

GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO TEXAS

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Although there were a few Germans in Texas when the area was under Spanish and Mexican rule, the first permanent settlement of Germans was at Industry, in Austin County, established by Friedrich Ernst and Charles Fordtran in the early 1830s. Ernst wrote a letter to a friend in his native Oldenburg which was published in the newspaper there. His description of Texas was so influential in attracting German immigrants to that area that he is remembered as "The Father of German Immigration to Texas."

These first immigrants settled in Austin, Colorado, Fayette, and Washington counties. Among the communities in that area considered German towns were Mill creek, Biegel, La Grange, Fayetteville, Cat Spring, Bellville, Frelsburg, New Ulm, Bernardo, Shelby, Ross Prairie, Millheim, and Berlin. Some of the names are German and some are English because some of these were places originally settled and named by Anglo-Americans from the United States but later settled by German immigrants and some of them were founded by Germans.

In the 1840s, the social, economic, and technological conditions in Germany, coupled with the availability of lands in frontier Texas, created an ideal climate for an influx of immigrants. In 1842, a group of German noblemen formed the *Verein zum Schutz deutscher Einwanderer in Texas*, called the *Verein* or the *Adelsverein*, to secure land in Texas for immigrants. The *Verein* obtained a grant of 3,800,000 acres in west-central Texas from Henry Fisher and Burchard Miller, thus known as the Fisher-Miller Grant. Prospective settlers were promised 320 acres of land for a married man or 160 acres for a single man, plus transportation across the ocean and to the land; a house, household furnishings, utensils, and farming equipment; churches, hospitals, roads and general provisions for their welfare.

Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels preceded the group to prepare for the arrival of the colonists. He realized that the huge land grant could not be settled immediately because it was too far from the coast and from existing settlements for transportation and supply, and so he established the town of New Braunfels as a way station to the Fisher-Miller lands. Prince Carl returned to his homeland and was succeeded by Baron Ottfried Hans con Meusebach, who discarded his title upon arrival in Texas and became known as John O. Meusebach. When it became evident that large numbers of expected settlers could not be located at New Braunfels, Meusebach laid out another settlement and named it Fredericksburg. About this time, it became clear that the grant of land was not suitable for settlement: the soil was not fertile enough for farming, and large numbers of Comanche Indians inhabited the area.

In the meantime, thousands of immigrants were enroute to their promised lands when the war between the United States and Mexico broke out. Due to the war, all means of transportation were needed by the Army, which left thousands of German immigrants stranded on the Texas Coast. Many perished due to exposure to the elements and to disease, but some made the longoverland trip--even on foot--to New Braunfels and to Fredericksburg. Some remained in the coastal towns and in the earlier-established settlements.

About this time, the *Adelsverein*, always underfunded, was bankrupt. When Texas became part of the United States, the state government awarded certificates of land to immigrants due lands in the Fisher Miller Grant. The treaties that Meusebach made with the Comanches opened the land for future settlement. Other German settlements in this part of the Texas Hill Country include Boerne, Comfort, Kerrville, Castell, Hilda,--and Luckenbach.

Meanwhile, the European revolutions of 1848 brought talented and well-educated Germans to Texas; these are known as the "48ers." Some of these gathered in "Latin Settlements" to pursue common interests in music, literature, philosophy, and theoretical politics. Such settlements included Latium, Bettina, and Sisterdale. Most of these settlements did not last long, and the 48ers moved into the larger cities, notably San Antonio, Houston, and Galveston. Each of these had a population that was about one-third German.

The Civil War disrupted travel, shipping, commerce, and communication, so that immigration from Europe was brought to a halt. Following the Civil War, Germans again came to Texas. In fact, more Germans came after the Civil War, from 1865 to 1980, than came in the entire 30-odd years of immigration before the war. But, the story of their immigration has not been remembered with the romance and flair of the *Adelsverein* settlers, the ones who came with the Prince, the ones who suffered such tragedy in establishing their settlements.

These later immigrants generally came in smaller groups and had a tendency to settle in areas where other Germans were already active or to displace the previous Anglo-American population. In some cases, later immigrants from other European countries in turn displaced the earlier German Settlers. But, German settlers also established new settlements as railroad lands were sold and as large, old plantations and ranches were broken up for farmlands. By this time, overseas as well as overland transportation had been improved with railroads advancing from the coast toward the developed areas of the state. German settlers of this period were not only the poor and deprived peasants, but also members of the craftsman, merchant and professional classes.

Later German immigrants settled in New Baden, Anderson, Pflugerville, Dessau, Westphalia, McGregor, Coryell, Thorndale, Copperas Cove, The Grove, Womack, Tours, and Malone, all in central Texas; from Rosenberg to Damon in East Bernard, Schulenburg, Weimar, Yorktown, Meyersville, Deutschburg, Ganado, Vatmann, Woodsboro, Tivoli, between Tynan and Skidmore, in Orange Grove, Violet, and Fashing, all in southeast Texas or near the Coastal Bend.

Not all the German settlers came directly from Germany; they also migrated from other parts of Texas and from other parts of the United States. Some such settlements include Muenster, Lindsay, Pilot Point, Mount Carmel, Fulda, Olfen, Windthorst, Rhineland, Nazareth, Umbarger, Slaton, and Scotland. (In spite of its name, Scotland was a German settlement; it was a secondary settlement of Windthorst, established on a subdivision of the Scotland Ranch--thus the name.) Marienfeld was renamed Stanton; and New Brandenburg was renamed Old Glory during the World War I anti-German hysteria. These settlements are in north and northwest Texas, on the High Plains, and even into the Texas Panhandle, forming a chain of "folk islands" in the cultural sea of Anglo Americans.

After 1900, German immigration to Texas decreased considerably. In times of economic downturn and worldwide wars, immigration from all countries nearly ceased. Following the World Wars, a considerable number of Germans were admitted to the united States, and many of these came to Texas, settling primarily in established cities and towns. By 1980, persons of German descent were the third largest ethnic group in Texas, exceeded only by persons claiming English-Irish and Hispanic descent.

A map of present-day Texas shows a "German Belt" from Houston westward to the Fredericksburg vicinity in the Hill Country. Yet, the German settlements are not only clustered in this band or belt; they are also scattered throughout nearly all parts of the large state of Texas.

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SOURCES:

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