



THE STONEWALL HERITAGE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 24 Number 1

January 2018

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORS

The Stonewall Heritage Society directors would like to thank Alexander Lorenz from the Texas German Dialect Project at the University of Texas at Austin for his discussion about the German dialect in the Texas Hill Country.

Alexander is looking for additional Texas German speakers who are willing to be interviewed by him on February 24 or March 3. You can contact Alexander at (662)588-9669 or KayHuffman (512) 740-0239 if you are interested in helping.

At our next meeting on January 23, A. J. Lott, retired coach and educator, will talk about his summer employment for over fifty years at the Stonewall peach shed at Burg's Corner. A. J. Lott worked and managed the operations of the shed during the peach season that started late in May and continued until September 15. A. J. Lott's talk will start with the peach growers bringing in their peaches, to the sizing, grading, and packing of peaches for shipment. Many local residents and their children worked in the peach shed or back in the orchards getting the fruit off the trees.

As always, refreshments will be served after the presentation.

**Tuesday
January 23, 2018
7:00 PM**

Program:

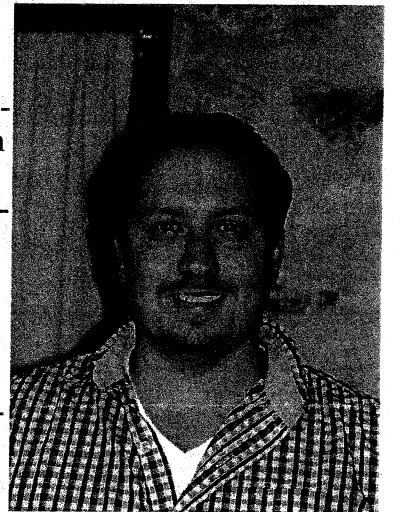
The Stonewall Peach Shed

**Speaker:
A.J. Lott**

**Stonewall Heritage Center
175 Elberta Street
Stonewall, Tx**

The Texas German Dialect Project

Alexander Lorenz with the Texas German Dialect Project at the University of Texas at Austin came to speak to the Stonewall Heritage Society on October 24, 2017. Alex first told us a little about himself. Alex came to UT in 2014 because he is interested in the German language outside of Germany. He speaks Russian, German, and English.



Alex' ancestors were Volga Germans. In a similar fashion to the Texas Germans, they moved away from Germany in the 18th century to find new lands, new freedom and to do what they wanted to do. They moved to an area of Russian along the Volga River in southeastern European Russia. In 1792, Catherine the Great invited Germans to come to Russia to farm. It was an official manifesto. Most of the Germans came from Baden, Bavaria, Hesse, the Palatinate, and the Rhineland. These Germans helped modernize the agricultural sector by introducing numerous innovations regarding wheat production, flour milling, tobacco culture, sheep raising and small-scale manufacturing.

Texas Germans began migrating to Texas in the 1830s. Germans tended to cluster in ethnic enclaves. A majority settled in a broad belt across the south-central part of the state. The belt stretched from Galveston and Houston on to the east to Kerrville, Mason, and Hondo in the west; from the Coastal Plain to the Hill Country.

Friedrich Diercks, known in Texas under the alias as Johann Friedrich Ernst, was one of the first settlers

in Texas. He had intended to settle in Missouri, but in New Orleans he learned that large land grants were available to Europeans in Stephen F. Austin's colony in Texas. In 1831, Ernst received a grant of more than 4,000 acres that lay in the northwest corner of what is now Austin County.

Ernst wrote length letters to friends in German, and through these "America letters" he reached and influenced other prospective migrants. In the 1830's German immigration was widely publicized in the Fatherland, prompting noblemen to start a project in 1840 they called *Adelsverein*. Between 1844 and 1847 more than 7,000 Germans reached Texas. Within a few years, the Germans proved themselves to be such a resourceful and productive group that, in 1843, the Republic of Texas required that all laws be published in German along with English. Most of the German immigrant clusters came from west central Germany, particularly Nassau, southern Hanover, Brunswick, Hesse, and western Thuringia. Many immigrants stayed in cities such as Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio, and others settled in the rugged Texas Hill Country. The *Adelsverein* founded the towns of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.

By 1850, when the organized projects ended, the German Belt in Texas was well established. However, the German immigrants found that what was promised was not really there. So, what do you do? Do you turn around? No, you don't. You have traveled across an ocean so you put down roots and you begin to farm, open stores and manufacture small-scale goods just as the Germans did in Russia. American letters and chain migration continued

through the 1850s but stopped with the Union blockade of Confederate ports. After the Civil war between 1865 and the early 1890s, more Germans arrived in Texas and the number of Germans increased to 40,000.

The Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) was founded in September 2001 by Dr. Hans Boas and is devoted to recording and preserving the Texas German language and culture. It is housed in the Germanic Studies Department at UT Austin.

Dr. Boas became interested in recording and preserving the Texas German Dialect after a chance encounter in a diner deep in Central Texas. He heard a group of elderly men speaking a very distinct version of German. Boas has a doctorate in linguistics, was working at UT Austin, and has dedicated his life to the German language and the people who speak it.

Boas had stumbled upon Texas German, one of the most incidental developments in American history. In the mid-19th century, thousands of German immigrants settled in the freshly annexed Lone Star State, congregating in small towns like New Braunfels, Boerne, and Fredericksburg. In those days German was Texas's dominant secondary language, with German newspapers, German radio broadcasts, German printing presses, and German church services popping up all over the state. When you separate a language from its source for over a century, it tends to take on a shape of its own. According to Boas, Texas German sounds like a strange combination of 19th century German with a dash of anglicization. For instance, the Texas German settlers of antiquity didn't have a word for the skunks they encountered in the South, so they had to come up with their own: "stinkkatze," literally "stink cat."

The goals of the TGDP are: To preserve the Texas German dialect, to gather basic research information about language variety in order to understand the nature of language variation and change, to provide information about language differences and language change, and to use the material collected in research projects for the improvement of education programs and language and culture.

The TGDP does this by conducting interviews with Texas Germans through out Texas. The interview has three parts:

- An interview about your life (in Texas German)
- Translations from English into Texas German
- Biographical questions



The interviews occur in public meeting places such as libraries, churches and the Stonewall Heritage Society. The interviews are audio-recorded. These recordings are divided into segments, transcribed, and after removing information about the person interviewed are put online for research purposes.

Some of the questions asked can help answer:

1. Does the Texas German spoken in different Texas areas differ?
2. What does Texas German have in common with other German speaking communities in the U.S.? In the world?
3. What effect has English had on Texas German?
4. Are there any words or phrases that can be traced back to the German dialect spoken by the original settlers?

As of today, the TDP has more than 850 hours of interviews with more than 600 Texas Germans. About 25% of these recordings are available for public access.

Several books and papers have been published about Texas German and can be found in the bibliography. Alex provided some examples of language differences.

Sometimes the front vowels are rounded, sometimes they aren't.

Differences between German and Texas German

Haarbürste 'hairbrush' – Haarbirscht

Süßkartoffeln 'sweet potatoes' – Siss (e) kardoffl

Tür 'door' – Tir

Häng da Bild über die Tür 'hang the picture over the bed' – hang s Bild iber die Tir

Kühe 'cows' – Kih (e)

Zwei Töchter 'two daughters' – zwei Techter

Zwei Kochtöpfe 'two cooking pots' – zwei Kochtep(f)

Wurst 'sausage' – Wurscht

Fünf 'five' – finf

Technological advancements also entered the vocabularies of Texas-Germans, but without access to the new German words, they developed their own terms or simply used the English ones. "Helicopter," for example, would be referred to as "hubschrauber" in Germany, but for Texas Germans, who had no way of knowing the new term, it simply became "der helicopter."

The acceptance of German in Texas, both as a

language and a culture, faded at the start of the twentieth century. In 1909, the government began enforcing English-only laws in schools, and German speakers were forced to switch to English early in childhood. With World War I and World War II, German gradually fell further out of favor in American society. Where once there were upwards of 10,000 Texas German speakers, by the 1950's families even stopped speaking the language at home. Fifth and sixth generation Texas Germans did not inherit the traditions nor the language from their parents, and today the dialect is almost gone. Modern hill country still holds a few Texas Germans, but the dialect is restricted to the older generations, most speakers over sixty years old. Anthropologists estimate that the dialect will be completely extinct within the next thirty years.

If you have further interest in the subject of Texas German, "google" Texas German and Texas German Dialect Project (<http://www.tgdp.com>). You can help ensure the longevity of the Texas German Dialect project by donating at <http://tgdp.org/donate>.

The Stonewall Heritage Society would like to thank Alexander, the Texas German Dialect project and the University of Texas at Austin for helping to preserve the language of our ancestors.

Bibliography:

- Rudolph L. Bieseke, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831–1961* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1930; rpt. 1964).
- Boas, H.C. (2009) *The Life and Death of Texas German*. Durham, N

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mvx9wp/the-last-days-of-texas-german-253

<http://sites.la.utexas.edu/hcb/files/2011/02/BOAS.pdf>

Don't forget to renew your Stonewall Heritage Society membership!

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