Alsatian Migrants in 19th Century Texas: Negotiated Ethnicities, Constructed Hybridities

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Introduction

The 19th century westward expansion of European populations across the North American continent is well chronicled in history but underexplored in archaeology. In the simplistic, categorical narratives sometimes favored by local heritage associations, Europeans are portrayed as valiant pioneers, overcoming hardships (including hostile natives) to persevere, survive, and succeed. By contrast, post-colonial, anthropological counter-narratives often portray Europeans as the intentional (or sometimes unwitting) purveyors of the destruction of indigenous lands, lives and lifeways. More recently, historical archaeologists have begun to develop the concept of hybridities, challenging us to realize that interactions and among indigenous and colonizing groups were much more complicated.

At its core, this paper involves a case study: a group of approximately 2,000 immigrants who moved from the valleys of the upland Rhine in Alsace, France to south Texas during the mid-19th century. I am in the initial phases of an historic archaeological project focused on the 19th century Alsatian settlement in Castroville, Texas, approximately 20 miles southwest of San Antonio.

As I have worked on this paper, my emphasis has shifted slightly from the construction of ethnicity to a multiscalar exploration of motivations, interactions and constraints among mid-19th century Alsatian immigrants to south Texas. I have three points to make here today:

1. We need to think about immigration at multiple scales of analysis – state, community, and individual. Migrant groups are enabled and constrained by much larger forces.
2. In my case study, the Alsatian immigrants interacted with many other ethnic groups: including Hispanic settlers, German immigrants, southern whites, Comanche, and Lipan Apache. Ethnicity was but one card played in negotiations among these groups, and often it was not the most important card -- religion, language, and subsistence were often more critical.
3. Today, Alsatian ethnicity has been recreated at both state and local levels, to serve the interests of "nationalist" (Texas) ideology as well local economic development.

Background

There were many forces at work and many players involved in the impetus for Alsatian migration to Texas. At the macro level, we need to think about the Mexican state (recently independent from Spain), the Republic of Texas (recently independent from Mexico, the Comanche "empire," the French Industrial Revolution, and empresarios (speculators, entrepreneurs and investors). The smaller scale social groups involved include Alsatian and German immigrants, Hispanic and southern white Texas residents, and a range of indigenous peoples (Comanche, Karankawa, Lipan Apache, Cherokee). Written and oral histories indicate interactions among these groups were multifaceted and complex, ranging from cooperative to antagonistic.

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain, initiating a period of cyclical political upheaval. Texas, combined with Coahila, was a state within the new Mexico. At this point the total population of Texas (not counting indigenous peoples) was about 3,000 (T. Jordan 1966:22). The populated parts of Texas were accessed from the coast, and a series of Mexican presidios or forts, including San Antonio, were established along key rivers that drained into Gulf of Mexico. The interior area was populated by Cherokee, Lipan Apache, Karankawa, and other indigenous groups. Across the plains of central and Southwest North America extending into Texas was the Comancheria – the Empire of the Sun (Hamalainen 2009). Comanche raids on presidios and associated Hispanic settlers were a continual problem, so the Mexican government invited Stephen F. Austin to become Texas' first empresario (T. Jordan 1966:22). Austin was given a large land grant in east Texas and asked to invite American colleagues and friends to settle there. Southern white farmers and planters, primarily from Tennessee and Georgia, began trickling and then pouring into Texas. They brought with them cotton and corn agriculture, hog and cattle farming, and slavery (T. Jordan 1966). By 1836, conflicts between these white, English-speaking settlers and the Mexican authorities escalated into violence. In an infamous series of events, including the fall of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto, the Texans broke away from Mexico and established Texas as an independent state.

However, the new government at Austin now had even more problems. Not only were the Comanche still an issue, but now Mexico was as well. Texas, Mexico, and the Comanche all laid claim to areas of south and west Texas. In 1840, the Comanche raided all the way across Texas to the coastal town of Linville. In 1842, San Antonio was twice occupied by invading Mexican armies. Texas' president Sam Houston decided to follow the earlier, Mexican strategy. He invited empresarios – businessmen and speculators with capital to invest – to bring more white, European settlers to Texas with promises of free land. Unbeknownst to the migrants, they were meant to form a human buffer to protect the established Euroamerican population of Texas from bellicose Comanche and Mexicans.

Prince Carl von Solms-Braunfels famously was responsible for bringing people from Germany. As director of the *Adelsverein*, or German Emigrants' Society, he established German settlements in New Braunfels and Fredericksburg. And Henri di Castro, a Portuguese businessman, was contracted to bring people from wherever he could find

them – he and his agent Louis Huth settled on Alsace (Weaver 1985). Every family who agreed to come to Texas would receive 720 acres, every single man 360 acres, plus tools and seed for startup. Of course, Castro would receive an equal amount of free land from the state of Texas for everyone he brought over. Incredibly, it didn't seem to occur to anyone to actually go out and survey or even examine the region before creating these land grants as lines on a map (T. Jordan 1966:45).

Meanwhile, in Alsace, west of the Rhine River, social and economic pressures created "pushes" for emigration. The valleys of the upper Rhine were filled with tightly-knit, Catholic communities in which nearly everyone was related, and most families produced 8-12 children. But a system of partible inheritance had resulted in families of 10 or more people attempting to make a living farming on 2 or 3 discontinuous acres. The situation was similar to that described by Bob Netting for Torvald in Switzerland, which is not far away (Netting 1981). In the late 1700s, Alsatian families had taken up cottage crafts, particularly spinning and weaving, to bring in cash income. But by the mid-1800s this situation was no longer tenable. With industrialization, large textile mills had opened in cities along the Rhine such as Mulhouse. Young women went to work in these mills, but this took them away from their villages and families, and often they did not return. So, Catholic families in these Alsatian communities were under economic as well as social pressure. When Louis Huth arrived in villages such as Fellering, talking about hundreds of acres of free land in Texas, it seemed an unbelievable opportunity. All people had to do was get to LeHavre, board a sailing ship, and survive a months-long voyage across the Atlantic, and their fortunes would be assured.

Between 1844 and 1847, Castro financed the immigration of 2,134 Alsatians to Texas (Waugh 1934; Weaver 1985). The Alsatians mostly traveled in extended family groups. Many were siblings in their 20s or 30s, with their spouses, children, cousins, and an aged parent or two. When the immigrants reached the shores of Texas, however, things were not as advertised. The first ship, the Ebro, arrived in the port of Galveston on New Year's Day, 1943. To cut a long story short, it took Castro over 18 months to come up with the resources to help these folks take possession of their land grants. Many died of malaria and dysentery while camped on the beaches of Galveston. Those who survived still had to travel by oxcart overland for 150 miles, crossing several rivers and swampy terrain, to reach San Antonio. Many died along this leg of the journey from disease, accidents, snakebite, and Indian attacks. There was huge hue and cry in Austin about the wretched treatment of the migrants (and Alsatians who had the resources to return to Europe did so). As English diarist William Bollaert recorded in San Antonio in September 1843,

> A number of Mons. Castro's emigrants are here, several of them sick owing to their injudicious march up the country in hot weather. Many have died, and the greater part who are left are about returning to France with the hopes of getting Mr. Castro to return to them the 100 francs he made each pay to him ere they departed Europe.

Finally, on September 2, 1844, Castro led 27 colonists west from San Antonio to break ground on his first colony – Castroville, on the banks of the Medina River. (One of these

colonists was my great-great–great grandfather, Antoine Golly, which was how I was drawn into this project).

Other inhabitants of the region included well-established Mexican families, Lutheran German immigrants, and indigenous Lipan Apache and Comanche (T. Jordan 1966; Sowell 1986). Written and oral histories indicate interactions among these groups during the 19th century were multifaceted and complex, ranging from cooperative to antagonistic. In the next section of the paper I use material and historical information to illustrate the wide range of interactions between the Alsatian immigrants and their neighbors.

Negotiations and Ethnicities

Although Castroville was founded as an Alsatian colony, the Alsatians were by no means the only group on the scene in 1840s south Texas. An established Hispanic population had been in residence in San Antonio for 150 years; a smaller, southern white population had been present for a couple of decades. German immigrants were flocking to Texas as part of the *Adelsverein* sponsored by Carl Solms-Braunfels. And of course, there was a sizeable indigenous population.

The earliest census data available for Castroville is from 1850 (US Government 1850). At this point the Alsatian colony had been established for 6 years, there had been a good deal of disease and other turbulence, and new European immigrants were arriving in a steady stream. Nonetheless the census statistics are telling. There were a total of 335 people living within the confines of Castroville proper (this does not include people in the hinterlands or neighboring communities) – 136 of these were children, and nearly half of the children were toddlers born in Texas. Of the 199 adults, 63 were Alsatian, but 98 were German, 21 were from other places in Europe (England, Ireland, Switzerland, Wales), and 16 were from Texas or the southern US (Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, etc). Only one "Mexican" person was listed on the 1850 census – the wife of a craftsman from "Texas." No indigenous people were listed. The census data are complicated by a number of factors. For example, Alsatians were technically from France, but the Alsatian language is very similar to German, so Alsatians may have been counted as either from France or Germany.

The census data also tabulated occupations for all adult males. It is interesting to note that nearly all of the southerners (7 out of 9) and over half of the Germans are listed as unskilled laborers or farmers (35 out of 60); the Alsatian and other European populations, by contrast, contained more tradespeople or professionals (25 out of 49). This trend continued during subsequent decades. Farming the rocky, arid soil of south Texas proved to be very difficult. On the other hand, Castroville, situated strategically at a ford on the Medina River, presented other opportunities. The town soon was bisected by one of only two major roads leading west from Texas to the California gold fields (T. Jordan 1966:170). Many Castroville residents took advantage of this situation, reinventing themselves as merchants, innkeepers, bartenders, smiths, and cartwrights.

Historical and archaeological information indicates that ethnicity was seldom the most important factor in the complex interactions among Castroville populations in the 19th century. I offer here a few examples of the range of interactions the Alsatians had with their neighbors.

Hispanics

A well-entrenched, hierarchically organized Hispanic society populated 19th century San Antonio and its surroundings. Historian David Montejano describes San Antonio society in the 1840s thusly:

> At the top were the prominent landed families, who lived in spacious flat-roofed stone houses; below them were the *rancheros*, who spent the greater part of their days working their cattle and horses and whose small adobe homes usually consisted of one sparsely furnished room; and at the bottom tier of the class order were the laborers, or jornaleros, who lived in *jacales* which were nothing more than mud houses with thatched roofs (Montejano 1987:35).

The Hispanic presence strongly influenced Alsatian settlement. Castro founded Castroville on the site of the Rancho San Lucas, one of several outlying *rancherias* that had supplied the presidio at San Antonio. He laid out the town according to the Spanish model known as the "Laws of the Indies," in a gridiron plan surrounding a central plaza fronted by the church and other public buildings. Blocks and streets were measured in *varas*, an old Spanish measurement equivalent to about 3.1 feet (Broadbent 43-44)

In a study of Castroville vernacular architecture, Mercedes Guerric (1999) found that the Alsatian immigrants had neither the materials nor the desire to erect half-timbered, multi-storied houses in the Alsatian style. Rather, they turned to the local Hispanic populations for assistance, without whom they would not have survived (Guerric 1999:61-62). Following the Mexican model, the earliest structures in Castroville were crude *jacales* of brush and thatch (Sowell 1986:114). The settlers then erected dog-trot cabins – two general-purpose rooms built of logs and separated by a breezeway. These cabins allowed maximized ventilation and inside/outside activities in the extremely hot, humid Texas climate. Eventualy, they built more substantial buildings of local limestone rock and cypress timber, or Mexican-made adobe brick. By the 1860s, houses were indistinguishable from a vernacular south Texas style, with thick masonry walls, long front porches, and kitchens in the back (Guerric 1999).

Like the Alsatians, most Hispanic Texans or Mexicans were Catholic. The shared bond of religion seems to have been more important than language or history. Some Alsatian settlers became integrated into the Hispanic community. One example is 3 year-old Theresa G'Sell , who left Oberentzen in 1844 with her parents Catherine and Michel, 3 siblings, and 10 more extended family members. Theresa's parents were killed by Lipan en route to San Antonio, and the remainder of the family dispersed, some returning to Alsace. However, the toddler Theresa was taken in by a prominent San Antonio family, the de la

Garzas, who had lived in Texas since 1731 (Gregory 1992). From this point onwards, geneaological records indicate Theresa essentially became Hispanic. She married Esteban Ximenes in 1855, and their children (e.g., (Manuel Jesus, Jose Francisco, Antonia, etc) continued to marry Hispanics (e.g., Jose Fransico married Sarafina Zuniga).

Germans

The Alsatian colonists had much in common with German immigrants, many of whom were farmers from Prussia (T. Jordan 1966:31-33). Although the Alsatians were French citizens, the Alsatian language is essentially a German dialect. Many Germans were Lutheran, but some were Catholic, and it was these Catholic Germans with whom the Alsatians seemed to have the most affinity. Some German and Alsatian families merged or otherwise joined forces on ships to North America, and others did so during the processes of arrival and settlement in and around Castroville. In oral histories, people frequently mention that Alsatians and Germans shared a strong work ethic and were therefore compatible mates, friends, and neighbors.

For example, after my great-great-great grandmother died en route from Galveston to San Antonio, my great-great-great grandfather, Antoine Golly, married three more times (two more wives lived less than two years). Golly's third wife, Rosina Britsch, was a German widow with a young son. After her death in 1848, Golly joined an Alsatian colony elsewhere in Texas, but 12 year-old Gottlieb Britsch stayed behind in Castroville, founding a Britch dynasty of ranchers and restaurateurs that continues to this day.

Both Alsatian and German settlements followed the European pattern of a nucleated village of houses with large kitchen gardens, and agricultural fields in outlying areas (T. Jordan 1966). Not only was this a familiar pattern, but it was eminently practical due to the threat of Comanche and Apache violence.

Culinary practices often reflect ethnically distinct choices, and they are archaeologically visible through the presence of food, serving, and cooking vessel remains (e.g., Beaudry 2013; Hamilakis 1999; Twiss 2007). One important, archaeologically visible difference between the Alsatian and the German settlers involves a preference for wine over beer. The Alsatians came from the Rhine valley, a region noted for wine production and consumption, and they immediately set about growing and fermenting grapes (T. Jordan 1966:141-141). According to Castro's diary, wine made from mustang grapes was sold in Castroville for 12¼ cents/bottle only 8 days after the settlement was founded (Waugh 1934:21). The Germans, by contrast, immediately began to brew the lagers with which they were familiar in Prussia. Founded in 1855, William Menger's Western Brewery on Alamo Square in San Antonio was the first commercial brewery in Texas (Hennech 1990). German beer-making continues to have a substantial impact on the economy of Texas.

Southern Whites

The Alsatian settlers adopted their subsistence and farming practices from the southern white practices brought by settlers from Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, and adjacent

states. In fact, when it became clear that the Alsatians were at a loss how to proceed with the first year's planting, Castro hired some of these "Texans" to help keep the Alsatians from starving (Weaver 1985:103). Corn and pork were the staples of the southern and hence the Texan diet (T. Jordan 1966:14). Cotton, wheat, rye and other crops were attempted in the area but with limited success. Ultimately, cattle ranching proved to the best way to make a living for those Alsatians determined to make it on their 320-acre allotments. But, as already mentioned, many settlers decided to remain in town and follow various trades. Kitchen gardens supplied fresh vegetables; in the warm climate, the Alsatians found that they could plant vegetables twice a year. On town lots, residents erected barns, sheds, smokehouses, and chicken coops. Everyone supplemented their diets with wild game, especially venison and turkey.

Despite the general homogeneity of the 19th century Texas diet, there should be some materially manifest traces of ethnically Alsatian cuisine in the archaeological record of Castroville. For example, Alsatian baking includes use of a metal mold to make a bread called *kugelhopf* (Civitello 2011). The mold was a particularly prized possession of young housewives and might be expected to be among the limited array of household goods transported to Texas from Alsace.

Indigenous Peoples: Comanche & Lipan Apache

One of the goals of our longterm archaeological project is to shed light on the indigenous side of this story. Oral and written histories present the point of view of the Alsatians and their descendants, but there was a sizable indigenous population in south Texas during the 19th century, and their story has largely been ignored. The oral histories make it clear that interactions between the white settlers and the indigenous inhabitants ranged from the cooperative and friendly to the savage. Around 1900, A.J. Sowell interviewed Alsatian and German settlers – mainly family patriarchs – in and around Castroville. A careful read of *Texas Indian Fighters,* Sowell's 860-page collection of oral histories, reveals that there was brutality, kindness, but most of all misunderstanding on both sides.

Early on, the Comanche and Lipan seemed to welcome trading opportunities with the Alsatians. Although wild game was plentiful, the Castroville colonists lacked firearms for hunting. Comanche and Lipan came into the settlement selling venison and turkey meat at "very cheap prices," and the first colonists were dependent on these provisions for survival (Sowell 1986:114). Two colonists went out hunting with the Lipan to help keep colonists from starving (Sowell 1986:115). Immigrant Nicolas Haby reported that friendly Indians came into town to run horse races and perform daring feats of horsemanship.

But tensions escalated over time. According to Haby, this was because the Indians did not want to work, but loved to steal horses and kill white people. According to immigrant Joseph Conrads, the problems started when the settlers continued to expand to the west, the Indians stole some horses, and settlers killed some Indians. Certainly there are many accounts of indigenous murders of European settlers and raids for horses, firearms, and captives. For example, in the winter of 1846, the Comanche "raised the tomahawk and unsheathed the scalping-knife", lancing to death 3 Alsatian men and cutting the heart out of

a boy who were attempting to start a farm several miles up the Medina River from Castroville (Sowell 1986:98-99).

Ironically, the Alsatian immigrants, who had themselves been displaced from their homes and exploited by larger social forces, had no idea how much they actually had in common with the similarly disenfranchised Lipan and Comanche. In 1846, 24 families set out from Castroville to found a new settlement at Quihi Lake – a natural sinkhole and permanent water source some 15 miles north of Castroville. Castro's agent Louis Huth distributed plots to the settlers, provided them with corn meal, bacon, and tools, and went back to town. The settlers erected temporary shelters and began clearing land for farming. But "it happened that Quihi Lake provided a convenient camping spot on a well-traveled north-south Indian trail, which made the location well known to various tribes" (Weaver 1985:78). After only a week on the spot, the Brinkhoff family was confronted by a band of Lipan who killed 5 adults and kidnapped two small boys. One was killed shortly thereafter – the other was sold to a trader about 6 months later, and the trader returned the boy to San Antonio. "These immigrants, only days in Texas, were entirely unprepared for this type of experience. They had few firearms and had not expected emergencies like Indian raids to be a part of their new life" (Weaver 1985:78). Many families decamped to San Antonio; those that remained built a brush fort on the banks of the water hole, but this was to be just the first in a series of Indian encounters at Quihi. The settlers clearly had no idea that they were attempting to farm on the site of an important seasonal camp.

Although the Alsatian and German settlers seemed to view any group of indigenous people as a threat, Sowell's book is also full of accounts of encounters that (often to the surprise of the narrator) did not involve violence. For example, the boy Bernhard Brucks, whose family had settled at Quihi, was out herding cows when he followed the sound of a chopping ax and found himself in the midst of an Indian camp. Brucks was terrified and could not understand their language. The Indians were in eating venison dipped in honey. They offered some to the boy, and he, thinking he was captured, ate as they suggested. But ultimately these Indians gave Brucks some venison to carry, led him back out the clearing, and pointed him in the direction of his home (Sowell 1986:162). However, this boyhood experience did not deter the adult Bernhard Brucks from joining the Texas rangers to become an "Indian fighter."

To the north of Castroville, German immigrants actively sought nonviolent coexistence with the indigenous population. In May 1847, German empresario Solms-Braunfel's agent John O. Meusebach successfully negotiated a treaty with the Penataka Comanche on behalf of the *Adelsverein*. For the sum of two thousand dollars, German immigrants would be allowed to settle unmolested in a 3 million acre area between the Colorado and San Saba rivers in west-central Texas.

But problems seem to have escalated over time in the Castroville area. Through the 1860s and 70s, Captain Jack Davenport led one of several groups of Texas rangers who engaged in tracking and annihilating bands of Apache and Comanche. It did not seem to matter whether the Indians caught by the rangers were the same as those who had perpetrated violence against the European settlers. Horse theft was a commonly cited crime, but the

narrators in Sowell's book seem to be just as often taking horses from the Indians as the other way around. And Jack Davenport reports that his rangers sometimes scalped the Indians that they caught , allegedly in retaliation for earlier Indian violence against the Europeans (Sowell 1986:112).

Nicolas Haby told Sowell (1986:99-102) an absolutely gruesome story about catching an Indian horse thief in the act on his ranch in 1870. Haby kept the Indian's gun and powerhorn, and exhibited the Indian's body for several days, during which time other Alsatians (who were angry about other, earlier events perpetrated by other Indians) disemboweled and scalped the corpse. Haby ultimately fed the man's remains to the hogs, and "Mrs. Haby would eat no hog meat for several years thereafter" (Sowell 1986:102). The point of me relaying this utterly horrifying episode is to illustrate the fact that some Alsatians certainly behaved with savagery equivalent to any perpetrated by Comanche, treating indigenous peoples as subhuman. "Sometimes an Indian can carry off as much lead as a California grizzly bear" (Sowell 1986:112).

Other stories relate completely different kinds of interactions. Priscilla Hancock, the current owner of the 1880s Ihnken home in Castroville, showed me the house's cellar and told me a story about its original mistress, Castroville colonist Marie Pichot Ihnken. Marie's husband, the German Gerhard Ihnken, was a successful local merchant. Marie "spoke the Indian language" and was a friend to the local Lipan. Upon one occasion, a Lipan man was accused of a minor theft, and a group of townspeople were searching for the man to arrest or lynch him. Marie hid the Lipan man in her cellar for several days until the furor had passed, then helped him escape and provided him with provisions (Priscilla Hancock, personal communication, January 2013).

Alsatian Ethnicity and Texan Nationalism

The picture that emerges in these interactions among Alsatian, German, southern white, and Hispanic peoples is one in which ethnicity played a relatively minor role. European immigrants, regardless of ethnic background, faced similar problems of shelter, subsistence and survival. Initially, they enlisted the aid of resident Hispanic, southern white, and indigenous groups. Shared religion, language, and work ethic initially were more important than shared ethnicity. Indigenous interactions, by contrast, were characterized by misunderstanding, competition, escalating violence, and ultimately, expulsion.

A century and a half later, Castroville touts itself as the "Little Alsace" of Texas. Many residents identify themselves as ethnically Alsatian. Descendants of the founding families have remained Catholic and, in many cases, endogamous. Some members of the Castroville community speak an archaic version of Alsatian, and they have established cultural exchanges with towns of origin in contemporary Alsace. The Steinbach House, a half-timbered structure that houses the Chamber of Commerce, is a relocated 17th century building from the Alsatian village of Wahlbach. Alsatian carpenters and masons came to Castroville to reconstruct the house, and the upstairs contains a museum featuring an eclectic range of donated "traditional" Alsatian goods and furnishings. The Castro Colonies

Heritage Association (CCHA) promotes Alsatian-Texan heritage in the form of domestic architecture and cuisine.

In San Antonio, the newly opened Institute of Texan Cultures celebrates a kind of nationalist Texan ideology similar to the Mexican concept of *la raza*. Texas is portrayed as a strong, distinctly unique state because of the contributions of some 27 immigrant and indigenous ethnicities. Small towns just outside of the booming technology corridor (along I-35 between San Antonio, Austin, Waco and Dallas) have reinvented themselves as ethnically themed weekend getaways (e.g., the German town of Fredericksburg, or the Czech town of West). B&Bs, restaurants, and antique stores in these towns hope to attract heritage tourists with money to spend. As in the 19th century, immigrant ethnicity cannot be studied without thinking about the larger-scale polities and economies within which these communities are enmeshed.

The re-imagined past and the construction of social memory is one of the primary activities of archaeology (Van Dyke 2011). Have the residents of Castroville actively maintained an Alsatian identity across time? Or is the local pride in Alsatian identity a relatively recent reinvention? Answers may be found in the stratified trash deposits in wells and privies behind the Jacob Biry homestead, where we plan to excavate in summer 2014.

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