

YANAGUANA – SAN ANTONIO SPRINGS – THE BLUE HOLE

At the Congregational home of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, is a famous artesian spring known as the San Antonio Springs, or the Blue Hole. Indigenous peoples called the springs *Yanaguana*, which in the Coahuiltecan language of these earliest Texans means Spirit Waters, or up-flowing waters of the Spirit. Native American creation stories describe how the Spirit Waters rose up, giving birth to all Creation.

This great spring was once a fountain spring rising up to twenty feet in the air. It joins Comal Springs, San Marcos Springs, and Barton Springs as one of the four fountain springs of Texas. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest these same four fountain springs may be depicted in a rock wall painting, known as the White Shaman Panel in the Lower Pecos, dating back some 4,000 years ago.

These four great springs issue from a common water source, the vast Edwards Aquifer that flows underground along the Balcones Escarpment from west of Del Rio to north of Austin. They give rise to life-giving rivers that have sustained human communities for thousands of years. Evidence of human presence in the headwaters of these rivers dates back nearly 12,000 years, signifying the importance of these great springs to early human civilization.

The San Antonio Springs were understood to be “the source” of the San Antonio River: *“the key to the situation, the Ojo de Agua, the birthright of the city”* (William Corner, 1890). Now the population of that city is well over a million, all dependent on water from the Edwards, which is riddled with many artesian wells. The first artesian wells drilled into the Edwards in the 1890’s had the immediate effect of reducing spring flow. Increased pumping to supply water to an expanding population has caused further drawdown of the aquifer, leaving them dry much of the time.

Today, the Blue Hole is protected in the Headwaters Sanctuary at Incarnate Word, a 53-acre sanctuary established in 2008 by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word who have occupied the headwaters of the San Antonio River since 1897. These remarkable springs and the many hundreds of smaller springs in the headwaters remain a powerful symbol of the literal and spiritual life-giving essence of water. Flowing or not, they remain, to many, the sacred springs.

For lots more information, go to: <http://www.edwardsaquifer.net/saspring.html>

*The whole river gushes up in one sparkling burst from the earth .
.. The effect is overpowering. It is beyond your possible
conceptions of a spring.* Frederick Law Olmstead, 1857

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