

**The Lateiner at Rest: Gravemarkers of the Lionized Texas German Intellectuals**  
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*In his recent book on U.S. Congressman Bob Eckhardt, Gary Keith refers to Eckhardt's contemporary (1970s) contribution to the "storied" Texas-German intellectual saga: the "Lateiner" lineage. My own research documents Keith's observation: The Lateiner label has little substance in recoverable history, but much leverage in perpetuating another fragment of Texas folklore. The documented evidence utilizes both secondary sources (academic and non-academic publications) and primary sources (gravemarkers of traceable, original, "Lateiner" families.)*

**GARY KEITH**

Two decades ago the University of Texas in Austin established the Briscoe Center for American History. The Center has published, since that inception, the equivalent of one book per year in its Focus on American History Series. Their "focus" is upon American history as seen through the contributions of Texans. Think of U.S. Presidents Lyndon Johnson, George Bush, and George W. Bush, for example - although these three Texans have their own, separate, libraries and research centers.

In 2007, Gary Keith, at the time an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio, published one of the books in that series: Eckhardt There Once Was a Congressman from Texas. Bob Eckhardt served as the United States Representative from the 8<sup>th</sup> District of Texas from 1967 through 1981. During those fourteen years, Eckhardt played major roles in the Open Beaches Act, creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve (in Texas), the War Powers Act.

“Bob Eckhardt was part of a storied German-Texas family of Eckhardts, Klebergs, Wurzbachs, von Roeders, **Englelkings**, and Schmelzers.” (Keith 4) By implication these six families appear to be part of a group of German intellectuals who came to Texas after the German Revolution of 1848. These people “were of the intellectual and artistic elite – a highly educated class that based their readings and studies in ancient Greek and Roman cultures and in the Latin language. They came to be known as the “*Lateiners*” (“Latin ones”), and some of them formed free-thinking *Lateiner* communities in the heartland of Texas.” (Keith 4) A few years later, “hoping to maintain their German culture, with its emphasis on science, classical music, literature, and the Latin language, the Klebergs and Albrech and Caroline Ernst von Roeder ... moved to a “*Lateiner*’ community in DeWitt County just a quarter mile from the Eckhardt ranch.” (Keith 12)

These references to Eckhardt’s Texas-German “*Lateiner*” ancestor appear to add credence to a familiar argument that these families used secular Latin language usage in their daily lives – perhaps even in memorializing their dead. At present, however, efforts on the part of numerous gravemarker and cemetery scholars have found only one such gravemarker – that of Meusebach. (Baird 2010)

### **THE “LATEINER” HISTORY**

One group of *Lateiner*, the FORTY (or FORTIERS), included Louis Reinhardt, who decades later supplied the names of his companions. This group consists of thirty-three men. In his recollections, Reinhardt used a charming mixture of either given or surnames – one or the other. Other scholars (Lich, in *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Vernie A. Stembridge, *the Handbook of Texas Online*, Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Vera Flach) have supplied some of the missing given-or-surnames. Reinhardt list: Amelung, Bub, Christoph Flach, Friedrich, Ferdinand, Fuchs, Ludwig Herff, Hesse, Hermann, Johannes Hoerner, Kappelhoff, Jacob Kuechler, Kuegler, Lerch, Lindheimer, Mertins, Michel, Mueller, Neff, Ottmer, Louis Reinhardt, Friedrich Schenck Gustav

Schleicher, Schleunig, Phillip, Friedrich Schenck , Schulz, Schunk, Straus, Vogt, Wagner, Wundt, Zoellner“

At this point, the scholarship becomes fuzzy. Jordan (48ers) , Lich, (Sisterdale),and Paul C. Ragsdale have identified five men - among a much larger group of men known as the FORTY-EIGHTERS - that they consider to be Lateiner. No two of these scholars list all five, but when their discussion overlap they do agree: Ottomar von Behr, Carl Daniell Adolph Douai, Julius Froebel, Ernst Kapp, and August Siemering. All five men were listed as Fortiers by Reinhardt; the forty-eighters arrived almost a decade after the fortiers.

Edwin E. Sharf, in a treatise on FREETHINKERS lists ten (of an estimated one thousand Freethinkers) that he considered to be “intellectuals.” Four of these men– Douai, Herff, Kapp, and Von Behr – were “both” Fortiers or Forty-Eighters. The six new names include Edward Degener, Louis von Donop, Julius Dresel, Baron Ottfield Hans Freiherr von Meusebach, Gustave Theissen, and Baron Edgar von Westphal. Again, Theissen and Westphal had already been listed by Sharf as “Freethinkers.”

Adelbert Regenbrecht writes about a settlement northeast of San Antonio, called Millheim. Again, note that at times Given Names are missing: “Six German settlers of the small settlement of Millheim were former students at German universities, namely: E.G. Maetze, Dr. Nagel, Lawher E. Kloss, Referendarius F. Engelking, Meisterlin and myself. Besides them lived there quite a number of highly educated Germans, for instance, Lieutenant Constant, Professor F. A. Trenckmann, Wilms, E. Kleberg, Robert and Alex Kloss.” (Regenbrecht, 3)

Finally, Weyland and Wade discuss the Lateiner settlement near La Grange, on Buckner Creek, This settlement is about sixty miles south of Millheim. Weyland and Wade identify eleven “intelligentsia”: Carl Ahlbrecht, Herman Bauer, August von Buttlor, Dr. Fred Denker, Carl Eifler, H.O. Grasshoff, August Kleinert, August Mensing, F. Perlitz, F. Pfefferkorn, and Carl Zavisch. (p. 235)

Collectively, these eleven scholars – quoted extensively by later scholars as being reliable - have identified sixty-seven men as Nineteenth Century German immigrant intellectuals – or Lateiner.<sup>i</sup>

#### **GRAVEMARKERS OF ORIGINAL LATEINER FAMILIES**

**Ottmar Von Behr.** Born in 1810 in Anhalt-Cothen, Germany. Lived in Houston in 1810.

Meteorologist and naturalist. Wrote an influential book for German immigrants. Moved to Sisterdale in 1847. First wife died; married Louisa Katzfass; they had three children. Was renowned singer; raised a breed of sheep that mixed German and Mexican strains. Started the first known lending library. Owned property in Germany. Died on a trip to Germany (to collect rent) in 1856. Louisa remained in Sisterdale with children from both marriages. (Ragsdale, 2011)

**Bub.** Killed by Indians, while at Bettina. (Reinhardt)

**Carl Adolph Douai.** Born in Altenburg, Thuringia, on February 22, 1819. Received his doctorate in philology and history at the University of Leipzig. Married baroness von Beust in Konigsberg, East Prussia; they had ten children. They settled first in New Braunfels, and then moved to San Antonio, where he served as editor of the *San Antonio Zeitung newspaper*. In his role as educational reformer (credited with establishing the concept of kindergartens), abolitionist, atheist, newspaper editor, and labor leader, he eventually moved to Boston; Hoboken, New Jersey; and New York. He died in Brooklyn, New York, on January 21, 1888 - his body cremated. (Sibley)

**Ernst Kapp.** Born on October 15, 1808 in Ludwigstadt, Bavarian Oberfranken. Trained under geographer Carl Ritter – cofounder of the modern academic discipline of geography. Settled with wife and five children in Sisterdale. Published two books, in German, on the relationship of technology to philosophy and on general comparative geography. A Freethinker. Died on January 30, 1896, in Dusseldorf on the Rhine. (Jordan, 2011)

**Kappelhoff.** Born in Dusseldorf 1808; died in Dusseldorf 1896. (Jordan, 1966)

**Edgar Von Westphal.** Edgar Oscar Julius Gerhard Ludwig von Westphalen was born March 26, 1819, in Trier. In 1948, in order to escape persecution he fled Germany to join the Latin Settlement at Sisterdale. For several years he served as liaison to Karl Mark and his political friend in Germany. He made numerous trips back and forth from Texas to Europe. In 1865 he came back to Europe permanently, spending a short time in London with his sister and her husband, Karl Marx. In November of 1865, he moved to Berlin, supported by his half brother Ferdinand von Westphalen. Edgar died September 30, 1890 in Berlin. (Wikipedia, April 14, 2011)

**Ferdinand Ludwig Herff.** Born on November 29, 1820 in Darmstadt, German. Finished his medical degree in 1843 in Giessen. Helped start the ill-fated commune called Bettina, in Texas. After it failed, he returned to German, where he married Mathilda Kungel Hoeffler in 1849. They returned to New Braunsfels in Texas. They moved to San Antonio, where he enjoyed an amazing career as an innovative medical doctor. He helped organize various Medical Associations – county, regional and state-wide. He helped establish San Antonio’s first hospital. He died May 18, 1912 and is buried in San Antonio City Cemetery #1. (Biography)

**Wm. Friedrich.** A member of the short-lived Bettina colony (Reinhardt) and a close friend of the Herff family. (Marker)

**August Siemering.** Born in Brandenburg, Germany, on February 08, 1828. Arrived in Texas in 1851, spent the first years teaching school at Sisterdale and Fredericksburg. In 1859, he married Clara Schutze; they had eight children. In 1865, he established the San Antonio *Freie Presse fur Texas*, one of the leading Republican newspapers in the South. He was active in politics, holding various public offices. He died on September 19, 1883, and is buried in San Antonio City Cemetery #1.

**Edward Degener.** Born Oct. 20, 1809. U.S. Congressman. Elected to represent Texas's 4<sup>th</sup> District in the United State House of Representatives, serving from 1869 to 1871. Wife's name was Marie Degener. Edward died on September 11, 1890; buried in San Antonio City Cemetery # 1. (Sanders)

**Christoph Flach.** Settled in Comfort after the dissolution of the Bettina colony. Became a successful farmer and business man. (Stewart)

**Meusebach, John O.** Born on May 26, 1812, at Dillenburg, Germany. He received his Law degree at the University of Halle in 1836. On May 9, 1847, he signed a treaty with Comanche chiefs - to secure security for the new town of Fredericksburg. He was elected to the Texas Senate in 1851. Married Countess Agnes of Coreth, in 1852. They had eleven children; seven of whom reached adulthood. He died on May 27, 1897, and is buried at Cherry Spring, near Fredericksburg.

**H.O. Grasshoff** – INSERT TWO PHOTOS. "...is my great-great-grandfather, and an immigrant from Naumburg in Silesia (now part of Poland). However, I have no further information indicating that he was part of any group of intelligentsia, so I've always questioned his inclusion in that list of names, or thought that perhaps it didn't take much to be considered the intelligentsia at that time and place. He and his wife entered the U.S. through New Orleans in late 1853, and ships records indicate that he was a "kaufman," or merchant. Within a few months he had moved to Fayette County and bought land south of La Grange, where he apparently became a farmer." (Grasshoff, 2010)

**Karl von Zavisch** Other than being listed in Weyland and Wade's list of Lateiner in Fayette County, Karl (or Carl) seems to have settled down as a farmer and or merchant.

#### **A CONTERMINOUS "LATEINER" LEGACY**

The Lateiner legacy, enjoyed by those of us in the twenty-first century, has obscured the nineteenth realities enjoyed by the actual families. Most of what we read highlights the lives of the patriarchs. Yet if we read closely, much evidence points toward an active intellectual life among

the women and children. In fact, a conterminous legacy exists – a legacy that has the same roots as the historical listings, but has a “history” of its own.

For example, early scholars, such as Regenbrecht and Jordan, carefully defined the Lateiners as German intellectuals who had little or no experience with actual farming. The term *Lateiner*, in effect, was derogatory.

Other scholars, however, indicate a positive image of these German intellectuals. In 1998, Edwin Scharf, writing to fellow contemporary freethinkers, repeats a favorite legend:

“These intellectuals would frequently gather at the schoolhouse of one of their rustic frontier homes to contemplate the important issues in philosophy, science, literature, politics, and music. Their meetings were often conducted in Latin or Greek, mystifying their neighbors and creating the name “Latin Colonies” for the settlement areas. Even large numbers of friendly Comanches would observe these sessions in bewilderment through the open windows and doors.”

I refer to this oft-told story as a “legend,” because in a famous treaty obtained by John Meusebach, the Comanche had to utilize the services of an English translator. It seems most likely that if these Comanche could not even understand German, they most certainly would not know the difference between German and/or Greek and/or Latin. And I also suspect that the German neighbors were less “mystified” than they were “amused.” Nonetheless some present-day freethinkers can trace their ancestry to these Lateiner – and these free-thinkers prefer a positive interpretation to that heritage.

**Bettina von Arnim.** A second argument for the conterminous history stems from the patriarchal culture of both the nineteenth century German-American culture and of the early twentieth historians’ culture. Bettina von Arnim was a writer, publisher, composer, singer, visual artist, and illustrator, patron of young talent and a social activist. She worked with Goethe, Beethoven,

Puckler, Schumann, Franz Liszt, Johanna Kinkel, and Johannes Brahms. Born April 4, 1785 in Frankfurt am Main, died January 20, 1859 and buried in Wiepersdorf. She never came to Texas. (Wikipedia, April 11, 2011)

The Free-Thinkers that started a communistic society named the colony after her. I have read no explanation of why the most famous of the communistic settlements was named after her - instead of other famous artists, such as Goethe or Beethoven. Bettina was most certainly a woman and the Lateiner certainly respected her.

A second example of this patriarchal bias can be found in Glen Lich's (4/14/20011) ambiguous listing of the Lateiner: "... Baron von Wesphal (a brother-in-law of Karl Marx....)." Was the Baron the husband of Marx's sister? Or was the Baron the brother of Marx's wife? Truth is, it was the latter. And the Baron was Baron von Westphalen, not Wesphal. (Wallechinsky & Wallace)

F. Lotto provides a third example of this patriarchal bias. Discussing one of the peasant German immigrants, Lotto claims that schools at that time were not as numerous as now. "Charley" went to private teachers, Mrs. Grasshoff and Mrs. Knowbelsdorf who taught school on the Bluff." (Lotto) This tidbit suggests that two female *women* were Lateiner – schooled enough to teach the Texas-German children.

A third argument for the patriarchal bias rests upon the numerous societies that encouraged children to pursue the various arts. Lich and Reeves discuss one such society: "...the young people's literary society, the Praire-Blume, whose member met on regular occasions to read compositions which they had written at home. Assembled here in intellectual equality the young Germans, boys and girls, read their thoughts in prose and poetry and exchanged critical ideas on the papers. (Lich & Reeves, 148)

A fourth argument for the patriarchal bias can be found in the numerous writings about these Lateiner families that have been written by women. Educated women have kept the Lateiner



history alive. Vera Flach is the most famous of these women. Elise Willrich is another. “Further insights into the lives of the German immigrants of the area are provided in letters written by Elise Willrich, wife of George Willrich, to her father in Germany. Translations of these letters are on file in the Fayette Heritage Museum and Archives at La Grange, Texas.” (Grasshoff, 1998, 30)

The final argument for emphasizing the importance of the Lateiner legacy returns us to Keith account of Bob Eckhardt. Keith is not the only person that lionizes the Lateiner. As we will see below, so has the San Antonio, high-profile Groos family.

### **GRAVEMARKERS OF CONTERMINOUS LATEINER FAMILIES**

**Groos, Gustav.** Born on June 10, 1832. “Many of the new farmers in this settlement [Latium], established in the late 1840s, were university graduates and enjoyed a cultural exchange, sometimes in Latin, rare among the pioneers of Texas.” The three brothers [Gustav, Friedrich, and Carl] founded Gross National Bank [still active in San Antonio] in 1866. Gustav married Anna Willrich, from Uelsen Hanover. He died in San Antonio on August 21, 1895; “Anna, aged 103, died on November 16, 1946. Both are buried in City Cemetery No. 1” (Gideon)

**Groos, Carl.** Born September 18, 1827 in Strass-Ebersback, Dukedom of Hesse-Nassau. Graduated from Weilburg gymnasium, passing the Engineer examination in 1846, with first honors. He married Gertrude Rodriguez and they had nine children. His second wife, Anna Siemering, sister of August Siemering. Anna Siemering and Carl had eight children. Carl served two terms on the San Antonio School Board and three terms as San Antonio alderman. He died January 27, 1912 and is buried in City Cemetery #1. (York)

**Marie Grasshoff.** Shares an obelisk marker with her husband Hermann. I quote her great-great-grandson Ray: “The writing on both sides of the stone appears to be precisely identical, even though Marie died about 12 years after Hermann. So based on that, it would appear that both sides of the stone were carved upon Marie’s death, and that probably their children selected the same

epitaph to be carved into both sides of the stone at that time. .... Unfortunately, I do not know German, but have attempted to translate, using online “dumb” auto translators, the epitaph” You were so full of Modest true love. With you our inspiration for life has disappeared.”

**Bob Eckhart** This paper began with Bob Eckhart – the Texas Congressman that Gary Keith “lionized” - and it will end with **Bob Eckhart**. We have completed a circle. “Bob Eckhardt,” wrote Keith, “was part of a storied German-Texas family of Eckhardts, Klebergs, Wurzbachs, von Roeders, **Englekings**, and Schmelzers.” This one sentence exemplifies the Lionization of the Lateiner. The eleven established scholars have recognized only the **Englekings** as “true Lateiner.” Nonetheless, San Antonio has streets named after Eckhardt and Wurzbach. Throughout Texas, moreover, people associate the name “Kleberg” with the huge King Ranch. The Von Roeders and Schmelzers, however, do not enjoy high name recognition, at least in South Texas. The Englekings, in other words, enjoy original Lateiner status, the rest enjoy conterminous status. Bob died in 2001 and is buried in Austin Memorial Park Cemetery. A simple flat gravemarker shares his space with a stone bench.

**UPCOMING BLOG.** One obvious conclusion to this short list of Lionized Lateiner lies in the list’s incompleteness. Numerous descendants of Texas Germans have demonstrated an interest in – and have encouraged my own research in – the two Lateiner “histories.” Preliminary discussions with Frank Faulkner, director of the Texana-Genealogy department at the San Antonio City Cemetery, suggest that we will be able to create a blog that would enable ongoing contributions to the project. We should, moreover, be able to establish and advertise the blog existence with a few months

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<sup>i</sup> Carl Ahlbrecht, Amelung, Herman Bauer, Ottomar von Behr, Bub, August von Buttlor, Lieutenant Constant, Edward Degener, Dr. Fred Denker, Louis von Donop, Carl Daniell Adolph Douai, Julius Dresel, Carl Eifler, Referendarious F. Engelking, Ferdinand, Christoph Flach, Friedrich, Julius Froebel, Fuchs, H.O. Grasshoff, Ludwig Herff, Hesse, Hermann, Johannes Hoerner, Ernst Kapp, Kappelhoff, E. Kleberg, August Kleinert, Alex Kloss, Lawher E. Kloss, Robert Kloss, Jacob Kuechler, Kuegler, Lerch, Lindheimer, E. G. Maetze, Meisterlin, August Mensing, Mertins, Baron Ottfeld Hans Freiherr von Meusebach, Michel, Mueller, Dr. Nagel, Neff, Ottmer, F. Perlitz, Pfefferkorn, Philip, Regenbrecht, Louis Reinhardt, Friedrich Schenck, Gustav Schleicher, Schleuning, Friedrich Schenck, Schulz, Schunk, August Siemering, Straus, Gustave Theissen, Professor F.A. Trenckmann, Vogt, Wagner, Baron Edgar von Westphal, Wilms, Wundt, Carl Zavisch, Zoellner.