

## [Max Richter]

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Life History

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Interview with Max Richter, German Pioneer, Riesel, Texas.

“I was born in Saxony Germany in the year 1864 I was a cabinet maker. My father was a baker. Most of the people were farmers where we lived in the Saxony part of Germany. The highest wages paid for the farm hand was three dollars a week and his hiving living expenses had to [come?] out of this. To cure fine wood such as black walnut it took from two to three years therefore we had to be very saving with our wood. The prospect for getting ahead being very small and then every male had to serve a time out in the army I decided in the year 1881 at the age of 17 years to try my fortune in the new country many of my country-man were coming to America. So I embarked on the passenger boat, from

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Glasgow Scotland, the Ethiopia, and in 19 days I landed in New York. From there I went by boat to Galveston, Texas then moved to Austin county, Texas.

"I farmed and raised stock here, but as there were very few of my nationality at this place and we were anxious for our comrades from the old country we then moved to Gillespie county, Texas and lived near the town of Fredericksburg. This was a good sized place and had good schools and churches. My neighbors were [?] Mr Frederick, for whom the town was named Mr Fisher, for whom Fisher county was named I understand, and Mr Edwards for whom Edwards county was named. They were fine neighbors and friends. Other of my friends and [?] neighbors were [?] Mr Frieayer, Miller, and Karstat, Edmond and Heinson. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 " While I lived near Fredericksuurg Fredericksburg the farmers worked their land with oxen, there were no roads, but just trails and we had to cut the brush from them to get thro'. This was mostly a German settlement. But we kept up our way of getting together which we had in Germany. We had our song-fests and our meetings and schools entertainments. A Mr Kleberg of San Antonio was the first man to bring a piano to Texas from Germany. He lived on a ranch to the north of San Antonio. We celebrated the fourth of July with [?] the American people and trained our children to know about the American holidays, just as we did in Germany for the German celebrations, only we were not as free in Germany as in America. Truly we found this new country of America to be the "land of the free."

"After I had lived in Texas awhile I married Miss Minna Brase, in Brenham, Prairie , Washington County. She was born in 1869, and we had nine children, five boys and three girls. We moved to the Riesel settlement in 1922. While I lived near Frederiscksburg we carried our produce to Houston and San Antonio, Houston being close to the gulf we took our produce ther there to be shipped to the forign foreign countries. The neighbors went together and made us wagon trains to / make these trips in order to help each other if there were any trouble on the way. The country was still infested with robbers and many

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Mexicans who did not hesitate to rob these trains. We would be from six weeks to two months on a trip. We had no horses, just oxen then and they were slow to travel.

“Fredericksburg was a wonderful place for wild game, there were deer and wild turkey plentiful , as well as wild hogs. We used dogs to hunt 3 with as fire arms was scarce. Then when we wanted to kill a beef all we had to do was to go out on the range and shoot a maverick. They were the calves and cows which did not have a brand. It was not considered to be stealing at that time to do this, they were looked upon as the wild deer and hogs and turkeys.

“While we lived near Fredericksburg we also drove our oxen to the wagons over to Austin, Texas , a distance of around seventy five miles, the trip would take us ten days or two weeks, there and back, and if the creeks were up or the rains came down the mountains we had to camp and wait for the water to go down. Austin being situated on the Colorado river it was the largest of the rivers which we had to cross and we did this by ferry. Sometimes the produce was rafted down it and by boat when the river was high enough. “ Austin situated on the left bank of the river was one of the most beautiful towns where we had the good luck to trade. The country around the town is rolling and picturesque, with a sprinkling sprinkling of wood over hills. When the Capitol was built it was and still is one of the most show places of the state in this part of the country. It is an imposing building of [limestone?] Tex Granite and stands upon a hill . From and from the broad street on which it is situated , the avenue stretches to the river and is lined on each side with the main buildings of the business part. Those buildings are ranged from the log houses of the first settlers to the stone like the governors mansion.

“There was one little German church with a German turrett, and another of stone. There were a number of saloons. It was our great pleasure to visit the legislature when we were in the city. There was much oratory and argument displayed over the improvement of the State and the questions of the day. 4 “Fredericksburg had one long main street where business was conducted. When I first went there on my arrival from Germany, the ox-

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drawn wagons still were the chief modes of freighting. While the stagecoaches passed through on their way North and south, and east to Austin and west to Kerrville. One of the busiest places was the bakery of Conrad Wehmeyer who had operated it for over thirty years from the early fifties to 1886. He and Mr Hitzfeld , who was a cabinet maker , decided to go into business together and for awhile they operated their business together , but later Mr Hitzfeld operated a saloon and Mr Wehmeyer a merchandise and bakery store.

“He had his trials it was said in the days of reconstruction, as he was county [?] treasurer during the days of the Civil War and so when the times were so troublesome afterward a band called the “hanger bands” wore mask’s and hung those they thought to be traitors, and Mr Wehmeyer's name was found in a list of those to be hung. He had to hide out and his [?] family had to run / the business with Mr Wehmeyer hid in the attic and his friends stood guard at night. Fully armed they would wait at night until the outlaws had let the men they had warned alone in peace.

“Another story of Mr Wehemeyer was told of how the soldiers who were stationed at Fort Scott (which was about two miles from Fredericksburg,) came and would buy up all the bread he had on hand but would have him to bake several bakings a day for them. One of the army cooks brought him his first yeast cake. Until this time he had made his yeast 5 from hops he had secured from Probst's brewery. The bakery was the only place where confections of that day was sold and the soldiers made themselves at home and considered themselves privileged characters. It was not uncommon for Mr Wehmeyer to have to put them out of his place. It was told that after the Civil War how he had trouble with the Union soldiers in this way. They would go in and help themselves the drunken ones especially were a trial.

“Living on ain Main street Mr ehemeyers Wehemeyers children told of how they could recall the torch light procession which the people of Fredericksburg celebrated in 1871 when the news that the war between Germany and France was over and Germany had

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been ceded Alsace Lorraine. The whole town took part and was ablaze with light of torches. Singing, shouting, firing their guns, the people went up and down the streets carrying lighted torches, and stocks, the ends of which were dipped in tar before being lighted. While in far away Saxony where I was at this time we too had our celebration much the same way over the glad news of the end of this war. Now many years later we who are in America are hoping that there will be no more war between Germany and France. The bakery of Mr Wehmeyer brings back many happy memories and a description would take too much time. Many orders came from the near by towns in later years, Mason LLano and other places. He continued his baking until he was seventy years old and did it on his old Dutch oven. During his last years he only baked on special request and usually for Dr Albert Keidel who prescribed his biscuit biscuit and zieback zwieback to his patients. He was 82 years old when he died in 1898. 6 “While Mr Wehemeyer had his cabinet maker in Fredericksburg, we often traded with Mr Pual Paul Maureaux, of San Antonio, when we carried our produce there for trade and to sell. Being a cabinet maker myself I was interested in Mr Maureaux business. It is worthy of ones reading, as the story goes of how he came to San Antonio when it was a little village, in 1852 with some immigrants who drove from the port of Indianola, Texas, (which was later washed away by a tidal wave and storm) finally after two months of travel reached the San Antonio country.

“This older Maureaux built his first cabinet making shop on West Commerce street near Navarro street near where Nic Tengg's building stood. He learned of a section of land on which grew a fine grove of bla black walnut about 200 miles southeast southeast of San Antonio. ealizing Realizing the opportunity of securing this fine wood for his shop he set out to make the trip and buy the wood and have it freighted to San Antonio. He found it already under ownership but managed to buy the wood, and after sixteen weeks he finally reached San Antonio on his return with the precious cargo of wood.

“To show how in those days one was content to take time for his work to be done right he had to wait for two years for this walnut to cure. He had to do the work with old fashioned hand saws, but the work was done well, showing the fine workmanship of the early day

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cabinet maker's. His first piece of furniture was an old time high teaster top bed, and it was placed in his shop on West Commerce Street , after three years since he secured the walnut [?] grove of trees. 7 “The new hand made furniture created quite a stir in the city and even to the near by towns. It was far more refined in quality and lines than the old type of crude furniture then used. So the story goes of how the wealthier homes gave orders for these beds and he was kept busy for months and had to make ther another trip to his grove to fill the demand. It was said the first beds sold for \$150.00 each. Could these old beds be found today they would have a huge value.

“In those days there was no such thing as the manufactured coffin, and the people from Fredericksburg and near by towns sent to San Antonio for the coffins if they were able to have them made, and Mr Maureaux wa was the official undertaker of the city. Years later when the furniture business [?] went out of the hands of the cabinet maker, Mr Marueaux opened up a furniture store and when I came to this country he had his business at West Commerce and Pecos streets , now the site of the store owned and opperated operated by his son Pual Jr.

“It is a long road which ime time has travelled , from the oxen drawn wagons with [?] their clanking chains slowly winding their way along the Main street of Fredericksburg, then the big maroon [?] colored stage coaches as they galloped thro ' the old town, and later the buggies, backs and carriages stirring up the dust as they drove [?] through the streets [?] to the steady stream of automobiles, trucks and busses as they too speed by. rom From the ndians Indians galloping [?] down the street on [?] their [?] Texas Mustangs ponies as the dimly lighted windows lit by a tallow candle cast it shadow into the night. 8 “Now the service stations with their electric signs , bright for the busses and trucks, whose heavy tires bear down on the tarviated street , o to the same corners and Main thorough-fares of Main street to which the Indians came bringing their deer skins filled with bear fat and wild honey , people pple still come in their automobiles , trucks and wagons to park at the trade

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centers. But now they shop at the big glass front with its bright signs and other means of advertising to the world the wares and supplies for which they represent.

“On the one half acre of land which was allotted to Conrad Wehemeyer when the first division of lots to the German settlers was made in 1846, now various business houses extending from Stebling Brothers store to Saenger and Ochs have completely buried in the dust of time all trace of the house and yard of Conrad [?] Wehemeyer and the bakery as he operated it [?] during those early days and down until my own time , has been kept only in the memory of the older settlers and his own family.

“As this is true of the Wehemeyer place so it is of many others. Time has claimed for its own many of these old landmarks , and one returning after being away as I have been , would no doubt find it difficult to locate where once the hitching post for the [?] oxen in those days stood. [?] But the memory of the families as they visited back and forth and the evenings as they read aloud the latest “Die Spinn Stube”, and the news from far away Germany still linger in the mind of one who has wandered to other times and other places.