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Texas Ain't Wales: Why Texas German is unlikely to be revived



Texas German will be extinct in 50 years. Most likely, cultural festivals like *Wurstfest* will live on.

At least once a year, the TGDP receives a phone call from someone interested in reviving Texas German. The dream of these callers is that Texas German be revived: spoken by more and more people, preferably younger people, who would use it not only in private conversations, but also in public

places, and who would then pass it on to their children. We are happy to hear the enthusiasm of fans of Texas German, but in such cases, we have to be the bearer of bad news: it is, unfortunately, too late to revive Texas German.

This assessment is often met with disbelief. How could it be “too late” to

revive a language? Our callers often come up with several creative suggestions for reviving Texas German: teaching it in preschools, using the internet to promote it, paying money to people who want to learn it. They also often bring up other language revitalization efforts around the world, where dedicated community members have successfully revitalized dying dialects and languages, Wales being a prime successful example. There are some very significant differences, however, between successful language revitalization efforts (as in Wales), and the disappearance of Texas German here in Texas.

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TGDP MILESTONES 2013-2014

- ◆ Dr. James Kearney receives the Gillespie County Historical Society Award of Merit in Fredericksburg (May 2014).
- ◆ TGDP members present 13 talks at conferences in Texas, California, Germany, Finland, Austria, Belgium, and England.
- ◆ TGDP is featured in radio shows of the “Deutschlandfunk” (National German radio) and KUT Austin.
- ◆ Dr. Hans Boas teaches a graduate class at UT Austin on Texas German during the 2014 Fall Semester.
- ◆ TGDP members record 32 additional speakers

TGDP methodology at work in rural Wisconsin

Ryan Dux, a Ph.D. student at UT Austin and a Wisconsin native, recently commenced a project modeled on the TGDP to record and preserve the dying Pomeranian Low German dialect spoken in Lincoln and Marathon counties in Central Wisconsin. Ryan learned of the moribund dialect through family contacts, and decided to apply his expertise as a research assistant with the

TGDP to the documentation of Wisconsin Pomeranian Low German. After a pilot study in January 2014, Ryan conducted interviews with approximately 30 speakers during the summer academic break using materials developed by the TGDP. He also presented his project and the TGDP at the Pomeranian Society of Central Wisconsin's summer gathering, the *Picknick im Busch*, and

published a short article in the Society's newsletter, *Dat Pommersche Blatt*. The Wisconsin Pomeranian and Texas German communities share many similarities, but also exhibit important differences. Both began in the mid-1800s, as thousands of Germans sought opportunities such as economic freedom and farming opportunities in the New World. The newly

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Lida Cope, East Carolina University: An update on the Texas Czech Legacy Project

In 2012, Hans Boas of the TGDP helped Prof. Lida Cope from Eastern Carolina University to found the Texas Czech Legacy Project (TCLP) at UT Austin. Dr. Cope is a specialist on Texas Czech, as she recorded many speakers in central Texas for her dissertation, which she completed in the 1990s. Support for the TCLP has come from the Czech Endowment at UT Austin, Texas Humanities, and many enthusiastic Texas Czech speakers and other community supporters. The first phase of the project involved digitizing older dialect recordings of Texas Czech at UT Austin. During the second phase of the project, a preliminary website was put up for presenting basic information about the TCLP, including a few sample recordings and transcriptions. Below, Dr. Cope summarizes what she has accomplished, and the exciting places she plans to go:

2014 has been a great year for us. We launched the project's web site, segmented several interviews, and published the segments along with Czech and English transcriptions in the site's Dialect Archive. Mark Hopkins represented the Project at the 27th World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in Pilsen, Czech Republic, this past summer, and Lida Cope gave several presentations at academic conferences in the U.S. and



**After an interview with
TX Czech speakers**

was invited to speak about the Project at UT Austin in spring 2014. Also in the spring, our work inspired a Slavic linguist, Robert Dittmann, at Charles University in Prague, to offer a Texas Czech seminar in which students transcribed and analyzed a series of our recordings. We intend to continue this collaboration as circumstances allow – it was wonderful to have Czech university students involved. We have been working closely with the faculty at the Institute of the Czech National Corpus in Prague, particularly with Marie Kopřivová, the head of corporate development. Her assistance has been instrumental in our never-ending discussions over the breadth and depth of the TCLP transcription and translation guide.

Lida Cope is fortunate to have a network of friends and acquaintances among Texas Czech activists and remaining speakers. For example, our continued progress on the Svatava Pírková Jakobson archive

(whose importance to the TCLP will become evident in the years to come) would not be possible were it not for the support of community members and volunteers from the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center in La Grange, particularly the Center's director, Retta Chandler, and librarian Janis Hrnčíř. Support from the Texas Czech network is also invaluable in arranging additional interviews whenever a trip to Texas becomes possible. Articles on the Project appeared in the *TCHCC Newsletter* (Náš Český Život 'Our Czech Life'), the organ of the Czech Heritage Society of Texas (Náš Hlas 'Our Voice'), and *Věstník* (Herald), the organ of The Slavonic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas. In addition, an article for scholars in Czech Studies was published in the *Czech Language News*.

It is vital for the Project's long-term success that we continue working closely with the dedicated activists

in Texas organizations and use every public opportunity to make the Project more visible. One such opportunity will take place in April 2015 when the Czech language program at DSES of UTA will celebrate its Centennial. Lida Cope and Mark Hopkins are co-editing a publication, sponsored by the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas and DSES, to commemorate the occasion. One chapter will be devoted to the *Texas Czech Legacy Project*. Also, Lida Cope will speak at the Czech Language Program Centennial Symposium, sponsored by the DSES, in April 2015.



**The TCLP in Moravia,
TX**

Our website is currently at <http://sites.utexas.edu/txczech>. Our permanent website, coming later this fall, will allow users to search through the transcribed segments by the age and gender of the speaker, location, and other criteria. Our efforts this year will concentrate on improving the site's searchability and continued transcriptions to enrich the Dialect Archive.



**Teaching a Czech class at the
TCHCC in La Grange,
Spring 2014**



Documentation, not revitalization, must be our main priority—cont'd from p. 1

First, there has to be substantial involvement from a significant number of community members who are passionate about reviving a dying dialect or language. In Wales, the grass roots effort of the 1960s and 1970s to revive Welsh was a widespread phenomenon, supported by a great number of Welsh people of different generations whose pride in their culture and language inspired them to participate in its revival. While most Texas German speakers that we interviewed over the past 13 years are typically very proud to speak the language, most of them are less willing to actively engage in any language revitalization efforts, such as teaching the dialect to preschool and school children. (Such an engagement would involve several hours of daily classroom instruction and activities, a commitment that most Texas German speakers do not feel comfortable making.) Community involvement across several generations is one of the central pillars of suc-



Many German immigrants came through Indianola

cessful language revitalization, and Texas German does not have this crucial support.

The second major factor influencing successful language revitalization is resources. Teaching materials such as dictionaries, grammar books, and textbooks would be essential for reviving Texas German. The TGDP has recorded and archived interviews with more than 400 speakers of Texas German, material that would be necessary for the creation of such instructional materials. However, writing books and creating an entire instructional cur-

riculum for Texas German would be a tremendous effort and require the collaboration of several people over multiple years, costing several million dollars. In Wales, community activists convinced the government to support such language revitalization efforts; here in Texas, it seems very unlikely that the revitalization of Texas German would be supported with tax dollars.

Another major problem is that there are not enough younger fluent speakers left who could lead the language revitalization efforts. Most of the remaining 6,000 - 8,000 fluent speakers of Texas German are 60 years of age and older. If a language revitalization effort had been started in the 1970s or 1980s, it might have had more of a chance of success; now, with a majority of speakers in their 80's, the crucial "middle generation" of fluent speakers no longer exists.

Finally, there is a lack of desire for revitalization among Texas German speakers themselves. Our

research over the past 13 years has shown that even though most Texas German speakers regard Texas German in a positive light, the overwhelming majority of speakers do not think that it is a good idea to revitalize it. This attitude reflects the realization that the dialect is not useful in present-day Texas. For example, when asked what language our speakers want their grandchildren to learn, many respond with "Spanish", because it is more practical in Texas today. Negative attitudes such as these are an influential factor in language revitalization efforts, as in Ireland with Irish Gaelic. Even though the Irish government financially supports the use of Irish Gaelic by its public servants and the general population, use of the language has still drastically declined over the past decade. One of the main reasons is that many Irish consider Gaelic to be outdated and antiquated; they, like many of our Texas German speakers, prefer speaking English instead.

In short, for those of us who care about Texas German, attempting to revive the language is not the best use of our time and energy. Instead, we can and should focus on documenting the remaining speakers. We may not be able to "save" the language; however, here at the TGDP, we are ensuring that it will not simply vanish without a trace.

New TGDP Member 2014: Sandy Schwalen

Sandy Schwalen is an undergraduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, studying in the Liberal Arts Honors Program. Growing up, she spent most summers in Germany visiting her grandparents, and occasionally attending Gymnasium (High School) with friends. Sandy hopes

to study abroad in German and/or France during her time as an undergraduate student at UT Austin. Besides the TGDP, she is also involved in the Liberal Arts Honors Student Council and her honors program's acting troupe Foot in the Door. Welcome to the TGDP, Sandy!



Schwalen on a 2014 trip to Germany



Dr. Jim Kearney brings Texas German history to life at UT Austin

Now in its 2nd year, Dr. Kearney's class educates UT students about the presence, history & impact of Germans in Texas

In the nineteenth century immigrants from several Central and Northern European countries altered the demographics of Texas significantly while accelerating both economic and agricultural development of the republic and (later) state. Germans provided by far the largest component of European immigration to Texas in the 19th century, followed closely by the Czechs. Because of the numerical preponderance of the German settlers, a large part of the course is devoted to their story, both in Europe and in Texas.

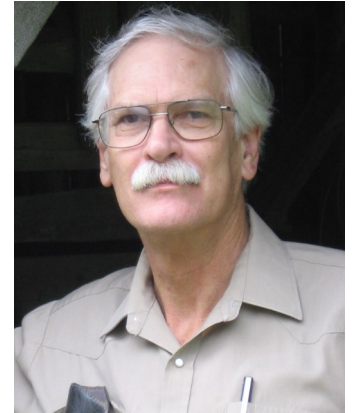
Painted churches, dance halls, and sausage festivals still speak to the cultural legacy of these immigrants in large swaths of Texas. Amazingly, pockets of bilingualism still survive after

several generations. The German story, especially, intersected with larger themes of Texas history—frontier, Native Americans, and slavery. Contrasting attitudes and values led to conflict at times, especially during the Civil War, since many of the immigrants openly opposed secession and/or slavery.

The Germans settled initially in the South-Central counties of Colorado, Austin, Fayette, and Washington. Later they settled the Hill Country counties of Comal, Gillespie, and Kendall. These two main focal points of German immigration contrasted in many ways. The South-Central experience was unorganized and proceeded by a process known as “chain immigration,” or basically

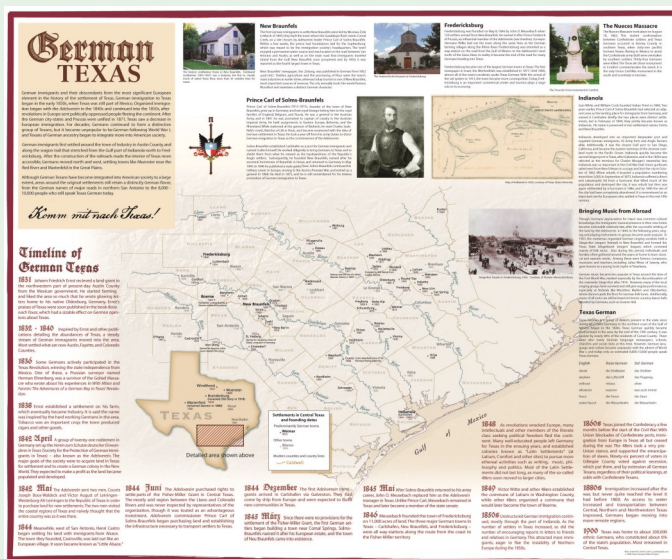
word of mouth. For the Hill Country, however, a corporation of German noblemen organized the settlements. This course examines the contrasting cultural responses of these two areas.

Field trips to the Briscoe Center for American History Studies, the Texas State Library, and the General Land Office highlight the course and serve to introduce students to these wonderful repositories of primary source material. Students will be required to do a mini-research paper and short presentation based on research in one or all of these facilities. They learn about both the push—the causes of European emigration—and the pull—the attraction of Texas as a destination. They



Dr. Kearney's favorite part of the course? Giving his students, many of whom are TX German themselves, the chance to learn about their community's contributions to Texas history.

also come to appreciate the positive contributions of the many different European nationalities that have added strands to the rich and colorful tapestry of the state.



The German Texas map is available exclusively from the TGDP for \$40.00 (includes shipping and handling). See enclosed order form for details.

Featured: Texas German Map

Show your Texas German pride and contribute to the Texas German Endowment at the University of Texas at Austin by purchasing one of our high-quality prints of the history of German immigration into Texas!

Donated for fundraising purposes by mapmaker and German American Justin Cozart, this **beautiful 34"x28" map** includes a chronology of the history of Texas Germans dating back to 1831, when Johann Friedrich Ernst first fell in love with the wide-open country and wrote a book about it, *Reise nach Texas*. It also explains key concepts in German immigration, such as the role of the *Adelsverein*, an organization that was instrumental in the settling of Texas, the founding of Texas German towns, basic differences between Texas and Standard German, the popularity of German music, and more. **Contact the TGDP for yours today!**



Featured TGDP alum: Karen Roesch, Ph.D., now at IUPUI in Indiana

This year we are pleased to announce that Dr. Karen Roesch, a former member of the TGDP team, has joined the faculty at Indiana University – Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). Dr. Roesch received her Ph.D. in Germanic Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin in 2009, and also holds a M.A. in Teaching and Curriculum from Michigan State University. From 2004 to 2011, she taught German language and culture courses at Texas State University and here at the University of Texas at Austin. Starting in August of this



Dr. Roesch will soon begin an Indiana German project

year, she became the Hoyt-Reichmann Endowed Scholar of German-American Studies, the Director of the Max Kade German – American Re-

search and Resource Center, and an Assistant Professor of German. Previous to this, she held the position of German Language Director for the Middlebury-Monterey Language Academy, a summer immersion German program for high school students. Her recent research has focused on documenting and recording the Alsatian dialect spoken in Castroville in Medina County, Texas. Her book, entitled *Language Maintenance and Language Death: the Decline of Texas Alsatian*, describes the Alsatian language spoken in Medina County today and provides an overview of

the extra-linguistic factors contributing to the dialect's preservation or accelerating its decline.

During her studies at UT Austin, Dr. Roesch worked on the Texas German Dialect Project in Gillespie and Medina counties, providing valuable data on Texas German in these regions. She is currently establishing a similar project on the German-American dialects in Indiana.

Here at the TGDP, we heartily congratulate Dr. Roesch on her recent appointments at IUPUI, and wish her all the best in her research and future endeavors.

Ryan Dux: finding success in applying TGDP methodology to Central Wisconsin Pomeranian Low German—cont'd from p.1

arrived Germans formed communities which were isolated from English influence, so the German dialects they brought over were maintained well into the 20th century. In many communities in both states, German was the most frequently spoken language at the turn of the century. There are, however, some notable differences in how the German dialects developed in the two states. In Wisconsin, there were many small waves of immigration from different regions of German-speaking Europe. Each of these groups formed their own small communities in Wisconsin, which resulted in small pockets of different Ger-

man dialects throughout Wisconsin. In Texas, on the other hand, most of the immigrants came from towns in a single region of West Central Germany and settled in or around two prominent German towns in Central Texas: New Braunfels and Fredericksburg. The relative homogeneity and geographic closeness of the Texas Germans led to a process called “dialect leveling,” where speakers of slightly different dialects get rid of the differences between their varieties in order to speak more similarly to one another. As a result of this, Texas German speakers can communicate with each other very easily, while dialect

differences in Wisconsin make some communities mutually unintelligible. Despite these differences, the German dialects in both Texas and Wisconsin face a similar unfortunate situation. Due to the World Wars and important social changes in the USA, the German speakers gave up their German in exchange for English and did not pass the language on to the next generation. Now, there are only a few elderly people who still have command of German; within the next 20 to 30 years, there will be no more German speakers in these communities. The tragedy of this situation is that, if nothing is done to preserve the dialects, then

with the passing of the final speakers, there will be no more record of the German language and culture, and their importance for the settlement and development of the USA will be forgotten. This situation prompted Ryan to document Wisconsin Low German to preserve the speakers' dialect and their stories for future generations of linguists, historians, and genealogists. By next spring, we plan to begin adding the interviews to the TGDP dialect archive and carrying out preliminary analyses of the structure and development of Wisconsin Pomeranian Low German.

TEXAS GERMAN DIALECT PROJECT (TGDP)

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Plans for 2015

- We are re-designing our database and website, as they are more than ten years old. Watch for the roll-out some time in the summer of 2015!
- The TGDP is also collaborating with colleagues who work on other German speech island communities around the world. In 2015, we will start our pilot project comparing Texas German with the German varieties spoken in Southern Brazil and Siberia.
- Our fundraising efforts continue for the Texas German Endowment at UT Austin. If you are interested in hosting or attending a fundraiser in your area, be sure to let us know!

The time is now: future of TGDP dependent on increase in funding

Like most worthy endeavors, the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) could not exist without the support of those who believe in its cause: the documentation and preservation of Texas German, an endangered dialect unique to the Lone Star State. Thankfully, we receive different types of support. Some of our most valued supporters are our Texas German speakers: the hundreds of Texas German speakers who have donated their time and energy to our interviewers, ensuring that their cultural and linguistic heritage will not disappear without a trace. We are also indebted to the undergraduate and graduate students at UT Austin for the innumerable hours they have collectively spent traveling and interviewing speakers, and then digitizing, analyzing, transcribing, translating, and archiving the interviews for future generations. Finally, until 2008, the TGDP received steady financial funding, from sources both inside and outside of UT Austin, which totaled \$200,000 over the seven years we received it.

Since 2008, the TGDP has been unable to receive further

external grants. While it is not uncommon for funding sources in academic endeavors to “dry up” after a certain amount of time, this loss of funding was at the same time accompanied by an increase in the number of Texas German speakers who wanted to be interviewed. The combination of the decrease in funding and the increase in potential speakers led to the creation of the TGDP waiting list. As of this writing, it is almost as large (400+) as the number of speakers that we have actually been able to interview over the past 13 years (~450). This means that out of all the speakers of Texas German who have expressed a desire to be interviewed, the number that we have actually been able to interview and document stands at just over 50%. What does this mean? First, the TGDP is extremely indebted to a small but dedicated group of donors, who, through their financial contributions to the Texas German Endowment, established in 2009 at UT Austin, have enabled us to continue our work, albeit at substantially reduced levels of operation. But time is running out. Speakers of

Texas German are getting older; every month we receive news that a speaker or potential speaker has passed away. This news is always particularly sad because if we would have had the funding, we could have interviewed these Texas German speakers before their passing.

We have now made it a major goal at the TGDP to increase our funding and grow the endowment. To that end, we are ramping up fundraising efforts and seeking donations from individuals, families, businesses, and organizations. If you would like to count yourself among the “Friends of Texas German,” visit our website at tgdp.org/donate, or send a check made out to the “Texas German Endowment - UT Austin” to the return address on this newsletter.

And if you are already among those who have donated to the TGDP endowment - our “Friends of Texas German” - from the bottom of our hearts, *danke schön!* You have enabled us to archive and preserve Texas German, thereby contributing to the legacy of the Texas German community for years to come.