

The House That Built Me

Nestled in the crooked hills of the Texas Hill Country is the town we all call home. Fredericksburg is the hub for the wine industry in south Texas, the tourist destination for history lovers, and the German-enriched town known for its flourishing culture and up-close view of the notorious settlement founded with a dream of freedom. The ecstatic energy radiating from the local is as infectious to the visitors as the captivating rolling of the hills surrounding our small town.

Fredericksburg was founded in 1846 by German settlers adventuring out into the unknown for a new perspective and the freedom to express themselves. Named after the notorious Prince Frederick of Prussia, the small town began with the thread of German culture weaving into the everyday way of life. This settlement was founded by Baron Otfried Hans von Meusebach (John), who was the Commissioner General of the "Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas." This society included many Germans exploring the New World to evade certain social, political, and economic injustices. The ideal vision of this new settlement was a piece of land resting between two creeks or rivers. After setting off from present day New Braunfels, Muesebach discovered the perfect area, situated between now Town Creek and Barons Creek. The south Texas hills, at the time, were infested with wild Indian tribes. The specific tribe nomadically settled in the area at the time of Muesebach were the Comanches. Led by Penateka chief Ketemoczy, the Fredericksburg Comanche tribe forged a treaty with the newly homed group of Germans in an area close to Mason. Smoking a peace pipe with John O. Meusebach, the Comanches and the fiery haired settler agreed to coexist in the rolling hills of central Texas, known as the 1847 Treaty. Unusual from most treaties, this specific pact did not usurp the rights of the Native American tribe, rather allowing both the civilians and the roamers to live in harmony. This iconic meeting is now memorialized in the town square, known as Marktplatz. Making history even more unique, this treaty was one of the only ones made that was never broken by either party. The harmonic living between the new founders and the area's original people led to various trade agreements and a close-knit relationship between new and old natives.

Newly settled towns in the large unknown land of the United States were doomed unless they became centralized, giving the town a common meeting place, a place of worship, and most importantly, shops and stores to provide the townspeople with easier access to the necessities of everyday life. The original homes constructed in the township were the classic log house structures with various fillings such as clay, moss, and grass. The structures on the historic Main Street were more innovatively build. Utilizing the surrounding access to stone, the settlers used the more reliable building blocks to construct stable buildings. Among the many stores on the town drag, City Drug was the hub for medicine and provided the townspeople access to many over the counter medicines. Owned by my great-great-great grandfather Lewis C. Gibson, City Drug was the first drug store constructed in the new town of Fredericksburg. Coming to the township with the dream of opening a drug store with his business partner, Gibson allowed the people living in Fredericksburg with all of the potions created to kills the worst sicknesses of the

time, making him Fredericksburg's first pharmacist. Along with the various medicines Gibson sold, he also introduced his patented elixir to the people of central Texas. His Peerless Screw Worm medicine was made to save the lives of livestock. This potion was created to prevent the larvae of the blow fly from infecting the horses and cattle of the time. The fly's larvae would cause a fatal disease, becoming fatal to the infected animals. Gibson's creation was so accurate that the King Ranch began implementing the use of this medicine in order to prevent the death of many of their cattle. Gibson's invention spread throughout Texas and became the well-known medicine to save the lives of livestock and to save the region's ranchers copious amounts of money. His works are on display in the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, giving eager historians a glance at the hardships and perils of the early frontier of the Texas hills.

Along with the various shops on Main, the township also included a building acting as a school house, local non-denominational church, and town hall, the Vereins Kirche. This building is one of the most iconic structures still standing tall in the center of the busy town. This notorious octagon shaped building was the first public structure built 1847 after the town's founding. Referred to locals as the "Kaffeemuchle," or to the English-speaking tourists as the "Coffee Mill," the Vereins Kirche provided service to the locals throughout the duration of its use. Serving as a schoolhouse for the children living within the town's limits, this building was run by school teacher, Professor Johann Leyendecker. The children were taught their lessons in their native tongue, German, and they learned the subjects still taught in schools today, but at the price of \$1 per quarter. Professor Leyendecker also held Catholic church services around the other Christian worships provided by the local pastor. While simultaneously being used by the townspeople, the Vereins Kirche was used by families as a fortress against Indian raids. Though Muesebach signed a treaty with the Comanches, other tribes sieged the town in hopes of regaining their lands. The Vereins Kirche now serves as a pinnacle tourist attraction, representing the rich history of the early immigrants into new, undiscovered world.

Though the Vereins Kirche served as the schoolhouse for the families living within the town's borders, many of the German families ventured on further, settling in the lands surrounding Fredericksburg. In 1878, the families of the newly founded lands erected the Crabapple School. Providing an education and a postal service, this schoolhouse provided an education and a mail service from 1887 to 1910. The first postmaster to dwell in this rural building was John J. Stein. The two main buildings on this ground were the schoolhouse and later a second building that served as a Lutheran church. Constructed of Limestone, the school house included the main education room and a second room, housing the resident twenty-eight teachers employed there. Included in the staff of twenty-eight was my great-great-great grandfather Lewis C. Gibson, owner of the drug store. Gibson taught at Crabapple School for two years, from 1895 to 1897. The Lutheran church building housed the worship of the area families for years until St. John's church, named after postmaster Stein, was constructed in 1887. This church was created for a more enhanced worship environment, and it still stands today representing the strong faith the city of Fredericksburg was built on.

The history of Fredericksburg is engraved in every stone of each building in the area. After the end of the Mexican War in 1848, a series of army posts were established in order to ensure the protection of the settled people of the West Texas area. One of the many forts built was Fort Martin Scott. Constructed near one of the main rivers in the area, Baron's Creek, and originally intended to be named Camp Houston, this post allowed for the soldiers to patrol the Fredericksburg-San Antonio road to prevent Indian attacks. Renamed for Major Martin Scott who perished in the Mexican War, the twenty-one building establishment housed the United States Infantry. To ensure the safety of the settlers, another treaty with the Indians was drafted and signed. The Fort Martin Scott Treaty was an unratified agreement between the Army, the Texas Rangers, twelve Comanche chiefs, six Caddo chiefs, four Lipton chiefs, four Tawakoni chiefs, five Quapaw chiefs, and four Waco chiefs. This treaty put regulations on commerce and implemented a prohibition on supplying alcohol to the various tribes. As their part of the agreement, all of the tribes agreed to remain at peace with one another and with the United States. The native American tribes agreed to return all raided property, the captives they had stolen, and to cease all depredations. Thanking them for their cooperation, the government agreed to establish many assets available to the tribes including, trading posts, school access, the blacksmith's services, and the acceptance of Christian ministers. After the fort was closed by the Army in 1853, with many of the commanders fighting in the Civil War, the fort was unused until the Texas Rangers took it over in 1866. During the peak of the War of Northern Aggression (Civil War), the Confederate Army took up camp in Fort Martin Scott. Soon after the battle was over, Fort Martin Scott was closed as a military base, and it was the new location of the Gillespie County Fair. The fort became a symbol of safety and the close-knit civilization nested in the rolling hills of the Hill Country.

Sharing its culture with sister city, Montabaur, in Germany, Fredericksburg has the rich German culture engraved in each corner to this day. Many of the original structures, such as the churches, Vereins Kirche, the old schoolhouses on the country roads, and the multiple shops littering the Main Street drag. The German culture is still flourishing in the Texas Hill Country as it was at the beginning of the settlement. Many of the older German generations carried their heritage with them and passed it down through the generations. Passing the German language throughout families in recent years has kept the rich heritage alive in the heart of Texas. Many families still use German as their main language to communicate to the older generations still dwelling in their hometown. A sign welcoming visitors to town states "Willkommen" is the first sign tourists see as they enter our German town. Along with the language, many German traditions are still celebrated year-round. The traditional language is still taught in school as it was in the original schoolhouse in 1847. The Oktoberfest celebration is held every year in the square of Marktplatz. Families and tourists travel into town every year to celebrate the German festival. Amusement rides, a large number of vendors, and games are provided to make the festival enjoyable for all ages. A German Christmas tree is erected in the center of the square to represent the holidays and the appreciation the founders had for the Christian faith. Many of the traditions of the German culture thrives in Fredericksburg in the 21st century. Each generation continues the traditions paved for them by the original settlers of the 1800s.

Throughout history, settlers have been travelling from their homelands to explore the new world in search of a new beginning. Evading the oppression of the rulers, the first immigrants came across the sea to freely express their religions, be able to speak freely without being punished for their opinions, and most of all, the settlers came to the new world to make a name for themselves and to pave the frontier for the generations to come after them. The beginning of the town of Fredericksburg was inspired by the dream of a haven for the German settlers to thrive in a safe environment. With the safety from the Indians, the townspeople were able to establish the foundation of the town they had dreamed about. The rich culture the German founders established at the end of the 1800s still flourished in town today with families passing down their cultures and traditions to the younger generations. The important history set forth for the future inhabitants of the Texas hills provides an up-close, in-depth view at the original way of life their ancestors experienced. Including the beautiful scenery surrounding the small tourist mecca, many of the largest attractions were the ones constructed by the early settlers. The history adds appeal and character to the small town we all call home. Culture and heritage are the most important aspects of life, and Fredericksburg is the perfect example of the continuum of traditions and praise for the generations who have created the home that is dear to each local's heart. On a personal level, my Texas German roots run deep in Fredericksburg's soil. Both sides of my family are original Fredericksburg residents and have laid a firm foundation for my appreciation of my heritage.