

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Belgian Texans

The story of Belgians in Texas is diverse but hardly fragmented. Belgium has consistently sent priests, builders, scientists, musicians, professionals, craftspeople, and farmers out into the world. Although never in great immigrant numbers, Belgians and Belgian influence have been notable in Texas.

A few Belgians moved into South Texas after 1867 and the fall of Maximilian's Mexican empire. Maximilian, anointed emperor of Mexico by the French, was an unlikely ruler. His wife, Carlota, was Belgian, and a good number of her countrymen had followed the puppet emperor to Mexico. After Maximilian's execution, many Belgians decided on the Rio Grande Valley as home.

Belgians moved to Galveston and Houston, and some were farmers, but San Antonio became Texas's primary area of Belgian settlement. Although entering many fields of endeavor—Belgians were cooks and bakers, candle and soap makers, restaurateurs and musicians—most in the San Antonio settlement were farmers.

From the last of the 19th century, several Belgian families and descendants founded the famous vegetable farms in western San Antonio. Men such as Van de Walle, van Daele, Persyn, and Baeten made year-round vegetable growing a successful business. The Belgians raised common crops and introduced new ones, including cauliflower and kohlrabi. Today, harvests range from flowers to picante sauce.

And the Belgians observed the "Kermess," a national fall harvest festival held in mid-August—and in mid-November, if the harvest was good. They also celebrated Belgian independence day on July 21. The Belgium Inn, the Belgian Village, and the Flanders Inn, among several other places, provided the settings for many a gathering, traditional or impromptu.



*Bolling at the Belgian Village in San Antonio, c. 1935—  
(from left) Maurice Verstuyft,  
Cyril Verstuyft, August Stevens,  
Frank Bache, and Rene Persyn*



*Octave Van de Walle's farm on Zarzamora Street, San Antonio, c. 1908*