their property in limbo.

"Your land is saddled with it, and you can't sell your property," Altwein said.

"We're going to try to change their minds," Susan Thibodeaux said.

"Our kids are sixth generation and they want to keep living here," Thibodeaux said.

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