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New Braunfels, TX

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NEW BRAUNFELS, TX. New Braunfels, the county seat of Comal County, is at the confluence of the Guadalupe and Comal rivers and the intersection of Interstate Highways 35 and Farm Road 725, thirty miles northeast of San Antonio and forty-five miles southwest of Austin near the southeastern border of the county. It was founded on March 21, 1845, when, under the auspices of the Adelsverein, Nicolaus Zink led a German immigrant wagemtrain up the Guadalupe River to the ford of the San Antonio-Nacogdoches road. They made camp at a site on Comal Creek (now Dry Comal Creek) chosen by Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, the first commissioner general of the Adelsverein, and promptly organized to receive later arrivals. Zink platted preliminary town and farm lots and supervised construction of a primitive stockade, the Zinkenburg, so protect the immigrants against allegedly cannibalistic Indians. Within weeks Prince Solms had laid the cornerstone for a more permanent fort and headquarters for the immigrant association, the Sophienburg (now the Sophienburg Museum), made provision for supplying the burgeoning settlement through its first summer on the frontier, and handed leadership of the colony over to John O. Meusebach. By summer the settlers numbered between 300 and 400, and the community had been incorporated under the name of Prince Solms's estate on the Lahn River in western Germany, Braunfels. From 1846 until the 1880s a number of Hispanics and Lipan Indians moved into New Braunfels each spring during sheep-shearing season.

Taking advantage of the reliable water power afforded by Comal Springs and the community's position on the road between Austin and San Antonio, the settlers wasted little time establishing the supply and processing businesses-stores, millworks, and craft shops-that soon made New Braunfels the commercial center of a growing agricultural area. Many immigrants brought artisanal skills as well as business acumen to their new home. Within a decade of its founding New Braunfels had emerged as a manufacturing center supplying wagons, farm implements, leather goods, furniture, and clothing for pioneers settling the hills of Central Texas. The town also figured as an important market for the expanding agricultural frontier. Its materials supplied places as close as Bastrop and Victoria and as far away as New Orleans, New York, and the Nassau province of Germany. It is reported that in 1850 New Braunfels was the fourth largest town in Texas.

The community's social and cultural development proceeded with its economic progress. Independent Evangelical Protestant, Lutheran, Methodist, and Catholic congregations were formed in the early years of settlement and undertook the construction of permanent church buildings. Blocks formed Baptist and Methodist churches in the late 1860s. The initial church school gave way to a city school, then to a district system that in 1858 was incorporated with the New Braunfels Academy. Citizens voted unanimously to impose a tax for the support of a public school eighteen years before the Constitution of 1876 provided for such local taxation throughout Texas. New Braunfels, Galveston, and Fredricksburg were among the first Texas towns to collect taxes to support schools. Catholics established schools in the 1860s under the direction of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Black schools were formed during Reconstruction, and schools for Hispanics appeared early in the twentieth century. In the decades before 1990 the New Braunfels Independent School District supervised five schools. A gregarious lot, the Germans of New Braunfels also organized the Germania Singing Society, the Schutzenverein Verein, a shooting club, and one of the early Turnverein or athletic clubs. All of these served to maintain the ethnic and cultural identity of the original settlers for later generations. The Neu Braunfelser Zeitung, which issued its first edition in 1852, was published continuously in German until 1957; it later merged with the English language newspaper, the New Braunfels *Herald*.

By the early 1880s, with a population estimated at 2,000, the community was linked by railpaath and rail lines with Austin and San Antonio, and textile factories along the Comal River were shipping cotton and woolen products. The following decade saw the installation of electric streetlights and the first telephone line through New Braunfels. A permanent county courthouse adjacent to the town square in New Braunfels opened in 1898. By 1900 both the International-Great Northern and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroads provided freight and passenger service and had helped secure the city's future as a manufacturing and shipping center. Flour mills, textile factories, and processing plants for construction materials provided the basis for steady growth in the twentieth century; from a population estimated at 3,165 in 1912 the town doubled in size to 6,242 by the onset of the Great Depression . The depression and the boll weevil nearly devastated the textile industry, which returned very slowly. A new growth period during and immediately after World War II saw the depression-era total nearly double again. In 1952 New Braunfels had approximately 12,200 residents. To keep pace with this growth and attendant social changes, New Braunfels reorganized its city government twice in the twentieth century, replacing the original aldermanic form in 1920 with the mayor-commission system, and subsequently replacing that with a council-manager form. In 1947 the city incorporated eight suburbs within its limits.

In the twentieth century New Braunfels added tourism to its major industries. The replacement of water and steam with electrical power in the late 1880s made land along the Comal and Guadalupe rivers within the city limits available for public use. By 1936 the city had developed much of this land for parks by purchasing Cypress Bend and Landa parks. Landa Park had first opened in 1899 as a private resort area, and, promoted by the International-Great Northern Railroad, had begun to develop as a tourist destination for vacationers from San Antonio. Tourism in New Braunfels accelerated in the decades following World War II, when Interstate Highway 35 was completed and when local merchants and investors began to capitalize on the natural and historic attractions offered by the city and its environs, particularly the recreational potential of the Guadalupe River and, after 1964, of Canyon Lake. The opening of Natural Bridge Caverns and the Wurstfest, a German-heritage celebration, in the early 1960s also facilitated the growth of a tourist industry that by the mid-1980s supported some thirty hotels and motels, as well as resort condominiums, around the city and Canyon Lake.

Tourism combined with the continued vitality of the city's industrial sector to sustain a roughly 30 percent increase in the population of New Braunfels for several decades after World War II. The city's proximity to San Antonio was another factor in its growth; in 1973 Comal County became part of the San Antonio Metropolitan Statistical Area. In the mid-1980s New Braunfels had fourteen major industries (each with more than seventy-five employees), with textile and construction-materials producers still predominant. Seven major financial institutions fueled the growth. In the 1970 census New Braunfels registered 17,859 residents; in 1980 it posted a gain to 22,402. Hispanic-surnamed residents constituted 34.3 percent of the population and Blacks 1.6 percent. In 1990 New Braunfels had a population of 27,334 and extended into Guadalupe County. The population grew to 36,494 in 2000.

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Bibliography Categories Citation Published

Rudolph Biesele, "Early Times in New Braunfels and Comal County," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 50 (July 1946); Edgar R. Dabney, The Settlement of New Braunfels and the History of Its Earlier Schools (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1957); Oscar Haas, *History of New Braunfels and Comal County, Texas, 1844–1946* (Austin: Steck, 1968; Vertical File, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

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Place
New Braunfels

Currently Exists
Yes

Place Type
Town

USGS ID
2411228

Town Fields
Has post office: Yes
Is Incorporated: Yes

Belongs to
Comal County
Guadalupe County

Coordinates
Latitude: 29.702383370°
Longitude: -98.114950000°

Population Counts

People	Year
1,727	1854
3,508	1860
2,261	1870
1,938	1880
1,608	1890
2,897	1900
3,165	1910
3,598	1920
6,242	1930
6,976	1940
12,210	1950

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