THE TEXIANS AND THE TEXANS

THE NORWEGIAN TEXANS

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THE TEXIANS AND TEXANS


The Norwegian Texans
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Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 77-632308
International Standard Book Number 0-933164-12-2


This publication was made possible, in part, by a grant from the HOUSTON ENDOWMENT, INC.

Printed in the United States of America

Cover: Ole Bull
Courtesy of Sadie Hoel

Inside Cover: Small Creek in Bosque County
I.T.C. Collection

Back Cover: Wilhelm Waerenskjold, wife and children
Courtesy of Mrs. William E. Waerenskjold
INTRODUCTION

“Farewell, thou Mother Norway, now I must leave thee. Because thou fostered me, I give thee many thanks. All too sparing wert thou in providing food for the throng of thy laborers, thou who gavest more than enough to thy well-schooled sons.”

“So we rowed up the bay; and there lay the mighty ships, with masts hewn of the tallest trees in the forest, all ready to sail for America. It was a wondrous sight to see: the decks swarmed like an ant heap, kerchiefs and caps of every color—and all were bent on leaving the country.”—from two Norwegian immigrant ballads.

It is not an easy task to leave the country of one’s birth and travel thousands of miles to settle in a strange land. Such a move is not undertaken without a good reason. Yet, between 1840 and 1914 more than 1,105,000 Norwegians emigrated; virtually all of them came to America. Their number included religious dissenters searching for freedom of worship, liberals frustrated by Norway’s conservative political system, factory workers dissatisfied with low wages and poor working conditions, and farmers who dreamed of mild winters, low taxes and rich land. Their reasons for coming were as varied as their social and economic backgrounds. But most came because they believed that the United States offered social mobility and economic opportunities that were denied them in their native land.
CLENG PEERSON

1821

Cleng Peerson is honored in Norway and Texas as the "Father of Norwegian Immigration to America." Born near Stavanger, Norway, in 1782 or 1783, little is known of his early life except that he traveled widely in Denmark, Germany, France and England. When he returned to Norway, he found himself in sympathy with the Quakers, who were being persecuted for their dissent from the official state church.

Peerson first came to the United States in 1821 to locate suitable places for his fellow Quakers to settle. His reports were favorable; the land was good, the people were congenial, and farm wages were high. In 1824 he returned to Norway to encourage others to immigrate to America. He returned to America in December 1824 and wrote a letter of encouragement to those who were planning to follow him, "I am letting you know that I have arrived, happy and well, in America. After a journey of six weeks we reached New York... I am already building a house, ... which I hope to finish by New Year's day. ... I bought a stove for $20, fully equipped with pans, pots for meat, a baking oven and other things—so we shall not need to build a fireplace."

The expedition that Peerson had organized arrived in New York in October 1825 aboard a 52 foot sloop named Restauration. The 53 Norwegians consisted of families, couples, single men and women—all sizes and ages, including one baby girl born at sea.

In 1833 and 1834 Peerson made a walking tour across Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. The result of his trek was the first large Norwegian settlement in the United States, at Fox River, Illinois.
Johan Nordboe was the first permanent Norwegian settler in Texas. At age 64, deeply in debt, married, with four children, Johan Nordboe saw America as the last chance for himself and his family. He sailed from Goteborg, Sweden, to New York in 1832. He settled for a time in upper New York state, and was one of the founders of the large Norwegian settlement at Fox River, Illinois. Nordboe was no illiterate peasant. A self-taught painter and physician, he wrote many letters to friends in Norway exposing the shortcomings of Norwegian society and encouraging his fellow countrymen to emigrate.

From Illinois in 1837, he wrote, "Here no restrictions are placed upon the right to earn one's living. . . . Religion is free in America, . . . every man believes what he thinks right." And finally in that same letter, "A poor man need never work for a minister without pay; such things belong only to the old world."

By 1841 Nordboe was living on his farm in Dallas County, Texas. There at last he achieved the success that had eluded him in Norway. He continued to write, "Here a young but poor man can soon become a well-to-do farmer, if he works hard and uses good sense. He can look forward to becoming rich without usury, a difficult task in Norway."

Johan Nordboe died on his farm in Dallas County in 1855, but he lived long enough to see other Norwegians follow in his footsteps.
JOHAN REINERT REIERSEN
1843
Johan R. Reiersen is considered to be the father of Norwegian immigration to Texas. He dreamed of “caravans of immigrants” who would leave the timid behind, escape the restrictive social and economic systems in Norway and establish large, prosperous settlements in the United States. Reiersen believed that mass emigration of Norwegian workers would create labor shortages in Norway which in turn would force an increase in wages.

In 1843 Reiersen prepared to visit the United States in search of a suitable place for a Norwegian settlement. Upon his return he would organize and lead the first group. For the success of his venture he would require men who were, in his words, “moral, orderly, industrious and friendly people.”

Reiersen spent the fall and winter of 1843 traveling in the upper Midwest. By January 1844 he had narrowed his choices to Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin. Subsequently he traveled to Texas, visiting Nacogdoches and San Augustine. He rode horseback to Austin where, “Congress had just assembled and I easily gained admittance to the president of the republic, General Houston, who was intensely interested in having immigrants choose Texas as their new fatherland.” Nearing the end of his journey, Reiersen remained undecided as to which place he would recommend.
Before his trip to America, Reierson, with his brother Christian, had begun a liberal newspaper, Christiansandsposten, which contained many articles—his own included—promoting immigration. When he returned to Norway in 1844, Reierson edited his notes on his travels into a book entitled Veiviser—Pathfinder for Norwegian Immigrants to the United North American States and Texas. It was the most comprehensive handbook about America published by a Norwegian up to that time, and was very influential in encouraging Norwegian emigration. Before returning to America, he began a monthly magazine, Norge og Amerika, (Norway and America), as a forum for reports from colonists, and for discussions of social and economic conditions among Norwegian farmers and laborers.

“A new spirit is awakened in these immigrants, a feeling of independence and freedom, a spirit of tolerance in matters of religion, and an open mind for information, together with that conviction of their worth as men and citizens which is the cornerstone of the moral virtues.”
—Reierson, in his Pathfinder.
In the Spring of 1845, Reiersen returned to New Orleans, bringing his own family and his parents. As soon as Texas was admitted to the Union, his father, Ole, bought a land certificate for 1,476 acres of unclaimed Texas land. They began the first Norwegian settlement in Texas in Henderson County. The colony was called Normandy, but the name was later changed to Brownsboro. In 1846, Reiersen’s brothers, Christian and George, arrived with 50 more settlers.

According to Elise Waerenskjold, most of the Brownsboro pioneers “settled, contrary to Reiersen’s advice, in very unhealthy places . . . in the bottom lands . . . All went fairly well until the warm season arrived; then almost everyone became ill, with the exception of J. R. Reiersen’s family, whose house lay on high and healthful ground. Consequentially, many were discontented, and some had died when the writer of these lines arrived in the settlement, in October, 1847.”

One of the most remarkable Norwegian settlers in Texas was Elise Amalie Tvede, who arrived at Brownsboro in 1847. The daughter of a Lutheran pastor, she went far beyond the social constraints of her day. At the age of 19 she became a schoolteacher—very unusual for a woman then. She championed various social causes, such as the temperance movement. In 1839, she married Svend Foyn, a young sea captain who later invented the harpoon cannon used in modern whaling. After three years they decided they were incompatible, and took the daring step of separating and divorcing. Elise resumed her maiden name and, in 1846, became editor of Reiersen’s monthly, Norge og Amerika. When the magazine ceased publication in 1847, Elise, then 32, left for Texas and arrived at Normandy in October, 1847. One year later, she moved to Four Mile Prairie where she married Wilhelm Waerenskjold, with whom she had crossed the Atlantic. Waerenskjold had been the leader of a group which had financed Reiersen’s first trip to Texas in 1843.
WILHELM AND ELISE WAERENSKJOLD

From The Lady With the Pen
When the Texas government renewed its offer of 640 free acres to families and 320 acres to single men, Reiersen founded another settlement on the borderline of Kaufman and Van Zandt Counties. Fourteen families from Norway joined this so-called Four Mile Prairie colony in 1850.

A few years later in 1869, Elise Waernesskjold described the settlement: "In its natural aspects this country (Four Mile Prairie) closely resembles Denmark and is very pretty... As the name signifies, the prairie dominates the landscape, although there is no lack of woods. Brownsville, on the other hand, is more like Norway, as the land is very hilly and even has high ridges and large pine woods. It was really beautiful when the Norwegians first settled there. The forests were without underbrush, and there were a few small prairies of luxuriant grass, but these prairies were later overgrown with an almost impenetrable thicket, just as the bushes have shot up everywhere among the trees."

Reiersen was filled with optimism about the prospects for Norwegian immigrants. "All those who have been in America a few years, with a few exceptions are in a contented and independent position... They do not suffer want. Taxes and rent encumber no one, and fear of confiscation of property does not trouble their minds. ... The majority still live in their original log cabins, which, however, are always a good deal better than the mountain huts in which they lived in Norway." —Reiersen on the Texas Norwegian Settlements.
ADAM LOVENSJKJOLD
Not all Norwegians favored emigration. The Rev. J. W. C. Dietrichson, who came to America to bring religious order into the Lutheran settlements, denounced the entire emigration movement so fervently that J. R. Reiersen accused him of being bought by the government of Norway-Sweden. The government was not entirely pleased with the sight of so many of its citizens leaving their homeland. In 1848, Adam Lovenskjold, the Norwegian-Swedish Consul-General, gave an "official" account in his "Report on the Norwegian Settlers in North America." His report was so pessimistic that he was accused of attempting to discourage emigration.
In 1847, when he was 64 years old, Cleng Peerson sold his farm lands in Missouri and Iowa, joined a Swedish religious-communal settlement at Bishop Hill, Illinois, and contributed all his possessions to the colony. He married a young girl who was a member of the sect, but the marriage did not work out. Peerson soon left her, “stripped,” he later wrote, “of everything except my honor.” For the next two years he lived in the Norwegian settlement he had begun at Fox River, Illinois. In 1849, he set out for Texas “to investigate the possibility of a new settlement.” He visited John Nordboe and was impressed with the immense stretches of still unsettled land. When he returned to Illinois, he urged the thousands of Norwegians who were pouring into the upper Mississippi valley and southern provinces of Canada to move instead to Texas. But when Peerson returned to Texas in 1850, he brought only a few families with him. One of these, the Ole Canutesons, homesteaded 10 miles south of Dallas, near John Nordboe. Peerson lived with the Canutesons and J. R. Reiersens during the next four years. It is interesting that the 1850 census listed 105 persons of Norwegian birth living in Texas.
THE WAERENSKJOLDS' WRITINGS

1851
Both Wilhelm and Elise Waerenskjold were good writers, and their letters about immigrant life in Texas were published, along with Reiersen's, in Norwegian papers. In 1851, a Norwegian newspaper published correspondence written under the name of a Captain A. Tolmer. Tolmer was disparaging of Texas—its soil, its climate, its crops and its people. Mrs. Waerenskjold wrote a long and vigorous "Manifesto" in defense of Texas, with supporting letters from John Nordboe and Cleng Peerson.

"When Tolmer says it is a miracle that he is still alive after having been in Texas a couple of weeks, one can only laugh. . . . I believe now, and as formerly, that there are many thousands in Norway who would be far happier over here. . . . In general, it depends much on a person's character and ability to work whether he will be satisfied or dissatisfied. Land can still be obtained in our neighborhood for 35 cents to $2 per acre. . . . I believe Texas is the best of the States to migrate to, partly because the climate is milder and more pleasant than in the Northern States and partly because the land is cheaper."

Elise Waerenskjold's "Manifesto," 1851.

THE WATERS OF THE BOSQUE

Although he was now 67, Cleng Peerson still found it difficult to remain in one place. In 1850, he began to explore land to the west. His tales led Ole Canuteson to follow his path. Canuteson later wrote: "In the summer of 1852, I started out (from Dallas County) with a man by the name of Bryant, to search for vacant land. . . . Our objective was the waters of the Bosque. . . . We found enough (land) to accommodate many more people than had at first been contemplated. This was the beginning of the Norwegian settlement in Bosque County."

BOSQUE COUNTY

1854
The Texas Legislature created Bosque County on February 3, 1854, and offered 320 acres of free land to those who would settle there. Peerson and Canuteson urged their friends to move to this area, which was more like their native land and offered better soil and plenty of wood and good water. Many of the Norwegians moved to the southwest part of Bosque County, which is still the most genuinely Norwegian colony in Texas. The first settlement, appropriately, was called Norse. The Bosque settlements lay in the south central portion of the county. It was a region of gently rolling prairie, dotted with woodlands and spring-fed streams. Among the first to establish land claims there were Karl Questad, Knut Canuteson, Jens Jenson, Berge Rogstad, and their families. Ole Ween was a single man.

1852
In 1852, the letters from Texas Norwegians were given great prominence in the Norwegian labor movement's chief newspaper, Arbeider-Foreningernes Blad. The editor, Marcus Thrane, hoped to encourage poorly-paid workers to migrate to Texas, thus creating a labor shortage at home. This, he reasoned, would build up pressure for higher wages and shorter hours.

In a letter to Thrane's newspaper, John Reiersen said: "I consider the old monarchical, aristocratic, and hierarchic institutions as contemptible. . . . I (now) am free and independent, among a free people who are not bound by the chains of old class and caste conditions, and I feel proud to belong to a mighty nation, the institutions of which must necessarily conquer eventually the entire civilized world because they are based upon the only principles which reason can acknowledge to be right."

DISCONTENT AT FOUR MILE PRAIRIE

Not every newcomer in Texas was satisfied with the first tract of land he had settled. One of them wrote: "The soil in this part of the country is of various qualities; here in Texas some of the land is so rich that I do not think any better can be found on this earth. . . . (J. R. Reieerson) has, so far as I am able to judge, a part of the very best land near Four Mile, but even that is far from as good as I have seen in other districts . . . I can tell you that I shall leave here as soon as I can obtain land somewhere else, where the yield may be ten times as much in a year."—T. Grimseth.
A BOSQUE COUNTY FARM SCENE
MAP OF THE NORWEGIAN SETTLEMENTS IN BOSQUE COUNTY

THE OLD NORSE POST OFFICE

Clarence Colwick
Karl Questad was born in 1815 in Loiten, Norway. As a young man he served as a hunting and fishing guide for the Norwegian gentry. Later, he became a blacksmith. Life for the poorer classes was not too promising, however, so Questad departed his homeland about 1850, and came to Texas. In 1853 he was in the advance party of Norwegian immigrants which explored the region along the Bosque. The land records show that in 1854 Questad was one of the first to take out a deed to farm land in the newly created Bosque County. The country was then so wild that marauding Indians sometimes raided the outlying homesteads. In 1867 he was attacked by Comanches and escaped only by jumping off a thirty-foot cliff.

Though he was a farmer by vocation, Questad continued to work as a blacksmith. He made his own farm implements in his smithy on the Questad Place, and, on numerous occasions, volunteered his skills to help less fortunate neighbors. He was also an accomplished stone mason. His masonry house at Norse still stands.

Questad possessed a variety of intellectual interests. He collected books and aided in the education of his fellows by loaning volumes to any who wished to read. He was an accumulator of scientific data. In 1874 and 1882 he sent collections of fossils and Indian artifacts to the Bergen Museum in Norway. He also contributed to the work of Gustav Belfrage by providing a home and workshop for the noted Swedish naturalist during the years 1870–1879.
THE BLUFF FROM WHICH QUESTAD JUMPED WHILE ESCAPING THE COMANCHE
Among those who moved to Bosque County was the Jens Ringness family which had come from Norway in 1851. Ole, the eldest son, became the mail carrier from the Bosque settlement to Fort Worth. An observant man, he noticed that when wagons were heavily loaded, their wheels cupped and dug large furrows in the soft earth. He began to wonder about the possibility of making a disc plow and disc harrow. At a local blacksmith shop, he put together models which worked successfully. In 1872, while enroute to Norway, he planned to register his patents in New York, where he was also to meet some prospective buyers. He died in New York under mysterious circumstances, before filing his papers. His brother, John, was advised by the New York patent office that the patent could be issued in his name if he would remit the usual $5 fee. But, he did not make the application, and the disc plow was later patented by the J. I. Case Plow Company. Today few people know that the idea for one of the major advances in modern agriculture first arose in the inventive mind of a Norwegian immigrant to Texas.

The first homes in the Bosque settlements were built of logs or, occasionally, of stone. The ends of the logs were notched so that they could be crossed and fitted together at the corners. Caulking was necessary to fill cracks in the walls. Stone homes were much more difficult to build, since the stone was quarried and shaped by hand, with the help of hammers, chisels and an occasional saw.
Early settlers in Bosque County built "stake" fences at social events called "fencing bees." For days ahead the men of the settlement cut and sharpened posts which were then hauled to the field where the fence was to be constructed. They drove the posts into the ground and bound them together at the top with wire. Where stakes could not be driven, rock fences were used.

Bosque County was part of the frontier. Although most of the Indians were friendly, the Kiowas and Comanches still made raids. The settlers formed their local militia for protection, and sentries sometimes had to be posted on the tops of hills. Ole Canuteson's cabin was ransacked in 1854, while, fortunately, no one was at home. In 1867, Karl Questad nearly died from an arrow wound suffered during a raid; and 14-year-old Ole Nystel was held captive for three months before he was bartered, unharmed, at a Kansas trading post for $300 worth of merchandise.
Hendric Dahl, who had come to Kaufman County from Norway in 1852, moved on to Bosque County in 1854. Dahl was a genuine Texas horsetrader. He swapped his saddle horse to Jasper Mabray for 320 acres of land in Gary Creek valley. When he returned from a visit to Norway in 1872, Dahl brought back a considerable number of new immigrants.

Hendric died in January 1873, leaving Christine with nine children to raise and a large farm to manage. Although she could not write and could read only Norwegian, Christine became an expert farmer. She continued to accumulate land on which she raised horses, cattle and grain.

At one time she owned more than 4,000 acres.

At her death in 1910, her children inherited a sizeable and profitable farming operation. Today the 320 acres that Hendric Dahl acquired in a horse trade remains one of the few farms in the settlement that has never been sold outside the family.
A CHURCH AND A PASTOR
AT FOUR MILE PRAIRIE
1854

The Norwegians at Four Mile Prairie established a church in 1848. At first, worship services were held in private homes. At Four Mile, William Waerenskjold led the services and conducted baptisms using an altar book which had belonged to his wife’s father. Still, Elise Waerenskjold and others worried that their countrymen were losing their religious ties in the new environment. Elise wrote, “Some of the Norwegians have abandoned their Lutheran faith. . . . I wish very much that we could soon get a good Lutheran pastor. . . . I cannot tell you how much I wish we might get someone who could instill a love and respect for the Christian teachings in the young people.”

In 1854 a small church was built at Four Mile. Through the efforts of the Waerenskjolds, the Reverend A. Emil Fridriksen of the Norwegian Lutheran Church made a missionary visit to Texas. He served the congregation at Four Mile Prairie, and another at Brownsboro, for four years—from 1854 to 1858.
1860
As influential as they were in promoting immigration to the United States, neither Peerson, Reierson, nor the Waerenskjolds could turn the main tide of immigration south to Texas. In 1860, the census listed only 326 persons of Norwegian birth in Texas.

As the nation edged toward Civil War, Elise Waerenskjold spoke out strongly against the institution of slavery. "I believe that slavery is absolutely contrary to the law of God. . . . People have asked me if I would tolerate having a Negro woman as a daughter-in-law. I must admit that it would not please me very much, but I would rather have it thus than to have grandchildren who are slaves. . . . We immigrants, to be sure, can do nothing to abolish slavery; we are too few to accomplish anything for this cause and would merely bring on ourselves hatred and persecution. All we can do is to keep ourselves free of the whole slavery system."

The Texas Norse were divided over the Civil War. Though most were Union men, according to Mrs. Waerenskjold, the records show that almost 50 of them served in the Confederate armies. The story is told of how Otto Swenson was conscripted from the Bosque area late in the War. He knew little English and cared less for the Southern cause. Since he had not been issued a uniform, he soon just walked off from his company, drifted around until the war was over, and then returned home. No action was taken against such men by the Union, which saw no reason to punish those in the South who had not fought against it.

1865
When the war had ended, Elise Waerenskjold foresaw great problems resulting from the Reconstruction process: "Much as I have always wished for the Negroes to be free, I cannot help thinking that it could have been brought about a little more gradually. . . . For great numbers of them, life will be harsher now than when they were slaves. . . . So many thousands of people suddenly left to their own resources without anything to give them a start in life! They have hardly enough clothes to cover their bodies—and this in a country terribly devastated by the war!"
THE FIRST NORSE BAND

Milton Lindberg
Cleng Peerson

Ovee (or Ovie) Colwick came to the Bosque area from Illinois in 1839. At that time he was a single man who devoted himself to caring for the sick and elderly. Cleng Peerson, now 76, made his home with Colwick, and, in return, deeded half of his land grant in Bosque County to Colwick. Despite his age, Peerson still made "treks" to Austin to negotiate land deals for his friends. It is said that he dressed for these trips in frock coat and top hat, and that he brought such entertainment through his story-telling that no one would ever accept money from him for his food and shelter. Cleng Peerson died in 1865, at the age of 82 and was buried in the Norse Cemetery. Years later, Colwick’s son wrote of Peerson: "He was the most unselfish man I have known. His chief ambition was to promote the welfare of his countrymen and fellow-men." A symbolic statue to Peerson’s memory now stands in Stavanger, Norway.
The Rev. Ole Olsen Estrem was the first resident pastor to the Norwegians of the Bosque country after the Civil War, and during his time (1869–1877) the first church was built at Norse—Our Savior's Lutheran Church. Estrem was succeeded by the Rev. J. K. Rystad, who served the Norse church for the next 48 years. In 1886, the "Rock Church," St. Olaf's, was built at Cranfills Gap, and Trinity Lutheran was built at Clifton in 1907. Rystad also led in the founding of an academy at Clifton in 1896. He served as its first president. Clifton Junior College was established as the upper branch of the academy in 1922. The academy closed in 1936. The Junior College was merged in 1953 with Texas Lutheran College at Seguin.
Peter Hoff and his family landed at Galveston in December, 1867. They had little money and no knowledge of the English language. They bought a wagon to haul their baggage to Bosque County, but they could not afford a team to pull the wagon. A kindly old man at Galveston hitched his team to the wagon and hauled them a day's journey. That night he asked a nearby farmer to lodge them for the night and haul them one day further. This was repeated with each “hauler” explaining the predicament to the next—until the family finally reached Bosque. No one refused to help, and no one asked for payment.

In 1867, thirteen died in an epidemic at the Four Mile Prairie settlement. The following spring, twelve of the thirty-three Norwegian families there moved to Bosque County, where most of the Norwegian immigrants now live.
1870
Wheat was raised in the Bosque colony and was milled at Norway Mill. The flour was then freighted by oxen to Waco, where the farmers also bought the manufactured products and foodstuffs they could not supply at home. This practice ended with the coming of the railroad in the 1880's.

1872
Some Norwegians migrated to Texas from other sections of the United States after 1872. Several families came to the Lower Rio Grande Valley with a substantial number of Swedes. Eventually they either intermarried with people of other nationalities or left the area. Few Norwegian names survive in the Lower Valley today. By 1880 the Census Bureau listed 880 persons of Norwegian birth living in Texas.

1884
Norwegians settled in the northeastern part of Bee County between 1884 and 1898, in a settlement known as Normanna ("Home of the Norseman"). By 1897 the village had seven stores, all of which were destroyed in a fire the following year. After the fire, many settlers moved out. Today the settlement has a population of 100.
Wilhelm Waerenskjold had been stabbed to death in 1866, in what Elise later described as a “cold-blooded and long-premeditated murder” by “a scoundrel of a Methodist preacher.” Elise continued to live on the 1,250-acre family farm at Four Mile Prairie which her son, Niels, managed. She often visited in the Norwegian homes, and local tradition remembers her as having a stately bearing and being received “like a bishop” into the homes she visited. She continued her letter-writing, giving her contemporaries (as she now gives us) the best account of the Norwegians in Texas. Late in 1894 she moved to the home of her son, Otto, in Hamilton, Texas, where she died on January 22, 1895.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Census reported 1,356 Norwegian-born living in Texas.
Oslo, located in Hansford County in the northern Texas panhandle, did not look at all like the ancient capital of Norway for which it was named. It possessed no view of majestic mountains and was 500 miles from any sea. It did boast a school, a Norwegian Lutheran church and a Norwegian language newspaper. The town was the product of one of the many panhandle land development schemes that bloomed and quickly faded during the early years of the 20th century.

The developer, Anders L. Mordt of Chicago, sold land to Norwegians from the Midwest. To encourage settlement Mordt built a school, donated land for a church and published a newspaper in the Norwegian language. He printed handbills, circulars and booklets, and organized railroad excursions so that potential buyers could see the land.

For a short time the settlement thrived. But a long drought that began in 1912 doomed the experiment. Many of the families moved away. About 30 Norwegian families remained in the area. Today, the Oslo church is the center of community life and descendants of the original settlers are some of the most productive wheat farmers in the state.
C. B. Normann, immigrant painter from Norway, was impressed by the work of the German immigrant Elisabet Ney, in preserving Texas’ historical figures in sculpture. In 1931-1935 he painted from photographs, *Elizabet Ney at Work*, which was presented in 1968 to the State by Governor and Mrs. John Connally. Normann’s *Signing of the Declaration of Independence* hangs in the San Jacinto Monument. His portraits of *Nine Texas Heroes* are in the State Library building in Austin.
The famous Texan, Mildred Ella Didrikssen (Babe Zaharias) was the daughter of Ole Didrikssen, a Norwegian immigrant. She was born at Port Arthur in 1912 and became perhaps the greatest woman athlete of all time. She dominated the women's events at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles and excelled in every sport, particularly basketball and golf. In 1950 she was named Woman Athlete of the First Half of the 20th Century. She died of cancer in 1956.

While the Norse settlements of Bosque County have retained much of their old-country flavor, the Norwegian descendants at Brownsboro and Prairieville have been assimilated by the farming communities, and only a few Norse names are now seen on the mail boxes of these areas. One reminder—about three miles east of Prairieville—is the old Lutheran church and the country cemetery full of ancient tombstones bearing Norwegian names.
One of a series
prepared by the staff of
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
INSTITUTE OF TEXAN CULTURES
AT SAN ANTONIO