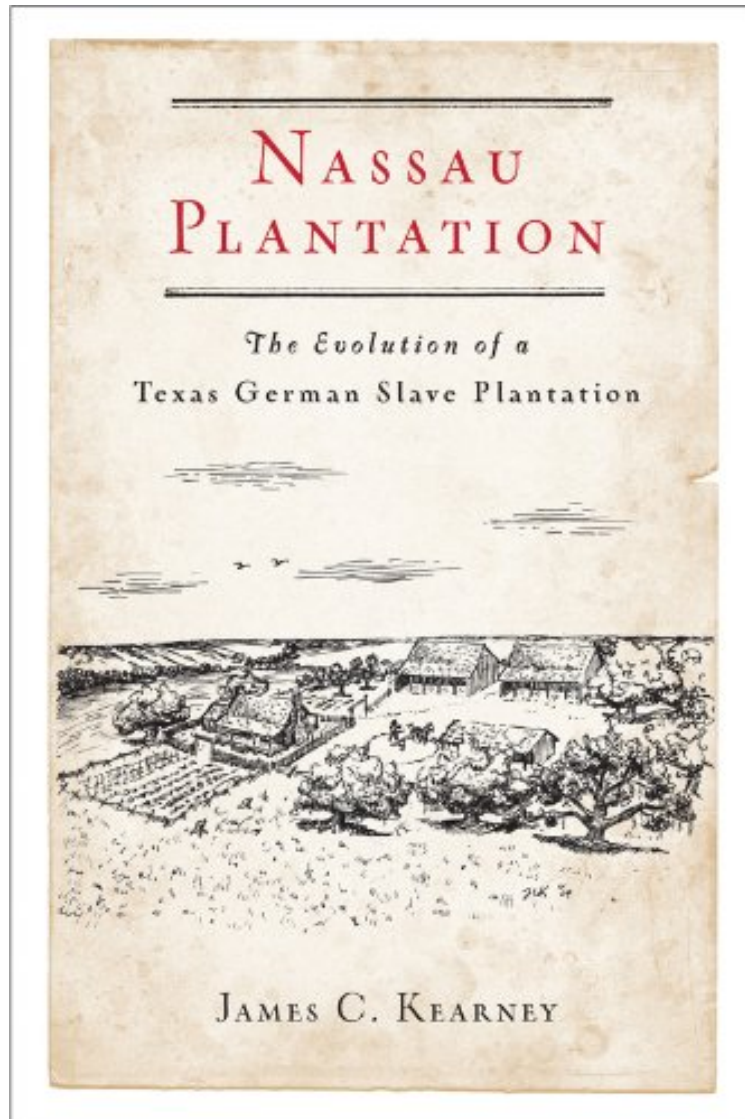


(Download free pdf) Nassau Plantation: The Evolution of a Texas German Slave Plantation

Nassau Plantation: The Evolution of a Texas German Slave Plantation

James C. Kearney

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James C. Kearney : Nassau Plantation: The Evolution of a Texas German Slave Plantation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nassau Plantation: The Evolution of a Texas German Slave Plantation:

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auntiebooLoved this history of early German immigration to Texas. Very well written and interesting. The author's drawings add a lot. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Definitive Work on the Subject By Matt Tippens James C. Kearney has written an original and insightful work on an often-overlooked aspect of the Society for the Protection of German Emigrants in Texas (Adelsverein), the Nassau Plantation - an attempt to set up a slave plantation by German noblemen in the 1840s near present-day Round Top. Drawing heavily on the reports, letters, and documents contained in the Solms-Braunfels Archives, Kearney traces the development of the plantation from the formation of the Adelsverein in Germany to its beginnings in Texas, the rise of the plantation as a valuable asset to the Society, and, finally, to the eventual demise of the plantation. The result is a wealth of new information on German-Texan history. Kearney's first chapter on the formation of the Adelsverein and its conception for the society to promote German emigration to Texas is outstanding. The society believed the best approach would be to invest in a slave plantation based on an almost feudalistic system where the plantation replaced the castle. In an effort to accomplish this, the Society sent Joseph Count of Boos-Waldeck to Texas in 1842. Despite the Count's misgivings about a large-scale immigration project, he preoccupied himself with the task of establishing Nassau Plantation, the centerpiece of his program and vision. Boos-Waldeck purchased seventeen slaves in New Orleans and Houston and began work on the plantation in March 1843, the preeminent building of which would be a "dog trot" called the Herrenhaus. The Count completely underestimated the difficulties of setting up a plantation on the Texas frontier and returned to Germany in December 1843, leaving a German Texan, Charles Fordtran, in temporary charge of the plantation. Three slaves soon ran away, two of which were never recovered. Prince Solms-Braunfels arrived to replace Boos-Waldeck in July 1844. Upon arriving at Nassau, the colorful and pompous prince was disgusted that the Adelsverein was now associated with slavery, remarking that slavery "is a true stain on human society, and something completely unworthy of our Society." Despite his condemnation, the plantation served Prince Solms well as a convenient and comfortable home base from which to conduct the business of the Society, preparing for the first boatloads of settlers who began arriving in the winter of 1844-1845. The Prince stayed at the plantation on three separate occasions before returning to Germany in June 1845. The same year, responding to criticism in Germany, the Adelsverein declared its new colonies "slave free zones." Ironically, the German settlements the society later established became hotbeds of anti-slavery and anti-secessionist sentiment. John O. Meusebach succeeded Solms-Braunfels as commissioner-general and he too spent time at Nassau during the first months of 1846 before attempting to move colonists onto the Fischer-Miller grant. At this point, the plantation was essentially leaderless and, in an improbable twist, a slave rose to become overseer of Nassau Plantation for a good part of the year 1847. By fall of the same year it had become painfully clear to the leadership in Germany that plans in Texas had not worked out, but had taken a disastrous turn when a shootout at the Herrenhaus left two dead. The shootout at the plantation set into motion the series of events that culminated in the dismemberment of the plantation. The revolution of 1848 in Germany created further turmoil. Into the leadership void at the plantation stepped Otto von Roeder, who by the Civil War became the largest German-Texan slaveholder in the state. As a gristmill owner, he organized shipments and supplied grain to desperate colonists in New Braunfels and Friedrichsburg in 1846, 1847, and part of 1848. By the summer of 1848, the Society's debt to Otto von Roeder had risen to \$6000. In 1850, von Roeder gained control of the Nassau Plantation in exchange for the assistance he had provided. He began parceling off the plantation and selling it to fresh immigrants from Germany transforming the region into one of the most exclusively Germanic areas of the state. One small criticism of the book is that the notes for chapter 13 are missing, although this is most like the fault of the University of North Texas Press and not the author's. Kearney deftly illuminates the importance of the Nassau Plantation. It had historical significance as the first and most important possession of the Adelsverein from beginning to end. The plantation served above all as a reservoir of value that could be parlayed into food and other desperately needed supplies. Although it failed miserably as an experiment in slavery, the plantation's supportive role gave newcomers from Germany a chance to get established in Texas. "Nassau Plantation" is a welcomed addition to German-Texan history and should remain the definitive work on the subject for decades to come.

In the 1840s an organization of German noblemen, the Mainzer Adelsverein, attempted to settle thousands of German emigrants on the Texas frontier. Nassau Plantation, located near modern-day Round Top, Texas, in northern Fayette County, was a significant part of this story. No one, however, has adequately documented the role of the slave plantation or given a convincing explanation of the Adelsverein from the German point of view. James C. Kearney has studied a wealth of original source material (much of it in German) to illuminate the history of the plantation and the larger goals and motivation of the Adelsverein, both in Texas and in Germany. Moreover, this new study highlights the problematic relationship of German emigrants to slavery. Few today realize that the society's original colonization plan included ownership and operation of slave plantations. Ironically, the German settlements the society later established became hotbeds of anti-slavery and anti-secessionist sentiment. Responding to criticism in Germany, the society declared its colonies to be "slave free zones" in 1845. This act thrust the society front and center into the complicated political landscape of Texas prior to annexation. James A. Mayberry, among others, suspected an English-German conspiracy to flood the state with anti-slavery immigrants and delivered a fiery speech in the legislature

denouncing the society. In the 1850s the plantation became a magnet for German immigration into Fayette and Austin Counties. In this connection, Kearney explores the role and influence of Otto von Roeder, a largely neglected but important Texas-German. Another chapter deals with the odyssey of the extended von Rosenberg family, who settled on the plantation in 1850 and helped to elevate the nearby town of Round Top into a regional center of culture and education. Many members of the family subsequently rose to positions of leadership and influence in Texas. Several notable personalities graced the plantation—Carl Prince of Solms-Braunfels, Johann Otto Freiherr von Meusebach, botanist F. Lindheimer, and the renowned naturalist Dr. Ferdinand Roemer, to name a few. Dramatic events also occurred at the plantation, including a deadly shootout, a successful escape by two slaves (documented in an unprecedented way), and litigation over ownership that wound its way to both the Texas Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court.

“In depth, thoroughness, and scope, Nassau Plantation has no equal in the literature of the Society. It will become the standard reference on this topic and will be of interest to scholars of German-Texan history as well as to the large element of German-Texans.”—Wolfram M. Von-Maszewski, editor of *Voyage to North America 1844-45: Prince Carl of Solms’s Texas Diary of People, Places, and Events*