

# Lubbock

## IN ANY LANGUAGE

BY MEREDITH McCLAIN

**Y**ou can visit Paris, Moscow, Rome, and New London without ever leaving the Lone Star State. But how many Texas towns can boast of having a namesake across the Atlantic?

In the summer of 1983, while touring overseas, a German folk dance troupe from Texas Tech University learned of a little place outside Cologne called Lubbock Town, a rural Old West village near the Rhine River. Delighted, the group visited Lubbock Town and discovered it had been named some 10 years earlier for the city on Texas' South Plains. So began the revival of an almost-forgotten German-Texan connection and the awakening of a lively cultural exchange.

Although Lubbock Town was established in the 1970s, the story of its origin begins much earlier, with the writings of the prolific 19th-Century German novelist Karl May. The author (whose name is

pronounced MY) set many of his books on the Llano Estacado, the broad expanse stretching from northwestern Texas into eastern New Mexico. They featured two main characters, a German frontiersman named Old Shatterhand and his blood brother, Winnetou, a noble young Mescalero Apache chief. Vivid descriptions of the exotic terrain accompanied plots in which the forces of good always triumphed.

Best-sellers in the 1880s and '90s, the books made May a millionaire and the best-known German author by the time of his death in 1912. Scholars think the popularity of his novels, more than anything else, explains the longstanding German fascination with the American West and the allure of the Llano Estacado among Germans both past and present.

Old West enthusiasts in Germany founded the Old Munich Cowboy Club, the first of that country's Western clubs, one year after May's death. A few other clubs soon followed, but

the pattern became a trend after World War II, when many West Germans, intrigued by America, were looking for week-end escapes. Today, hundreds of clubs exist, with a total membership of perhaps 50,000.

Of those hundreds of clubs, few have been as fortunate as the "Western-Indianer-Freunde" ("Western and Indian Friends") Club of Cologne, whose members built the village discovered by those Texas Tech dancers. After incorporating in 1957 with the goal of learning more about the American West, the club's original 38 members began traveling on weekends to a rural site seven hours outside of town. In 1972, they moved closer to Cologne and, over time, built the elaborate village that stands today. A large saloon, blacksmith shop, sheriff's office, church, bank, printing shop, and various bungalows give the theme-town the look of a Western movie set.

With stables for horses available at an adjacent farm and green fields all around, the resort town provides an ideal setting for practicing Western skills and escaping Cologne's big-city stresses. Club members usually spend their week-ends relaxing in their "hobby outfits" and refining their rid-

ing, roping, leather-tooling, and beadworking expertise. An annual spring Powwow, hosted by a different group each year, brings together club representatives from across Germany for a long weekend. Wearing authentic Western or Indian dress, the enthusiasts visit around campfires and in tipis, eat chili and drink beer (available at the saloon), ride and rope, and barter for handmade items like bows and arrows and beaded moccasins. Clubs from Belgium, Holland, and France sometimes participate, too.

So how did Lubbock Town get its name? Years ago, club member Horst Klausner visited Lubbock and liked what he saw. No doubt, the city's location on the fabled Llano Estacado influenced him as well. Back home, Horst suggested the club name their village Lubbock Town. Today, a wooden plank bearing the name and mounted between wagon wheels marks the village entrance.

While in Lubbock, Horst met then-mayor Jim Granberry. The mayor sent official greetings to the Cologne club and invited the group to visit the city for which their village was named. In September 1973, several club members flew to



Members of the Western and Indian Friends Club, a cowboy club in Cologne, Germany, built a resort village in the 1970s and named it Lubbock Town for the city on Texas' South Plains. This photo, which dates from the village's founding days, shows members in their "hobby outfits." Current members still come here on weekends to practice their Western skills.

Lubbock, where they received cowboy hats and a City of Lubbock flag, attended a Texas Tech football game, and toured Palo Duro Canyon in a chauffeur-driven van. Before they returned home, Lubbock's new mayor, Morris Turner, proclaimed them honorary city citizens.

Despite the warm welcome, over the next 10 years, Lubbock residents and members of the Cologne club lost contact with each other. So imagine the surprise of the Texas Tech folk dancers when they came

across the town in 1983 and found Lubbock-area memorabilia—Red Raider bumper stickers, barbed wire from South Plains ranches, the Lubbock flag—decorating the saloon. Club members had never forgotten their Texas welcome, which by then had taken on legendary proportions.

In September 1993, the Southwest Center for German Studies at TTU hosted another visit for members of the Cologne club, this one timed to coincide with the annual

National Cowboy Symposium & Celebration (see "Cowboy Culture," August 1994). The 13 Germans who came loved it so much that a contingent returns for the event each year. The friendly relationship between Lubbock and Lubbock Town has also sparked reciprocal visits, including professional tours of Germany by Lubbock musicians such as classical guitarist Susan Grisanti, the Western Swing trio Blue Prairie, and mezzo-soprano Sue Arnold.

Club members have continued to improve their Old West village and now offer an open-house weekend in August that attracts thousands. Participants soak up the atmosphere, listen to live country-western music, and enjoy grilled steaks. "Rodeo parties" for children give aspiring cowboys and cowgirls the chance to ride horses and try out lasso-throwing.

On any given weekend, you can usually find at least a dozen devoted members celebrating at Lubbock Town—even in freezing winter weather. The beer kegs may be frozen, but the bourbon, tequila, and country-western music flow into the wee hours.

To keep alive this intercultural exchange, 25 members of Cologne's cowboy club will arrive in Texas this September to attend the Cowboy Symposium as guests and to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their honorary citizenship. And for the first time, the Germans will show off their riding skills in the Cowboy Symposium rodeo. Once again, Texas hospitality will embrace a group of German friends who think there's just no place like Lubbock.

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