

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Swiss Texans

The Swiss are only a small cultural representation in Texas, but, as the ethnic-studies cliché goes, they made “a contribution far greater than their actual numbers.”

Generally, the Swiss had little reason for leaving their homeland or coming to Texas. Most Swiss taking leave of Europe in the 19th century simply sought greater opportunity or were moved by a spirit of adventure. They were also quick to assimilate into the culture of a new home, wherever they went.

They heard about possibilities in the Americas through the usual channels: newspapers, letters from wanderers, commercial advertising, and emigrant organizations.

A few schemes existed for mass emigration—one in 1819 with the goal of moving 10,000 Swiss to Texas was approved by the Spanish government—but all were failures.

The Swiss came as individuals and families, and they entered an astonishingly diverse number of occupations: horse traders, professional botanist, the first Presbyterian missionaries, baker, bankers, Texas Ranger, mercantile-business owner, cheese-maker, woodcarver, mural and fresco painter, admiral of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations. One family operated a farm, started a cotton gin, managed a stagecoach stop, and opened a lumber business.

Swiss Texan history reads like a breathless roster of accomplishment. It is.



Christian Moser established the first of three Swiss-owned dairies in Dallas in 1873. Here he drives his dairy wagon in the 1880s.



Peter Mansbendel, master carver of all types of objects in many kinds of wood—He produced portraits, carvings of flora and fauna, bas relief panels, furniture, and decorative motifs for mantels, stairways, and doors.