

Texas German Is A Dwindling Relic Of The Hill Country's Immigrant Roots

The dialect is spoken by fewer than 10,000 people today, mostly because teaching German was banned in Texas during World War II.

Texas German Is A Dwindling Relic Of The Hill Country's Immigrant Roots

July 3, 2020

TEXAS STANDARD

By Michael Manno | July 3, 2020 6:39 am
Arts & Culture, Race & Identity, Tech Translation



Mark Borsari/Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

The Marktplatz at Wurzbach in New Braunfels in 2010. The festival held every November is a celebration of German heritage. Sadly, the Marktplatz was destroyed in a fire in 2003, but the festival is rebuilding a new structure.

A wave of Germans immigrants came to Texas starting in the 1830s. Many settled in the Hill Country, starting cities like New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.

Lars Hinrichs, director of the Texas Linguistics Lab at the University of Texas at Austin, told Texas Standard host David Brown that those German immigrants brought their language with them, but eventually, their various dialects melded into a new one known as Texas German.

"There were enough Germans there in the Hill Country that there was an actual speech community," Hinrichs said.

He said people continued to speak the dialect into the early 20th century.

Hinrichs is a native German speaker himself, and said Texas German has many similarities to standard German, with some distinctions. For one thing, Texas German doesn't use umlauts over certain vowels like ü or ö. Also, the grammar is simpler.

"To me, it sounds very American, even though you hear that it's a native speaker of German, so it's an interesting mix," he said. "It sounds like a dialect, but it's not a dialect that exists in Germany."

Texas German is not a completely dead dialect. Hinrichs said he has heard it spoken in Fredericksburg. But it's rare. That's because during World War II, it was illegal to teach in German in Texas schools.

"After that, the culture kind of collapsed," he said.

There are fewer than 10,000 speakers of Texas German today.

Listen to archival recordings of Texas German speakers in the audio player above.

Web story by Caroline Covington.

If you found the reporting above valuable, please consider making a donation to support it [here](#). Your gift helps pay for everything you find on [texasstandard.org](#) and [KU2.org](#). Thanks for donating today.

More from 07/03/2020

Under Greg Abbott's Latest Order, Most Texans Must Wear Masks In Public

Texas Standard For July 3, 2020

Big District, Big Change: As District 13 Congressional Runoff Heats Up

Despite Assurances, Some Doctors Fear A COVID-19 Surge Will Strain Resources

Firework Sales Are Up In North Texas, In El Paso, Not So Much

My Socially Distanced Path To Citizenship

Delivering Food During The Pandemic Hasn't Been Profitable For This Long-Term Driver

Typewriter Rides Creative Masks

Texas GOP Moves Ahead With Plans For An In-Person Convention



Connect Texas: Connect with your district today



Most viewed right now

Gov. Abbott warns of potential flash flooding across Texas this week

Commentary: The 'feral' roots of Texas freedom

Amazon drone delivery could soon come to more Texans — like it or not

Texas Standard for Oct. 1, 2020: Houston voters weigh marijuana enforcement priorities

From groceries to building materials, rising diesel prices may hit Texas's wallets in other areas

Trump administration's reinterpretation of Endangered Species Act could weaken protections