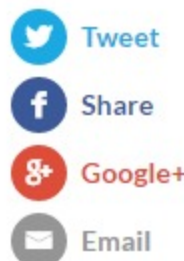


Don't Bid Auf Wiedersehen to Texas German Just Yet

By VERONICA ZARAGOVIA • JAN 1, 2014



The Saengerrunde Damenchor began singing in 1959 at the Austin Saengerrunde. The women usually rehearse on Monday evenings.

DAVID WEAVER

Texas is the only place in the world where you can find an unusual hybrid of German and English.

This Texas-German dialect stretches back to the 1800s, before Texas was even a state, when German immigrants arrived here. While the number of speakers dwindles, Texas-German pride hasn't.



You can hear it at places like the [Austin Saengerrunde Hall](#), where Rod Morgan bowls regularly on Monday nights. The heritage of this Austin native stretches far beyond the capital city -- to Germany. His family moved to Fredericksburg from Germany in the 19th century, before Texas was a state, he says.

"I've been bowling here for 37 years. And it's a great fellowship," Morgan says. We can talk amongst ourselves about things people new to town can't relate to, growing up here."

At Saengerrunde Hall, he says, German heritage is as important as a bowling victory.

"Saengerrunde is an attempt to maintain the German heritage, German activities, and this was a social club," Morgan says. "Had singers and bowlers and always had a dance once a month. And the parents would bring their kids here with their blankets and pillows and they'd go find a corner to sleep while the Germans danced to umpa music and had a good time and drank cold beer."

People like Morgan grew up hearing what's called Texas German. University of Texas linguistics Professor [Hans Boas has recorded hundreds](#) of hours of the language.

"The Texas German that you hear today is very different from any German dialect anywhere else in the world. It's different for two reasons," Boas explains.

The first reason is that people moved here from across Germany, and over time mixed their variations of German together, creating what Boas calls a "new world dialect."

"And then a heavy influence of English. So lots of English verbs and lots of English nouns being borrowed into Texas German," Boas adds.

They basically made words up if they hadn't learned it in the motherland.

"One famous example is the word *stinke katze*, which means stinking cat, which means skunk," Boas says.

But there's a lot of variation in the dialect.

"Out of a group of 50 people, you'll barely find two people who really talk alike," Boas says.

Boas created a digital archive [called the Texas German Dialect Project](#). It's a digital archive with hundreds of hours of recordings from across Texas.

"We've recorded about 430 speakers over the last 12 years and I have a list of more than 300 speakers who are waiting to be interviewed. And I get emails and phone calls every other week with more people who would like to be interviewed," he says.

Texas German speakers can also be found in Houston up to Comfort, Boerne and Kerrville, Georgetown up to Waco, north of Dallas up to the Oklahoma border. And even in San Angelo and the Midland area.

One attendees at Saengerrunde Hall -- Bill Langner -- learned German before he learned English.

"When I was a baby I was born in Burton, Texas. My dad was away fighting in World War II and so my mother took my sister and I and moved back to her parents' house in a little town called Burton," Langer says.

Speaking German during the World Wars, however, carried a stigma. So, families wanted their children to become fully American, speaking only English at home. That means the last generation of Texas German speakers won't pass the language on and it will die out.

Though the dialect is waning, the culture lives on in beer halls, festivals and societies like the Austin Saengerrunde. And efforts like the Texas German Dialect Project aim to preserve the language as old as Texas.

TAGS: TEXAS GERMAN



RELATED CONTENT

The (Mis)Pronunciations That Keep Austin Weird

By ANDREW WEBER • MAR 12, 2013



FILIPA RODRIGUES FOR KUT NEWS

Sure -- Austin's weird.

New Braunfels Hopes German Roots Attracts Tourists in Off-Season

By NATHAN BERNIER • JUL 20, 2011

A web short *highlighting Wurstfest, a New Braunfels attraction that reels in 120,000 tourists a year.* Video by [Axel Gerdau](#).

In a city perhaps best known for its summer recreation and once-a-year "[ten day salute to sausage](#)", New Braunfels is trying to capitalize on its German heritage to bring in tourists year round.

"We are a destination in the summer for [Schlitterbahn](#) and the river, and people know about [Wurstfest](#)," New Braunfels Mayor Gale Pospisil told KUT News. "But we have a great deal of German heritage here, and one of the things we've been working on is trying to spread our tourism over the entire year."