

## The Hungarian Texans



*Helen Ujhazy Madarasz (c. 1890), first Hungarian businesswoman in Texas, successfully dealt in real estate and, with her son Ladislaus, established the first nursery in the area on land that is now the San Antonio Zoo and Brackenridge*

Hungary in east-central Europe is a land of many peoples. Magyar, German, Slav, Romanian, Romany, and Slovak have mingled for a thousand years. The Hungarians, the Magyar, are themselves immigrants from farther east. This is a land of overlapping traditions and many languages.

Hungary, notably from 1848 to 1956, was a homeland its sons and daughters were forced to leave. The reasons were the usual: failed revolutionary efforts to break away from conquerors, international war, political unrest, and overpopulation during peacetime.

Those who left, many for the Americas, retained their language, customs, foods, and dress to a noticeable degree and their pride of origin absolutely. In new homelands, such as Texas, they continued a social change and adaptation that began in 10th century Europe.

The revolution of 1848-1849 directed against Austrian rule caused the exile of many soldiers and civil leaders, often the educated nobility from the highly stratified culture of Eastern Europe. People of the lower economic class had no means to leave; many of the rulers did.

László Újházi was a former civil governor of the Komárom fortress at the time of the 1848 revolution. Coming to San Antonio with others from the losing side, Újházi became the leader of Texas's Hungarian community

organization. One of his daughters, Helen, became Texas's first Hungarian businesswoman.

Joe Petmecky came to New Braunfels in 1845, even before the outbreak of revolutionary feeling in Hungary, then set up a gunsmith shop in Austin. Petmecky became famous for his master craftsmanship and was soon known for his inventions. One idea that made him famous in the American West was the spring-shank steel spur. If a cowboy was thrown from his horse, the spur would open and fall away, rather than remain strapped on and possibly cause a broken ankle.

Hungarians in Texas were seriously split by the Civil War, some willingly enlisted in the CSA, some were conscripted, and some became Union soldiers.



*J. C. Petmecky's gun shop, Austin, 1925 –J. C. is seated; behind him is Howell Petmecky (at left) and Robert Felix.*

Dr. Arthur Wadgymár settled at Carrizo Springs in 1880; he was typical of the early Hungarian arrivals: professionals and craftspeople. However, between 1880 and 1920, like so much of Europe, Hungary provided agricultural immigrants. Under Austrian domination but in relative peace many of the years from 1849 to World War I, the country felt the pressure of overpopulation. So farming families came to Texas.

Following World War I, Hungary, on the losing side, was literally dismembered. Three-quarters of its land and population was put under other rulers. In World War II Hungary, joining Germany in an effort to regain territory, faced Russia—and lost.

In 1944 the Red Army advanced into Budapest, and many Hungarians left their homeland.

Under Communist rule few people were allowed to leave the shattered country. The subsequent Budapest uprising of 1956 resulted in another failure. Thousands fled west and, just as a century before, many of the refugees were well educated and technically trained.



*Alois Goebel and his musical group, which played at the Menger Hotel, San Antonio, early 1900s –The three young women on the right are his daughters.*



*Ludwig Varga's saddler store, Cuero –Several generations of the Varga family owned or worked in saddler shops in San Antonio and Cuero. Their saddles were in great demand because of their high quality.*

Some individuals, such as Rose and Steve Safran, walked into Austria with little more than the clothes they wore and were eventually welcomed into the United States. The Safrans made San Antonio their home.

Today, a scattering of Hungarians, most descended from earlier arrivals, live across Texas mainly in urban areas. Individuals have entered the arts, investment and professional services, and politics.

# TEXANS ONE AND ALL: THE HUNGARIAN 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 political factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.*

	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; min-height: 150px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;"><b>Political Push Factors</b></p> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; min-height: 150px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;"><b>Political Pull Factors</b></p> </div> 	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;"><b>WORD BANK</b></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; margin: 0;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">War</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Discrimination</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Acceptance</td> <td>Peace</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Harsh Government</td> <td>Personal Freedom</td> </tr> </table> </div>	War	Discrimination	Acceptance	Peace	Harsh Government	Personal Freedom
War	Discrimination								
Acceptance	Peace								
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## Hungarian Settlers in Texas

Hungary is a country in east-central Europe and people from many different backgrounds live there. Magyar, German, Slav, Romanian, Romany, and Slovak people have lived together there for centuries, but it was a very troubled country.

Hungary was often controlled by rulers from other neighboring countries. In 1848, some Hungarians began a revolution against the Austrian rulers that controlled Hungary, but they were not successful and many people were forced to leave their home to find a safer place to live.

During World War I, Hungary found itself on the losing side. At the end of the war, Hungary lost 75 percent of its land. Again, Hungarians found themselves controlled by foreign rulers. During World War II, Hungary hoped to regain some of its lost territory, but they lost again.

At the end of World War II, the communist army of Russia marched into the Hungarian capital of Budapest and took control. Many Hungarians fled the country in 1944, and many more left in 1956. Hungary finally gained its independence in 1989.

What groups of people called Hungary home?

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Why did many Hungarians move in 1848?

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How did World War I and World War II affect the people of Hungary?

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## Digging Deeper

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

What country did Hungary side with during World War II?

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What did they hope to gain by siding with this country?

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Was Hungary successful? Why or why not?

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*When the communist government came to power in 1944, Hungarians lost many of the freedoms they once had. Life changed so much that some Hungarians decided to leave their home in search of a place with more freedoms.*

What event caused some families to leave Hungary in 1944?

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What was one restriction placed on Hungarians under communist rule?

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Thousands of Hungarians fled their home country in 1956. Why did they leave?

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When the Safran family left Hungary in 1956, what form of transportation did they take?

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What did the Safran family take with them when they left Hungary?

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Many families left Hungary just as the Safran family did. Why do you think this was their only option?

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How would you feel if your home was taken over by another country?

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Would you leave your home and immigrate to a new country? Why or why not?

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### Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Hungarian Texans and political push and pull factors.

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