

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Italian Texans

Until the mid-19th century, Italians coming to the Texas area were adventurers, explorers, or soldiers.

Italian explorers, from the 15th and 16th centuries, were well known indeed, but none came in the service of an Italian city or province, none of which could mount New World exploration like Spain and Portugal. Thus, adventurous Italian soldiers and sailors took employment elsewhere.

According to some documentation, Amerigo Vespucci saw the coast of future Texas in 1497 while determining for Ferdinand of Aragon whether the new lands of Columbus were Asia—or an unknown continent. Vespucci did not command the voyage but was official observer for the king on this and three later voyages more of confirmation than exploration.

In 1870 only 186 Italians were listed on Texas's census records. But by 1920 the number was over 8,000. Significant Italian emigration was a part of the 1880–1920 surge from southern and eastern Europe. Many Italians in these decades, moving away from economic depression and warfare in Europe, headed for the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico. Texas received a substantial share.

And when they came in those years, the Italians most often settled with their geographic compatriots. Piedmontese settled in Montague County. Individuals from Venice and Modena joined Piedmontese in the coal mines of Thurber. Lombardy provided hands for the New York, Texas and Mexican Railway between Victoria and Rosenberg. And Sicilians settled in Galveston County and up the Brazos River valley.

Urban communities followed in Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio. As with other immigrant groups, many of the first arrivals, mostly younger men, settled to establish families.



Josephine Lucchese, internationally renowned coloratura soprano and daughter of Sam Lucchese, San Antonio bootmaker, began her singing career in 1922 and retired in 1970.



Italian Club picnic at the mining town of Thurber, late 1800s