

The History of DeWitt County (1899) by C. H. Waltersdorf, Publisher and Editor of the *Lavaca County News*



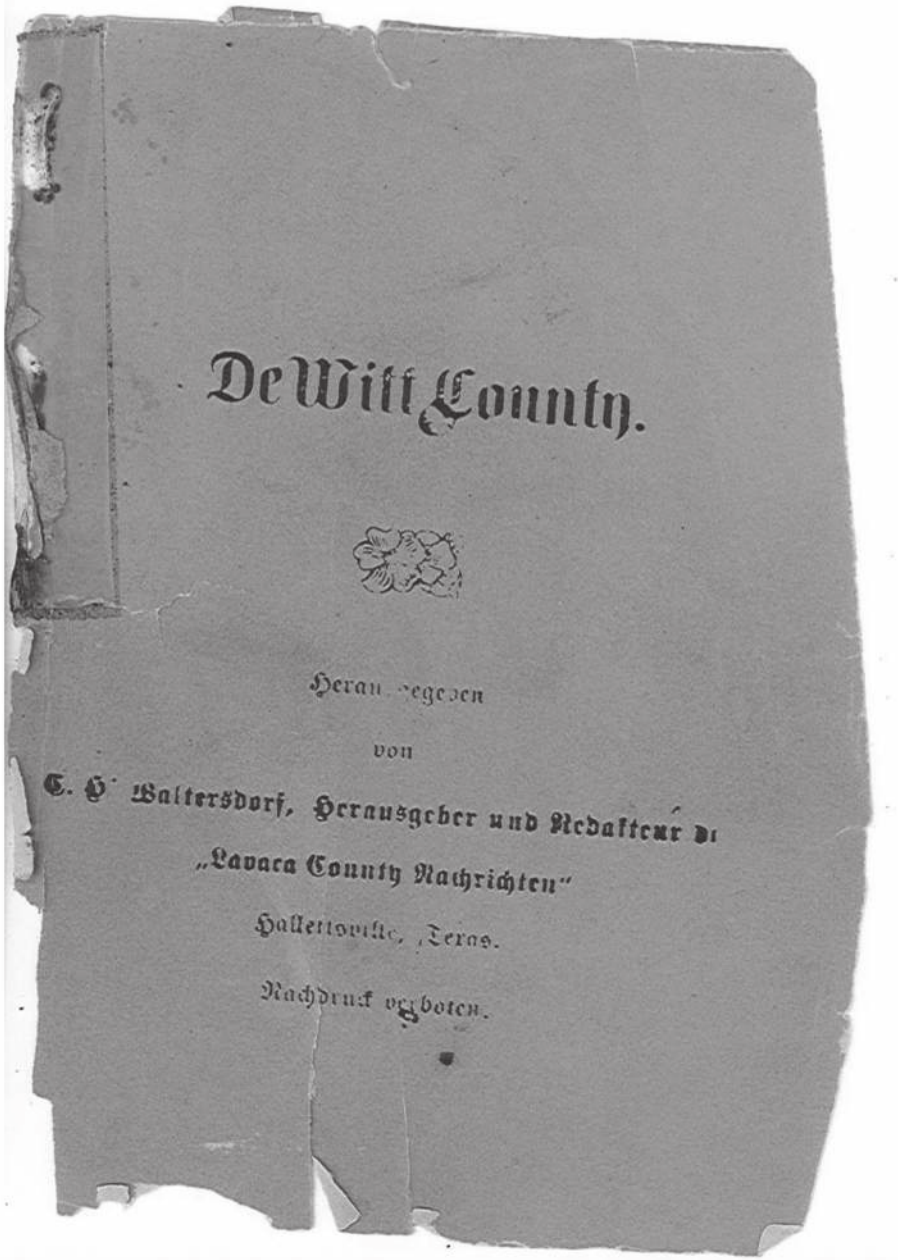
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C. H. Waltersdorf's *Geschichte von DeWitt County* (1899). *Courtesy of DeWitt County Historical Museum.*

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Notes and Documents

The History of DeWitt County (1899) *by C. H. Waltersdorf, Publisher and Editor of the* Lavaca County News

Translated and Annotated by James C. Kearney

As the 175th anniversary of DeWitt County approached in 2020, members of the DeWitt County Historical Commission began preparing for a grand celebration commensurate with the county's rich history. One of the commission members, Beverly Bruns of Yorktown, discovered C. H. Waltersdorf's history among her family papers. It is the only known extant copy of his published study, which he wrote in German and published in 1899. Beyond the fact that Waltersdorf had briefly published a German language newspaper in neighboring Lavaca County, the *Lavaca County Nachrichten*, almost nothing was known about him. Both he and his history, it would seem, had slipped into oblivion. However, Peggy Ledbetter, president of the commission, quickly recognized the value of the forgotten narrative and agreed that a translation would be a valuable addition to the planned celebration. Mary Brindley, another commission member, approached me about doing the translation. After a quick perusal of the scans, which were all legible, I agreed to undertake the project. In addition to the translation itself, I was able to put together a short biography of Waltersdorf and to provide extensive endnotes to his narrative.

Carl Herman Waltersdorf was born in Germany in 1872 and died in Cuero, Texas, in 1937.[1] He lived an extraordinary, restless life marked by

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[1] "Services for C. H. Waltersdorf," *Cuero Record*, Jan. 13, 1937.

many abrupt twists and turns. In 1889, at the age of seventeen, he came to the United States with a brother to join his parents, who had emigrated to Texas twelve years previously. Upon arriving in Texas, his father had purchased a small farm near Runge, just across the DeWitt County line in neighboring Karnes County, where he set up a homestead in an area with a strong and growing German presence. The town of Runge, in fact, had coalesced around a mercantile store and post office established by business associates of Henry Runge (1816–73), a successful and farsighted Texas German businessman.[2]

When Waltersdorf arrived in Texas, not only was he reunited with his parents, whom he had not seen in twelve years, but he also met for the first time his new brothers and sisters, who had been born in Texas. One can only imagine the story behind this unusual arrangement. Once settled, the teenager soon found employment as a typesetter with the *Deutsche Rundschau*, a German language newspaper published in Cuero, where he learned the newspaper trade at an early age. At the age of twenty, he married the daughter of a German American family in Cuero by the name of Ziehahn; they were a family of some means, apparently, because they helped him establish his own German language newspaper, the *Lavaca County Nachrichten*, in neighboring Hallettsville in 1895.[3] An episode from the period suggests that he might have offended some readers on occasion:

> Editor Waltersdorf of the *Nachrichten* and Dr. Schiersman of Shiner had a little difficulty here at the post office last Saturday during which the editor knocked the doctor down. We have not been able to get fully into the merits of the affair, but what we have learned would go to show that Mr. Waltersdorf had considerable provocation for what he did. Mr. Waltersdorf went immediately before Mayor Eschenburg and paid his fine. Scrapping is rather an expensive luxury for newspaper men to be indulging in.[4]

In 1899, Waltersdorf penned his *History of DeWitt County*, which he advertised in his newspaper and sold as a supplement for twenty-five cents. According to the *Hallettsville Herald*, he also traveled around the county to give talks and promote his history.[5]

For reasons that are unclear, Waltersdorf apparently became disenchanted with the newspaper business after a scant five years. In May 1900, he sold the paper to his younger brother, Richard (Dick) Waltersdorf, who had worked for him as a typesetter and under whose stewardship the paper continued for many years thereafter.[6] Obviously restless and unsure

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[2] "Obituary of Mrs. Carl Waltersdorf," *Weekly New Era-Herald* (Hallettsville, Tex.), Mar. 17, 1931.

[3] *Hallettsville Herald*, Oct. 19, 1899.

[4] *Shiner (Texas) Gazette*, Nov. 29, 1899.

[5] *Hallettsville Herald*, Nov. 9, 1899.

[6] *Hallettsville New Era*, June 15, 1900.



Office of the *Lavaca County Nachrichten. Courtesy of the Friench Simpson Memorial Library, Hallettsville, Texas.*

of his next move, Waltersdorf moved with his family first to Cuero, where he briefly opened a saloon,[7] and soon thereafter to Shiner, where he contemplated starting another German language newspaper.[8] The following year he placed an ad in a Lockhart newspaper seeking a position as either a salesman or a bookkeeper.[9]

Waltersdorf underwent a religious conversion sometime during this time frame, perhaps occasioned by the death of an infant child. Prior to this point, we can infer from reading his *History of DeWitt County* that religion had little interest for him. Local histories almost invariably focus on religious life, the establishment of churches, the names and dates of the pastors, the sizes of the congregations, and so forth. But that wasn't the case for Waltersdorf. His history contains not one single mention of a church or any descriptions of religious life; this was an extraordinary omission, since these were important institutions in the county. We can also infer that he probably came to America with no solid religious affili-

[7] *Hallettsville Herald*, May 24, 1900.

[8] *Freie Presse für Texas* (San Antonio), June 19, 1900.

[9] *Lockhart Daily Post*, July 3, 1901.

ation, which made it easier for him to join the Methodist Church once he did convert. There were quite a few German Freethinkers[10] in Texas at the time, and when they or their children did get religion, so to speak, many opted for the Methodist Church rather than the traditional Lutheran or Catholic confessions to which most Germans belonged. In fact, so many Germans joined the Methodist Church that a separate but affiliated branch, the German Methodist Church, had organized before the Civil War so that services could be tailored to German congregations. Many Texas German Methodists retained their affiliation with the northern rather than the southern branch after the two split in the 1840s because of their opposition to slavery.

Not content to merely join the church, Waltersdorf attended the seminary at Southwestern College in Georgetown,[11] and by 1908, he received an appointment to the German Mission Conference.[12] A newspaper announcement from 1904 gives us some insight and perhaps a clue to Waltersdorf's conversion.[13] In December of that year, he officiated at the funeral of Reverend A. Engel, eighty-six years of age, the oldest preacher and missionary worker in the church. The obituary goes on to state that Reverend Engel had been associated with all the early pioneers of the German Methodist Church across the United States. Reverend Engel might well have been the one who turned Waltersdorf to religion and convinced him to join the German Methodist Church.

For the next ten years or so, Waltersdorf served as pastor in various Texas German communities such as Bartlett in Williamson County, at a small community near Llano, in New Braunfels, and finally in San Antonio. Toward the end of this period of his life, he served as editor of a Methodist newsletter called the *Mission Friend*. In 1910, he moved the newsletter to Cuero from New Braunfels, apparently taking the physical

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[10] In the wake of the failed revolution(s) in Germany in 1848, a new brand of German immigrant landed in North America. Unlike most of the previous waves of immigrants, who had emigrated mainly for economic reasons, these new immigrants were often overtly political and many had university educations. They had refused to accept the authority of both the state and the church, hence the appellation "freethinkers." A substantial percentage of these freethinkers came to Texas, where they often set up their own towns and communities that are often referred to as *Lateiner* communities, *Lateiner* referring to the fact that many were trained at universities where Latin had been a prerequisite for matriculation. The most prominent *Lateiner* communities in Texas were Millheim in Austin County, Sisterdale in Comal County, and Comfort in Kendall County, but there were others. Indeed, the cluster of farmsteads along Five-Mile Coleto Creek in DeWitt County, where Robert Justus Kleberg and two of his Von Roeder in-laws settled in 1848, can be considered a *Lateiner* community by virtue of the fact that all were university-trained men who emigrated from Germany to escape the all-pervasive authority (*Obrigkeit)* and lack of personal freedom.

[11] *Texas Methodist Centennial Yearbook (1934): The Story of Methodism During the Last One Hundred Years in Texas: Illustrated with Some Twenty-five Hundred Portraits of Persons and Places* (Elgin, Tex.: Rev. Olin W. Nail; 1934), 128; "Partial list of students and friends who visited for the Homecoming," *The Megaphone* (Georgetown, Tex.), Apr. 23, 1909.

[12] *Christian Advocate* (New York, N.Y.), Nov. 13, 1908.

[13] *Guadalupe Gazette* (Seguin, Tex.), Dec. 2, 1904.

press with him.[14] This venture, however, did not last long, and by 1916, for reasons that are unclear, he seemed to have completely abandoned his religious calling. From this point on, there is no mention of any ministerial activity, such as performing weddings or conducting funerals. Once again, he began to try his hand at different occupations: as a real estate agent, a fire insurance agent,[15] and even as a politician, as shown by his unsuccessful run for justice of the peace in 1924.[16] A more successful career blossomed in 1917, when he began importing seeds and flower bulbs.[17] In 1924, he and his wife set up their own plant nursey and orchard in Cuero to complement the import trade. This developed into a solid business, one which he pursued for the rest of his life, and which his wife Matilda continued for many years after his death in 1937 at the age of sixty-two.[18] He was survived by a sister and three bothers. He and his wife had no surviving children. They had lost two daughters in infancy. His obituary mentioned that he also served for many years as a correspondent for the *Neu Braunfelser Zeitung*, an important German language newspaper located in New Braunfels with a statewide readership. He had been active for many years in the Sons of Hermann, a German fraternal order, and had served as a state officer. Mathilda Waltersdorf passed away in 1969 at the extraordinarily old age of ninety-six.[19]

Waltersdorf's history described an area of some importance to German immigrants to Texas. The original, pre-Civil War German settlers in DeWitt County are strongly associated with the failures and disappointments of the two most ambitious schemes for promoting European (principally German) emigration to Texas in the nineteenth century. The Society for the Protection of German Emigrants in Texas, often referred to as the Adelsverein for short, attempted to populate the Fisher-Miller Land Grant a hundred miles north of San Antonio in the period 1844 to 1847. The French empresario, Henri Castro, settled Alsatians on his land grant thirty miles west of San Antonio during the same time frame. The Castro migrants, though technically of French nationality, usually identified as German since most spoke a German dialect as their mother tongue. DeWitt County straddled the watershed path inland from Indianola, where both groups disembarked from Europe on the way to their destinations further inland, while Yorktown lay at the midway point between the coast and both San Antonio and New Braunfels.

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[14] "Rev C. H. Waltersdorf will soon move the plant of the *Mission Friend* from New Braunfels to Cuero." *Cuero Daily Record*, Sept. 20, 1909.

[15] *Cuero Daily Record*, Jan. 31, 1916.

[16] "Results of race for justice of the peace," *Cuero Daily Record*, July 27, 1924.

[17] *San Antonio Express*, Nov. 8, 1917.

[18] *Cuero Record*, Jan. 13, 1937.

[19] *Cuero Record*, Oct. 20, 1969.

A perfect storm of misfortunes—the outbreak of war with Mexico, a worldwide pandemic of cholera, a lack of adequate financial resources, poor planning and leadership, etc.—plagued both endeavors threatening, in the case of the Adelsverein, a complete collapse and debacle of the first order. Consequently, many hundreds of German immigrants made it no further inland than DeWitt and surrounding counties. Here, in frustration and despair, they decided to put down roots, rely only on themselves, and forego all the pie-in-the sky promises made by the Adelsverein in Europe. Thus, the county began to acquire a sizable German component by the mid-1840s to complement the earlier Anglo American settlers and the Black slaves they had brought, who according to the 1850 census, amounted to roughly a third of the total population; the percentage of African Americans in the county was about the same thirty years later.[20] Here it is well to mention that there is another perplexing omission on the part of Waltersdorf to go along with the complete absence of any mention of religion, namely the lack of even the smallest acknowledgement of the substantial Black presence in the county and the role they played in its development. Whether through intention or simple obliviousness, Waltersdorf unfortunately ignored their presence.

After the Civil War, immigration from Germany resumed in a big way, stimulated now not by empresarios such as Henri Castro but by chain immigration,[21] private initiatives (such as that of Henry Runge & Co.), and the railroads, which sought to dispose of the millions of acres of bonus lands they had been given by the state as an incentive to lay track. As a result, DeWitt and surrounding counties—Karnes, Lavaca, Victoria, and Gonzales—became major destinations for German (and to a lesser extent Silesian and Czech) emigration in post–Civil War Texas. Hundreds made the move and augmented the already substantial population of Germans who had already put down roots in the area for two decades prior to the Civil War. This influx led to a continual and dramatic upward shift in the number of Germans in DeWitt County as a percentage of the White population from 1850 until 1890.[22] To put it into the simplest terms, for every ten Anglos in 1850 there were roughly two Germans.[23] By 1887, this had

[20] According to the Tenth United States Census (Ancestry.com), Black residents amounted to 2,938 out of 10,085 people, or 29 percent of the population.

[21] Chain immigration is the term applied where there is no organized structure to promote immigration; rather, it is a process that usually begins with a dominant personality but as family and friends write to friends and relatives back home, others often follow.

[22] By time of the 1887 Texas Agricultural Census, which broke down counties by ethnic makeup, DeWitt County had 11, 952 inhabitants. Of these, 5,254, or 44 percent, were "Americans" (meaning Anglos who originally had moved to Texas from the United States); 3,519, or 30 percent, were "Germans" (meaning those who associated themselves with German language and culture); 2,516, or 21.5 percent were Black; and, finally, all others (including Mexicans) 407, or 3.5 percent of the total.

[23] Seventh United States Census (Ancestry.com).

changed so dramatically that now for every ten Anglos there were about seven Germans. By 1900, the German element had become majority.[24]

The German element concentrated originally in the western part of the county in and around the town of Yorktown, which occupied the halfway point on the road between Indianola and New Braunfels, which followed the watershed between the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers. After the war, however, the German presence spread across the county with the founding of numerous small communities, such as Meyersville, Nordheim, Arneckeville, Hochheim, and Five-Mile Coleto Creek. Many Germans also relocated to Cuero, the founding of which coincided with the arrival of the railroad in 1872. The town quickly blossomed to be DeWitt's leading community and county seat. Here the German element played an active part in both the commercial and social life of the new town, which Waltersdorf highlights in his history and illustrates on the example of several leading personalities.

What better profession to really get to know a community down to the brass-tacks level than that of newspaper editor? Waltersdorf's many years in the profession acquainted him not only with important movers and shakers but also with the common people from all walks of life in the several counties that originally made up DeWitt's Colony: DeWitt, Victoria, Lavaca, Karnes, and Gonzales. It seems he knew everyone and their story. His historical account reflects this intimate knowledge, and that is one of the many charms of his narrative. In his descriptions of the various communities that make up DeWitt County, Waltersdorf invariably lists by name the families and individuals who were shopkeepers, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, saddle makers, etc.; in other words, the common people who went about the business of providing the goods and services necessary for a community to function and thrive. This was an invaluable service in retrospect because these are the people whom historians often neglect.

On a couple of occasions, Waltersdorf chooses to highlight some particular individual by offering vignettes from their personal lives to flavor his narrative. In this regard, the merchant Wilhelm Eckhardt in Yorktown comes to mind, but the prime example is that of *Tante* Sieder, the extraordinary energetic lady who built a thriving business feeding and housing the hundreds of freighters transporting goods to and from first Indianola and then Cuero once the railroad arrived. In describing a typical noon meal where a hundred or so teamsters gather at *Tante* Sieder's tables, Waltersdorf brings to life time and place in a delightfully immediate way.

For Waltersdorf, the story was not just about men and what they were

[24] Twelfth United States Census (Ancestry.com). Here I understand "Anglo" to mean those who originally had moved to Texas from the United States and generally carried British surnames, while I understand "German" to mean those who maintained familial connections to Germany and associated strongly with German language and culture even though they may have been born in Texas.

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Albertina "Tante" Sieder. *Courtesy of DeWitt County Historical Museum.*

doing. On several occasions, as with *Tante* Sieder, he takes pains to underscore the sacrifices women had to make, the hardships they were forced to endure, and the important roles they often played in the economic development of the area. This was an unusual sensibility for the period.

Unfortunately, these everyday folks are not what the area is most well-known for. For many people, DeWitt County evokes only one thing: the Sutton-Taylor Feud, the largest and most infamous of the ten or so feuds that wracked Texas with gun violence after the Civil War. Since Waltersdorf devotes considerable print to the bloody events and relates anecdotes about its principal character, John Wesley Hardin, a few broad remarks are in order about the feud to set the background.

It is generally accepted by scholars that the large feuds that spread across Texas after the Civil War were not discrete affairs, contained within themselves, but rather part and parcel of the widespread Reconstruction

violence that wracked the state for many years after the cessation of hostilities; they were varied and extreme manifestations of the general refusal on the part of many die-hard Confederates to recognize the defeat of the South and accept the emancipation of the slaves. But beyond this context, in their attempt to explain and understand, scholars have often disagreed among themselves as to the correct interpretation and understanding of these feuds with the internal debate sometimes becoming nasty. This is especially true of the Sutton-Taylor Feud.

On the one hand, several scholars (and Hollywood, in general) have cast the Taylors as victims—using "Taylors" as a collective term for the many families and scores of armed men loosely affiliated with the extended Taylor clan. By this interpretation, they were honorable ex-Confederates merely standing up for their rights against the organized campaign on the part of Reconstruction authorities to intimidate, to dispossess, and to disenfranchise all ex-Confederates. They relied on their guns only as an act of last resort against Reconstruction authorities, in general, and the hated State Police, in particular, which was often manned by ignorant ex-slaves determined to exact revenge on their former masters. The Sutton faction, in their eyes, fell into this camp since its eponymous head, William Sutton, as well as another important leader, Jack Helm, had both served in the State Police. The earliest written account of the feud published by Victor Rose in 1880[25] certainly promoted this view *in extremis*, but toned down somewhat; so too did later versions, such as C. L. Sonnichsen's account of the feud.[26]

On the other hand, the respected historian James Smallwood took the lead in challenging this interpretation of the feud. He pointed out in his book *The Feud that Wasn't: The Taylor Ring, Bill Sutton, John Wesley Hardin, and Violence in Texas* that very few of the Taylor clan, including its titular head, Pritgen Taylor, actually fought for the Confederacy.[27] They were too young, too old, or, if old enough, had managed to avoid service altogether. Using Reconstruction and its putative wrongs as a pretext, what they did engage in, according to Smallwood, was cattle and horse thievery on a massive and heretofore unprecedented scale. With an organized criminal network that stretched from the open prairies of South Texas all the way to the railhead markets in Kansas, gangs of robbers systematically preyed on their fellow southern Anglo neighbors (mainly), many of whom had fought for the Confederacy, by stealing their cattle and horses and shooting them down in cold blood if they stood in the way.

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[25] Victor Rose, *The Texas Vendetta: The Sutton Taylor Feud* (New York: J. J. Little & Co., 1880).

[26] C. L. Sonnichsen, *I'll Die before I'll Run: The Story of the Great Feuds of Texas* (New York: The Dev in-Adair Co., 1962).

[27] James M. Smallwood, *The Feud that Wasn't: The Taylor Ring, Bill Sutton, John Wesley Hardin, and Violence in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).



Treue der Union monument in Comfort, Texas. *Photo by author.*

Nearly all published accounts, however, whether of the one school or the other, fail to mention the sizable and growing German population in South Texas, with the greatest concentration in DeWitt County. This is an unfortunate oversight on several counts. To begin with, many Texas Germans had been avowed Unionists during the war, to the alarm of Confederate authorities. After the war not a few had become active in the Republican party, often rising to positions of influence and elective office, to the dismay of die-hard ex-Confederates. Thus, any discussion of Reconstruction violence in Texas in those areas with a strong German component cannot rightfully ignore this significant element of the story.

The most powerful symbol of German Unionist sentiment during the war is, of course, the monument in Comfort, Texas, *Treue der Union* (True to the Union), which memorializes the Germans who fell at the Battle of the Nueces, August 10, 1862; a battle where sixty (for the most part) Hill County Germans fought a larger Confederate force to a standstill. It is generally not recognized, however, that the so-called Mason County War (also called the "Hoo Doo" War), which took place more or less at the same time as the Sutton-Taylor Feud, was clearly a continuation of the vigilantism and extrajudicial violence that wracked the Hill Country

during the war years when at least forty (mainly) German settlers in addition to those who fell at the Battle of the Nueces met their deaths at the hands of the so-called *Haengebund* (hanging band), a roving band of mounted rangers, nearly all Anglos, charged with rooting out disloyalty by any means necessary.[28] After the war, organized rustlers began preying on German farmers and stockmen in Mason County who, in turn, organized and struck back. In this way the "war" took on the coloration of an ethnic strife between the Anglos and Germans in its latter stages fueled by lingering Civil War era bitterness.

Interestingly, Waltersdorf never mentions the Mason County War and rarely alludes to the larger context of post–Civil War violence in Texas and the South. He does, however, offer many anecdotes to highlight ethnic tensions between the Germans and the "rowdies," as he terms them, showing that palpable tensions did exist in the county. Luckily, these tensions never escalated into a full-blown ethnic conflict as happened in the Texas Hill Country. The Germans who had settled in South Texas came to see themselves, unlike the Hill Country Germans, as largely non-partisan bystanders to a kind of internecine conflict between different "American" factions or gangs, whom, as mentioned, the author invariably refers to as either "rowdies" or "cowboys." But throughout, Waltersdorf frames his narrative from the Texas German point of view, and, seen in this light, it is very instructive; indeed, this perspective is a welcome compliment to the many books and articles about the feud already in print that downplay or completely neglect this important contour to the violence that plagued the county for over a decade.

It should be remembered, however, that Waltersdorf did not arrive in Texas until 1889, more than a decade after the events he describes, so nearly everything he relates is anecdotal. However, he most certainly knew many people, including first and foremost his own parents, who had first-hand experience with the violence he describes. In general, Waltersdorf gets his version of events correct, but he is obviously not a trained historian, and here and there we encounter factual errors.

Only one book had been published about the feud prior to 1899[29] when Waltersdorf published his account, and it can be inferred from what he wrote that he was most likely unfamiliar with that account, as on several points he differs. It is not surprising, then, that he occasionally misspells names and does not have an insider's understanding as to who made up the various factions and what led them to attack one another, which appears to have mystified him. I have noted these mistakes, when encountered, and provided corrections in the endnotes for the reader. When nec-

[28] For a full description, see Nicholas Keefauver Roland, *Violence in the Hill Country: The Texas Frontier in the Civil War Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021).

[29] Rose, *Texas Vendetta.*

essary, I have also provided additional context in the endnotes to certain episodes for the benefit of the reader.

It becomes clear that the larger purpose of Waltersdorf's narrative is to congratulate the German element in DeWitt County and surrounding counties on their substantial contribution to the economic and social development of the county. He also subtly contrasts throughout the attitudes, skills, and energy that the German immigrants brought along with them to their new homes in Texas with that of their Anglo neighbors, and to this end the feud certainly provided a convenient foil. But he is never jingoistic or heavy-handed in this, and he is quick to recognize those Anglo leaders who also distinguished themselves in positive ways. His effusive praise of the Texas Ranger Jesse Hall offers a clear example of this.

Walterdorf's history appeared in 1899, which marked the end of a very prosperous two decades of development and growth for the counties encompassed by DeWitt's colony. In so may respects, in education, in social life, in transportation, in goods and services available, and in population growth, things were looking up and optimism fills the air. But in the book, Waltersdorf admonishes his fellow Germans to never forget the hard times—the pioneer days, the Civil War, the feuds, the hurricanes—and the sacrifices made by those who went before, both men and women, that enabled the present generation to live in a stable and prosperous society that is content with the present and enthusiastic for an even brighter future; indeed, Waltersdorf's whole narrative seems structured around the well-known German saying: "*Der erste hat den Tod, der zweite leidet Not, der dritte erst hat Brot*" (starvation to the first generation, hunger to the second, bread finally to the third).

A Word on the Translation

Waltersdorf probably had no more than a basic education in Germany. This gave him a grounding in the fundamentals of literacy, to be sure, but did not introduce him to Latin, Greek, or even the classics of German literature. His writing style is free from the tight grammatical and organizational rigor that would be expected from a product of a German *Gymnasium* (preparatory school).[30] For instance, he often refers to heads

[30] The German educational system, although it varies somewhat from state to state, contrasts markedly with the American system. The basic structure dates to the eighteenth century, when the Kingdom of Prussia introduced free and compulsory primary education for both boys and girls, consisting of an eight-year course of basic education offered in the *Volksschule*. This provided not only the basic skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) but also a strict education in ethics, duty, discipline, and obedience. Privileged children often continued their education thereafter in secondary schools, but the general population had little access to these opportunities during the nineteenth and early twentietth centuries. After completing the *Volksschule*, most children from rural and trade backgrounds would enter an apprenticeship in a guild. This basic system has endured with the important caveat that it is now much easier for children of working-class parents to pursue higher education. See "Education in Germany," *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Germany> [Accessed Dec. 19, 2022]; "Zunft heute und in der Geschichte," <https://www.zunft.de/Die-Geschichte-der-Zunft> [Accessed Dec. 19, 2022].

of households as "Papa," as in Papa Strieber or Papa Gohmert. This sort of informality would never be allowed in German publications of the period, especially in historical writing. His use of paragraphs is also seemingly completely arbitrary with no discernable principle guiding their placement.

His sentence structure is also simpler than was fashionable in German expository writing of the period. The German language has the ability to construct very long sentences with many relative clauses, the so-called *Bandwurmsatz* (tapeworm) sentence. This was a particularly fashionable (and annoying) tendency in the nineteenth century, with single sentences often filling a half page or more. Waltersdorf, thankfully, avoided the extremes of this tendency, and wrote for the most part in a straightforward and unencumbered style. His style is also free of allusions to classical or contemporary literature and is noticeably devoid of abstract, scholarly words, another indication that his formal schooling probably ended at age fourteen or fifteen. On the other hand, it is often spiced with homely sayings and aphorisms.

Waltersdorf's shortcomings, however, are also his strengths, for he is preaching to the choir, so to speak. He assumes that most of his readers have some familiarity, at least in broad outline, with the history of the county. His purpose is to reinforce this awareness with names, facts, and anecdotes, and to instill a justified pride in the accomplishments achieved, especially for the German element. His tenor of familiarity is quite charming and makes for pleasant reading, even more than a century later.

My translation aims to remain true to the intent and meaning of Waltersdorf's German but to make the English version come across as natural. In order to accomplish this, I took liberties with the original in places, choosing instead of literal, word-for-word renditions, more appropriate American words and phrases. I have also taken the liberty of restructuring his paragraphs according to best principles of modern usage in order to improve the flow and readability of his narrative.

Finally, the reader will notice that I have italicized words throughout. I have done this for two reasons: first, to highlight German words that I have kept in my translation, as, for instance, when I retain *Herr* for Mr., or *Tante*, for aunt. I have also italicized those American words that Waltersdorf inserts into his narrative. He does this quite often, which is interesting linguistically. It indicates that the author found the equivalent German words in certain contexts to be inadequate to the Texas experience so he simply substituted the American word. He even on occasion fuses English and German words to produce amusing hybrids. An example of this would be *Rowdietum*, which is a combination of the American English "rowdie" with the German suffix "-tum," which is akin to the English suffix "-ness," as in "rowdiness."

C. H. Waltersdorf's *History of DeWitt County* (1899)

Long before today's DeWitt County received its name, what we now call Dewitt County was part of a large land grant assigned to various individuals for the purpose of colonization under the *empresario* system established by the Mexican government in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Green DeWitt,[31] originally from Missouri in the United States of America, traveled to the capital of Mexico in 1823 in order to make an application for a colonization land grant. Stephen F. Austin, the Father of Texas, was also in the Mexico City at the time and had already been fortunate enough to obtain a land grant contract in 1823. Green DeWitt, however, was put off for over two years by the Mexican government until finally in 1825 he obtained a land grant for himself under the condition (2) that he settle 400 families on the land assigned to him.

Since Stephen F. Austin had located his grant such that the Lavaca River formed its southern boundary[32] and since the Mexican government had stipulated that Green DeWitt locate his colony to the southwest of Austin's, DeWitt's colony received in consequence the following boundaries: To the north the San Antonio-Nacogdoches road formed the boundary. At the time the Nacogdoches road was the main commercial route between Mexico and Louisiana and had been laid out by a young Frenchman, St. Denis.[33] This had taken place already in 1714, and the traces of the same were still present at the time the boundary was determined. Therefore, DeWitt's colony had this road for its far northern boundary, Austin's colony and the Lavaca River for its eastern boundary, De León's colony (present Victoria County) for its southern boundary and the Guadalupe and San Antonio rivers for its western boundary.

And from this we see that present DeWitt and Gonzales counties now

[31] Green DeWitt (1787–1835) was born in Kentucky but moved with his father to Missouri when it was still a possession of Spain. He received more than a rudimentary education, participated in the War of 1812, and returned to serve for a while as a sheriff. Inspired by Moses Austin's success in acquiring a land grant concession from Mexico in 1822, he resolved to travel to the Mexican capital and obtain an empresario grant for himself. As Waltersdorf writes, he was not successful at first, but eventually he obtained a grant from the state of Coahuila y Tejas rather than the central government. DeWitt's story did not end nearly as well as that of his fellow empresario and friend Stephen F. Austin. His wife and two children died of cholera soon after he moved to Texas, and he exhausted his own and his wife's fortunes in his colonization endeavor without ever achieving any meaningful return. Indeed, when he succumbed to cholera in the spring of 1835 on the eve of the Texas Revolution, he was essentially penniless. See Edward A. Lukes, "DeWitt, Green," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/dewitt-green> [Accessed Dec. 3, 2022].

[32] The Lavaca River actually formed the western boundary of Austin's grant, not the southern.

[33] San Antonio–Nacogdoches. This is the road that came to be known as the El Camino Real, or King's Highway. Present Texas State Highway 21 follows roughly the route of the old road. The author is correct in stating that St. Denis followed the trail but it had already been used by at least two other Spanish expeditions prior to his traversing it in 1714 and it had been in regular use for nearly a hundred years by 1825. "Old San Antonio Road," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/old-san-antonio-road>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Dec. 9, 2020].

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comprise the grant obtained by DeWitt from the Mexican government for the purpose of colonization.

After Green DeWitt had gotten all the necessary papers officially signed and sealed, he designated James Kerr[34] from Missouri, who at the time was a member of the Missouri Senate, to be his administrator and surveyor. Kerr then resigned his senate seat and moved to Texas.

James Kerr was accompanied by Deaf Smith,[35] (3) who settled at Gonzales in 1825 and later played an important role in the War of Independence from Mexico.

In order to demonstrate his gratitude to the Mexican government, Kerr named his settlement Gonzales in honor of Don Rafael Gonzales, at the time the governor of the state of Texas y Coahuila. Although the founding of the colony seemed to start off favorably, constant depredations by the Indians were so troublesome that Kerr found it necessary to abandon his settlement and retrench temporarily to the colony on the Colorado. Later, Kerr established the settlement on the Lavaca.

However, when DeWitt arrived in Texas in 1827 with his family and learned that help against the Indian threat had been promised, he decided to relocate the colony at Gonzales once again, which he did. One could conclude upon reviewing the topography of the area that, combined, the Austin and DeWitt grants formed the "pearl" of all the various grants issued. Everything that one could ask of Mother Nature was present: a sunny climate, adequate rainfall, and especially abundant water resources (rivers). As if bequeathed by God, a virgin and rich landscape opened up for a new wave of industrious settlers.

That nevertheless for years on end these settlers found themselves faced with daunting hardships and numerous dangers can be readily imagined by the reader. The Indians were not disposed to be friendly toward the settlers and could foresee that with time they would be evicted from the lands they had inhabited since time immemorial. It was a natural turn of events, therefore, that the same used all means at their disposal to make the settlers' lives as hard and difficult as possible.[36] Seated in the comfort

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[34] James Kerr (1790–1850) was a friend of Stephen F. Austin and was serving in the Missouri senate when he agreed to be the chief surveyor for Green DeWitt in his colonization plan. His alacrity at joining the venture is a testament to how appealing and exciting these contracts were at the time. With Erasmus (Deaf) Smith as a companion, Kerr did the original survey work, including selecting a site for the future capital of the grant that became Gonzales. Kerr himself, however, settled in the Austin colony and is listed as one of the "Old Three Hundred." He continued as a civic leader and legislator during both the republican and early statehood years. In 1856, Kerr County was named in his honor. Stephen L. Hardin, "Kerr, James," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/kerr-james>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Dec. 12, 2020].

[35] Erasmus (Deaf) Smith (1787–1837) is a storied figure in Texas history. Smith, already located in Texas and married to a Spanish woman from San Antonio, joined James Kerr and assisted in his survey work in 1825. Smith later played a major role in the Texas Revolution as scout, messenger, and soldier. Thomas W. Cutrer, "Smith, Erastus [Deaf]," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/smith-erastus-deaf>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Dec. 12, 2020].

and security of our homes today, we cannot admire enough the tenacity and energy of these early settlers.

What an enormous gamble it represented to pull up stakes and to resettle one's family in a region where a man could rely only upon his own manliness and God's grace; where, so to speak, the bridges to all civilization had been crossed and burned. But what has been said here about men applies equally to women! Truly, it required an enormous self-confidence to willingly leave civilization behind and to knowingly embrace a life-and-death struggle in the effort to carve out a new existence in the wilderness. Many a family doubtless succumbed to the deprivations and hardships accompanying the move, or to the attacks by the Indians, but these unfortunate possibilities had been consciously weighed and accepted beforehand in the final decision to relocate to the wilderness. The *empresarios* had offered such generous terms that many a man eagerly gave up home and hearth in the United States and embraced the risks attendant to the move to Texas. The offer made to the settlers consisted of the following: (5) Every man over twenty-one would receive 640 acres of land. If married, he would receive an additional 320 acres, and for every slave the new settlers brought along, an additional 80 acres of land could be gained. There was also a provision that if a man established a mill or something of this sort for the common use and benefit, he would receive bonus land as a reward. From this it is obvious that every settler had the possibility of acquiring a sizable tract of land that he could have only dreamed about at an earlier date. Finally, all taxes on the part of the colonists were to be waived for the first six years.

Unfortunately, the peace—such as it was due to the constant friction with the Indians—did not last very long. When Bustamento [Bustamante][37] took over the government in Mexico in 1830, it signaled the end of the relatively good times for the colonists since the Mexican government from this point on did everything in its power to make their lives difficult, so much so that the colonists found it necessary to eventually rise up in revolt against Mexico. The history of the State of Texas shows us that the young Texans were victorious over the Mexican army under Santa Anna and achieved independence from Mexico in 1836.

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[36] It is curious that Waltersdorf in his discussion of the Indian depredations does not mention the Great Comanche Raid and Battle of Plum Creek, which occurred in the summer of 1840. The raid, one of the most spectacular in the history of Texas, saw a large party of Comanche raiders under the storied war chief Buffalo Hump pass through the heart of DeWitt County on the way to lay siege to Victoria and to burn Linnville to the ground. See Donaly Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid: Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1987).

[37] Anastacio Bustamante was declared vice president of Mexico in January 1829 and was acting president when the Law of April 6, 1830, was passed. The law, which attempted to limit further immigration from the United States and to prohibit the introduction of more slaves, was an alarm bell to the colonists and one of the underlying causes of the revolution that broke out in 1835 and led to the independence of Texas from Mexico in 1836. C. A. Hutchinson, "Bustamante, Anastacio," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/bustamante-anastacio>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Dec. 12, 2020].

But since our goal is not to write the history of Texas but to keep DeWitt County as our central focus, it becomes necessary nonetheless to have a look back at the circumstances that preceded the orderly organization of the county. The actual organization of the county did not take place until Texas was admitted into the United States in 1846.[38] Thereafter, the Texas legislature authorized the establishment of DeWitt County and its boundaries were given as follows: To the north and east the boundary with Lavaca County. To the east and southeast Victoria County. To the west and southwest Karnes County, and to the west and northwest Gonzales County.

At the time of the organization of DeWitt County the chief occupation for the settlers was animal husbandry. The prairies teemed with cattle, horses, etc., and even the breeding of sheep was carried on with some success. Circumstances improved once Texas entered the Union, and most settlers looked forward to a bright future. The livestock that people raised and tended were either driven on the hoof through Indian Territory to northern markets or driven south to Indianola or Port Lavaca, where they were boarded on ships for markets across the Gulf of Mexico.[39]

During and even before the organization of DeWitt County, German emigrants began to filter into the county, and it wasn't long before their settlements began to spring from the earth. Yorktown and Meyersville, both of which lay on Coleto Creek, became the two most attractive destinations. Exactly how these two settlements (and others as well) succeeded in becoming what they are today (7) is worthy of further investigation.

When DeWitt County was organized, Clinton on the Guadalupe counted as the main settlement and was designated the county seat. The town retained this distinction until 1874–75 when Cuero—recognized today as a "pearl" of the southwest—was chosen by the citizens to be the new county seat. At this point we want to examine in sequence the various towns and settlement in the county and relate how they were settled and to give each settlement both the material and spiritual credit it is due.

Yorktown

Certainly, young and old alike can remember the festive celebration

[38] Actually, Texas was admitted into the Union in 1835, albeit in December of that year.

[39] The problem of a readily accessible market for livestock prior to the Civil War was a major impediment. Very few herds of cattle were driven north prior to the Civil War. The Indian threat was too great, there were no developed trails, and many agriculturalists in Missouri and other states dreaded the so-called "Texas Fever," which Texas cattle were said to carry. Because there were so many watersheds to cross, only a few hardy drovers attempted to drive cattle to the east toward New Orleans. Several entrepreneurs attempted to ship cattle by steamboat to New Orleans, but this was by and large not a very profitable undertaking since it was both expensive and risky. The most profitable pre-war market was, in fact, in hides and tallow. Cattle were slaughtered by the thousands along the coast simply for their hides and tallow, which were then shipped to New Orleans, while the remaining carcasses were then thrown into the gulf for the fish and turtles to eat. This all changed after the Civil War with the blazing of the Goodnight-Loving and Chisholm Trails. The latter, in fact, began in DeWitt County. Cuero now houses a wonderful museum about the Chisholm Trail to celebrate this fact.

that took place in 1898 when Yorktown recognized in high style the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the town. If ever Yorktown put its best foot forward for a celebration, it was certainly on this occasion, a day of honor marking the passing of fifty years since its birth, years that had also witnessed the passing of so many brave and upstanding settlers, both men and women, who truly should have earned the honor on behalf of Yorktown and from God himself to have been present for the celebration as well.

The younger generation has no idea what difficult and unhappy times their parents and grandparents were forced to endure since the founding of Yorktown, and may Providence itself protect and guard against the return of such wild and lawless circumstances (8) as existed in the 1860s and 1870s.

Among the first settlers who chose Yorktown as their future abode belong in the first instance Mr. Caesar Eckhardt, Franz Hoppe, the old family fathers Strieber, Riedel, Dürr, Judge Kleberg,[40] the family fathers Freye,

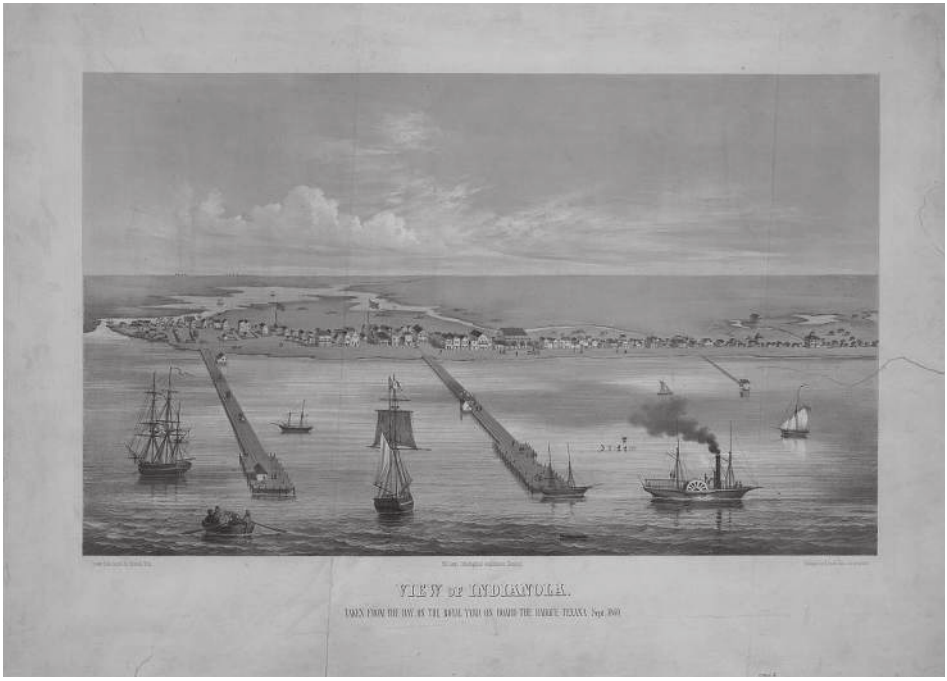
[40] Robert Justus Kleberg (1803–88), whom Waltersdorf refers to as "Judge" Kleberg, lived on his farm on Five-Mile Coleto Creek near present Meyersville south of Cuero. Several generations of the extended Kleberg-Von Roeder clan played determinative roles in the history and development of DeWitt County. In the spring of 1835, Robert Justus Kleberg emigrated with the large Von Roeder family to Texas, where they founded the community of Cat Spring in present Austin County, the second German community in Texas after nearby Industry. In the fall of 1835, he, along with his brother-in-law Ludwig von Roeder, joined Houston's army and participated in the Battle of San Jacinto, a fact he was always very proud of. President Houston appointed him to the first board of land commissioners and then in 1841 as chief justice of Austin County. In 1848, he and two Von Roeder brothers moved to DeWitt County where they established the first German colony on Five-Mile Coleto Creek, referenced above. He was appointed a county commissioner and subsequently chief justice of DeWitt County by Governor Bell and reelected in 1854, hence the title "Judge" Kleberg. Kleberg County in South Texas is named for him.

Robert Justus had three sons, all of whom achieved eminence. Robert Justus Kleberg II (1853–1932) is the most well-known on account of his marriage to the daughter of Richard King, the founder of the famous King Ranch. He subsequently took over the management of the enterprise, which he directed until his death in 1934. His son, Richard M. Kleberg (1887–1955), succeeded him and in addition to his ranch duties served as a seven-term congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives and was an early protégé of Lyndon Johnson.

Rudolph Kleberg (1847–1924), the eldest of the senior Kleberg's sons, is more important to DeWitt County. Confederate veteran, teacher, newspaperman (the *Cuero Star*), lawyer, businessman, county attorney, state legislator, federal prosecutor, and U.S. congressman, he was active on many fronts in DeWitt County for many years. He and Gustav Schleicher, another important Texas German, co-founded the town of Cuero in 1872 as the half-way point on the Guadalupe River between Indianola and San Antonio for the proposed Gulf, Western Texas & Pacific Railroad. Schleicher served as chief engineer for the project and Kleberg functioned as head lawyer. The town was officially incorporated April 23, 1873. See Rudolph Kleberg, "Sketch of the History of Cuero," for Mrs. George J. Schleicher, Austin, July 12, 1923. Vertical Files (Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin).

Both Rudolph and a sister married into the prominent Eckhardt family of Yorktown, thus cementing a relationship with this important family, which for many years owned the important mercantile business in Yorktown discussed at length in the narrative.

Rudolph also connected to the Sutton-Taylor Feud in important ways. In his autobiographic sketch he writes, "I suffered the usual trials of an editor of a country newspaper [i.e., *Cuero Star*] but was in constant danger on account of the exiting lawlessness, which I denounced in the severest terms." Rudolph Kleberg, "Autobiography," Rudolph Kleberg Papers, Vertical Files (Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin). Rudolph also served as a lieutenant in the Cuero "Home Protection Club" to safeguard the town from the lawlessness attendant to the feud. In this capacity, he participated in two shooting affrays that involved both the Sutton and Taylor factions.



Indianola, Texas, in 1860 as drawn by Helmuth Holtz. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93515580/> [Accessed Dec. 19, 2022].

Heisig, Weye, Dr. Cormick, Louis Lenz, and others. One by one, they all came to set roots and establish hearth and home in Yorktown, and the present solidity of the community is a testament to how well they succeeded. But one should not believe that these first settlers had rose beds to sleep in. Not at all! It took a lot of hard work, as one might expect, for the civilizing impulse to transform the raw circumstances of the region, and truly the few early settlers were not to be envied in this regard.[41]

[41] It is interesting and perplexing that Waltersdorf completely ignores the role of the Society for the Protection of German Emigrants in Texas, the so-called Adelsverein, in his overview of the German element in DeWitt County and for the existence of Yorktown. This Adelsverein bought into the Fisher-Miller Land Grant contract with the Republic of Texas in 1844 and over the next several years transported and settled nearly 8,000 German emigrants in Texas. The bulk of these immigrants landed at Indianola, which, in fact, was founded by the Adelsverein and went by the name of Karlshafen at the time. And as Waltersdorf stresses, the route north up the Guadalupe watershed led right past present Yorktown, Gonzales, Seguin, and then on to New Braunfels, which was founded by the Adelsverein on Easter in 1845. The Adelsverein intended that all these immigrants should eventually settle in the Fisher-Miller grant per the terms of their contract, which lay a further 100 miles to the north, but because of the many disasters and calamities that befell the organization, the majority of the immigrants never reached this final destination, opting instead to put down roots along the way, leading to a string and swath of German settlements from the coast all the way to present Mason County, the so-called "German Belt" of Texas. The majority of the German settlers in DeWitt County fit this pattern, and Yorktown counts as the principal settlement

From Yorktown it was about eighty miles to San Antonio and about forty miles to Victoria and from there on to Port Lavaca and Indianola an equal distance. (9)

If one takes either Port Lavaca or Indianola as the starting point to either San Antonio or Mexico from the Gulf of Mexico, then one must credit the first settlers in Yorktown with great foresight in locating their settlement at a place that straddled a future highway of great commercial importance. We want to have a further look at actually how brilliant this foresight turned out to be. By the time Yorktown was settled, San Antonio had already grown to be a well-developed town. Because of the proximity to Mexico, the United States government felt compelled to station a large contingent of its military resources on the Texas border along the Rio Grande. San Antonio became the base and headquarters for the American troops as well as the supply depot in support of the thousands of soldiers along the border. However, as an inland city, San Antonio had to transport all the material necessary to supply the base by oxen from Port Lavaca or Indianola, the two ports on the Gulf of Mexico where the ships that brought everything by water could land and unload. And returning to the settlers at Yorktown, we find that they located their town almost exactly at the halfway point between these ports and San Antonio.

Now, since the transport of these wares was such an enormous undertaking and the money to be made by the freighters so attractive, it is no wonder that Yorktown quickly grew into a regional transportation hub. The location of Yorktown benefitted its inhabitants greatly. Three days journey up to San Antonio; three days back down to Yorktown. (10) Three days down to Port Lavaca or Indianola; three days back up to Yorktown. This schedule could be completed in two weeks, and in this way two complete round trips could be accomplished in a month on a regular basis. Yes, those were encouraging times, but also hard times! Money wasn't much of a problem back then. Everybody had a job to do and earned his keep. Those not engaged in freighting planted corn for the draft animals. Blacksmiths, wheelwrights, cabinet makers, businessmen; indeed, everyone with the exception of the doctor had his hands full and kept busy, and the dollars passed quickly and easily from one hand to the next.

These circumstances continued for many years until the Southern States seceded from the Union. As can be historically documented, Texas contributed approximately 90,000 men to the Confederate Army, and Yorktown was not spared by this levy. All the young men had to march off to war. Yorktown even organized a full company of cavalry from its own. The old family father (now deceased) Caesar Eckhardt served as commander of the unit which was organized as a company of lancers.[42] Fritz

south of New Braunfels that owes its existence and demographics in the first instance to the failed efforts of the Adelsverein.

[42] Caesar Eckhardt, then sixty years old, organized a mounted home guard. Gary Keith in his book on

Bauer, then a saddle maker in Yorktown, had to work day and night to furnish the scabbards for the lances and to fasten the same onto the stirrups of the saddles in order to render the lances useable. A few of the young men, such as Adolph Strieber, who was absent at the time, found themselves compelled to serve in the Northern Army. This gentleman returned after the war as an officer of a unit of Northern volunteers.[43]

Lady luck smiled on Yorktown because the son of Papa Freye was the only one to die while in captivity.

When one considers that (11) nearly all the young men marched off to war, then it is easy to imagine that most business activity ground to a halt for the duration since only the old and infirm remained behind. But these, too, were often requisitioned to do service as freighters along with their wagons and carts by the military authorities.[44] To do one's part was the watchword. The men were off to war, but the brave women never lost faith in the effort as well.

Frau Eckhardt started a small shop that people say carried a little of everything. Truly in consideration of the uncertain times, it required an exceptional self-confidence on the part of a woman to venture forth and open a business on her own. *Frau* Eckhardt took the risk, and it succeeded; indeed, it succeeded to such a degree that her modest undertaking became the basis of Eckhardt & Sons, today a giant business that rests en-

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Congressman Bob Eckhardt, the great-grandson of Caesar, gives a humorous account of the guard. They dressed themselves up in old German uniforms and did drills with ceremonial Masonic swords in lieu of genuine swords. The women, according to Keith, thought it silly and preposterous. See Gary Keith, *Eckhardt: There Once was a Congressman from Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 14.

[43] Reading between the lines, it is fairly obvious that Strieber was not compelled to serve in the Union army, but rather chose to do so voluntarily, as did scores of his fellow Texas Germans. The turn of the twentieth century saw a growing nostalgia for the Old South and the "Lost Cause," a nostalgia and sympathy illustrated by the wildly popular success of Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansmen* (1905), which romanticized the Ku Klux Klan, and perpetuated the myth that southern Whites were the real victims of the war. Waltersdorf, of course, reflected the temper of the times, and, consequently, downplays the fact that widespread opposition to the Confederate cause existed in all the German communities of Texas. Although several high-profile leaders, such as Ferdinand Lindheimer in New Braunfels, argued persuasively that it was their duty to serve their new country even if in a bad cause, many Texas Germans passionately disagreed. Not a few chose to flee to Mexico rather than join the Confederate army, and many volunteered for service in the First Texas Cavalry, which fought for the Union and was commanded by Edmund Davis, who subsequently was appointed governor of Texas during Reconstruction. The most spectacular and tragic manifestation of Texas German support for the Union occurred at the so-called Battle of the Nueces, August 10, 1862, when a band of about sixty mostly Texas Germans attempting to make their way to Mexico to avoid conscription were ambushed by a larger Confederate force on a remote stretch of the Nueces River. A fierce battle ensued and many were either killed or subsequently executed. A large monument in Comfort, Texas, *Treue der Union*, commemorates the Germans who remained "true to the Union" fell at the battle.

[44] Actually, not a few Texas German profited handsomely during the war, especially those strategically positioned along the so-called cotton trail. Because of the Union blockade, the Confederate states west of the Mississippi could only dispose of their one cash crop, cotton, by shipping it west to neutral Mexico. The trail, which began at the western railhead of the Confederacy at Alleyton on the Colorado River across from Columbus and over which thousands of wagons and carts laden with cotton passed, snaked very close to Yorktown. Freighters and local growers of cotton were often paid in Mexican gold rather than the essentially worthless Confederate script, and so the wages and commissions they earned survived the war.

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tirely on her initiative. Later we want to return to this business for special attention.

Papa August Kraege, who ran a tannery in Yorktown during the war, was exempt from military service since he produced leather for the government. Similarly, the miller Hoff, who had a windmill, ground cornmeal so that those who remained behind had something to heat in their pans.

Scarcity ruled the kitchen. Coffee was so expensive that to enjoy it every day was out of the question. Some sort of substitute was an absolute necessity, but where to get it without stealing? What did people do? They took oats, corn, and acorns, and also beets, roasted them all in a skillet (12) and brewed a substitute. At first, most found the new coffee repulsive, but since humans are capable of adapting to almost anything with time, the substitute eventually gained acceptance.

The four years of the war proved a bitter pill for Yorktown. The little bit of money that had been saved in earlier years had to be expended during this time since there was next to no employment available. But the old saying applied: "God never abandons his Germans."[45] This saying proved itself brilliantly in Yorktown. The war was barely over and the returning citizens put all their energies into replacing and restoring what had been lost during the war.

Herr [Caesar] Eckhardt put much energy into his new store. Papa L. Lenz set up a dancehall next to his small tavern. Lechner & Zedler had their blacksmith shop and mill, Meier had a large house and tavern on the other side of Coleto Creek. Schoolhouses were there. C. B. Rau & Riedel owned a store and in a short while life in Yorktown began to resemble a beehive of activity.

But for all this frantic desire to find employment and replace that which had been lost, the citizens did not fail to remember their youth. Three schoolhouses were present; two in lower Yorktown and one in the upper part, and Yorktown saw to it that competent teachers were hired and that they received generous compensation. What Yorktown did shortly after the war, it continues to do today, namely the community provides for the education of its young people in a way that few German settlements in Texas can match. (13)

When one considers how very few people in Yorktown actually demonstrate musical ability, then it is all the more astonishing how many excellent orchestras Yorktown has provided to the world. This musical success has to be attributed first and foremost to Papa Moritz Riedel. There are few men who have devoted their time and energy with such enthusiasm over the years to initiate one generation after the other into the mysteries of music.

But we don't want to get ahead of ourselves. Let us continue with the

[45] The saying reads in German: *Gott velässt keinen Deutschen nicht.*



Caesar Eckhardt's store in Yorktown, Texas, c. 1905. *071-0569, General Photograph Collection, UTSA Special Collections.*

story of the development of Yorktown. As stated, after the war "life returned to the party," as the saying goes.[46] A Casino Club[47] was founded and counted over a hundred members in its membership. Then there was a very popular singing society (*Gesangverein*). Dr. H. Schulz and also Papa Heuchling served as its directors. And, oh, the singing that took place there with from three to six voices for each harmony.

Among them were Bertold Gohmert, Robert Eckhardt, Rudolph Gohmert, Robert Gohmert, Julius Neuser, Papa Lenz, Dr. Schulz, Papa Heuchling, Rau, Riedel, Trenck, and Rudolph Kleberg, all powerful singers. And after the singing was over, how congenially they "rubbed the salamander"[48] before returning home to wives and children. Papa Lenz, who served as Casino host, also erected a stage for a theater in his hall, where theatric productions were regularly staged. And we shouldn't assume that these productions were amateurish. Not by a long shot! There were not a few good upstanding and influential men in the community at the time (14) who had attended the theater in Germany, and who refused to be satisfied with anything second-rate. Yorktown was a lively community then:

[46] The author uses the German expression, *Leben in die Bude bringen* (bring life into the cabin) here, a saying for which there is no exact American equivalent.

[47] Casino clubs were not gambling clubs but rather German cultural clubs dedicated to literature, theater, and music. They were established in all the principal German communities across the state, small and large, after the Civil War, the most extravagant of which, still in existence today, was located in San Antonio.

its businesses prospered and everybody had a job because freighting continued to be a profitable endeavor. At the time, there were still no wagons manufactured in the North. Everything had to be manufactured by hand in local shops. The wagons were all built locally and constructed to transport cargos of 5,000 lbs. and pulled by a team of eight mules.

All sorts of enjoyable diversions characterized the daily life of Yorktown then: either balls, or theater performances at the Casino Hall of L. Lenz, or dances given by the old trumpet player Meier on the other side of Coleto Creek. On Sundays, he blared away solo and many a party did not end until the following afternoon. And yes, some of the old folks are still alive to remember! And what wonderful memories they have to share!

But however congenially the Germans sought to shape their community life at the time, a bitter pill remained that in the final analysis could only be removed by force.

The pleasurable activities that the Germans organized with their balls, etc., were, it seems, a thorn in the side for a certain segment of Americans.[49] These people believed they had the right to crash the dances inappropriately attired—coatless, leather leggings, boots and spurs—and grab the nearest German girl and twirl her around the dance floor unashamedly, but they were sorely mistaken in this. The Germans were quick to show them the door, and with few exceptions, they found themselves unceremoniously ejected from the festivities. This, of course, created bad blood with the result that the Americans gathered outside and discharged their pistols into the hall.

The next time around, however, the Germans were prepared to meet this outrage. Several brought their shotguns along and positioned themselves strategically behind the windows in the second story of the building, and when the *rowdies* made their appearance and begin shooting, they were greeted by such a hail of lead that from this point on the Germans were no longer disturbed.

During this space of time, however, certain events took place that not only gave Yorktown a bad name, but all of DeWitt County, as well, although the German element had absolutely nothing to do with the entire affair.

DeWitt County was almost exclusively a stock raising[50] county at the

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[48] To "rub the salamander" is a German student expression for everybody getting soused together. It derives from the fact that any fiery alcoholic drink is termed a "salamander" in German, which goes back to the folk belief that salamanders could live in fire.

[49] By this point, of course, nearly all the citizens of Yorktown were American citizens and hence Americans. Waltersdorf uses "Americans" here, and elsewhere, to contrast citizens of German descent from those of Anglo descent.

[50] Interestingly, the author uses the American term "stock raising" in his text and puts the German equivalent, *Viehzucht,* in parenthesis. It is fascinating to speculate, but the reason was probably that there was really no equivalent in Germany to the cattle business as it was practiced in Texas at the time, and so the German term lacked those immediate associations that the American term did evoke. This linguistic phenomenon actually led Texas Germans to adopt many Anglicisms for which the German equivalents were deficient and to incorporate them into the language they spoke among themselves.

time, and since the counties of Victoria, Gonzales, DeWitt, and Karnes all touched, Yorktown became the *de facto* center of this larger grouping. It had long become customary among the Americans not to distinguish between "thine and mine" in respect to cattle and simply to appropriate any stray animal they could catch. Given how widespread this habit was, it didn't take long for them to fall out among themselves, with some of these disputes devolving into ugly feuds that resulted in many murders.[51]

Sutton[52] was murdered at the Indianola wharf.[53] (16) Thereafter several factions coalesced: the Sutton faction, the Taylor faction, the Wesley Hardin faction, etc. Also, several Americans like old man Tomlinson [Tumlinson],[54] who lived close to Yorktown, got drawn into the fray. Since Yorktown stood in the geographical center of the dispute, the town was often plagued by the presence of the various gangs who often washed their dirty linen on the streets of the city, so to speak. Clinton, situated on the Guadalupe, served as county seat of DeWitt County and at the time the district court under Judge Cleburne [Claiborne][55] of Goliad was in session. The citizens of Yorktown had petitioned the court for protection since the Wesley Hardin and Taylor gangs had between them over a

[51] This is Waltersdorf's introduction into the storied Sutton-Taylor Feud, the largest and most infamous of the ten or so feuds that wracked Texas with gun violence after the Civil War.

[52] William E. Sutton, originally from Fayette County, was serving as a deputy sheriff in DeWitt County when the feud began in 1870. He later served in the State Police, which became a lightning rod for disaffected ex-Confederates because it had been formed by the Reconstruction governor Edmund Davis and often included black police officers. His aggressive approach to law enforcement led to several extrajudicial deaths of members of the large and extended Taylor clan. Their desire for revenge launched the feud, which continued as tit-for-tat killing for many years. Sutton and a companion were assassinated March 11, 1874, while they waited on a steamboat platform in Indianola, Texas. See Charles Leland Sonnichsen, *I'll Die Before I Run: The Story of the Great feuds of Texas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, First Edition, 1951), 52–55.

[53] It is beyond the purview of this translation to offer a complete account of the feud, but in several subsequent notes I have added context and, if needed, factual corrections, to the specific incidents the author highlights. Suffice it to say, much information is available for those readers interested in a wider exploration of the Sutton-Taylor Feud in the form of printed books and articles and also in online resources. An article in the *Handbook of Texas* online offers a good starting point for further exploration. See: C. L. Sonnichsen, "Sutton-Taylor Feud," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/sutton-taylor-feud>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Sept. 23, 2022].

[54] Joseph Tumlinson (1811–74) was a remarkable character. Tumlinson's father, John Jackson Tumlinson, was one of Stephen F. Austin's original Old Three Hundred colonists. Chosen *alcalde* of the Colorado District at present Columbus, he was killed by Indians in 1823. Young Joseph, only twelve years old, joined the party of rangers that sought to punish the malefactors who killed his father; this was an early baptism into the violence that plagued the Texas frontier. Later he participated in the War of Independence and was a veteran of the Battle of San Jacinto. After the defeat of Santa Anna, he obtained a headright in DeWitt County, where he made his home as a farmer-rancher-sometimes lawman for the rest of his life. He participated in several Indian fights during this time. After the Civil War, as an on again-off again lawman, he became a real thorn in the side of the Taylor faction, whom he considered nothing but a lawless gang of cow thieves and murderers who used putative Reconstruction injustices as a pretext for their criminality. The Taylor faction made many attempts on his life, but he always eluded their ambushes and attempted assassinations. He passed away peacefully at his ranch on November 23, 1874, one of the very few associated with the feud who died a natural death. Samuel H. Tumlinson, "Tumlinson, Joseph," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/tumlinson-joseph>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Sept. 23, 2022].

[55] Waltersdorf is referring to Judge D. D. Claiborne. He spells his name in various ways in the text. Henceforth the correct spelling will be used.

hundred men in Yorktown poised to fight one another.[56] What happened then? The sheriff of DeWitt County was authorized to raise a posse of at least a hundred men in order to ride to Yorktown and place the gang members in custody.

The sheriff did as instructed and organized a *posse comitatus*, some mounted and some on foot, some armed and others unarmed, and headed for Yorktown. But the sheriff and his men began to have second thoughts, and the gang itself began to have second thoughts, and when the sheriff arrived in Yorktown with less than half of his original posse (the majority had dropped off along the way and hidden themselves in the bushes out of fear for their safety), it was discovered that the Hardin and Taylor factions had negotiated a compromise whereby they agreed to lay down their weapons, a least for the time being. So, instead of the sheriff taking the gang members into custody, they turned the tables, so to speak, (17) placing the sheriff and his men in their middle after which the whole assemblage then rode for Clinton where they intended to have their agreement formally drawn up and attested. No sooner said than done! They arrived in Clinton to find district court under Judge Cleburne was still in session. The gang members dismounted and—still all armed to the teeth—walked into the courtroom and demanded the poor old judge interrupt the proceedings at hand and immediately take up their business. Truly, it was an extraordinary situation! To think that the highest court in the area could have found itself in such a predicament should cause any skeptic to concede that the German element in DeWitt County really did find itself in a precarious situation.

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[56] The incident actually occurred in May 1873, a year before William Sutton's death. John Wesley Hardin had emerged as the deadliest gunfighter on the Taylor side by this point, not the head of a separate and opposing faction, as Waltersdorf suggests. He had collected a large gang, perhaps seventy or more men, and laid siege to the nearby ranch house of Joseph "Joe" Tumlinson, a former deputy of Jack Helm and one of the principal allies of the Sutton faction. Tumlinson, a wily old Indian fighter, had holed up with a smaller group of men in his ranch house that he had turned into a fortress. They came under siege by Hardin and his men, but the confrontation had turned into a stalemate. The posse that came to arrest the gang members was, in fact, led by Deputy Sheriff D. J. Blair. In his memoirs, Hardin claimed that Blair came to reinforce the outnumbered Tumlinson, but changed his tune when he saw how many men Hardin had with him. It was "good citizens" from the town, according to Hardin, who negotiated the truce. See John Wesley Hardin, *The Life of John Wesley Hardin* (Seguin, Tex.: Smith and Moore, 1896), 84, 85.

On the ride back to Clinton, Blair placed the Hardin-Taylor men in front, while the law officers took up the center, and the Tumlinson men formed the rear of the procession. The sheriff with a larger posse joined the strange procession along the way. Once in Clinton, the two parties were separated at different ends of town where, by Hardin's account, the county clerk not the district judge, drew up the "peace document" and forty-one men signed it, including Hardin and Tumlinson. The whole affair, however, was an extraordinary and improbable turn of events, and in this respect, Waltersdorf certainly gets it right. See also Smallwood, *The Feud that Wasn't*, 132–133.

[57] Wesley Hardin (1853–95), usually John Wesley Hardin, is one of the most celebrated (and controversial) gunfighters in American history. He was certainly the deadliest. By the time he turned twenty-one, he had killed at least twenty-seven men, probably many more. Yet, he has sometimes been described as a thoughtful and courteous "gentleman," a description completely at odds with the fact that he was a cold-blooded and remorseless killer. That he behaved respectfully toward the Germans in DeWitt County, and others as well, who were not deemed a threat, seems to corroborate his Jekyll and Hyde nature.



John Wesley Hardin. *Wikimedia Commons.*

What did the old judge intend to do, or better yet, what could he possibly do under the circumstances? Since he valued his hide, he was forced to accede to their demands. Wesley Hardin[57] spoke for his faction while Taylor presented the other side's case. When one considers that at this time the government already had put a high price on Wesley Hardin's head, it was an astonishing turn of events that he was even allowed to speak and was not arrested on the spot.[58]

If, however, we view Wesley Hardin from a favorable side, then we have to concede that he was in a life and death fight with his own kind, with other American *cowboys*.[59] Hardin came to Yorktown often and although he was universally recognized as a killer, it is still my firm belief that not a single German in DeWitt County alive today would claim that Hardin ever molested him. On the contrary, when he came to Yorktown, he conducted himself as an upstanding citizen, paid for what he bought without complaint, and treated everybody with courtesy. Even in the saloons he behaved himself properly, raising a glass of beer with others, and always in a spirit of congeniality.

The following occurrence can serve to illustrate how far Wesley's notoriety had spread. A young drummer on his maiden tour of the Southwest arrived in Yorktown in his hack laden with his wares and took a room with Papa Lenz. Schreiber happened to be present on the very next morning in the Lenz barroom when, as it happened, Hardin also stopped in. As usual, Hardin, Lenz, and Schreiber enjoyed a glass of beer together. Papa Lenz had just poured the drinks when the young drummer stepped into the barroom. "Polite"[60] as always, Hardin invited the young salesman to join them over a glass of beer, an offer the young man gladly accepted. Papa Lenz, courteous as usual, made introductions all around. We already had our glasses in hand when Papa Lenz said to the young drummer, "Mr. Wesley Hardin." (19)

Now, as the young man heard the name Wesley Hardin, his glass dropped from his hand and he bolted for the door. But Wesley Hardin ordered him to return to the table, and although frightened to death and shaking, the young man reluctantly complied. Papa Lenz had to pour him another drink and the drummer, for better or worse, felt compelled to quickly empty his glass whereupon he quickly excused himself and departed. The man could not be persuaded to even unpack his samples,[61] and instead left Yorktown as soon as possible.

[58] Just a few days before the "truce" was signed, on May 17, 1873, Hardin killed a DeWitt County deputy sheriff, J. B. Morgan, in a gunfight in Cuero, and played a part in the death later that same day of Morgan's superior, DeWitt County Sheriff Helm.

[59] Cowboys: throughout the narrative Waltersdorf uses the English word as a pejorative term for the lawless American element in DeWitt County.

[60] Waltersdorf uses the English word "polite" and places it in parentheses.

[61] Traveling salesmen or "drummers" of the period often carried miniature replicas, i.e., "exemplars," of the manufactured goods they were representing.

[128.62.216.60] Project MUSE (2026-11-02 17:12 GMT) University of Texas at Austin (+1 other institution account)

This can serve to offer proof that the devil did not appear quite as black as he was often painted. However, as far as the Taylor gang goes, not one among them could be compared to Wesley Hardin in this respect. This collection of men, and especially Jim Taylor, were always willing and eager to conduct themselves in the most disreputable and low-down manner at the drop of a hat. There are still plenty of people in DeWitt County who can sing a song about that! Jim Taylor even went so far on occasion as to compel people whom he randomly met on the public roads to perform a private dance for his own amusement, which he enlivened and encouraged with his revolver. The murderous gunplay among the Americans, which is to say among the *cowboys*, was simply part of daily life then.

Here, another example: The author of this [history] was engaged one day as an official translator in Helena in Karnes County.[62] It was around five o'clock when he was released from his duties from the court. As he reported, "I saddled my horse and was in the act of returning to Dewitt County when someone called my name. When I looked around it was old Captain Tourlinson[63] [Tumlinson] and he asked me if I were headed for Yorktown. When I answered in the affirmative he bade me to wait, and said that they should all return together. I was surprised to see in addition to old man Tumlinson,[64] his sons John, Bill, and Wells, Jack Friar, and approximately half a dozen more men standing next to their horses. I had not noticed these people at all during the course of the day's business, and although I had nothing in common with these men, I had no choice but to accompany them on the road back to Yorktown.[65]

In the beginning everything went well with much lively conversation, but I noticed that two young men, whom I took to be brothers and who had been in the courtroom during the day, rode about 150 yards ahead of the group. As long as there was still daylight everything went well and I had no earthly inkling that something bad might happen.

We continued to ride along but the darker it became the quieter my companions became. We came to a spot about two or three hundred yards

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[62] Helena, today a ghost town, was for many years the principal town and county seat of Karnes County, which adjoins DeWitt County to the west. When the railroad by-passed the town, most businesses packed up and left and in 1894 the county seat was relocated to Karnes City. Because of its lawlessness, Helena was once known as the "toughest town on earth." See "Helena, Texas," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helena%2C_Texas>, *Wikipedia* [Accessed Feb. 24, 2021].

[63] Tourlinson: My guess is this name is a typo. It should probably read Tumlinson, as becomes clearer in the next sentence.

[64] Joe Tumlinson: see note 54 above.

[65] This event references a shooting that occurred May 15, 1873. On that date, James Cox and Jake Christman had ridden ahead of a larger mounted party headed by Joe Tumlinson traveling by night from Helena in Karnes County to Tumlinson's ranch in DeWitt County not far from Yorktown. They were ambushed by a much larger group at the Salt Creek crossing headed by Jim and Scrap Taylor. Upon hearing the shooting, Tumlinson, by one account, had a premonition of the ambush and held back. When they heard the shooting, his men scattered. John Wesley Hardin was rumored to be among the ambushers, a fact he neither confirmed nor denied. Sonnichsen, *I'll Die before I Run*, 70, 71; Smallwood, *The Feud that Wasn't*, 170, 171.

before the big bend on Salt Creek and the two men who had taken the lead were no longer visible. Suddenly the dreadful sound of gunfire broke the silence, and before I could come to my senses, my companions had vanished, and I found myself alone on the road. The gunfire had spooked all of the horses, and it took a couple of minutes before I could settle my own Bill down. I beat a hasty retreat and left the road for the open prairie over which I wandered around aimlessly until daybreak and only got back to my house at nine o'clock the next morning. About eleven that same morning, the bodies of the two young men who had ridden ahead of us were brought in and taken uptown, (21) where they were turned over to Papa Lenz, who buried them that afternoon. Both had been so thoroughly shot up they resembled sieves.

I wouldn't have mentioned all these sad circumstances except for the fact that those who came to Yorktown in subsequent years and found a peaceful and well-ordered town have little inkling of what it was once like. Their eyes need to be opened to the fact that the Yorktown of today has little resemblance to the Yorktown of yesterday. But with time these sad circumstances faded from memory and Yorktown could rejoice in its progress. And just as Yorktown looked forward to a promising future so too did the little community of Meyersville, albeit on a smaller scale.

The first to settle at the spot that became Meyersville included the families of Judge Kleberg, Grodhaus, Hausmann, Schiewitz, Hartz, Scholle, Holzapfel, Fahre, Arnecke, and the family Schütze; this last-mentioned family, since the sons were all grown, made the move after the war. In consequence, we find the descendants of the above-named families still in Meyersville today. *Herr* Julius Schütze,[66] a son of the old gentleman and previous inhabitant of Meyersville, today serves as national president of the German Order of Hermann's Sons,[67] the head man of this thriving fraternal order.

Because of their proximity, (22) Meyersville and Yorktown could always

[66] Julius Schütze (1835–1904) is an important figure in Texas German history. He was of that class of educated Germans, often referred to as *Lateiner*, who contributed much to the cultural life of Texas. He arrived at Indianola, Texas, with his family in November 1852. His brothers Louis and Adolf had preceded him to Texas. His brother Louis was lynched by Confederate partisans for his Unionist sentiments during the Civil War. Julius settled first in Yorktown and hauled freight between Indianola and other points. He also lived in Meyersville, where he founded the Texas Sängerbund, a German singing society, and in 1853 he participated in the first state *Saengerfest*, held in New Braunfels. In 1854, he moved to San Antonio. In 1858, he moved to Austin, where he taught at the German School and tuned pianos. He was a member of the *Sängerrunde* that founded (and still owns) Scholz Garten, an Austin institution that is still in existence. He also founded and published one of the most important Texas German newspapers, *Vorwärts* (Forward), which was published continually for more than twenty years.

[67] The Order of the Sons of Hermann is a mutual aid society for German immigrants that was formed in New York City on July 20, 1840, and remains active to the present. The first lodge in Texas was organized in San Antonio in 1871. The growing popularity of the fraternal order saw the rapid establishment of more than a hundred lodges across the German communities of Texas. Open to members of any heritage today, the order provides low-cost insurance and mutual aid and has historically promoted the preservation of German language and traditions.

be regarded as two parts of one whole. If Meyersville did not progress quite as fast as Yorktown, it was due rather to location than to lack of energy on the part of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, despite all the obstacles it faced, the settlement has enjoyed continued prosperity and progress.

From the very beginning, Yorktown has had the advantage over Meyersville. It was settled earlier, and already by the war's end, many families had located in the vicinity with the exception of the direction of the San Antonio road. Consequently, the Borcherts, the Burrow brothers, the old father Zedler and the old Pastor Wagenschein had settled on Smith Creek. In the direction of the Callahan settlement, one found the Sasse family, Papa Henig, Papa Duer, Holzhausen, Machest, and between Yorktown and Meyersville lived the families Gerhardt, Hartmann, Ferd, Gohlke, and Dr. Brassell.

Even Yorktown, divided into two parts known as the upper and lower towns, despite the fact that it was only one town, had businesses in both parts. Lower Yorktown contained the businesses already mentioned. In upper Yorktown, Papa Guggenheim had his store and Papa Herfig had a bar and hall. Papa Dahlmann had a store and Dr. Cornick had an apothecary. In addition, Papa Metz had a saddlery, and all these establishments formed a harmonious unit.

Only in respect to the post office did disagreement exist. The largest part of the population and the most businesses were to be found in the lower part of Yorktown, and these were not content until the post office was also relocated to the lower part of town. This accomplished, *Herr* Berthold Gohmert was installed as the first postmaster and Yorktown was satisfied.

As might be expected in a town like Yorktown, one found in addition to the usual craftsmen skilled tinsmiths like Rudolph Gohmert and Adolph Strieber, both of whom established successful businesses, and both of whom were regarded as pleasant and congenial individuals.

One other unusual business that existed for many years in Yorktown needs to be mentioned, namely the business of manufacturing saddle trees.[68] This business was carried on by *Herr* August Riedesel and *Herr* Goering. The saddle trees made in Yorktown enjoyed a good reputation and were known far and wide, and the aforementioned gentlemen received such a volume of orders that they could not fill them all.

Old Papa Grun supplied all the shoe customers their footwear while his brother took care of the slaughter house. *Herr* Zuch was the tailor and he was also a very sociable fellow.

Henze and Gip, likewise, had a thriving blacksmith shop and the Old Mama Gips served as midwife for the mothers when the time arrived.

[68] Saddle trees are the framework of the saddle; a substructure constructed out of wood and to which the tanned leather components are attached.

In this way, Yorktown headed slowly but surely toward a prosperous future, which was (24) not at all surprising since an exceptional unity among the inhabitants in respect to their common interest prevailed.

With time, however, the expectations of the citizens increased, the businesspeople made changes accordingly and expanded their facilities. Accordingly, Moritz Riedel built a new store and set it up as an apothecary.

At this time the railroad line from Indianola to Victoria[69] already existed, so that the wagon trade was now restricted to the Victoria–San Antonio circuit, but still, as earlier, also to and from Mexico. After the train started running to Victoria, it wasn't long before DeWitt County welcomed the founding of another town located on the bend of the Guadalupe. Cuero arose like a phoenix from the earth and the founding of Cuero, which we will take up in turn, occasioned a complete revolution in the entire DeWitt Grant in so far that it rendered Gonzales, which had already reached an honorable age, completely obsolete.

In spite of the ascension of Cuero, Yorktown continued to pursue its interests and goals in a slow but steady fashion. New businesses continued to be built; the wagon trade was no longer profitable so the inhabitants concentrated ever more on farming as their principal activity.

When the fence law was passed in 1873 [1879],[70] according to which every person who intended to raise livestock had to do so in an enclosed pasture, this forced the big landowners to survey out their various tracts into smaller parcels suitable for farms (25) and led to DeWitt County becoming an outstanding farming region in general.

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[69] The history of the railroad between Indianola and Victoria is a complicated story with many false starts and financial disappointments. Even before the Civil War, visionaries saw the potential for a railroad joining Matagorda Bay, either at Port Lavaca or Indianola, with the interior of the state and thereby dramatically reducing the cost of transportation for both freight and people. A line was completed to Victoria in 1861, but Confederate General Magruder, fearing an invasion from the Union forces, had the tracks taken up. During Reconstruction, Union forces took over the roadbed and re-laid tracks from Port Lavaca to Victoria to facilitate the resupply of Union forces stationed in San Antonio and elsewhere in the interior. Eventually, on August 4, 1870, New York investor and financier Charles Morgan gained control of the wharves at Indianola and all the various companies and entities involved, and merged them into a new company, Gulf, Western Texas & Pacific Railway Company, and in so doing secured a monopoly over all transportation from the Gulf Coast into the interior of Southwest Texas. His success, however, was short-lived because competition from railroads pushing from the east connected the port of Galveston, a superior port, to San Antonio by 1875. Consequently, Morgan's plans for extending his railroad further into the interior never came to fruition.

[70] The point Waltersdorf makes about fencing is correct but his dates are off. Two systems or conventions in respect to fencing existed in Texas well into the twentieth century, and every county could determine for itself which convention it preferred. By the "open range" convention, it was the responsibility of farmers to fence out free-roaming livestock that they did not own. By the other convention, which quickly became dominant in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it became the responsibility of stockowners to fence their cattle in, whether on private or public land. But these two practices did not become formalized into law until a decade or so later than the date given by Waltersdorf, after the introduction of barbed wire. Barbed wire made it possible to economically fence large areas and by the late 1870s and early 1880s it had become generally available. In April 1879, the Texas legislature passed the first fencing law, a law charging an annual rent for each section of public land enclosed, and a law of 1884 made it an offense for any person to fence state lands without executing a lease. See "Nesters," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/nesters>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed June 20, 2021].

Since those earlier not engaged in the freighting business planted cotton, the number of cotton gins increased to accommodate the increased demand, and today one can also see how Yorktown has emerged as a major farming center.

In general, businesses will adjust to the resources available in a given area. This is a well-known and correct pattern, and when we apply it to Yorktown where one house of business after other stands and close to a dozen taverns and dancehalls are to be found, then one has to confess that here in Yorktown things are good; verily, a place to settle down and build a house!

As I said at an earlier point, I wanted to come back to the business of *Herr* Eckhardt & Sons [Caesar Eckhardt and sons Robert and Wilhelm]. This enormous enterprise was originally begun as an extremely modest endeavor by *Frau* Eckhardt during the war. After the war, *Herr* Eckhardt built what for the times would count as a very large store, but it did not take long before even this store was not equal to the demand, and the business had to expand into a larger two-story building. The Eckhardt family enjoyed a run of good fortune. Well-advised children like Robert Eckhardt took care of the books while Wilhelm Eckhardt, the soul of the business, labored tirelessly day and night, and tended to all aspects of the business. But here it wasn't the case as in so many other businesses where the anointed son just walks around and barks orders, heaven forbid!—that was (26) not Wilhelm Eckhardt, for him it was always hands-on and he took care of the most difficult and important tasks himself. Despite such personal attention to detail, he always found time to survey the big picture and to make sure that business as a whole ran smoothly.

But what sort of goods did the business have to offer? To begin with, groceries, then dry goods, clothing, boots, shoes, hardware, lumber, furniture, saddlery—in short, everything that could be found in a business.

Yes, Wilhelm Eckhardt carried it to such an extreme that once a customer asked for something that wasn't there, he could be sure that the next time he set foot in the store, it would be there. One could ask for everything from cross-cut saws to the finest surgical instruments, and it would be produced.

But the floor space was not adequate to the growth of the business, so in addition to the two-story building next to the old store, it became necessary to erect another structure, a warehouse next door. So, everything was filled to the brim with wares, and despite the fact that other businesses were there, the business retained (and still retains) the advantage over the competition. *Herr* Wilhelm Eckhardt, although now an old man, still runs the business. But the question remains: how was it possible to built such an enormous business in a town like Yorktown? The answer is simple: the competent leadership of Wilhelm Eckhardt, who stocked the store with foresight and inspiration, and who evinced a live-and-let-live attitude that

not only inspired (27) confidence in the people of the area, but also the unrestricted confidence of the wider business world.

Schreiber relates a nice tale of how Wilhelm Eckhardt once dealt with a drummer. Wilhelm checked in all incoming wares personally, and on this day, he was busy putting together ovens that had just arrived. Everybody knows that such work is very dirty and neither face nor your hands are spared. As it transpired, a drummer was in Yorktown for the first time and hoped to sell his wares to Eckhardt. He found Robert Eckhardt in the office busy with the books, and when the drummer offered his wares to him, he replied, "My brother is outside," and took no further notice of the drummer. He then went over to the warehouse where he saw several people working and waited patiently for Wilhelm Eckhardt to appear. But he never appeared. In the meantime, the drummer grew impatient and just at that moment Wilhelm came out of the warehouse, looking every bit like a hired hand, and headed for the store. The drummer queried Wilhelm in the following manner: "Say, my man, I will give you four bits if you tell me where I might find Mr. Wilhelm Eckhardt."

Wilhelm calmly accepted the four bits[71] and then replied, that would be him. Taken aback, the drummer refused at first to believe it, but soon discovered that Wilhelm wanted none of his wares, but was gracious enough to return the four bits. The Eckhardt store (28) only did business with certain wholesalers and it was very difficult for an individual drummer to place any orders with the store. This maxim was another reason that has made the business the successful enterprise it is today. May the next generation walk in the steps of Wilhelm and it will be to their honor if they do so.

Clinton

As mentioned earlier, Clinton was designated the county seat and district court when DeWitt County was first organized. Accordingly, it was not surprising that many businesses, typical for such a location, concentrated there. Clinton was well-situated. It lay close to the Guadalupe and had a ferry with which to convey wayfarers and wagons. Similar to Yorktown, the German element predominated in Clinton. The following gentlemen were the early settlers in Clinton and considered themselves fortunate in respect to the circumstances that then prevailed. *Herr* Nagel Sr. had his tinsmith shop and iron wares business there. William Hausman had a dry goods and grocery store. Julius Gohmert had his hotel. Old Henry ran a beer joint and had a little store. Papa H. Richter was the county treasurer and a jovial man-about-town. Dr. White was the doctor and took care of all the common illnesses.

Since all the county officials had their offices in the courthouse, there

[71] Four bits: fifty cents.

often was a lively hustle and bustle to the town, and one can easily think that Clinton was a good place to do business in its heyday. A very imposing building had even been constructed there, a so-called institute, that served as a local school. Only God knows the reason why, but most of the Germans preferred sending their kids to Yorktown rather than the local school, an expensive proposition since it necessitated lodging their children with other families and paying room and board. Also, because of the ferry across the Guadalupe and the way the roads were laid out then, Clinton did a good business with the surrounding areas. But as is often the case, the hour finally struck marking Clinton's passage from prosperity into oblivion.

The railroad was extended beyond Victoria to a point three miles distant from Clinton on the far bank of the Guadalupe, and this terminus became Cuero. Had the Guadalupe not been there, which cost the railroad a fortune to bridge, who knows, Cuero might not exist today. But it was better that way. Cuero is more centrally located and the city has enough space to become a metropole of the Southwest.

With these remarks we will leave Clinton in order to have a closer look at our "Phoenix," Cuero. (30)

Cuero

Cuero, like Clinton, lies in a bend of the Guadalupe and originated, as mentioned, at the end point of the Mexican & Northwest Railroad [San Antonio & Mexican Gulf Railroad].[72] The prediction that Cuero would remain the terminus of the railroad for a long time proved correct. With their talent for business and sensing opportunity, many Germans quickly chose Cuero as their hometown. The following gentlemen were the first to set up businesses in Cuero and to them the present Cuero owes a deep debt of gratitude because, like the saying goes, "as the Old sang, so the Young pipe."[73]

[72] The post–Civil War economic history of Texas is largely the story of where the railroads chose to go. A town's fortunes rose or fell with this decision. Clinton was a textbook example of the demise of a town, whereas Cuero provided the opposite instance of a sudden blossoming of a town due to the somewhat arbitrary location of a new railroad. The railroad Waltersdorf references, the Mexican & Northwest Railroad (actually the San Antonio & Mexican Gulf Railroad), consolidated with the Indianola Railroad to become the Gulf, Western Texas and Pacific Railroad in 1870. The prominent Texas German entrepreneur H. Runge had been heavily involved in the early attempts to organize a railroad into the interior from Indianola and had succeeded in laying a line to Victoria, but in May 1872, Charles Morgan bought out Runge and the other investors. The new company began work in April 1872 to extend the line north from Victoria into DeWitt County. Gustav Schleicher, a prominent Texas German entrepreneur—Schleicher County is named after him—surveyed a terminus at Cuero and platted the town, and, for this reason can be considered the "father" of Cuero. The tracks reached the new town on March 3, 1873. The company originally had plans to lay tracks to Seguin and New Braunfels and as far north as Austin, but competing railroads, principally the Texas Central Railroad doomed this plan. Craig H. Roell, "Gulf, Western Texas & Pacific Railway," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/gulf-western-texas-and-pacific-railway> *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed June 30, 2021].

[73] Waltersdorf quotes the well-known German saying: *Wie die Alten sungen, so zwitschern die Jungen.* The

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H. Runge & Co in Cuero, Texas. *Photo by author.*

Messrs. F. Mügge, Wm. Frobese, C. & H. Reiffert, who already had a branch business of the international concern, H. Runge & Co.,[74] in Indianola (Powderhorn), quickly constructed a large store and warehouse in Cuero, and continued without interruption their previous commission and transport business from Indianola. They expanded this to also construct a large complex that housed a grocery store, a farm implement business, and a furniture store, as well as several other businesses, both large and small. The same firm also established the first bank in Cuero. It is not too much to say that from the very beginning these gentlemen stood

saying actually derives from a Dutch proverb, *Zo de ouden zongen, zo piepen de jongen*, referring to the fact that children often mimic their parents just as young birds mimic the peeping chirp of their parents.

[74] Waltersdorf discusses the Eckhardt store in Yorktown at length and holds up Wilhelm Eckhardt as a model of German enterprise and business acumen in Texas, but H. Runge & Co (later Kaufman & Runge) was a much larger enterprise and Heinrich (Henry) Runge (1816–73), the owner, was easily the most prominent and successful Texas German businessman of the nineteenth century. He had business interests in retail, cotton, real estate, ranching, railroads, banking, and shipping. In 1845, he established the first private unincorporated bank in Texas. For more information, see: Henry J. Hauschild, The *Runge Chronicle: A German Saga of Success* (Victoria, Tex.: self-published, 1990); also, by the same author, "Runge, Henry," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/runge-henry>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed June 30, 2021].

at the forefront of the growth and development of Cuero, and not only in respect to banking, trade, and commerce, but also in the realm of social and moral influence. (31) Truly, the town's success can be attributed to the creative energy that manifested itself at every turn. Today the Runge firm still stands as the largest and most respected firm in all of the Southwest. Since it became obvious to anyone with a modicum of business sense that a business located next to the Runge establishment would be a favorable location, Wilhelm Gohmert, a resident of Yorktown, quickly smelled opportunity and purchased the corner lot adjacent to the Runge complex, where he built a tavern and personal residence. The valuable corner quickly became well-known—and had to become well-known—since the freighters associated with the continuous wagon traffic to and from the Runge store needed to wash away the dust with a beer at the Wilhelm Gohmert tavern. And Wilhelm Gohmert was the right man for it, polite, accommodating, and always ready with his dry wit. It was no wonder that money flew over the counter. Next to Wilhelm Gohmert, *Tante* [Aunt] Sieder built a large hotel where the hungry could always expect a good meal.

But this begs the question: Who is *Tante* Sieder? And I would like to answer this question: What? You don't know *Tante* Sieder? Man, where do you come from? *Tante* Sieder? Ask any German, in Friedrichsburg [Fredericksburg], in Boerne, New Braunfels, Seguin, DeWitt, Goliad, Victoria, Gonzales, etc., and everyone will be able to tell you who *Tante* Sieder is. But since you do not know who she is, listen up, and I will tell you who and what she is. You see, unknowing ones, many years ago when no one thought about Cuero or even that a railroad might one day come to Cuero, all freight had to be picked up at Indianola (Powderhorn)[75] and you can also understand that thousands of freighters traveled to Indianola in order to supply their towns and settlements with goods. Now when the freighters arrived at Indianola with freight from San Antonio and other places, this freight had to be unloaded and new consignments for the return trip negotiated and then loaded for the return trip to San Antonio, Mexico, and other destinations. This all took time, and with time the men became hungry, and soon the word spread: lunchtime at *Tante* Sieder's! As you might guess, *Tante* Sieder owned a boarding house and hotel. Now, my dear friend, the scene that unfolded there, you needed to see it for yourself in order to appreciate it correctly. Imagine long tables that could seat upwards of a hundred men, and everything necessary—knives, forks, spoons, plates, clean and shiny and a meal fit for the most scrupulous gourmet. The service was prompt, and the star of the show, *Tante* Sieder,

[75] Powder Horn, in Calhoun County, was a depot for Indianola in the 1850s, located south of that town at the site where Powder Horn Lake connects with Matagorda Bay. It began as an addition to the already established Indianola and was known as Brown's Addition. It was at the site of the old German immigrant campsite. "Powder Horn, TX," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/powder-horn-tx>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Aug. 8, 2021].



Advertisement for the Sieder House. *Courtesy of DeWitt County Historical Museum.*

like a general in the field, was here, there, everywhere, seeing to it that her guests were well attended and satisfied.

But that wasn't everything. Anyone who had deluded himself into believing that frivolous, off-color jokes were an acceptable part of the program would soon be disabused of the notion because *Tante* Sieder, though generous to a fault, ran a tight ship and insisted on propriety. (33) In short, everyone liked *Tante* Sieder and she had a good word for all concerned. But yes, everything under her control ran according to a tight plan. *Tante* Sieder did not need to ask anyone for their fare. All knew that that was something she didn't do. For the noon meal, each placed his fifty cents next to his plate, and, once dinner was served, *Tante* Sieder would walk up and down the tables and pocket the money. You see, that was *Tante* Sieder in Indianola, but thereafter she moved to Cuero where, as I already said, she built a stately hotel.

When we take a closer look at the successful business that *Tante* Sieder built and the energy and management necessary for its success, then we have to admit that many a man would be ashamed to compare his own accomplishments with those of her own. Above all, it is absolutely a given that *Tante* Sieder should take her place as an equal alongside those select individuals instrumental in making Cuero what it is today, and the citizens of Cuero are beholden to this woman in more ways than many are willing to admit.

As in Indianola, so in Cuero. In no time at all *Tante* Sieder dominated the entire hotel business, and just as earlier, everyone who was hungry ended up sooner or later at her table, a place where the down-and-out received the same attention as the well-to-do. And even though other hotels sprang up, the reputation of *Tante* Sieder was so firmly established that no one could fail to take notice. And even to this day. Cuero is filled on a daily

basis with strangers and people from outside the county, but these now have the opportunity to see for themselves that *Tante* Sieder's tables are always crowded with customers. (34) Hats off to *Tante* Sieder! She earned it the hard way.

The next to settle in Cuero was *Herr* Hamm, who opened a shoe store and established a shoe repair shop. Papa Nagel moved from Clinton to Cuero and set up a large iron and tinsmith shop. Papa Burghardt opened a bakery. Wilhelm Hausmann came from Clinton and set up a general merchandise business. C. Meissner maintained a barroom. Julius Gohmert built a barroom and a residence. Otto Büchel built a large store and next to H. Runge had the largest grocery store in Cuero. F. Büchel built a cotton gin and grain mill that was much in demand. Dr. Frank served as post master and the big house he built was well-furnished for that purpose. Additionally, Gustav Dietze and Wilhelm Hausmann erected large residences somewhat removed from the business district as did most of the businessmen. Wm. Hasdorf opened a store. Wm. Westhoff opened a lumber yard close to the railroad and opposite from him Wilhelm Mangold also built a store and a home. Dr. Reuss Sr. opened up an apothecary next to *Tante* Sieder. Welch was the clockmaker. Shatton the saddler. Waldeck had a barroom; the same one he had put on wheels to accompany the building of the railroad from Victoria to Cuero.

Henry Wieland had a carpentry business, Mutt (35) had a hotel, Thompson owned a store, Woodward a livery stable, Rudolph Kleberg and Capt. Friend and others were lawyers who hung out their shingles in Cuero.

In this way, Cuero sort of arose from the earth. The hectic life in the town resembled a witches' brew and everywhere one looked, things were being built and the sound of pounding hammers rang out until late in the night. And those that settled here, they are still here. An iron determination to succeed prevailed on all sides and where such a will is present, success must necessarily follow.

Cuero erased Clinton from the map, at least in regard to commerce, so it was no wonder that the idea soon took hold to move the county seat from Clinton to Cuero. The matter was discussed earnestly and openly among these founding settlers, the field was prepared, and it came to a vote. The result: Cuero emerged—as could be easily foreseen—the undisputed victor by a wide margin and the courthouse in Clinton was taken down and reassembled in Cuero. At the same time a new jail was constructed out of solid stones that featured all the latest innovations, and in this way a new era dawned for Cuero. And as if this wasn't enough, the disaster that befell Indianola,[76] washing away three-quarters of the town, led to many of the

[76] On September 16, 1875, a powerful hurricane struck the central Texas coast. The storm completely destroyed Velasco at the mouth of the Brazos River, did extensive damage to Galveston, and nearly de-

survivors relocating to Cuero after they had disassembled what remained of their houses, loaded the components on railcars, and shipped them to Cuero for reassembly. This sudden influx of Germans, who were all known as skilled and capable people, gave a new impetus (36) to the town and boosted once again the number of energetic citizens who allied their life goals with that of the town of Cuero.

Therefore, in consideration of this sudden influx of vigorous and competent citizens, Cuero got a jump start for its development in a way not given to many such places. And with its economy thriving, the people did not fail to prioritize the education of their youth. It must be said to the great credit of the Germans of Cuero that unlike their compatriots in many other towns who do not seem to care whether or not their children continued to learn German in their schools, they rejected that idea. No, in Cuero, the basic belief prevailed that the beloved German mother tongue should be preserved and cultivated in the schools without, however, neglecting the English language in any way. So, what was done about it? The people simply got together and put up a large, spacious building, engaged qualified teachers, offered them a good wage, and in this way attained their goal. Now that a German school was present, it did not take long before the suggestion was made to also set up a gymnastic hall.[77] With rare unanimity and determination, this suggestion was also quickly transformed into reality, and it didn't take long until Cuero had a magnificent building completely outfitted and equipped for gymnastics as well as theatrical productions. Oh, how many congenial Sunday afternoons and evenings were spent in this facility!

But Cuero, like Yorktown, was not spared the troubles brought on by

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stroyed the town of Indianola, where the storm surge washed away three-quarters of the buildings and significantly damaged the structures that remained standing. The exact number of victims has never been determined since many washed out to sea. Indianola was partially rebuilt after the storm of 1875 but many chose not to remain. The town was not wholly abandoned, however, until another, even more powerful hurricane struck in 1886, the *coup de grace* for Indianola. The town never recovered and only a small park and monument remain of the once thriving port. See Helen B. Frantz, "Indianola Hurricanes," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/indianola-hurricanes> [Accessed Dec. 3, 2022]. A more detailed source about the Indianola hurricane that relates directly to Cuero is Rudolph Kleberg, "Sketch of the Founding of Cuero,", July 12, 1923, Box 2J47, Rudolph Kleberg Papers, (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin).

[77] German communities throughout Texas organized their social life around traditional fraternal societies called *Vereine*. These included singing (*Gesang-Vereine*), shooting (*Schützen-Vereine*), and gymnastic societies (*Turn-Vereine*). Many of these are still in existence to the present. There is a long history behind the gymnastic societies. They were much more than just places to exercise. They became community centers that also provided venues for cultural events, such as theatrical productions and musical programs, and they sometimes supported all-German militias. This was probably the case in Cuero when the Germans in the town organized to protect the town from threats from the Taylor faction in the feud. Historically, the "Turner" movement is strongly associated with the rise of German nationalism in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a sentiment that strove to unite the many German-speaking states in Europe into one unified homeland. The black, red, and gold German flag of the present was, in fact, originally the flag of the *Turnverein*.





German school in Cuero, Texas. *Photo by author.*

the various American gangs of *cowboys* and *rowdies*.[78] Although Cuero always saw to it that it had a competent city marshal (the giant Benjamin),[79] it happened much too often that Jim Taylor showed up with his crowd in Cuero and behaved as he pleased. Many old settlers will remember how he had the habit of using the doorknobs on the houses for target practice, often splitting them in two. But with time, the Germans had enough of it, and the *rowdies* found it prudent to spend less time in Cuero. In consequence, however, the ruffians threatened to burn Cuero to the ground. It meant hard times for the citizens of Cuero. Bales of cotton were positioned on the outskirts, and the citizens armed themselves and organized *reliefs* to patrol the town during the night and in this way protect themselves from the gangs.

As it came to pass, Wesley Hardin was in town one day, whether alone, or with a gang, who knows? But it didn't take but a short time before the news arrived that the Wesley Hardin *crowd* had cornered the Jim Taylor *crowd* in a cow pen on the outskirts of Cuero and that it was sure to end in bloodshed. However, as the saying goes in respect to riffraff, "enemies one minute, friends the next."[80]

One had to believe that all this feuding would eventually culminate in a final showdown that would put an end to it once and for all, but this was not the case. After a short while the news arrived that Dr. Brassell and two of his sons had been murdered.[81] (38) The murder case, which is still unresolved to this day, created a sensation at the time not only among the citizens of DeWitt County but across the entire state. People's opinions concerning the crime varied wildly. But the actual reason why these

[78] In a 1923 letter, Kleberg wrote the following: "A wave of lawlessness prevailed in Southwest Texas and centered in and around Cuero, and which finally resulted in mob law and a disrespect for constituted legal authority. Feuds, factions, and a lawless vendetta threatened to overturn the supremacy of the law, and men were shot down in cold blood and lawbreakers could not be brought to justice. In fact, the situation was so bad that good citizens had to organize in self defense and to bring about law and order. Accordingly, in the first days of January, 1874, following a call by Mayor Threkeld for a mass meeting of citizens at the City Hall, the 'Home Protection Club' was formed to act as a posse when called to action by officers of the law. This was a local military organization composed of some of the best citizens of Cuero who had regular drills and always held themselves in readiness to the support of the civil officer in making arrests and keeping the peace, and who cleared the town of lawless characters." Kleberg then offers a complete list of 83 members, almost evenly divided by those with German and Anglo names. Kleberg himself served as lieutenant of the militia. Subsequently, another mass meeting was held in June 1874, for which Kleberg served as secretary. The attendees petitioned the governor for the intervention of the rangers, following which in the summer of 1874, Captain McNelly and his full company of rangers were sent to DeWitt County. Kleberg, "Sketch of the Founding of Cuero."

[79] City Marshal Benjamin: It is not clear whom Waltersdorf is referring to.

[80] Waltersdorf is describing an important episode in the Sutton-Taylor Feud that occurred before and after New Year in 1873–74 in Cuero. Waltersdorf uses the well-known German expression, *Pack schlägt sich, Pack verträgt sich* (riffraff are enemies one minute, friends the next), to refer to the fact that a truce was hastily arranged among the parties at the last minute which prevented a large gun battle on the outskirts of Cuero.

[81] Dr. Brassell's murders: Actually, Dr. Phillip Brassell and one of his sons, George, were slain. The other son, James, managed to escape.

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people were murdered has never been adequately explained.[82] On one point everyone agrees, however, whoever perpetrated the murders most certainly did not intend to include the old doctor in the deed.

It was general knowledge that the sons of Dr. Brassell, who lived on the prairie between Yorktown and Cuero, had come upon a calf out on the prairie and shot it dead. They then cut out the hindquarters and left the rest of the carcass to the buzzards. The calf in question could not have been Dr. Brassell's and had to belong to someone else since the doctor did not own a single head of livestock. Unfortunately, this sort of casual thievery was all too common, and the two sons were caught red-handed in the deed. It is hardly surprising then that many people concluded that this is the reason why they were murdered.

That Dr. Brassell was not an intended victim became clear in district court in Cuero where the case was taken up.[83] It was revealed that the murderers only intended to abduct and lynch the two sons of Brassell. The murderers had engaged a young man, whom they understood (39) had not been in the region for very long, and had him pretend to be an official of the court and to serve arrest warrants in the night at the house of Dr. Brassell and to take his two sons into custody[84] The young man, unaware of the true situation, carried out his task and went to the house of Dr. Brassell. The old Dr., however, refused to allow his sons to go along with him unaccompanied, and decided to join them. According to the sworn testimony of the witness (Mrs. Brassell), the three had barely stepped down from the porch of the house before a hail of bullets greeted them and the three were shot down in cold blood.[85]

This sad circumstance aroused the indignation of the peaceful element in all corners of the county since it seemed like the senseless gunplay and

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[82] Litigation continued for more than twenty years, and in the end, only one person was convicted and he was subsequently pardoned by the governor.

[83] The district court had moved to Cuero in 1876, when Cuero supplanted Clinton as the county seat. Waltersdorf is correct, therefore, in identifying Cuero as the site of this altercation.

[84] By this point the Sutton faction, which had always had a tenuous relationship with law enforcement, first with the State Police and then with local authorities, had supporters in the Cuero city marshal's office and also in the sheriff's office. This is how they were able to supply a warrant for the arrest of Dr. Brassell's sons. According to James Smallwood's account, far from being innocent victims, both Dr. Brassell and his sons were heavily involved in the feud as part of the Taylor faction, his sons having participated in several particularly brutal murders. Revenge for these murders was the motive for their killing, not cattle thievery, though they may well have been involved in this as well. Smallwood, *The Feud that Wasn't*, 170–173.

[85] Waltersdorf version of the events surrounding the murder of Dr. Brassell and his son—only one of his sons was killed in the affray—was generally accepted and repeated as received truth well into the twentieth century. One of Dr. Brassell's daughters—the unidentified witness with the lantern alluded to by Waltersdorf—swore to this version of events in district court on several occasions. The exculpatory testimony of another, impartial witness was disallowed by the presiding judge, leaving the daughter's testimony as central in the conviction of several men. In 2008, however, James M. Smallwood released a new account of the feud that persuasively argues that the Brassells died as a result of a general shoot-out among approximately twenty men, with more or less the same number on each side in *The Feud that Wasn't*, 171–173.

general lawlessness that had plagued the area for years had started up again. In consequence, the county sent an urgent request to the governor requesting an attachment of rangers be sent to the county.

The governor responded favorably to the request and dispatched Capt. [Lt.] Hall[86] and his entire company of rangers to Cuero where the captain set up his headquarters and then distributed *detachments* of rangers to various points around the county.

Capt. Hall was a stern and competent leader who maintained strict discipline among his men, a fact demonstrated on a daily basis to the citizens by the courteous manner with which they comported themselves. Finally, with the arrival of the rangers, (40) the awful miasma that had hung over the peaceful citizens of DeWitt County for years was finally cleared away once and for all. Everybody rejoiced and looked forward to a brighter future.

But whoever believed that the *rangers* were only there as a deterrent were soon disabused of the notion, because hardly a day passed without the *rangers* bringing in another malefactor. Yes, when the Brassell murder took place, and people were scratching their heads as to who might be responsible, the news broke one day: Capt. Hall had managed to take into custody the entire gang and they were now all sitting in the *jail*. This aroused a lot of curiosity as can well be imagined. But it was a fact! But how did Capt. Hall bring it about?

That a man like Capt. Hall, whom I believe would follow the devil into Hell in order to arrest him, a man possessed of an iron will and a courage second to none, could have succeeded in this was easy enough to imagine, but the means by which he brought it about were so interesting in themselves that I would be remiss not to relate them here.

As I said, the murder took place, but several who took part in the murder had been recognized the night that it took place.[87] It happened in this way: Just before Dr. Brassell and his sons left the house a member of the family had gone outside with a bright lantern and recognized several men

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[86] The website of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fames states the following about Jesse Lee Hall: "He was born in Lexington, North Carolina on October 9, 1849 . . . He first worked as a schoolteacher, but soon became a city marshal in Sherman, a deputy sheriff in Denison, and the sergeant of arms for the Texas Senate. In August 1876, Hall became the second in command of Leander McNelly's Special Force of Texas Rangers. Serving in the Goliad region, Hall soon broke up a gang of vigilantes and gained the goodwill of the community. In October 1876, Hall became the acting commander of the Ranger company. He moved the company to Cuero to suppress the Sutton-Taylor Feud. The company was reorganized at Victoria in January 1877. Hall was made 1st Lieutenant and company commander with John B. Armstrong serving as the 2nd Lieutenant. Hall used the company to help suppress cattle rustling, raids across the border fueled by the Diaz revolution in Mexico, and the raiding of John King Fisher and his men. In 1880 Hall retired from the Rangers, turning over command of the company to T. L. Oglesby." See "Jesse Lee (Leigh) Hall, <https://www.texasranger.org/texas-ranger-museum/hall-of-fame/jesse-lee-hall/> [Accessed Sept. 23, 2022].

[87] A man by the name of Lewis Deloney was willing to testify as to the identity of the assassins, but the judge in the case, Henry Clay Pleasants, disallowed the testimony which made prosecution all but impossible. Smallwood, *The Feud that Wasn't*, 172.

on the perimeter. These names were made known to law enforcement, and in this way, Capt. Hall was able to obtain arrest warrants.

What did Capt. Hall then do? He found out that one of those involved had obtained a marriage license and calculating that there would soon be a large marriage ceremony at the home of the future father-in-law, who also belonged among the suspects, Capt. Hall laid his plans in such a way that he was able to cancel the entire family at one fell swoop. If he had not laid his plan in this way, and gone after them piecemeal, he would have most likely found the various nests empty, so to speak.

All good things take time. Although Capt. Hall saw various perpetrators on a daily basis on the streets of Cuero, he did not confront them and behaved toward them as if they were the leading citizens of the town. In the meantime, through his spies, he kept precisely informed about the preparations underway for the wedding. No sooner said than done. The day of the wedding arrived and after the ceremony had taken place, the assembled guests all took their seats for the wedding feast. Naturally, the gentlemen present were all armed to the teeth, but in order to enjoy the sumptuous feast prepared for the joyful event, they had all placed their weapons against the walls.

Capt. Hall had planned his move perfectly. After his thirty *rangers* had taken up strategic positions around the house, Capt. Hall entered the dining room alone, greeted the guests courteously, and implored them (42) when they all stood up in shock, to quietly take their seats again if they valued their lives. When a couple nonetheless remained defiant, he gestured to the windows, which more than sufficed to convince them of the hopelessness of their predicament since the barrels of several *Winchesters* of the *rangers* pointed their way could be clearly discerned.

Capt. Hall read them the arrest warrants, after which the gentlemen were shackled together with iron cuffs and led off to the jail in Cuero. All this was carried out professionally in the most courteous manner, but nonetheless, a sad wedding day for the poor young bride!

From this day on, prisoners arrived from all corners of the county, and truly one didn't have a clue as to whom to speak with about the affair. Even people who were completely innocent were implicated and only after much time, effort, and expense did they manage to walk about as free men again.

When the time arrived for the district court to convene, Cuero was teeming with men, and many of them had not come out of curiosity. The court could clearly foresee that it would be very difficult to impanel a jury to hear the murder case, so for the first day of the pre-trial hearing, a large number of potential jurors had been summoned. But day after day passed without being able to swear in the twelve jurors required. There was truly no surprise in this since supporters of the defendants had openly threatened that anyone who agreed to be on the jury, especially any Germans,

would not make it back home alive. This sufficed and even though a jury was finally seated, it had no intention of convicting the men. (43)

There is a basic axiom of American jurisprudence: "to win time is to win everything." And that was the situation in this case. A *mistrial* was declared and a change of venue moved the new trial to another jurisdiction. The presiding judge, however, at the time *Major* Pleasants, decided that the accused needed to be removed to the *jail* in San Antonio. This decision, however, frustrated the intentions of the supporters of the defendants and they resolved to free the prisoners somewhere along the road to San Antonio.

The day arrived to transport the prisoners to San Antonio. The *rangers* who comprised the escort arranged themselves in part on horseback next to the paddy wagon that contained the six prisoners while other *rangers* waited on their horses outside the fence of the *courthouse* and also around the *jail*.

The prisoners were under guard in the *courthouse*, where they were saying good-bye to their families. One of them asked permission to go outside. This request was granted but the rangers did not think it worth the trouble to accompany the man to the latrine since they felt that he would be in clear view of the *rangers* outside. The prisoner went to the latrine, which stood in the corner of the courtyard, climbed over the back, and took to his heels.

This little escapade was apparently planned in advance because a good horse, saddled and ready to ride, was tied up and waiting about 450 steps away, (44) while three women had positioned themselves strategically to block the *rangers*' line of fire and to shield the prisoner. But as I said, the *rangers* were on the lookout for trouble. As soon as the alarm was given, in the blink of an eye all were horseback, quickly surrounding the escapee and placing him back into custody. Finally, everything was ready for the trip to San Antonio. A large crowd had gathered on the courthouse square to see the prisoners off, and, as can well be imagined, many supporters of the prisoners were among the spectators. *Capt.* Hall, who handed over the prisoners to the lieutenant in charge, ordered the prisoners into the paddy wagon, which was then locked. *Capt.* Hall then gave the lieutenant in charge his instructions in a loud and clear voice that everyone could hear: "Lieutenant, I am certain that an attempt will be made to free the prisoners somewhere between here and San Antonio. So, listen up! At the first sign of such an attempt, your instructions are to make sure that the six prisoners are dead before you have fired a single shot in the direction of your attackers; in other words, you and your men will shoot the prisoners yourselves before you allow them to be freed. Only the dead corpses of the prisoners can be liberated."

There was no way to misinterpret this order, and so it came to pass that *Lieutenant* Armstrong, who commanded the escort, arrived without inci-

dent in San Antonio. The *rangers* who stayed behind (45) still had their hands full. It wasn't long before a *rowdy* was found shot to death on the *Sandies*[88] in neighboring Gonzales County. It got too hot for several other *rowdies* as well and they left the county for greener pastures. So, short and sweet, the *rangers* cleared the county so thoroughly of the *rowdy* element[89] that DeWitt County, and especially Cuero, could finally breath a large sigh of relief.

Now that all impediments to the better classes had been removed, the spirit of industriousness and creative energy returned to the citizens of Cuero, and the first thing that happened was the town founded a stock company to build a *cotton* textile mill.[90] Truly an ambitious undertaking! Especially when one considers that Cuero was still a child among adults in comparison to other towns of Texas and yet dared to risk such an undertaking, and successfully so. In consideration of this accomplishment, many other towns in Texas, even those larger in size, could well blush in shame. But what did this initiative demonstrate? Did it not demonstrate the guiding presence of the creative and ambitious business spirit among the Cuero-ites? Did it not demonstrate the self-confidence and unbending determination to carry through its vision of what Cuero should become?

Cuero eventually reached its goals and, similar to Yorktown, only a few at the present have any inkling of what it took to get there. Hundreds and hundreds have little appreciation for the risks, travails, and hardships the first Cuero-ites had to face and overcome.

But the determination of men is strong and this determination (46) laid the foundation upon which the present Cuero rests. The Cuero of today no longer resembles the Cuero of the past. Although a few remain, most of the old buildings have been replaced by more handsome buildings.

In the early days, who would have thought in their wildest dreams that Cuero would one day stand at the forefront of modern technology with its use of water power? But as said before, there had to be present certain citizens of Cuero (and Germans) like the brothers Otto and Friedrich Büchel, who took the risky step of damming the Guadalupe River in order

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[88] Sandies Creek, formerly known as Castleman Creek, rises in eastern Guadalupe County and runs southeast across the full length of southern Gonzales County to its mouth on the Guadalupe River, a mile northwest of Cuero in DeWitt). The tributaries of the stream include Rocky and Five-Mile Creeks. In October 1835, Gonzales men buried the famous "Come and Take It" cannon on the banks of Sandies Creek during the Texian revolutionary army's advance on San Antonio de Béxar. There the tiny cannon remained until a 1936 flood unearthed it. The flat-to-rolling terrain is surfaced by the sand that gives the creek its name. "Sandies Creek (Guadalupe County," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/sandies-creek-guadalupe-county>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Aug. 3, 2021].

[89] The word Waltersdorf uses here is *Rowdiethum,* an interesting American/German fusion for which there is no exact equivalent.

[90] Waltersdorf is referring to the cotton weaving facility that stayed in business for more than one hundred years and operated under several names before Mount Vernon Mills bought it in 1994. The plant struggled to compete and finally closed its doors and laid off 280 employees in 2016.

to harness its hydraulic potential, and not only to deliver water to Cuero, but to many other facilities as well. The dam was also important for irrigation purposes as well.

Taking into consideration its climate and geographic location together with the benefits of the dam, it becomes evident that Cuero is in a position to compete with any and all markets in respect to the cultivation of fruits and vegetables.

But the damming of the river by itself will not be enough for Cuero. Neither was the construction of the large cotton mill, the well-known Cuero Milling Co. One is forced to ask, then, "What comes next for Cuero"? It would be hard to say precisely but one thing is certain: it won't take long for the business and civic leaders (47) to take on other ambitious projects that are calculated to elevate Cuero even higher in the ranking of towns and cities. The truth of the matter—which even the envious will have to admit—is that Cuero as it stands today has surpassed most of the older towns of Texas in respect to civic spirit and accomplishment on the part of its citizens, and that the town, irrespective of what other towns do, is well on its way to becoming the "Pearl of the Southwest."

And if Cuero succeeds in this—something that we can't know for certain ahead of time—and if the old-timers are alive to witness it, something we all hope for, then it will show that the liberal spirit that has characterized Cuero from the very beginning was passed on by them and has never died out.

This spirit showed itself at the time the state legislature passed the crazy local option law.[91] The American populace was all fire and flame in favor of this law, and the various counties had nothing more pressing to do than to schedule special elections on local option. DeWitt County rejected the option, but Gonzales County voted in favor. What was the result? The merchants there could henceforth shutter their shops and twiddle their thumbs because their clients went elsewhere. Corn, cotton, everything from Gonzales County ended up in Cuero, and although the pouring of alcoholic spirits was permitted there, no one encountered drunks on the

[91] The forces in favor of prohibition began to gain strength in Texas and across the nation after the Civil War. The 1876 Texas constitution included a local-option clause that allowed for counties to vote whether they would allow alcoholic drinks.

Ebenezer LaFayette Dohoney (1832–1919), a lawyer and politician, was a driving force behind the prohibition movement in Texas. He authored the local option provision inserted into the 1876 Constitution, but not content with that, he agitated for total prohibition, but he was not successful in this. In 1887, the "drys" engineered a state prohibition referendum, which they lost by more than 90,000 votes. Nevertheless, dry sentiment was widespread. By 1895, 53 of the 239 counties were dry, and another seventy-nine counties were partly dry under local option. K. Austin Kerr, "Prohibition," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/prohibition>, *Handbook of Texas Online* [Accessed Aug. 8, 2021]. German communities across the state were unified in their opposition to any form of alcoholic restriction. In fact, there was no single issue so divisive after the Civil War than this issue. They considered it tyranny of the majority over the minority and therefore unconstitutional. Waltersdorf's description of how the Germans considered the consumption of alcoholic beverages to be an art and that, in contrast to the Americans, rarely got drunk and lost control, is very telling in this context.

streets of either Cuero or Yorktown. People understood here, as in the German fatherland, that drinking is an art, (48) and, moreover, an art imbibed at an early age along with mother's milk. And it should come as little surprise to others, then, that the Germans valued and cultivated this art and remained in control of themselves as respectable citizens always even when drinking.

Gonzales suffered patiently for a while with its self-imposed handicap while Cuero continued to harvest the fruits sewn by Gonzales's folly. Later, of course, Gonzales threw *local-option* into the cellar, and not only because of business considerations, but equally because of the disturbing fact that even more drunks were on the streets with *local option* than the period before, when the idea had crossed no one's mind.

Cuero, always carefully studying its situation, possesses not only one of the most beautiful *courthouses* in the state, but also can look with pride to both its English and German schools. May Cuero continue along this path so that it will one day take its stellar place among the towns and cities of Texas.

Yoakum

Yoakum, situated in the northeast corner of the DeWitt county, only belongs partially in this county, whereas the other part is in Lavaca County. As the junction of several southwestern railroads, Yoakum has the machine shops of the S.A. & A.P Railroad and is a forward striving little town that (49) that is growing by the day.[92] That business is doing well in the town can be gleaned from the simple fact that the railroad alone pays out $30,000 a month in salaries.

As a railroad junction, Cuero also draws a significant number of tourists. The construction of new houses is always a sure sign of economic upturn. In addition, the area around Yoakum is blessed with excellent *farmland*, and it will not take long before the entire region around this friendly little town is completely settled.

In respect to the layout of the town, Yoakum has sufficient room to expand, and since the town is still relatively young, in consideration of its present size and the period of its existence, it is almost a certainty that Yoakum will become an important place for business in the future. Yoakum has the wherewithal to accomplish this because it counts a large number of competent businessmen among its citizens.

Arneckeville

This little place, which lies between Meyersville and the former Clinton, received its name from old Papa Arnecke, who lived there himself.

[92] A good starting point for information on this railroad is Nancy Young, "San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/san-antonio-and-aransas-pass-railway> Accessed Aug. 8, 2021).

[128.62.216.60] Project MUSE (2026-11-02 17:12 GMT) University of Texas at Austin (+1 other institution account)

Although, similar to Meyersville, somewhat off the beaten track, quite a number of Germans settled there, and as the saying goes, what long endures is all for the good, and so it was with Arneckeville. Today the *settlement* has businesses, and halls, etc., and, despite the fact that it will never become a large town, a pleasant place (50) that possesses a satisfied and industrious population, who are content to live out their lives as they find it and never as it might be. May the future bring to Arneckeville everything a person could hope for!

Hochheim

Hochheim, likewise located on the Guadalupe, is a friendly patch of earth, that is celebrating its prosperity. The Schwab brothers were the original settlers of Hochheim where they conducted what for the place was a substantial business. In addition, the old Schweitzer, originally a resident of Yorktown, was active as a small businessman. While in Yorktown, he had the strange habit whenever he ventured into his wife's sacred realm, the kitchen, of tossing any pots and pans that happened to be in his way into Coleto Creek. But at Hochheim he seemed more at peace with himself and had abandoned this odd practice. But alas, the old Swabian has now gone home to his fathers.

Concrete *College* was located close to Hochheim on the way to Cuero, a for-the-times outstanding institute that provided an education to many a young man. But other than this, Hochheim was thinly settled and it was largely cattlemen who patronized the settlement. Nevertheless, after the large *pastures* had been parceled off into *farms,* Hochheim is happy to have a good and industrious population.

Lindenau

This community is only six miles from Cuero. Lindenau also sprung up like from the earth like a lightning bolt and rejoices in a thriving honorable German population, who literally do not let a blade of grass grow in their fields. But also, in respect to its social life, Lindenau assumes its rightful place. Congeniality is the motto of this small settlement, but Lindenau offers proof that congeniality need not get in the way of education, since the community maintains a good a well-organized school for its young people. The best of luck to this new settlement; may it thrive and reach its goal in a timely fashion without setback or misfortune!

If we take a step back now to survey DeWitt County in general with special attention to its many communities, then we must conclude that it is one of the best governed and progressive counties that the State of Texas has to offer.

In respect to soil characteristics, DeWitt *County* is with few exceptions unique since all soil types are represented, and, consequently, all different

sorts of crops can be grown. In respect to climate, one can say that it is one of the few counties not subject to severe drought; indeed, the prospects for normal rainfall are usually significantly better than is the case in other *counties*.

In a word, DeWitt County is a patch of earth blessed by God where one can live a good life.

May it continue to thrive. This is the heartfelt desire of the writer.