

Early German Settlers
February 9, 1999 - By Carol A. King



The other day I was really fortunate to have the pleasure of traveling one of the back roads with a descendant from the area. I can research and study for days on end and never end up learning as much as I did from this experience. Suddenly the area breathes, the past comes to life, and I can feel the hardships and struggles, the joys and fears, of our predecessors. I emerge feeling as though I've entered a time machine far more real than any virtual reality experience could possibly reproduce.

The afternoon spent with Palmer Hohenberger exploring the area that the German immigrants settled south of Fredericksburg was one that I'll count as a cherished memory. Palmer's great grandfather and grandmother (or should I say Opa and Oma?) named Ferdinand and Katherine Hohenberger were among the Germans that came to Texas in the mid 1800's. Like so many others, they were escaping the strife and turmoil occurring in their homeland. They arrived at Indianola on the Gulf Coast and from there made their way to Luckenbach. After remaining in Luckenbach for a year or so, they headed to the Fredericksburg area via the old Immigrant Trail. There they purchased 160 acres south of Fredericksburg for \$30 down in gold and two more payments of \$30 each in gold. On the way to their new home, their oldest son, Carl, who was in charge of driving the hogs, died of a heat stroke. Sadly, they began their new life in sorrow



It absolutely astounded me to stand with Palmer at the site of Ferdinand and Katherine's original farmstead and imagine what it must have been like out there. It sat in the middle of nowhere at a time when the Comanches were still troubling the settlers. If you look at the size of that house (and it has had additions since their time) and imagine it sitting out there alone, it's hard to really understand how they managed with themselves and three children. The only way that Ferdinand could earn some hard cash was to haul freight with his oxen to San Antonio and then on to Galveston. This meant that he would be gone for two to three months at a time. It makes me shudder to think about Katherine and the children being left there by themselves.

Palmer told me the story of one son being approached by six Indians intending to capture him. They crept up on him with their ropes out and ready to snatch him. The fear that crawled through his body caused him to ride hard in the opposite direction. He managed to ride to a corner of one of those stone fences Germans were always erecting. He then turned and fired his six-shooter causing the Indians to think twice about capturing him. They abandoned their intentions and rode away. I'll bet he had some bragging to do when he finally made it home!

Then there was the fact that so many Germans were unwilling to fight with the Confederacy. They had so recently come to the United States and pledged their allegiance to their new country, besides being anti-slavery in their beliefs. This really didn't set well with the majority of independent Texans who were willing to fight with the Confederacy. Therefore, the Germans who felt loyalty to the Union were considered to be traitors. Palmer showed me a depression in the washout of the nearby creek where one of the neighboring Rausch boys hid from Confederates (or as the Germans called them, haengebände) who hunted the "traitors" down and hung them. I could taste his fear as he lay there cocking his double barrel shotgun and thinking about the consequences of shooting some Texas Rangers. Fortunately for him, he was not discovered.

In my current book, "Fredericksburg, Comfort, and a Railroad" I am going to tell the story of these Germans. I will take you in my own time machine back to their beginnings in Texas. You will follow the route of their settlements and see the remnants of their perseverance and endurance that remain imprinted on the countryside. I am hoping that you will be able to experience and absorb the feelings of these people as they struggled to make their home in this land. Palmer had several other wonderful stories and I hope you will enjoy them in the book as much as I did hearing them. Thanks, Palmer, for an afternoon I will never forget!