



"From the Old to the New World" *Harper's Weekly*, (New York) November 7, 1874

Early German Settlements in Texas 1831-1850

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Timeline

- 1803–1815 – The Napoleonic Wars - abolition of serfdom and demand for constitutional limits on monarchs.
- 1820 – Monroe Doctrine - opposed European colonialism in the Americas.
- 1820 – Act Regulating Passenger Lists - ships' captains required to submit a list of all passengers to the collector of customs in the district in which the ship arrived.
- 1821 – Mexican Independence – spurred efforts to develop Texas through immigration.
- 1831 -- First permanent German settlement in Texas (City of Industry).
- 1836 – Texas Independence.
- 1840 – Population of Texas estimated at 70,000.
- 1845 – Texas becomes a state.
- 1846-1848 – Mexican American War.
- 1848-1849 – The European Revolutions - tens of thousands killed, and many more were forced into exile.
- 1850 – First (official) Federal census of Texas – Germans are 5% of the 212,592 population.
- 1861-1865 – American Civil War – severely limited immigration.

Land Contracts

Empresarios – were granted the right to settle on land by Spain, and later Mexico, in exchange for recruiting and taking responsibility for settling the eastern areas of Coahuila y Texas in the early nineteenth century.

Later, the Republic of Texas, In order to attract settlers, entered into colonization contracts with various individuals to establish colonies in the Republic and receive payment in land. In addition to large grants made directly to the contractors, settlers in such colonies were granted 640 acres each, if heads of families, or 320 acres, if single.

In addition to the contracts, many individuals and small groups travelled independently to Texas during the time period. Later, groups and individuals moved from other parts of the United States into Texas.

The Key Players

Johann Friedrich Ernst (1786-1853)

- 1831 – in partnership with Charles Fordtran, issued a grant of more than 4,000 acres on Mill Creek in the northwest corner of what is now Austin County in Stephen F. Austin's colony.
- He wrote lengthy letters to friends in Oldenburg, Germany, which influenced other prospective migrants. He described a land with "a winterless climate like that of Sicily."
- First settlements were the towns of Industry (1831) and Cat Spring (1834).
- The Teutonic Order was formed in 1831 to, "...further immigration, facilitate correspondence between Texas and Germany, practice philanthropy and preserve the German traits of character."
- The German settlement of Cat Spring was founded in 1834 as a result of the Ernst letters. Frequently mentioned in the minutes of the Cat Spring Agricultural Society and related literature are such localities as Hanover, Westphalia, Mecklenburg, Oldenburg, Holstein, Hamburg and Saxony. Others came later from Switzerland and Moravia.
<https://www.catspringtexas.net/aboutCatSpring.htm>

Henri Castro (1786 – 1865)

- 1842 -- in partnership with *Jean Jassaud*, issued two land grants by the Republic of Texas for the colonization of 600 families.
- The 1,250,000 acre grant west of San Antonio came to be known as Castro's Colony, and included the present day counties of Atascosa, Frio, La Salle, Medina, and McMullen.
- Castro settled the first shipload of families at Castroville in September 1844; in late established the villages of Quihi (1845); Vandenburg (1846); and D'Hanis (1847).
- Between 1843 and 1847 he succeeded in chartering 27 ships, which brought 485 families and 457 single men, mainly from clusters in the Upper Rhine Plain of Alsace, to Texas.
- Transcriptions and images of the passenger lists of those ship are freely available on the [USGenWebSites server](#).
- Castro and Jassaud did not fulfill the colonization of the other grant in what is now Starr County, along the Rio Grande.

Henry Francis Fisher (1805–1867)

- 1842 – in partnership with *Burchard Miller* received a grant of 3,878,000 acres between the Llano and Colorado Rivers. The grant required the settlement of 1,000 immigrant families of German, Dutch, Swiss, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian ancestry.
- In 1844 Fisher and Miller sold their grant to the Adelsverein, with the provision that Henry Fisher would be made part of the Adelsverein colonial committee.

The Key Players (cont.)

Prince Karl of Solms-Braunfels (1812-1875) and John O. Meusebach (1812-1897), Commissioners General of the Adelsverein,

- The goal of the Adelsverein was to create a settlement of German immigrants, primarily from Nassau, southern Hanover, Brunswick, Hesse, and western Thuringia, on the 3,800,000-acre Fisher-Miller grant and in a number of other places in Texas.
- Although they never achieved that goal, the Adelsverein did found the towns of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.
- In exchange for a one-time payment of \$240 from each household that wanted to go, the Adelsverein would furnish:
 - 320 acres of land in Texas,
 - free transportation to Galveston and onward to the land claim,
 - a doctor and surgeon on each ship,
 - food, water, and supplies to last the passengers and crew for six months,
 - a log cabin,
 - all living and farming expenses for the first year,
 - free use of irrigation canals, grain mills, cotton gins, and other infrastructure that the Adelsverein would provide at its own expense.
- Single adult males could sign up for \$120 and receive 160 acres when they arrived at the land grant; otherwise the deal for them was the same.
- Satisfaction was guaranteed: Any settlers who weren't happy in Texas could return to Germany on Society-chartered ships "and pay no more for the homeward than the outward voyage."
- The first settlers recruited by the Adelsverein arrived in Galveston on three ships, the "John Dethard," the "Herrschel," and the "Ferdinand." They made port 29 Nov, 8 Dec, and 14 Dec 1844, respectively. They then sailed on to Carlshafen (Indianola) where Prince Solms had been preparing to send them inland. Transcriptions of those passenger lists are available at: [Zeitung Ships Lists, 100th Anniversary Issue, Aug 1952](#) and the [Combined Ship Lists](#) .
- Transcriptions of all the Adelsverein ships' passenger lists are available at Ship Lists August 1845 - November 1846. They have also been published in *A New Land Beckoned: German Immigration to Texas, 1844-1847*, and are available through the [Galveston Historic Seaport](#) Web site.
- Because lack of resources meant the initial immigrants would not be able to reach the Fisher-Miller grant, Prince Carl purchased 1,100 acres north-east of San Antonio and named the new town New Braunfels.
- Later Meusebach led colonizers into the Hill Country and founded the town of Fredericksburg—named for Prince Frederick of Prussia—80 miles west of Austin, in May 1846.
- The [Texas General Land Office](#) has many holdings related to the Adelsverein settlers.

Other German Settlements

New Ulm, Austin County

- Founded in 1841 as Duff's Settlement by James C. Duff.
- German-speaking settlers arrived from nearby towns such as Industry, Shelby, and Nassau Farm.
- Post office opened in 1852 under the name New Ulm, since many of the settlers came from Ulm, Germany.

Frelsberg, Colorado County

- Founded around 1837 by Capt. William Frels and his brother John, who immigrated to Texas from Germany in 1834 on the ship Congress.
- Original settlers were from the area around Holstein and Oldenburg. By 1847 the population had increased enough to require a post office, and new immigrants from the Rhineland organized Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church.

Serbin, Lee County

- On 20 Sep 1854, about 550 Sorbian (Wendish, not Serbian!) Lutherans from congregations in Lusatia, Prussia, and Saxony left for Texas under the leadership and pastoral care of John Kilian.
- They arrived in Galveston in December 1854 on the English sailing vessel, the Ben Nevis, having travelled via Hamburg, Hull and Liverpool, England and Queenstown, Ireland.
- A free searchable transcription of the passenger list is available on the Briscoe Center for American History Web site.
https://www.cah.utexas.edu/research/ship_passenger_lists.php
- Throughout Texas, particularly on the church rolls of Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches, can be found Wendish names from the passenger list of the Ben Nevis – names like Lehman, Moerbe, Schatte, Fritsche, Becker, Schubert, Dube, Teinert, Wukasch, Kiesling, Prellop, Kasper, Zoch, Miertschin, Urban, Wenke, Knippa, Noack, Groeschel, Wuensche, Melde, and many more.

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