



The Swiss Texans



George Hermann— From modest beginnings, he achieved great wealth and gave his city of Houston a hospital; Hermann Square next to City Hall; and Hermann Park, an important recreational facility.

The Swiss are only a small cultural representation in Texas, but, as the ethnic-studies cliché goes, they made “a contribution far greater than their actual numbers.”

Generally, the Swiss had little reason for leaving their homeland or coming to Texas. Most Swiss taking leave of Europe in the 19th century simply sought greater opportunity or were moved by a spirit of adventure. They were also quick to assimilate into the culture of a new home, wherever they went.

They heard about possibilities in the Americas through the usual channels: newspapers, letters from wanderers, commercial advertising, and emigrant organizations.

A few schemes were planned for mass emigration. One, in 1819 with the goal of moving 10,000 Swiss to Texas, was approved by the Spanish government—but it and all were failures.

The Swiss came as individuals and families, and they entered an astonishingly diverse number of occupations.

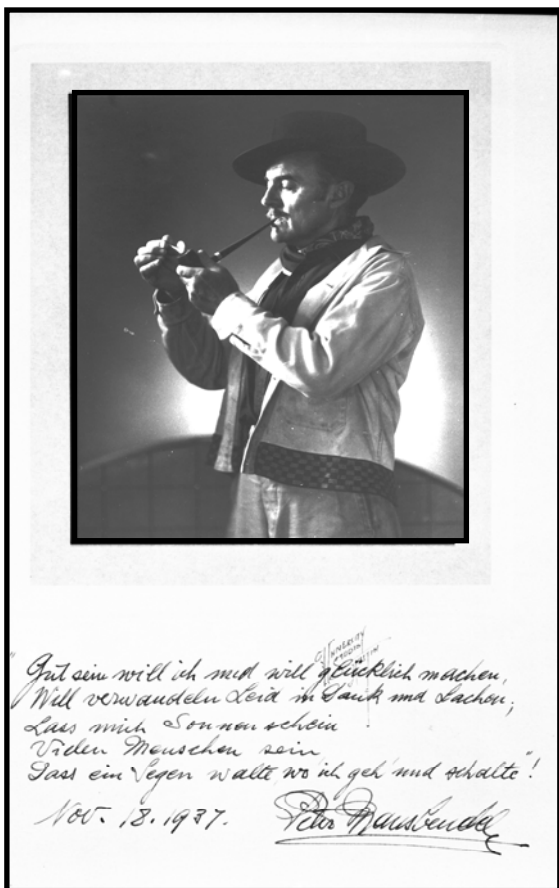
Henry and Louis Rueg were in Nacogdoches by 1823 as horse traders; Jean Louis Berlandier came as a professional botanist in 1828 at the invitation of the Mexican government and stayed to complete the first ethnographic description of Texas Indians; and Peter Fullinwider and his wife entered

Mexican Texas, illegally, as the first Presbyterian missionaries.

Charles and Mary Amsler settled in Cat Spring, German country, in 1834, and both participated in the revolution two years later. They, and various family members, operated a farm, started a cotton gin, managed a stagecoach stop, and opened a lumber business. Andrew Baldinger was a Galveston banker. John Hermann, a veteran of Waterloo on the losing side, came to Houston with a wife, three children, and five dollars. Helped by the sale of his wife's jewelry, Hermann prospered as a baker. His son, George, bought land on which oil was fortuitously found and became a Houston philanthropist.



Christian Moser established the first of three Swiss-owned dairies in Dallas in 1873. Here he drives his dairy wagon in the 1880s.



Peter Mansbendel, master carver of all types of objects in many kinds of wood— He produced portraits, carvings of flora and fauna, bas relief panels, furniture, and decorative motifs for mantels, stairways, and doors.

John Jacob Rahm, a Texas Ranger, advised the German Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels to buy the land on which New Braunfels was established; Henry Rosenberg of Galveston was a mercantile-business owner and banker; and Johann U. Anderegg produced Swiss cheese in Texas's Hill Country. Getulius Kellersberger, chief engineer for Confederate States of America forces in Texas, planned and built Texas' coastal defenses.

Gustave Duerler turned pecan shelling into a Texas industry; Edward Walter Eberle, born in Denton of Swiss parentage, became admiral of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations; Karl Hoblitzelle organized the Interstate Amusement Company and literally developed the commercial theater in contemporary Texas; and Peter Mansbendel was one of the most original and creative woodcarvers of the 20th century. Godfred Fleury, a mural and fresco painter, also constructed parade floats and founded an advertising company. He was still going strong when, at the age of 68, he entered the University of Texas at Austin as a freshman engineering student. Of maternal Swiss descent, Dwight David Eisenhower was born in Texas and, with much military service in the state, often referred to Texas as home.

Swiss-Texan history reads like a breathless roster of accomplishment. It is.



Detail from a Mansbendel mantel carved in 1932

WHAT IS CULTURE? THE SWISS TEXANS

NAME: _____ DATE: _____ PERIOD: _____

What is Culture?

Take a moment to think about what you have done today. What kind of home did you wake up in? What did you have for breakfast? Did you listen to music on your way to school? If you did, what kind of music did you hear and what language was it in? Your answers to all of these questions help to identify your *culture*.

Culture is a way of understanding the world around you. It is the way of life of people who share similar beliefs and customs. You are not born with culture. You learn it!

Some aspects of your culture are obvious to others around you. Your language, including slang, music, clothing, and food help others to identify you and your culture. Other aspects of culture are less obvious and may only be understood by others once they get to know you. These less visible aspects of culture include your values, religious beliefs, family traditions, work ethic and many more. While these cultural traits may be less obvious to outsiders, they are no less important.

Culture can be a very confusing subject because there are some many things that help to define our culture, and it is always changing. Through technology and movement, cultures have spread knowledge and skills from one place to another in a process called *cultural diffusion*. The population of Texas represents over 400 different cultural groups! Everyday people of different cultures interact, share and grow. In Texas there are many great examples of cultural diversity and cultural diffusion.

Define culture: _____

How do you learn culture? _____

Why do cultures change? _____

What is *your* culture?

After reading ***What is Culture?*** draw a self-portrait in the frame below to represent aspects of your culture. Be sure to include the parts of your culture that others may be able to see as well as what others cannot see.

Swiss Settlers in Texas

The Swiss had few reasons to leave their homeland for Texas, but that did not stop them from coming. In the 19th century, Switzerland was a well-organized and prosperous country. Switzerland competed with England in the field of spinning and weaving, was the banking center of Europe and had a world-wide reputation for its manufacturing industry. For its citizens, Switzerland provided free public education, highly respected universities, social security and welfare programs as well as civil and religious freedoms.

Despite the many benefits of living in Switzerland, however, many left the country for Texas in search of new opportunities and adventure. They settled throughout the state, often choosing to live near German and French settlements since they were familiar with the languages. Regardless of where they settled, though, the Swiss brought with them the many ideas and skills that made their culture unique.

What reasons did the Swiss have to *stay* in Switzerland?

Why did many Swiss decide to immigrate to Texas?

How do you think Texas differed from Switzerland in the 1800s?

Using **Texans One and All: The Swiss Texans**, answer the following questions about why the Swiss moved to Texas and how they brought their culture.

How did Swiss immigrants hear about opportunities in America?

Describe some of the jobs Swiss immigrants did in Texas.

The Swiss were known for their *precision* in many types of manufacturing. Look at the images in your reading. What example of precision do you see? Describe the image and you think it relates to Swiss culture.

Geography Skills

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



- Nacogdoches
- Cat Spring
- Galveston
- Houston
- New Braunfels
- Denton