

CULTURAL HISTORY

Suzzette

by Neal McLain

The map collection at the Brazoria County Historical Museum contains numerous plat maps of property subdivisions. While examining these maps, I ran across two maps of a place called Suzzette. Both maps are reproduced below.

Fig. 1. is an undated plat map showing several survey lines in relation of Bastrop Bayou and one of its tributaries. This map was drawn in ink on opaque drafting paper, indicating that it was not intended for distribution. It was probably a "study" map — a map prepared by a drafter for the purpose of working out details before preparing a final map. This map is unsigned, but it was probably prepared by J. Lee Chambers, Brazoria County Surveyor from 1904 to 1910. The map was donated to the museum by Nan Bass, Chambers' niece.

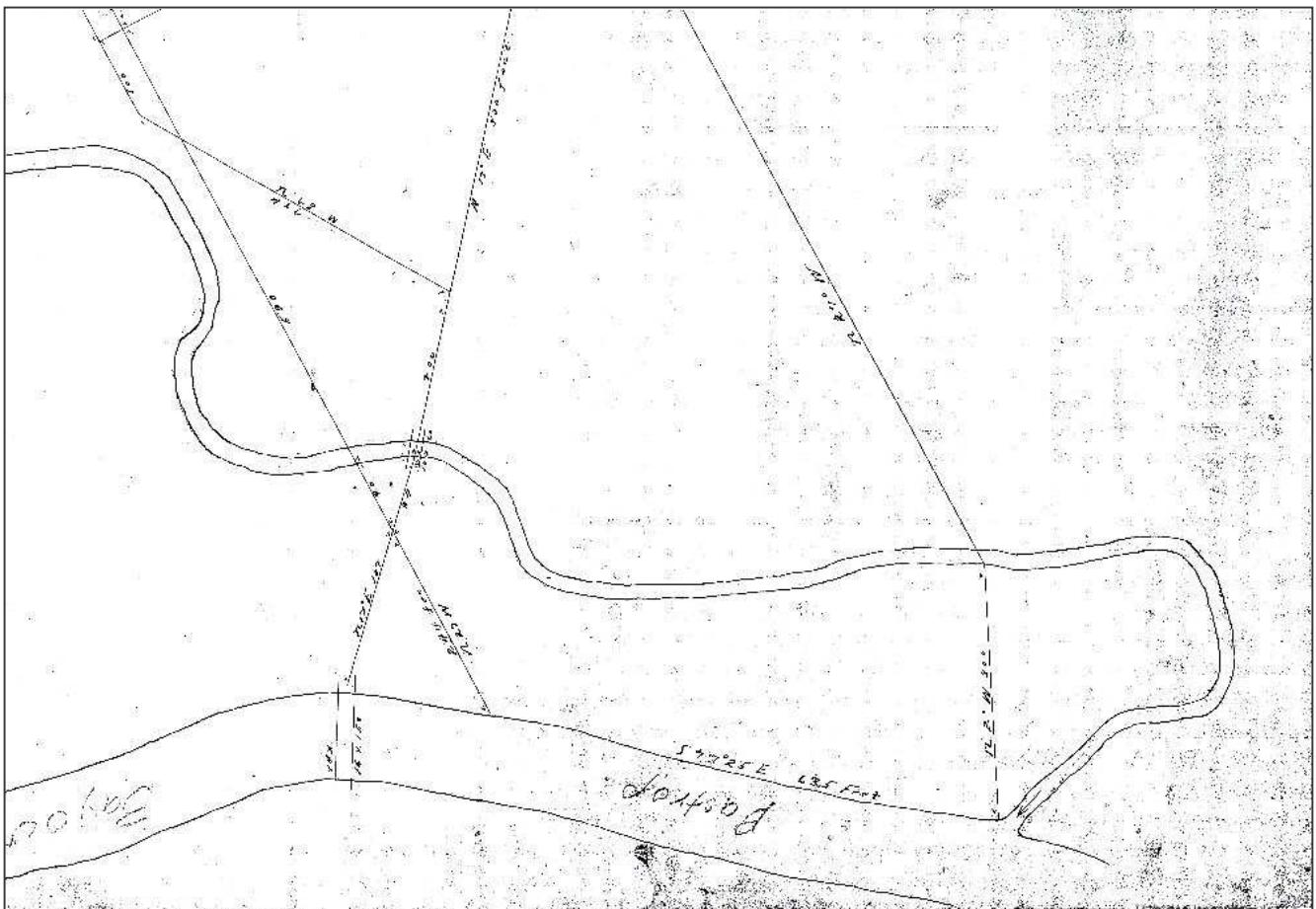


Fig. 1. Undated Plat Map of Suzzette. Unsigned; probably drawn by J. Lee Chambers.

Ink on opaque drafting paper. Nan Bass Collection, Brazoria County Historical Museum.

Object ID 1988.070c.0013. Property of Brazoria County Historical Museum. Used with permission.

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Fig. 2. is a plat map dated October 15, 1906. It shows of the same geographic area as Fig 1, with the addition of a title block and several small residential lots ("town lots"). This map was drawn in ink on drafting cloth, indicating that it was intended for distribution.^[1] This map is signed and dated by J. Lee Chambers, and was donated to the museum by Nan Bass.

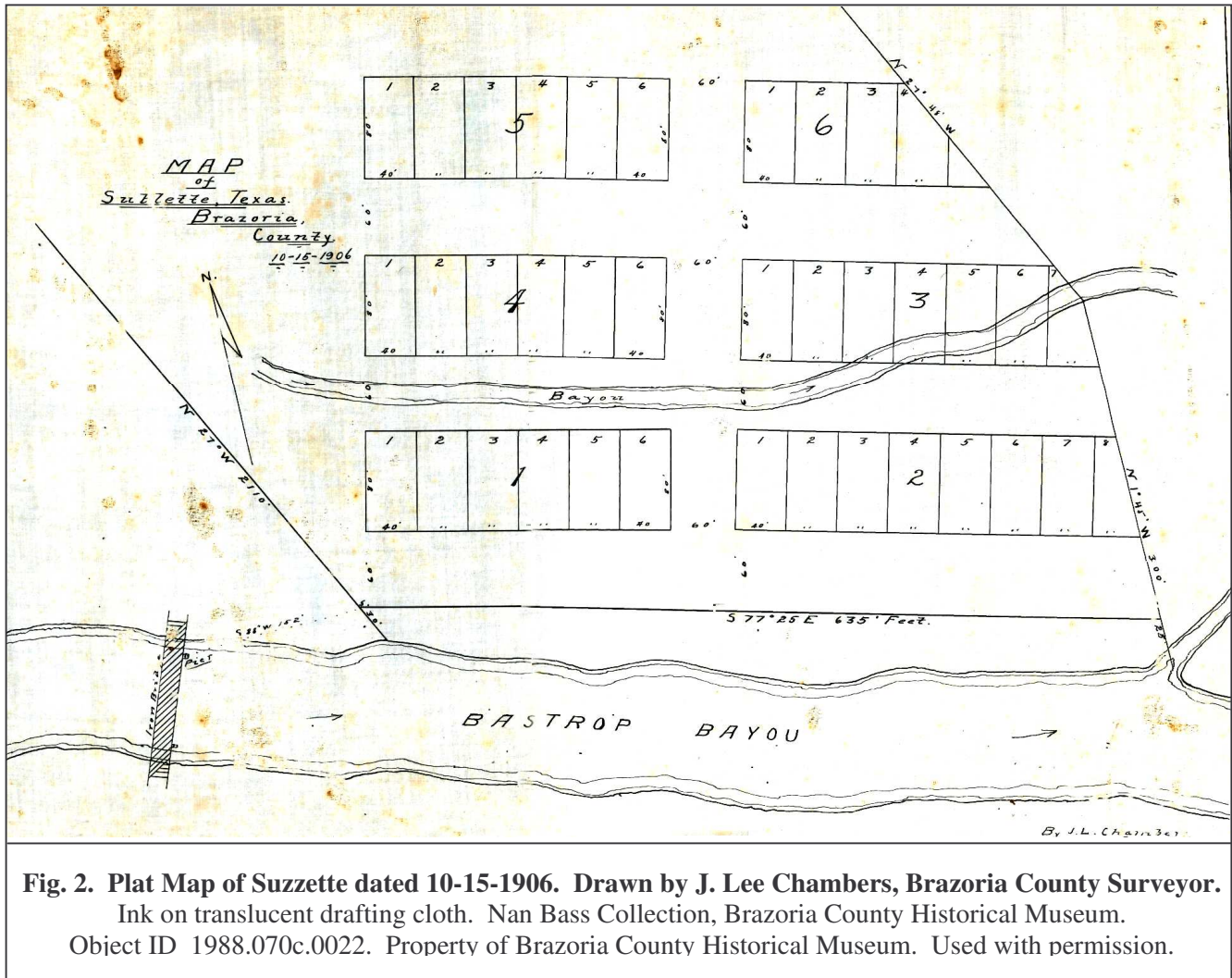


Fig. 2. Plat Map of Suzette dated 10-15-1906. Drawn by J. Lee Chambers, Brazoria County Surveyor.
Ink on translucent drafting cloth. Nan Bass Collection, Brazoria County Historical Museum.
Object ID 1988.070c.0022. Property of Brazoria County Historical Museum. Used with permission.

So where is Suzette?

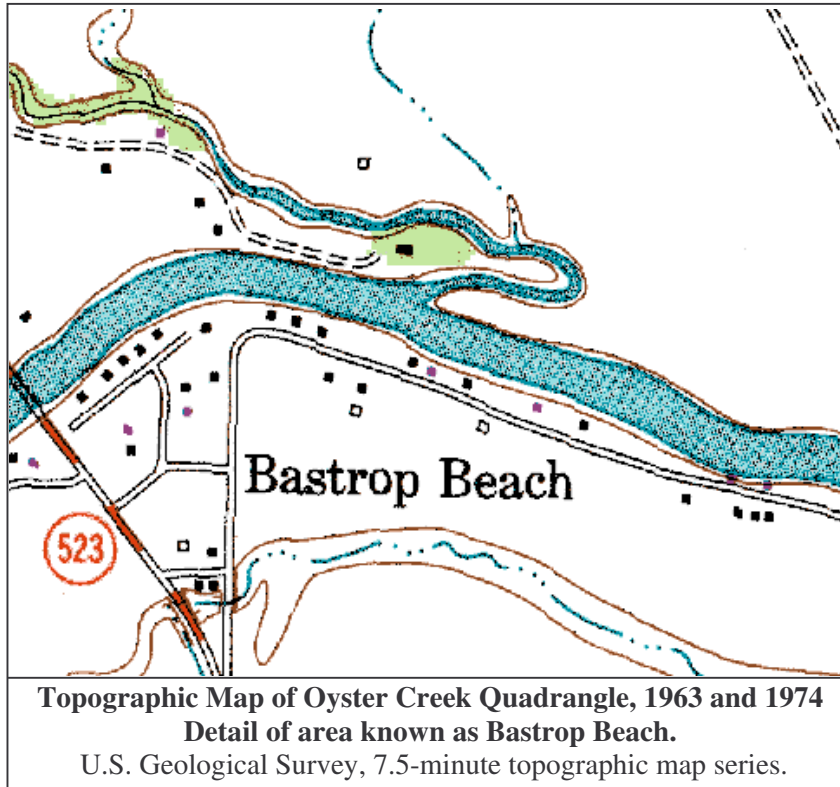
Neither of these maps answers that question. But there are clues:

- The proximity to Bastrop Bayou.
- The narrow unnamed tributary of Bastrop Bayou labeled "Bayou" in Fig. 2.
- The "Iron Bridge" shown in the southwest corner of Fig. 2.

[1] At the time these maps were prepared (ca 1906), documents intended for distribution were prepared on a translucent medium, either tracing paper or drafting cloth (a finely-woven cloth coated with a sizing agent to provide a smooth drafting surface). Distribution copies were made by a process known as *cyanotype*: light-sensitive paper was placed in direct contact with a translucent original, and exposed to ultraviolet light (or sunlight) passed through the original. After exposure, the print was fixed by wet chemical processing. The resulting copy was a negative image: white lines against a blue or purple background, commonly called a *blueprint*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blueprint>

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A modern map published by the U.S. Geological Survey provides the answer: Suzette is the unincorporated community known today as Bastrop Beach.



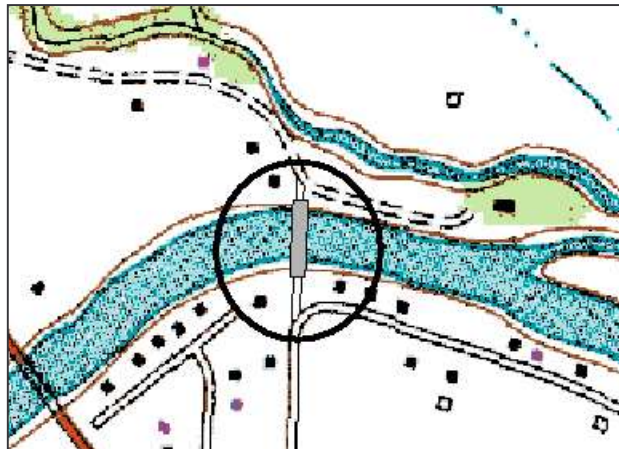
In this map we can clearly see the unnamed tributary north of Bastrop Bayou.

We also notice that the locations of today's houses (the little black squares) bear no relationship to the "town lots" that J. Lee Chambers surveyed a century ago. Chambers had laid out six residential blocks north of the Bayou, each encompassing several lots. Today, there are only two houses in that area.

But where is the old iron bridge?

The bridge is gone now, but the map at right shows the historic locations of the bridge and the approach roads.

The south pier is gone too. According to local folklore, it was removed during the initial construction phase of what is now FM 2004 so that grading crews could get access to the southern shore of Bastrop Bayou to unload barges containing construction materials.



The only extant evidence of the old bridge is the north pier. According to my local folklore source, it was left standing because the adjacent property owner (former County Judge Follett) objected to its removal.

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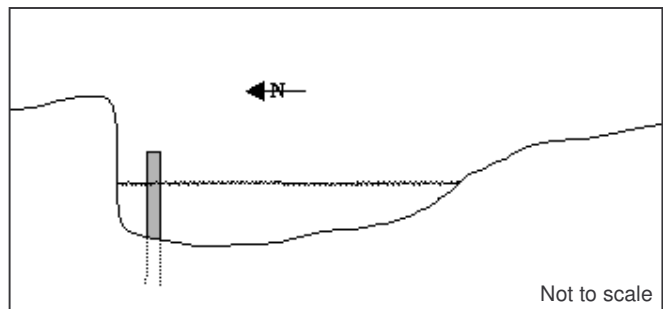
A satellite photo tells the story: a new bridge carries the highway (FM 523) across the bayou, bypassing the community. But the approach roads to the old bridge stand out clearly. They're still in use today as County Roads 485 and 596.



Credit: Wikimapia.org and Google Inc.

The satellite photo above also tells another story: the way in which watercourses (rivers, creeks, bayous) meander. Note that the old bridge crossed the bayou at a *meander* — what we'd commonly call a *bend*. When a watercourse encounters a meander, it erodes sediments from the outside of the meander and deposits them on the inside.

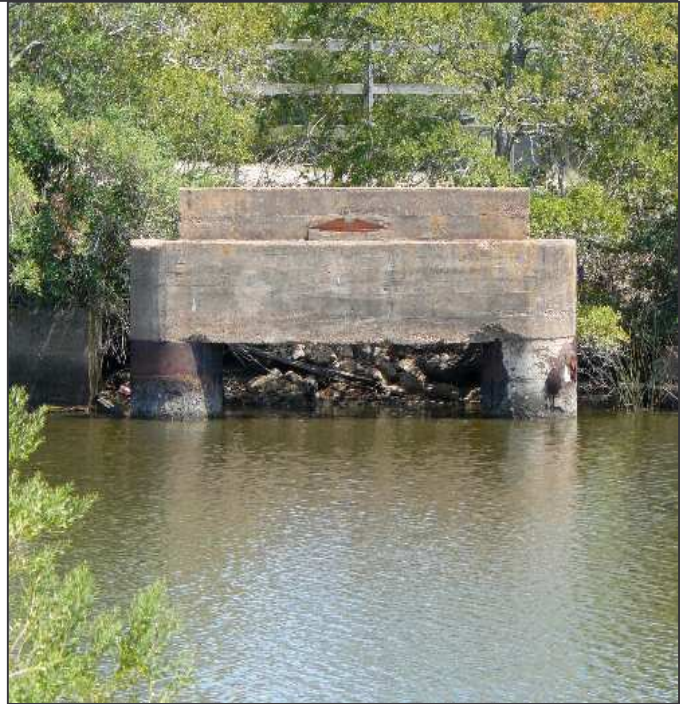
A profile of the bayou at the location of the old bridge (right) illustrates the results of meandering. Erosion of the north bank has produced a bluff, while deposition on the south bank has produced a gradual slope.



Hypothetical profile of Bastrop Bayou at the location of the old iron bridge, looking east. Note the bluff on the north side, the result of erosion, while the gradual slope on the south side is the result of deposition. The extant north pier of the old bridge is shown near the north bank.

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The following photos show these features:



Site of the old iron bridge, looking north, from the south approach road (CR 458).

This road ends in a gradual slope, now used as a boat launch.
The bluff and the extant north bridge pier are visible on the opposite bank.



Site of the old iron bridge, looking south, from the north approach road (CR 596).

This road ends abruptly at a barrier at the crest of the bluff. The north pier is barely visible through the vegetation on the face of the bluff.

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The unnamed tributary north of Bastrop Bayou (which I will call *Noname Creek*) provides a further example of meandering. In this case, the erosion at the outside of the meander is so severe that the entire meander (which I call the *U-turn bend*) has migrated eastward. We have access to maps dating back for more than a century to document the migration of the U-turn bend.



Noname Creek from County Road 224

Noname Creek (top right) is a narrow stream, but it has carved out a fairly deep channel, perhaps indicating that it carries a lot of water during periods of heavy rain.

The three maps at the right show the eastward migration of the U-turn bend during the period 1906 to the present. The vertical dashed lines identify reference points common to all three maps:

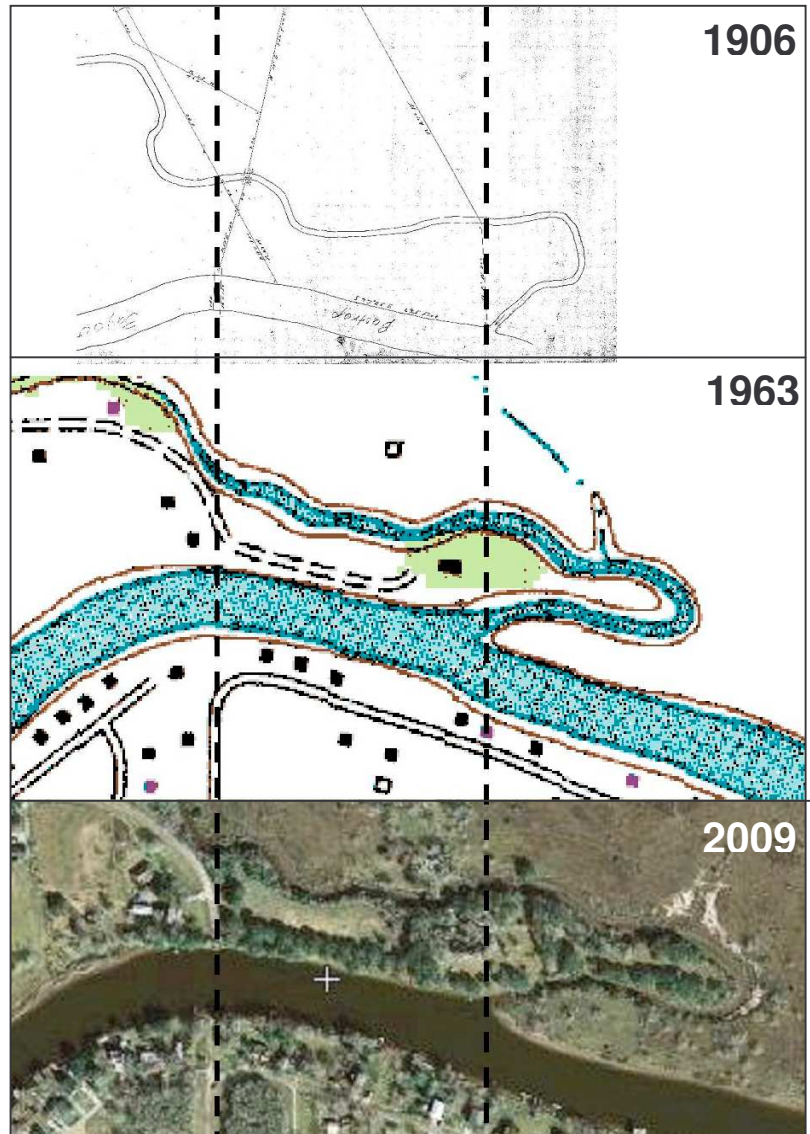
- Iron bridge.
- Mouth of Noname Creek.

Map credits:

1906: Undated Plat Map of Suzette (copy of Fig. 1, page 1). Brazoria County Historical Museum; used with permission. Although undated, this map was prepared as a study map for a later map (Fig. 2, page 2) dated 1906. It is reasonable to assume that the study map was prepared about the same time as the published map.

1963: US Geological Survey Topographic Map 7.5-minute Series, Oyster Creek Quadrangle. Original map dated 1963; photo revised 1974. The location of Noname Creek was not changed during the 1974 revision.

2009: Satellite photo, Wikimapia.org and Google.com. The exact date is unknown; assumed to be recent.



Thanks to Bastrop Beach residents Carole Wenny and Mike MacKenna for information used in this column.