

Leo's Lance

The 5 Cultures of Gaines County Part II

(Editor's Note: This is the second part of a two-part installment which takes a look at the five major cultures which helped form our Gaines County Heritage).

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We are writing about the five major cultures which have impacted and formed the culture of Seminole. Having discussed the Comanche Indian culture and the early pioneers, the farmers and ranchers of mostly white, European descent who followed the ouster of the Comanche, we now come to the next major influence:

Spanish Americans

These different cultural influences don't necessarily follow in chronological order. Dating back to the Comanche days, a number of horse hunters and meat hunters and traders from Mexico made their way onto the Llano Estacado. They traded with the Comanche and lent their Spanish names to watering holes, streams and draws on the prairie. Llano Estacado (meaning Staked Plains), and Laguna Sabinas (Cedar Lake) are examples. Spanish became a kind of universal language among the plains Indians. A language most tribes understood at least a little of.

Texas at one time belonged to Spain and then to Mexico before gaining their independence. There was, during this time, a large population of Latinos in Texas, especially south Texas.

Different designations are given to the people of Latin American descent who live in North America, such as Latinos, Hispanic, and Mexicans. Wikipedia describes Latin American culture as, "the formal or informal expression of the people of Latin America and includes both high culture (Literature, high art) and popular culture (music, folk art and dance) as well as religion and other customary practices.

"Definitions of Latin America vary. From a cultural perspective, Latin America generally includes those parts of the Americas where Spanish, French or Portuguese prevail: Mexico, most of Central America, and South America."

Gaines County History and Demography online says, "Soon behind the early pioneer were Hispanic settlers who came to work on the farms and ranches." These are the people who had the most influence on the culture of Seminole.

Many of these brought their families with them and as they contributed to the economy, they began to establish homes and businesses and eating places in the communities.

Tex-Mex cuisine became a favorite food of the area. The Latino influence brought such favorite foods as corn - based tortillas, tamales, pupusas, and Chili Rillenos, various salsas and other condiments such as guacamole, pico de gallo, and mole. And of course, an American favorite dessert, sopapillas (sopapillas).

As the Latinos were taking their places in our society they brought with them a second language, Spanish, which has become a part of our children's education in school. Hispanic citizens have had a powerful influence on our culture. Even to the way we build our homes in some cases.

The African Americans

In 1867 the 9th U.S. Cavalry, an all black unit, guarded the western frontier against native Americans. Later they were joined by the 24th and 25th U.S. Infantry in sweeping the last of the Comanche from the high plains. These, also, were black soldiers.

Blacks contributed to the exploration, colonization and growth of Texas.

There has been an African American section of our town from the earliest times. To our shame, they were limited to a small area of the town in which to live, and were not allowed to attend school with the rest of the populace, they had their own "Black" school. To their credit they pitched in and became a

part of the community in spite of these setbacks. They served as nurses, caregivers to the elderly and laborers in many different fields. Our society finally opened up giving the blacks in our midst opportunity to function fully as citizens.

Many have gone to college including some who attended the, so-called, Black, school in Seminole. They have filled needful jobs for the city and county and the local hospital. More than one of our black citizens has filled the pulpits of our town, and others became teachers in our schools.

Blacks in America have passed down much in the way of art, music, performing arts and sports. During the wars many blacks joined the military and

fought valiantly for our country. In many ways they have contributed to the culture of Gaines County.

German Settlers

The latest influence, starting in the mid 1970's, has been the influx of German Settlers, primarily of the Mennonite faith, who have come to Gaines County from Mexico and Canada.

As a whole, these folks have proven to be industrious and hard working. They worked as domestic engineers, on the farms and ranches and in the oil field, and some began buying their own farms and businesses. They have established several needed businesses among us

including restaurants and construction works and lumber and hardware. They have built a number of churches and parochial schools.

Many have blended into the culture taking jobs in public positions, and have attended and even taught in public schools.

These German folks brought a third language into our culture, German. Not many of us have learned to speak German yet, but this will probably come with time.

There are people from other cultures besides these five who have also come in among us and contributed to our way of life.

We are thankful these different cultural influences have blended together to form the

community we call Seminole. There are differences in each of these influences, but by each accepting the other the differences enhance the whole and make our town one of the finest growing and thriving towns in the country. Many of our local residents say, "I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

It has been said, "What makes America great is the blending of the cultures of many different nationalities into 'One nation under God!'" Isn't this what makes Seminole great?

A Latin phrase found on the Great Seal of the United States of America and on every coin minted of our money, reads: "E Pluribus Unum." It means, "From the many, one." Suggesting our nation was formed

out of many nations and cultures, to become one nation.

This idea echoes the words of the Bible in Acts 17:26 where it says, "And He (God) has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,..." The culture of Seminole and Gaines County is a blending of the five major influences, and many lesser cultures into one.

If anyone would like more information on the subject of these two articles about the culture of Seminole you may visit the Gaines County Museum, Seminole chapter. At the museum you can see visual evidences of the cultural impact of the various groups, and find many details we weren't able to include in our articles.



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