

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

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## Norwegian Texans

Texas Norwegians, arriving and settling as small rural groups, have been few. The 1900 census listed a peak number of 1,356 native Norwegians in the state, a total that declined to 1,000 in 50 years. Today, more than 95,000 Texans claim Norwegian descent.

Most of the emigration came from rural areas in Norway to rural areas in Texas. West of Waco, the community of Norse was for a time the largest concentration of Norwegians in Texas. The area remains home to about a hundred people; many are descendants of the Norwegian arrivals. The church community has maintained one custom into recent years, an annual smörgåsbord held at Our Savior's Lutheran Church.

Norwegian immigration lasted somewhat past the Civil War, and individual families did maintain some Old World customs. But, separate as most homesteads were, Norwegian as a language disappeared in all practical use by 1940.

The Norwegian Society of Texas, with groups in several Texas cities, was founded in 1975 to preserve, and certainly to replicate, Norse heritage. Members of this group still emphasize their Viking heritage and costume—which were never actually a part of Texas culture until the last two decades.

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Immigrant attitudes toward Norway were often like Johan Reiersen's, full of honest respect but critical of a country that could not provide for the working class. An old emigrant song is very direct:

Farewell, thou Mother Norway, now I must leave thee.

Because thou fostered me, I give thee many thanks.

All too sparing wert thou in providing food for the throng of thy laborers.

Thou, who gavest more than enough to thy well-schooled sons.



*Elise Wærenskjold (c. 1857), a woman far beyond her times: schoolteacher; champion of social causes; briefly editor of Reiersen's monthly magazine in Norway; then, in Texas, noted writer for Norwegian papers on the benefits of immigration to America and the beauties of Norwegian life in Texas*



*The Norway Mill in Norse, built in the 1880s*