

The Old German Free School

High atop a hill in downtown Austin, with skyscrapers and a major interstate highway for neighbors, sits the headquarters for the German-Texan Heritage Society.

Climbing the stairs to this beautiful stone building with bountiful flowers and lush landscaping, one can see the new state historical marker, which explains that this is the Old German Free School, originally constructed in 1857 by immigrants.

The formation and early days of the school are documented in literature provided by the German-Texas Heritage Society:

On September 12, 1857, a public meeting was held in Austin to establish a German school for the city. It was reported that "the necessary funds were raised, and the school will be opened as soon as a house can be prepared and teachers employed." Wilhelm von Rosenberg, a civil engineer and draftsman in the General Land Office, immediately purchased a lot on Mulberry Street near Red River for \$35 and later donated it to the school. School lore says that he also donated \$1,000 in gold for the construction of the building. Von Rosenberg had been a member of the nobility in his native Prussia, but had immigrated to Texas in 1849 because of his outspoken democratic views. By October 21, 1857, a German and English teacher had been hired, and construction of a school building had begun, with plans to open on January 1, 1858. The rammed earth method of construction which was used was a "simple, yet a fast technique." The building had two large classrooms, a small basement and space in the yard for physical exercises.

The German Free School soon became one of the largest schools in Austin. Out of necessity, a two-story addition was built in 1872 by one of the school's first teachers, Julius Schütze, who also lived in the building.

With the new Reconstruction government in Texas in 1870 came the first serious attempt at free public education in Texas. While the



German Free School Association moved to make their school a public one for the 1871-72 school year, the conversion was not successful. The student population decreased, and the German school went back to being a private tuition learning institution.

During the first half of the 1900s, the property changed hands several times until it was bought and restored by artist and teacher, Dr. Kelly H. Stevens, who donated his historic home to the German-Texas Heritage Society in 1991.

ON THE INTERNET: For more information on the GTHS, check out the group's website at www.gths.net.

- Texas True -



**Authentic Texas
Home Furnishings & Gifts**

15050 Hwy. 155 South
Tyler, Texas 75703

www.texastrue.com • 903-561-4793