

Getting to Fredericksburg

by Carol A. King, Texas Daytripper

Most of the early settlers in Fredericksburg were German. The thousands of Germans who immigrated to Texas during the 1800's came for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reason, they believed that their lives would be enriched by coming to Texas. This belief allowed them to persevere through many hardships and to finally find their new homes.

After Texas gained its independence from Mexico, many Germans responded to letters they were receiving telling of a new land that had virtually no winters, abundant game, rich and fertile soil, and large tracts of available land. By the 1840s, thousands of Germans had already emigrated to the New World. During the 1840s, there was much political and social unrest in Germany causing several of the noble and educated to look towards changing their homeland. A group of them decided to form a society to help German citizens emigrate. Unfortunately, this new society, known as the Adelsverein (or Society of Noblemen), was not prepared for this huge task. Their zest for the wealth and power they thought this whole thing would create for them caused them to purchase land in Texas that they hadn't checked out very well. One purchase was known as the Fisher Miller grant and was for over four million acres in north central Texas. Unbeknownst to the noblemen, this area was still unsurveyed and was ALSO occupied by hostile native Americans. Needless to say... it was uninhabitable.

When the first German settlers arrived in Galveston, it turned out they had no place to go. Adelsverein Commissioner, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, managed to purchase some additional land and led the first settlers to the area later to be known as New Braunfels. The next batch of settlers, however, met with horrifying circumstances when their long ship journey ended at Indianola on the Texas coast. For one thing, the Adelsverein was almost bankrupt, and so could not provide any shelter for these people. For another thing, the United States had begun its war with Mexico and had confiscated most teamsters that would have carried the settlers to New Braunfels. These Germans were stuck on the Texas coast for months with no provisions or homes. They lived in tents, or attempted to dig holes in the sand. Hundreds died of the several diseases that developed during a rainy season with no shelter. Several took off on foot for New Braunfels, suffering losses of possessions and family members along the way. Needless to say, they were a little bit upset. When John O. Meusebach was appointed as the new commissioner of the Adelsverein, he solicited more funds, and procured another tract of land to accommodate the new colonists until they could claim their land within the Fisher Miller grant. This new tract of land was named Fredericksburg for Adelsverein member, Prince Frederick of Prussia. Meusebach led the first settlers to Fredericksburg in April of 1846.

The German settlers had made it to Fredericksburg but not without hardship. Food was scarce. Their poor diet contributed to a disease that was similar to dysentery. Many newcomers died. The two-wheeled oxcart that traveled to and from the cemetery could

be seen carrying the settlers' losses daily. John Meusebach felt their sorrow and knew that the settlers' morale needed a strong boost. These people were not only suffering with personal losses, but also from disappointment about the promises that had been made to them. The land that they had traveled so far for, and suffered so much for, was still not inhabitable. The terms of the Fisher-Miller grant stipulated that the land must be occupied and surveyed by the fall of 1847. The district surveyor, John James, flatly stated that he and his crew would not travel into the northern area of the grant until peace had been made with the Indians.

Meusebach knew that they were running out of time. He felt that it was critical to proceed with the colonization efforts. Government officials were not able to promise any help with settling the Indian hostilities, so Meusebach took it upon himself. In January of 1847, a mounted party made up of well-armed Germans, Mexicans, and several American surveyors headed out from Fredericksburg. The governor of Texas, upon learning of this expedition, sent a messenger to warn Meusebach of the consequences of entering Indian territory. By the time the message was received, however, negotiations had already begun. On their way into the territory, Meusebach's party had met up with some friendly Shawnees who assured them that the Comanches had spotted them. It was probably very disconcerting for Meusebach's band of forty odd men to find itself suddenly in the midst of five to six thousand Comanches, but contact was made. Agreeing to the Comanches demand that only four or five of the group could come farther for the negotiations, five very brave pioneers continued forward. After much negotiation and time spent with the Comanches, Meusebach's words were heard and an agreement was reached.

The resulting treaty allowed the settlers to go unharmed into Indian territory and the Indians to enter the white settlements. It provided for mutual reports of wrongdoing and allowed for the survey of the lands with a payment of at least \$1,000 to the Indians. The terms of the treaty were never broken. The colonization efforts continued and five colonies were formed before the Adelsverein ceased to exist. Ironically, however, these colonies did not thrive, and the "temporary" settlements of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg did.