

History of Valentin Hoch and “The StageCoach Inn”

Valentin Hoch was born October 5, 1808 in Oberschonau, Germany and married Margarethe Elizabeth Pabst on March 20, 1830. This marriage was blessed with six children: Friedrich, August Friedrich, Marie Magdalene, Amyethy, Friedrieck Theodor and Friedricke Wilhelmine.

It was in his home in Southern German that Valentin Hoch signed an immigration agreement promising him 320 acres of land, sight unseen, in Texas, three thousand miles away in San Antonio County. It was bought from land agents sent over to the “Old Country” to bring settlers to Texas.

Preparations for the long hazardous voyage began. Valentin and his wife carefully planned the household utensils they would need as well as the kind of clothing, staple foods and tools. Of course the tools were absolutely essential in the taming of the wilderness that Indians had recently vacated.

Just days before they left for their journey, their youngest child, Friedricke, became ill and died. In the fall of 1845 the family was assigned to the ship “The Everhard” and they began their journey. On their way to America another child, Friedrieck Theodor, died and was buried at sea. It was a long and tedious journey and the thoughts of the mother kept going back to the home she had left and babies they had buried.

Somehow she managed to live until the ship anchored at Indianola, Texas and they carried her ashore but there she died. It is said that she died of either scarlet fever or cholera, but other say she died of a broken heart. There was no place to buy a casket so Valentin made a wooden box in which to lay his wife, and she was buried at Indianola.

Valentin was among a group of new settlers who were to receive a land grant and escorted to his new land upon arrival in America, but circumstances led to the new immigrants being left stranded without transportation, little food, and no shelter on an island where disease and death were spreading rapidly. Many immigrants, such as Valentin grew discouraged with the immigration company and set out on their own, abandoning their land grants. These German immigrants left Indianola and followed routes inland along the Guadalupe River.

It is said that when the lonely German traveler came to the rolling rocky hills and the wooded hollows of the uninhabited spot along the Guadalupe River, he pulled his old gray horse to a halt and said to his son, August, ‘Here we shall build our home’.

He faced many challenges in this unfamiliar land and without his wife by his side he felt he could not go any farther. It is believed that he had a friend in DeWitt County and lived in a little one room house until he bought the land and selected the spot on which to build his home. Deeds recorded in Gonzales County shows the following: Alfred M. Walker to Valentin Hoch and Augustus Weig, February 17, 1848, 45 ½ acres. (this land lies west of the house site). Theophilus Eberhardt to Valentine Hoch, January 21, 1869, 1 acre (this land lies east of the house site).

Valentin was a very methodical man who disciplined himself and set high standards by which he lived. He spent several years quarrying the sandstone and bringing his materials to the spot where the house was to stand. There were no modern tools, no giant cranes to lift the heavy stones, no one

to quarry the stone from the Guadalupe River Valley except Valentin and a friend, Mr. Augustus Weig (both has been stone masons in the old country). Hoch had acquired an old gray horse before he left Indianola and he used this horse hitched to a slide to haul the stones from the Guadalupe River valley, more than a mile away, to the house site. As there was no lime, they had to make it by stacking a layer of wood and a layer of sandstone and burning it. The residue was then sifted to remove the waste and the ashes used for mortar. Willow and walnut sticks were used as lath for the inside walls. The house was completed in stages as shown by the stone lintels over the doors. The east door of the house shows "V.Hoch 1856," another over the west door reads "1857 V H" and still another over the fireplace shows that the kitchen was completed in 1866. It is said that a blackened spot over the fireplace marks the place where butcher knives were sharpened on the stone. He also built an oven in which to bake their bread. At the end of each summer, mustang grapes were gathered along the river and made into wine, which was stored in the cellar.

It took roughly ten years to complete the house. When completed, the structure consisted of a small, two-and-a half story house, the attic was designated for the boys, second story for the girls and the ground floor was designated for the adults. The Rock House, with plumb line accuracy, indicated Hoch's ability as a craftsman. He accomplished so much with so few tools to help, especially in the construction of the upper levels. The hand hewn shingles for the roof showed patience and skill as well.

Several years before the house was completed, the Hoch family found that life became more of a struggle each day without his wife and mother of his children. The father had overwhelming dues that kept him occupied and away from his family. A neighbor came to Valentin and suggested that he need a housekeeper and he had heard there was a lady at Indianola who had come to this country in 1853 and had recently lost her husband. He said she had two small children and that she might be interested in being his housekeeper. So Valentin set out for Indianola to see the lady. What arrangement they made concerning their respective families were not known, but he returned with the young blonde German lady and her two children, Ann and Julius. She was no longer Johanna Flemming, but Mrs. Valentin Hoch for they were married on August 18, 1854. They were evidently quite happy together and the Rock House because a shelter for their children. Four other children were born to this union. They were Mathelda, Emma, Theodore and Mollie, making a total of 10 children and family of 12.

Many of these pioneering people came to this wild land with a doubt in their hearts as to its ability to hold them. They built temporary houses wondering if they would remain. But few Germans, a crew which came over about the time Hoch did, never went back to their homeland; instead, they built houses to last, permanent homes that would house their families for many years. Pioneers made everything count. Nothing was too small to be considered unimportant. Hoch was said to be skilled in other trades. He was a nail smithy, a mechanic, a baker, a lay minister for the Lutheran Church and, by necessity, a farmer and a tender of livestock.

Nearly six years after his arrival in America, Valentin finally received the land grant that was initially promised to him in his immigration agreement when he came over from Germany but by then Hochheim had already become his home.

The village of Hochheim got its name from Valentin Hoch. The word Hochheim is a German word pronounced "Hoe' hime" meaning literally "Home of the Hochs." It was also sometimes called

Dutchtown. It became a thriving community when at least six more families arrived. They were Crawfords, Helms, Humphreys, Steens, Timms and Schwabs. The little settlement rapidly developed into a trade center. There was a blacksmith shop, two grocery stores, a drugstore and in 1870 a post office was established. There were numerous schools and churches in the area. The town also had a Masonic Lodge.

In 1857 the Rock House became a Stagecoach Stand on the old Austin-Indianola Road. The stagecoach was regarded as an important symbol in the development of Texas. It served as a primary role by providing settlers with a means of transportation, a way to haul goods to other areas and for the delivery of mail. The stagecoach team contained four horses and contracts were awarded to Mr. Hoch by the government. The house was referred to as "The Stagecoach Inn" and was a welcome stop for weary travelers. There the travelers could rest and enjoy a hearty meal, while the coachmen changed the four-horse team.

The community continued to grow and by 1885 it had a population of 200. There were ten businesses, including a steam gristmill. They also shipped wool, cotton and hides. The nearby towns of Cuero and Yoakum provided them with banks and railroads. Soon there was a daily stage stop which connected Hochheim to Gonzales and Cuero.

The Stagecoach Inn, or as some called it, "The Old Rock House," is located on U.S. Highway 183 just south of Hochheim midway between Gonzales and Cuero. The house remained in the Hoch family until 1899 when August Hoch and his heirs sold it to Valentine Bennet. Mrs. Lucille Bennet Boothe inherited it from her father and she and her son Ross, Jr. did a remarkable job of restoration in 1954. A storm in 1934 had done considerable damage and it was in a terrible state of disrepair before Mrs. Boothe obtained the property. In 1964 the historic landmark received recognition from the San Antonio Conservation Society and from The Texas Historical Survey Committee in recognition of the authenticity of its restoration. It was also entered in The National Register of Historic Places in 1974. Markers may be seen on the wall to the right hand side of the front door. There are also historic markers on U.S. Highway 183.

In 2001, the property was donated to the Hochheim Historical Foundation. The Hochheim Historical Foundation is currently working on further restoration to ensure that the home remains in good condition for many years to come. The descendants of Mr. Hoch will be forever grateful to the Foundation for caring enough to preserve this bit of Texas history.

Submitted by: Mildred Allen Duhon, Great Granddaughter of Valentin Hoch