

THE NEW BRAUNFELS CEMETERY

I. CONTEXT

The New Braunfels Cemetery is located on W Nacogdoches Street between Grace and Pecan Streets in the southwesterly direction from the Main Square in New Braunfels, Texas. The location of the cemetery had no significance except that it was not near either of the flooding basins of the Guadalupe and Comal Rivers. The cemetery is visible to all traffic on the busy Interstate 35 Highway.

The New Braunfels Cemetery was dedicated on 23 June 1845; a few months after New Braunfels was founded. This Cemetery gave rest to many Colonists in the early years of hardship that besieged the German Immigration Company.¹

II. OVERVIEW

The destination of the members of the German Emigration Company, who left their native land in the early 1840s was the Fischer and Miller land grant on the San Saba and Llano Rivers. The Company, headquartered in Majnz, Germany, had been formed to direct a mass emigration project from Germany to Texas, and made a contract with the Republic of Texas to settle

up to six thousand families and single men on the grant above mentioned.²

In the summer of 1844 a member of this Emigration Company – namely Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, was sent to the Republic of Texas to arrange for this project. He was to formulate plans necessary for the arrival of seven shiploads of settlers which were to sail for Texas in the fall of the year.

Transportation and maintenance on the way from the coast to the uncivilized Indian country near the San Saba and Llano Rivers was the greatest challenge.³

After his arrival in Texas, Prince Carl and a few companions traveled on horseback to this land grant and found conditions primitive and very difficult. He therefore decided it would be impossible to take the settlers all the way inland without first establishing a stopping point, or supply station midway between the coast and the San Saba and Llano River land grant.⁴

As a result of this decision, Prince Carl on March 15, 1845 in San Antonio, Texas purchased from the heirs of J. M. Veramendi, land situated on the Guadalupe and Comal Rivers.⁵ Lt. Nicolaus Zink surveyed and platted a town site, which Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels named New Braunfels.⁶

At the west end of this town plat, four acres were set aside for the New Braunfels Cemetery, whose name was never changed throughout the years.

The first person buried in this cemetery was 50-year old Mrs. Elise Catherine Reh Peter. Her death and burial occurred June 23, 1845 and at this occasion (according to Pastor Ervendberg's comments column) the cemetery was dedicated. There is no existing gravestone for Mrs. Elise Peter, for her husband Gerlach Peter who followed her in death one month later – July 1845. One might presume they were settlers. Mr. and Mrs. Gerlach Peter came from Bretthausen, Marienburg, Nassau; they had a daughter, Wilhemine, who after her marriage to John F. Russell lived in Bexas County.

The oldest gravestone now existing in the cemetery marks the resting place of Johann Justus Kellner. He was born December 22, 1821 and died on July 31, 1851. A single man, he arrived in 1845 from Braunschweig, Germany. He married Mrs. Wilhemina Elmendorf and they had two sons, Ernest and Wilhelm, at the time of his death. In 1847 Mr. Kellner bought from Adolf von Wedemeyer 32 or more acres of land with the ferry that operated where the Comal River joins the Guadalupe (this crossing is already designated by a Texas Historical Marker). He operated the ferry until his death in 1851. His widow, Wilhemina, married Carl Bardenwerper

and they operated this ferry until 1866 when they sold it the Florenz Kreuz family.

The majority of the persons buried here are of German descent. There are at this time 753 marked graves.

While there were only 20 deaths recorded in 1845, the church records for the year 1846 show the tragic figure of 348 deaths.⁷ The many hardships endured by the settlers on the sea voyage, the lack of adequate transportation, and inclement weather of the Texas coast area all contributed to the tragic death rate that year. Many of these were buried in nameless graves, and the southwest section of this cemetery is their resting place. According to the minutes of the City of New Braunfels;⁸ the last lot sold at the New Braunfels Cemetery was in June, 1945, and now burials are only permitted on lots purchased prior to the 1945 date. Prior to this 1945 date when uninformed personnel dug graves in the seemingly vacant southwest section, they would discover the skeletal remains of the victims of epidemic of 1846.

The cemetery has never been owned by anyone other than the City of New Braunfels who is responsible for its maintenance and upkeep.

According the city minutes dated July 12, 1847, the City of New

Braunfels made the following resolutions:⁹

RESOLVED, that the 4 acres of land allotted to New Braunfels Cemetery be enclosed with good fence – (currently, enclosed with a chain-link fence).

RESOLVED, that all deaths be registered before burial.

RESOLVED, that a sexton be employed to dig graves at least 5 feet deep for a child. Fees of 25 cents for a child's grave under one year of age; 75 cents for under 12 years of age and \$1.00 for an adult's grave.

The sad part of this report is that in the years 1960 to 1973, vandals at ⁱⁱⁱ different times entered this cemetery and destroyed or damaged, beyond repair, many of the gravestones; consequently many of the oldest graves are now nameless and unmarked.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Comal County Historical Commission feels a State Historical Marker would be a fitting tribute to the aims and ambitions of these early pioneers, and it would serve as memorial of their endeavors.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹ Comal County Genealogy Society, *Cemeteries of New Braunfels in Comal County, Texas*, Revised reprint February 1988, p 164. Information from an Historical Marker found in the cemetery.

²Chester W. and Ethel H. Geue, *A New Land Beckoned, German Immigration to Texas, 1844-1847*(Library Binding Company, 1966) p. 4.

³ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴ Ibid. p.7.

⁵ Ibid. p.7.

⁶ Ibid. p 8

⁷ First Protestant Church records, 172 W, Coll St. New Braunfels, Texas.

⁸ Comal County Clerk's Office, City of New Braunfels Minutes.

⁹ Oscar Haas, *History of New Braunfels and Comal County, Texas 1844-1946*, The Steck Company, Austin, Texas, 1968, p 178.
