

KORUS FARMSTEAD (Korus-Rakowitz Farmstead)
U.S. Highway 281, ~~AWA~~ Farm Road 536
Leming Vicinity
Atascosa County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3417

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Location: U.S. Highway 281 and Farm Road 536,
Leming vicinity, Atascosa County, Texas

Significance: The farmstead chronicles the development of 160 acres in Las Gallinas (Spanish for wild turkey) by a Silesian immigrant family. Members of the first organized group of Polish immigrants to America who founded and settled Panna Maria, Texas, in 1854, the Koruses left twelve years later to operate and own this farmstead. It has been owned and occupied by direct descendants of the Koruses for nearly 130 years. Its four primary structures, coupled with the numerous outbuildings, provide a clear record of the changing needs, attitudes and social position of a Polish immigrant family in Texas. Moreover, the dogtrot-style house provides a rare example of vertical log construction. It and the other three primary structures retain a fairly high degree of architectural integrity.

Description: This set of documents focuses on the farmstead's four primary structures: a dogtrot-style house, two single-cribs, and a single-story Queen Anne Victorian house.

The two main rooms of the dogtrot-style house are enclosed by vertical split logs, finished on the interior with lath and adobe coated with white lime plaster. Enclosed shed rooms flank the eave sides of the western main room while the eastern main room is flanked on the south by a porch and on the north by a shed room. The latter shed room was likely used as a kitchen and is enclosed by two walls of the vertical log, lathe, adobe, and lime white plaster finish. A witch's hat roof of corrugated metal shelters the building. Evidence remains in two shed rooms that the original roof had a different pitch. Cross-ties once spanned the main rooms, but they have been cut. Wooden planks floor the main rooms and the two western shed rooms. In the western main room, between the original double top plate and the 4x4 plate for the new roof is sandwiched the remains of tongue-in-groove flooring for a second floor.

The two cribs are of horizontal log construction, the west one with double saddle notched joints and the east one with full-dovetail joints. The west crib is flanked on its eave sides by two enclosed shed rooms. The sheds are attached as simple post and beam constructions with vertical board siding. The crib has wood flooring. Corrugated metal roofing spans all three rooms. The roof is probably not the original as it uses only sawed lumber.

The east crib faces the west one across a distance of approximately six feet, establishing a dogtrot-type relationship between the two cribs. The east one is flanked only on its southern eave by a vertical and horizontal sided shed, used today as a tack room. Both rooms have wooden floors.

The Queen Anne Victorian house is located northwest of the other three buildings, closer to the two main roads. It is a single-story wood-framed building with typical finish details. Its primary facade faces west and is spanned by a hipped roof. Two wings extend back from the facade. The south wing terminates in gables with fishscale patterned wood shingles.

History: The original 160 acres were obtained from Sam Houston, Governor of Texas, by Nicholas Welt via a pre-emption certificate in 1860. The pre-emption act of 1854 permitted one to settle on 160 acres of "the vacant public domain, live on it for three years and make improvements, then obtain title to it... as an outright gift with only the requirement of occupancy." (Miller, Thomas Lloyd, The Public Lands of Texas 1519-1970, 1972, pp. 35-36)

Title of the land passed from Welt to F.F. Michand (May 27, 1859 to May 13, 1860) to Marianne Hervieux (September 8, 1860 to October 1860) to Anton Wagedac (October 15, 1860 to October 21, 1867) who gave title to the north half of the 160 acres to Maria Wiczoreck who returned title to Anton Wygledac "except household furniture" September 2, 1863. Anton Wagedac sold the 160 acres to Jahn Korus for \$600 on October 21, 1867. The Korus family has lived and worked on the farm until December 1994 when Jahn Korus' granddaughter, Apolonia Korus Rakowitz passed away. Over the years the acreage has dwindled, although the family did purchase other land nearby. The remaining 112 acres is now owned by Apolonia's sons, Herman and Wilfred Rakowitz.

Jahn Korus, his wife Marianne Strzelczyk and three of their children were among the first organized group of Polish immigrants to America. From Ligota Toszecka (near the city of Tost today) in Upper Silesia, the Koruses, with 99 other Polish and Silesian families, arrived on the *Weser* into the port of Galveston in 1854. From there, they traveled west along the Gulf of Mexico, then inland to found the town of Panna Maria, Texas. In Panna Maria, the Koruses are believed to have rented a small farm, but in 1867, Jahn Korus bought land in Las Gallinas and the family moved there.

The two horizontal log structures were perhaps the original residences on the farmstead, suggested by the deed from Maria Wiczoreck to Anton Wagedac, but they have been used for most of the twentieth century as cribs.

The Korus-Rakowitz family asserts that Jahn Korus built the dogtrot as their family home soon after 1867. A brief family history in the Atascosa County History states that "They built a two-room, dog-trot-style log home from native black-jack oaks." (Jerome Korus stated

that this information is from Leroy Korus). The log construction is unusual: split in half and tapered at the top end to fit into a channeled plate. Tightly spaced, the flat face of the logs creates an exterior wall. The rounded half of the logs face in and have wood twigs and slats attached as lath and white lime plaster sheathed adobe.

One of 25 families to settle in Las Gallinas, the Koruses were among the eight founding families of St. Joseph's Catholic Church (closed in 1981 and burned in 1983). The church was built on land donated by three families; Jahn Korus donated one acre. Food for the family was raised on the farm; hogs, horses and cattle were raised for the San Antonio market. Jahn and Marianne's success was measured by their ability to purchase additional land in 1876, now a separate farmstead run by other direct descendants.

Jahn Korus's youngest son, Jacob Korus stayed on the farm, increased the acreage, married and raised a family there. The Queen Anne house was built around 1912. Apolonia Korus Rakowitz, his youngest child, was born in the frame house in 1915. The only changes to the house appear to be the addition of a shed roofed screened in porch and bath soon after original construction, the addition of corrugated metal roofing on top of the original wood shingles after 1955, the addition of the bathroom in the main entry hall in 1961 and the poured-in place concrete front steps in 1964. On the interior, cheesecloth hung wallpaper covered the walls at least through the 1960's. Linoleum floorcoverings still protect the hardwood floors.

Sources:

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Jordan, Terry G., Texas Log Buildings: A Folk Architecture, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1978.

Atascosa County History

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For oral histories, family photographs and historic documents:

John Beard and Kathy Korus Beard

Jerome Korus

Herman J. Rakowitz and Carol J. Bailey

For historic documents:

The Atascosa County Clerk, Jourdanton, Texas.

David G. Potter, Atascosa County Survey Office, Jourdanton, Texas.

James R. Andrus , Martin Abstract Company, Inc., Jourdanton, Texas.

Genealogical and Historical section of San Antonio Public Library.

A nomination of the Korus Farmstead is currently being prepared for the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

Historians: The project director was Associate Professor Dan Leary. Historical research was guided by James W. Steely of the Texas Historical Commission. The graduate student team consisted of Costas Arsalides, Cristina Duro, Kate Griffin, Julie Klump, Greydon Petznick, Tina Roach and John Russick.

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