

**German Immigrants in Hill Country Texas:  
Immigration and Assimilation from Secession to the Civil War**

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During the 1840s, Germany and its citizens were under great economic and political stress. A period of already sporadic harvests worsened causing famines to become a regular occurrence endangering poor working-class families throughout the German principalities. A movement, which began in the colleges and universities, as well as the parlors of the well- educated elite, to modernize the languid political and governmental institutions of Europe gained momentum. Inspired by the example of new forms of democracy, the intellectuals of Germany and several other European countries attempted to lead an uprising that would become known as the Revolutions of '48. Although these revolutions would largely fail, the political and economic discontent remained strong.

A group of noblemen formed an organization called the "Adelsverein" and began planning a German colony in the new nation of Texas. The leaders of this organization believed this would provide an outlet for the political aspirations of the disaffected intellectuals of Germany and economic opportunity for the burdened

working poor. The Adelsverein did not foresee the changes that would come to Texas as they proceeded with their plans. Texas and its new German population experienced the tumult of the Sectional Crisis and the violence of the Civil War, with the majority of Germans opposed to slavery and secession, while the majority of Texans determined to separate from the United States and form a new Confederacy of States.

The lasting historical impression of the German immigrants in this period is a population that stood against slavery and sought to undermine the Confederacy. While the majority of Germans were opposed ideologically to slavery, only hardliners, inspired by the intellectuals among them, actually resisted the Texas government. Due to the acts of a few, the entire German population of the Texas Hill Country found themselves under suspicion of being insurgents and suffered under the watchful eye of the Texas military. These ideological differences would lead to outright conflict at the Battle of the Nueces, sometimes referred to as the Nueces Massacre, as well as through intimidation tactics such as mass hangings. These high profile incidents left a lasting impression on Texas' history and mythology which obscures and neglects the reality, actions, and opinions of the majority of German Texans during the Civil War.

In addition to the growing Army of the North, Texas also had conflict with Native Americans, Mexican border disputes, and Unionists of Texas to worry about.

These internal pressures meant that Texas dedicated significant time and resources to maintain stability and protect its borders. The quick surrender of Federal property and the withdrawal of Federal troops in Texas, gave the new government the opportunity to expand the militias and establish its own army. It also meant that all the strategic positions and posts the federals once held and the responsibilities the federals once assumed would need to be shouldered by Texas.

After Secession Texas quickly moved to found its own standing army and local militias. Local pro-Confederate US Army officers and soldiers readily joined up. The primary concern in West Texas was staffing and garrisoning the many forts around Texas and establishing posts in unsecured areas. The majority of Confederate recruits came for the more populous eastern parts of the state where they would serve along the coast and in units fighting the Federal Army along the Mississippi. Local militias made up of volunteers from the western counties of the state were organized to patrol and defend against a variety of threats.

A week before the ratification of Secession by the voters of Texas, the headquarters of the United States Army, located in San Antonio, surrendered to Texas State forces on February 16, 1861. This action was followed by the peaceful taking of several federal properties throughout northern, eastern, and along the gulf coast of Texas by newly created units of the Texas Army. The allegiance of these new units,

filled with volunteers ranking from commanders to privates, belonged to the Texan and the Confederate goal of preserving slavery, not just in the South but keeping the new territories and states in the West open for the future expansion of slavery. Their strong adherence to this ideology made them wary and suspicious of those who disagreed with the goals and objectives of Texas Secession. The increasing likelihood of a war against the United States would add to this underlying paranoia in the years to come.<sup>1</sup> For the duration of the Civil War, there were regular troubles with nearby Native American tribes throughout Texas. From the Indian Territory, in present day Oklahoma, came raids, some of them with hundreds of warriors, on counties such as Young, Montague, and Cooke near the Texas border. The raids claimed dozens of lives and resulted in livestock and horses being stolen as well as women and children being kidnapped.<sup>2</sup> In West Texas, encounters and minor conflicts with Indians were a regular occurrence. In his autobiography recounting his 16 years in America, Englishman Robert Hamilton Williams told of his time in Kansas as a Ranger before statehood and in Texas where he owned a ranch and served with the Confederate Army during the Civil War. In one passage during his time on the Texas frontier,

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph A. Wooster, *Civil War Texas*, (Austin, Texas State Historical Association, 1999) 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Wooster, *Civil War*, 47.

Williams tells that while passing through the small village of Uvalde his unit heard that just down the Frio River a group of Indians had “killed a cow and... killed and mutilated two settlers.” As his unit continued on they saw “a number of buzzards hovering” near the “bank of the river.” They concluded this to be the location of the slaughtered cow and possibly the Indians remained close by, so they scouted the area. Williams party were discovered as they looked down onto the camp and a long shootout and chase on horseback ensued. After escaping and reaching Williams’ own nearby ranch, they returned with some local reinforcement, however “the wily Comanchés had so scattered that it was hopeless to follow the trail.”<sup>3</sup> These often hostile engagements between Indians and settlers in West Texas created the need for a standing force to protect against Indians and bandits. The Frontier Regiment, mostly composed of local volunteers including German settlers, fulfilled this role after Texas seceded from the Union.

With threats and instability on practically all sides from the moment of its creation, the Confederate State of Texas looked to replace the Federal troops and secure former Federal property. These issues meant that the Gulf Coast and its ports had to be defended to the East, Indian incursions and raids repelled to the West and

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<sup>3</sup> R. H. Williams, *With the Border Ruffians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982.), 255-258.

the North, and internal security maintained. While these initial concerns seemed to be mostly under control, internal concerns as well as the brewing Civil War would soon complicate matters.

As part of its efforts to galvanize loyal citizens and to have grounds to charge dissenters with crimes, the Confederate State of Texas ordered everyone take an oath to the Confederacy. These understandable measures eventually crossed a line, punishing those that tried to remain neutral. The political and military leaders of Texas harassed, punished, and executed many actual and suspected Unionists often without proper evidence, due process, or trials.

After the enactment of secession and the establishment of the Confederate State of Texas, the Texas government began its push to remove citizens who opposed secession or slavery. In the summer of 1861 two proclamations, one by Texas Governor Edward Clark and another by Confederate President Jefferson Davis, gave details on who had to leave and set a deadline for their departure. Governor Clark's Proclamation, released on June 8, 1861, attempted to completely eliminate communication and commerce, even the paying of existing debts, by any citizen of Texas to any citizen of the United States. The proclamation also said that the "citizens of States or Territories, now at war with the Confederate States... are hereby warned to depart within twenty days of this date or they will be arrested as spies." Two

months later, on August 14, President Davis put forth a proclamation regarding an act of the Confederate Congress that addressed “alien enemies,” in it he called for “every male citizen the United States of the age of fourteen years and upward... adhering to the Government of the United States... to depart... within forty days from the date of the proclamation.” The impracticality of the demand to leave cannot be overstated. Farmers who had spent years building up their acreage and yields to give their families a more secure life could not easily uproot without risking losing their wealth and endangering their households. This reason among others lead to some German Texans taking the oath even if they voted against secession and secretly abhorred leaving the Union.<sup>4</sup>

General Hamilton P. Bee, under whose charge the lower Rio Grande district lay, declared martial law in Bexar County on April 28, 1862. Due in part to concerns over Union sympathizers, this declaration included measures to begin enforcement

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<sup>4</sup> “Proclamation by the Governor of the State of Texas,” June 8, 1861, in William Paul Burrier, *Nueces Battle and Massacre Source Documents*, (San Antonio: Watercress Press, 2014), 23-25; Proclamation by the President of the Confederate States of America, “August 14, 1861, In Burrier, *Source Documents*, 29-30. W. P. Burrier has made an exhaustive study of the events surrounding the Battle of the Nueces. One of Burrier’s key assertions is that most of what is known about the battle comes from accounts of the ancestors of the Germans involved in the battle and they are therefore biased. Mr. Burrier has collected a wealth of primary source documentation to combat these myths. While well researched and admirably collected, Mr. Burrier often comes across as slightly biased in favor of the Confederacy in his own writing.

of the Confederate Conscription Act passed earlier that month. One month later, on May 30, a more detailed declaration of martial law was issued by Brigadier General Paul O. Hébert. This declaration covered the entirety of Texas and ordered the appointment of Provost Marshalls to enforce its regulations. Both of the proclamations above required the swearing of an oath to the Confederacy be taken by all residents or face punishment by the state of Texas.<sup>5</sup>

Captain James Duff and his company went to Fredericksburg in May to inform the populace of the new martial law and returned a few months later as Provost Marshall to help enforce the new measures and investigate pro-union sentiment in the area. In his communications to his superior, Major E. F. Gray, Duff details his attempts to hunt down and imprison Unionists in Gillespie and surrounding counties by eliciting information from locals and informants. Two of the men Duff attempted to capture were Andrew Jackson Hamilton, future Reconstruction Governor of Texas, and Jacob Kuechler, an important German Unionist organizer. Both Kuechler and Hamilton evaded capture, their freedom stood as important failures for the Confederates during and after the war. Many Germans on both sides described Duff's

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<sup>5</sup>"General Bee's Proclamation of Martial Law in Bexar County," April 28, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 102-104; "General Herbert Proclamation of Martial Law," May 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 123-131; "Confederate Oath of Allegiance," in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 40.



occupation as akin to a reign of terror. Franz Kettner, a German immigrant living north of Fredericksburg in Mason County, related in a letter to family back home in Germany writing, “we got martial law... under whose jurisdiction the most horrible murders were committed.” He also attests that “approximately 25 people were killed... without any sort of trial... found hanged from the trees.”<sup>6</sup>

Franz Kettner was not the only German making such claims and such atrocities were not limited to Germans nor were they limited to the Hill Country. In October of 1862, just two months after the Battle of the Nueces, approximately one-hundred and fifty men were arrested and put to trial in Cooke County, another area of Texas that voted heavily against secession in the referendum. The creation of a group opposed to conscription and their subsequent petition to end the exemption for certain slaveholders spurred on the arrests of known and suspected Unionists. Using martial law as justification, under a civilian jury, over forty were executed or lynched, several of the condemned completely innocent of having Union sympathies at all. The Great Hanging inspired other towns in the region to take justice into their own hands with

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<sup>6</sup> Wooster, *Civil War*, 40; William Paul Burrier, *Nueces Battle and Massacre: Myths and Facts*, (San Antonio: Watercress Press, 2015), 47; “Captain Duff’s Report,” June 23, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 132-136; Wooster, *Civil War*, 39; Franz Kettner to his Parents, Foley’s Crossing, Texas, December 1865, in *Die Kettner Briefe*, ed. Charles Kettner (Wilmington, DE: Comanche Creek, 2008), 112-113.

several hanging suspected Unionists. Even Confederate President Jefferson Davis condemned the hangings and had General Paul Octave Hébert dismissed as commander of Texas.<sup>7</sup> The new Confederate and Texan governments dealt with sedition and the increasing need for soldiers beyond the initial volunteers to fight the battles in the East. The solutions they implemented proved to serve as a call for the more radical pro-Union Germans to organize and prepare to resist, resulting in more extreme measures and paranoia on both sides.

The Hill Country, with its high hilltops and sheltered valleys, provided a relatively easy place for people to hide from Confederate authorities. This area was a perfect place for draft dodgers and possible Union partisans to operate covertly and ready ground for the Texas military to suspect as a base for guerrilla operations and uprising. It also offered a secluded staging ground for those looking to leave for New Mexico or Mexico, either to escape service, imprisonment, or execution. Many others fled west to join the Union cause and serve in the Union Army.

The secession ordinance passed by the Texas legislature on February 1, 1861, was put up for ratification by the voters on February 23. The ordinance was ratified

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<sup>7</sup> Wooster, *Civil War*, 42-44; Richard B. McCaslin, "Great Hangings at Gainesville," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 20, 2018.

overwhelmingly with 46,153 voting for secession and 14,747 voting to stay in the Union. One-hundred and twenty-two counties of Texas returned results, out of those only nineteen counties showed an overall vote against secession. Several of these counties were along or near the northern Texas border with the Indian Territory; the majority were grouped in and around the Hill Country, these counties had large German populations. The Texas authorities were well aware of the election results and these areas became a cause for concern after Texas Secession.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the more ideologically driven Germans that voted against the secession referendum avoided taking the oath for as long they could. Others trying to avoid registering for the Confederate act of conscription found their way to the remote parts of the Hill Country where they could use the terrain to avoid being pressed into service. Captain Duff focused on the German Unionist with a substantial effort to root out men running from conscription, whatever their cause might be, was put in place with groups of Rangers sent to locate camps or evidence of their existence. The need for martial law was grounded in the concern that, as Duff put it, these were “renegades from justice from other States, and men who will not fail to

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<sup>8</sup> Joe T. Timmons, "The Referendum in Texas on the Ordinance of Secession, February 23, 1861: The Vote," *East Texas Historical Journal* 11, no. 2 (1973): 12-28.

injure a political or personal enemy." These deserters, conscription dodgers, outlaws, and other enemies of Confederate Texas put a fear of a Hill Country insurrection into the minds of Texas authorities.<sup>9</sup>

While German immigrants had been coming to Texas for some time, the first significant influx came in the 1840s through the organized efforts of the Adelsverein, the Adelsverein was an organization of German aristocrats looking to provide relief for working class Germans who suffered under repeated and ongoing economic depressions as well as to give an outlet to disaffected intellectuals who sought greater freedom and representation in their government.<sup>10</sup>

Created by a group of aristocrats and investors, the Adelsverein helped to immigrate poor farmers and workers looking for greater opportunity during a long bout of economic depression in the 1840s. It would also encourage university educated political dissidents from the revolutions of 1848 to leave Germany. The majority were looking to build new lives and find new opportunities. Within a decade they would unexpectedly find themselves embroiled in the debate over slavery, free-soil, and ultimately find themselves in the middle of the American Civil War.

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<sup>9</sup> "Captain Duff's Report," June 23, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 134; Wooster, *Civil War*, 43-44.

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert Giddings Benjamin, *The Germans in Texas*, (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1974), 30-32.

Provisionally organized on April 20, 1842, the Adelsverein<sup>11</sup> acquired land on the Texas coast as well as along the route they intended to travel to their larger land grants they obtained in central Texas. The core intent behind German colonization in the free state of Texas was to help poor and struggling farmers and workers find better social and economic opportunities. The secondary long-term goals included setting up a colony that could provide raw materials to the homeland and a German colonial market for finished goods that could open the important American market for German exports. Investors in the Adelsverein focused on the potential for future profits of the Societies endeavors. A series of commissioners and agents worked to lead the Society as the Adelsverein struggled through issues of financial mismanagement, promising more than could be delivered to the settlers. The Adelsverein ultimately established both failed and successful farming communities and towns before finally folding in 1853.<sup>12</sup>

While most of the original settlers through the Adelsverein were laborers and

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<sup>11</sup> The Adelsverein was formally known as The Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas and was sometimes informally referred to as the Verein.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, *Germans in Texas*, 33-35; David J. Gelo and Christopher J. Wickham, *Comanches and Germans on the Texas Frontier*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018), 8-32; Louis E. Brister, "Adelsverein," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 16, 2018.

farmers with families, some were single men looking for opportunity. A small but substantial number, however, were educated professionals who had spent significant time in and around German universities. A notable example of these intellectuals was the Darmstadt Forty, a group of well- educated men well qualified in science, administration, art, law, agriculture, and business, who arrived in 1847 to establish and foster communities in the German area of Texas. The Society recruited them with the idea that since German universities created more educated men than Germany could successfully employ, the colony could put their skills and training to better use, thereby providing them with greater opportunities. In Germany great unrest grew during the late 1840s that would give rise to the protests and minor revolutions. The recruitment of intellectuals belonging to this revolutionary movement was intentional (ibid). They would have a place they could try to bring their ideas to fruition and the home country would be rid of a few of the loudest voices of discontent.

The Society was permanently established in early 1844 and the first immigrants began arriving that December in Galveston. The Verein chose as the future port of disembarkation the newly rechristened town of Carlshaven, so named by the general commissioner Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, which was locally known as Indian Point and is also known as Indianola. Prince Carl also acquired

land near the springs of the Comal River, founding there a settlement that would become the largest of the German towns of the Hill Country naming it New Braunfels after his ancestral home. The newly arrived German immigrants, numbering in the tens of thousands over approximately two years, had to then head up to New Braunfels and then onto their assigned settlements. Multiple issues arose for which the Adelsverein failed to account. Financially, they significantly underestimated the cost for transportation and housing that they promised to their emigres. This is partially explained by the Mexican-American War driving down the supply of pack animals thus raising costs correspondingly, but the Verein's estimate was markedly off even before the outbreak of war. This kind of financial mismanagement would plague the Society for most of its existence. Since there was no transport from Carlshaven, the immigrants were forced to choose between walking from the coast to New Braunfels or staying on the coast with no resources and little money. Either choice meant little difference as thousands died of starvation, epidemics, attacks by native tribes, or exposure (ibid).

The citizens of the Hill Country, especially those of German descent, disliked slavery and many counties with high German populations voted against seceding from the United States of America. They even created their own Union Leagues and attempted to form local militias enlisting only Unionists. The Confederacy and Texas

eventually required citizens to take an oath of loyalty. Those who refused to take the oath would have to leave the state by a set number of days as prescribed by law. These oaths, combined with the Confederate Act of Conscription, caused several groups of Germans to leave the state, often heading to Mexico in hopes of joining the Union Army.

### **Secession and the Union Loyal League**

As discussed above, the majority of Germans in the Hill Country voted against Secession. Living on the frontier meant that most of the men in the area served as part of militias organized to protect against Indians and outlaws. Secession and the dissolution of Federal troops in the region meant that Texas needed to reorganize and recreate this defense. Some Unionists viewed this as an opportunity to coordinate their own units, going so far as to form a militia unit with an almost entirely German and pro-Union force.

In late 1861, Texas created the Frontier Regiment to organize units to guard the western frontier. Jacob Kuechler, a member of the Darmstadt Forty, received permission to establish a local border defense militia company. Kuechler served as a surveyor, documenting significant parts of the area during German settlement as well as working for Gillespie County establishing property and land-grant boundaries. His familiarity with the Hill Country terrain would prove useful to the German Unionists.



The frontier unit Kuechler established purposefully excluded secessionists, enlisting mostly Germans and only pro-Union troops. Ernest Cramer, a member of the company, expressed the feeling that serving in the frontier unit allowed the men to serve without being pressed into service against the Union. Cramer wrote to his parents, while he hid in Mexico during the war, that the company "was to be used for the purpose of protection against the Indians and only to be used in the service of the state of Texas."<sup>13</sup>

The organization of this company angered many pro-secession volunteers in the area and several letters to Governor Lubbock complained about Kuechler's methods of enrollment. The Governor disbanded the unit and ordered the recruitment of only pro-Confederacy troops to the unit. These events certainly added to the concern of the state regarding Unionist activity in the Hill Country. The episode is also one source of the local Hill Country myth that the subsequent secret German Unionist militia intended to protect the local populace from frontier incursions and never intended to interfere with the state.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James Patrick McGuire, "Kuechler, Jacob," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 20, 2018; "Ernest Cramer to his Parents," October 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> "Frank Van der Stucken to Texas Governor Lubbock," February 13, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 44; "Petition of Kerr County Citizens to Texas Governor Lubbock," February 14, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 49-51; "David H. Farr to Texas Governor Lubbock," February 13, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 46-47; "Ernest

However the German Unionists felt about serving in the Frontier Regiment, their long-term goal focused on aiding the North when the fighting came to Texas, a fight they felt was eminent, but would never materialize. The failure of the Unionists to create their own official militia only reinforced their need for a secret pro-Union organization, which is often referred to as the Union Loyal League. In his letter to his parents, Cramer clearly tells them the German Unionist company planned “that as soon as the Northern Troops would come within reaching distance, we would join them.” This admission shows that Hill Country Unionists were dedicated to direct resistance to the Confederacy as soon as it was practical.<sup>15</sup>

The German Unionists had clear anti-Confederate goals and worked hard to keep them secret. The existence of this organization proved the concern of the local Texas military to be justified. The efforts the Confederates enacted to repress and control the local Germans, while demonstrably overreaching and violent, were based on just the kind of insurrectionist and guerrilla activities the Germans were planning.

The passing of the Confederate Conscription Act in April of 1862, was a

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Cramer to his Parents,” October 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> “Ernest Cramer to his Parents,” October 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 72-73.

turning point for Germans that were ideologically opposed to slavery and secession, causing a relative few to decide to attempt to escape to Mexico so they could then join the Union Army. Texas forces in the area were actively searching for draft dodgers and Unionist insurgents. The Battle of the Nueces occurred as a party of Partisan Rangers pursued them during their flight to Mexico.

Waiting for a Union advance on Texas, the clandestine League soon realized that no serious attempt at an offensive in the West was planned as long as the fight was so dire in the East, especially in Virginia and Tennessee. They attempted to use the Frontier Regiments to keep their company in the open and to protect their communities from Indian incursions, but they also sought to use it to resist the Confederacy when the time came to act. Ernest Cramer described the purpose of the Hill Country Unionists, "Our company had been formed... with the understanding that as soon as the Northern troops would come within reaching distance, we would join them."<sup>16</sup>

In April of 1862 the Confederate Conscription act was passed and in May martial law was declared across Texas. These events moved the League to prepare and eventually flee to Mexico to join the Union army in New Orleans. In early August,

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<sup>16</sup> Burrier, *Myths and Facts*, 18-21; "Ernest Cramer to his Parents," October 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 72.

Confederate troops were sent to enforce both conscription and martial law in the Hill Country. These pressures forced many Germans to act, either they agreed to swear the oath in order to stay with their families, or to take to the hills and work to resist the Confederacy. Writing to relatives in Germany just days before the group left for Mexico, Eduard Degener plainly explains the intent of the Germans operating out of the wilds of the Hill Country saying, "in exposed parts numbers volunteer for the purpose of carrying out guerrilla warfare," and "Confederate Troops coming from all sides ascend our mountains." Ernest Cramer also states bluntly that this group had sworn they would never serve the Confederacy under any circumstances. Several groups hid between Fredericksburg and Comfort and slowly grew their numbers, when they met up they numbered around 65. On August 2, they began their journey to Mexico. The group set forth knowing if they were caught they would be captured and probably executed. This makes the slow pace of their progress curious and require analysis. It is clear that they did not believe the Rangers were pursuing them directly, their commander, Fritz Teneger ordered a pace that would allow for hunting and foraging, to extend their provisions for the long journey.

This would prove disastrous.<sup>17</sup>

Many misconceptions and inaccuracies have lingered in the telling of the Battle of the Nueces, often stemming from local versions of events that have been handed down over time. These tales naturally slant in favor of the German Unionists whose descendants still live in the area.<sup>18</sup> In early August, a German by the name of Burgmann agreed to tell Captain Duff what he knew of the German group, informing him that the group left recently and offering to guide the Rangers. The Confederates, numbering over 90 and moving at a brisk pace, easily gained ground on them and found evidence of their route. In the evening of August 9, the Confederates located the Unionists camp and waited for day break. Just before dawn, the Confederates moved to flank the Germans. They were spotted and fired on by guards posted away from camp. The German camp was poorly situated to defend against an attack and did not allow for a practical retreat.

After three Confederate assaults and a determined Unionist defense, many Germans and a few Rangers were dead or wounded. A few small groups of Germans

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<sup>17</sup> Wooster, *Civil War*, 40-44; "Eduard Degener to Col. Von Bernewittz and Ernst Bramigk" August 1, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 170; Ernest Cramer to his Parents, Monterey, October 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 71-76; Burrier, *Myths and Facts*, 92-93.

<sup>18</sup> A point-by-point rebuttal of the most common mistakes is presented in the works of William Paul Burrier which has been useful in putting events in perspective and to establish a solid timeline of events.

were able to slip away during the fight, but the German wounded organized to give those remaining a chance to escape by sacrificing themselves. After the Confederates overwhelmed the last defenders, the wounded survivors were brought together and ultimately executed by those left to guard them. Many of the fleeing Unionists escaped, but several were tracked down running to Mexico or attempting to hide out in the Hill Country. Most of those captured were executed, but a few were imprisoned or pressed into service for the Confederacy.<sup>19</sup>

The German immigrants brought with them their values, which included a firm stance against slavery. Many of the Germans simply wanted to survive the war and maintain the security of their families. A significant number held strong pro-Union feelings that, when combined with their anti-slavery beliefs, drove them to organize and prepare to do their part in resisting the Confederacy, which included fighting against it on the field of battle when the time came. Many of these idealistic

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Germans made their way to Mexico and ended up serving in the Union Army, but several fought and sacrificed on Texas soil as well. The Germans have been

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Border Ruffians*, 237-250; Ernest Cramer to his Parents, October 30, 1862, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 75-80; Henry Schwethelm to his Grandson Otto, 1913, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 167-168; "John W. Sansom's Account of the Nueces Battle," 1905, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 212-214; Jacob Kuechler to James Newman, August, 1887, in Burrier, *Source Documents*, 318-319.

portrayed as staunch anti-Secessionists, their own accounts from the era show a less unified population regarding their attitudes and actions during the Civil War. It can be stated that the majority disagreed with the institution of slavery and were morally opposed to its existence. The reality of their loyalties and opinions is more complex.

The available first-hand accounts from German Unionists and Confederates in the Texas Hill Country sheds light on their motives, personal thoughts, and everyday lives. While important ideological values dominated their decisions regarding slavery and secession, they also expressed concerns over practical and mundane matters. The letters of the Coreth and the Kettner families, both involved heavily in the conflicts surrounding them, reveal the personal dynamics at play in their lives.

The surviving letters between Franz Kettner and his family in Germany span the years from 1850-1875. Obviously, most of the area covered is updates on family life and the ups and downs of living on the Texas frontier. Throughout the Civil War Franz tells his parents of the difficulty and danger he and other Germans faced at the hands of local Confederate “patriots” and the local Texas soldiers. He describes the sentiments of the Germans towards the Confederate troops, “what they are fighting for is, for Europeans who were raised to be against slavery and remain against it, much too bad a thing.” While he recounts several deadly encounters and the Battle of the Nueces, which he was not present for but details his knowledge of the event in

two separate letters sent home two years apart, one in 1863 and another in 1865, most of what he wrote centered on describing his growing family, the success or failure of his farm and ranch, the scarcity of basic items and economic depression during the coastal blockade, and the goods and products his parents could provide from Germany before onset of secession and after the Confederacy's fall. During Reconstruction many Germans were offered employment in the new Texas government, Franz gained an appointment as tax assessor for six counties in his area. Through the letters, Franz Kettner shows himself to represent the opposition most Germans had toward the secession and the Confederacy, but not the driven ideology of those who planned and actively worked to undermine it.<sup>20</sup>

This is not to say that all, or even most, Germans opposed the Confederacy. In Fredericksburg, the heart of the German Hill Country, a resolution opposed to the activities of German Unionists in the area was drafted in April of 1862 by the mostly German unit of Gillespie County Rifles headed by Charles Nimitz.<sup>21</sup> Many German

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<sup>20</sup> Franz Kettner to his Parents, Foley's Crossing, July 8, 1860, in *Die Kettner Briefe*, 87-90; Franz Kettner to his Parents, Foley's Crossing, October, 1863, in *Die Kettner Briefe*, 98-103; Franz Kettner to his Parents, Foley's Crossing, December, 1865, in *Die Kettner Briefe*, 87-90; Franz Kettner to his Parents, Foley's Crossing, July 8, 1860, in *Die Kettner Briefe*, 87-90; Franz Kettner to his Parents, Foley's Crossing, March 30, 1866, in *Die Kettner Briefe*, 134-135.

<sup>21</sup> Burrier, *Myths and Facts*, 29-31.



Texans served in the Texas and Confederate militaries and many civilians supported the secession and the Confederacy. Carl Coreth, for example, was a young German in his mid-20s when he decided to enlist in the Texas Militia and later in the Army itself. Born to a noble family in Germany, Carl arrived in Texas when his father immigrated to the state, bringing his whole family. Carl, writing to his brother Rudolph in May 1861, responded to news that Rudolph intended to enlist, saying, "I will do it too if necessary. There are people here who say they would not... I feel duty bound to do it though." He goes on to express feeling encouraged that others, including his wife, agreed with his decision. They did not own slaves, though they had prosperous farmsteads, the head of the family had to disavow his claim to his home country and family inheritance when he naturalized and became a citizen. Texas was their home and they felt compelled to defend it. Outside of these professions of loyalty most of what the Coreth's correspondence relayed mundane matters about late pay and everyday boredom while in Confederate service and the difficulty in procuring basic goods and services under the Union blockade. Both Carl and Rudolph would serve for almost the entirety of the war, serving in the Red River campaign in Louisiana and seeing combat against the Union (ibid).

The survivors of the Nueces Battle and other Hill Country Germans played a significant role in Reconstruction which served to further integrate them into the

society and culture of Central and South Texas. From their arrival, the Germans constructed their own communities and social connections recreating the ones they left in Germany. By the time of secession, assimilation into the wider Anglo-Texan culture seemed close at hand. Five years under Confederate Texas had caused serious setbacks and created division between Germans and Texans. During Reconstruction, the Federal authorities took control of the Texas Government and needed qualified and trusted individuals to fill a variety of essential positions.

Although injured in the battle, Fritz Teneger escaped to Mexico until after the war ended. He established himself in Kerr County during Reconstruction. He was elected to the Texas House of Representatives and served for two consecutive terms. He worked in Austin with committees focused on immigration and State public grounds (ibid).

Escaping to northern Mexico, Jacob Kuechler continued to work as a surveyor. He returned to Texas in 1867 and worked in the San Antonio area working as a customs tax collector.<sup>22</sup> His expertise in surveying and especially his knowledge of the Texas and Mexico border lands were vital to his appointment to the General Land office during Reconstruction. He also served on the post-Civil War Constitutional

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Lye, "Tegener, Fritz," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 20, 2018.

Convention. After working for the State of Texas for many years, he continued his career as a surveyor by surveying land for the railroads.<sup>23</sup>

August Siemering was another anti-Slavery German who lived in the Hill Country. He worked as a school teacher in Fredericksburg and worked hard to galvanize the German community against Slavery and secession. After secession he was forced to serve in the Confederate Army. During Reconstruction he became a journalist and founded the *Freie Presse für Texas*, a German-language newspaper in San Antonio. He also worked for the San Antonio Express News and was well known as a German language novelist and even published a history of German immigrants in Texas.

The previous first-person accounts and individual profiles show the depth and breadth of German experiences during Civil War Texas and into Reconstruction. Jacob Kuechler, Ernest Cramer, and Fritz Tegener showed themselves to all be soundly pro-Union Germans who resisted the Confederacy in Texas, sometimes directly. While August Siemering was ideologically opposed to slavery and secession, he served the South in the war when pressed into its service.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Coreth brothers felt called

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<sup>23</sup> James Patrick McGuire, "Kuechler, Jacob," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Ella Gold, "Siemering, August," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 20, 2018.

to support their new home and to defend it by enlisting and fighting directly on the battlefield. These examples demonstrate the variety of values and motivations that drove German born immigrants actions throughout the Sectional Crisis, Secession, and the Civil War.

The Germans who immigrated to the Texas Hill Country came for a variety reasons but mostly to escape an economy that was experiencing a deep depression. The Adelsverein also sought to give political agitators and dissidents a way out of Germany that avoided further political upheaval. The clear majority of those immigrants eligible to cast ballots voted against Texas secession. This and other provocations caused the new Texas Confederate State to regard them with suspicion and to prosecute a campaign of intimidation and harassment in the region. The Confederate Conscription Act compelled some of them, as well as other Pro-Unionist, to avoid the draft and ultimately caused several groups to head to Mexico in order to join the Union Army. These factors led to the Battle of the Nueces and the massacre that followed. The perception of this time produced a myth that the actions and attitude of this relative handful of Germans was indicative of the German population as a whole. The reports, letters, and other primary sources from the German settlers reveal this to be an incomplete representation. Eventually these immigrants would play a substantial part in the rebuilding of Texas during Reconstruction and their

ancestors would become leaders in their communities for generations to come.

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