



Issue No. 9:

The Relief Issue

Texas Dance Hall Relief Fund

TDHP News & Histories

... And more!

A year of challenges and growth.



Tracy Rohrbacher
TDHP Board President

Greetings dance hall fans, community partners and friends

We have moved on from 2020, a year that proved to be challenging as everyone adjusted to a global crisis. In many instances the isolation rekindled a heartfelt appreciation for many things including family time, community connection, travel inspirations or the energy of live music. So many of these themes are found within the walls of our Texas dance halls.

Texas Dance Hall Preservation (TDHP) has long been a steward of preserving dance halls. In response to COVID-19, the Dance Hall Relief Fund was initiated as a disaster relief effort. The fundraising initiative resulted in generous donations in the amount of \$265,809 distributed to 32 halls the last week of December.

In 2020, TDHP awarded an additional \$22,500 to nonprofit halls through our Preservation Grant program, providing seven deserving halls with funds for needed upgrades.

Additionally, the National Parks Service Grant in response to Hurricane Harvey allowed TDHP to hire five graduate interns charged with finding and documenting every dance hall, existing or gone, in a 51 county swath of Texas. This information will allow TDHP to create a disaster preparedness toolkit for dance halls throughout the state.

In 2020 we welcomed Casey Jordan to TDHP staff as our Executive Director. Her background and experience has proven invaluable. Deb Fleming remains a steadfast contributor to TDHP in her new role as Outreach Coordinator.

As we look toward the opportunities that 2021 will present, the TDHP Board members and staff will continue to advocate for the preservation of our cherished Texas dance halls in new ways. We welcome the time when we can once again enjoy live music in our halls together!

Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc.
3005 S. Lamar Blvd., Suite D-109 #315
Austin, Texas 78704

Casey Jordan, Executive Director

<https://www.texasdancehall.org>

Tracy Rohrbacher
TDHP Board President

On the cover: Unnamed masked dancers at an event at Blase's Hall. Photo by Gary McKee.

Inside This Issue

TDHP Staff year in review	2
TDHP News and upcoming events	3
Preservation Grants	5
TDHP Dance Hall Relief Fund	6
TDHP Intern articles	10



A year like no other.

From the Executive Director:

I started as the Executive Director of TDHP in February 2020. Just three weeks later, the entire world, along with all the Texas dance halls, shut down. Starting a position like this in such a year has been challenging to say the least. Shifting the 2020 goals so dramatically and quickly was difficult, but I am so proud of what TDHP was able to accomplish in 2020, despite the circumstances. 2021 promises a gradual return to more “normal” dance hall operations, something we are all ready for!

While I wish it hadn't been necessary, our Dance Hall Relief Fund allowed TDHP to directly support halls throughout the state during an intensely trying time. I'd like to thank every donor who supported our effort this fall. Your support has gone straight to the halls, and every one involved is deeply grateful to you.

Decisions will be made on the scheduling of the 2021 Dance Hall Tour soon, and we will update you as we know more. This year has been difficult for nonprofits, and your ongoing support for TDHP has been more important than ever. Thank you for helping us continue to support the halls. We look forward to coming together for music, dancing, and community as soon as it is safe for us all.

- Casey Jordan

Executive Director, TDHP



Casey Jordan, TDHP Executive Director

From the Outreach Coordinator:

The uncertainty presented by the arrival of COVID-19 in mid-March required major adjustments to the Outreach role: field visits were traded for phone calls and emails with hall contacts. Kept homebound, 'data housekeeping' became a priority.

As we moved into the summer and early fall, it was clear our halls were struggling but determined to survive this difficult time. The calls, emails and texts were more dire as hall reserves dwindled, uncertainty about reopening and an ever changing list of guidelines made it difficult to offer assistance to halls from across the state.

Outreach took on a new meaning with the beginning of the Dance Hall Relief Fund in October. As applications arrived, the real detailed work began: analyzing utility bills, insurance binders and following up with halls. The entire fourth quarter was spent immersed in the relief applications.

In November, TDHP was blessed with a very generous donation and everything changed: every hall would get their full request.

What a tremendous way to end a year of challenge and uncertainty. The hours of reviewing hundreds of utility bills and insurance forms were worth every minute when it came to finalizing the amount each hall received as 2020 came to a close.

- Deb Fleming, Outreach Coordinator



Deb Fleming, TDHP Outreach Coordinator

TDHP news and updates

Coming Soon: the 2021 Texas Dance Hall Tour!

This fall, plan to join Texas Dance Hall Preservation for a long overdue weekend of dancing, tours, daytime activities, and of course some of the best bands that Texas has to offer! While our friends at Asleep at the Wheel won't be along for this tour — they'll be too busy celebrating their rescheduled 50th anniversary (!) — we will enjoy good music, fantastic halls, and all that Texas has to offer. More information will be available soon!

Remembering a Texas dance hall legend

Texas dance halls are filled with stories of big personalities and incredible people. The people who create, run, and protect these halls are as varied and important as the halls themselves. This year, our Texas dance hall family lost one of its biggest personalities. On January 24, James White, founder and legendary owner of the Broken Spoke in Austin, passed away. Known for his friendly personality and fierce love of his Austin landmark honky tonk, Mr. White was as well known as the Spoke itself. TDHP offers our sincere condolences to his family and friends. The Broken Spoke remains a welcome reminder of days gone by, and a lasting tribute to the man whose spirit it embodies.



James White, Broken Spoke

Special Thanks to HEB and Central Market

TDHP would like to extend a huge thank you to one of the best Texas companies around, H-E-B /Central Market, for their ongoing support of TDHP and the work we do. This year H-E-B is donating \$1M to 100 nonprofits in support of the arts, and we are lucky to be one of them. Everyone's favorite grocery store said, "We are proud to share your commitment to enrich lives and preserve the culture of our Texas communities."



Helping Here.

Central MarketSM
H-E-B

Insuring a future

How do you insure a 150 year old dance hall? For many hall owners, this is a difficult question. When homeowners obtain insurance on their houses, insurance companies use nearby comparable properties to determine reasonable insurance coverage and rates. But what if your building is the only one of its kind in a three-county radius? In 2020 TDHP contracted Historic Appraisal Services, LLC to appraise five Texas dance halls, creating a "comp" group of halls. Their findings will help halls obtain appropriate levels of insurance for their unique historic buildings.



SPJST #92 was one of five halls chosen to represent Texas dance halls for insurance appraisals.

Show off your Dance Hall Pride!

TDHP is excited to offer these classic red bandanas with our logo as a thank you to new members! This idea has been in the works for several months, and we are happy to be able to send them out to all new members this month. As a nonprofit organization, we rely on donations and memberships to continue our mission and support as many halls as possible. We have big plans for this year, and members will be the key to making them all happen. And now you'll get the bonus of a new bandana to show your support of historic Texas dance halls. Go to our website, www.texasdancehall.org to join! Membership levels start at \$25!



A Survey as big as Texas: Hunting for halls

In early 2020, TDHP received a grant from the National Park Service to fund a dance hall survey and disaster preparedness toolkit for dance halls. The goal was to scour the 51 county area affected by Hurricane Harvey in 2017, identify every hall in that large area, survey a selection of halls, and create a disaster preparedness toolkit to help halls address issues and mitigate damage from future storms.

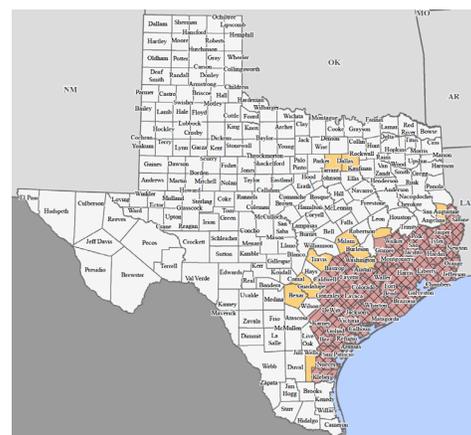
The first step of this large project was a county-by-county survey of the 51 counties. To do this, TDHP hired five graduate student interns and charged them with searching historic newspaper archives, county historical commissions, and any other resource they could find to locate and identify every dance hall (still standing or long gone).

Over ten weeks the interns discovered 353 halls that TDHP had not previously identified! Phase two of the project will be the physical survey of 50 – 100 halls by the Cultural Resource Management firm, Cox McInain. Teams will visit each hall and then work with TDHP to create recommendations for halls to better prepare for natural disasters. TDHP looks forward to creating another resource for Texas dance halls throughout the state at the conclusion of this important project.

Our interns had a blast on their historic treasure hunt, uncovering stories of halls long gone. Each intern was tasked with choosing a topic and writing an article. Those stories follow later in this newsletter, and are as unique as the interns! TDHP is lucky to have had a fantastic group of interns who really dove in to their projects.



Hurricane Harvey interns Jake Dromgoole, Valeria Munoz, Helen Johnson, Kyla Campbell and Willa Granger meet with Executive Director Casey Jordan to kick off a 10 week research project.



This FEMA map of counties affected by Hurricane Harvey served as a starting point as interns searched online sources for evidence of any and all dance halls (existing and long gone) in the 51 county area.

2020 Preservation Grants

In spring of 2020, as the US began to grapple with the COVID-19 crisis, the TDHP Board of Directors met and voted to adjust our Preservation Grant Program in response to the inevitable dance hall revenue concerns. In previous years the Preservation Grants have funded grants up to \$2,500 for “brick and mortar” repair and upgrade projects. With the April decision, TDHP increased the maximum grant amount to \$5,000. Knowing that halls were, in most cases completely shut down, TDHP wanted to offer increased support to halls to address larger maintenance and repair issues. This would also give TDHP the opportunity to support employment of local contractors during this difficult time.

In our Fall grant round, TDHP distributed \$20,000 in funds to six halls throughout the state in grants ranging from \$2,000 - \$4,850. Hermann Sons Dallas, Anhalt, Twin Sisters, SPJST #1, La Bahia Turnverein, and KJT 35 (Ennis) addressed issues including dangerously out-of-date wiring, plumbing issues, drainage problems and air conditioning upgrades.

Funding for two of the projects, Anhalt and Twin Sisters, came from our Jim Cannon Memorial Fund. This special fund, established to honor and remember Texas dance hall supporter and lifelong fan Jim Cannon, has provided \$25,000 in preservation grant funding in his memory. Donors Jane and Peter Nicholson have ensured that their friend Jim’s memory lives on with their generous contributions to this fund.

THDP Preservation Grants are available to non profit halls, with two grant rounds per year. Our Spring 2021 round will also include grants of up to \$5,000 for eligible member halls, and \$2,500 for non member halls, with a total of \$20,000 available for qualified projects. Our grant program allows THDP to directly assist nonprofit halls in the ongoing repairs and maintenance necessary to keep these buildings vibrant and safe for everyone.

For hall owners interested in joining as members, head to our website: www.texasdancehall.org to join up!



La Bahia Turnverein is one of six halls that received Preservation Grants from TDHP in Fall 2020.



Twin Sisters received a TDHP preservation grant to address needed electrical and plumbing issues.



Funds from the Jim Cannon Memorial Fund went toward Fall 2020 Preservation Grants.

Spring 2021 Preservation Grant Deadline: April 19!

It's that time again! Time for nonprofit dance halls to submit their applications for the TDHP Preservation Fund grant program. If your hall is in need of repair, please contact Casey Jordan to learn more about the grant program. You can also download the grant application as a PDF from our website at <https://texasdancehall.org/dance-hall-owners/preservation-fund-grants/>.

This grant program is designed to help with building repairs that have not already been completed, and once again for spring 2021 TDHP member halls are eligible for grants up to \$5,000. Non member halls are eligible for up to \$2,500 in funding.

Relief for the Halls

As 2020 kicked off, TDHP was excited to grow and provide new programs and information to our member halls. For the first time, TDHP had two staff members, and we were optimistic about the future for both Texas dance halls and our organization.

When Covid-19 hit, TDHP was faced with a complete change in operations and plans. The halls we work to support shut down completely, and we waited to see how to best respond. In the spring we worked on internal organization and hall communications. As the shutdown continued into the summer months, we knew TDHP needed to find a way to help the halls. Messages from hall owners grew more and more troubling, with many of them depleting savings and unsure how to pay ongoing bills.

After much behind the scenes work, TDHP rolled out our Dance Hall Relief Fund.

In September, invitations to apply were sent to almost 200 halls throughout the state. Eligible halls (50 years or older) could apply for reimbursement of building related costs that continued to accrue even with halls completely shut down. The Relief Fund functioned as a reimbursement grant, covering specific expenses directly related to the building such as insurance and utilities. Thirty-two halls from across the state applied, submitting receipts for over \$250,000 worth of expenses.

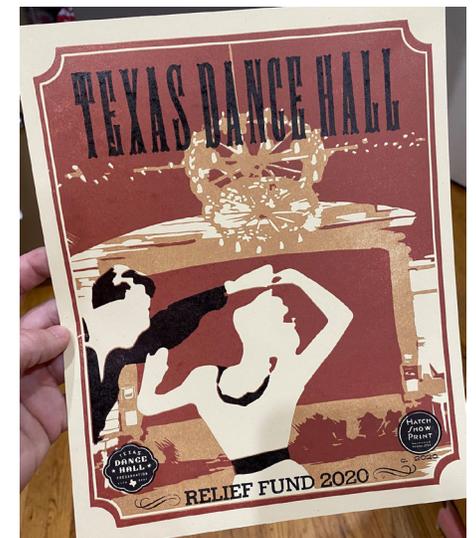
Our fundraising goal set, TDHP launched the public fundraising effort through press releases, news appearances, and a steady stream of social media content. Donations came in, but in this uncertain time we knew we had set a lofty goal. In mid-November we received a call that would change the entire situation. A generous anonymous donor notified us that we would receive a check for \$250,000 - we would reach, and exceed, our goal. Our grand total was \$265,809 in Relief Fund donations, going entirely to the halls in need.

Exceeding our initial goal, we were able to request even more months of utility bills to reimburse. Individual halls requests ranged from \$1,200 to almost \$50,000 – and each one was fully granted.

Receipts and bills were verified and organized, and on December 29th, TDHP sent out 32 checks to the applicant halls. The feedback we received from hall owners was heartwarming, and we were so grateful to be able to help so many halls during this unprecedented time.



Relief Checks ready to be sent out to the 32 applicant halls



Commemorative posters created by Hatch Show Print in Nashville.



SPJST #1

32 Halls

American Legion Post 121
 American Legion Post 200 (Wallis)
 Ballroom Marfa
 Blase's Hall
 Broken Spoke
 Ellinger Chamber of Commerce Hall
 Geronimo Memorial VFW
 Harmonie
 Henry's Hideout
 Hermann Sons Gonzales
 Hochheim Prairie
 Hungerford – St. Francis Serafin KJT
 Kendalia Halle
 La Bahia Turn Verein
 Lindenau Rifle Club
 London Hall

Millheim Harmonie
 Moravian Hall
 New Tabor SPJST
 Pioneer Hall
 Round Top Rifle Association
 San Antonio Hermann Sons
 Schneider Hall
 Schroeder Hall
 Sons of Hermann – Dallas
 SPJST #1
 SPJST #92 - National Hall
 Stagecoach Ballroom
 Sweet Home Hall
 Twin Sisters
 Wied Hall
 Yorktown Community Hall



Sons of Hermann - Dallas



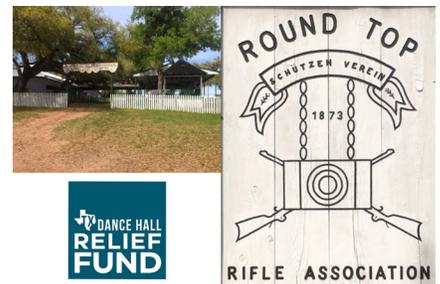
Hungerford Hall



Millheim Harmonie Hall



Twin Sisters



Round Top Rifle Club



Sons of Hermann San Antonio

Making a difference

"We received our check – I cannot even begin to thank you – I just cried when I opened it. This will help us tremendously!!!!"

Cynthia Ivey, Hungerford

"Thank you , this is truly amazing ! THANK YOU , THANK YOU , THANK YOU !!!! BLESS YOU AND YOURS !"

Jon Dunham, National Hall, SPJST #92

"We would like to thank you and the donors of the Texas Dance Hall Preservation Fund from the bottom of our hearts."

James White, The Broken Spoke

"I would like to thank you and the Texas Dancehall Preservation and your donors for the donation, it will really help us out to have these fixed expenses covered. Your hard work is very much appreciated. I hope you, members and officers of Texas Dancehall Preservation, and your awesome donors have a Safe and Wonderful New Year!!!"

Kurt Heim, Treasurer, The Round Top Rifle Association

"We want to express our gratitude again. I cannot say thank you enough. And please do come visit as soon as you feel comfortable."

Christine Krause, Schroeder Hall

"I just wanted to thank you and Texas Dance Hall Preservation for the help. You don't know what it's meant. I was seriously contemplating closing our Halle. With this extra boost, I think we will open again as soon as feasible. Thank you again for all your help."

Judi Temple, Kendalia Halle

"We received our check, and as previously stated, it is a God send. Thanks again to all of you guys for your effort & support."

Sam Morris, Moravian Hall

"We received our Relief Fund check from TDHP and the beautiful poster! Thank you and TDHP for all that you are doing. These relief funds mean a lot to our small organization. We are so grateful for the support."

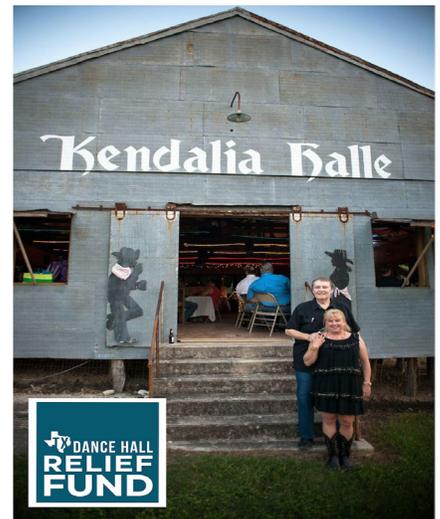
Britt Matzurak, Ballroom Marfa



The Broken Spoke



Schroeder Hall



Kendalia Halle

Thank you to our donors



Anonymous
Trinidad Almanza
Danny Bagley
Larry Baldauf
Marcia Ball
Ray Benson
Lara Bernhardt
Teresa Bishop
Alyse Black
Denise Boudreaux
Cindie Brooks

James and Valerie Brown
Kenny Brown
Bobbie & Don Burgess
Whitney Burgess
Brian Burgoyne
Tom & Cathy Burke
Courtney Buzbee
Jeff Campbell
Shanon Casey-King
Jon Cerny
Peggy Coker
Nancy Coplin
Jennifer Cottrell
Alice Culhane
Cody Dana
Carol Dickerson
Michael Dunn
Michael Econoplous
Cash Edwards
Erin Elledge
Jaime Escuriex Hurley
Julie Fairchild
Mary Lynn Faulk
Deborah Fleming
Sharon Fleming
David Flory

Lori Foster
Carol Fougerat
Susie Fowler
Tracy Fowler
Jim Friscia
Tammy Frost
Sara Fullerton
Charles Gallagher
Dan Gallagher
Michael Gay
Dennis Gerow
Michele Gillette
Sarah Girouard
Wendy Goldstein
Pam Golightly
Joy Gooden
Claudia Guerra
Sophia Gustafson
Kathryn Hair
Len Hause
Christian Hauser
Patricia Hayes
Amy Heimann
Edward Hess
Gary Hogan

Tracy Hutson
Clellan Hyatt
Judith Hyndman
Emily Jackson
Graham Jackson
Connie Jennings
Charles John
Wes Johnson
Sherri Jones
Casey Jordan
James Jordan
Kelly & Becky Joy
Tara Kellam
Louise Kirchen
Amy Kocian
Mary Kocian
Justin Krueger
Kristi Lawson
Daniel Layton
Kristina Lelcu
Ronda Levin
John Lewis
Marie Liscom
John Mackin
Suzann Madeley

James Mahaffey
Jeff Mangus
Kathy Marcus
Ronda Martens
Sarah Martin
Audrey Masters
Steph McDougal
Jane McFarland
Alyson McGee
Molly McHugh
Jason Mellard
David Miller
Donnis Miller-Shiple
Brenda Mitchell
Betsy Moore
Jim Morgan
Walter Morgan
Patrice Mushlin
Charlotte Neuse
Megan Newman
Rebecca Newton
Rebecca Nolan-Olson
Marie Oehlerking-Read
Adam O'Neill
Michael Boisvert

Candace Perez
Deann Peter & Mark Rask
Jerome Petruk
Marguarette Pousson
Laura Pratt
Sally Rassenfoss
Steve Ray
Matt Reyes
Jade Roberts
Tracy Rohrbacher
Lisa Rubey
Mary Kelley Russell
Ronald Rust
Mary Schatz
Sarah Schmidt
Rhonda Schondel D'Amico
Kelly Shears
Susan Bishop Shelby
Catarina Sigerfoos
Tyler Smith
William & Kathleen Stafford
Lauren Stamp
Kaylee Stanfield
Erik Stevens
Kenneth Stock
Karl Stolleis
Linda Sullivan
Joe & Kaysie Taccetta
Lorraine Taylor
Laura Thomas
Ross Tieken
Amy Tolliver
Riley Triggs
Susan Turpin
Bernadine Visalli
Danny Vivian
Andrea Warren

The Legacy of Alum Creek

BY JAKE DROMGOOLE

In Bastrop County, just four miles from the county seat that shares its name, lies the community of Alum Creek. Alum Creek was founded in 1829 by seven families from Stephen F. Austin's lower colonies, and by 1884, the population peaked at 200, decreasing to around 40 by the turn of the century.

The Great Depression delivered another blow to Alum Creek, but economic hardships did not deter "Uncle John" Briggs from opening a dance hall on his property in the late twenties. A popular destination for not only the community of Alum Creek, but for surrounding cities as well, Briggs' Hall seemed to hold a different memory for each of its guests. In his article, "The Alum Creek Story – Honky-Tonks and Rebirth," journalist Steve Vasey writes how although Briggs did not sell alcohol, some patrons remembered a number of drunken brawls taking place at the hall. One man from Smithville even recalled getting into a fight every time he attended a dance at the hall. Though the hall seemed to be very popular within the county, Uncle John decided to close the establishment in the late thirties.

The vacancy left by the Briggs Dance Hall was filled nearly two decades later by a rough and tough Louisianan by the name of Eddie Pittman. What started as a restaurant located across the highway from Briggs Dance Hall, soon became the epicenter for music and entertainment for Alum Creek. According to Vasey, nearly everyone living in Bastrop County during Pittman's ownership of the hall had a memory of either the hall, or the man himself. The stories of Pittman's rough and tough ways are rivaled only by those of his kindness, with many remembering the man for his generosity. The stories of his dance hall, known as Eddie Pittman's Place, are the stuff of Texas legend. There are some that claimed Pittman used the hall to produce and sell moonshine (though this was disputed by a local sheriff). As far as the music goes, patrons recalled seeing everyone from Bob Wills and The Texas Playboys, Webb Pierce, the Texas Playboys and even a young Elvis Presley performed at the hall.

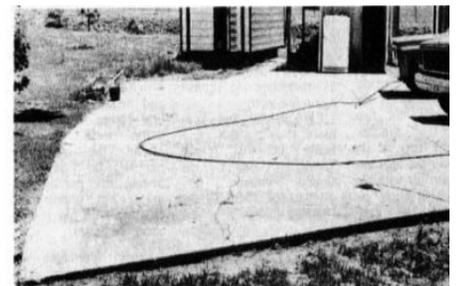
Eddie Pittman, after a lengthy battle with diabetes, gave up his hall and moved back to his native Louisiana. The hall would continue on under a couple different names including The Ponderosa, then Dean and Jean's and finally, Verline's. Sadly, a fire destroyed the structure in late 1971, taking with it one of Alum Creek's most beloved and well known buildings. The stories of "Uncle John" Briggs and Eddie Pittman are reminders of the importance of Texas dance halls, and the variety of services they provide communities. While there is no doubt both halls provided their communities, and even cities as far as San Marcos and Waco, an opportunity to dance and socialize, they also strengthened the small community when they seemingly needed it the most.



The rural area in Bastrop county was once home to some hopping halls!



The Alum Creek cemetery is one of the few remaining reminders of the town.

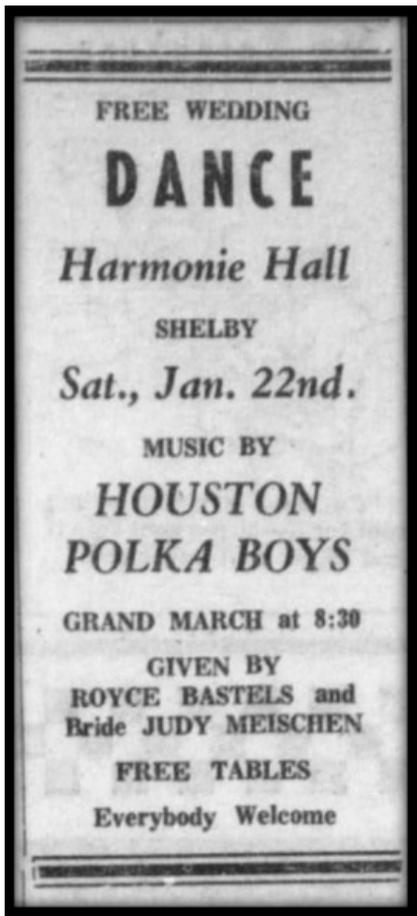


OUTLINES OF THE old dance area can still be made out from the concrete slab that once supported it. —Times Photo

All that remained of the old dance hall in Alum Creek.



Free wedding dance advertisement from the July 23, 1992 issue of the New Ulm Enterprise



Wedding dance ad from New Ulm Enterprise, Jan 20, 1966

Free Wedding Dances

BY HELEN JOHNSON

While perusing old Texas newspapers looking for information about dance halls, one comes across a lot of interesting, although sometimes extraneous information. One piece seen over and over in the newspapers in several the counties was the "free wedding dance." Admittedly, I had heard of it before; but I really didn't know much about the practice. It's a practice that is hard to imagine happening in modern times.

But what exactly is a "free wedding dance"? Trying to find out a little more, I contacted county historical commissions for more information. I spoke with Caroline Zaskoda, an Austin County commission member, who had been to these dances as a child.

According to Ms. Zaskoda, people often did this to include others in their celebration not included in the wedding itself. Many of the churches in these communities were small, appropriately so, but people's connections in their communities were far reaching. If both bride and groom were from the community, the connections and ties would be doubled, making for one large party.

A "free wedding dance" provided the families with a way to include more people in the celebration of the marriage. It was an example of the closeness that developed within many small towns and the importance people placed on those relationships. I think it is overwhelmingly an example of the warm heartedness of the people living in those places that such a wonderful tradition developed.

Several examples of the practice were mentioned in Austin and Colorado counties, mainly from the 1940s through the 1970s. I wondered just how widespread the practice was and when it began. In the Portal to Texas History, (a go to must for anyone looking for anything in the past regarding Texas) a quick search of "free wedding dance" pulled up 1,865 entries with newspapers from 16 counties. Newspapers from Austin, Bastrop, Bell Brazoria, Burleson, DeWitt, Fayette, Gillespie, Harris, Jackson, Kendall, Lavaca, Matagorda, McLennan, Medina and Williamson all had listings for a "free wedding dance."

The earliest listing was from 1910 in The Hondo Anvil Herald in Hondo, Texas, in Medina County. The county with the most listings was Fayette with 686 over 6 decades with the majority coming from the 1950s. Lavaca County had 661 listings spanning 40 years from the 1920 through the 1960s. Austin County had 227 listings for "free wedding dances" followed by McLennan with 121.

Obviously this inclusive tradition was one that many halls throughout the region hosted and encouraged. A testament to the spirit of community and celebration found in our wonderful Texas dance halls.

Pan American Ballroom

BY VALERIA MUNOZ

Built in 1963, The Pan American Ballroom in El Campo, the ballroom was built and managed by Ignacio "Joe" Vallejo. The ballroom hosted dances for El Campo and surrounding communities throughout the years. In the picture and advertisement in El Campo Leader-News, most of the music groups brought to the hall played Spanish Music, such as Los Diferentes de Matamoras Band, Los Bandidos Band of Houston, and Los Unidos Band of Corpus Christi, but the hall was open to patrons from all backgrounds. The ballroom was a place where Latinos and Mexican Americans could gather and dance celebrating holidays and events together. Prominent bands played the ballroom: the Glenn Miller Band performed there, and in 1965, Jan Garber's Orchestra played in the Pan American Ballroom, and according to The Victoria Advocate, Garber's Orchestra was the "Number One Dance Band in America."

As evidenced by several historic newspaper articles, the ballroom also hosted various organizations and events throughout the years. The ballroom was open for the use of other organizations that included the County Cotton Clinic, El Campo Rotary, and Home Demonstration Club women of District 11 for social gatherings and meetings.

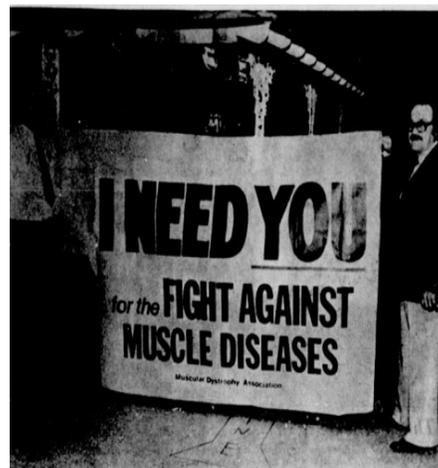
Ignacio Vallejo also used the ballroom to fundraise for different causes in the community. Vivian Vallejo, the wife of Ignacio Vallejo, contributed to fundraising for educational scholarships and managed the ballroom with her husband. In 1975, Vallejo fundraised \$1,000 dollars for a University of Houston student to buy a car to commute from El Campo to Houston. The family also hosted dances for the Muscular Dystrophy Association in correlation with the Pan American Scholarship Club. Another fundraiser created by the Vallejo family was the Little Queen's Contest, which afterward would host a dance. This event was hosted to gather funds for a new wing added in the St. Roberts's Catholic Church.

In 2003, Elisa Estrada and her family purchased the ballroom and are the current owners. Estrada explains that the ballroom continues to offer a space for the community to celebrate Quinceañeras, Baptism, weddings, and dances.

Like so many dance halls throughout Texas, the Pan American Ballroom played, and continues to play an important role in its community, by hosting and inviting people from all walks of life to enjoy each other, experience music, and celebrate their connections.



Two dancers dancing at the Pan American Ballroom. Pic El Campo Leader-News, September 24, 1986.



Ignacio Vallejo part of the Muscular Dystrophy Association promoting a Benefit Dance. El Campo Leader-News, January 26, 1983.

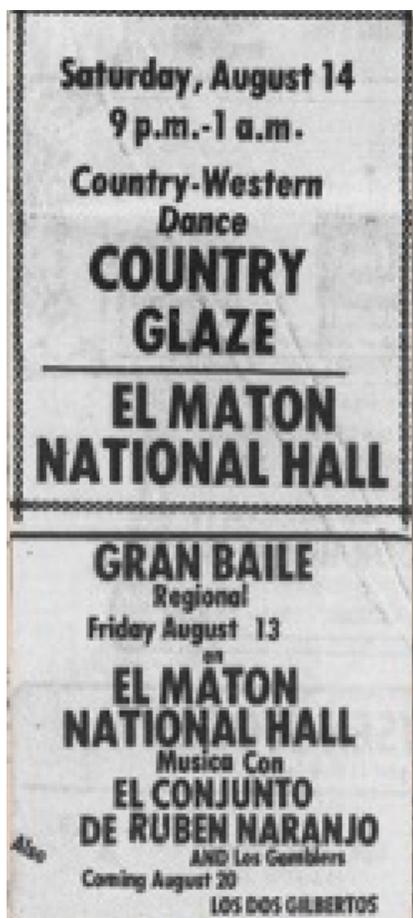
When History has No Address

BY WILLA GRANGER

Google Maps is both a blessing and a curse. The ease of ready-made directions, anywhere in the world, has been liberating—if not simply time-saving. But what are the drawbacks of GPS? Suffice it to say that our spatial and cognitive grasp of the physical world have been re-mapped according to a new digital logic. Has GPS, and the wider technological coterie of the Google-verse, made us dumber?

I'll leave that one up to the neuroscientists. But it does beg the question: beyond analogue maps alone, how did rural Texans move through the landscape of farmlands and small-town—often on aptly-named “Farm to Market” roads—in a pre-computer era? What were the tools and visual cues? This line of inquiry is irresistible when examining the print culture of country dance halls throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. Despite many weekly and monthly newspaper ads touting a rotating crop of musical acts, dance halls rarely, if ever, listed an address. In lieu of street addresses, dance halls sometimes advertised themselves in terms of direction and mileage. The Oasis Inn, for example, was billed as being “Five miles south Milano on Highway 36.” Often, dance halls merely affiliated themselves with certain towns: Hubert’s Danceland was simply of Riviera, Texas, or Cobb’s Ballroom, of Corrigan, Texas. Dance hall ads did include some specifics: the price of a ticket, when the band began, who was performing. Promotional blurbs were even tailored to different audiences. In two physically adjacent advertisements, El Maton Dance Hall promoted a “country-western” dance in English, and beneath it, a “Gran Baile” in Spanish.

Why no addresses? An immediate answer is patent: dance halls were community venues, where neighbors convened each weekend to socialize, eat, and dance. That is to say that like church, dance halls served an internal community along a routine timeline: week in and week out. Directions, and certainly addresses, were unnecessary for locals with a mental map of the surrounding roads, buildings, and landmarks. This was particularly true for the early dance halls of the Hill Country, Czech or German facilities that often held to their ethnic or fraternal identity. Greater than dancing, these were community centers. As for newcomers, it is fair to speculate that guests operated through spoken directions, word of mouth, or even more simply—following the music. Navigation relied on a deeper attunement to one’s landscape, not to mention the social practice of asking for directions: a rare act these days indeed. It is important to remind ourselves that dance halls were once institutional anchors in an interwoven social and geographic landscape, and many remain so to this day.



Historic newspaper ad for an event at El Maton National Hall.



Historic newspaper article for the Oasis Inn dance.

