



# AUSTIN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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*On the Cover:*

**1910 Austin Saengerrunde picnic at Madras Park, San Antonio, Texas**

Photo from the Austin Saengerrunde archives

The Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly is published once per quarter of the year (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter) by the Austin Genealogical Society (AGS). Deadlines for submissions are the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the second month of the quarter. The AGS Editor reserves the right to edit all contributed materials for style, grammar, and length. Contributors are solely responsible for the accuracy and proper citation of consulted sources. In addition, contributors are responsible for adhering to all applicable copyright law in their works. AGS assumes no responsibility for the content of submitted material.

AGS Members and the public are encouraged to submit material for publication to:

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## FROM THE EDITOR

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Greetings AGS Members,

I would like to take a moment and thank everyone who has submitted articles for our quarterly this year. It is an honor and a joy to read about your family histories and to be a little part of your journey along the way. I would also like to thank our publications team who take the time to proofread, fact check and provide valuable input to the final product. Without YOU this wouldn't be possible.

We have some wonderful submissions in our Winter 2018 quarterly. We learn about the history behind the oldest ethnic organization in Austin, Texas – Austin Sängerrunde. It was established in 1879 by German settlers as a traditional singing group to preserve German heritage. They celebrated their 139<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past February! Sängerrunde Halle is located in downtown Austin on San Jacinto Boulevard, just next door to Scholz Garten. Established in 1866, Scholz Garten is one of the oldest continuous running businesses in the city. I encourage you to stop in for a cold drink and take in the rich history they have to offer.

We get to know a man named Billy, who in the 1870s came to Texas from Alabama on the run from the law for murder, and we find Griff and Desda (who frequent readers might recognize) in Cisco, Texas, in the midst of a Christmas robbery! We also get to “dig” deeper into the archaeological findings at Whitemarsh and the home of the Bridger family.

As always, we welcome feedback and suggestions on our quarterly publication. Let us know what you think and happy reading.

Have a safe and Happy Holiday!



**Angela Doetsch**  
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# DAS DEUTSCHE LIED: THE AUSTIN SAENGERRUNDE, 1879–1918

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By Nicholas Roland

**O**n April 9, 1917, three days after the United States' entry into the First World War, a reported 20,000 people marched up Congress Avenue in Austin, Texas, in a "loyalty parade." Austin's main thoroughfare was "gorgeously decorated with United States, Lone Star, and Confederate flags" and schools and businesses shut down in support of the parade. Upon arriving at the grounds of the state capitol building, the marchers "passed in review" for Governor James E. Ferguson and Texas National Guard Adjutant General Henry Hutchings. Participating in this militaristic demonstration of solidarity were two hundred members of the Sons of Hermann and the Austin Saengerrunde, Austin's German singing club.<sup>1</sup> Judge Rudolph Kleberg, a second-generation German-Texan lawyer, judge, and politician from Dewitt County, was among several speakers who exhorted the assembled citizenry to lend their full support to the war effort against the Central Powers. Kleberg delivered a speech that was likely similar to many he gave in German-Texan

communities in 1917–1918. Noting that he didn't believe there were any traitors in Austin, Judge Kleberg proclaimed, "It is the duty of every American citizen to uphold the banner of liberty. I am proud of my German descent, but prouder still of my Americanism. We have a duty to perform and we should act coolly, courageously, and manly."<sup>2</sup> Like Kleberg, many Texans of German descent strove to assert their status as loyal American citizens when the country went to war with Germany. Despite their best efforts, German-Texan social and cultural institutions faced a concerted attack from the Texas State Council of Defense, hostile legislators, and erstwhile friends and neighbors during the First World War.

Although the First World War marked a period of Anglo-American hostility toward Germans and German institutions, the four decades prior to the Great War were marked by a flourishing German-Texan *Kultur*. The Austin Saengerrunde was one of the foremost German organizations in Texas' capital city

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<sup>1</sup> "20,000 Take Place in Demonstration at Capital City," *San Antonio Express*, April 10, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Quote in Matthew D. Tippens, *Turning Germans into Texans: World War I and the Assimilation and Survival of German Culture in Texas, 1900–1930* (Kleingarten Press, 2010), 103.

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While it was joined by contemporaries such as the Sons of Hermann, the Austin Turnverein, the Austin Männerchor, and several beer gardens in town, the Austin Saengerrunde holds special significance as the only one of these institutions to survive into the twenty-first century. This is a remarkable achievement given the level of anti-German sentiment in Texas during the First and Second World Wars and the inevitable acculturation of German immigrants. Its survival can largely be traced to a number of developments that occurred in the organization's first forty years of existence.<sup>3</sup>

Its name literally meaning “singing in the round,” a popular style of choral singing at the time of its founding, the Austin Saengerrunde grew out of and eventually outlived other German organizations in Austin. By the turn of the twentieth century it was the only remaining German singing society in Austin. The Saengerrunde also pioneered the popularization of the state *Saengerfest* and successfully integrated itself into the life of the town. Rather than serving as a secluded

bastion of German culture, the Saengerrunde was ubiquitous at public events and musical performances in Gilded Age and Progressive Era Austin. Dynamic leadership during this period allowed the Saengerrunde to weather the storms of the world wars and remain central to Austin social life. As a result of the groundwork laid in the first decades of its existence, this ethnic musical organization with origins in nineteenth century German cultural nationalism is now the oldest ethnic and musical institution in Austin and continues to play a role in community life.

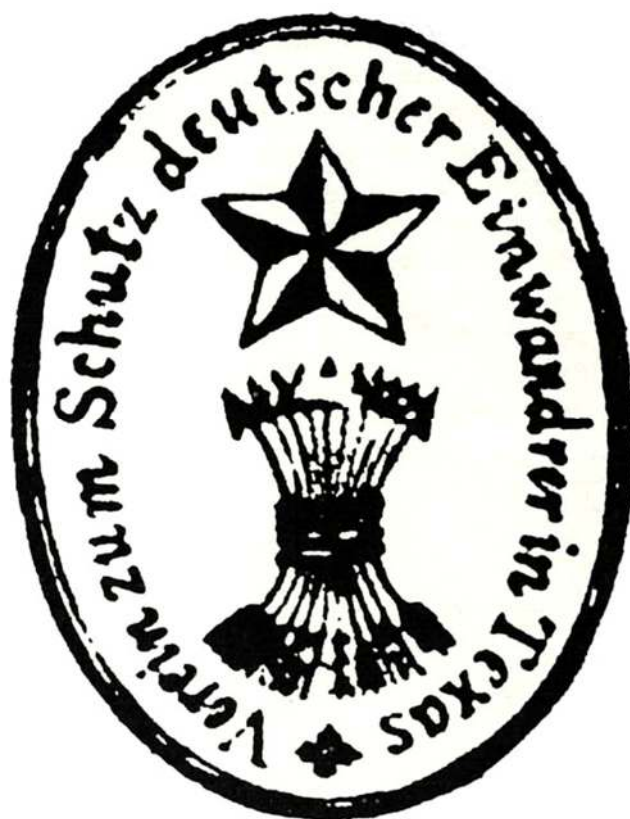
The Austin Saengerrunde was a relative newcomer when it was founded as a German singing club in 1879. Singing societies appeared with the first major wave of German immigration to Texas in the 1840s. In December 1844, the first group of German immigrants under the auspices of the *Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas* (Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas), more often referred to as the *Adelsverein*, arrived in Galveston, Texas. The *Adelsverein* was a colonization scheme founded by a group of German noblemen, who hoped to turn a profit from

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<sup>3</sup> Author's note on spelling and punctuation: I use the spellings preferred by the contemporary Austin Saengerrunde, and by the other historical organizations that I discuss at the time of their existence. Unfamiliar and generic German terms that are used frequently in this article are italicized in the first instance; proper names and titles are not.

their Texas land grants as well as to alleviate their lands of alleged overcrowding and poor economic conditions. While the Adelsverein corporation only lasted a few years and never turned a profit, it provided the impetus for a relatively large amount of German immigration to Texas in the antebellum period. Important centers of German-Texan culture, such as New Braunfels and Fredericksburg, were founded and settled by Adelsverein immigrants and other German settlers who followed.<sup>4</sup> By 1850, as many as five percent of the white population in Texas was German-born, although Germans were often a majority of the population in the belt of counties running from Houston to the Hill Country in the west.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after their arrival, many newly founded German communities formed singing societies.

New Braunfels, Texas, was initially settled in May 1845, and by the fall an informal singing club had formed. In 1850, the first German singing club in Texas was formally organized in New Braunfels as the Gesangverein Germania.<sup>6</sup> In creating this and other



**Logo of Verein zum Schutze Deutscher Einwanderer in Texas**

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*Saengerbunde* (singing clubs), German-Texans drew from popular musical forms in Germany with origins in the German nationalist movement. According to historian Theodore Albrecht, German nationalists used

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<sup>4</sup> Louis E. Brister, "Adelsverein," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ufo01>), accessed May 1, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>5</sup> Terry G. Jordan, "Germans," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/png02>), accessed May 5, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>6</sup> Theodore Albrecht, "German Singing Societies in Texas," (PhD diss., North Texas State University, 1975), 22–23.

the singing of patriotic and folk songs as a means of indirect political resistance to the Napoleonic Empire in the early nineteenth century. In the first decades of the century, male singing groups, known as *Liedertafeln*, became extremely popular among middle-class German speakers in Switzerland and the German states.<sup>7</sup> The *Liedertafeln* were joined by the *Turnverein* (athletic club, commonly Anglicized as Turner) movement in spreading the ideals of German nationalism. These popular cultural forms were transported to America with German immigrants, where they underwent a transformation in a new land.

Although Austin was on the periphery of the core belt of German settlement in antebellum Texas, a sizable number of Germans moved to the city in the 1840s and 1850s. As was the case wherever German communities took root in the Lone Star State, Austin's German immigrants formed a singing club, the Austin Männerchor, in 1852 or 1853. On October 15 and 16, 1853, members of the Männerchor braved what were essentially frontier

conditions to travel to the first state-wide Saengerfest in New Braunfels, Texas, along with organizations from San Antonio, Sisterdale, and the New Braunfels club. The second Saengerfest was held in San Antonio, Texas, in May 1854. The Texas State Saengerbund, a state-wide organization of German singing clubs, was formed at this festival. Saengerfests continued through the 1850s, rotating between host sites until the outbreak of the Civil War.<sup>8</sup>

Manfred Holck, club historian of the Austin Saengerrunde in the 1970s, credits the Civil War with demoralizing and exhausting the Austin Männerchor.<sup>9</sup> State Saengerfests halted between 1861 and 1870, finally resuming in San Antonio in September of that year.<sup>10</sup> Although Texas is typically considered to have sustained the least direct impact from the Civil War of any Confederate state, the years 1861–1865 were certainly traumatic for German-Texans. Many German-Texans were lukewarm Confederates at best, with many maintaining outright opposition to

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Albrecht, "German Singing Societies," in *The Handbook of Texas Music, Second Edition*, ed. by Laurie Jasinski, et al. (Denton, Tex.: The Texas State Historical Association, 2012), 237–238; Theodore Albrecht, "Texas State Sangerbund," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xat01>), accessed May 2, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; Albrecht, "German Singing Societies in Texas," 80.

<sup>9</sup> Manfred Holck, *A Century of Singing "Das Deutsche Lied" Austin Saengerrunde 100th Anniversary 1879 February 8th, 1979, a historical narrative* (Austin: Austin Saengerrunde, 1979), 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht, "Texas State Sangerbund."

secession. Towns with large German populations such as San Antonio and Austin, along with the majority German counties in the Hill Country, turned in votes against secession in 1861.<sup>11</sup> In a pattern that would resurface during other major wars, Anglo-Texans suspected Germans of disloyalty. Especially in the Hill Country, Germans found themselves targeted by Confederate and Texas state military forces and several atrocities took place.<sup>12</sup> Wartime inflation, high taxes, and the Union blockade also took an economic toll on many city-dwelling Germans who worked in white-collar jobs in the mercantile business.

Against this backdrop of social and economic disruption and ethnic suspicion, German cultural organizations haltingly resumed their activities in the post-war period. In 1873, New Braunfels, Texas, held the second post-war Saengerfest. In 1874, San Antonio again hosted the state Saengerfest, this time adding an orchestra. For the 1877 celebration, the Alamo City hosts enlarged the orchestra to nearly forty musicians.<sup>13</sup>

Where antebellum Saengerfests were rather informal gatherings, these increasingly elaborate events reflected Gilded Age tastes, an improved economy, and a desire to move on from the war years.

At the 1877 Saengerfest, Austin was chosen as the next host. However, the Austin Männerchor postponed the event amid fears of yellow fever. During 1878 a yellow fever epidemic swept through the American South, devastating Memphis, Tennessee, and other cities. Fortunately, Austin was spared from the epidemic. Despite the apparent sensibility of postponing the Saengerfest in the face of a record wave of yellow fever, the decision seems to have exposed a generational rift in the Austin German community. According to Holck, “the younger men, this new generation, quietly rebelled for action and started their own group of singers, men and women.”<sup>14</sup> On February 8, 1879, fifteen men met in the upstairs office of Charles F. Rumpel, a German-Texan stationary and bookseller on

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<sup>11</sup> See Dale Baum, *The Shattering of Texas Unionism: Politics in the Lone Star State during the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> For more on conflict in the Hill Country during this period see Joe Baulch, “The Dogs of War Unleashed: The Devil Concealed in Men Unchained,” *West Texas Historical Association Yearbook* 73 (1997): 126–141. See also Nicholas Roland, *Violence in the Hill Country: The Civil War on the Texas Frontier*, forthcoming from University of Texas Press in 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Albrecht, “Texas State Sangerbund.”

<sup>14</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 4.



Congress Avenue in Austin, Texas. Together they formed the Austin Saengerrunde.<sup>15</sup>

The formation of this new singing club was a challenge to the Austin Männerchor and a reflection of larger historical processes at work in 1870s Austin. On Christmas Day, 1871, Austin was finally connected to the American rail network by the Houston and Central Texas Railway. The city was the westernmost terminus on the rail line and experienced a boom period over the next five years. Austin's population doubled to over 10,000 residents by 1875, gas street lamps were installed in 1874, and streetcar lines were established in 1875. In 1876, an elevated bridge was built over the Colorado River, replacing a pontoon bridge dating from 1869. A second rail line, the International and Great Northern, reached Austin in 1876. Additionally, an 1872 election finally confirmed that Austin would remain the state capital in perpetuity. Although population growth and expansion leveled off somewhat by 1880, residents of the town were optimistic

about Austin's future.<sup>16</sup> The founding of the Austin Saengerrunde reflects this optimism, and it can be seen as a manifestation of the forward-looking New South ethos. While the Civil War generation would be forever scarred by their experience, the young men of the New South greeted the advent of railroads, industry, and urbanization with enthusiasm.<sup>17</sup>

An examination of late nineteenth century membership in the Austin Saengerrunde reveals Holck's assertion of the organization's youthfulness to be correct. A survey of Saengerrunde members reveals that the membership was mostly composed of men who did not live through the Civil War as adults. The first president of the Saengerrunde was Charles Ohrndorf. The 1881 edition of Morrison & Fourmy's Austin city directory lists Ohrndorf as a resident at the home of Mrs. Julia Ohrndorf, a widow. His occupation is not listed, indicating that he was likely a young man living with his mother.<sup>18</sup> The first secretary of the organization, by contrast, was Charles F. Rumpel, owner of the stationary

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–17.

<sup>16</sup> David C. Humphrey, "Austin, TX (Travis County)," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hda03>), accessed May 2, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>17</sup> On the generational rift in the New South, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction, 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007), 26–28.

<sup>18</sup> List of leadership: Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 24; occupation and residence from Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Austin for 1881–1882*, Book, 1881, page 131; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph39151/>, accessed May 2, 2013), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History.

and bookstore where the Saengerrunde was founded. Rumpel was a native of Germany, having immigrated to the United States in 1869. In 1879, he was a relatively mature 36 years old.<sup>19</sup> By 1881, the leadership of the Saengerrunde was even more youthful, with August Giesen assuming the position of Secretary and Hilmar Guenther serving as Treasurer.<sup>20</sup> Giesen and Guenther both worked as bookkeepers at local businesses and both boarded at Mrs. F. Schenck's home.<sup>21</sup> Guenther was a 20 year old native of Germany in 1881, and although Giesen's age cannot be determined, his professional status and residence at a boarding house indicate that he was in all likelihood a younger man.<sup>22</sup>

The youthful makeup of the Saengerrunde extended beyond the leadership of the organization. A list of seventeen members from the June 20, 1885, meeting minutes contains fifteen members who could be identified in a city directory or census

records.<sup>23</sup> An undated photograph from the late nineteenth century, most likely the 1890s or around 1900, yields an additional 20 individuals identified as Saengerrunde members, nine of whom can be positively identified in a city directory or census records. Other sources yield two more names. This sample of 26 members reinforces the youthfulness of the organization. Of the 1885 members, the average age for the twelve members who could be identified was 26.7 years in 1880, one year after the organization's founding. The average age in 1880 of the members in the undated photograph, ten of whom could be identified, was 20.2 years.<sup>24</sup> Because this photograph is likely from the 1890s or around 1900, many of these members were children at the time of the Saengerrunde's founding and joined as they entered adulthood. The Austin Saengerrunde in the late nineteenth century was an organization of young men with different outlooks and concerns than that of their

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<sup>19</sup> 1900 U.S. Federal Census, Austin, Travis County, Texas, Ward 6, Enumeration District 90, page 8, Rumpel household, jpeg image, (Online: The Generations Network, Inc., 2009) [Digital scan of original records in the National Archives, Washington, DC], subscription database, <<http://www.ancestry.com/>>, accessed April 30, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's*, 86, 91.

<sup>22</sup> 1880 U.S. Federal Census, Austin, Travis County, Texas, Home 66, Schenck household, jpeg image, (Online: The Generations Network, Inc., 2009) [Digital scan of original records in the National Archives, Washington, DC], subscription database, <<http://www.ancestry.com/>>, accessed April 30, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 24; *Morrison & Fourmy's*; 1880 and 1900 United States Federal Census, Schedule 1, Population, Austin, Travis County, Texas.

<sup>24</sup> 1880 United States Federal Census, Schedule 1, Population, Austin, Travis County, Texas.



*Scholz Garten and the Austin Saengerrunde building  
PICA 16300, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

parents or older neighbors and relatives in the Austin Männerchor.

In addition to being overwhelmingly a young man's club, the Austin Saengerrunde membership consisted of men tied to the emerging economic order. White collar, upper blue collar, service industry professionals and small manufacturers dominated the ranks of the Saengerrunde. A survey of the aforementioned membership lists yields a

total of three bookkeepers, three saloon keepers or bartenders, manufacturers of boots and shoes, soap, and crockery, two salesmen, two newspaper editors, a gun and locksmith, a jeweler and watchmaker, a dry goods merchant, a book seller, a "junk store" proprietor, a book binder, a section foreman on the railroad, and one resident "at home."<sup>25</sup>

Austin Saengerrunde members were largely members of an emerging middle-class and

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<sup>25</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's*; 1880 United States Federal Census, Schedule 3, Manufactures, Austin Travis County, Texas.

shared many characteristics with club members throughout America. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of vigorous growth for fraternal organizations and widespread middle-class membership in clubs. The city of Austin was no exception to this phenomenon, boasting four Masonic lodges, six Odd Fellows lodges, four Knights of Honor lodges, an American Legion of Honor lodge, an Ancient Order United Workmen lodge, and a B’Nai Brith lodge. These were joined by the Travis County Medical Society, the Austin Typographical Union, the Travis County Fish and Game Protective Association, the Austin Gun Club, the Bull Creek Fishing Club, the Austin Temperance Club, several women’s clubs, including the Austin chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Austin Greys, a local militia unit.<sup>26</sup>

Despite many similarities with Anglo-Texan fraternal societies and clubs, the Austin Saengerrunde also differed from its counterparts by representing the distinctive German Liedertafel tradition. The Saengerrunde drew from Austin’s large ethnic German population, comprised of 757

German-born individuals in 1875.<sup>27</sup> Beyond the sizeable German-born population, many more Austin residents’ parents or grandparents had emigrated from Germany at some point in the mid-nineteenth century. German immigration was even stronger in the post-Civil War decades, with around twice as many Germans immigrating between 1865 and 1890 as during the antebellum period.<sup>28</sup> The Austin Saengerrunde, along with several other organizations such as the Society Germania, the Sons of Hermann, and the Austin Turnverein, provided Germans with a chance to socialize, speak their native tongue, and reminisce about their homeland. These organizations also acted as business and community networks and mutual aid societies for their members. As time went on, they became politically active, mobilizing against anti-German causes such as temperance and “Americanization” programs. Thus, the Austin Saengerrunde fulfilled several roles for an immigrant community in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. It reflected the optimism and enthusiasm of an emerging class of young, white-collar, immigrant entrepreneurs in the New South, while simultaneously continuing

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<sup>26</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy’s*, 34–39.

<sup>27</sup> Humphrey, “Austin, TX (Travis County).”

<sup>28</sup> Jordan, “Germans.”

the Liedertafel tradition and serving the social needs of an ethnic minority community.

While the Austin Saengerrunde fulfilled a number of desires and needs within the German immigrant community, its immediate purpose was to salvage the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Saengerfest that had been postponed by the Austin Männerchor. Originally scheduled for October 1878, the Saengerfest was rescheduled for April 15–17, 1879.<sup>29</sup> Although founded just two months before the scheduled dates for the Saengerfest, the Saengerrunde quickly and skillfully utilized its social and business connections in Austin to garner community support and financing for the Saengerfest.

According to Holck, “In all the newspaper accounts of the 1879 Saengerfest only the Saengerrunde was mentioned and nowhere a word about the Austin Maennerchor.”<sup>30</sup> However, the centrality of the Austin

Saengerrunde to the 1879 festival must be qualified. The Saengerrunde may have provided youthful energy and a driving force behind the 1879 festival, but Saengerfest Central Committee leadership remained in the hands of older, more established members of Austin’s German community, certainly including members of the Austin Männerchor and likely the Society Germania as well. The president of the committee was Dr. Gustavus Weisselberg, a 54-year-old Prussian-born physician. M. Stakemann was a Männerchor member and served as secretary. Well known businessman and Männerchor member Walter Tips was musical director for the festival, as well as employer for several Saengerrunde members.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, newspaper accounts do mention the Austin Männerchor and the Society Germania as participants in the festivities, if not explicitly assigning principal leadership to any of the German singing clubs.<sup>32</sup>

In a less triumphant passage that is probably closer to the truth, Holck describes the effort of the entire Austin community in organizing the 1879 Saengerfest:

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<sup>29</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> “Saengerfest,” *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, April 16, 1879.

<sup>32</sup> “Torchlight Procession – Order of March,” *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, April 15, 1879.

Though the small Saengerrunde appears to have been the driving force to master the monumental task of arranging the 1879 State Saengerfest with the building of a triumphal arch across Congress Avenue, the banquets, picnics, dances and concerts at the Millett Opera House, the imported orchestras from St. Louis and New Orleans, all the other singing groups in Austin, the people and merchants of Austin must have been a part of this event to make it the great musical success in Austin it was reported to have been.<sup>33</sup>



**German Saengerfest, arch and streetcars on Congress Avenue looking towards Capitol Building, Austin, 1889**

*Courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission  
Mabel H. Brooks photograph collection, 1932/005-114*

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<sup>33</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 14.

Whichever organization provided the primary force behind the 1879 festival, its execution was deemed a remarkable success. The town's newspapers covered the event extensively, and a reported seven to eight thousand onlookers braved "a light shower and very threatening weather" on the evening of April 15, 1879, to greet the assembled Liedertafeln as they paraded by torchlight from the Millett Opera House to the Turnverein Hall. The Saengerfest parade passed under a triumphal arch erected at the foot of Congress Avenue to welcome the visitors to the "City of the Violet Crown."

The *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman* reported, "Every house was beautifully illuminated with lamps, candles, jets, transparencies or Chinese lanterns, and many were supplied with all, presenting a brilliance and splendor that was absolutely charming. The entire city seemed to have crowded on the Avenue and Pecan street ... ." Following the procession, the singers ate at a banquet and listened to addresses by Prussian-born Mayor Jacob C. Degress, festival committee chairman Dr. Weisselberg, and Oscar

Samostz, a prominent German-Texan druggist in Austin.<sup>34</sup>

The following day, April 16, Saengerfest participants rehearsed in the morning, then took an excursion to Mount Bonnell. The *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman* reported that "Those from the flat regions near the coast and above Dallas seemed to especially enjoy the ride up the river and the beautiful mountain scenery and lofty peaks ... right royally did they enjoy it." In the evening, Millett's Opera House hosted the Grand Concert of the Saengerfest, with orchestral music provided by the New Orleans National Orchestra of St. Louis. The *Daily Democratic Statesman* correspondent declared it to be "a rich musical treat and thrilling," and maintained that "all that was done was good and different from everything ever seen or heard before."<sup>35</sup> The following day, Saengerbund delegates attended a business meeting at Germania Hall, on the site of Scholz's Garden. Following the business meeting, a huge barbecue took place at Pressler's Garden, one of the city's several beer gardens.

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<sup>34</sup> "Saengerfest – The Procession and the Banquet," *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, April 16, 1879.

<sup>35</sup> "Saengerfest – The Excursion and the Concert Yesterday," *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, April 17, 1879.

Picnickers were addressed by Alexander W. Terrell, a State Senator, and Dr. Berthold Hadra, a German-Texan surgeon from San Antonio. The festivities concluded with a grand ball at Millett's Opera House.<sup>36</sup>

The 1879 Saengerfest represented an acceleration of the trend toward opulence and grandiosity in Saengerbund festivals. Looking back on the 1879 fest, the Schulenburg *Sticker* wrote that "Austin went a long way further in the direction of musical

festivals and engaged the New Orleans National Orchestra of St. Louis for orchestra music and accompaniment. In this way the singing festivals began to assume a more different and simultaneously more pretentious and more expensive character... ." <sup>37</sup> Festival organizers also skillfully orchestrated community support and involvement in the Saengerfest. Tickets were sold to the general public and the use of a St. Louis orchestra drew Anglo-Texan interest.



**Pressler's Beer Garden**

*PICA 05968, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

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<sup>36</sup> "Saengerfest of the Texas German Singing Associations," *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, April 16, 1879.

<sup>37</sup> "History of Saengerbund," *The Schulenburg Sticker*, May 20, 1909.



The successful incorporation of the non-German public into the 1879 Saengerfest marked the beginning of a trend that would characterize the Austin Saengerrunde for the next four decades. Between 1880 and 1918, Austin newspapers were filled with advertisements for concerts and dances sponsored or produced by the Saengerrunde. Often taking place at the Turner Hall, one of the opera houses, or a beer garden, these popular events ensured that the Saengerrunde was at the heart of musical and social life in Austin during this period. The Saengerrunde was also actively engaged with civic life. On May 8, 1890, the day after passage of a municipal bond to finance construction of a dam on the Colorado River, the *Austin Statesman* reported that “The Austin Saengerrunde and Prof. Besserer, elated over the election, called at the Statesman office last night and treated the editorial and composing room with a delightful serenade.”<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the organization maintained German traditions, such as the “continental Sunday.” This tradition entailed convivial beer drinking and socializing on Sunday afternoons, often accompanied by a concert given by the

singers or a hired band. The German ethos of *Gemütlichkeit* – cordiality and good cheer – appealed to many Austinites, whether Teutonic or Anglo, and the Saengerrunde and its sister organizations thrived in this period.

Especially important to the Saengerrunde’s success and long-term survival were the activities of one member. Carl William Besserer, “one of the most prominent musicians and educators during the early days of Austin’s history,” was a founding member of the Austin Saengerrunde. He served as choir director for the organization and made a living as a professional musician and music teacher. Besserer was ubiquitous in the Austin music scene, directing a number of bands, including the State Military Band in 1911. Advertisements for Sunday afternoon concerts at Scholz’s Garden, owned by Besserer’s father-in-law August Scholz, frequently mentioned that music would be provided by Besserer’s band. In the 1890s, Besserer’s band provided entertainment aboard the *Ben Hur* riverboat on Lake Austin.<sup>39</sup> Besserer was also a founder of the Austin Symphony Orchestra and directed the

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<sup>38</sup> “Jubilee Notes,” *Austin Daily Democratic Statesman*, May 8, 1890.

<sup>39</sup> Clayton T. Shorkey and Laurie E. Jasinski, “Besserer, Carl William,” *The Handbook of Texas Music, Second Edition* (Denton, Tex.: The Texas State Historical Association, 2012), 49.

Austin High School orchestra as well as the Austin Municipal Orchestra.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the Saengerrunde's prominent place in Austin community life, the struggle over prohibition marked a significant challenge to German *Kultur* in Texas. The German "continental Sunday" tradition flouted conservative Anglo-Protestant norms regarding the Sabbath, and beer gardens were

centers of German-Texan community life. The 1876 Texas state constitution contained a local-option clause, and the "dry" movement initially worked at the county level to ban the sale or manufacture of alcohol. Particularly strong in the rural counties of North Texas, the "drys" managed to garner enough support for the state to hold



**Scholz Garden**

*PICA 08823, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

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<sup>40</sup> "Old King Carl, Part 3: Carl William Besserer, Founder of the Modern Austin Music Scene," Richard Zelade, accessed May 3, 2013, <http://richardzelade.wordpress.com/2012/07/04/old-king-carl-part-3-carl-william-besserer-founder-of-the-modern-austin-music-scene/>.

a prohibition referendum on August 4, 1887.<sup>41</sup>

German organizations stridently opposed the prohibition law and held numerous rallies throughout the state to drum up “wet” support. In Austin, Besserer’s band played at “wet” rallies.<sup>42</sup> When Texans went to the polls, prohibition suffered a crushing defeat. Out of nearly 350,000 votes cast, prohibition garnered the support of only 130,000 Texans.<sup>43</sup>

Although prohibition was turned back in the 1880s, German drinking culture continued to face attack from the “drys.” By 1895, fifty-three of 239 counties in Texas were dry, and another seventy-nine counties were partly dry under local option.

In 1908 and 1911, prohibition referendums were narrowly defeated, and prohibition played a significant role in state politics throughout the period.<sup>44</sup> Anti-prohibition forces responded to the Anti-Saloon

League’s campaign by pouring money into the coffers of “wet” politicians.

The Texas Brewers Association, the Anti-Statewide Prohibition Organization of Texas, and the Wholesale Liquor Dealers Association worked together to promote the “wet” cause. Despite money from the liquor and brewing industries, “drys” continued to gain ground. By the 1910 statewide election, a majority of the state’s Congressmen and Senators were in favor of prohibition. Despite these gains, Oscar B. Colquitt, an anti-prohibitionist, won election to the Governor’s office in the same year. Colquitt was a key ally for the German *Vereine*, and supposedly enjoyed membership in the Austin Saengerrunde.<sup>45</sup> Addressing the singers at the 1911 state Saengerfest in Austin, Colquitt stated that “Some of my enemies have chided me because of the friendship of the German-Americans for me. But I am your friend and I am glad of it. I am proud of you, for you are good people.”<sup>46</sup> Although German-Texans had Colquitt’s friendship, German *Kultur* continued to face

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<sup>41</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans into Texans*, 33–35.

<sup>42</sup> “Old King Carl, Part 3.”

<sup>43</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans into Texans*, 35.

<sup>44</sup> K. Austin Kerr, “Prohibition,” Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vap01>), accessed May 4, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>45</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> “Song Wins Him Pardon,” *Austin Statesman*, May 24, 1911.



**Bar at Scholz Beer Garten**

*PICA 16572, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

the threat of prohibitionism until the First World War.

During the 1890s and early twentieth century, the Austin Saengerrunde gradually became one of the principal German-Texan cultural institutions in the city. The last instance of the participation of the Austin Männerchor at a state Saengerfest seems to have been in 1891.<sup>47</sup>

By 1918, only the Austin Saengerrunde and the Sons of Hermann represented German-Texans in Austin's "loyalty parade." The generational break with groups like the Austin Männerchor and the Society Germania led to the gradual dying out of those organizations, leaving the Saengerrunde as the only remaining singing club in Austin. At the same time that German

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<sup>47</sup> Oscar Haas, *A Chronological History of the Singers of German Songs in Texas* (New Braunfels, Tex.: New Braunfels Zeitung, 1948), 28.

clubs were going extinct, many of the beer gardens that served as important centers of German community life closed down. Around the turn of the century, Turner Hall closed, eventually passing into the hands of the Scottish Rite Masons. Bulian's Garden

institutions, German migration to Texas slowed during this period, and the German-born population of the state lost ground, falling from 6.2 percent of all Texans in 1900 to 5.6 percent in 1910.<sup>49</sup> However, during this period of receding German influence the



**People Outside Scholz Beer Garten**

*PICA 18526, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

was destroyed in the 1900 flood caused by the failing of the Austin dam. Pressler's Garden shut down by 1910 due to expansion of the city.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the loss of these

Austin Saengerrunde swelled to its largest membership, increasing from 167 members in 1907 to a high of approximately 375 members from 1912 to 1914.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rachel Feit, "Gardens of Eden: How Austin Used to Celebrate," *The Austin Chronicle*, January 26, 2001, accessed May 3, 2013, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/food/2001-01-26/80303/>.

<sup>49</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 61.

<sup>50</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 17.

With the increase in membership, the Saengerrunde began to look for an appropriate venue for meetings, practices, and social life. Throughout its life, the club had used a variety of venues for its activities while never owning its own property. The 1881 city directory listed the Turner Hall as the Saengerrunde's place of meeting, and Scholz's Garden was also used at times.<sup>51</sup> By 1901, the Saengerrunde conducted its business at Scholz's Garden, probably due to the size of the facility and the closing of other locations. In 1904, the Saengerrunde entered into an agreement with the Lemp Brewery of St. Louis, who owned Scholz's Garden at the time, to purchase the property, which included a hall, bar, beer garden, and bowling alley. The property was finally acquired in 1908, thus giving the Austin Saengerrunde a permanent home that it still owns and occupies today. This initiative is credited with spurring the club's remarkable growth prior to the First World War.<sup>52</sup>

With a growing membership, the issuance of a state charter in 1903, the acquisition of a permanent property, and the fading of other German organizations, the Austin Saengerrunde became the most prominent

representative of German culture in the city by the time war broke out in Europe in 1914. Many German-Texans were initially supportive of the German war effort, and even held donation drives to support the German and Austrian Red Crosses. Teutonic pride gradually tempered as the United States' position toward Germany began to shift. Texas especially became a focal point for fear-mongering about Imperial Germany. The infamous Zimmermann telegram promised to restore the American Southwest, including Texas, to Mexico if she would make war on the United States in alliance with Germany. Cross-border violence spilling over from the Mexican Revolution had already led to a military mobilization in Texas, and fears of raids or an invasion from the Rio Grande were stoked by newspaper editors and government propagandists.

When the United States went to war with the Central Powers in the spring of 1917, federal, state, and local governments waged a simultaneous campaign against German culture on the home front. All forms of German culture were demonized during 1917–1918. In Texas this effort was carried out by a variety of patriotic organizations and

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<sup>51</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 14–17.



1910 Austin Saengerrunde picnic at Madras Park, San Antonio, Texas

*Photo from the Austin Saengerrunde archives*

by state and local Councils of Defense (CCD), an organization formed in 1916 as part of the national preparedness campaign. Austin was no different from the rest of the state in turning on its German population. One German-Texan was beaten after making derogatory statements about the Red Cross. The Austin CCD casually remarked that “they should have beat him to death.” This

organization concluded that “if we are not to handle the unpatriotic pro-Germans without gloves ... we had as well close shop and wait til the end of the war.”<sup>53</sup> Mob violence was also accompanied by intimidation, often spurred by perceived reluctance in supporting Liberty Bond sales or Red Cross fundraising drives. The Austin CCD complained of a well-to-do German farmer who spent “not

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<sup>53</sup> Austin CCD, quoted in Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 111.

one damn cent” on Liberty Bonds, and decreed that “If a man is able to help this government and does not do so within the full limit of his ability, he can profess his Americanism all day long but he will never make me believe he is a loyal American.”<sup>54</sup> Jane Y. McCallum, a prominent Austin clubwoman and suffragist, helped to paint a German-Texan lawyer’s office yellow when he failed to participate in the Third Liberty Loan drive.<sup>55</sup>

The Austin Saengerrunde was dramatically affected by these activities. Christian Klaerner, a German-born Saengerrunde member, was investigated and removed from his position as the state librarian, even though no proof of his disloyalty could be found. The mayor of Austin banned the performance of German music at municipal concerts.<sup>56</sup> The last large public concert given by the Saengerrunde took place in April 1915 at the University of Texas Auditorium.<sup>57</sup> The last state Saengerfest before the war was celebrated in 1916 in San Antonio, and no Saengerfests took place during the war.<sup>58</sup>

Driven underground by anti-German hysteria, the Austin Saengerrunde suffered a drop in membership and an end to its usually busy social calendar. In deference to public sentiment, the Saengerrunde’s New Year’s ball for 1918 was cancelled.<sup>59</sup>

German-Texans such as Judge Kleberg attempted to demonstrate their loyalty and mitigate the worst effects of the anti-German hysteria. Despite their best efforts, the Texas state legislature mounted a concerted assault on German culture. Linking anti-prohibitionism with support for the Kaiser, the “drys” finally prevailed as Texas enacted prohibition in 1918. Saengerrunde ownership of Scholz’s Garden is likely the only thing that kept the establishment afloat until Texas repealed prohibition in 1935. In 1918 the state legislature also banned the use of German in school instruction, including German language courses. German *Vereine* were frequently investigated for conducting meetings in German.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>55</sup> Janet G. Humphrey, *A Texas Suffragist: Diaries and Writings of Jane Y. McCallum* (Austin: Ellen C. Temple, 1988), 112.

<sup>56</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 123–125.

<sup>57</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Oscar Haas, *A Chronological History of the Singers of German Songs in Texas*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Holck, *Das Deutsche Lied*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Tippens, *Turning Germans Into Texans*, 158, 164.



By the end of the Great War, the Austin Saengerrunde was damaged but continued to survive.

Elements of German *Kultur* gradually reasserted themselves in Austin and throughout the state. However, recovery from the anti-German hysteria of 1917–1918 was not an immediate process. The first state Saengerfest after the war was held in Austin

on May 14 and 15, 1922, fully three and a half years after the Armistice.<sup>61</sup>

Germans throughout Texas faced widespread intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and German cultural activities resumed haltingly. After the 1922 Saengerfest, another festival did not take place until 1927 in Houston, Texas.<sup>62</sup>



**Austin Saengerrunde**

*Photo from the Austin Saengerrunde archives*

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<sup>61</sup> Haas, *A Chronological History of the Singers of German Songs in Texas*, 43–44.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

In the interwar years, the Austin Saengerrunde gradually reasserted itself into the social life of Austin, until the outbreak of the Second World War again drove it largely underground. The Austin Saengerrunde faced its gravest threat during the great wars of the twentieth century and survived. Theodore Albrecht ruefully concluded in 1975 that “Since 1920, the German singing societies in Texas have been on the decline, and their days as viable musical organizations are numbered as old members die off without replacement.”<sup>63</sup>

Almost forty years later, the Austin Saengerrunde remains ensconced in its clubhouse at the rear of Scholz Garten in downtown Austin, Texas. Its members continue to carry on the traditions of German song and *Gemütlichkeit*. Despite this apparent continuity, the Austin Saengerrunde largely exists today due to a number of contingent developments in its first four decades of existence. In its beginning as a youth movement within older, more established clubs, the Saengerrunde became the new face of German culture in Austin. Deprived of youthful members, other organizations gradually died off and the

Saengerrunde became the only singing club in Texas’ capital city. The club successfully integrated itself into the social fabric of Austin, a fact that may help explain its survival in the face of intense pressure during the First World War. The Saengerrunde was an inherently acculturated organization, simultaneously a safeguard for German culture in Austin and an expression of entrepreneurial immigrant ambitions in the atmosphere of the New South.

Carl W. Besserer and other prominent members of the Saengerrunde lent it an air of respectability and civic-mindedness at a time when any manifestation of German culture was considered suspicious. Finally, the forward-looking decision to purchase the Scholz’s Garden property gave the Saengerrunde a permanent place in Austin life. Had this purchase not taken place, the club likely might have been forced to disband during the First World War due to blacklisting and refusal of facilities by Anglo-Texan propertyowners. At the same time, Texas’ oldest bar might also have ceased to exist during the years of prohibition and anti-Germanism.

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<sup>63</sup> Albrecht, “German Singing Societies in Texas,” abstract.

Fortunately for Austin and for Texans of German heritage, the Austin Saengerrunde has proven to be durable and resilient and will doubtless continue *Das Deutsche Lied* for decades to come.



**Singers at Saengerrunde Hall**

*PICA 14016, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library*

## WILLIAM “BILLY” FRANK NELSON 1852–1909

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By AGS Member Bob Cantin

**W**illiam “Billy” Frank Nelson was not a Texas Ranger. Nor was he a Mason, although he was buried in a Masonic Cemetery. Nor did he ever drive a car or fly in an airplane. Unfortunately, when he was a young man, he murdered more than one person. And for this he was chased across three state lines by a sheriff. He lived a rugged, rural life as the son of an overseer, then farmhand and finally farmer who died very young at age 57. He committed an unforgiveable crime, but he also fathered 10 children and for that we can be very thankful. Thankful because one of his daughters was my wife’s grandmother.

Billy was born July 13, 1852, at Dixons Mills in Marengo County, about 60 miles southwest of Selma, Alabama. The state of Alabama did not record births until 1908 so we must rely upon sources such as Ancestry.com as the sole source for this information. As far as we have been able to obtain, Dixons Mills only appeared in the 1870 United States Federal Census, having 120 residents of whom 80 were listed as black and 40 as white.

Billy was the son of William J. Nelson, who was 36 years old when Billy was born, and

his wife, Eliza B., 26, a Virginian. In 1852, Billy had two older sisters, Susan, age 4; and Frances, 3; as well as a brother, one-year-old John E. Nelson.

William J. Nelson had been born in South Carolina in 1814 and later moved to Dixons Mills, Alabama. An unincorporated community, Dixons Mills was named for a group of mills operated by Joel B. Dixon, one of the early settlers of Marengo County, Alabama, in the nineteenth century. The first of their mills was a water-powered grist mill at a dam that he and his sons built. His business grew and eventually included a steam engine-driven sawmill and two steam-powered cotton gins.

According to the 1850 United States Federal Census, William J. was an overseer, who has been described as a “very important personage,” since most of the success of a plantation or estate depended upon him. He was the “middle man” in charge of the productivity of the enslaved, usually 50 to 100 in number. An overseer was usually hired at the beginning of the year, on a one-year basis, from a group of professional farmers.

Plantation owners often advertised for overseers and requested references from former employers. The overseer was usually white, but sometimes free men of color were hired for this position. During the Civil War, a few women even served as overseers.

Many variables influenced the amount of pay an overseer received, including size of the plantation, number of enslaved, resident or absentee proprietor, lodgings, servants, provisions and other privileges. Salaries ranged from \$100 to \$2,000 per annum. A work contract had to be signed outlining responsibilities and included personal behavior such as marital status (they had to be married), no drinking and no leaving the plantation without a pass. Of almost equal importance was the responsibility to harvest as large a crop as possible.

Among the overseer's duties was the prevention of runaways and their recapture when necessary. Prior to the Civil War, overseers were called upon to give police protection against slave uprisings, and many were exempt from military service on that premise. An overseer kept records and census figures as well as having the responsibility of being the keeper of the keys to the smoke house, corn crib, barns, stables and the like. He also supervised the care of the livestock

and was required to inspect the workers' houses and their health care.

The social status of an overseer was held in low regard by a large number of plantation owners. The greatest ambition of an overseer was to make the transition to farmer, and possibly to plantation owner. An overseer and his family usually lived in a small house behind the larger plantation house on the owner's property.

It was into this rural environment that Billy Nelson was born and raised. It is little wonder that he became a farmhand, rather than an overseer.

The Civil War took place from 1861–1865, but Billy would have been too young to have served his country in that war. In 1870, Billy was an 18-year-old farmhand, still living in Dixons Mills with George B. and Sarah R. Wright, both of whom were 38 years old. Others in the household were Benjamin Mason (25), Mike Reaves (14) and his brother John Reaves (11). Their post office box was listed as Shiloh.

No doubt, Billy honed his farming skills while working and watching his father oversee the plantation as they picked primarily cotton, and some other crops for food.

Sometime between 1870 and 1878, Billy left Alabama in a hurry, travelled to Texas and does not show up on any records in Mississippi or Louisiana. Here's why.

Billy had a half-brother, who was mulatto. They were very close in age and very close growing up together. An African American man killed his half-brother and it was reported that "Billy went on a rampage and started killing the black slaves until he got tired of killing anymore." Then, he saddled up and headed for Texas with the sheriff on his trail until he crossed the Mississippi River. Billy never returned to Dixons Mills.

In Texas, Billy met a young girl named Rachel Ann Cude, who in 1870 was living in Hopkinstown, Gonzales County, Texas, with her father, James Washington Cude, Sr., age 48, and her brothers and sister. Rachel Ann was the fifth oldest of eight brothers and sisters and had never attended school. Rachel Ann's mother, Rachel Ann Walker Cude, had died two years earlier in 1868 at the age of 39 in Gonzales, Gonzales County, Texas. Gonzales is located about 65 miles east of

San Antonio and in 1870 had a population of about 1800.

The town of Gonzales has an interesting history and played an important role in the early formation of Texas. It contributed 32 men to the defense of the Alamo and all were slaughtered in The Battle of the Alamo (February 23 – March 6, 1836). With the news of the Alamo massacre, General Sam Houston was in Gonzales organizing Texas forces. He anticipated that the town would be the next target of General Santa Anna's Mexican Army. General Houston didn't want the Mexican Army to capture Gonzales, so he ordered the town burned to the ground to deny it to the enemy. Widows and orphans of Gonzales and their neighbors were forced to flee. Gonzales was derelict immediately after the Texas Revolution, but was eventually rebuilt on the original site in the 1840s.

Billy and Rachel Ann Cude were married in 1878, presumably in Gonzales, when Billy was 26 and Rachel Ann 16. There is no marriage record we could find and perhaps one doesn't exist.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: At the time of submission, a marriage record has been located for William "Billy" Frank Nelson and Rachel Ann Cude on October 9, 1878, in Caldwell, Texas. "Texas, County Marriage Index, 1837-1977," database, FamilySearch ([Page 139](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939Z-Y8GQ-Q?cc=1803987&wc=M61N-W29%3A146614801: December 22, 2016), 004539370 > image 61 of 692; county courthouses, Texas.</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

The State of Texas,  
Caldwell County } To any Ordained  
Minister of the Gospel, Judge of the District  
court, Judge of the County Court or any Justice  
of the Peace: You or either of you are  
hereby authorized to solemnize or join in  
the Holy Union of Matrimony W.F. Nelson  
and Anna Cude in accordance with the  
laws of this State, and that you make due  
return of this your authority to my office  
within sixty days from date hereof, showing  
how you have executed the same.  
Given under my hand and seal of  
Office this 5<sup>th</sup> day of Oct. A.D. 1878.  
J.P. McDowell Clerk Caldwell Co.  
This is to certify that the above License  
was executed by me, by joining the within  
named parties in the Holy Union of Matrimony  
my this 9<sup>th</sup> day of Oct. 1878  
John L. Hollaman C.M. G.  
Filed Oct. 12. 1878. Recorded Feb. 12. 1879.  
J.P. McDowell  
Clerk Caldwell Co.

**Marriage record for W.F. Nelson and Anna Cude**

October 9, 1878, Caldwell County, Texas

They were to have 10 children in the next 24 years. Following marriage, they headed south about 90 miles to Beeville, Bee County, Texas. Their first daughter, Margaret Virginia "Jennie" Nelson, was born on August 20, 1879, in Beeville.

Things were literally buzzing in Beeville, "A Honey of a Town" according to its slogan in the south Texas brush country. It was named for Barnard E. Bee Sr., former Secretary of

State for Texas and Secretary of War for the Republic of Texas. The Nelson's didn't remain long in Beeville because within a year, the 1880 United States Federal Census saw them living in Frio, Texas, southwest of San Antonio. Perhaps Billy lived his life, always looking over his shoulder for that Alabama sheriff.

Billy was an unemployed farmer living in Frio, Texas, according to the 1880 Census

which also listed Rachel Ann’s occupation as “keeping house” and her nickname as “Rody.”

Frio became known as a “cowboy capital” and cultural center during the 1870s, and by the 1880s estimates of its population hovered around 1,500. In 1880, the International-Great Northern Railroad extended through Frio County but bypassed the town of Frio itself. With the establishment of the town of Pearsall, Texas, along the rail route, people began to leave Frio, the population of which soon dwindled to 100. Today it is a ghost town with 85 scattered residents.

Billy and Rachel Ann then headed northeast with their daughter for a more populated community, Travis County, where Austin was located and is the capital of Texas. Billy probably figured there was “strength in numbers” in a populated area so Austin fit his “hiding” needs perfectly.

Realizing that children cost money to raise, the couple waited more than five years before having a second daughter, Eula Estelle, on New Year’s Day, 1885, at Austin. By then, their farming life must have been going well for Billy and Rachel Ann because their family grew by leaps and bounds.

On August 28, 1887, a third daughter, Mittie Velma, was born at Devine, Medina County,

Texas, some 80 miles southwest of San Antonio and very near Frio. She was followed by another daughter, Ruby A., also born at Devine on January 12, 1890. Perhaps by that time, Billy had become an overseer like his father, or owned a farm.

It is unfortunate that the 1890 United States Census was lost to a massive fire. Some 90 percent of the records were destroyed at the Commerce Department, Washington D.C., where they were stored. However, some records were also being kept in Travis County, which is where Billy and Rachel Ann would finally settle down. In 1890, Billy was 38 and Rachel Ann, 28.

In 1890, Travis County, Texas, had 36,322 residents. Of these, 14,575 lived in Austin. Innovations and improvements in progress at that time included a trolley system and water-generated electricity, but most streets remained unpaved. By the turn of the century, several hundred businesses filled the needs of the 22,000 Austin residents.

The majority of Travis County’s residents lived on farms or in smaller towns, and agriculture dominated the area economy. Cotton became the principal field crop in the late 1880s and remained so for 60 years, with cattle being the second largest export. 65,000



acres about 30 percent of the county’s improved farmland was planted in cotton.

On July 24, 1891, Rachel Ann lost her brother, James Washington Cude Jr., in Medina, Texas. Death records were not kept that far back so we don’t know the cause. He was only 32 years old.

Then in her 30s, Rachel Ann gave birth to five of her seven children, each approximately two years apart: James Arthur (1892-1956) in Medina County, Texas; Herbert (1894- ) in Travis County, Texas; Myrtle May (1897-1917) in Travis County, Texas; James William (1899- ) in Austin, Texas; Lee Malcolm (1901-1974) in Texas, and another son, Onice (1903-1957) in Texas. Myrtle May (my wife, Marsha Cantin’s, grandmother) was sadly killed by her husband at the tender age of 20.

Tragedy struck Rachel Ann twice in 18 months as her father, James Washington Cude, passed away on May 12, 1908 in Devine, Texas, and then her husband, William Billy Franklin Nelson, who died November 4, 1909 in Austin, Texas at the youthful age of 57.

Billy is buried in the Boggy Creek Masonic Cemetery in Austin, Texas. The 6.6-acre site was originally a community graveyard.

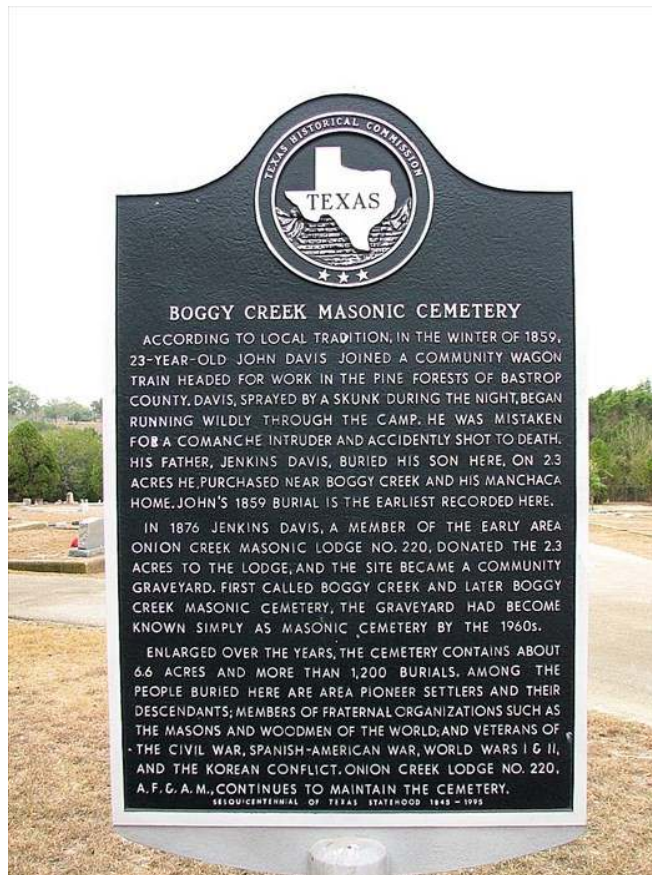


*Photo courtesy of Bob Cantin*

Today, more than 1200 burials are there including pioneer settlers, members of fraternal organizations such as the Masons and Woodmen of the World, and Veterans of the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II and the Korean Conflict.

Hopefully, we will be able to obtain an obituary of William “Billy” Frank Nelson from the Austin American Statesman newspaper when we visit the city.

We are also hoping the Austin Genealogical Society can be of assistance in helping us complete this ancestor's life story.



**Boggy Creek Masonic Cemetery**

*Photo from the collection of Bob Cantin*

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Marci Delaney, Genealogist

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT WHITEMARSH

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By AGS Member James Bridges

While various small professional exploratory investigations directed by Principal Archaeologist, Alain Outlaw, took place at Joseph Bridger's plantation Whitemarsh, located in Smithfield, Isle of Wight County, Virginia, over the past eight years, more intensive and extensive work funded by the St. Luke's Historical Association, began in May 2017 under his oversight at Archaeological & Cultural Solutions, Inc. (ACS). This undertaking began with the very careful clearing of dense woods in the dwelling area to minimize potential damage to subsurface remains. Excavations also proceeded around brick foundations forming the presumed earliest Bridger home.

During this work, important artifacts linked to the earliest historic period occupation were recovered from intact deposits, undisturbed by more recent digging by avocational archaeologists. These objects included a sprig-molded blue and gray Rhenish stoneware jug fragment similar to a vessel depicted in the c.1660 Netherlandish painting *The Milkmaid*, or *The Kitchen Maid* by Johannes Vermeer.

This masterpiece is displayed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and significantly it shows the setting in which these vessels were used. Also found dating to the early occupation period at Whitemarsh were smoking pipe stems marked "LE" for Llewellyn Evans, a pipe maker who worked in Bristol, England, from 1661 to 1688, near the Bridger ancestral home.



**The Milkmaid**

By Johannes Vermeer

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Milkmaid\\_\(Vermeer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Milkmaid_(Vermeer))

To better understand the setting of Whitemarsh, a one-foot contour topographic map is being created to study the disposition of outbuildings, fence lines, yards, and other associated cultural features on the landscape. This study extends to soil coring to record the former size and depth of the contiguous unnamed creek, immediately south of the dwelling. The work has demonstrated that the drainage was likely once navigable, with access to the James River. Supporting evidence indicates that the original bottom of the creek was filled over by eight feet of erosional soils, built up from over 350 years of cultivation of the adjacent surrounding fields.

Important work also has been undertaken in the archaeological laboratory at Christopher Newport University (CNU), in nearby Newport News. Alain's staff and History Department students are processing (washing and numbering), conserving (preserving), and analyzing (cataloguing) artifacts as well as studying five known collections from the site. Four of the five collections are now owned by St. Luke's. The fifth is from the Isle of Wight Museum (IOWM) and, in partnership to study community history, the IOWM loaned their collection to ACS. This

arrangement is allowing the examination of 17<sup>th</sup> century wine bottle and ceramic shapes as fragments from the different collections are cross-mended to provide more complete vessel drawing profiles.

Following the excavation of 2.5' and 10' square units by hand, remote sensing studies were carried out over large areas of the site in the field and sections of the woods. These non-excavation methods have been very useful in narrowing down promising locations for subsurface features. ACS investigations are presently focusing on "ground truthing," i.e. mechanically removing plow zone soils down to natural clay where architectural features are suggested to be present by remote sensing. Once it was uncovered and cleaned by hand, the surface near the existing brick outbuilding revealed partial brickwork that survived the robbing of bricks, plowing, and erosion since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus far, the 28-foot-wide north gable of the main dwelling, a substantial brick structure over 30 feet long, has been mapped. The current architectural focus of the project, including the recording of two outbuildings, will continue into the fall.

# GRIFF

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## *Chapter XI: A Christmas Robbery*

**By AGS Member Glenda Lassiter**

*Griff (Gordon Oscar Griffiths) was born in 1908 near Jermyn, Texas in Jack County. In 1990, when Griff was 82 years old, he recorded the story of his life on audio tapes. He left the tapes to his daughter, Glenda Lassiter, asking her to write his memoir from them.*

*Chapters 1-10 are serialized in the Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly beginning in the winter edition of 2015. Photographs from this early part of Griff's life were published in the 2018 summer quarterly.*

Chapter 1 – "Sand" (December 2015 Vol. 56 No. 4)

Chapter 2 – "A Child in Texas" (June 2016 Vol. 57 No. 2)

Chapter 3 – "Graduation" (September 2016 Vol. 57 No. 3)

Chapter 4 – "Leaving Home" (December 2016 Vol. 57 No. 4)

Chapter 5 – "Denton" (March 2017 Vol. 58 No. 1)

Chapter 6 – "College" (June 2017 Vol. 58 No. 2)

Chapter 7 – "The Deal" (September 2017 Vol. 58 No. 3)

Chapter 8 – "Last Year of College" (December 2017 Vol. 58 No. 4)

Chapter 9 – "Exams" (Spring 2018 Vol. 59 No. 1)

Photographs from Griff's Life – (Summer 2018 Vol. 59 No. 2)

Chapter 10 – "The Monitor Top" (Fall 2018 Vol. 59 No. 3)

"This is happiness." Griff mused to himself. "To be traveling through a snow storm in a cozy train car to spend Christmas with Desda in Cisco." To Griff the passenger car was more than just cozy; it was elegant. The wildcat oil well discovered in Ranger, Texas, just 20 miles from Cisco in 1917, had made worldwide headlines as helping the Allies to win World War I which raged in Europe. The Texas and

Pacific Railroad got people, equipment, and oil in and out of the "Roaring Ranger" oil field. The prosperity had brought about upgrades in the passenger cars that included plush seats, carpeted floors, and even a dining car. While Griff would never consider the expense of eating in a dining car, having one on the train smacked of prosperity. There was even a Pullman sleeping car. Although Cisco itself had a

small role in the oil boom, its population had grown rapidly, estimated by some to be as high as 15,000 from approximately 2,000 in 1910 before the oil boom.

Today was Friday, the day before Christmas Eve, 1927. Griff was traveling from Fort Worth, Texas, where he had been calling on prospects by car with other salesmen, selling the Monitor Top refrigerator to households in the small communities surrounding Fort Worth. When clients understood that this appliance meant no more depending on ice deliveries, or, more often, trips to the local ice house for ice to keep food chilled, they were sold. Husbands looked at this convenience as a perfect Christmas gift for the "little woman" in 1927. As Griff had said many times, his little "putt-putts" were selling themselves. Word spread from household to household about the appliance, and all he had to do was introduce himself to the prospective buyer, show a brochure of the Monitor Top, and he had a sale. "They are selling like hot cakes!" Griff had told Desda.

The clickity clack of the metal train wheels on the track seemed to match the beating of Griff's heart as he thought of seeing Desda and how all of his dreams were coming true. He looked out the curtained windows of the car at the sleet cutting across the glass and

found nothing but joy in the gray clouds and cold gloom surrounding the mesquite bushes along the track. At last, the train pulled into the fine modern station in Cisco. In the wake of the oil boom, Cisco had built a new railroad station that cost \$25,000, a huge expenditure for the little town.

Prosperity from the booming Ranger oilfield had been such that when Conrad Hilton had come to Texas intending to buy a bank, he instead bought the 1916 two story red brick Mobley Hotel in Cisco that was overflowing with roughnecks. Rooms had been so in demand that Mobley rented the hotel's 40 beds in eight-hour blocks. This was Hilton's first hotel and was the beginning of his dream of building hotels throughout the state in the burgeoning market.

As Griff collected his luggage, he could see that Desda was waiting for him in her mother's green Chevrolet. She and her younger brother Ross hurried to meet him when he stepped down from the train.

"I can't believe you are actually here," Desda whispered in his ear as he held her close in a welcoming hug. She looked stunning in her bright green cloche hat and enormous matching knitted neck scarf worn over a belted calf-length black winter coat. Desda drove them through the snowy downtown

center of Cisco where shoppers crowded the decorated streets and store fronts. The fourteen-year-old Ross chatted excitedly about Christmas while Desda and Griff sat in smiling silence enjoying the bliss of being together again. Sleet continued to fall, but these three young people were far too exhilarated to notice it.

As Desda, Griff, and Ross rode down Main Street, a young man named Marshall Ratliff was only a few blocks behind them. Ratliff's intention was to hold up the First National Bank of Cisco. During this period in Texas, three or four banks were being robbed every day, and the Texas Bankers Association offered a reward of \$5,000 to anyone shooting a bank robber during the crime.

Ratliff was known around Cisco and to conceal his identity he disguised himself as Santa Claus. He had recruited three other men for the robbery. Dressed as Santa, he wore a wide cheery smile and walked along Main Street, stopping to greet children who flocked eagerly around him wanting to talk to Santa. He met with his fellow bank robbers in the alley and led the way into the bank. Some of the excited children followed Santa right inside. Because it was two days before Christmas and the crowd was filled with the Christmas spirit, no one seemed

surprised when Santa came walking down the street.

When he entered the bank, the cashier called out, "Hello, Santa!" However, Santa did not respond. Instead, he went to the desk in the middle of the lobby. When the cashier again called out, "Hello, Santa," Ratliff again did not respond.

At that point, Ratliff's accomplice, Hill, walked into the bank with a pistol, which he pointed at the cashier, saying "Hands up!" Then Helms, the second bandit, entered with a gun and was followed by a third armed man, Davis.

Ratliff went into the cashier's cage and took a pistol from under the counter, which he stuffed into his Santa suit. So now all four bandits were armed, including "Santa Claus." They grabbed money from the tellers and forced one teller to open the vault.

Meanwhile, a bank customer and her six-year-old daughter entered the bank because the child wanted to see Santa. Realizing the danger, the woman pushed her daughter through the bookkeeping department and out the door into the alley. She announced, "They are robbing the bank." She turned to her daughter and screamed, "Run!"

One of the robbers called out to the mother, "Be still or I'll shoot," but she escaped, screaming for help as she ran the one block to the city hall and police department, alerting the police chief, "Bit" Bedford, and nearby citizens about the robbery. Grabbing a riot gun, Chief of Police Bedford ordered two officers to cover the back door of the bank and posted himself on Main Street in front of the bank.

By this time, "Santa Claus" had filled his sack and was exiting the vault. The robbers looted the bank of \$12,200 in cash and \$150,000 in securities. Then gunfire rang out. Witnesses were uncertain about who fired the first shot. Some say that the robber named Hill fired a shot through the bank window which was returned by someone outside. Immediately Chief Bedford and an officer directed fire at the robbers, pushing open the bank doors.

A spirited outburst of gunfire erupted. Many citizens who owned guns were now outside the bank, and many more had rushed into hardware stores for pistols and rifles. One of the fugitives and several bank customers were struck. The robbers forced customers out the door to provide themselves cover as they made their escape. Most of the customers broke away, but the robbers kept two little girls as shields as they made their

way to their getaway car. More than a hundred shots had been fired before the robbers got back to their car. In the alley, both Chief Bedford and one police officer were mortally wounded. Chief Bedford had been a Peace Officer in the area for 25 years. He was shot five times in the exchange of fire. The bandit Davis was severely wounded and Ratliff, in his Santa suit, suffered from two wounds.

The four robbers began their getaway with their hostages, but they had forgotten to fill their car's tank and were almost out of gas. They were pursued by the mob of citizens and one of their tires was flattened by a shot. They exited the vehicle and stopped a passing Oldsmobile driven by a fourteen-year-old boy. They forced the teenager out of the car and transferred the loot, hostages, and the two wounded robbers to the Oldsmobile with bullets flying all around. However, they soon realized that they could not start the car because the youngster who was driving had taken the keys from the ignition. Robber Davis was by now unconscious, so they left him in the Oldsmobile and returned to their first car which had a flat tire taking the two hostages with them. They did not realize until later that they had left the money in the Oldsmobile with Davis. The money was returned to the bank and the wounded Davis



was taken to a Fort Worth hospital, where he died.

The three escaping robbers abandoned their bullet-riddled car with the flat tire and the two hostages several miles from town and continued their escape on foot.

When Griff, Desda, and Ross arrived at the Stubblefield house, news of the bank robbery was all anyone was talking about. At this time Henry Stubblefield, Desda's father, was Justice of the Peace in Cisco and well known in the law enforcement community. Neighbors and friends were gathered at the house, sharing the news of the robbery and who had been injured in the gunfire at the bank.

Officers and citizens poured into Cisco from nearby farms and communities to be part of the manhunt. Many members of the posse were on horseback or on foot as they searched the ravines and canyons around Cisco. Despite the efforts of the citizens, the bandits were able to escape and steal another car the next morning.

The search continued in the ice and snow storms throughout Saturday and Saturday night. At a church party on Christmas Eve, when Saint Nicolas entered in costume, a little boy called out in a shaky voice, "Santa Claus, why did you rob that bank?"

The three remaining robbers were finally apprehended in Graham, Texas, 57 miles north of Cisco, on December 30, and seven days after the robbery. All three lived to face trial. The robber Helms, who had gunned down both lawmen, was given the death sentence and was executed by electric chair on September 6, 1929, in Huntsville, Texas. Hill was given life imprisonment – 99 years. Ratliff, the Santa Claus robber, was convicted of armed robbery on January 27, 1928. His mother filed for a lunacy hearing in Huntsville, and he was extradited to the Eastland County jail, ten miles from Cisco. While there he duped his two jailers and got hold of a six shooter in an office desk and killed one of them. The second jailer, Kilbourn, beat him into unconsciousness and returned him to his cell. A crowd began to gather the next morning and had grown to 2,000 by evening. The jailer, Kilbourn, continued to protect the Santa Claus bandit, but was overpowered by 15 to 20 men. They carried Ratliff to a vacant lot behind the Majestic Theatre in Eastland, where they threw a rope over a guy-wire between two telephone poles. The first attempt to hang him failed, and he fell to the ground. The second time, they were successful. His last words were, "Forgive me, boys."

When the robbers were on the run and out of Cisco, the Stubblefield family had their

Christmas around a big decorated tree in the dining room and, as always, sang hymns and carols in front of the big upright piano in the living room. Flora prepared a traditional Christmas dinner, and Griff pitched in and helped. All five of the Stubblefield children were home for Christmas. Desda's family was very welcoming to Griff as they all seemed to know he would be joining their family.

On Christmas night Griff and Desda went for a walk in the snow. He stopped her and took both of her hands into his, saying, "I want you to be my wife," His heart was in his throat.

"Are you serious?" she asked.

"Will you do that for me?" Griff responded.

Desda smiled and nodded, "Yes."

Griff and Papa Stubblefield had their talk out in Papa's office which was in a separate building behind the house. They had hit it off from the beginning and on earlier visits would sit together and talk for hours with Griff smoking his cigarettes and Papa smoking his pipe. Papa was kind and reminded Griff of how much he missed having the father he had lost when he was only six years old.

"Desda and I are very much in love and want to get married," Griff told Papa. "And I want to ask your permission."

"She's already told me that she wants to spend the rest of her life with you," Papa replied.

"I have a good selling career on the road, but when I get married, I will settle down, and we can build a home together," Griff told him.

Papa smiled. "Well, you are doing very well in your sales business. And Flora is really happy about your connection to the church. That is very important to her."

"You know I'll always take care of Desda," Griff said.

"I know you will, Son," Papa replied.

Papa and Mama Stubblefield agreed that Desda and Griff could marry in June the following summer after Desda had finished her teaching contract in Romney. The thought of marrying Desda gave Griff a sense of contentment that he had never known. He was just wondering if this happiness and prosperity could really last.

*(To be continued) ...*

# PIONEER FAMILIES OF TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

The Austin Genealogical Society will issue a pioneer certificate to those who can prove their ancestors lived in Travis County, Texas, prior to the close of 1880. To qualify for the certificate, you must be a direct descendant of people who lived here on or before December 31, 1880, proved with birth, death and marriage certificates; probate, census and military records; and obituaries and Bible records.

Applications for Pioneer Families of Travis County can be found at:

<http://www.austintxgensoc.org/pioneers/> or from Kay Dunlap Boyd, 3616 Far West Blvd. Ste. 117-247, Austin, Texas 78731. Each application is \$20, and the certificates make nice gifts. You don't have to be a Travis County resident or a member of Austin Genealogical Society, although membership in the Society is another fine bargain at \$25 a year.

**Austin Genealogical Society**  
**Travis County Texas**  
**Pioneer Families Certificate**

This is to Certify that

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Date _____	Pioneer Families Chairman _____
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