

TEXAS DANCE HALL PRESERVATION, INC.

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TDHP and SPJST**

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On the Road with TDHP in 2018



Deb Fleming
TDHP Executive Director

The new year kicked off with a bang and much excitement, as we look ahead to 2018 and beyond. I stepped into my new role as Executive Director in July 2017, and the past six months have been a time of transition from being the President of TDHP's Board of Directors to my new, more structured and focused position, running Texas Dance Hall Preservation on a day-to-day basis. Our organization has grown and matured exponentially over the past few years, and the expertise and depth of experience of our Board of Directors assures us of unlimited potential for the future. I am extremely honored to be working with the returning directors, as well as our new directors.

TDHP is excited to once again collaborate with Lone Star Beer and their "Tabs & Caps for Texas" campaign! This spring, with your help, we have the potential to raise \$30,000 toward preserving Texas dance halls. I've been zigzagging the back roads, delivering plexiglass Lone Star Beer "boots" to over a dozen dance halls in recent weeks. I've been reconnecting with old friends at some halls and meeting new friends at others, as we grow our outreach and relationships with more halls and their owners and operators. You'll find more about our partnership with Lone Star later in this issue.

These road trips are truly the part of the "job" — if you want to call it that! — which I love the most. The exploration and discovery, of course, but especially engaging with the folks who keep our historic halls alive with their own perseverance and creativity. They are a testament to our Texas forefathers and they're why many of these special places are still with us today. I applaud them one and all!

We are wrapping up the Dance Hall Trail program with Yeti this month, and I enjoyed camping out at the Yeti Flagship location in Austin for three days in February, meeting the "trailblazers" who went in search of halls on the Dance Hall Trail list. It was fun to hand out the Yeti award items while hearing stories about the participants' experiences in the halls they visited. Plus, the Yeti store is pretty amazing. Stop in and see it if you are in the area.

Over the next few weeks, I will be mapping out several possible routes and a list of possible halls for the next two Texas Dance Hall Tours with Ray Benson and Asleep at the Wheel. This may mean another road trip or two to check out halls that I am unfamiliar with and meet their caretakers. Texas Dance Hall Preservation has covered a lot of ground over the past ten years, but there is still much more to do, and I am honored and proud to be an active part of it today.

This issue of our newsletter is all about families: from Emily Gimble, following in her father and grandfather's footsteps as a Texas musician, to the Galvan and Burris families who are keeping the dance hall tradition alive in Corpus Christi and Columbus, Texas, respectively. Texas dance halls are all about family, tradition, and making memories to last a lifetime. Enjoy!

Deb Fleming



DRINK THE NATIONAL BEER OF TEXAS AND SUPPORT A HISTORIC TEXAS DANCE HALL—WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

With the kind support and assistance of Lone Star Beer, large acrylic plastic “boots” are being placed in retail stores, bars, and dance halls from Dallas to Houston, Corpus to San Antonio, in Austin and all around the Lone Star State.

From now until April 30, 2018, for every tab or bottle cap deposited in the boots, Lone Star will contribute one dollar to TDHP’s preservation efforts. The money will be used to promote and support the preservation of these historic and culturally vibrant venues. Together, TDHP and Lone Star hope to raise \$30,000 towards this preservation goal.

Don’t worry if your favorite watering hole doesn’t have a boot on the premises—just take them to a venue that does. And while you’re at it, you’re encouraged to take selfies with the boots and share them on Lone Star’s Facebook page, TDHP’s Facebook page, and other social media. Oh, by the way, you can chip in your “at home” caps and tabs, too.

Remember, every Lone Star Beer tab and bottle cap collected will go to further TDHP’s mission. It’s a mission to which Lone Star is also committed. “At Lone Star Brewing Company, we always strive to stay true to our roots,” said brand manager Elkin Vasko. “Whether we’re participating in local events, welcoming out-of-towners, or helping out our neighbors, everything we do is tied into being authentically Texan. We can’t think of a better way to continue this tradition than by partnering with the Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc.

“Texas dancehalls across the state have been offering Lone Star beers for as long as we can remember, and we want to do our part in helping the restoration process for those that have supported us throughout the years.”





"The Galvan Ballroom's Legacy Cannot Be Overstated"

Not all Texas dance halls are rustic structures set back among the trees in small rural communities. Some of the most storied dance halls in the state are nestled into distinctly urban settings; think of the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas, the Garten Verein in Galveston, or the Eldorado Ballroom in Houston's Third Ward.

Among these is the Galvan Ballroom, a venerable structure situated on Agnes Street, beside a busy highway squarely in the middle of Corpus Christi. Since its opening in 1950, the Galvan has played host to everyone from the Dorsey Brothers and Duke Ellington to blues and R&B bands, from Corpus homegirl Selena and conjunto accordion firebrand Esteban Jordan to punk rock bands. In its early years, it was an important force for musical integration in a segregated era.

Though today its primary function is hosting weddings, graduation parties, reunions and *quinceñeras*, the Westside neighborhood landmark has a rich musical history in Corpus Christi's Mexican-American community. So much so that, this past June, the Texas Historical Commission unveiled a marker citing the Ballroom's history and its importance to the people of the city.

"The Galvan Ballroom helped bridge the gap between Mexican and American jazz bands, as well as help bring into the spotlight talented Hispanic musicians that may not have had the access to popular jazz clubs at the time," reads the text on the marker. "The Galvan Ballroom's legacy cannot be overstated as a center for Hispanic musical heritage." The Ballroom is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“It was a fantastic success,” recalled Bobby Galvan, Sr., whose father, Raphael, Sr., built the two-story R. Galvan Building, which houses the 9,000-square foot ballroom on the second floor, in 1949. A family-owned music store occupies the ground floor.

“When my uncle Ralph was building it, he went to a bunch of different ballrooms around the state to get ideas,” said 94th District Judge Bobby Galvan, aka Bobby, Jr. “Dallas, Houston, Galveston—he modeled the place after several different ballrooms.”

Bobby, Sr., who, at age 88, still oversees the venue, recalled the glory days. “My dad and brother, they started bringing in big-name bands like Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Duke Ellington. They also brought in internationally known bands like Perez Prado, from Cuba, and big bands from Mexico.”

“The Galvan established its reputation as the place to go for high-quality big band, swing and jazz music,” notes *The Handbook of Texas Online*. “Men and couples paid a small admission fee, while women got free entrance. Rows of tables and chairs lined one side of the wall, and chairs lined the opposite wall. A custom-made revolving chandelier with four spotlights served as a magnificent centerpiece over the dance floor.”

Built in the Art Deco-era Streamline Moderne style, the building became a showcase not only for the touring bands of the day, but also for the Galvan family’s own array of gifted musicians. According to Bobby, Sr., “My brother Ralph’s band was a fantastic band, as good as any big-name band.” In addition to Ralph, Jr., and Bobby, Sr., the group also featured their brothers, Sammy and Eddie.

The Ballroom opened on March 2, 1950 with a performance by the Galvan Orchestra, led by Raphael, Sr., along with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra.

“My dad was also one of the founding members of the Texas Jazz Festival,” said Bobby, Jr.

But with the demise of the Big Band Era in the late ‘50s, the Ballroom had to shift focus to survive. “The African-American community used it a lot for blues acts through the ‘80s and ‘90s,” said Bobby, Jr. “We also had all the conjunto bands, like Steve Jordan and all those guys, and big *orquestras* from Mexico.”

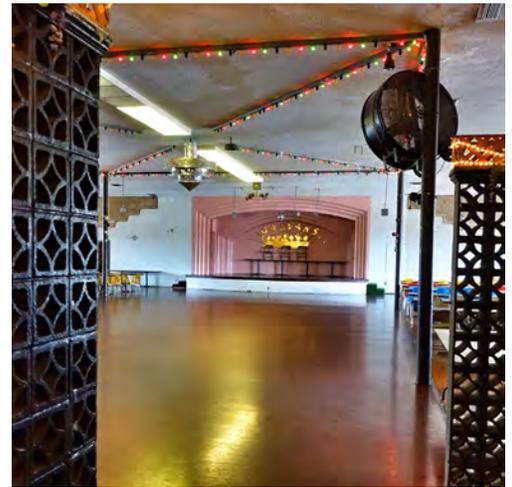
Times and urban patterns continued to evolve and, eventually, made the Ballroom untenable for regular live music performances. Private parties became the venue’s primary business model.

“The thing about these older buildings is, the town moves out,” said Bobby, Jr., referring to the growth of the suburbs at the expense of inner-city neighborhoods.

“But we’re still functioning,” he said proudly. “It’s still serving a purpose, which is great. I had my 50th birthday party here, and my daughter had her Sweet 16 party here. We’ve had people tell us that they had their wedding here, and their 25th anniversary, too. I had a lady stop me one day and tell me she had her *quinceñera* at the Ballroom and her daughter was going to have hers here, too.”



Ralph Galvan Jr. (left), Duke Ellington and Raphael Galvan Sr. at the Galvan Ballroom on Feb. 14, 1952. (Photo courtesy of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library)



The interior of the Galvan Ballroom today (Photo courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission)

Read more about it:

[Ralph Galvan, Jr.’s Legacy](#)

[Galvan Ballroom Marker Dedication](#)

[The Galvan Ballroom on the National Register of Historic Places](#)

FEATURED

An Interview with Emily Gimble

JOHN T. DAVIS



“I still love playing the schottische and the Cotton-Eyed Joe. It’s important to keep that tradition alive.”

Emily Gimble is Texas dance hall royalty. Her childhood playgrounds were the beer joints, honky-tonks, and dance halls where her grandfather, Johnny Gimble, plied his trade. Gimble, as even the most casual fan of country music and Western Swing probably knows, is arguably the most celebrated country fiddler of all time. Beginning his career as a member of Bob Wills’ Texas Playboys, Gimble went on to a lifelong career in Nashville and Texas as the top-gun session man and band member for country’s biggest luminaries. It’s easier to name the hit-making artists Johnny *didn’t* play with than those he did.

Emily accompanied Johnny and her dad, bass player and guitarist Dick Gimble, to their shows from the time she was a little girl. Later, as a musician in her own right, she would return those same venues to perform with the Marshall Ford Band, the Warren Hood Band and, finally, as a member of Asleep At the Wheel. Today, she is pursuing her own career, with one solo album (*Certain Kinda*) under her belt. Emily took a few minutes to speak with TDHP about her dance hall memories.

Do you recall going to the dance halls as a child with Johnny?

It’s hard for me to remember the names of some of these places, because I was little. I had exposure to them as a kid, when I was about seven, and as a teenager, and then playing in them with my grandpa, and then I got a second wind of it when I joined the Wheel. We would play places like Schroeder Hall—and I’d walk in and go, “I think I’ve been here before...”

Or it might just be the feeling of the dance halls—the hardwood floors, the nostalgia of it all, where you would say to yourself, “I don’t know if I’ve played here before, but I feel like I’ve been here before.”

Do you have a favorite?

The first one I thought about was Fischer Hall (near Wimberley). I first went out there when I was in my 20s to play with Slim Richey. I said, “Whoa, I have definitely seen this place before. And I called my dad, and he said, “You have seen it. That’s where we shot *Honeysuckle Rose*, with Willie Nelson.” Which is a movie I grew up watching! (Johnny Gimble had a role in the 1980 film as one of Willie’s band members and was featured prominently in the Fischer Hall scenes).

I remember thinking, "I wish they had that (movie) on (a) record, I want to hear Papa (Johnny) do those songs." And (then I) found them, and I've been playing them on repeat for a little while. He does "Fiddlin' Around" and the "Cotton-Eyed Joe." I love Fischer Hall; I love it out there so much.

More recently, I was thinking about how, after Papa passed away (in 2015), we had his memorial at Luckenbach. It was the best memorial service I've ever been to. Everybody that went still talks about it. It was like going to a family reunion, which is kind of how going to dance halls and being a part of that whole thing feels anyway.

Do folks come up and tell you stories about seeing Johnny in the halls?

Definitely. I played with Heybale! recently for a Christmas party at this dance hall between Lockhart and Bastrop (Watterson Hall). There were several people who came up to me while I was loading in, and they'd say, "I used to see your grandpa!" They had experiences of playing with him or seeing him. Anyone who saw him never forgot it. They held it with them.

Do you know if he had a favorite dance hall?

I do not know that, but I will tell you that that was Papa's ideal environment: any place there was a dance hall. He played music for people to dance to. That whole scene was his favorite thing to do. I think it's because he grew up playing music in those venues. He catered to making the dance floor fill up.

He was in charge of Bob's dance hall up in Dallas (Bob Wills' Ranch House, now the Longhorn Ballroom) when Bob was out on the road. He played with Bob for two years, and then Bob assigned him to lead the house band there, and he did that for a few years before he moved to Waco. He definitely held court there for awhile. I bet he loved playing that place.

You grew up in dance halls as a kid, and then you're back as a performer. How has your perception changed?

I remember sleeping through a lot of gigs because I was probably five to seven or eight. I was out past my bedtime! As a teenager, I was into different kinds of music, because I was trying to rebel, which is what we do.

The more I played with my grandfather, and the more that I dug into Western Swing and Texas music in general, it feels like going to church (*laughs*). As every year goes by, I appreciate these places more and more.

Anytime I was with the Wheel and we were going to play one of these dance halls, I'd get so excited. I don't know if you think this is corny, but I still love playing the schottische and the "Cotton-Eyed Joe." Because I remember doing those things as a kid. And it's important, not just for dances, but to keep that tradition alive.

You were a member of Asleep At the Wheel for two years. Talk about that a bit.

People show up with a certain enthusiasm when they know they're gonna get to see Asleep At the Wheel. And it was that way with my grandpa, too. They just have such a draw, they've been around for so long.

What's great about that band is that people show up and they want to hear "Cherokee Maiden" and "Stay All Night," and Ray (bandleader Ray Benson) plays those songs with the same passion and feeling and excitement every time he plays.

What's coming up on your horizon?

When Whit (Smith, of Hot Club of Cowtown) is at home, we've been doing "Whit and Emily," a little band thing, every Saturday when he's home at the Continental Gallery in Austin. I've finished up a record with the Marshall Ford Swing Band, a Western Swing band I've been playing with for the last ten years. For the last two years, since leaving the Wheel, I released a record of my own and toured with Hayes Carll and Doyle Bramhall II. But for the last six months, I've been at home! I bought a house in Lockhart, and I've been fixing it up.

Dad and I do a few gigs every three or four months as The Gimbles... we do all the songs we loved to play with Papa. Walt Wilkins is having a festival called "Walt, Stock and Barrel" out in Fredericksburg, and we're going to be doing that in April. And we're going to be playing Al Dressen's Western Swing Hall of Fame thing out in Lockhart this year in the fall.



SCHNEIDER HALL STILL WELCOMES ALL

BY PATRICK COX, PH.D.



Photos of Schneider Hall courtesy of Dave Norris



Amber Burris Becerra

Generations of families and friends have gathered at Schneider Hall for dancing, weddings, parties, speeches, and special occasions for nearly a century. Located three miles south of Columbus, Texas, on Highway 71, Schneider Hall has been a site for gatherings and festivities for young and old and those in between. Nestled among towering live oak trees dripping with Spanish moss and strands of lights, the weathered wooden structure with the gabled metal roof welcomes visitors and families like an old friend with open arms. Now owned by Amber Becerra, the historic hall has been restored and is open for music, weddings, and social gatherings.

Columbus, where the hall is located, was one of the earliest settlements in Texas during the Spanish and Mexican colonial era. It is the seat of Colorado County, one of the original counties established as part of the Republic of Texas. Many Germans immigrated to Frelsburg, Columbus, and other Colorado County communities during the nineteenth century. In addition to the Anglo settlers of the county, the area also included many Austrian and Czechoslovakian immigrants, Mexican Americans, and African Americans who were freed from slavery after the Civil War.

In the early 1900s, the good citizens of nearby Columbus kept themselves entertained with horse racing, betting, drinking, and chewing tobacco, the favorite pastimes in Columbus, as well as in most of Texas, during this period. Racetracks and saloons were popular gathering places — but not especially family-oriented. Dance halls, such as Schneider Hall, provided a more refined and organized entertainment venue for families and visitors. The music and other performances, food and drink, and all manner of contests drew people from near and far.

Schneider Hall originally operated from the early 1920s through the 1930s. The Schneider siblings — Fred, Jim, Willie, Jake, and Martha — owned and managed the facility. They hosted regular dances at the hall on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday nights, along with a variety of other events and social gatherings. For example, in October 1937, the Arabia Temple Band and Drill Team toured the Gulf Coast region and made a stop at Schneider Hall for a performance and a barbecue. The Farmers League Rally Day in 1939, held at Schneider Hall, featured speakers from across the state and drew large crowds, with more than 1,000 people reportedly in attendance.

After the onset of World War II, Schneider Hall officially closed its doors on a regular schedule of dances and events in 1942, but the family continued to host occasional events and parties throughout the 1950s.

Today, Schneider Hall is owned by Larry, Amber, Kyle and Adrienne Burris. The hall was used for hay storage until 2009, when the Burris family began renovations for their daughter's wedding reception. In May 2010, the restoration of the hall was completed. Every effort was taken to maintain the integrity of the original dance hall, and reclaimed wood from other old structures was used whenever possible.

Continued on next page

Schneider Hall, continued

In addition to the renovation, a fully functioning stand-alone bathroom was built for both women and men was installed. A large deck was built onto the rear of the hall to expand its outdoor facilities. Water and electricity have also been included in the renovated structure. Although the hall has no air-conditioning there are many large windows that allow a comfortable breeze to circulate air.

Amber Becerra , the general manager of Schneider Hall, takes great pride in her legacy and work. "Schneider Hall has been in my family since my great, great grandparents purchased the property in 1925," she stated. "I was part of the renovations that we did in 2010 getting ready for my sister's wedding, and then I officially took on running and managing the hall in 2014 after my mother passed away."

Schneider Hall is a very special place to Amber and to the community. "It holds many childhood memories for me. I have hauled many hay bales into the building, and built many forts in those hay bales," she recalled. "It now offers a wonderful sanctuary to let loose and just relax. There is something about the hall and its surroundings that just make you feel comfortable and at home. For our community, it's wonderful place to gather, and I often donate it to school and other functions to give back to the community," she stated.

When asked about her favorite memory of Schneider Hall, Amber said, "Playing as a child there, and the day I discovered my grandma's writing on the wall. She attended dances there when she was a young girl, and she wrote on one of the walls, it's a neat little section of the walls." Schneider Hall is truly part of the family as demonstrated by the literal handwriting on the wall.

With Schneider Hall in full operations, Amber said she has plans for the future along with important renovations. "I want to continue to grow our business and continue to host weddings, and other special events. We will eventually need a new roof, since the roof is original, and a few other things, but overall our building is in good shape despite its age."

Amber is a stalwart member of the Texas Dance Hall Preservation Association and supports the focus and work of the organization. "I believe in preserving history, and structures and believe the Texas Dance Hall Preservation Association does an amazing job in getting people excited about dance halls, and the rich history they hold."



MEMBER PROFILE: Alice Culhane



Alice Culhane (front), with friends Becky and Doris at Welcome Hall in Industry, Texas (photo courtesy of Alice Culhane)

Alice Culhane was born in Oklahoma, but she got to Texas—specifically, Dallas—as fast as she could. This Lifetime Member of TDHP and classic car enthusiast talks about what the organization means to her.

My whole life has been about trying to save things. That’s just the way I grew up, and when Deb (Fleming, former TDHP president) told me about what she was doing, I kind of scooted right in. I love dancing and I love music. That’s how Deb and I met! I’m passionate about preserving things.

Two years ago, in May, I put together a group of classic car enthusiasts from the Dallas and Houston clubs, and we took a weekend trip down to Austin. Deb took us on a tour with the cars, and we had a blast.

When they did the first big Dance Hall Tour, my friend Becky came in from Colorado, and my friend Doris, who is an interior designer, came with me from Dallas. We made some good friends on that trip. Some of the people came just for the dancing, and some came for the heritage and the buildings. It was a great mix of people.

I’m grateful to see people work so hard to keep this part of Texas history alive. I didn’t grow up with that in Oklahoma. When I saw them trying to preserve these old dance halls ... People would say to me, “Have you ever been to Gruene Hall,” and I’d say yeah. But then I’d say, “Have you ever been to (Fair) Pavillion or Kosciusko’s? Or any of these others?”

I can’t say enough about this organization that’s working to preserve these halls — to find the ones in ruins and try to find somebody to take care of them.



Calling All TDHP Members!

Would you like to be featured in a future TDHP newsletter? We’d love to hear from you and find out why you love Texas dance halls. Tell us about your favorite hall or musician, share a memory, and don’t forget to include a photo. Send your email to Deb@TexasDanceHall.org.

TDHP and SPJST: Partners in Preservation

If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.

Henry Ford

Texas Dance Hall Preservation is pleased to announce our partnership with SPJST (*Slovanska Podporujici Jednota Stau Texas*, or the Slavonic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas). We will work together to identify, document, and preserve community lodge halls associated with SPJST.

SPJST was founded in La Grange, Texas, in 1897. The organization traditionally provided more than insurance, with extensive fellowship activities at its lodges, scholarships for education, care for the aged, and a weekly newspaper, the *Vestnik*. Today, SPJST is the largest fraternal organization in the state, with 104 lodges and 40,000 members. SPJST halls often serve as community centers, hosting festivals and events open to the public, as well as private functions such as weddings, family reunions, and *quinceñaras*.

The Boards of Directors of both SPJST and Texas Dance Hall Preservation recognize that many SPJST lodges around the state are struggling with aging buildings and membership, and that they could benefit from technical and/or financial assistance to renovate, rehabilitate, or restore lodge hall buildings. As SPJST President Brian Vanicek noted, "Maintaining lodge halls represents an ongoing challenge for our members, as well as for us here in the SPJST Home Office." The preservation of these buildings is part of the mission of both organizations.

TDHP will work with SPJST as we develop an inventory and database of Texas dance halls, which is one of the first steps toward helping dance hall owners access the State of Texas Historic Tax Credit Program. That effort will, of course, also include independently owned for-profit and non-profit halls, as well as lodge halls associated with other organizations, such as the Sons of Hermann. For more information, or to share photos and information about your dance hall, please contact TDHP president Steph McDougal at steph.mcdougal@mcdoux.com.

TEXAS DANCE HALLS NEED YOU!

Want to learn more about TDHP and have a positive impact on dance halls?

Visit texasdancehall.org to get the latest news and info. We hope you'll consider becoming a member of Texas Dance Hall Preservation and, remember, a \$25 individual membership makes a great gift! Your membership helps us provide assistance directly to dance hall owners and their communities.

Thank you for reading and sharing this newsletter with friends!