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German Free School Association of Austin

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Photograph, German Free School building in Austin. Image courtesy of the [German Texas Heritage Society](#). Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with [Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107](#).

GERMAN FREE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION OF AUSTIN. The German Free School Association of Austin was chartered by the [Texas legislature](#) on January 19, 1858, as the first chartered school in Austin, for the "education of the youth, the promotion of useful knowledge, and the advancement of the sciences." The school was to be "accessible to all alike without regard to religious opinions." The charter named Carl Wilhelm (William) von Rosenberg, [Karl Wilhelm Pressler](#), Joseph Martin, H. Steussy, Dr. J. A. Brown, William Sattler, and Christian Wilhelm as trustees. The two-story school building, at what is now identified as 507 East 10th Street, was constructed in 1857 with volunteer labor on land overlooking Waller Creek, donated by the von Rosenberg family. Two-story living quarters were added in 1872 for the schoolmaster, [Julius Schuetze](#). Classes were taught in English with German probably as a second language. State funds for teachers were distributed by the Travis County Commissioners Court in 1858 at the rate of 10 cents per day per student for students not paying tuition, and at 1½ cents per day per student for students who were paying tuition. A larger number of nonpaying students attended the German Free School than any other school in Austin. The school became public when the city schools opened in 1871, but the transition was not smooth.

Photograph, Portrait of Julius Schuetze, a schoolmaster and trustee for the German Free School Association of Austin. Image available on the [Internet](#) and included in accordance with [Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107](#).

Photograph, Historical marker for the German Free School in Austin. Image available on the [Internet](#) and included in accordance with [Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107](#).

The German Free School Association's original charter expired at the end of its twenty-year term in 1879. A recharter of the Association was filed with the Department of State in 1884 by trustees Julius Schuetze, G. P. Assmann, R. Haschke, Ed Wolf, Ed Steiner, Max Haas, and Henry Vogel. The school closed soon thereafter, and the building was used by the Germania Verein. Schuetze and his family continued to stay in the family quarters and eventually purchased the rest of the building. Ownership of the former school building changed hands several times after Schuetze's death in 1904. Austin artist Dr. Kelly H. Stevens bought the structure in 1948 and painstakingly restored it for his home, using numerous architectural pieces salvaged from other Austin landmarks; he also established a lovely terraced garden. In August 1991 Stevens deeded the German Free School property to the German-Texan Heritage Society (founded in 1978), with the understanding that it would be preserved for future generations. The building is now the headquarters of the German-Texan Heritage Society and the German Free School Guild. The guild was established in 1993 as a volunteer service arm of the society to support the facility as a historic cultural center with a library, tours, beginning-German classes, and other regularly scheduled programs. The building carries an Austin landmark seal and a historical medallion from the Texas State Historical Survey Committee (now the [Texas Historical Commission](#)).

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