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DLI class to discuss Germans' settling of Texas

By Jeff Anderson | Special to the Times | Saturday
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Myra Hargrave McIlvain lived along the Texas coast, where she discovered the old ghost town of Indianola and became fascinated with the Germans who developed the seaport that at one time rivaled Galveston.

McIlvain eventually moved to Austin and began writing Texas historical markers and then books about famous and infamous people and places in the state. Her research led to admiration for the German immigrants who made such a lasting contribution to our state.

On April 12 from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., McIlvain will join Dynamic Learning to lead a class at the Dietert Center on this intriguing aspect of Texas history, "Germans Come to Texas." McIlvain is the author of "Texas Tales: Stories That Shaped a Landscape and People," which chronicles the migration of German immigration from Matagorda Bay to the Hill Country.

Myra Hargrave McIlvain will lead a class about Germans coming to Texas at the Dietert Center as part of the Dynamic Learning Institute.

Her stories tell of hardy settlers who colored our landscape with hard work and a unique culture we enjoy today.

Though he fled charges of embezzlement, the letters that Friedrich Ernst wrote home about the opportunities he found in Texas led to a flow of immigrants that grew into the thousands. Today, Ernst is known as the "Father of German Immigration."

Ernst's glowing letters created the first large wave of German immigrants. Then, 21 German noblemen hoping to make a fortune lured settlers to the cheap land available in Texas. However, a poorly planned immigration led thousands of settlers to the barren shores of Matagorda Bay on the Texas coast. Many settlers died, and others felt so betrayed by what they encountered that they refused to follow the organizers inland and stayed behind to begin a seaport that eventually grew to rival Galveston.

The first wave of Germans who did continue inland established New Braunfels and then Fredericksburg. The German immigrants

eventually spread out across Texas, coloring the landscape with their handiwork.

The next time you visit The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden, notice the 77 scriptures embedded in the cross-shaped walkway that are inscribed in German, among three languages, which speaks to the significant heritage the German migration brought to Texas.

McIlvain hopes participants will gain a greater appreciation of the culture, challenges and accomplishments of the German immigrants who came by the thousands to Texas. Her DLI class will explore the history that led to the mass migration of Germans to Texas and will help attendees understand the attitudes of the German settlers toward the Civil War. It will also help participants understand how the Germans dealt with the Indian threat when they settled Fredericksburg — a threat so dangerous that an empresarioial land grant west of San Antonio required an escort by the Texas Rangers to protect settlers from Indian attacks.

McIlvain aims to bring the Texas story to life in her teaching with the sincere desire that students will leave class stimulated and with a special zip in their step.

Social commentaries on her classes include:
“I had no idea there were so many interesting sites so close to home!”
“I would love to hear more from Myra!”

“What a wonderful combination of geography and history!”

“Myra is such fun, I wish she were my neighbor!”

“Myra has amazing command of historical detail!”

“Her course was a delight, especially for those of us who are not native-born Texans!”

Myra believes learning something new makes her feel young again. She will share her zestful insights into fascinating stories that shaped the landscapes and the people of Texas on. She will also sign copies of her books “The Doctor’s Wife,” “Stein House” and “Texas Tales: Stories that Shaped a Landscape.”

The class host for “Germans Come to Texas” is DLI founding board member Darcie Mosier. Cost to attend the class is \$20 per person. To register, call 792-4044 Monday through Friday, or register online at www.clubed.net.

Also mark your calendar for lunch April 24 when Schreiner University President Charlie McCormick shares his fascinating insights into how folklore and folklife is shaping our lives today.

DLI Chairman Jeff Anderson is servant pastor of SERV Kerrville, a nonprofit collaborating with community partners to empower lifelong learning.