



The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Germanic Studies

## **The Texas German Endowment**

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### **1. Introduction**

Once considered one of the major languages of the Lone Star State, Texas German is a unique dialect that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was spoken by more than 100,000 Texans. English-only laws during World War I led to the loss of public institutional support for the widespread maintenance and use of German in such previously flourishing venues as German-language schools, newspapers, churches, and businesses. Whereas German was the principal language for most Texas Germans as late as the 1940s and German monolinguals anchored the community's language uses well into the 1960s, English became the primary language for most Texas Germans in both private and public domains in the 1970s. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, only an estimated 8,000 speakers of Texas German remain, most of whom are 60 years and older. Since this unique Texan dialect is not being passed on to younger generations, it will become extinct within the next thirty years. With the loss of Texas German, we will witness the end of a very special way of life that has had major impacts on Texas culture, history, and traditions for the past 150 years.

### **2. History of the Texas German Dialect Project**

Members of the "Texas German Dialect Project" at the University of Texas at Austin are interviewing the remaining speakers of Texas German in order to document this unique dialect in the form of stories about all aspects of Texas-German life past and present. The resulting web-based multi-media archive will allow future generations to listen to and understand stories told by the last remaining speakers of Texas German. More precisely, the Texas German Dialect Project aims:

1. To preserve the Texas German dialect as it reflects the rich cultural and linguistic traditions of its residents;
2. To gather basic research information about linguistic diversity in order to understand the nature of language variation and change;
3. To provide information about language differences and language change for public and educational interests;
4. To use the material collected in research projects for the improvement of educational programs about language and culture.

From 2001-2007, more than 26 members of the "Texas German Dialect Project" in the Department of Germanic Studies at UT Austin have conducted oral-history interviews in order to transcribe and translate them. The interviews including their transcriptions and translations are

stored in a web-based multi-media archive which will be accessible to future generations (see <http://www.tgdp.org>). So far, more than 225 remaining speakers of Texas German have been interviewed in Fredericksburg, Doss, Spring Branch, New Braunfels, San Antonio, Bulverde, Brenham, La Grange, Freyburg, Victoria, Crawford, and many other places, totaling more than 500 hours of interviews.

### **3. Funding Needs**

The process of adding entries to the Dialect Archive is extremely time intensive. Per hour of interview added to the archive, an estimated 50 hours of work are necessary for setting up the interview, traveling to the interview site, recording the interview, digitization, transcription, translation, and editing. So far, 38 undergraduate students, 19 graduate students, and one faculty member have been involved in the activities of the Texas German Dialect Project. From 2001-2007 the project has received funding from various sources both inside and outside of the University (total direct funding received so far: about \$200,000 from Humanities Texas, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the University of Texas at Austin).

After five years of funding by different sources, we have been unable to receive further grants for the past 15 months. This lack of funding has drastically reduced our ability to record interviews and store them in the archive. While we used to conduct about ten interviews per month, we are now down to only one interview per month. As of June 2007, we have a list of more than 230 Texas Germans who are waiting to be interviewed by the project.

To re-establish the old level of operation, the Texas German Dialect Project requires an estimated budget of about \$25,000 annually. Since both state and federal funding agencies have cut down on funding for the humanities over the past two years, we have not been able to secure funding from these sources, which means that we have basically reached an interruption in recording and processing interviews. Since many of the current and potential Texas German informants are in their 80s and 90s this means that valuable interviews would be lost in case they passed away before they are interviewed. For these reasons the sole option to guarantee continuity of the Texas German Dialect Project lies in the establishment of a Texas German Endowment to insure its permanent maintenance.

The Texas German Dialect Endowment at the University of Texas is seeking donations from individuals, businesses, and organizations. The donations are deposited into an account which generates interest each year. This interest will support the recordings and research activities of the Texas German Dialect Project for the next 30-40 years. After that, the interest generated by the endowment will be used for scholarships for students who are interested in researching Texas German culture, history, and language at the University of Texas. All donations are tax-deductible. Special arrangements can be made to name a scholarship in honor of a person, business, or organization. Checks should be made out to "Texas German Dialect Endowment – UT Austin" and sent to Hans Boas at the address below. Receipts will be sent out within approximately two weeks.

If interested, please contact Prof. Hans C. Boas, Department of Germanic Studies, EPS 3.102, C3300, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712-0304. Phone: (512) 796-3046. Email: [hcb@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:hcb@mail.utexas.edu)