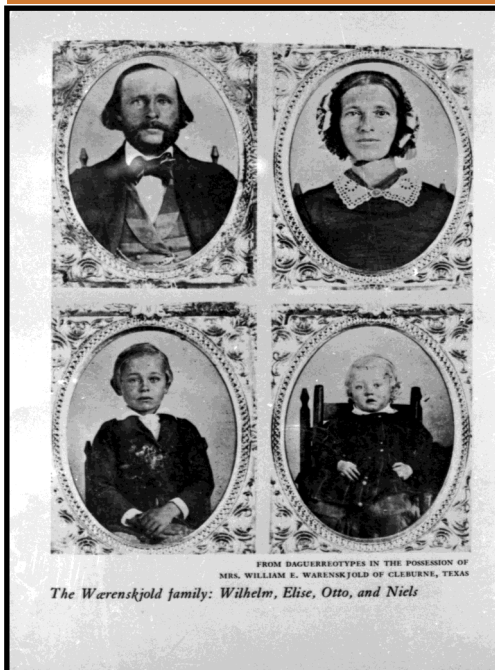




The Norwegian Texans



Elise Waerenskjold (c.1857), a woman far beyond her times; schoolteacher; champion of social causes; briefly editor of Reiersen's monthly magazine in Norway; then, in Texas, noted writer for Norwegian papers on the benefits of immigration to America and the beauties of Norwegian life in Texas.

Normandy, but after 1848 the name yielded to Brownsboro. Later, at Four Mile Prairie on the border of Kaufman and Van Zandt Counties, a colonial area was established with a small number of families. Reiersen died in Texas, still writing, always irritating native Norwegians by telling them Texas was better than their homeland.

Cleng Peerson, Ole Canuteson, and Carl Quæstad walked the Bosque River and led a few Norwegians into the new Bosque County in 1854. West of Waco, the community of Norse was for a time the largest concentration of Norwegians in Texas. The area remains home to many families today who are descendants of the Norwegian arrivals. The church community has maintained one custom into recent years, an annual smörgåsbord held at Our Savior's Lutheran Church.

Texas Norwegians, arriving and settling as small rural groups, have been few. The 1900 census listed a peak number of 1,356 native Norwegians in the state, a total that declined to 1,000 in 50 years. Today, over 95,000 Texans claim Norwegian descent.

Most of the emigration came from rural areas in Norway to rural areas in Texas. The first known individual was Johannes Nordboe, who, in 1841 when he was over 70, settled near Dallas with his family.

Johan Reinert Reiersen attempted a colony in Henderson County in 1845. Reiersen, a journalist, editor, and author, had been sponsored in 1843 by a group of prospective emigrants and financiers to tour the United States and report settlement possibilities.

This Reiersen did—he heard about Texas in New Orleans. Visiting the Republic, he was given a welcome by Sam Houston. Reiersen apparently was convinced; returning to Norway, he so complimented Texas and so insulted the opportunities in Norway that many Norwegians were outraged.

Deciding to emigrate, Reiersen left for Texas, arriving in 1845. He established the magazine *Norge og Amerika* before leaving, turned it into an emigration newsletter, and edited it from Texas.

After annexation he brought settlers to Henderson County in the new state, where he was joined also by his two brothers. They named the place



J.R. Reiersen, the Father of Norwegian Immigration

Ole Ringness

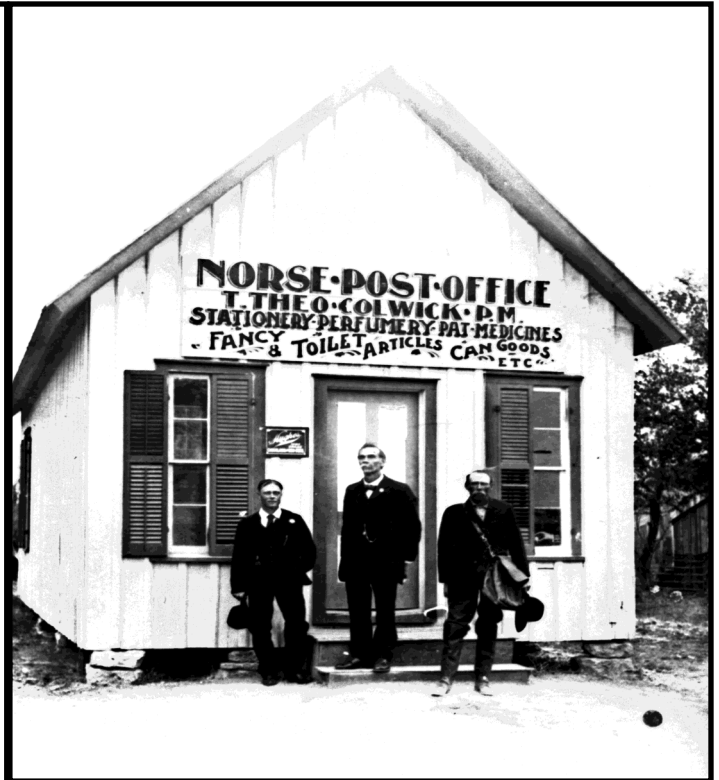
Ole Ringness, born in Norway, came to Texas with his parents in 1852, stopping in Reiersen's Prairieville settlement. Typhoid fever and drought caused a move to Bosque County, west of Clifton, where Ringness became a mail carrier between that area and Ft. Worth.

Ringness noted, one long and particularly muddy day, that wagon wheels, cupped on the axle, threw out a good deal of dirt to the side. Being a farmer, Ringness immediately had the idea of a new plow blade, shaped like a saucer or a disk. This plow, he knew, would work out well in wet, black soil. He soon made several models in his father's blacksmith shop.

In 1872, Ringness went to New York City to register a patent. He carried a considerable amount of money, intending to visit Norway after the conclusion of his business.

From New York, the family was notified of his death. The cause of death was not, and is not, known; his place of burial could never be determined. And, according to a patent office communication, the plow design had not been fully registered, but a patent could be issued for a \$5 fee. The family did not pursue the patent registration.

Later, disk plows were on the commercial market, patented by J. I. Case Plow Company, as a successful, popular improvement for many soil conditions.



The First Post Office in Norse was also a store. Ole Ringness (at left) was a substitute carrier.

Cleng Peerson, responsible for much of the Norwegian immigration to the eastern United States as well as to Texas, is buried at the Norse church.

Norwegian immigration lasted somewhat past the Civil War, and individual families did maintain some Old World customs. But, separate as most homesteads were, Norwegian as a language disappeared in all practical use by 1940.

The Norwegian Society of Texas, with groups in several Texas cities, was founded in 1975 to preserve, and certainly to replicate, Norse heritage. Members of this group still emphasize their Viking heritage and costume—which were never actually a part of Texas culture until the last two decades.

Immigrant attitudes toward Norway were often full of honest respect but critical of a country that could not provide for the working class. An old emigrant song is very direct:

Farewell, thou Mother Norway now I must leave thee.

Because thou fostered me, I give thee many thanks.

All too sparing wert thou in providing-food for the throng of thy laborers.

Thou who gavest more than enough to thy well-schooled sons.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____ PERIOD: _____

What is Assimilation?

The many immigrants to Texas brought their unique cultures with them. The people of Poland spoke Polish, the Germans knew how to make sauerkraut, the Norwegians built log homes like those they had built in Norway, the Japanese planted rice as they did in Japan, and the people of India built Hindu temples in Texas.

As immigrants from different cultures made Texas home, many changed or lost some of the cultural traditions they brought with them. This process known as *assimilation* happens when people living together merge, or combine, their cultural traits. Through assimilation, some cultural traits are lost and others are adopted. People may change the way that they dress, the language that they speak and even the food that they eat based on the cultures of others they live near.

Assimilation is not always an easy or welcomed process. Sometimes it happens by force because immigrants and their cultures are not accepted by the majority. Through political and social pressure, some groups have been forced to give up their language and other cultural traditions.

The population of Texas today is one of great cultural diversity with more than 400 different cultural groups represented. Although many groups have assimilated and adopted other cultural traditions, the ongoing arrival of new citizens continues to create Texas anew, enriching us all.

List five cultural traits that new immigrants bring with them to a new place.

How does *assimilation* affect culture?

Describe one example of how a person or group has been forced to assimilate to be accepted.

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Norwegian Texans

Using **Texans One and All: The Norwegian Texans**, answer the following questions about why Norwegians moved to Texas and how they assimilated.

How many Texans claim to be of Norwegian descent?

How did Johan Reinert Reiersen irritate his fellow Norwegians?

What was the largest Norwegian town in Texas?

What Norwegian customs still exist in Texas today and what customs are no longer practiced?

According to the old emigrant song, what did Norway do well for Norwegians and what did the country fail to do?

Geography Skills



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

- Dallas
- Henderson County
- Brownsboro
- Bosque County
- Norse

Globalization

The world is more connected than ever before! Changes in technology and political policies in the last several decades have led to greater increases in international trade, made migration easier, and put information from around the world at the tips of our fingers. This process called *globalization* has created an increasingly connected world culture and economy. Some fear that globalization may erase traditions and customs of smaller cultural groups. While we have more access to information, products and movement, globalization may also decrease the diversity that makes cultures unique and interesting.

What examples of globalization do you see in your home or community?

How do you feel about globalization? Explain your answer.

Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Norwegian Texans and assimilation.
