

Dessau's Three German Blockhouses



Richard Denney

Vice-Chair
Travis County Historical Commission

<https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com> rdenney@utexas.edu

Martin Wieland, Andreus "Andrew" Krüger and Gottlieb Schwarzkopf immigrated to America from Germany ca. 1854. Landing in Galveston they made their way to Travis County where they settled at a point about twelve miles north of Austin. Later they named this community Dessau in memory of their homeland. The three assisted one another in building three separate nearly identical blockhouses, small fortifications, usually with loopholes from which to fire a gun, and in which persons could take refuge against attacks. This is the story of those three blockhouses.

This article is based in part on the marker application for the Fortress Home. Information was provided by descendants and friends of the Wieland family. Among these being Mr. and Mrs. Martin Wieland, Jr., Mr. Henry Wieland, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Schoen, Mr. and Mrs. Bruno Schoen, Mr. Albert Neans, Mr. and Mrs. Clements Wieland, Mrs. Alma Fleischer, Mrs. Selma Nauert, Miss Etta B. Smith, Miss Ella Smith, and Mrs. Ruth Barran.

Fortress Home

Built in early 1850's by Martin Wieland, from Dessau, Germany. Used as a neighborhood fort. Enlarged 1873, 1912. Recorded Texas Historic Landmark - 1964

Note: this is an on-going project; article will be updated as needed

Marker Application Text

[Note: references to "Old House Farm" are today Fort Dessau Amenity Center, 1429 Maier Dr, Austin, TX 78753]

Martin Wieland was born in Dessau, Germany, May 6, 1825. In 1854, at the age of

twenty nine he emigrated to America, accompanied by Mr. Andrew Krueger and Gottlieb Schwarzkopf. They landed in Galveston and came directly to Travis County, where they settled at a point about twelve miles north of Austin. Later they named this community Dessau in memory of their homeland.

I remember that Mr. Martin Wieland, Jr. told me his father came to this country to get away from a harsh step-father. During the Civil War he wrote his Mother that he was hauling cotton to Mexico in two ox- wagons. His Step-father answered with the accusation that he was sure Martin didn't have one yoke of oxen, much less two. From that time on Martin did not communicate with his German family.

These three new comers lived in improvised quarters until each had built his one room. Mr. Krueger built his about a mile north of the Herman Krueger farm on the west side of Cameron Road. The Schwarzkopf room is now a part of the R. L. Smith home, and the Wieland room is the pride and joy of Old House Farm. Martin Wieland lived in a tent while his room was under construction. The three friends helped one another. While the mortar was drying between the rocks in Martin's walls, he'd lend the other two a hand. It seems they had other help occasionally, too.

The three rooms were almost identical. Like the other two, Martin built his of nearby field-stone plastered over. The room was 18 by 20 feet; the walls, about 18 inches thick. There were only one door with old rim lock and one window, both on the south side. Fewer openings meant to Mr. Wieland a stronger wall and greater protection. A capacious fireplace with stone hearth cooked his food and kept him warm. Slightly over 11 feet above the floor ten large cedar beams, cut from trees on Bull Creek, reached from wall to wall with no attic floor above. It is said that Martin kept his hay on these beams. In the west wall on both sides of the chimney are port holes, so placed that one could straddle a beam and handle a gun.

The local Indians camped on Walnut Creek were friendly, but the outlaws were troublesome. According to Mr. Albert Neans, as many as five families spent the night in the Wieland room when the Indians from Indian Territory went to the Coast for the winter and back North in the spring. And the outlaws and hostile Indians shot back at this fortress-room. The west outside wall is marked with nearly a hundred bullet holes, which have been plastered over. The plaster is now a different color from the original plaster of the wall.

Martin Wieland apparently started the construction of this first room shortly after his arrival in 1854 or perhaps early in 1855. By 1873 Martin must have prospered for he added two large rooms on the East, a kitchen on the North, a cellar under the North-east room and a bedroom and floored attic upstairs. The attic, over the original room, was floored with 2 x 12 boards resting on the cedar beams.

After his marriage Mrs. Wieland complained of the dust drifting down between the attic floor boards to the room beneath. It was at this time that he covered those beautiful beams with a beaded Victorian ceiling board, which he painted white. One rainy afternoon while the present owners were working in the original room, Mr. Martin Wieland, Jr. told them that his mother said there were large cedar beams behind that ceiling board. A step ladder materialized quickly, a piece of ceiling board was stripped off, and there in all its pristine glory plus a coat of whitewash was a beam.

All of this addition was built of cut-stone hauled by oxen from either Cedar Park or Jollyville. A limestone corner block on the south wall attests to the builder and date

as follows: Martin Wieland 1873 Joseph Rohrmiller, Builder

All nails used in these early rooms and in the out houses were the old cut square nails. Mr. Rohrmiller was not only a builder but an artist. Witness the cozy, low-ceilinged kitchen with rock hearth all across the west side, the chair rails in all the rooms, the alter-like simplicity of the plastered mantel in the old room, the beautiful wooden mantel in the southeast bed room, the gallery, with its hand-hewn cedar !Posts and cedar flooring which ran all the way across the south side , and the excellent proportions of the whole exterior, which caused Wayman Adams, the artist, to say when he first glimpsed the east side, "How beautiful! The house grows out of the hill."

Martin had a comfortable, beautiful home to offer his bride when on March 28, 1877 he married Mrs. Lou Blumentritt, nee Caroline Bastian, a widow with two children, Fritz and Johanna.

In 1911 Martin again enlarged the house by adding a wooden room at the southwest corner of the original room and swinging the porch around to follow the east side of the new room. Mr. Rohrmiller must either have been dead or not consulted by the carpenter for this addition is not in keeping with the artistry displayed in the rest of the house. The fancily turned Victorian posts of that part of the gallery have been replaced with plain cedar. Only one of the hand-hewn posts of the 1873 gallery is left.

Just north of the house the original barn, presumably of logs with rock floor, burned in 1894. Minnie Wieland (Nehring), then a young lady, frantically pumped water from the underground rain water cistern at the corner of the kitchen until the fire singed her eye brows and hair, but this water poured on the roof helped to save the house.

Martin Wieland bought land as he could accumulate the money. His first purchase was eleven acres, on which the house now stands. During the day he cut hay. At night he took it by ox cart to sell to the Army, quartered in Austin where the State Hospital is now. His oxen knew the way so he got his night's sleep on top of the hay. Home again, he cut more hay and bought more land, all of which he fenced with cedar rails brought from the hills.


On one of these trips home with rails Martin fell under the wagon, one wheel of which ran over him, breaking several ribs and his hip. He recovered without benefit of doctors or traction, but he limped the rest of his days. As his money accumulated, Martin also built sheds, barns, etc. In addition to the barn that burned, one just west of the house, too far gone for restoration, was torn down by the present owners. Surviving are the old mule barn, small shed and room, privy, blacksmith shop, smoke house, and large barn east of the house, all showing the pleasing lines of Martin's good taste. West of the blacksmith shop was a large pig pen enclosed with a cedar stockade fence, Mr. Martin Wieland, Jr. came by one day, just as a part of that fence was being torn down to include the area in the house yard. "You are not taking down that fence," he begged. "Why there have been pigs in that pen for over ninety years." Most of the fence is still there but no pigs. About 50 years ago an iron cannon ball was found on little Harris Creek, which runs through the farm. Around 1939 Warren Wieland, son of Martin Jr. and Richard Carlson found a mastodon tooth on the south side of this same creek. The place is covered with small fossils.


No history of this farm is complete without the tragic story of neighbor Schwarzkopf, who plied his trowel with such high hopes both at his room and Martin's. He had used blasting powder gotten from the Army to blast out rocks in his construction work. In some way the powder got wet and, when it became dry, it exploded, killing Mr. Schwarzkopf. He had no relatives in this country. So when Mr. Embe Warren Smith bought the place, he had to send the papers to Germany for signatures of his heirs. Mr. Schwarzkopf was buried in the field west of the Smith house.

Wieland House Photos



Wieland home with marker visible. Part of home built around the blockhouse.

						
<p>Wieland house with exposed west wall of the blockhouse showing gun ports & patched bullet holes. Notice chimney is internal to the house.</p>	<table><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>					

 <p>VIEW OF THE NORTH AND WEST ELEVATIONS OF THE SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE.</p> <p>LOOKING NORTH ACROSS THE SUBJECT PROPERTY FROM THE EAST SIDE OF THE BARN. THE TREE LINE IN THE DISTANCE IS WHERE HARRIS BRANCH CROSSES THE SUBJECT PROPERTY.</p>	<p>Page 17 marker application</p>
--	-----------------------------------



LOOKING SOUTH ACROSS THE SUBJECT PROPERTY FROM THE YARD AREA OF
THE SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE.



VIEW OF THE SOUTH AND EAST ELEVATIONS OF THE SINGLE FAMILY
RESIDENCE

Page 19 marker application



VIEW OF THE YARD AREA SURROUNDING THE SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE
AND THE BARN LOCATED ON THE SUBJECT PROPERTY.



CLOSEUP VIEW OF THE BARN LOCATED NEXT TO THE SINGLE FAMILY
RESIDENCE.

Page 23 marker application



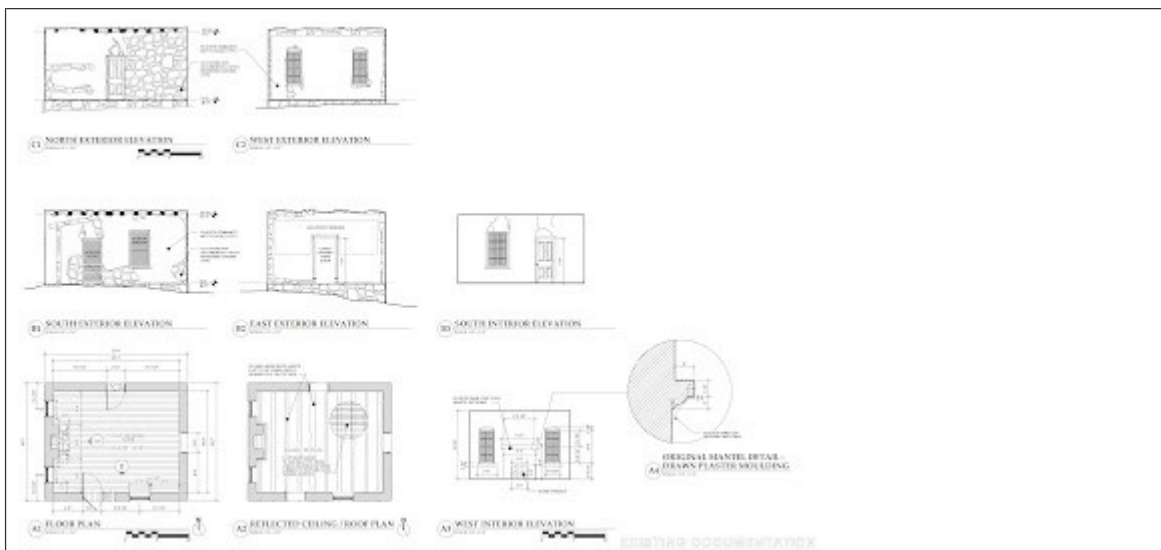
Cedar beams of the original Wieland blockhouse, now part of the Fort Dessau Amenity Center

Gottlieb Schwarzkopf Blockhouse

The Schwarzkopf blockhouse was later incorporated into the R. L. Smith home. In 2020, after the property was sold, the exterior house was removed leaving the original blockhouse, minus a roof. This blockhouse was then moved to Pioneer Farms to be rebuilt. The architectural drawings (courtesy Hutson Gallagher, Inc.) and photos made before the structure was moved provide a look at the general size and layout of what the original three blockhouses would have looked like (sans roof). The drawings and photos do reflect some modifications made when the blockhouse was incorporated into the Smith house.

The marker application notes that the three "rooms" (one room blockhouses) were almost identical. Indeed both the Wieland and Schwarzkopf houses are aligned alike, chimney's on west wall. Window casements on west wall appear identical on both. Gun ports on the Wieland house are on this west wall but are in that part of the structure above the cedar beams missing from the Schwarzkopf blockhouse as shown here. Were they present before the roof was removed? One would assume so. Marker application also states the massive cedar beams in the ceiling were from Bull Creek; probably a safe assumption the beams of the Schwarzkopf blockhouse are also.

[Click photos to enlarge.](#)



Architectural drawings of the Schwarzkopf blockhouse by Hutson Gallagher, Inc. Click to enlarge.



West wall. Chimney was centered between windows, and as with the Wieland house, chimney was internal to the house.

One question that comes up: the marker application says the Wieland house had one door and one window on the south side. If so, the windows on the west wall of the Wieland house were added later. But if added later as part of on-going expansion, it's odd that the *same modification* (matching windows) was made to the Schwarzkopf house. Since all three houses were said to be "identical" to start with, could this feature perhaps have actually been part of the original blockhouses?



West - South walls



South wall.

Marker application says of Wieland house "There were only one door with old rim lock and one window, both on the south side". Given the Schwarzkopf house has same cardinal orientation and said to be "identical", this south wall may be have the original door and window.



South - East walls. Door added as part of Smith house.



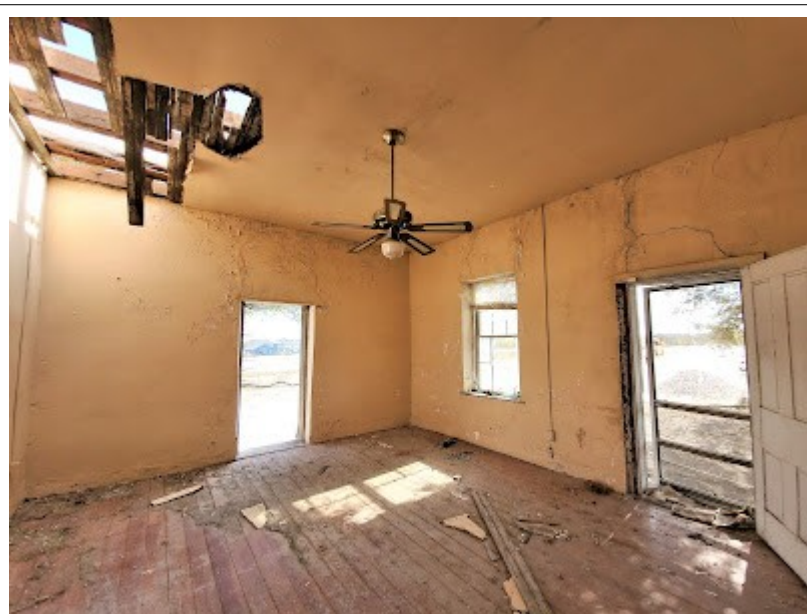
East - North walls



North wall. Door added as part of Smith house.



North - West walls. Remnants of chimney bricks foreground.



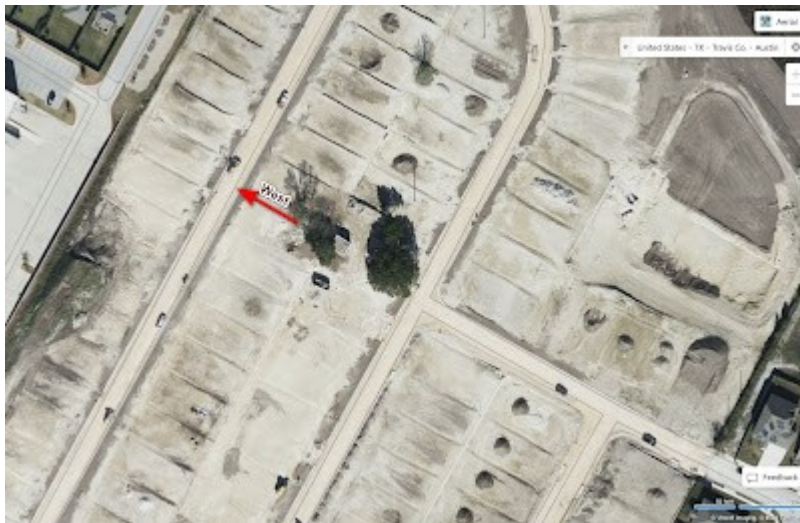
Interior from fireplace looking to East - South walls



Interior looking to fireplace on West wall. Notice internal chimney, not attached to exterior.



Massive cedar beams of roof. As with the Wieland blockhouse, from mill on Bull Creek?



Bing aerial view with roof beams exposed. Shows orientation of blockhouse.



1940 aerial of the farmsteads that grew from the original Schwarzkopf and Wieland blockhouses

Andrew Kruger Blockhouse

Andreas "Andrew" Krüger built the southernmost blockhouse. His descendants are alive and well in Travis County as witnessed by on-going family reunions. The original name spelling appears to have been Krüger with a German umlaut. In English the closest approximation to that sound is the spelling Krueger. But as on his tombstone it is also spelled Kruger, i.e. like the German but without the umlaut. As that's on his tombstone I'll go with that spelling.

Descendants told me (paraphrasing) "That log house at the Pioneer Farms is that of Frederick [AKA Friedrich] Kruger Sr., born November 13, 1832 in Dessau-Roßlau Germany and died February 27, 1904 in Hutto, Williamson Co., Texas. He was the brother of Andrew Kruger whose block house has yet to be found. Frederick actually came to Texas about five years after his brother."

As the descendant noted, the third blockhouse has not been located. A person associated with property development around the Schwarzkopf blockhouse stated he heard the Kruger blockhouse was still standing and provided general directions; that was November of 2020. In January 2022 members of the Travis County Historical Commission and Pioneer Farms with escort from a Travis County Sheriff made a field trip to a location west of Dessau Rd, just south of Scottsdale Lane. Google aerial photos from March 2021 showed a number of old buildings. TCAD dated some 1937; TCAD is not a reliable source for dating but that meant they were older. One building was listed as a barn giving hope this was an old farmstead. In particular this location is about only about .25 miles south of where the Fred Kruger house was originally located prior to its move to Pioneer Farms. Unfortunately sometime between 2021 and 2022 someone had come in with a bulldozer and completely cleared the property. Nothing remained. If the blockhouse was there, it is now gone.



Area west of Dessau Road we had hoped to find the blockhouse.



Krueger family reunions are still being held. Photo is of Andrew and wife Auguste Thiele Kruger.



Andrew Kruger and wife Auguste Thiele Kruger, Lutheran Cemetery in Pflugerville



Frederick Kruger cabin at Pioneer Farms. [Click to enlarge.](#)



Frederick Kruger cabin at Pioneer Farms



Frederick Kruger cabin at Pioneer Farms

Notes, References

Fortress Home historical marker <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=161507>

Marker application for Fortress Home, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth491598/m1/1/?q=marker%20application%20ofortress>

The Wieland blockhouse is now part of the Fort Dessau Amenity Center, 1429 Maier Dr, Austin, TX 78753

The Schwarzkopf blockhouse has been moved to Pioneer Farms. It was originally located about .25 miles northwest of the Wieland blockhouse on what is now the

FORT DESSAU WEST subdivision.

Andrew Kruger on Find A Grave <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/79585416/andreas-kruger>