

## The Lebanese & Syrian



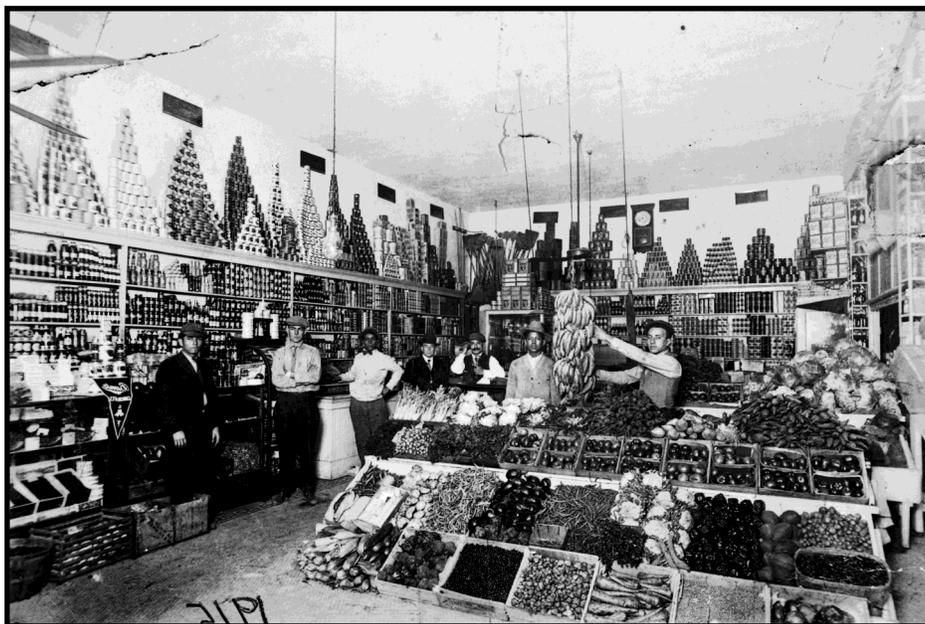
*Annie Swia Casseb with baby George and Solomon (Sr.), c. 1900— Solomon established the first supermarket (c. 1923) in San Antonio.*

Texans descended from those who came from the present-day areas of Lebanon and Syria number some 50,000 and have established some of the most lasting communities.

Perhaps the first Syrian to come to Texas was Hadji Ali, born Orthodox and raised Moslem, who landed in Indianola in 1856. Among his shipmates were 33 camels. The Syrian was a caravaner employed by the United States Army then experimenting with the use of camels for transportation in the Southwest. Hadji Ali stayed in Texas only a short time but did pick up a new name: Hi Jolly. He moved on to Arizona, where he lived for more than 50 years. He is buried under a small stone pyramid with an iron camel on top.

Most Arabic-speaking emigrants came between 1880 and World War I. Many of the first arrivals were Christians, who abandoned their homelands because of religious persecution. Few of the earlier individuals were Moslem, but after 1945 hundreds of Moslems came as a result of military conflict in the Middle East.

The first individuals and families either entered Texas through Mexico or came after entering the United States at New York. Originally from the Ottoman Empire's provinces, the immigrants were simply called "Syrians" until Lebanon became a nation in 1919. Referring to the history of the eastern Mediterranean, many of them—even today—appropriately consider themselves of Phoenician descent.



*Solomon and George Casseb's produce store, San Antonio, 1915*

Urban in settlement pattern, the first generation of mostly young men were traveling salesmen or operated tiny businesses. Some individuals dreamed of enjoying a few prosperous years in Texas, then returning home. Few did. Other arrivals established themselves as retail merchants, educators, lawyers, oil producers, and manufacturers. The Lebanese and Syrians were typical in acculturation, but many families maintained Arabic as a home language, while stressing the need to handle English well. Most preserved their cultural heritage in terms of food, music, and literature.

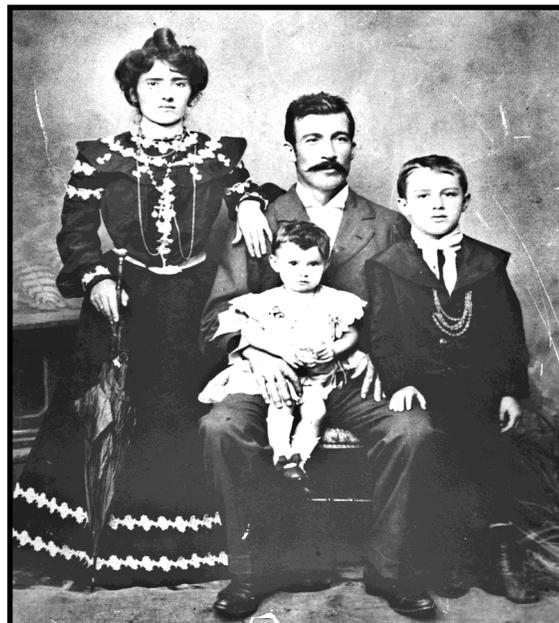
Individuals often maintain close family ties to Lebanon and Syria, and visits to the homeland are frequent in comparison to some cultural groups.

Many families belong to the Maronite Rite Catholic Church, although Orthodox churches exist in several cities including Beaumont, El Paso, Austin, and Houston.

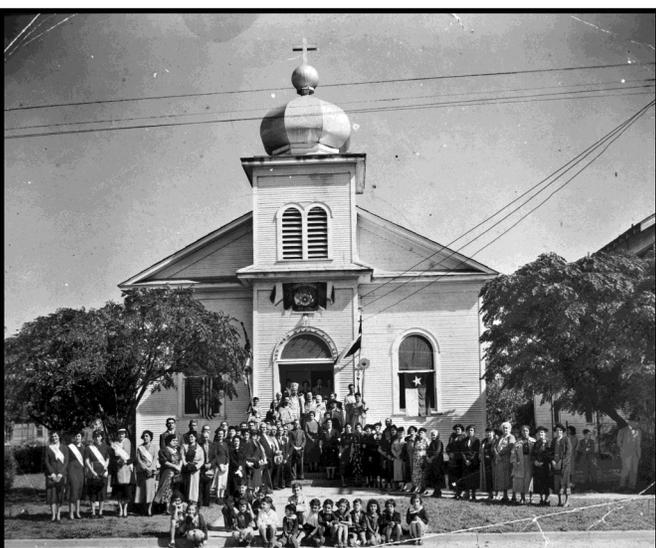
Community groups often formed close-knit organizations. Many of these were church-oriented; others were formed by individual families. Many Lebanese established extended families in several settlement areas. Today, the Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese American Clubs has many Texas members. This nonpolitical federation stresses both Americanization and the preservation of ethnic pride. The organization, often working through local clubs, sponsors economic aid, scholarships, and literary and civic awards.

Houston community groups are well known for retaining Arabic as a family language and maintaining cultural traditions at gatherings called sahras. These were held in many communities by families, clubs, and churches, and feature traditional foods, dances, music, and dress.

In San Antonio many families are Maronites, an Eastern Rite of the Catholic Church in which the mass is conducted partly in Syriac and Aramaic. The church remains the community center, and the group spirit is strong enough to support periodic special events during the year with Arabic music, dancing, and food.



*The Leon Curry family, c. 1900— Son Joseph Curry invented and manufactured machinery used in processing Mexican food, and his brother, Peter Michael Curry, was a military officer in World War II, then practiced law in San Antonio, becoming a district judge in 1967 and serving until his retirement in 1992.*



*St. Michael's Syrian Orthodox Church, Beaumont, c. 1936*

Some well-known names in the state have become legendary: George Kadane and Michel T. Halbouty in oil exploration and production; J.M. Haggar, clothing manufacturer and noted philanthropist; Najeeb E. Halaby, former president and chief executive officer of Pan American World Airlines and operator of an international law firm, whose daughter, Lisa, married King Hussein of Jordan and became Queen Noor al Hussein; Dr. Michael DeBakey, the internationally known cardiovascular surgeon; and lyric soprano Helen Donath.

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.*



**Social Push Factors**

**Social Pull Factors**



**WORD BANK**

Religious Persecution	Close to Family
Religious Freedom	Lack of Schools
Education Available	Far from Family

## Lebanese and Syrian Settlers in Texas

In the 1800s, the Ottoman Turks ruled a large empire across Europe and Asia. It included the modern-day countries of Lebanon and Syria. Most Ottoman Turks practiced Islam, but they allowed their subjects to practice a variety of religions.

In the area now known as Lebanon and Syria, Maronite Christians and Druze lived under Ottoman rule. Druze practiced a religion that developed out of Islam. They were each given an area of land to control, but religious differences and economic tensions eventually led to fighting. In April of 1860, thousands of Lebanese and Syrian Maronite Christians were killed, villages were destroyed and hundreds of churches were burned.

This religious persecution caused many people living in this area to want to leave. In 1880, many Christians from Lebanon and Syria left their homes to find more religious freedom, and some of them came to Texas. Most early Lebanese settlers in Texas belonged to the Syrian Orthodox Church, Eastern Rite Catholic Church or Greek Catholic Church, and some were Protestant.

What empire ruled Lebanon and Syria in the 1800s?

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What happened in 1860 that caused many people to want to leave Lebanon and Syria?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did Christians from Lebanon and Syria hope to find in Texas?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Digging Deeper

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

Who was probably the first Syrian to move to Texas? What did he bring with him and why?

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When did most of the early Arabic-speaking immigrants come to Texas? Why did they come to Texas?

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What language did many Lebanese and Syrian families speak at home?

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In what other ways did Lebanese and Syrian families preserve their cultural heritage?

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Religion played an active role in their communities. What religions did many of these immigrants practice?

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What are *sahrias*?

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Why do you think *sahrias* are important to Lebanese and Syrian communities?

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In what ways do you and your family celebrate your cultural traditions? How is this similar to or different from *sahrias*?

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### Summarize What You Learned

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

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