

OSCAR J. FOX AND HIS HERITAGE

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DRIVING south out of Marble Falls, Texas, on U. S. Highway 281, one climbs a high hill to a roadside park which provides a panoramic view of the town, the Colorado River and its valley, cedar-clad hills, Granite Mountain, and blue Packsaddle Mountain in the distance. At this park between the two attractive cabanas is a red granite memorial marker which is inscribed with a bar of music and these words:

"The Hills of Home"
Memorial to Oscar J. Fox
Composer of this song
1879-1961
This is the view which gave
inspiration for this beautiful song.

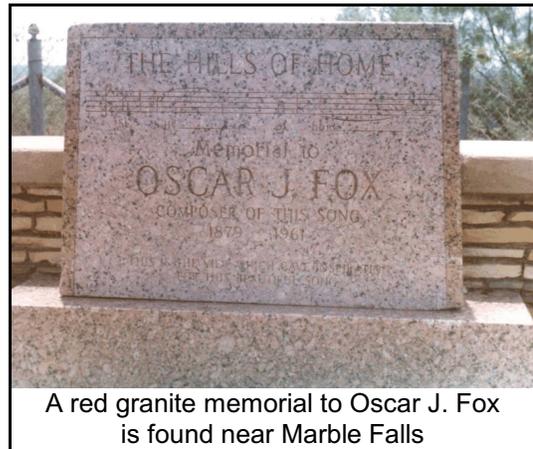
There is a story behind this marker – a story of Oscar J. Fox and his freedom-loving, music-loving Swiss and German ancestors. Here it must be noted that the family name, Fox, is the English translation of the original name Fuchs. Several members of the Fuchs family adopted this name in their Americanization process.

The Reverend Adolph Fuchs of Mecklenburg, Germany, and his family left a life of ease and a host of loving friends and parishioners to sail to Texas in the fall of 1845 to face there the hardships of frontier life. Political freedom and vocational opportunity for himself and for his children were the stars which led the Lutheran pastor to Texas. His daughter Ottilie in her book, *Was Grossmutter Erzählt* (What Grandmother Tells), 1915, says that in Germany he would have liked using his musical and literary talents gainfully, but the opportunity to do so was not there.

They planned to claim in Texas a land grant of many hundred acres on the Colorado River given to them by a close friend, Lueders, whose brother had died serving in the Texas Revolution. The grant had been received by Lueders from Sam Houston, President of the Republic of Texas, as pay for his brother's military service.

When the small children of the pastor were told that the trip to America was assured, they ran outside to a public place and shouted as loud as they could, "We are going to America!"

The Fuchs family were among the immigrants brought to Texas by Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels. Their boat landed at Galveston. There the Reverend Fuchs severed his ties with the immigration society and took his family on a small steamer on Buffalo Bayou to Houston. He



A red granite memorial to Oscar J. Fox is found near Marble Falls

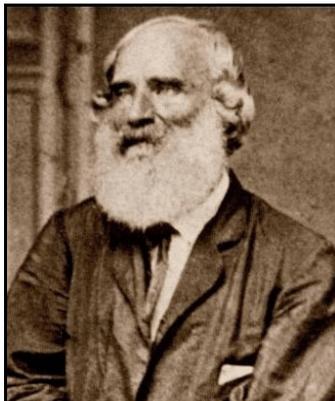
purchased a wagon and five yoke of oxen and headed toward Cat Springs in Austin County.

That summer they bought a farm in Cat Springs and built a two-room cabin. Often when dusk had fallen, the family, consisting of the parents, daughters Ulrika, Lulu, Ino, and Otilie, and sons Conrad, Wilhelm, Hermann, and blue-eyed Bennie, gathered on the front porch for worship and song. Some of the songs were composed by the father himself. In fact, the whole family was talented musically and had wonderful singing voices. This custom of family singing when all assembled on Sundays and holidays continued through the years. The daughter-in-law of Fuchs, Louise Romberg Fuchs reports in her book, *Erinnerungen (Reminiscences)*, 1927, that once Father Fuchs exclaimed with enthusiasm, "We could travel and give concerts!"

As Fuchs realized that his farming alone would not provide adequately for his family, he decided to utilize his musical knowledge in teaching. First he taught music at the homes of rich plantation owners on the Brazos; later, at Baylor Female College in Independence, Texas.

After eight years in Cat Springs, the land grant in Burnet County near Marble Falls was cleared of all legal technicalities. The hills called to the Reverend Fuchs, and he gave up his teaching position at Independence. At the end of their journey, the family found a beautiful landscape – a wild, green river valley covered with tall grass and wild flowers, the Colorado River, and purple-blue mountains in the distance. They made their home on what is now the Armin Matern Ranch. In those early days that country came to be known as Tiger Mill.

Of this time in Fuchs's life, Lota Spell in her book, *Music in Texas*, says:



The Reverend Adolph Fuchs was the grandfather of Oscar J. Fox

Though he busied himself with farming and ranching problems, music never lost its interest. Until his death in 1885 he continued to compose; a manuscript volume preserved by the family is evidence of his creative bent. In this are songs of which he wrote both the words and the music, and musical settings of poems by Fallersleben, Goethe, Uhland, and Wieland.

About 1850 another boat sailed from Europe to the New World. Getuli Kellersberger of Baden, Switzerland, and Carolina Bauch of Magdeburg, were passengers. Kellersberger, an engineer, had built the first iron bridge in Switzerland, still in use today. Miss Bauch, an accomplished pianist, was taking her piano with her to the New World. On the trip these two became the best of friends. After arriving in New York City, Getuli stayed there on business, and Carolina went on to Cat Springs, Texas, to be near her sister, Mrs. Johannes Romberg. Getuli became a federal engineer and surveyed Grand Central Park. He later went to Texas and married Carolina.

On their honeymoon they went around South America by way of Cape Horn. En route, their ship needed repair, and the newlyweds stayed in a South American port for three months. They received lodging free of charge all this time because a man enjoyed Carolina's piano playing. After a year they arrived in California.

Four children were born to Getuli and Carolina in California: Emma, Julius, Bertha, and Dora. Getuli then went to Mexico to do some work there for the British government. He had his wife and children sent to Cat Springs by stagecoach. At the beginning of the Civil War, Getuli stopped his work and joined the Confederate Army. As he was stationed in Galveston, his family joined him

there. He became a colonel during the war and served under General John B. Magruder.

After the war Getuli Kellersberger sent his family to Baden, Switzerland, so that the children could be educated there. He returned to Mexico to finish his job.

The daughter Emma was educated in music and came to Texas to teach. Emma met Bennie Fuchs of Tiger Mill, perhaps by obtaining his aid as piano tuner. He was both a cattle raiser and a piano tuner. They were later married.

Their first child was a daughter, Cora. On October 11, 1879, a son, Oscar Julius, was born. But Emma Kellersberger Fuchs died five months after her son's birth. Hermann, Bennie's brother, and his wife Lina took in the two children and reared them with their own three: Albano, Frieda, and Johanna. Though Bennie later remarried and had another son and daughter, Oscar remained with Uncle Hermann and his family.

The three-story Hermann Fuchs home is now the Krumm ranch home. Oscar and Albano slept on the third floor of this house. Oscar, as the younger, had to go to bed earlier than Albano; he dreaded this because he was afraid of the dark. One night he came downstairs crying, "*Die Katze hat mich gekickt!* (The cat kicked me!)"

Oscar learned to ride the trail after cattle and goats. Incidentally, his uncle Hermann had brought the first Angora goats to Texas in 1882. Oscar's first-hand acquaintance with ranching no doubt had much to do with his later colorful cowboy compositions.

Oscar was like his father Bennie in that he loved to hunt and fish on the Colorado River. Bennie killed many a wild goose and duck from a raft camouflaged with cedar branches. This love for nature remained with Oscar throughout life, and at every opportunity he came back to the home country to hunt, fish, or camp with his family beneath the giant pecan trees.

Oscar was first taught by a "house-teacher." Later he used a boat on the Colorado River or rode horseback to get to the school at Marble Falls. He learned to play the piano before he could say the alphabet. He, of course, helped to do the chores, and once he jokingly remarked, "After milking the cows, I have to unwind my hands to play the piano."

When he was fifteen, he went to San Antonio to go to high school. Here he received his first formal training on the piano and violin. In 1896 Oscar was sent to Zurich, Switzerland, by his grandfather, Getuli Kellersberger, to attend the Municipal College of Music. In 1899 after three years in Switzerland, he journeyed to Galveston and spent a year there. In 1900 he went to New York City for two more years of education.

In New York City he dated the celebrated Lillian Russell. He had a way with the ladies that pleased them, and he, in turn, was their great admirer. Mrs. Annie Kellersberger Schnelle, Oscar's first cousin, tells that he would return from a community dance and exclaim to her mother, Mrs. Julius Kellersberger, "Ich bin schon wieder vom Stengel gefallen! (I fell from the stem again)" meaning that he had fallen in love again that night.

In 1902 Oscar returned to San Antonio where he lived for the remainder of his life except for two years in Dallas, 1928-1930. Before he was married, he spent his summers at the home of his uncle, Julius Kellersberger, in Cypress Mill, Texas. He rode to Johnson City once a week to teach music. Among his pupils were the Johnson girls, cousins of President Lyndon B. Johnson. He would stay in Johnson City for two days each week and then return to his uncle's house. He organized a choir in Cypress Mill for entertainment. The choir members were all relatives of his. He enjoyed working with them, saying that they were wonderful choir material.

In 1905 Oscar married Nellie Tuttle. They had three daughters: Julia, Nellie, and Emma. Julia is now Mrs. James B. Cashell of Longview, Texas, and has five children. Nellie is now Mrs. Francis

Bowen of Afton, Virginia, who has twins (a son and a daughter) and another daughter who has four children. Emma is now Mrs. Jack Mitchell of San Antonio, Texas, and has two girls.

At San Antonio, Oscar was director of the St. Mark's Episcopal Church choir. From 1925 to 1928, he commuted to Austin as director of the glee clubs and the University Choral Society at the University of Texas. For these groups he completed twelve arrangements of cowboy songs. In October, 1928, he moved to Dallas to serve as director of music at the Church of the Incarnation, but he returned to San Antonio in 1930 to become organist and choir director at Christ Episcopal Church.

Oscar became known for his arrangements of the old cowboy ballads for concert use, but he also composed art songs. He wrote the music for "My Heart Is a Silent Violin," "White in the Moon the Long Road Lies," "The Tempest," "The Hills of Home," "The Rain and the River," "Homecoming," "The Old Chisholm Trail," "The Cowboy's Lament," "Old Paint," "Home on the Range," "Git Along, Little Dogies," "Greer County," and "Come, All Ye Jolly Cowboys."

Lota Spell in *Music in Texas* calls Oscar "the first native composer to achieve fame through the use of Texas background." James McCamy in *The Alcalde*, March, 1928, states that *The Musical Observer* had announced, "Mr. Fox has not sought far afield for his song subjects. He has found them in his own state and has accordingly immortalized a colorful phase of American life – that of the cowboy."

The song, "Old Paint," published in February, 1928, established his popularity in Texas. The Austin *American* termed it at that time "the most effective and beautiful of the series of cowboy songs. It has a melody that one hums again and again and words that catch the mood of the cowboy as he turns his pony homeward after a night of gaiety."

Oscar returned several times to New York City to learn the theory and composition of music under Percy Goetschius. He also went to Rochester and Chicago in 1926 and 1927 to accompany Harold Butler's singing of a group of cowboy songs.

"The Hills of Home" came into national attention in 1927, when it was sung by the winner of the second place, men's division, of the national Atwater Kent radio audition contest.

Oscar was interviewed in November, 1947, by a San Antonio *Express* reporter on his method of writing. "First, I have to get a good poem. No, I will never try to write my own lyrics. I have no talent for it."

Once he found a poem, he memorized it. John A. Lomax's collection, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, was a source for many of Oscar's songs. Poems were written especially for him by Eric Von der Goltz and Grantland Rice. About writing the music, he said, "Sometimes it is easy; sometimes poems sort of sing themselves. But usually the melody comes to me gradually. I make a sketch. I revise. I rewrite. I polish. Almost any song I have written can be sung without piano accompaniment."

The poem, "The Hills of Home," was written by Floride Calhoun, a New York poet, while she lived in San Antonio.

"The Hills of Home" has been sung for radio and recording by many well-known male singers, such as Reinhard Werrenrath, Metropolitan Opera baritone Robert Merrill, tenor James Melton, Nelson Eddy, and Mario Lanza. Among the other famous singers who have sung Oscar's songs are John McCormack, Ted Roy, Eileen Farrell, Richard Crooks, Donald Dame, Conrad Thibault, and Lawrence Tibbett. Oscar appeared on the West Coast in recitals in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.

Fox was a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers; Composers-

Authors Guild; Texas Music Teachers Association; and the Alpha Iota Chapter Sinfonia Fraternity of America.

In 1949 Burnet set up a homecoming for Oscar. He presented a concert of his songs there, accompanying Miss Marjorie McClung. In fact, he was asked many times to present recitals of his music throughout Texas; he was the accompanist to the singer or singers.



Oscar wrote more than fifty songs in his lifetime. He died on July 13, 1961, in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the age of eighty-one. He became ill while visiting his daughter, Mrs. F. C. Bowen, at Afton, near Charlottesville. Services were held in San Antonio. He was a widower for many years before his death.

Through the efforts of Mrs. Annie Kellersberger Schnelle of Marble Falls, cousin of Oscar, the memorial to Oscar J. Fox was constructed. Texas State Highway Department engineer Ed Bluestein accepted Mrs. Schnelle's idea of putting up the memorial. He suggested the building of the two cabanas to attract sightseers. The memorial was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies on Sunday, May 27, 1962, in the presence of his three daughters and other relatives and friends.

The music of "The Hills of Home" reveals how dearly Oscar loved his boyhood home and the hills, and all who hear are moved to a longing for home by this song:

My prairie home is beautiful, but oh,
I miss the broken sky-line that I know;
I look in vain for rivers and for lakes,
But over all my heart at sunset aches
For hills of home, the hills of home!

The everlasting hills, how firm they stand!
Their mighty summits braced a Titan band,
Uplifting hoary foreheads to the blast
When Indian summer's golden glow is past:
Oh, hills of home, the hills of home.

I know them, love them, see them once again.

Their cloudy summit veiled in misty rain,
Or softly, dimly blue, or capped with snow;
I'm homesick for you, mountains that I know,
Oh, hills of home, the hills of home.