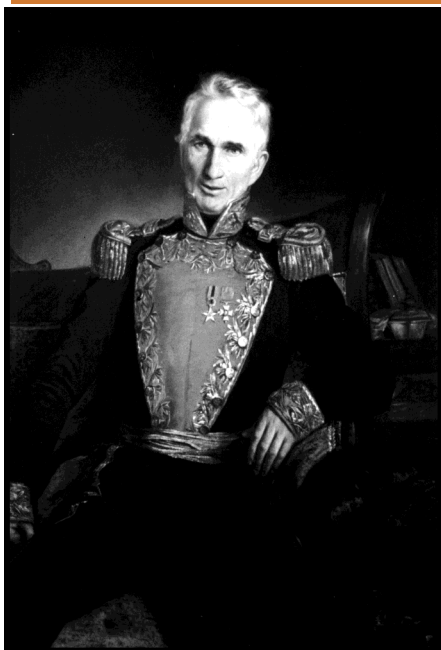




The Italian Texans



General Vicente Filisola

Until the mid-19th century, Italians coming to the Texas area were adventurers, explorers, or soldiers.

Italian explorers, from the 15th and 16th centuries, were well known indeed, but none came in the service of an Italian city or province. In the mid-16th century—and for many years before and after—the Italian peninsula was a mass of republics, city-states, kingdoms, and duchies. Some enjoyed fair economic independence, but none could mount New World exploration like Spain and Portugal. Thus, adventurous Italian soldiers and sailors took employment elsewhere.

According to some documentation, Amerigo Vespucci saw the coast of future Texas in 1497 while determining for Ferdinand of Aragon whether the new lands of Columbus were Asia—or an unknown continent. Vespucci did not command the voyage but was official observer for the king on this and three later voyages more of confirmation than exploration.

A number of Italian soldiers marched with Vázquez de Coronado's expedition as it crossed Texas's high plains in 1542. Later,

Henri de Tonti, serving his commander and friend Sieur de La Salle, entered Texas in 1686 and 1689 searching for La Salle's settlement and made records of his visit. Tonti, born near Rome, was a resourceful and colorful Italian, known in the New World for his artificial hand made from copper and his presence up and down the Mississippi.

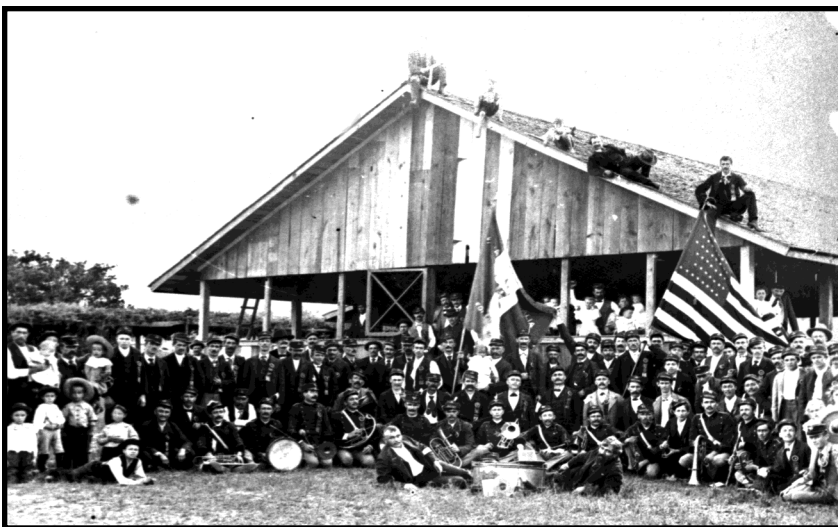
Later Italians came to trade and stay. Vicente Micheli was an early Texas settler in the East Texas fur trade at Nacogdoches in 1793. Entering ranching and horse trading, Micheli moved to San Antonio after 1806. As owner of Rancho de San Francisco and a mercantile store, he called himself the “Merchant of Venice.”

During the Texas Revolution Giuseppe Cassini (called José Cassiano in San Antonio) provided the rebellious Texans with food from his store. For this he had to flee his home, but after the revolution he returned to San Antonio and became a land dealer with extensive holdings.

General Vicente Filisola was second in command to General López de Santa Anna during the revolution. Filisola proved a durable soldier, escaping attempts to make him a scapegoat for Mexico's loss of Texas. He remained in military life through the Mexican War. Stephen F. Austin, who met Filisola in 1833 before decisive hostilities, declared him a “blunt, honest, candid and prompt soldier . . . he is the friend of the farming and agricultural interests—a decided enemy of smugglers and lawyers.” General Filisola remained loyal to Mexico during the revolution, but others, such as Prospero Bernardi, fought on the other side with Sam Houston at San Jacinto.



Josephine Lucchese, internationally renowned coloratura soprano and daughter of Sam Lucchese, San Antonio bootmaker, began her singing career in 1922 and retired in 1970.



Italian Club picnic at the mining town of Thurber, late 1800s

In 1870 only 186 Italians were listed on Texas's census records. But by 1920 the number was over 8,000. Significant Italian emigration was a part of the 1880-1920 surge from southern and eastern Europe. Many Italians in these decades, moving away from economic depression and warfare in Europe, headed for the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico. Texas received a substantial share.

And when they came in these years, the Italians most often settled with their geographic compatriots. Piedmontese settled in Montague County. Individuals from Venice and Modena joined Piedmontese in the coal mines of Thurber. Lombardy provided hands for the New York, Texas and Mexican Railway between

Victoria and Rosenberg. And Sicilians settled in Galveston County and up the Brazos river valley. Urban communities followed in Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio. As with other immigrant groups, many of the first arrivals, mostly younger men, settled to establish families.

La Tribuna Italiana

For some 50 years, La Tribuna Italiana, founded by Charles Saverio Papa of Sicily, was the banner of Italian culture in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.

Papa arrived in Dallas in 1908, calling the city "Venice" because of unusual floods that year. He operated a barbershop for five years, then—without a press or money—decided to start a newspaper. What he did have were four words for the masthead: Justice, Freedom, Opportunity, America. He soon joined forces with an Italian printer, Louis Adin, who could run a linotype machine. Papa could sell advertising.

The Italian-language newspaper proved a success and supported communities in three states.

In 1940, when Benito Mussolini declared war against the Allies, La Tribuna Italiana changed its name to The Texas Tribune, then published in English.

The paper survived Adin's retirement and Papa's accidental death, until 1962. In a last editorial, logical reasons were given for ceasing publication. The claim was made that the paper had always supported the advancement of Italian communities. It had also worked for the "amalgamation of our people into the whole American society." With that accomplished, publication could cease.

Prolific sculptor Pompeo Coppini (here working on The Alamo Cenotaph) contributed greatly to Texas.



THE ITALIAN 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 economic factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.



Economic Push Factors

Economic Pull Factors



WORD BANK

Lost Job

Higher Wages

Available Work

Low Pay

Italian Settlers in Texas

Italians have a long history in Texas. While many Italian-Americans migrated to Texas during the 20th century because of the booming job market, the earliest Italians were in the state during the years of Spanish exploration.

These early Italian explorers arrived in Texas with Spanish explorer Francisco Vásquez de Coronado in 1541. Along with Coronado, they trekked across the High Plains, but did not settle in the state.

The first known Italian settlers came to Texas in the late 1700s as merchants. Vincente Micheli was among those. He came from Brescia, a city in Northern Italy, and settled in Nacogdoches, in East Texas. Other Italians settled in Texas and worked as farmers, miners, brick makers and railroad workers. Frank Qualia emigrated from northern Italy to Del Rio and established Texas’s first winery in 1883.

Regardless of why Italian immigrants moved to Texas, they brought with them their strong cultural identity which has been defined by traditions of food, faith and family.

During what century did Texas experience the greatest influx of Italian Americans?

When did the first Italians arrive in Texas?

What kind of work did early Italian settlers do in Texas?

What three things define Italian culture?

Digging Deeper

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

When did the first Italians come to Texas and why did they come?

Why did Vicente Micheli call himself the “Merchant of Venice”? Explain what Micheli meant by this AND where Micheli got this title (Hint: It is a literary reference).

What role did Giuseppe Cassini play in the Texas Revolution?

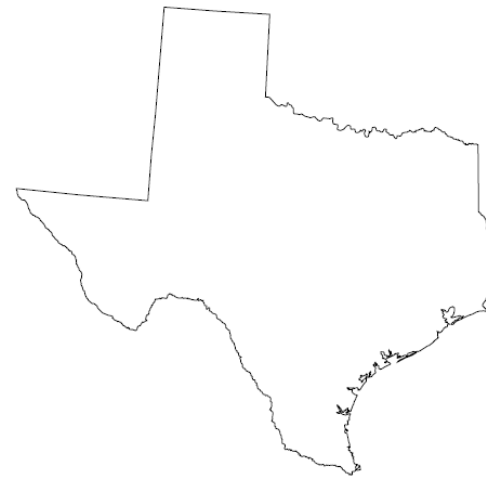
Why did many Italians leave Europe between 1880 and 1920?

How did the newspaper *La Tribuna Italiana* influence Italian culture in Texas?

Do media outlets exist today for specific ethnic groups? Explain your answer and describe how they may or may not influence Texas culture.

Geography Skills

Use your textbook to find the locations mentioned as significant to the Italian experience in Texas, and label them on the map below.



- Nacogdoches
- San Antonio
- Montague County
- Thurber
- Victoria
- Rosenberg
- Galveston
- Houston

Use your textbook or atlas to list other Texas cities and towns that you think have Italian influences.

Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Italian Texans and economic push and pull factors.
