



THE TEXAS GERMAN TIMES

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Welcome to the inaugural newsletter of the Texas German Dialect Project!

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) in the Department of Germanic Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. This newsletter pro-

vides information about the progress of the TGDP in recording, documenting, and archiving interviews with the remaining speakers of Texas German. It also offers scientific information about the origins of the Texas German dialect and how it has changed over the past 150 years. The newsletter informs members of the Texas German community and the general public about on-going project activities such as the recruiting of Texas German speakers in new locations and presentations about the project. The goals of the TGDP are:

Texas German dialect as it reflects the rich cultural and linguistic traditions of its residents.

- Gather basic research information about the history of Texas German language and culture.
- Provide information about language differences for public and educational interests.
- Use material collected for the improvement of educational programs about history, language, and culture.

- Preserve and archive the



Historic Marker in Indianola commemorating the arrival of German immigrants

Texas German Dialect Project Celebrates 6th Anniversary

In September 2007, the TGDP celebrated its 6th anniversary. Founded by Dr. Hans C. Boas at the University of Texas at Austin in September of 2001, the project was originally designed to record and archive interviews with 50 Texas German speakers. Because Texas German is not passed on to younger generations and will thus become extinct within the next 30-40 years, Boas decided to enlarge the scope of the project to include more communities where Texas German is still spoken. With grants from the university and Texas Humanities he has hired students to assist him with conducting interviews, transcribing them, and ar-

Interview with a Texas German speaker



chiving them in the archive of Texas German, which is freely accessible over the Internet (<http://www.tgdp.org>). During the past six years, more than 50 students have been involved in recording interviews with Texas German speakers. The recordings are used for teaching students about Texas German history, culture and language. They are also used for research explaining the origins and current structures of Texas German. Since 2002, Boas and his research team have also traveled throughout Texas to report on Texas German history, culture, and language at meetings of local historical societies, heritage organizations, and German-American clubs.

TGDP MILESTONES 2007

- ◆ In 2007, Texas German and the TGDP were featured on NPR radio, as well as an Associated Press story that appeared in 75 newspapers around the world.
- ◆ In March 2007, the *Institute for the German Language* in Mannheim (Germany) awarded the Hugo-Moser Prize for Germanic Linguistics to Hans C. Boas for his work on Texas German.
- ◆ In September 2007, the Texas German Dialect Endowment received a \$50,000 donation.
- ◆ In 2007, TGDP members interviewed 54 Texas German speakers and deposited the recordings in the on-line archive, bringing the total number of interviewed speakers to more than 250.

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Preserving our heritage: Why should we care about the Texas German dialect?

Texas German is an integral part of Texan history and culture



At the beginning of the 21st century, Texas German has evolved into a unique language variety that is reflective of the history and culture of the German settlers in Texas and their descendants. In 1986, Joseph

Wilson of Rice University observed the following about the future of Texas German: “Fifty years from now (in the year 2036) there will be no speakers of Texas German left, and monolingual Texans will find it hard to believe that German was a living language in Texas, spoken by hundreds of thousands for two hundred years. Every sample of Texas German that we can collect now, while Texas German is still alive, will be precious in the future.” Unfortunately, Wilson’s prediction about the end of Texas German is slowly but surely becoming reality. Since Texas German has not systematically been passed on to younger generations since the 1940s, it is now dying out. Currently, the TGDP plans to interview as many remaining speakers as possible, but it is literally running out of time. We

have a list of more than three hundred elderly speakers who are waiting to be interviewed because they want to tell future generations about Texas German life on the frontier in the 19th and 20th centuries. These stories are unique and personal—they describe and explain the “Texas German Experience,” which is different from that of other ethnic groups in the Lone Star State. However, many Texas German speakers are nearing the twilight of their lives, and very few have passed the language on to their children. When the language is lost, stories are lost. There are more stories waiting to be collected than we have time or resources to accommodate. We want to make even more stories available to you and your children, and we want the academic community to help get these

stories into the history books. Texas Germans have been instrumental in making Central Texas what it is, but their contributions are largely left out of the Story of Texas. In short, we should care about the Texas German dialect, because it offers us the last opportunity to document the unique history and culture of its speakers and ancestors, so that future generations will remember the Texas Germans like they remember the Alamo.

“WHEN THE LANGUAGE IS LOST, STORIES ARE LOST. THERE ARE MORE STORIES WAITING TO BE COLLECTED THAN WE HAVE TIME OR RESOURCES TO ACCOMMODATE.”

Voices of the past: How to use the Texas German Dialect Archive on the Internet

Imagine that in 200 years people around the world will be able to listen to Texas German stories for free even though the dialect and all the stories transmitted by it will have become extinct by then. By listening to these oral history stories, people will gain a better understanding of the impact that German settlers and their descendants had on the Lone Star State in the 19th and 20th centuries. They will also come to appreciate the hardships that the immigrants encountered when coming to Texas. You can take part in this experience today by using the on-line Texas German Dialect Archive at The University of Texas at Austin. If you have a computer with access to the Internet, direct your web browser to the following address:

<http://www.tgdp.org>. You will first see the home page of the Texas German Dialect Project. From there, click on the “dialect archive” link at the top of the page, then click on “Enter Archive.” If you are not

registered yet, you are asked to provide a user identification (e.g., your name), and a password of your choice. After registration, you can use your user identification and password to log into the archive for free. By clicking “Enter Archive” you have to agree to the terms of use displayed on the next page. Then, you are taken to a new page containing a map of Texas with an area marked in red. Click on the red area and you will see the names of the locations where we have conducted interviews with Texas German speakers. Clicking on a location opens a new window containing a list of all available interviews for that location. Clicking on the title of an interview, e.g., “German Christmas”, will open a new window containing the transcription of the interview as well as an English translation. As you read the transcription and translation you can listen to the actual recording of the interview on your computer.



Cemetery in Fredericksburg



How is the TGDP different from Texas German heritage organizations?

The Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) differs from Texas German heritage organizations in that it is dedicated to active heritage preservation by recording oral history interviews. Language is an integral part of a person's identity, just like one's cultural values, religious beliefs, or ethnic identity. Without a distinct language or dialect, ethnic groups lose a vital part of their identity. The Texas German community is currently undergoing drastic linguistic and cultural changes because the Texas German dialect has not systematically been passed on to younger generations since the 1940s. By 2040 the dialect will be extinct. Once it is gone, so are all the stories about the old times, recipes, songs, prayers, rituals, and, most importantly, an identity that once set the descendants of German immigrants apart from other ethnic groups in Texas. What will then be left of the German heritage in Texas? Who will remember all the contributions German immigrants made to the State of Texas? What hardships did the early settlers have to endure? These are some of the questions people may ask once the Texas German dialect has died out, and with it all the knowledge about Texas

German history and culture previously passed down from one generation to the next. The question then becomes: How can we find out more about the Texas Germans? When you ask this question today you may turn to history books used in schools, or perhaps the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, but you will find few answers there. Imagine what it will be like in 100 years from now. By recording oral history interviews with the remaining speakers of Texas German, the TGDP overcomes this lack of information. The stories, including their transcriptions and English translations, are housed in an archive that can be accessed for free from anywhere in the world over the Internet. The archive will be there as long as the University of Texas will be. Archiving these interviews for future generations will help Texas German culture gain its rightful place, full of respect and

distinction. Texas Germans have retained and preserved the best of German traditions and values. The whole world, and perhaps



Heritage preservation in action

most importantly, the descendants of the German immigrants in Texas, will be able to learn and to be proud of where they come from. This is our mission: to actively preserve the German heritage in Texas through recording and archiving oral history interviews.

Featured TGDP Alum: Jim Rybarski

Jim Rybarski worked for the TGDP from January 2004 until May 2006. Jim first got interested in Texas German when taking Boas' seminar "The Structure of German" in 2003. He then became an undergraduate research assistant and focused on transcribing and translating Texas German interviews. In the summer of 2004, Jim began conducting interviews with Texas German speakers in New Braunfels, Bulverde, and Victoria. Subsequently, he became interested in the grammar of Texas German, in particular the question of why the dialect has fewer cases than Standard German and other German

dialects. After some preliminary research on the topic, Jim decided to write his honors thesis on case loss in New Braunfels German. Using the interviews in the Texas German Dialect Archive, Jim analyzed the speech of more than 20 speakers from New Braunfels and found that the use of dative and accusative cases in New Braunfels German is determined by the speaker's age, gender, and level of education. After defending his thesis in April 2006, Jim graduated from The University of Texas, spent the summer with his family in Dallas, and then joined the Peace Corps. He is currently teaching English at a school in a small village in Benin, Africa.



TGDP-alum Jim Rybarski with his host family in Benin. Read about his adventures at <http://jiminafrica.blogspot.com>

Plans for 2008

- The TGDP will begin developing educational materials for K-12 history lessons informing students about Texas German history, culture, and language.
- Hans Boas' new book "The Life and Death of Texas German" will be published with Duke University Press.
- The TGDP will begin analyzing current recordings of Texas German with recordings made in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The TGDP will continue interviewing Texas German speakers across the state.



Linguist's Corner: Why is Texas German so unique?



Hans C. Boas, Ph.D.

One misperception about Texas German is that it is “bad” German. From a linguist’s point of view, there is no such thing as a “good” or a “bad” dialect. Instead, each dialect is its own regular communication system that adheres to internal rules and regularities. The common prejudices against dialects can often be attributed to socio-political or historical causes. Texas German is not only a systematic and rule-governed dialect, it is also different from other dialects in that it has borrowed many words from English. Such

borrowings are common in language contact situations around the world. Think of all the foreign words that have been borrowed into English! Texas German is different from all other German dialects in the United States in that it is relatively young. While German was spoken in Pennsylvania as early as the late 1690s, systematic immigration to Texas did not start until the 1840s. Another feature that makes Texas German so unique is the range of so-called donor dialects: the immigrants came from at least five distinct dialectal areas in central Europe. Once in Texas, these dialects converged and over time came into contact with English. The result is the Texas German of today. For more information, see Boas’ upcoming book “The life and death of Texas German,” to be published in 2008 with Duke University Press.

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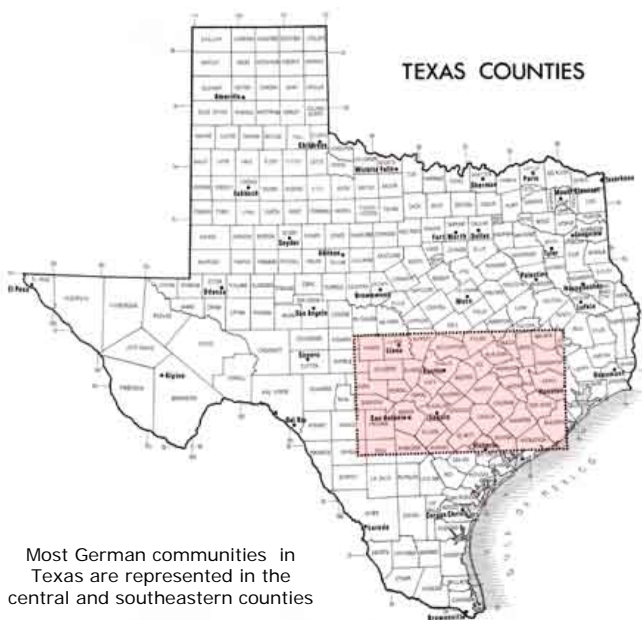
Graduate Student researches Texas Alsatian in Medina County

Karen Roesch, a doctoral student in the Department of Germanic Studies, is currently interviewing speakers of Texas Alsatian for her research on Alsatian language and attitudes in Medina County. She has conducted interviews in Castroville and D’Hanis since the beginning of the year, talking to descendants, historians, and li-

brarians to investigate how and why the Alsatian-speaking community has been able to maintain their distinct culture and language so long. These Alsatian communities have been isolated from the homeland for 150 years and surrounded by Texas German communities in Quihi and Hondo who speak a very different dialect,

which the Alsatians refer to as *Hochdietsch*. Examples of Alsatian words include *Ross* ‘horse’, *Hüs* ‘house’, and *Büer* ‘farmer’, and sometimes make communication between Alsatian and other Texas German communities difficult. Castroville promotes its historical heritage in many ways and has an active exchange with its European

partners in Alsace, France. European Alsatians make regular trips to Castroville to maintain the historical Steinbach Hüs. When the visitors are in town, gatherings are usually in Alsatian. The visitors comment that the Texas Alsatians “speak like the Alsatians 150 years ago!”



How are interviews conducted?

Setting up an interview with a Texas German speaker can be difficult. When we call, people sometimes think that we are telemarketers and hang up on us. When we are able to secure a time and date for an interview, we typically stop by the speaker’s home, or a local museum or library to conduct the interview. After signing a consent form that allows us to use the recordings for educational purposes and to archive them in our online archive, interviews begin with

open-ended questions about people’s lives, ancestors, jobs, local customs, family, or other topics. The goal of these oral history interviews is to have people talk naturally for as long as they feel comfortable. Then, we ask speakers to translate English words and phrases into Texas German. We record all interviews and take them back to the university, where they are archived. Names of people are removed to protect their anonymity. Interviews last between one to two hours.



Featured TGDP Student: Louise Swanepoel

Currently a senior at The University of Texas at Austin with just one semester left before graduation, Louise Swanepoel has been working for the TGDP for more than a year.

Louise comes from South-Africa, but has been living in the United States for 11 years. After graduating from McNeil High school in Round Rock, she attended Austin Community College for a year before transferring to the university.

There, she discovered her love of languages and linguistics, literature and cultural studies aside. Pursuing the double-majors of

English and German, she has had the opportunity to study a number of Germanic languages, such as modern-day Dutch and Frisian as well as older languages such as Old English and Old High German. Her native knowledge of Afrikaans has also aided Louise in her in-depth studies of both German and Danish. Not content to stop there, she has also recently begun studying Arabic, her first attempt at a non-Indo-European language, and is writing an honors thesis in the field of historical Germanic linguistics. She is also a leading participant in the



Louise Swanepoel, TGDP undergraduate research assistant

university's student German radio program and an active member of both the German and Danish clubs.

Louise began working for the TGDP in the spring of 2006. She has been involved in a number of different aspects of the TGDP, from conducting interviews to editing them, organizing data and training other students.

After graduation, she hopes to attend graduate school in Europe and continue her involvement in academics.

Texas German in the Classroom

The 2007 spring semester saw two Texas German Dialect courses offered by Prof. Hans Boas at the university—one undergraduate course and one graduate course.

Designed to provide students with a thorough overview of the

structure of the Texas German Dialect, the courses covered the following material: (1) History and geography of Texas German; (2) The sound system of Texas German; (3) The grammar of Texas German; (4) The lexicon of Texas German; (5) Conducting linguistic fieldwork; (6) Dynamics of language contact and language death.

Students made extensive use of the web-based Texas German Dialect Archive throughout the semester to determine how the dialect has changed over the past 150 years.

Further, as an essential part of the course, students made a trip into the Texas Hill Country to observe and conduct linguistic interviews with some of the remaining speakers of Texas German.

During the fall 2008 semester the course "German-Texans:

OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Are you a Texas German Speaker? Do you know anyone who speaks Texas German? Please contact the TGDP by email (texasgermandialect@gmail.com), regular mail (see address below), or by phone (512) 279-2879. Please provide information on how to establish contact so we can set up an interview.

Texas German Dialect Project
Department of Germanic Studies
1 University Station, C3300, EPS 3.102
University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX 78712-0304

The Immigrant Experience," explores the relationship between the German-speaking immigrants who came to Texas starting in the 1840's, the communities they created, and the legacy they left for future generations. The course is taught by Karen Roesch, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Germanic Studies, who is currently working on her dissertation on Texas Alsatian.

Students study different aspects of language and culture, including the social and political climate of the country these immigrants left behind, hardships they encountered in the new state, and the effect of two world wars on subsequent generations.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS OFFERS A VARIETY OF COURSES DEALING WITH TEXAS GERMAN, TEACHING STUDENTS THEIR HISTORY AND HOW TO CONDUCT FIELD INTERVIEWS .



The University of Texas tower

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DEDICATED TO THE
PRESERVATION OF
TEXAS GERMAN

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INTERVIEWS
AND LEARN
MORE ABOUT
THE PROJECT AT
WWW.TGDP.ORG

Ways to give: How to contribute to the Texas German Dialect Endowment

Since 2001, the TGDP has conducted more than 250 interviews with speakers of Texas German throughout the Lone Star State, totaling more than 550 hours of interviews.

However, the project currently has a list of over 300 Texas Germans waiting to be interviewed. Because many of the current and potential Texas German informants are in their 80s and 90s, this means that valuable interviews could be lost in case they passed away before they are interviewed. The process of adding entries to the Dialect Archive is extremely time intensive. Per hour of interview added to the archive, an estimated 50 hours of work are necessary for setting up the interview, traveling to the interview site, recording the interview, and then digitizing, editing, analyzing, transcribing, translating, and archiving the interview material.

During the past six years the project has received funding from various sources both inside and outside the University, totaling \$200,000 so far. After years of funding by different sources, the

The Vereinskirche Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas



TGDP has been unable to receive further external grants for the past 15 months, drastically reducing the TGDP's ability to record and archive interviews.

To maintain its operations, the TGDP requires an estimated budget of about \$50,000 annually. Since both state and federal funding agencies have cut down funding for the humanities over the past three years, the TGDP has not been able to secure funding from these sources. In the summer of 2009, the project will reach an interruption in recording and processing interviews. For these reasons the sole option to guarantee continuity of the TGDP lies in the establishment

of a Texas German Endowment to ensure its permanent maintenance.

The Texas German Dialect Endowment is seeking donations from individuals, businesses, and organizations. The tax-deductible donations are deposited into an account at The University of Texas at Austin which generates interest each year. This interest will support the recordings and research activities of the TGDP for the next 30-40 years. After that, the interest generated by the endowment will be used for scholarships for students who are interested in researching Texas German culture, history, and language at the university. All donations are tax-deductible. Those who wish to contribute to the endowment can make checks out to "Texas German Dialect Endowment—UT Austin" and send them to Hans Boas, and receipts will be sent out within two weeks. If you are interested in making a donation to the endowment or have questions about the endowment, please contact Dr. Boas at (512) 279-2879.