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Fredericksburg, TX

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FREDERICKSBURG, TX. Fredericksburg, the county seat of Gillespie County, is seventy miles west of Austin in the central part of the county. The town was one of a projected series of German settlements from the Texas coast to the land north of the Llano River, originally the ultimate destination of the German immigrants sent to Texas by the Adelsverein. In August 1845 John O. Meusebach left New Braunfels with a surveying party to select a site for a second settlement en route to the Fisher-Miller Land Grant. He eventually chose a tract of land sixty miles northwest of New Braunfels, where two streams one-half mile down the Baltender River, the streams were later named Barons Creek, in Meusebach's honor, and Town Creek. Meusebach was impressed by the abundance of water, stone, and timber and upon his return to New Braunfels arranged to buy 10,000 acres at credit. The first wagontrain of 120 settlers arrived from New Braunfels on May 8, 1846, after a sixteen-day journey, accompanied by an eight-man military escort provided by the Adelsverein. Surveyor Hermann Wilke laid out the town, which Meusebach named Fredericksburg after Prince Frederick of Prussia, an influential member of the Adelsverein. Each settler received one town lot and ten acres of farmland nearby. The town was laid out like the German villages along the Rhine, from which many of the colonists had come, with one long, wide main street roughly paralleling Town Creek. The earliest houses in Fredericksburg were built simply of post oak logs stuck upright in the ground. These were soon replaced by fachwerk houses, built of upright timbers with the spaces between filled with rocks and then plastered or whitewashed (see GERMAN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE).

The colonists planted corn, built storehouses to protect their provisions and trade goods, and prepared for the arrival of more immigrant trains, which came throughout the summer. Within two years Fredericksburg had grown into a thriving town of about 1,000, despite an epidemic that spread from Indianola and New Braunfels and killed between 100 and 150 residents in the summer and fall of 1846. The first two years also saw the signing of a major peace treaty between Fredericksburg and Austin, the signing of the Meusebach-Comanche Treaty, which effectively eliminated the threat of Indian attacks, the opening of the first privately owned store by J. L. Ransleben, the construction of the Vereins Kirche, which served for fifty years as a church, school, fortress, and meeting hall, the formal organization of Gillespie County by the Texas legislature, which made Fredericksburg the county seat, the founding of Zodiac, a nearby settlement by a group of Mormons under Lyman Wight, the construction of the Nimitz Hotel, and the establishment by the United States Army of Fort Martin Scott, which became an important station for the overland stage of Indianola, two miles east of town. After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Fredericksburg also benefited from its location as the last town before El Paso on the longest of Upper El Paso Road.

Religion played an important part in the lives of the German settlers of Gillespie County. Devout farmers drove as much as twenty miles into town for religious services and built Fredericksburg's characteristic Sunday houses for use on weekends and religious holidays. Though most of the original colonists were members of the Evangelical Protestant Church, there were also Lutherans, Methodists, and Catholics. Initially all communicants held services in the Vereins Kirche, but in 1846 the Catholics built their own church, which was supplanted in 1849 by the Marienkirche (still St. Mary's Church). Also in 1846 the German missionary Father Menzel erected a large wooden cross on Cross Mountain (see north of Fredericksburg). The Methodists withdrew from the Vereins Kirche around the same time, and another group left the Evangelical Protestants in 1853 and formed Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church under Rev. Philip F. Zizelman. Their church building, completed the following year, was the first Lutheran church in the Hill Country.

The German settlers were also passionate believers in the importance of education. The first school in Fredericksburg was established under Johann Leyendecker, in whose home Catholic services were held immediately after the town's founding. Leyendecker succeeded as teacher a year later by Jacob Brodbeck, who was to rate succeeded by Rev. Gottlieb Burchard Dangers. In 1851 Bishop John Odin equipped Dangers, Odin remained an important figure in the community until his death in 1897. The first public school, with a church-supported school to deal in 1897. The first public school, a combined Evangelical and Collegiate County suffered under Carolinian martial law, imposed in 1862, and from the depredations of such outlaws as James P. Waldrip. Waldrip, the leader of a notorious gang, was shot by an unknown assassin beneath a live oak tree outside the Nimitz Hotel in 1867.

The bitter experience of the Civil War strengthened the traditional German determination not to get involved in state and national affairs. The German tried to maintain their independence by steadfastly refusing to learn or use English. The first newspaper in the county was the German-language Fredericksburg Wochenblatt, established in 1877, and a measure when the Austin Indian hunts to Fredericksburg in the 1890s claimed that the local sheriff, who spoke German and broken English, was the only person in Fredericksburg who could act as an interpreter for him. The most authoritative history of early Fredericksburg was Pen Seagulls men formely pürligen Jahheiten der deutschen Kolonie Fredericksburg, written by Robert O. Domlin for the town's fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1896. Not until after 1900 was the first purely English-speaking teacher employed in Fredericksburg's public schools.
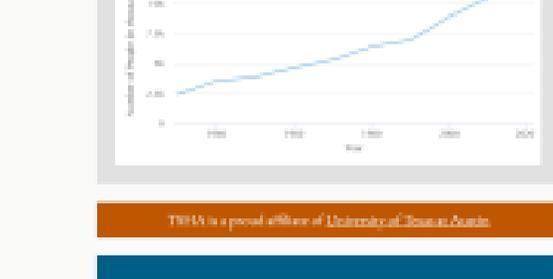
As the town grew in size and importance, however, its self-imposed isolation was beginning to break down. The first Gillespie County Fair was held in 1881 at Fort Martin Scott and moved to Fredericksburg in 1889. The fair, celebrated as the first in Texas, now attracted relatively large numbers of visitors to Fredericksburg. The town revived briefly when the San Antonio and Fort Worth railroad company in 1896 and in 1913 in 1896 the construction period that two to 1,672, but after 1900 it fell to 1,595. A railroad to the town finally reached Fredericksburg in 1913. To foster the town's trade, the town boosters' incorporated near the San Antonio, Fredericksburg, and Northern Railway, which passed through Fredericksburg and connected with the San Antonio Railway, written by Robert O. Domlin for the town's fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1896. Not until after 1900 was the first purely English-speaking teacher employed in Fredericksburg's public schools. The railroad was organized as the Fredericksburg and Northern Railway in 1913 and was granted with a three-day celebration. The railroad was reorganized as the Fredericksburg and Northern in 1917 and retained its operation until July 25, 1942, when it shut a victim of improved roads and automobiles.

As World War I, another resident of Fredericksburg considered Dwangier's editorial newspaper too pro-German. Another symbol of change was the spring 1918 vote to incorporate, a move the people of Fredericksburg had resisted for eighty-two years because they preferred to use the county as the unit of local government; why they resumed, yet one set of public officials when one would suffice? At the time of the vote Fredericksburg was the largest unincorporated town in the United States, and the increasing size and complexity of both the town and the county made a change necessary. The 1930 United States census, the first in which Fredericksburg was included, gave the town's population as 2,426. Thereafter the population grew slowly but steadily, reaching 3,544 in 1940, 3,867 in 1950, 4,629 in 1960, 5,326 in 1970, and 6,412 in 1980. In the following decades the population increased more rapidly, so that by 1990 it reached 6,934 and by 2000 the community had 8,911 inhabitants and 930 businesses. See also GERMANS.

In the 1980s Fredericksburg had thirty-eight restaurants, thirteen motels, a resort farm, a campground, three art galleries, and twenty antique stores. In addition, the town was the site of a number of annual events, many of which recall Fredericksburg's German heritage. Easter Fires, held the Saturday before Easter, reenacts both an old Indian legend and the story of German settlers' attempts to quiet their children frightened by the Indian council fires in the hills outside of town by telling them that the fires were set by Easter bunnies boiling Easter eggs. Other notable annual events include a county fair in late August; Oktoberfest, held in early October; and Kristkindl Markt, a Christmas market held in early December. Also in Fredericksburg is the Admiral Nimitz State Historical Park, centered around the old Nimitz Hotel and dedicated to the men and women who served in the Pacific theater in World War II (see NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR).

Population of Fredericksburg, TX from 1930 to 2021

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