

City of Schertz

Remembrances Special Edition Article 2018-4

Prepared by: Schertz Historical Preservation Committee

Sources: Edwouard & Marie-Jeanne Finger *"A Story From Alsace"*

Jungman, S. Anthony, *"Heritage – A Family History"*, Nov. 1991.

*"Schertz, Texas – The Story of Great Ancestry, Legacy and Development"*



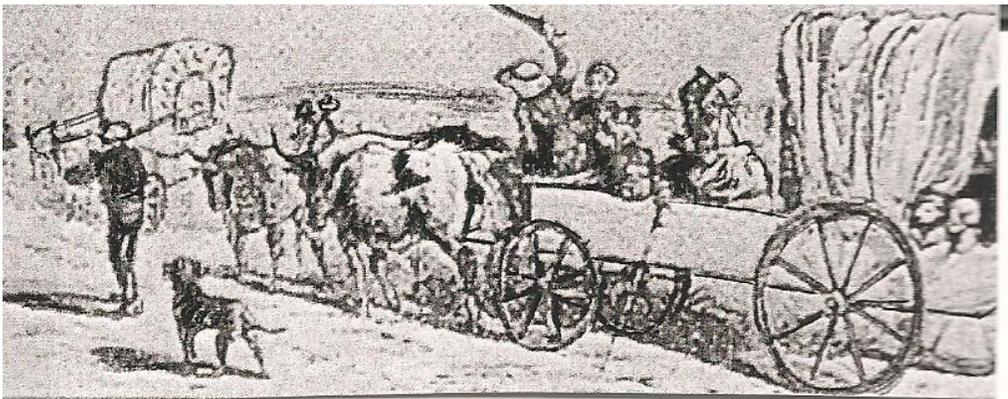
## Alsace, France - Family Migration to Central Texas

The province of Alsace, France is situated along the country's far eastern border along the Rhine River and adjacent to its neighbor Germany. Alsace is a region that Roman General Julius Caesar, while passing through France on one of his military conquests, referred to it as: "the finest province in the whole of Gaul (France)." King Louis XIV, upon seeing Alsace, cried out: "this magnificent garden." The writer himself has been duly impressed by the beauty of the province while touring it bi-annually from 2007 to 2017. Running north and south along the western half of the province is the Vorges Mountain Range which harbors an appreciable amount of World War I and World War II battlefield history as well as beautiful scenic landscapes. Occupation of the region has shifted between tribal peoples from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) in its early history, to Celts around 900 B.C., to Northern and Central Germans around 375 B.C., to the Romans from the first century until the fourth century A.D., to Swedes during the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Thirty Years War, and from German to French (and vice-versa) in more modern times (1871-1918). It is from Alsace that many of the regions citizens migrated to Central Texas during the period from 1840 to 1860, to include our city's founding family, the Joseph and Anna Marie Schertz family. The reasons for such a migratory movement from this "magnificent garden" to an untamed wilderness in the southcentral region of Texas are many and a few are captured in a story told by a couple from D'Hanis, Texas that a grandmother (Marie Josephine Finger) had passed on to them.

Marie Josephine Finger (born: 1866, died 1949) sometimes told stories to her Alsatian grandchildren, to include Marie Jeanne Finger, of her (Marie Josephine's) uncles who had migrated to Texas in 1846. One of the uncles was single and the other had a three-year old boy. Marie Josephine had learned from her parents that the uncles had settled in a small village in Texas where many Alsatian immigrants from the Alsace villages of Niederentzen and Oberentzen had settled (Castroville and/or D'Hanis, Texas). Nicolas Haby (Haby's Alsatian Bakery, 207 Highway 90 West, Castroville, Texas) was among the first to migrate to Texas. Haby returned to Alsace after a few years stay in Texas and provided enthusiastic accounts of the big and rich Texas countryside. Those Alsatians who listened to Haby were told of the inexpensive and fertile land available in Texas. Many who listened followed Haby back to the Central Texas land. There seemed little to keep the Alsatians from migrating since there were large families living under the same roof with barely enough to eat. The geographic location of Niederentzen and Obrentzen, along the "Grand Ballon" mountain range (1,424 meters high), was a factor that limited the amount of rain that would fall on the region and thus crop (wheat and rye, fodder & potatoes) failure was always a threat. The stony land on the right bank of the Rhine River was allocated to the poor farmers while the fertile soil on the left bank was reserved for the rich

farmers. Many of the poorer families had to forgo schooling for their children because work was valued more than schooling. Ironically, the former stony Alsatian land is today, with proper irrigation applied, the most fertile corn growing region in all of Alsace.

As hard times were being experienced on the European continent, a revolutionary beginning was taking place as the Republic of Texas was being formed. The new republic was cash poor but land rich. In order to stimulate settlement of the newly formed Texas territory, land grant sales of Texas real estate were offered to certain businessmen under the agreement that they would recruit, sponsor and deliver new European colonists for settlement of the granted territory. General James Hamilton, Loan Commissioner for the Republic of Texas, appointed Empresario Henri Castro to handle land sales in the Texas territory in accordance with the "Law Granting Land to Immigrants of February 4, 1841". The law provided for granting six hundred fourteen acres to each head of household and three hundred twenty acres to a single man. The grants would be given only if the recipient would agree to live on the land for three years, cultivate at least 10 acres, survey the property, and register the property with the Chief Justice of the county when terms were fulfilled. Castro arranged a land grant sale of land west of San Antonio, Texas (now Castroville, Texas). By the fall of 1843, Castro had successfully recruited enough Alsatian/German colonists to begin their embarkation for Texas. In late 1843 to early 1844, three or four shiploads of Castro-sponsored immigrant colonists landed in Galveston Bay and/or Indianola, Texas. The exhausted colonists soon discovered that Castro had made no arrangements for a sponsoring agent to meet them with supplies and transportation on to San Antonio, Texas or to the Castro grant territory. As they could, some of the immigrant colonists found their own transport either to Galveston or Houston while others pursued a wilderness trail toward central Texas. Eventually, Castro arrived to make good on his promises of transportation to and granting of free land for the Alsatians. The Castro migration effort led to the establishment of the village of Castroville, Texas and the eventual migration of the Schertz family to the land along the Rio Cibolo (Schertz, Texas).



Pioneer European Settlers Trek Across the Wilderness to spaces in South Central Texas