

People Names in Native-Plant Names, Part II

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Lindheimer daisy, Lindheimer's silktassel, Lindheimer's senna, Lindheimer's maiden fern, Lindheimer's nolina, Lindheimer muhly, and the "Lindheimer" list goes on and on. Certainly the most common sir name used for naming Texas native plants is Lindheimer.

Most of these plants were first collected by Ferdinand Lindheimer, a German naturalist and plant collector who is called the "Father of Texas Botany." Lindheimer was born 205 years ago in Frankfort. Supposedly he developed an interest in botany as a youth, but that is not well documented. Lindheimer was educated in elite schools, including the Royal Prussian University, where he was a student of philology. His later writings in Texas reflect his early studies of Greek and Latin literature and mythology. He withdrew from the university without receiving a doctoral degree when he was almost 25. After he left the university, Herr Lindheimer became a teacher at a boys' school in Frankfort. Several men on the faculty of that school were active in a movement to unify German lands under a democratic constitution. For this, a few faculty members were condemned for sedition, and some others felt compelled to leave Germany. It is unknown what part, if any, Lindheimer played in the political uprising, but he left Germany for the US in 1834. He joined a group of German intellectuals who were working on a farm near Belleville, Illinois.

These immigrants included the botanist George Engelmann. The friendship of Lindheimer and Engelmann was destined to have a most profound influence on the history of Texas botany.

The Spartan life at Belleville soon drove Lindheimer and six others to set out for Mexico. Three turned back at New Orleans, but Lindheimer and two brothers named Friedrich were determined to continue to Vera Cruz. After a miserable voyage, they made their way to a German colony inland of Vera Cruz. Ever the naturalist, Lindheimer made notes on the vegetation along the way. After a short time in that tropical area, Lindheimer could not envision a bright future for himself. He decided to go to Texas, an idea that had intrigued him for awhile. The little Mexican ship he took from Vera Cruz to New Orleans went aground somewhere on the northern Gulf coast. Lindheimer and two Frenchmen walked two days to Mobile.

On April 20, 1836, Lindheimer enlisted in an army unit bound for Texas, the day before the Texans won the Battle of San Jacinto near Houston. Almost a month later, he arrived in Texas and spent the next 19 months in the Texas army in the Houston-Galveston area. Apparently, he was in the good graces of his commanding officer, who allowed him to collect botanical specimens while other soldiers had to drill.

For most of the duration of the Texas Republic, Lindheimer lived in Houston. After he was discharged in 1837, Lindheimer made a short visit to his friend George Engelmann in Missouri, but he came back to a small farm he bought near Houston. He was not a successful farmer, probably because he was trying to farm and botanize at the same time.

Engelmann, who was now a prominent botanist of international fame at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, sent books on botany and optical equipment to Lindheimer in Texas. In return, Lindheimer sent Engelmann botanical specimens from the wilds of Texas.

Among Lindheimer's favorites of the plants he discovered in the early 1840s was one named *Lindheimera texensis*, the single species of a new genus. Today this is known as Texas star or Lindheimer daisy. During 1845, the year Texas joined the Union, Lindheimer traveled to the German colony that Prince Carl von Solms-Braunfels had established on Comal Creek 25 miles northeast of San Antonio. He liked this beautiful area and acquired a little plot of land on the outskirts of town overlooking the steep banks of the Comal.

There began an extraordinary episode in the history of Texas botany involving, along with Lindheimer, other men for whom Texas native plants are named. But that is for another column.