



## The Greek Texans

Greeks and people of Greek heritage came to the Americas and Texas mostly between 1890 and 1920. Greece has been a colonizing country for some 2,500 years; thus, some Greeks came from Greece itself, others from satellite colonies in the Middle East. Many Greek colonials were expelled from Turkey during warfare. In Greece, economic depression at the turn of the century, overpopulation, and—not incidentally—social customs such as an expensive dowry system that had to accompany marriage, drove many individuals to seek fortunes elsewhere.

Most Greek emigrants to Texas went directly into cities. Here, the typical single man would work in a low-paying job until he had earned the money to open his own business. If he met with success, and most did, this prosperity led to a trip home for a marriage and a quick return to Texas.

But the first to arrive were rather different adventurers. Captain Nicholas, who never admitted another name, was a young pirate who sailed the schooner *Arabella* as part of Jean Laffite's buccaneer fleet. Coming into his share of luck, Nicholas tried to settle down by buying himself a Karankawa bride (for 10 pounds of sugar and an undisclosed quantity of rum), lost her in a storm, sailed with Laffite off Yucatán, survived yellow fever, escaped wrecks, and returned to Galveston on board a Texas Navy ship in 1842. The apparently indestructible captain finally did settle down in Galveston, living by his skills as fisherman and trader and by his wits as a storyteller. Just a few days before his 100th birthday, still going strong, Nicholas died in the Galveston storm of 1900.



*The Very Reverend Theoclitos Triantafilides, first priest of the Serbian, Greek, and Russian Eastern Orthodox Church of SS. Constantine and Helena, Galveston*

Some individuals of Greek descent came early to Texas on very different business. Colonel Francisco Garay, with General Urrea during the Texas Revolution, managed to save a few men from the Palm Sunday massacre at Goliad.



*Bishop John of Thermon (holding Bible) at his Orthodox Holy Ordination ceremony (the first to be held in Texas) in the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Houston, 1970*

Born of Greek parents, Garay had served the Mexican Republic as consul at Gibraltar and attaché in London before joining the army and finding himself in Texas as part of a very bloody revolution.

Later Greeks, seeing Texas as a home, formed small communities. Some individuals worked their way to Galveston as seamen, leaving ship there for other lives; others abandoned railroad work for urban Texas settings. In an era when women did not travel alone, most women were brought as brides.

Galveston, as Texas's leading seaport before the rise of Houston, was a lure to fishermen, sailors, and merchants. There, joining with Orthodox Syrians, Serbians, and Russians, the Greeks helped build the Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church, where the first priest, the Greek Theoclitos Triantafilides, conducted services in Greek, Russian, and Serbian.



Typically individualistic as Greeks are, Faithon P. Lucas, a cafe owner in Dallas, summarized immigrant feeling after he was called a “damn foreigner.”

“Friend,” Lucas remarked calmly, “I am ashamed that I was not born here, but I came as quickly as I could.” This might have been remark enough, but holding his accuser’s eye, he continued. “I have done my best to be worthy of America. But I am just as ashamed as your grandfather was when he arrived.”

Greek urban communities typically centered around the church or social societies. By the 1940s communities existed in all of Texas’s larger cities—San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, Galveston—and also in Waco, Austin, Wichita Falls, El Paso, Port Arthur, and San Angelo.

March 25, Greek Independence Day, has been observed officially in Texas since the governor’s proclamation in 1943 of “Greek Independence in Texas.” The day is marked in homes, churches, and community centers with a feast, costumed dances, religious services, and speeches.

*Dancers celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, Houston, 1965*

The church is the focus for most of the Greek festival days, which include Christmas Eve midnight services; gifts on New Year’s (St. Basil’s Day, although this is yielding to today’s commercial Christmas); the blessing of the waters at port cities on Epiphany; somber Good Friday processions; and the feast of Easter Sunday with its notable breads, pastries, cheeses, and in former years, roast lamb and costumed dancing.

And the Greek wedding may still extend in excess of the hour needed for the exchange of ceremony, although the duration is shorter than the former 10-day celebration. Also, to nearly everyone’s delight, the dowry system has been mostly abandoned.

Ancient Greeks contributed much to Western culture—structures of literature and government, music and philosophy, science and drama—modern Greeks have helped construct Texas.





*The Garden Fruit Store, San Antonio, belonging to Elias Varessis (Pappa Louis)*

# THE GREEK TEXANS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives *push* them to leave, and things in a new place *pull* them.  
*Instructions: Decide what social factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.*

 <p><b>Economic Push Factors</b></p>	<p><b>Economic Pull Factors</b></p> 	<p><b>WORD BANK</b></p> <p>Religious Persecution    Close to Family</p> <p>Religious Freedom        Lack of Schools</p> <p>Education Available       Far from Family</p>
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## Greek Settlers in Texas

The first Greeks to arrive in Texas were adventurers! Captain Nicholas was a young Greek pirate who sailed as a part of Jean LaFitte’s buccaneer fleet and settled on Galveston Island in 1842. Galveston became one of Texas’s leading seaports in the 19th century and attracted Greek settlers who worked as fishermen, sailors and merchants.

Later, some Greeks came to Texas to escape religious persecution and warfare. In 1923, the Lausanne Treaty ended fighting between Greece and Turkey that had been going on since 1919. The treaty forced people of Greek and Turkish descent to resettle to new areas based on their religious beliefs. 1.3 million Christian Greeks were expelled from Turkey, while 500,000 Muslims were forced out of Greece. Some of the Greeks that lost their homes and property moved to Texas.

Today, Greek communities can be found across Texas! Major cities, such as San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston, have large Greek populations, as well as Galveston, Waco, Austin, Wichita Falls, El Paso, Port Arthur, and San Angelo.

Who was one of the earliest Greek settlers in Texas?  
 Why did he come to Texas?

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\_\_\_\_\_

Why did some Greeks come to Texas after 1923?

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In what major cities can you find Greek communities today?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Digging Deeper

Using **Texans One and All: The Greek Texans**, answer the following questions about why Greek immigrants moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state.

When early Greek immigrants arrived in Texas, how did they earn a living?

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Were early Greek settlers men or women? Why?

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Galveston was the site of one of the earliest Greek communities in Texas. What kind of work was available in Galveston?

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Look at a map of Greece and compare it to a map of Texas. Why do you think many Greeks would feel comfortable settling in Galveston? What do these two places have in common?

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By 1940, what other Texas cities had large Greek communities?

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## Cultural Celebrations

Much of Greek culture is centered around the church. What religion did Greek settlers bring to Texas?

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List 5 festivals or holidays that are celebrated in Greek culture.

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How are these celebrations similar to or different from holidays you celebrate?

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In addition to their religion, in what other ways have Greeks influenced Western culture?

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### Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Greek Texans and social push and pull factors.

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