

FACES IN THE CROWD

Spring Branch: Then and now

Local author's book chronicles names, places in his hometown

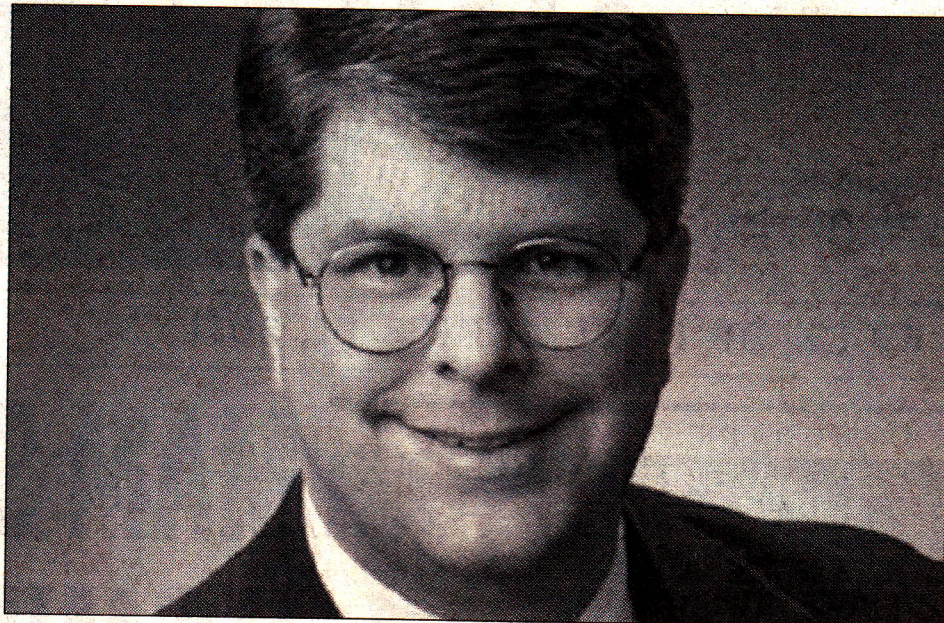
By RIKI MARKOWITZ
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Probably thousands of Houstonians pass by Spring Branch on the Katy Freeway or Loop 610 on their daily travels to or from work, school or Memorial City Mall. Very few likely realize the history behind this neighborhood that was once a farming community.

George Slaughter, a writer who grew up in Spring Branch, believes people will be fascinated by the area's origins and wrote a book to prove it.

Quite a few books have been published on Spring Branch. What makes this one stand out, "Spring Branch: Images of America," is that it's a pictorial history. Today, Spring Branch looks much like any other American town with schools, subdivisions and housing complexes, hospitals and malls.

The pages of Slaughter's book, however, illustrate a more fascinating tale: German immigrant families came here in the mid 1840s for a better life and recorded on film the evolution of Spring Branch. The book covers a time when the Republic of Texas had just become the nation's 28th state, when the small farming village was annexed piece-by-piece by Houston, and eventually transformed into a magnet for businesses that attracted a melting pot of Asian and Hispanic immigrants as well as families seduced by its proximity to downtown Houston and



LIVING HISTORY: An abundance of historical pictures set George Slaughter's book "Spring Branch: Images of America" apart from other local history books.

the Energy Corridor.

Anyone can go to the local library and dig up photographs of ribbon cutting ceremonies — snapshots that show a plot of vacant land next to a shiny new shopping center or library, Slaughter said. "Spring Branch," however, features images of what this land was like when the original settlers were farming and raising families, including shots of men plowing their fields adjacent to modern strip malls and portraits of families whose surnames are seen on today's most traveled Spring Branch roads. This is one aspect of the book, in fact, that originally attracted Slaughter, he said.

The community of Spring Branch is populated by buildings, such as the Don Coleman Community Coliseum and Darrell Tully Stadium, named for hometown heroes who, in part, play a role in putting this neighborhood on

the map. Slaughter reveals earlier days of the first settlers, like Karl Kolbe, whose name is slated to grace the 35-acre property he lived on in the 1840s and will house more than 250 single-family homes — Kolbe Farms. Residents familiar with Hunters Creek Elementary School know that it's on Beinhorn Road, Slaughter said, but probably don't realize that Christian Beinhorn was a German-born farmer who emigrated to the area with his family.

The fact that Beinhorn died of a spider bite is just one of those interesting tidbits Slaughter throws in the book to humanize an old story.

This project may have seen the light of day years ago, he said, if the images in the book could be found in the town's historical archives. In fact, most are unpublished pictures from the personal collections of descendants of Spring Branch's first families.

GEORGE SLAUGHTER

Fast Fact: Slaughter has published a pictorial history of Spring Branch. It illustrates the history of the area when German immigrants settled the land, when the Republic of Texas became the 28th U.S. state and the piece-by-piece annexation of the area by Houston.

Quite often, Slaughter found himself in their homes digging through boxes of sepia-toned pictures barely recognizable but for those that include more recent traces of modern day Spring Branch, such as the farmer tilling his fields with a brand new Star Furniture store, then a mom-and-pop shop, gleaming in the background.

VOI

Volunteer Houston features a variety of volunteer opportunities throughout the community.

Taxes in Spanish

Spanish-speaking volunteers will be needed during the coming tax season as interpreters in a program that helps income people complete their federal income returns. The assignment doesn't require any expertise, just good interpersonal skills, fluency in English and Spanish, and willingness to assist volunteer tax-form preparers in communicating with people at any of a number of libraries and community centers throughout Houston.



Visit with shut-ins

Share the joy of Christmas with institutional shut-ins. If you have time available on Dec. 18, plan on coming to a meeting place near Green Plaza (either at 9:30 a.m. or 12 noon) and team

W H E R E

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