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**Geographic Factors in the Development of the  
Fredericksburg Area**

*Carol Fritz*

As a result of economic stress in Central Europe following the Napoleonic Wars and the industrialization of the Rhine region, the Mainzer Verein—a society of nobles—was organized in Germany in 1844 to direct and protect German emigration. After considering several regions as possible locations for its future colonies, the Society ultimately decided upon an unoccupied section of central Texas. This decision resulted from a favorable report by the Company's agent, Prince Victor von Leiningen, despite the fact that another agent, Count von Boos-Waldeck, advised against settling the Texas area because of the expense of transportation and lack of protection from the Indians.

The Mainzer Verein secured the empresario rights to a tract of land known as the Fischer-Mueller grant, located north of the Llano River and west of the Colorado River (see map). In this grant each colonist was to receive 320 acres if head of a family, or, 160 acres if unmarried. In order to reach these lands, Prince Carl Solms-Braunfels, leader of the Texas venture, planned to establish a chain of settlements thirty to forty miles apart extending from Carlshafen<sup>1</sup> on the coast to the lands of the Llano. Each settler in these villages was to receive a one-half acre town lot and ten acres of outlying farm land until he could be established on the Fischer-Mueller grant.

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<sup>1</sup>Carlshafen, the entry port for the immigrants and the location of the Verein's warehouses, was destroyed by the hurricane of 1886.

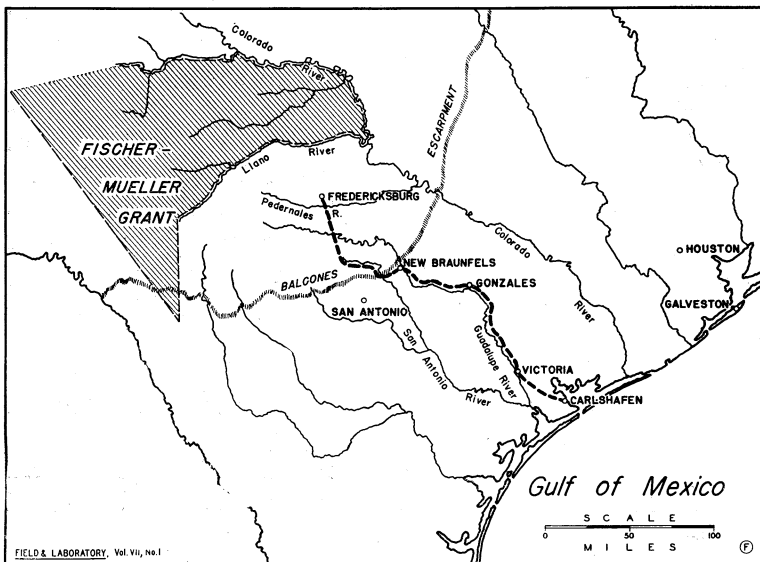
Later, Solms hoped to build a good road from Carlshafen to the settlements, replacing the wagon trails which were almost impassable in rainy weather. He also planned to build a railroad over the route similar to the one then in operation near the Ruhr in Westphalia, but using live-oak rails and horse-drawn cars.

New Braunfels, the first inland settlement of the Society (see map), was founded March 21, 1845. In the latter part of August of the same year, John O. Meusebach, who replaced Solms as agent of the Verein, left New Braunfels to select a suitable place for the second outpost. The additional settlement was needed for the immigrant contingent the Society was sending to Texas in the winter of 1845-46.

About 80 miles from New Braunfels, Meusebach found a tract of arable, well-watered land, supporting a sufficient supply of wood for building purposes. A more desirable location would have been along the Pedernales River, but the lands were occupied and could not be purchased from the owners; hence, the Society was forced to buy its 10,000 acres of headrights some distance back from the stream. Along Baron's Creek, a tributary of the Pedernales, the town lots of Fredericksburg were surveyed in May, 1846.

### **The Environmental Landscape**

The Fredericksburg area is a rough, stony upland with flat-topped divides deeply dissected by spring-fed streams. The upland areas are underlain by limestone, sandstone, and crystalline rocks. The Pedernales Valley contains the only large area of bottom land soils—the Pedernales group—a shallow, reddish to brown soil type, which has formed partly from the weathering of limestone and partly from alluvium. These soils usually occupy flat to rolling valley locations but sometimes are found on the upland divides, in which case they are generally stony. The Denton soils, the only other type of wide extent in the area, are brown in color, friable, and often contain much broken limestone.



Location of the lands of the Fischer-Mueller Grant, purchased in southwest Texas as a site for the colony of the Mainzer Verein. The sites of the Society's port, Carlshafen, and the two interior settlements New Braunfels and Fredericksburg are shown, together with the projected road from the coast to Fredericksburg.

The native vegetation consists of small trees of post-oak, mesquite, juniper, and like species; shrubs of the cat-claw, sumac variety; and buffalo, curly mesquite, grama, and needle grasses.

The mean annual rainfall of the region is about 28 inches, the rainy seasons being in spring and early autumn. The average length of the growing season is 240 days. Although not handicapped by destructive floods as are the regions to the east and south, small streams overflow frequently during rainy months and wash away valuable soils.

### Colonization of the Area

The people who came to Fredericksburg were largely from Hanover, Hesse, the Electorate of Hesse, and Nassau in Central Germany. Others came from Oldenburg, Holstein, Mecklenburg, Prussia, Anhalt, Saxony, Thuringia, Bavaria, Wuerttemberg, Baden, Westphalia, and Rhenish

Prussia. Most of them were farmers or laborers who suffered from evils of over-population in Germany, political subjection, revolutionary troubles from 1815 to 1849, and deplorable social conditions resulting from industrialization of the Rhine region and the concentration of wealth. They had endured extreme poverty and were seeking cheap land, higher wages, and escape from the high taxes imposed upon them at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. With the peasant class came also some of the small trade class; such as blacksmiths, wagon makers, tinsmiths, stonemasons, locksmiths, gunsmiths, carpenters, tanners, and cabinet makers; a few disappointed politicians; students who had failed in the universities; and a small number of adventurers. However, most of these people failed because of their ignorance of farming methods in a semi-arid region, or because they could not endure the hard labor and rigorous activities of the frontier life.

Securing food was especially difficult for the settlers since in their homeland they had not been accustomed to raising corn, the crop that formed the basis of their existence in Texas. A slight delay in planting could cause extreme discomfort for a whole year. The Verein had contracted to supply the colonists with all necessities until they could help themselves, but money and other supplies were slow in coming from Germany and often came in pitiable amounts. Distance from the coast and lack of roads, railroads, and navigable rivers delayed or prevented shipments of supplies from the warehouses at Carlshafen. The one hundred and twenty settlers of the first contingent practiced community farming, raising their own corn and beef. They were fortunate in finding wild grapes, wild plums, haws, and pecans growing in abundance.<sup>2</sup>

In January, 1847, the geologist, Dr. Ferdinand von Roemer, made a trip from New Braunfels to Fredericksburg. He described the area as follows:<sup>3</sup>

Fredericksburg is situated on a gently rising plain about six miles north of the Pedernales

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<sup>2</sup>Prairie fires have destroyed most of this wild growth.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted with permission from Roemer's *Texas* by Oswald Mueller, pp. 228-29.

Creek between two small creeks which form a juncture immediately below the city. The western one, Meusebach Creek, is the larger of the two. A dense, uniform oak forest covered the area on which the houses are now being erected. This forest extended over almost the entire surrounding country with the exception of a small strip of open prairie, which ran parallel with the larger creek. The stumps in the streets were by no means all removed. The city lies southeast by northwest which is also the direction of the principal street about two miles in length. The main street, however, did not consist of a continuous row of houses, but of about 50 houses and huts, spaced long distances apart on both sides of the street. Most of the houses were log houses for which the straight trunks of the oak trees growing round about furnished excellent building material.

Most of the settlers, however, were not in possession of such homes, since they required so much labor, but lived in huts consisting of poles rammed into the ground. The crevasses between the poles were filled with clay and moss while the roof was covered with dry grass. Some even lived in linen tents which proved inadequate during the winter months.

It is interesting to note that the abundant limestone and granite building materials available were not used until some time later. The Tatsch home in Fredericksburg built in 1852 was the first rock house in the area. The durability of this old house is testified to by the fact that it is still occupied.

The Fischer-Mueller grant was never an outright grant of land but was a contract with the State of Texas to settle a specified number of families within the area in a certain time limit. The grant had almost expired when the Verein bought it from Fischer and Mueller. In 1848 the Texas Legislature renewed the Fischer-Mueller grant in order to take care of the land claims of the Verein colonists. Land certificates covering several thousands of acres in Llano, McCulloch, and Concho counties were issued to the Fredericksburg settlers. Meanwhile the German

colonists had obtained, at their own expense, additional lands near Fredericksburg. Preferring to remain on those lands rather than to move into the wild Indian country to the northwest, most of the colonists sold their State grants for sums smaller than the real value of the property. Others who did not sell later utilized the outlying lands for cattle, sheep, and goat ranching.

### Development After Colonization

Fredericksburg became well-known during 1849 as it was on one of the four main roads opened by the United States Government to the Rio Grande Valley after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The settlement was also the last station on the road to El Paso, hence its storekeepers did a good business selling supplies to people on the way to California during "the gold rush".

After 1849 Fredericksburg grew slowly. Subsequent settlement in Texas was retarded by the Civil War and the reconstruction period. When immigration revived, richer lands in north Texas attracted most of the new settlers.

Lands to the northwest did not attract the German settlers of the Fredericksburg area. Most of them remained on the lands originally secured by their grandfathers. County records reveal but few migrations. Each generation continued the same mode of livelihood established by its predecessor—that is, intensive farming as was practiced in Germany.

### Future Outlook of the Area

With the soils being exhausted rapidly by successive crops of cotton, some climax utilization should be devised before fertilization becomes absolutely necessary. The streams of the area show that sheet erosion has been extremely active. Reports of early settlers, reveal that Live Oak Creek, for example, that once had a clear and full flow, is today silting up and carrying little water. This is due partly to the streams being tapped by water wells.

Fredericksburg remains in a more or less isolated position and retains the aspects of a frontier town despite the building of a branch line railroad from San Antonio in 1915. Since 1930 three modern highways have been completed providing excellent transportation to all parts of the area. Even with these advantages, however, agricultural practices in the Fredericksburg area seem destined by natural causes to be extensive rather than intensive.

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## Origin of the Menard "Crater"

*Emmett Blakemore*

On August 30, 1938, the foreman of the Wilkerson Ranch twelve miles southwest of Menard, Texas, reported that a meteorite fell on the ranch and created a large crater. The story, widely publicized by newspapers, caused the writer, accompanied by Professor J. D. Boon of Southern Methodist University, to investigate this phenomenon. The reported crater was found by following the Menard-Ft. McKavett highway west nine

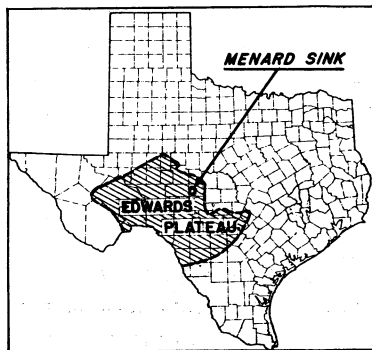


Fig. 1.. Location of Menard sink.