

Texas Historical Commission Staff (WCT), 8/27/96, revised 9/13/96

18" x 28" Official Texas Historical Marker with post  
Comal County (Job #20496)

Location: 494 S. Seguin, New Braunfels

**JOHANN MICHAEL JAHN\***

JOHANN MICHAEL JAHN(1816-1883)

CAME TO NEW BRAUNFELS IN 1845

AS A COLONIST WITH THE GERMAN

EMIGRATION COMPANY,HE MARRIED

ANNA KLEIN BELLMER IN 1850,A

"TISCHLERMEISTER" OR MASTER

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FURNITURE,ACTIVE IN CIVIC AFFAIRS,

HE WAS ELECTED ONE OF THE FIRST

ALDERMEN OF THE CITY,AFTER

JAHN'S DEATH,HIS SON AND GRAND-

SON OPERATED THE BUSINESS,AND

BUILT THIS BUILDING IN 1910,THE

COMPANY CONTINUED UNTIL THE

1930s,JAHN'S WORKS HAVE BEEN

DISPLAYED LOCALLY AND AT THE

WITTE MUSEUM IN SAN ANTONIO. \*\*

(1997)\*\*\*

\*3/4 inch lettering

\*\*1/2 inch lettering

\*\*\*1/4 inch lettering

## JOHANN MICHAEL JAHN

Johann Michael Jahn was a noted furniture maker in early New Braunfels. He was born in 1816 in Barth, Pomerania and emigrated to Texas with a group of settlers under the leadership of Prince Carl of Braunfels. He came to this country in 1844 aboard the boat Herschel that landed in Indianaoia. He came to New Braunfels in 1845. (Goff-Gregory 150)

Jahn served his apprenticeship with a cabinetmaker in Prague some time before 1833. As a result of a disagreement between them, the master threw a tool at Jahn, striking him in the hip. The injury left him crippled and remained troublesome for the rest of his life. It was believed that as a result of the injury, he was denied entrance into the Army and therefore decided to come to America and start a fresh new life. (Stover 9)

Jahn was deeded 160 acres of land in the settlement of New Braunfels in agreement with the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants with whom he had made arrangements to settle in New Braunfels. Town lots 177 and 186 that were deeded to him are on the corner of the present Seguin Street and Butcher Street. This is the location where he settled and began his furniture business. (Haas History 50)

In 1850, Jahn married a widow, Anna Marie Klein Bellmer, who was the daughter of Stephan Klein who had been a shipmate of his on the Herschel. Mrs. Bellmer's husband, Carl, was elected City Treasurer in 1847 and was serving as Constable when he died in 1850. (Biesele 133)

The Jahns had two children - Carl Andreas and Anna. (Haas History 273) They built their home on the corner of Seguin and Butcher Streets, and he worked out of a small shop next to their home. A large two story building was constructed next to the home in the early 1870's to take care of the ever increasing amount of furniture business. Upon Johann's death in 1883, his son Carl took over the management of the business and his unmarried daughter Emma, also took an active role in the business. (San Antonio Museum Association 250)

In 1910, the original homestead was moved back around the corner facing

Butcher Street, and a two-story brick building was erected on the site. This building still stands and is now being used as an office building. (San Antonio Museum Association 250)

By 1866 Jahn began to advertise "Ready Made Furniture", which indicated that he was not solely dependent on his hand-made products. He had taught his son Carl the trade, and although he produced some hand made pieces, he never acquired the proficiency of his father. (Stover 14)

The furniture made by Jahn represents a remarkable expression of the Biedermeier style. Jahn was a highly skilled craftsman and he produced furniture of unusually high quality. His style is more closely related to the European examples than to the more provincial furniture usually encountered on the frontier of Texas. His pieces were never marked for identification, although there still exists one table with a faint J/J below the top. Jahn's artistry was recognized by a showing at the Witte Museum in San Antonio in 1973, at which time numerous pieces were on display and a book was written entitled "Tischlermeister Jahn" - a title he had acquired denoting his designation as a master craftsman upon completion of his apprenticeship. (Stover 16-18)

Jahn was also very active in civic affairs of early New Braunfels. He was elected one of the first aldermen of the city in 1847 (Biesele 133) and was also one of the founders of the First Protestant Church in 1845. (Haas Church History 115) (Goff-Gregory 150)

Jahn Furniture Company remained a prominent business establishment in New Braunfels for many years. Both Carl (Johann's son) and Paul (grandson) took active roles in the development and growth of New Braunfels. Carl served as Mayor for 18 years, and Paul was involved in all civic affairs during his lifetime. (Haas History 106-211-213-273)

After Johann's son Carl took over the business, the operations expanded to include mattress manufacturing and household moving and storage. Carl's son Paul, assumed managership of the business upon his father's retirement and stayed with the business until the property was sold in the 1930's.

The corner of Seguin and Butcher Streets on which the 1910 brick building still stands, is currently owned by Rob Eversberg and has been converted to offices. Minimal changes have been made to the exterior of the building, but the two-story frame building which was erected next to the original homestead has been razed to provide space for a parking lot.

Jahn's home was moved to Conservation Plaza on Churchill Drive where it is being restored along with the small work shop which was located behind his home. Most of the tools in the original shop have been donated to the Museum of Handmade Furniture in New Braunfels and to the Sophienburg Museum. The Museum also holds several pieces of Jahn's furniture as does the Lindheimer House on Comal Street in New Braunfels.

Information submitted by:

Ruth Jahn Heitkamp, great-grand daughter of Johann Jahn.

#### Works Cited

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films. Bates got bit parts in several features but continued to focus on local theater until 1939, when she met and did a screen test for Alfred Hitchcock. Impressed with her talent and surprised to learn that her training had not come from the stages of London and New York, he cast her as the vain American dowager Mrs. Van Hopper in his 1940 film *Rebecca*. Directed by Hitchcock, Bates made her movie debut in this release with Joan Fontaine and Laurence Olivier, and from it she became a well-known character actor and went on to roles in more than fifty films.

Her movie career began after her fiftieth birthday, and for the rest of her life she enjoyed a variety of comic and dramatic supporting roles with some of Hollywood's biggest names. She shared the screen with Ingrid Bergman (*Saratoga Trunk*, 1943), Claudette Colbert (*Since You Went Away*, 1944), Gypsy Rose Lee (*The Belle of the Yukon*, 1944), Errol Flynn (*San Antonio*, 1945), Kirk Douglas (*My Dear Secretary*, 1948), and Ronald Reagan (*The Girl from Jones Beach*, 1949). Her general stage persona was a plump, matronly character. She frequently played wealthy women (*His Butler's Sister*, 1943; *Slightly Dangerous*, 1943; *Cluny Brown*, 1946) but also ranged to play a gypsy (*They Got Me Covered*, 1943), several maids (*Winter Meeting*, 1948; *The Judge Steps Out*, 1949), and a murderer (*The Brasher Doubloon*, 1947). She also had several roles as a humorously obnoxious mother-in-law (*Love Crazy*, 1941; *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*, 1942; *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, 1947) and as a landlady (*Love and Learn*, 1947; *Portrait of Jennie*, 1948). Florence Bates enjoyed her work in films and was grateful for the financial, social, and professional success it gave her. Soon after her movie career started, her daughter and only child died from childbirth complications; Bates credited her new career with easing much of the pain of this loss. She also never forgot the origins of her success and throughout her life maintained ties to the Pasadena Playhouse, attending plays, endowing scholarships, and offering encouragement to local actors.

She made some radio and television appearances after her film career was established, but it was the movie screen that made her known to the public. She continued in films into the 1950s, although after the death of her husband in 1951 her own health and happiness declined. Florence Bates died of a heart attack on January 31, 1954, in Burbank, California. She was survived by a granddaughter, who lived in Texas and inherited the actress's fortune.

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*Debbie Mauldin Cottrell*

**JAENSSON, SWEN** (1815–1899). Swen Jaensson, known as Swante Palm, son of Anders and Ingerd (?) Jaensson (Jensson), noted book collector and promoter of Swedish immigration to Central Texas, was born at Bästhult, Barkeryd Parish, in the province of Småland, Sweden, on January 31, 1815. He was tutored by the parish clerk and became interested in books and learning at a very early age. He left home to serve as secretary to the parish recorder in Norra Vedbo and later became a clerk at the Göta Court of Appeals in Jönköping. Between 1838 and 1844 he lived in Kalmar, where he was a clerk in the sheriff's court and editor of the newspaper *Kalmar Posten*.

Influenced by his nephew Swen Magnus Swenson,<sup>qv</sup> who had immigrated to Texas in 1838, Jaensson followed in 1844 and soon thereafter took the name Swante Palm. He first worked in Swenson's general store in La Grange, Fayette County, and from 1847 to 1850 was La Grange postmaster. In 1850 Swenson moved his store to Austin, which became the state capital that year, and Palm continued as his bookkeeper. In 1853 Palm went to Panama as diplomatic secretary to Thomas William Ward, United States consul there. He returned to

Austin in 1854 and lived there the rest of his life. In 1854 he married Agnes Christina Alm. A son, Swante Sture, was born in 1855 but died in infancy.

After his return to Austin, Palm continued to be associated with Swenson in various business interests. Proslavery but antisecessionist, he cautiously maintained neutrality during the Civil War.<sup>qv</sup> This fact left him in a relatively advantageous political position after the war, and he served in a number of public offices, among them Travis County justice of the peace and member of the Austin City Council. From 1858 to 1860 he participated as a meteorologist in the first Texas Geological and Agricultural Survey. In 1868 he helped organize the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Gethsemane Church in Austin (later called Gethsemane Lutheran Church). From 1869 to 1872 he served two terms as Austin postmaster.

In 1866 the Swedish government named Palm vice consul for Norway and Sweden, a position he held the rest of his life. As vice consul and as agent of the American Emigrant Company in the 1870s, he encouraged Swedish immigration to Central Texas and helped immigrants once they had arrived. In 1883, on one of Palm's two trips to Sweden, King Oscar II awarded him the Order of Wasa in appreciation of his service as vice consul. As a result of this award, he is often called, incorrectly, Sir Swante Palm. In 1891 Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, awarded him an honorary doctorate. Palm was a member of several scholarly organizations and helped organize the Austin Archaeological Society.

Palm is best known for his library of about 12,000 volumes, collected over a lifetime from all over the United States and Europe. His collection included Scandinavian works, books about Texas, classics, literature, and scientific books. He knew English, French, Latin, German, and various Scandinavian languages and dialects, and copious marginalia indicate that he read much of what he collected. He donated most of his books to the University of Texas in 1897, a gift that increased the size of the university library by more than 60 percent. Palm spent his last days as assistant librarian, supervising the cataloguing and use of his collection, which, he stated, "is closely interwoven with my very existence." He died in Austin on June 22, 1899. See also **SWEDES**.

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*Alfred E. Rogers*

**JAGAVANS INDIANS.** The Jagavans Indians, who were living on the Texas coast when they were met by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca<sup>qv</sup> between 1528 and 1534, were possibly the same group as the Yguaces.

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*Margery H. Krieger*

**JAHN, JOHANN MICHAEL** (1816–1883). Michael Jahn, cabinet-maker and early settler and civic leader of New Braunfels, was born on June 12, 1816, in Barth, a small town near Stralsund, in the Prussian province of Pomerania. As a youth he left home to serve a five-year apprenticeship with a cabinetmaker in Prague. During this period Jahn was permanently disabled when, during the course of an argument, his master threw a tool that struck his hip. Jahn subsequently worked for six years in Switzerland as a journeyman and

probably earned the designation *Tischlermeister*, or master craftsman, before he immigrated to the United States in 1844. Jahn's reasons for leaving Europe are unknown; speculations have centered on his injury, which excluded him from military service, and the impact of machine-made items on the market for handcrafted items in Germany.

He sailed to the United States on the *Herschel* as a member of the *Adelsverein*.<sup>9v</sup> He arrived in Galveston on December 5, 1844, and traveled to Carlhafen (later Indianola), where his group joined Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels,<sup>9v</sup> who led them to the site of future New Braunfels on the banks of Comal Creek. Jahn apparently worked in New Orleans for a few months in the mid-1840s, thinking the market might be better there, but soon returned to establish a shop on Seguin Street and help to build the community of New Braunfels. He was a charter member of the German Protestant Church in 1846, and on June 7, 1847, he was elected an alderman in the town's first municipal elections. He continued to be active in civic affairs throughout his career, serving on a number of committees and in various appointed posts. In 1850 he married Anna Marie Klein Bellmer, widow of Carl Bellmer. They had two children.

Jahn's furniture business prospered throughout the 1850s and 1860s, so much that in 1866 he began importing machine-made furniture to meet the demand. Tax records indicate that he continued to handcraft furniture after 1866, with the help of his son and several assistants. Jahn produced furniture in the Biedermeier style, which typically features careful craftsmanship and the grain and color of wood as its primary decorative elements. Several cabinetmakers in New Braunfels worked in the style during this time. He occasionally experimented with more elaborate styles, as in a walnut scroll-back side chair, ca. 1870, for which the cross splat is beautifully carved in a scrolled Grecian motif. Jahn used native woods such as walnut, pine, cypress, mesquite, and cherry to make chairs, tables, sofas, chests of drawers, bedsteads, wardrobes, and other common household items. He signed only a few, if any, of his handmade pieces, although markings such as "J. J.," "Jahn," "J. Jahn," and "J. Jahn New Braunfels" were stenciled or written on machine-made furniture assembled and sold in his store. Attribution of his work therefore depends on an assessment of quality, construction techniques, and in some cases, provenance.

Jahn's business continued to expand in the 1870s, during which he constructed a two-story shop building adjacent to his home on Seguin Street and opened a second store in Seguin. An 1872 *Texas New Yorker* article on New Braunfels craftsmen estimated his estate to be "not worth a cent less than about \$25,000.00." In later years he turned over an increasing amount of work and business affairs to his children. He focused his efforts on cultivating native mustang grapes and making wines that were served to guests and customers when they visited the Jahn home or shop. Jahn died on January 10, 1883, and was buried in Comal Cemetery. His children and grandchildren continued to run the shop until 1944; the two-story building still stood at 494 South Seguin Street in 1990. Examples of his work, as well as some of the tools that he made and used, are in the collections of the New Braunfels Conservation Society, the Sophienburg Museum<sup>9v</sup> in New Braunfels, the San Antonio Museum Association,<sup>9v</sup> and the Winedale Historical Center<sup>9v</sup> in Round Top.

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**JAILLET, CLAUDE** (1843–1929). Claude Jaillet, priest, the son of Claude François and Marguerite (Dubois) Jaillet of Lyons, France, was born on September 8, 1843. In 1862 he entered the Séminaire

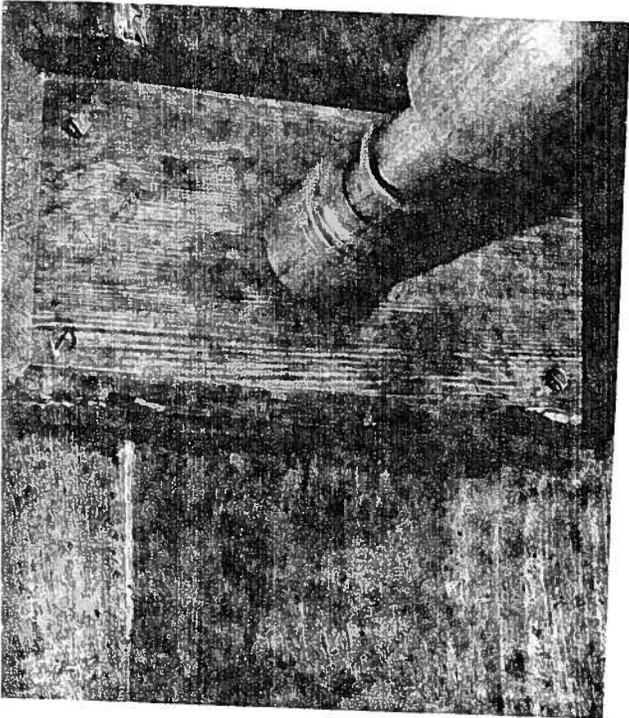
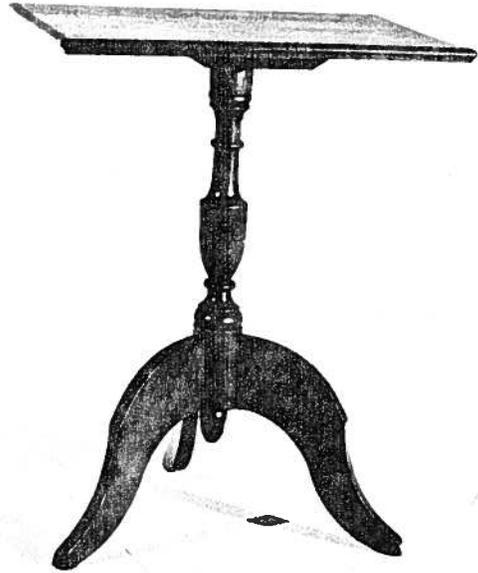
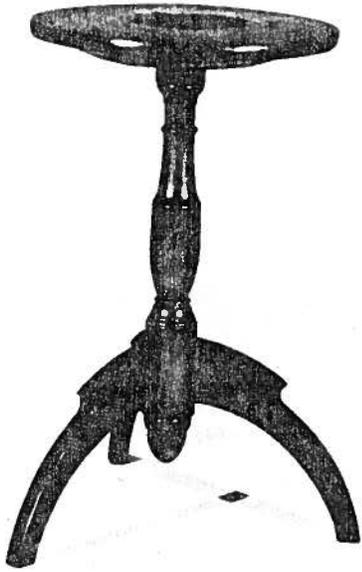


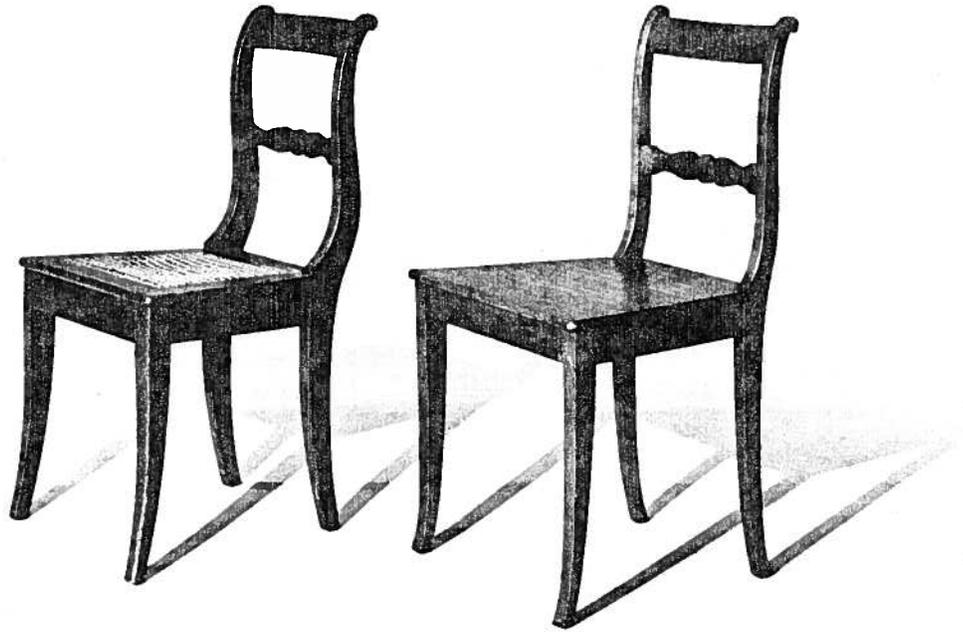
Mesquite rocking chair in the Biedermeier tradition, by Johann Michael Jahn, ca. 1855. Courtesy New Braunfels Conservation Society. Photograph courtesy Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas. Furniture maker Johann Jahn of New Braunfels crafted this rocking chair in the German tradition for his own use.

d'Alix, where he studied philosophy. He later studied theology at the Grand Séminaire de St. Irenée in Lyons. In 1886 he was ordained a priest by Claude Marie Dubuis,<sup>9v</sup> the second bishop of Galveston, who had traveled to France to recruit priests for Texas. After his ordination Jaillet left France for the United States on September 25, 1866. Several other priests sailed with him, as well as twelve nuns going to New Orleans or Galveston.

Jaillet landed in New York and proceeded to Galveston, then to Indianola, and at last to Corpus Christi. From there he left for San Diego, Texas, where he built a chapel and his own residence. He served as the first priest in San Diego before he was assigned to the Fort Stockton–Fort Davis area in West Texas in 1871. He was subsequently assigned to the San Antonio River missions between Medina and Panna Maria, then sent to Laredo for eight months. Afterward, he moved to Corpus Christi, where he served the outlying ranches from 1873 to 1875. The people of San Diego petitioned Bishop Dominic Manucy<sup>9v</sup> to get him back, so in 1875 he returned and rebuilt the church. He remained in San Diego until 1884, having served there for a total of fourteen years. He returned to Corpus Christi, where he was assigned to St. Patrick Church (later St. Patrick Cathedral) as pastor and vicar general of the diocese. In addition, Father Jaillet acted as chaplain for the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament<sup>9v</sup> from 1884 to 1913. In 1914 Bishop Paul J. Nussbaum<sup>9v</sup> gave him the title pastor emeritus of the cathedral. Father Jaillet chose Spohn Hospital<sup>9v</sup> for his retirement residence and served as its chaplain. He offered Mass for the sisters until two years before his death.

Jaillet twice refused the office of bishop and would have refused the titles of monsignor and prothonotary apostolic, but he was too busy at the time to decline. He spent so much time on horseback that he became known as the "saddlebag priest of the Nueces." He died at Spohn Hospital on November 30, 1929.





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# PRESS CLIPS

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JUN 29 1997

## Jahn historical marker unveiled



Photos submitted  
Pictured from left  
are Larry O'Neill,  
Paul Norwood  
and Rob  
Eversberg. The  
partners finished  
refurbishing the  
historical Jahn  
building, at 494 S.  
Seguin Ave., in  
1982.



Attending the public dedication are, from left, John J. Biesele of Austin, Linda Heitkamp Gabbard and her mother Ruth Jahn Heitkamp of New Braunfels, Elizabeth Jane Hinchliffe of Austin, Jerry and Mary Jahn of Cyril, Oklahoma, their son, Cale Jahn, and Jenny Gregory of Austin.



Ruth Heitkamp, great-granddaughter of Johann Jahn, and Carmen Butts, chairwoman of the Comal County Historical Commission, unveil the Johann Michael Jahn historical marker.

### Early New Braunfels settler honored with marker

A State of Texas Historical Landmark marker was unveiled and publicly dedicated May 23. The marker depicts the early life of Johann Michael Jahn, one of the original German settlers in New Braunfels. Jahn was a master craftsman and furniture maker.

Some of his works are on display locally at the Sophienburg Museum. The historical marker is located at 494 S. Seguin Ave. in front of the Jahn building. The original structure housed the Jahn Furniture Co. and was built in 1910 by Johann Jahn's son, Carl Jahn.