

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places Registration Form****1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Bellville Turnverein  
Other name/site number: Bellville Turnverein Pavilion  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

**2. Location**

Street & number: 966 East Main Street  
City or town: Bellville State: Texas County: Austin  
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ National ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

*Mark Wolfe*  
Signature of certifying official / Title

State Historic Preservation Officer

*12/13/23*  
Date

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

<input type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

### Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions:** SOCIAL: Meeting Hall; RECREATION AND CULTURE: Dancehall

**Current Functions:** SOCIAL: Meeting Hall; RECREATION AND CULTURE: Dancehall

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification:** Other: Late-Nineteenth Century Dance Hall

**Principal Exterior Materials:** WOOD, STONE

**Narrative Description** (see pages 7-11)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Social History, Ethnic Heritage/German, Architecture (*local*)

**Period of Significance:** 1897–1974

**Significant Dates:** 1897, 1909, 1935, 1937

**Significant Person** (only if criterion B is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion D is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Hintz, Joachim H. (builder)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see pages 12-21)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see pages 22-23)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre (0.69 acres)

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.946109°N Longitude: -96.247005°W

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The property is located on the southern portion of the Austin County Fair Convention & Expo grounds. The boundary includes 0.69 acres, specifically the southern portion of the legal parcel identified as A073 J NICHOLS (Property ID: 54513), Bellville, Austin County, Texas as recorded in the Austin County Appraisal District. Data accessed July 25, 2023. The boundary is defined by the stone curbing to the east, south, and west and runs along the rear of the property, cutting out the adjacent buildings to the north (Map 2).

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes less than one acre of the larger 14.27 acre legal parcel identified as A073 J NICHOLS (Property ID: 54513). It includes the historic property and the lawn to the south. Other buildings on the Expo grounds are excluded from the boundary due to their association with the county fairground development and not the Bellville Turnverein.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Verena Aeschbacher (Austin County Historical Commission) and Kristina Kupferschmid,  
Architectural Historian  
Organization: HHM & Associates, Inc.  
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Telephone: 512/478-8014  
Date: August 2023

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 24-27)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 28-39)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 5-6, 40-56)

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## Photograph Log

Name of Property: Bellville Turnverein  
City or Vicinity: Bellville  
County: Austin County  
State: Texas  
Date Photographed: October 25, 2022  
Photographer: Kristina Kupferschmid

*All photographs accurately depict property conditions. No changes nor significant deterioration has occurred since the photos were taken in October 2022.*

Photo 1 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0001)

Oblique of Bellville Turnverein including lawn with flagpole and curbing. Camera facing north.

Photo 2 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0002)

Façade of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 3 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0003)

Rear of Bellville Turnverein in background with fairground buildings in foreground and middle. Camera facing south.

Photo 4 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0004)

Historic entrance at southwest corner of park, at East Main Street (FM 529) and N. Amthor Street, with Bellville Turnverein in background. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 5 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0005)

Entrance on East Main Street (FM 529) with historic stone wall and curbing. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 6 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0006)

Lawn with walkway and flagpole in front of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 7 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0007)

Picnic tables at east side of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 8 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0008)

Rear of Bellville Turnverein showing (left to right) 1972 addition, 1909 addition, and 1935 addition. Camera facing south.

Photo 9 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0009)

West side of Bellville Turnverein with 1935 stage addition at the left. Camera facing east.

Photo 10 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0010)

Rear entrance. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 11 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0011)

East side of Bellville Turnverein with reconfigured rear addition to right. Camera facing west.

Photo 12 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0012)

Interior of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing north.

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Photo 13 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0013)

Detail of original flooring at perimeter and bench near historic primary south entrance. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 14 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0014)

Interior of Bellville Turnverein with bench around perimeter. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 15 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0015)

Detail of roof framing in interior of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing east.

Photo 16 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0016)

Stage in Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 17 (TX\_AustinCounty\_BellvilleTurnverein\_0017)

North rear entrance and window into kitchen. Camera facing northeast.

This project was funded in part through a grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as administered by the Texas Historical Commission. The contents and opinions, however, do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal funds from the National Park Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental Federally Assisted Programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

*This project was funded through an Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund grant from the National Park Service that addresses damage inflicted by Hurricane Harvey. In January 2020, NPS staff concurred that the property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.*

The Bellville Turnverein (also known as Bellville Turnverein Pavilion) was constructed by the local German Turnverein society in 1897 in Bellville, Texas.<sup>1</sup> It is located at 966 East Main Street less than one mile southeast of the town square on the grounds of the Austin County Fair Convention and Expo. Constructed by German-American builder Joachim Hintz, the round dance hall has a 12-sided wood-frame, wood siding, and a sectional cone roof. The roof's framing system—an intricate combination of wood rafters—is exposed in the interior's large open room and supported by a thick concrete column. Other character defining features include its shuttered windows, stage, and decorative rooftop cupola. Alterations to the building largely occurred during the period of significance (1897–1974) and include several rear additions. Repair work to address damage from Hurricane Harvey began in 2020 with approval from the Texas Historical Commission and was carried out in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The property retains a high level of historic integrity. Since reopening, it has hosted weddings, banquets, conferences, reunions, and various other events.

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## Setting and Site (Maps 1-4)

The Bellville Turnverein is located on the north side of East Main Street (Farm-to-Market Road 529) on the outskirts of Bellville, the county seat of Austin County. Residential neighborhoods and commercial development characterize the area west, towards downtown. A designated Historic Texas Cemetery, Oak Knoll Cemetery, occupies 22 acres southwest, across FM 529. Large agricultural homesteads create a rural setting to the east and south. Located on the grounds of the Austin County Fair Convention and Expo, the pavilion shares the site with fairground buildings to the north and a circa 1930s American Legion building to the east.<sup>2</sup> The park and fairgrounds, which extend onto the county-owned parcel immediately north of the park, contain buildings dating from the late 1930s through the 1990s and include covered pavilions, concession stands, bathrooms, barns, and large exposition buildings. A baseball field and an open lawn make up the western half of the park property. Roughly 100 feet southwest of the pavilion is the Austin County Veterans' Memorial, a star-shaped monument added in 1999. A paved drive, dating to the late 1930s, connects buildings within the park and is accessible from FM 529 and North Amthor Street to the west. Another entrance, at the intersection of North Amthor Street and FM 529, historically provided access into the park at the southwest corner but was removed and resodding sometime in the 1960s or 1970s per aerial photos. A late-1930s low stone wall along North Amthor Street and FM 529 opens at each entrance, including the historic one at the southwest corner of the park, where it is distinguished by round stone columns topped with metal Texas stars (Photos 4-5).

The nominated property encompasses 0.69 acres of the larger legal parcel and includes the pavilion and associated landscaping features. The boundary encompasses most of the triangular-shaped area bounded by internal drives at the southeastern corner of the park (Map 2). Cutting out the northern quarter of the triangular area to exclude three fairground buildings, the boundary follows the stone curbing along the drives to the east and west. The drive and curbing were added between 1938 and 1939, after the city acquired the property. The boundary also includes the small lawn directly to the south of the pavilion, separated by a drive (Photo 6). The lawn, demarcated by stone curbing includes a late 1930s flagpole and a paver-laid walkway and sitting area with benches, created some time after the

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<sup>1</sup> Bellville Turnverein is the historic name that was most commonly used. The building was also referenced as the Bellville Turnverein Pavilion at times. Pavilion is used periodically throughout the nomination and is used interchangeably with round dance hall.

<sup>2</sup> Though the entire property may potentially be eligible as a historic district for its association with the county fair, the grant for this nomination and the Determination of Eligibility were for the turnverein only. Further research and fieldwork would be required.

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historic period. Other buildings on the Expo grounds are excluded from the boundary due to their association with the county fairground development and not the Bellville Turnverein.

Some objects and structures within the boundary are too small to include in the resource count. These include the curbing, a newly paved walkway around the western half of the pavilion connecting the front entrance to the rear entrance, two historical markers—a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark for the Bellville Turnverein Pavilion and an Official Texas Historical Marker for the builder, Joachim H. Hintz—positioned south of the main entrance, a flagpole, and picnic tables on historic-age concrete slabs on the east lawn (Photo 7). Landscaping within the boundary is limited to several trees to the east, south, and northwest of the pavilion, and shrubbery at the historic primary entrance into the pavilion and at the seating area north of the flagpole. Historic photographs and aerial images show more trees historically surrounding the pavilion, and newspaper articles indicate much of the entire property was covered with trees prior to city ownership (1937).

## Architectural Description

### Building Evolution

The current footprint is the result of several phases of construction and additions (Figure 1). Built in 1897 with 12 equally sized bays, the Turnverein first expanded the building in 1909 when a shed-roof addition used as a dressing room was added at the far northwest bay (Photo 8). In 1996, the wall on this addition was raised and its shed roof replaced with a flat roof (compare Photo 8 with Figures 1-2). In 1935, a hipped-roof addition was built in the bay west of the dressing room addition to accommodate a stage (Photo 9). In 1972, a shed-roof rear entry and storage addition were constructed at the north and far northeast bays. Finally, in 2022, the current configuration was achieved. During the rehabilitation, the 1972 storage addition was removed and a new one rebuilt (Photos 10-11). The removal of the addition exposed two original windows. The new shed-roof storage addition is half a bay—compared to the previous full bay width—and is flush with the entry addition.

### Exterior (Photos 1-11)

The Bellville Turnverein is a 12-sided, round dance hall, approximately 80 feet in diameter. Its large size accommodated meetings, sports, dances, and social events. Completed in 1897 by German builder Joachim Hintz, the hall was constructed from materials shipped directly from mills. Structurally, the hall has a foundation of 36 stone-clad brick interior perimeter piers, multiple exterior piers, and a wood frame.<sup>3</sup> Historically exposed, stone-clad concrete foundation skirting, possibly added in 1939, now conceals the foundation piers.<sup>4</sup> The building is clad in lap siding painted white. Each of the original 1897 bays contain three window openings, except for the historic primary entrance bay on the south side of the building. This bay contains a historic-age paneled wood double door—painted green and white—flanked by a window on each side. As originally built, the front entry only had wood stairs, and no railing or roof. In 1939, the wood stairs were replaced with concrete stairs, a wood landing, and a stone-clad wing wall was added.<sup>5</sup> In 1972, a small metal shed roof and metal stair handrail were added, and in 1997 the current wood gable roof, wood porch deck, stairs, columns, and handrails replaced the existing entryway (Figure 3).<sup>6</sup> The 1897 window openings all have wood sills, exterior casing, and crowns painted green. Though originally open, wood-framed side-hinged interior storm windows were added in 2022. The current green louvered shutters were also added in 2022.

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<sup>3</sup> Stern and Bucek Architects, “Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1,” prepared for the Building Assessment and Recommendations for Rehabilitation of the Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Texas, 3, May 2018.

<sup>4</sup> This assumption is based on the stone cladding of the brick piers, the addition of a stone-clad entry, and the construction of the stone curbing in 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Stern and Bucek Architects, “Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1,” 5.

<sup>6</sup> Stern and Bucek Architects, “Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1,” 5.



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These shutters replaced the one-over-one single wooden side-hung windows with green fiberglass that were added in 1972.<sup>7</sup>

Fenestration on the additions is a combination of historic- and non-historic- age windows and doors. The 1935 stage addition has two windows identical to the windows in the original bays. These windows flank a paneled single- wood door painted to match the siding. Set underneath the eave of the addition's hipped roof, the door is inaccessible from the ground without a ladder (Figure 2, Photo 8). The adjacent 1909 addition has three small awning windows near the roof that were added at existing vent openings in 2022. This addition's three original window openings, below the southernmost vents, appear boarded in photographs from 1996, and infilled in later photographs. Mimicking the fenestration of the south entry bay, the original rear entryway fenestration was lost with the construction of the 1972 addition. As built in 1972, the rear (north) entry bay retains its double-door and two metal slider windows with green wood casing (Figure 2, Photo 10). The double-door, built flush with the wall in 1972, was inset to its current location in 2022 for ADA compliance. The door is accessed via a concrete ramp with a painted green metal railing. The ramp, constructed in 2022 to accommodate the door's new location, rises above the older concrete landing that extends across the width of the addition. In the adjacent bay to the east, two of the three original 1897 windows were re-exposed with the removal of the 1972 storage addition (Photo 11). The third window, next to the entryway bay, is now an interior doorway from the dance hall into the 2022 storage addition. The 2022 storage addition has no fenestration.

A sectional cone roof caps the building. Originally clad in wood shingles, the roof has had fiberglass composite shingles—replaced several times—since 1972.<sup>8</sup> Original to the roof is its 12-sided cupola with louvered panels for ventilation in every other bay (Figures 5-6, Photo 2). Its wood siding is painted white, and the louvers are painted green. A decorative wooden balustrade with newel posts topped with round finials wraps around the top of the cupola. It is also painted white and green to match the rest of the pavilion. Original to the cupola, the balustrade was removed sometime before the 1990s, but was restored in 1996.<sup>9</sup> Likely removed at the same time as the balustrade—but not restored—was a flagpole that projected up from the cupola.

### Interior

The interior is characterized by a large open room that occupies the entirety of the 1897 original building (Figure 1, Photo 12). To the sides of the open room—in the small additions—are the stage, bathrooms, entry hall and kitchen, and a storage room. The oak flooring in the hall was added in 1935 and laid atop the original pine wood floor.<sup>10</sup> Portions of the original pine flooring remain along the perimeter. Laid parallel to the building perimeter, the original pine floorboards are not in alignment with the oak floors, which are laid at an angle and run north-northwest by south-southeast (Photo 13). Fixed wood benches wrap around most of the perimeter of the room (Photo 14). Added in 2022, they replaced the older built-in benches. In addition to providing seating, the benches also help conceal the HVAC supply units and equipment added to the building in 2022. Until 2022, the building had no air conditioning and heating was provided by overhead natural gas heaters added in 1972. Historically, the temperature was by and large controlled by the open windows and louvered cupola.<sup>11</sup> Horizontal tongue-and-groove siding covers the walls and is painted white. Corners are articulated by vertical wood columns. The storm windows and historic-age south double door all have wood trim. Attached to the wall along the bench are eight plywood fold-down tables. Added sometime shortly after World War II, the tables are painted white and supported by a metal pipe leg when folded down.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stern and Bucek Architects, "Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1," 5.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Cheely, "The Bellville Turnverein Pavilion," Recorded Texas Historical Marker application, 1996, 5, from the Texas Historical Commission.

<sup>9</sup> Stern and Bucek Architects, "Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1," 5.

<sup>10</sup> The RTHL marker application says 1935 and Stern and Bucek Architects say 1970s.

<sup>11</sup> The rest of the HVAC mechanical system is under the floor in the building's crawl space.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with Tom Baron, Bellville Turnverein Pavilion Restoration Project, October 25, 2022.

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In the middle of the open room, a large 12-sided concrete column supports the exposed roof framing system (Photo 12). Added in 1935, the column replaced the 12 original six-by-six columns that extended to the cupola.<sup>13</sup> From the central column, the roof framing system radiates outward and upward (Figure 4). Comprised of vertical posts and braces, diagonal rafters, and horizontal beams, the wood frame creates an intricate pattern. In the middle of the framing system, a vertical “cylinder” with metal tie-rods extends up and supports the cupola (Photo 15). The framing wood is unpainted, as is the wood lath and sheathing.

The raised stage, open to the main room, is accessed by two sets of side stairs (Photo 16). Return air grills for the HVAC system were inserted into the raised stage. Wood flooring and wall siding match the rest of the room. The stage door, visible from the exterior, has been covered by siding and is not visible from the interior (Figure 2, Photo 8). The ceiling of the stage is covered in wood siding.

The 1909 addition adjacent to the stage, built as a dressing room, has been reconfigured multiple times. Converted to a women’s bathroom in 1939, and then into men’s and women’s bathrooms in 1972, the room was updated in 2022 (Figures 1-2, Photo 8). A paneled wood door north of the stage stairs provides access to the men’s bathroom from the main room; “Herren” (“gentlemen”) is painted above the door and a painted Turnverein bicentennial plaque is left of the door. The women’s bathroom is accessed from the north entry hallway by an identical paneled door. “Damen” (“ladies”) is painted next to the door.

The entry hallway and kitchen occupy the addition adjacent to the bathrooms (Photo 17). A wide opening in the wall provides access to the main room from the hallway. Next to the hallway, a smaller shuttered opening serves as a passthrough counter window into the kitchen from the main room. The rear hallway, currently used as the building’s primary entrance and exit, and kitchen were both updated in 2022. Floors in both are ceramic tile, and walls are painted white drywall. The ceiling is lower than the height of the main room walls in the addition and they are also painted white drywall. Entrance to the kitchen is from a single paneled door off the east side of the hallway. The storage addition, adjacent to the kitchen, is accessed from the main room via paneled wood double doors.

### **Alterations since 1974**

Alterations outside the period of significance have been sensitive to the historic materials and design of the building, have been purposeful, and have allowed for the building’s continued use and preservation. Two major phases of work outside the period of significance have occurred: one in the 1990s and one most recently in 2020-2022. In 1996 the building was in a state of deterioration due to neglect and a lack of funding for upkeep and renovations. Upon designation as a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark (RTHL) in 1996, the Bellville Historical Society led a restoration effort in 1997, coinciding with the building’s centennial. Approved by the Texas Historical Commission, the work addressed the building’s roof leaks, floorboard deterioration, peeling paint, and wood deterioration at the cupola.<sup>14</sup> The rehabilitation project also replaced the south entrance’s shed roof and stairs and landing—which was suffering from wood rot—with the current wood gabled roof and stairs. The most recent rehabilitation effort, funded in part with a grant from the National Park Service and carried out in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, addressed Hurricane Harvey-related damage and helped weatherize and modernized the building. Hurricane Harvey’s historic rainfall exposed the roof’s susceptibility to leakage, causing damage and staining to the underside of the cupola and the vertical roof support posts below the cupola. Storm damage addressed in the rehabilitation included replacing rotten wood in the kitchen, rear entry, and restrooms, as well as the roof replacement in those areas. Roof framing was strengthened including installation of a specially fabricated horizontal girt to support long rafters. Hurricane ties were installed on all rafter ends and lightening protection was installed. Wood siding was

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<sup>13</sup> Stern and Bucek Architects, “Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1,” 5.

<sup>14</sup> Verena Aeschbacher, Michael Yancey, and Peter Aeschbacher, “Turnverein ‘Gut Heil’ Pavilion,” Draft NRHP Inventory/Nomination Form, 2019, from the THC.

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repaired as necessary. The cupola received a new roof and louvers and parts of the balustrade were repaired and replaced. The work also included the addition of windows, shutters, HVAC, an ADA compliant ramp and railing, updated electrical, and new bathrooms, kitchen, and benches. The paint analysis was completed to determine historic colors and the interior and exterior wood was painted. The 1972 storage addition was also reconfigured in 2022.

### **Integrity**

The property retains a high degree of integrity. It remains in its original location. Despite the intrusion of historic-age and non-historic-age county fair buildings and the 1999 Veteran's Memorial to the southwest, the property retains a characteristically rural setting. Integrity of design, materials, and workmanship are also highly intact, with the overall plan and design of the building largely unchanged from the period of significance. The various additions were constructed during the period of significance and are considered historic. The round, 12-sided wood-frame, wood siding, sectional cone roof, and decorative rooftop cupola all remain. The roof's framing system—an intricate combination of wood rafters supported by a thick concrete column—remains intact and visible on the interior. Other intact features include the fenestration pattern, shuttered windows, some historic-age doors and flooring, stage, and interior materials. Overall, the property conveys the feeling of a late nineteenth century round dance hall in Texas. While now owned by the City of Bellville, it remains a community center associated with social and cultural activity.

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## Statement of Significance

The Bellville Turnverein (also known as Bellville Turnverein Pavilion) is located at 966 East Main Street in Bellville, Texas. Beginning in the nineteenth century, many German immigrants settled in Austin County and Bellville. Amidst the growth of the German Turnverein movement in Texas, the Bellville Turnverein organized in 1885 and built Turner Hall in 1889. Due to popularity of events, the society outgrew the hall in just a few years necessitating the purchase of more property in 1895 and the new Bellville Turnverein was built in 1897. A strong symbol of Bellville's rich German heritage and cultural traditions, it accommodated a variety of events such as dances, meetings, festivals, concerts, and movies over the years.<sup>16</sup> The property is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage/German at the local level of significance for its association with the growth of the local German Turnverein society and for the important role it played as a community center fostering much of Bellville's social and cultural activity into the 1970s. Bellville Turnverein is also nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent intact example of a late nineteenth century round dance hall, a property type distinct to rural Texas communities settled by German and Czech populations, and as an outstanding design by Joachim Hintz. The building was the first round dance hall built by Hintz, and it served as a prototype for others constructed nearby in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The period of significance begins in 1897, its year of construction, and extends to 1974, accounting for its continued use and function through the 50-year point.

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## Criterion A: Social History and Ethnic Heritage/German

### Early History of Austin County and Bellville: Nineteenth Century Settlement and Development

Permanent settlement in present-day Austin County began under Mexican rule in 1821 with the founding of Stephen F. Austin's Colony. Spread over a large area in southeast Texas, Austin's Colony encompassed all of present-day Austin County. Between 1821 and 1835—when the colonial land office closed—approximately 2,000 people lived in the colony, primarily in areas with rich soil, along the Brazos, Colorado, and San Bernard rivers.<sup>17</sup> Though most colonists came from the American Southeast, immigrants also came from Germany in the early 1830s. Following Texas's independence and the organization of Austin County in 1837, more settlers arrived, migrating from the Southeast, Germany, and present-day Czech Republic. By the mid-1840s, the county's population was around 2,500, comprised largely of farmers.<sup>18</sup> Enslaved people accounted for roughly 45 percent of the population. The population was dispersed across the county, though the northern and western parts were favored due to its rolling hills and rich soils. Small clusters of settlements included the communities of Industry and Cat Spring, both settled in the 1830s. Bellville was founded in 1846 following Austin County's search for a new county seat location. Laid out on 145 acres of land donated by brothers Thomas and James Bell, Bellville officially replaced San Felipe as the Austin County seat in 1848. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, Bellville steadily grew. By 1900, Bellville was the largest city in Austin County with around 1,500 people (roughly 10 percent of the entire county population).<sup>19</sup> The downtown developed around the courthouse square with hotels, stores, and offices, and residents lived scattered outside the downtown and into the countryside. Bellville slowly grew in the twentieth century, though it remained small; its

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<sup>16</sup> Bellville Turnverein is the historic name most commonly used. The building was also referenced as the Bellville Turnverein Pavilion at times. Pavilion is used interchangeably with round dance hall.

<sup>17</sup> Historical Note, "A Guide to the Austin's Colony Records, 1823-1841," TARO Texas Archival Resources Online, accessed October 20, 2022, [https://txarchives.org/txglo/finding\\_aids/00053.xml](https://txarchives.org/txglo/finding_aids/00053.xml).

<sup>18</sup> Charles Christopher Jackson, "Austin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/austin-county>.

<sup>19</sup> Based on 1904 population numbers.; *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1904*, May 1904, 207; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph123779/m1/219/?q=bellville>; accessed April 26, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas State Historical Association.

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population stayed below 3,000 during the historic period. Commercial growth was generally confined to the courthouse square, though highway development contributed to commercial businesses along routes leading in and out of town.

*Germans in Austin County and Bellville*

In the nineteenth century, Germans accounted for a large portion of the population growth of Austin County and Bellville. Between 1831 and 1900, thousands of Germans settled across the county, including in Bellville. The emigration of Germans to Austin County followed the arrival of Johann Friedrich Ernst. From Oldenburg, Germany, Ernst emigrated with his family in 1829, arriving first in New York before settling in Texas in 1831. Originally destined for Missouri, the Ernsts, along with another German, Charles Fordtran, changed their destination to Texas after learning of settlement incentives, including land grants, offered by the Mexican government in *Coahuila y Tejas*.<sup>20</sup> Considered one of the first German families who settled in Texas, the Ernsts obtained a league of land on Mill Creek in the northwestern part of present-day Austin County. Fordtran received a quarter of a league for surveying the tract.<sup>21</sup>

At this time, Germany was experiencing political and economic unrest driving professionals and tradesmen alike to seek new opportunities elsewhere. Population pressures, land shortages and seizures, unemployment, and high taxes were only some of the issues facing Germans in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>22</sup> The industrial revolution had also led to the decline of trades and the rise of a new industrial proletariat subject to poor working conditions. Rising food costs, caused by failed harvests and a potato blight, also contributed to German unrest. Mandated military service and religious and political persecution, worsened by the failed German Revolution in 1848, also contributed to the emigration to the United States of hundreds of thousands of Germans.

Letters written to family and friends from recently emigrated Germans describing the opportunities available were often published in newspapers and books in Germany. The letters enticed and encouraged other Germans to join those already established in the U.S. Such chain migration occurred across the country, in Texas, and in Austin County. After letters from Ernst circulated in German newspapers, more Germans emigrated to Austin County. Compared to the more organized colonization efforts of the mid-1840s that led to the founding of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg, German immigration to Austin County in this period “was rather haphazard. Families in Germany simply read Ernst’s letters in their newspapers and decided to make the voyage to Texas.”<sup>23</sup> By 1860, half of Austin County’s population—roughly 5,000 people—was German.<sup>24</sup> Many settled near Ernst, where they formed the community of Industry (roughly 15 miles west of present-day Bellville), while other communities, including Cat Spring, Welcome, and New Ulm, were founded by or almost entirely comprised of Germans.<sup>25</sup>

Bellville’s population by the end of the nineteenth century was roughly half Anglo American and half German. Unlike more isolated communities with large German populations, particularly further west in the Hill Country, these two communities interacted commercially, educationally, and socially, frequently sharing information and advancing assimilation.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Bellville “had become a blend of the two cultures.”<sup>27</sup> Like the Anglo residents, Germans in

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<sup>20</sup> Stephanie L. McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas: History of a Building Type, 1897-1937, MS thesis, (University of Texas at Austin, 2008), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh E. Meredith, “Ernst, Johann Friedrich,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/ernst-johann-friedrich>.

<sup>22</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 10.

<sup>23</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 10.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson, “Austin County,” *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>25</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 10.

<sup>26</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 14.

<sup>27</sup> Isabel Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, (New Ulm, Texas: New Ulm Enterprises, 1992), 147.

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Bellville were merchants, musicians, farmers, teachers, carpenters, and woodworkers.<sup>28</sup> Deeply integrated within the community, many Germans were considered influential town and business leaders. Outside the commercial realm, Germans shared cultural traditions and were heavily involved in the community's social life. So integrated into the community, German culture and "German social institutions and mores became a significant part of the fibre that was Bellville."<sup>29</sup>

Social History of Bellville in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Despite its relatively small population, Bellville had a vibrant social scene in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, in part due to its large German population. Social and recreational events included concerts, dances, dramas, excursion train trips, and an annual Maifest, a traditional German celebration of the arrival of spring. Hosted by organizations "whose sole purpose was the promotion of community-wide activities," these events brought the town together and helped create a close-knit community.<sup>30</sup> Social organizations in Bellville were varied with regard to focus and interest, membership—men, women, or both—and cultural origin. There were groups focused on dancing, playing cards, literacy, and reading. Women's groups included the Lily Club for "pretty girls;" the Bachelor Maids club, "famous for the character of entertainments given;" the Good Luck Society; and the German Ladies Club.<sup>31</sup> Most clubs did not have their own meeting spaces, but typically met in the homes of members. Bellville also had several *Gesang Vereins*, German singing clubs. Common in Texas towns with German populations, these singing clubs were typically all-male and provided music for *Saengerfests*, singing festivals. In addition to preserving and spreading this German cultural tradition, *Gesang Vereins* provided German immigrants an opportunity to commune with one another. Bellville's oldest singing club, the Piney Concordia Gesang Verein, was founded by some of the town's early German settlers in 1860. A second club, the Bellville Liederkranz, organized in 1891.<sup>32</sup> After meeting in members' homes for several decades, the Piney Concordia Gesang Verein built a meeting hall outside of town. Its second hall, Concordia Hall, built to replace the first building destroyed by a storm in 1900, still stands at 952 South Tesch Street and is used by the Lions Club.<sup>33</sup>

While some clubs were exclusive in their focus, other groups in Bellville organized for a more general goal of hosting and promoting social events for the community-at-large. One of the first social clubs, Unity Hall Society, was an all-men's group that counted many Germans among its members. The group built a meeting hall, Unity Hall, in 1873 just south of the courthouse square on S. Holland Street (roughly the present-day location of City Hall). Figuring "significantly in the social, political, and educational life of the community," the hall hosted a variety of community events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>34</sup> In addition to its role as an "amusement center," hosting concerts, dances, and plays, the building also served as a public school. Sold to the school district in 1881, the building continued to serve a social function when not in use by students.<sup>35</sup> The Bellville Social Club, another organization devoted to community activities, used Unity Hall for its annual Maifest in 1881, 1882, and 1883, attracting thousands of people.<sup>36</sup> In addition to Maifest, the Bellville Social Club, which counted several Germans as founders, also hosted masquerade balls at Unity Hall. Due to the popularity of its events, the Bellville Social Club in 1883 purchased 14.7 acres less than a mile southeast of the courthouse on Crump Ferry Road on which to build a large hall that would provide one place "for all the social amusement needed in a community," bringing the "people closer together in

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<sup>28</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 147.

<sup>30</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 148.

<sup>31</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 156.

<sup>32</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 148.

<sup>35</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 148.

<sup>36</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 149.

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feeling and interest,” according to the local newspaper.<sup>37</sup> Despite having drawings for a building—octagon in shape with a stage—the club only ever built a raised platform on the property.<sup>38</sup> Though the Bellville Social Club never constructed a pavilion on the site, another social organization, the Bellville Turnverein, succeeded in constructing one 14 years later, in 1897.

*Bellville Turnverein History*

The Bellville Turnverein organized in 1885. Dedicated to the promotion of social activities in Bellville, the Turnverein was part of a larger national Turnverein Movement. Stemming from Turnvereins—gymnastics clubs—in Germany, the first Turnvereins in the U.S. organized in Cincinnati and New York in 1848.<sup>39</sup> By 1852 there was a national Turnverein association with more than 20 local clubs, a newspaper, and an annual convention.<sup>40</sup> Founded in the U.S. by Forty-Eighters, supporters of the failed 1848 revolution in Germany, the mission of the national Turnverein organization reflected the spirit of its founders:

Promote physical education and disseminate rational ideas, in order to advance health, happiness, prosperity, and the progress of mankind. The Turner principles, briefly summarized, are as follows: Liberty, against all oppression; Tolerance, against all fanaticism; Reason, against all superstition; Justice against all exploitation! Free speech, free press, free assembly for the discussion of all questions, so that men and women may think unfettered and order their lives by the dictates of conscience – such is our ideal, which we strive to attain through “a sound mind in a sound body.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the promotion of gymnastics and exercise, Turnvereins in the U.S., as in Germany, had political, social, and cultural interests, promoting German culture as well as liberal politics. The Turnverein was characteristically comprised of freethinkers with liberal beliefs. The American Turnvereins by and large supported the Union and abolition during the Civil War, with many members volunteering for the Union Army. Some clubs were more politically active than others, supporting socialist movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Culturally, while encouraging American citizenship, Turnvereins also focused on preserving the German language and traditions, speaking German at meetings and hosting German celebrations such as Maifests, Oktoberfests, and Christmas Markets. The clubs served as support systems for new immigrants and fostered community among Germans in the U.S. by providing a space for exercising, gathering, eating, drinking, meeting, and socializing.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there were more than 300 Turnverein clubs with over 40,000 members in the U.S.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, though, numbers declined. Anti-German sentiment stemming from the two world wars, assimilation of Germans into American culture, and a lack in popularity of gymnastics led to clubs

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<sup>37</sup> “Efforts being made to restore historic Turnverein,” *The Bellville Times*, July 13, 2017, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 149.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Lou LeCompte, “Turnverein Movement [Turner Hall],” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/turnverein-movement>.

<sup>40</sup> Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis Ruth Lilly Special Collections & Archives, “American Turners Local Societies, 1866–2006.” <http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/collections/german-american/mss038>. (Accessed April 2023); Andrew Wanko, “The Glories of Germanhood: A History of the Turnverein in St. Louis.” Landmarks Association of St. Louis, Inc. [http://www.landmarks-stl.org/news/the\\_glories\\_of\\_germanhood\\_a\\_history\\_of\\_the\\_turnverein\\_in\\_st\\_louis\\_chapter/](http://www.landmarks-stl.org/news/the_glories_of_germanhood_a_history_of_the_turnverein_in_st_louis_chapter/). (Accessed October 2022).

<sup>41</sup> *American Turners. A century of health, 1848-1948*, p.3. SC 369 AME, quoted in “A German-American Contribution to Davenport’s History: Turnverein, the Turner Movement,” blog post, The Davenport Public Library, July 27, 2018, [A German-American Contribution to Davenport’s History: Turnverein, the Turner Movement | Primary Selections from Special Collections \(davenportlibrary.com\)](https://www.davenportlibrary.com/a-german-american-contribution-to-davenport-s-history-turnverein-the-turner-movement).

<sup>42</sup> “A German-American Contribution to Davenport’s History: Turnverein, the Turner Movement,” blog post, The Davenport Public Library, July 27, 2018, [A German-American Contribution to Davenport’s History: Turnverein, the Turner Movement | Primary Selections from Special Collections \(davenportlibrary.com\)](https://www.davenportlibrary.com/a-german-american-contribution-to-davenport-s-history-turnverein-the-turner-movement).

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disbanding or merging with other clubs. Some halls closed, while others were sold and used as dance halls, bars, or bowling alleys. According to the American Turners, there are currently 50 active Turnverein clubs in the U.S.<sup>43</sup>

The first Turnverein club in Texas organized in Galveston in 1851.<sup>44</sup> At the height of the movement in the late nineteenth century, 21 towns in Texas had 28 Turnverein societies, some with over 600 members. Large cities and small communities with German populations, including Houston (organized 1854), New Braunfels (organized 1855), San Antonio (organized 1855), Comfort (organized 1860), and Boerne (organized in 1878), had Turnvereins. Split on the issue of slavery and secession during the Civil War, some Texas Turnverein members withdrew from the national association and volunteered for the Confederacy. In the 1870s, Texas Turnvereins formed their own association rather than joining that national organization, an indication that most Texas societies were more politically conservative than those on the East Coast and in Midwest.<sup>45</sup> Even so, Texas Turnvereins maintained similar cultural and social goals, opening up their large halls to host community-wide celebrations and events. In many communities with Turnvereins, particularly the smaller rural towns, society halls often served as community centers.<sup>46</sup> Though the promotion of gymnastics was one of the primary functions of the early Turnverein movement across the country, by the late nineteenth century, gymnastics, particularly in Texas, had failed to gain popularity. Turnvereins whose sole function was gymnastics disbanded or merged with other social organizations and clubs.<sup>47</sup> Other German societies, including Agricultural Societies and Shooting Clubs, also existed in communities with German populations, sometimes with or without Turnvereins. Though the focus of these societies, as indicated by their names, differed from Turnvereins, they often provided similar social and cultural functions.

In Austin County, known Turnvereins organized in Coshatte (roughly five miles southeast of Bellville), New Ulm, Industry, and Bellville. Other German societies with similar social functions, including Agricultural Societies, formed in Cat Springs, Shelby, and Peters. The Belleville Turnverein organized comparatively late, in 1885, and counted some of Bellville's town leaders as officials. Officially named the Bellville Turnverein Gut Heil (Good Health) on its state charter, the society, though its membership small, exclaimed in the local newspaper it had "spunk and enterprise in it that makes it a potent factor in the life and happiness of Bellville."<sup>48</sup> The society, which had 31 members in 1886, hosted social events at Unity Hall and promoted and fostered German cultural traditions through music, dancing, and some sports.<sup>49</sup> The Bellville Turnverein was considered more of a social and cultural organization rather than an athletics club.

Shortly after organizing, the Turnverein purchased a small lot near the county jail on Bell and Holland streets to construct a hall to serve the society's needs and function as an opera house and community space. Funded in part through society dues and the sale of bonds, Turner Hall opened around 1889.<sup>50</sup> Designed by noted Houston architect Eugene Heiner and constructed by Austin County carpenter and builder Joachim Hintz, Turner Hall sat around 600 people and served as a playhouse, and a dance hall, in addition to its use by the Turnverein.<sup>51</sup> The Turnverein committee in charge of events provided the "fun-loving people [of Bellville] an attraction every few weeks."<sup>52</sup> The local schools also used the building for events, and politicians, including Governor Will Hogg, gave speeches in Turner Hall. The building also hosted the Turnverein's Maifest. Taking over the event from the Social Club, the Turnverein hosted its first Maifest in 1890. The Santa Fe Railroad ran excursion trains from Brenham and Kenney to

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<sup>43</sup> "Our Clubs," American Turners, accessed April 14, 2023, [Our Clubs American-Turners American Turners](#).

<sup>44</sup> LeCompte, "Turnverein Movement [Turner Hall]," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>45</sup> LeCompte, "Turnverein Movement [Turner Hall]," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>46</sup> LeCompte, "Turnverein Movement [Turner Hall]," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Lou LeCompte, "Turnverein Movement [Turner Hall]," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed December 01, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/turnverein-movement>.

<sup>48</sup> "Efforts being made to restore historic Turnverein," *The Bellville Times*, July 13, 2017, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Freie Presse Fur Texas*, June 4, 1886, 1, from newspapers.com.

<sup>50</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 150.

<sup>51</sup> *The Bellville Times*, January 18, 1895, 12.

<sup>52</sup> *The Bellville Times*, January 18, 1895, 12.; Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 150.



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Bellville for the celebration that featured a stock show, produce exposition, beer and food stands, local merchants, games, and a shooting gallery.<sup>53</sup>

Due to the popularity of its events, the Turnverein sought a building and site larger than the one downtown. Retaining ownership of Turner Hall (which burned down sometime around 1900), the Turnverein also purchased the Bellville Social Club's property on Crump Ferry Road in 1895. The group paid around \$850 for the roughly 14-acre site.<sup>54</sup> Shortly after acquiring the site, the Turnverein held the 1895 Maifest there, using the Social Club's platform as a stage. After two years of using the platform, the Turnverein agreed to build a pavilion in its place. They contracted Hintz to build it for \$360.<sup>55</sup> Similar to the Social Club's plan for a pavilion, the contract with Hintz called for a nearly round, 12-sided building roughly 80 feet in diameter. Using lumber shipped directly from mills, Hintz finished the pavilion in October 1897. Local newspapers at the time predicted "it will stand to be a source of great enjoyment for this and the next generation to come."<sup>56</sup>

For the next four decades, the Turnverein and pavilion remained the center of Bellville's social life, hosting some of the community's largest events. At the site, the society hosted annual Maifest celebrations, fall harvest festivals and stock shows, Easter egg hunts, and Fourth of July celebrations, often attracting thousands and even tens of thousands of visitors for some festivities (Figure 5-7).<sup>57</sup> During this period, the Turnverein started working with other local organizations and groups, including church groups, the Bellville Chamber of Commerce, and the Vocational Department of Agriculture at the local high school, to plan and co-host events at the pavilion. They also started working with the Austin County Fair Association (founded as the Bellville Community Fair Association) in 1927 to host the annual fall county fair. Beginning in 1928 and continuing today, the Austin County Fair Association used the Turnverein property for the annual Austin County Fair. The property also became a favorite dance spot, prompting the Turnverein in 1935 to add the stage and replace the original floors with an oak floor, making it "one of the best dance pavilions in South Texas."<sup>58</sup> After replacing the floors, the Turnverein adopted a rule that no meals be served in the pavilion. Politically, little is known about the Bellville Turnverein, but in 1911, the society hosted an anti-prohibition rally, featuring bands, speeches, fireworks, and a dance.<sup>59</sup> The society opened the property to the public for use as a park in the early twentieth century, adding a baseball field to the north side of what was called Turner Park. The Turnverein also opened the pavilion to a variety of other organizations, including the Piney Concordia, Austin County Medical Society, the Motor League of South Texas, and the Old Settlers, who used the site for events and meetings throughout the period. Despite its use, the building did sit unused a times, resulting in damage from woodpeckers living in the park's tree grove.<sup>60</sup>

During a period of renewed anti-German sentiment in the leadup to World War II and a decline in Turnverein societies across the country and locally, the West Mill Creek Turnverein in neighboring Washington County disbanded in 1938, and the Bellville Turnverein sold its 14-acre tract and building to the city in 1937. After months of talks between the city, which was looking for a site to build a public pool, 24 Turnverein members agreed at a September meeting to sell the property, along with Unity Hall (which they purchased in 1904 after Turner Hall burned), for \$5,250 for

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<sup>53</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 151.

<sup>54</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 152.

<sup>55</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 153.

<sup>56</sup> Frizzell, *Bellville: The Founders and Their Legacy*, 153.

<sup>57</sup> Reflecting the assimilation of the Germans in Bellville, and likely the anti-German sentiment lingering from World War I, the society changed the name of the annual spring festival from Maifest to Community Fair around 1920. The only known historic photographs of the property located are those included in the nomination.

<sup>58</sup> "Pavilion at Turner Park Is Given New Bonnet and Shoes," *The Bellville Times*, May 3, 1935, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *The Houston Post*, July 14, 1911, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *The Bellville Times*, April 6, 1911, 5.

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“amusement and park purposes.”<sup>61</sup> For its part, the city issued park bonds and increased the tax rate to purchase the property.<sup>62</sup>

When acquired by the city, the tract remained mostly vegetated and unimproved, other than the Bellville Turnverein and baseball field. Asked by the city to prepare plans and specifications for park improvements, Texas A & M University landscape arts students and professors prepared lofty drawings that included a softball diamond, two tennis courts, paths and sidewalks, a roller skating rink, barbecue pits, tables and benches, recreation buildings, a pool, and landscaping and fencing.<sup>63</sup> Funding for park improvements came in part from a \$25,815 Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant awarded in 1938.<sup>64</sup> Around 40 local men worked for six to eight months on park improvements, incorporating some of the Texas A & M student specifications. When completed, the improved city park featured: a swimming pool and bathhouses (demolished), two tennis courts (demolished), a wading pool (demolished), an American Legion building (extant), and an open-air pavilion (extant) for concerts and entertainment.<sup>65</sup> An exhibit building was also added in cooperation with the Austin County Fair Association (extant).<sup>66</sup> Though not listed as improvements, two of three buildings directly north of the pavilion were also likely built at this time due to their similarity in design and materials to the open-air pavilion. Improvements also included new native stone fencing, walls, and curbing (extant) and re-landscaping with “an ornamental entrance at the southwest corner of the tract, and a paved driveway leading to another entrance just south of the pavilion.”<sup>67</sup> The nominated property also received new concrete entry stairs and stone entry walls as part of the park improvements.

After the sale of the property to the city, Turnverein references in the local newspaper waned, though no article or record of the society disbanding was identified. Under city ownership, the pavilion continued its role as a dance and meeting hall, used and rented to various organizations and groups, including the local high school band, football team, and the local electrical cooperative. The County Fair Association continued using the pavilion, too, hosting dances and movies during its annual fair. As the city and Austin County Fairgrounds Association added more buildings to the site, the pavilion, without air conditioning or heating, was comparatively obsolete and therefore used less frequently. Despite the money invested in the rear entry addition in the early 1970s, by the 1980s years of neglect left the pavilion in poor condition. Texas Parks and Wildlife offered to buy the pavilion from the city and demolish it, but Bellville’s mayor, the Austin County judge, and the Bellville Historical Society organized to restore and save the building.<sup>68</sup> The society worked with the Texas Historical Commission to make the pavilion a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and led a restoration effort that was celebrated, along with the pavilion’s centennial, with a party and dance. Despite the renewed interest in the pavilion, it remained underutilized in the 20 years after the restoration, hosting antique fairs and little else. The most recent rehabilitation, though, led by the nonprofit Bellville Turnverein Restoration Project, modernized the building and reignited interest in its use as an event space. Since reopening in 2022, the pavilion has hosted weddings, banquets, conferences, reunions, and various other parties and events.

### Criterion C: Architecture

Between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, hundreds of large halls and pavilions were built in Texas. Constructed by various societies and groups, including Turnvereins and Agricultural Societies, these buildings

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<sup>61</sup> “City Purchase Park Property from Turnverein,” *The Bellville Times*, September 10, 1937, 1.

<sup>62</sup> “City Commission Approves Budget; Tax Rate Raised,” *The Bellville Times*, September 19, 1937, 1.

<sup>63</sup> “Bellville City Park Improvement Plans Gain New Impetus,” *The Bellville Times*, January 20, 1938, 1.

<sup>64</sup> “\$25,815.00 WPA Park Grant Approved,” *The Bellville Times*, May 19, 1938, 1.

<sup>65</sup> “\$25,815.00 WPA Park Grant Approved,” *The Bellville Times*, May 19, 1938, 1.

<sup>66</sup> “\$25,815.00 WPA Park Grant Approved,” *The Bellville Times*, May 19, 1938, 1.

<sup>67</sup> “\$25,815.00 WPA Park Grant Approved,” *The Bellville Times*, May 19, 1938, 1.

<sup>68</sup> “Grawunder kept Turnverein alive” undated newspaper article from collection of Carolyn Zapalac (descendent of Joachim Hintz)

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generally served a similar purpose.<sup>69</sup> Whether constructed as meeting halls, dance halls, shooting halls, or sports halls, these buildings played significant social roles in their communities. Despite a common social role, differences in locale, geography, climate, ethnic and cultural association, material availability, and funding resulted in various hall plans and designs. One variation in Texas was the non-orthogonal, or “round” hall, a multi-sided building of five or more sides of equal length. Though some were not truly “round,” these halls are generally circular compared to the square and rectangular halls.<sup>70</sup> In Texas, only 18 round dance halls, including the Bellville Turnverein’s building, are known to have been constructed.<sup>71</sup>

Rare compared to orthogonal halls in Texas, round dance halls were almost “exclusively” constructed in rural Central and South Central Texas communities with German and Czech populations between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.<sup>72</sup> The first round dance halls built in Texas were the 1847 Vereins Kirche in Fredericksburg (demolished in 1897 and replaced by a 1935 replica), and the 1880 Garten Verein in Galveston (extant, NRHP 1977).<sup>73</sup> Built by Germans and similar in plan, the first two round dance halls differ from later halls in terms of size, construction, and ornamentation. Significantly smaller in diameter and height than later halls, the Vereins Kirche was also differentiated by its roof support comprised of multiple interior pillars. The Garten Verein is distinctly different from most halls because of its high style and ornamentation, a reflection of its location in one of the state’s largest nineteenth-century cities and the wealth of the businessmen who funded its construction.<sup>74</sup> In comparison, later halls, beginning with Hintz’s Bellville Turnverein, were built larger and more modestly. They also share the following physical characteristics:

- “Pier and beam foundation
- Wood frame construction
- Sectional cone roof
- Interior center support structure and pitched-truss roof-support system
- Passive ventilation with a cupola and multiple windows per elevation”<sup>75</sup>

In her thesis on round dance halls in Texas, Stephanie McDougal argues that Joachim Hintz and the Bellville Turnverein were largely responsible for introducing and popularizing the larger more modest building form in Texas. Though non-orthogonal-shaped buildings were not new in the nineteenth century, having been used for centuries in Europe and the Middle East for churches and mosques, the octagonal form became popular in barn design in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. Octagonal or round barns were particularly prevalent in Upper Midwestern states.<sup>76</sup> Agricultural journals touted the design for requiring less material, its strength, and its easy light-frame construction compared to barns that required heavy timbers.<sup>77</sup> Also promoted through agricultural college and experiment station publications, the form’s popularity grew in the nineteenth century, as detailed descriptions and plans were disseminated through various agricultural publications, like *American Agriculturalist* (Figures 8-9). Popular plans published in the journal between 1885 and 1888 featured both self-supporting roofs, as well as barns that had one or

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<sup>69</sup> Turnverein designs in other states contrasted the Bellville Turnverein. For example, the 1883 Turnverein Milwaukee Hall (Turner Hall) was a four-story brick vaguely Romanesque Revival building designed by Henry C. Koch and Company. “Turnverein Milwaukee Hall (Turner Hall)”, *Society of Architectural Historians*, accessed December 7, 2023, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/WI-01-MI34>.

<sup>70</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 4.

<sup>71</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” vii.

<sup>72</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” vii.

<sup>73</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 36; Galveston is one exception in terms of location since it is not located in Central or South Central Texas.

<sup>75</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 41.

<sup>76</sup> Rowan Davidson and Peggy Veregin, “Wisconsin Centric Barns,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2017, 3; Michelle Dennis, “Common Farm and Ranch Barns in North Dakota,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2016, 18.

<sup>77</sup> McDougal, “The Round Dance Halls of Texas,” 26.

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multiple central support posts, similar to Bellville.<sup>78</sup> In the 1890s, the true-round barn, versus the octagonal, was also heavily promoted in journals. Many of these plans featured interior central silos with a ventilation cupola above, and some with dance floors, similar to the Bellville design.<sup>79</sup> Through this promotion and dissemination of information, Hintz was likely influenced by the design and adapted it for use as a social hall in Bellville.

As a German and a farmer, as well as a carpenter, Hintz was an active member of his local German agricultural society, the Cat Spring Agricultural Society. As a member, Hintz had access to the society's lending library, which included United States Department of Agriculture reports and publications from the society's various subscriptions, including *American Agriculturalist*.<sup>80</sup> The non-orthogonal plan in these publications likely appealed to Hintz for several reasons: it required fewer materials, therefore costing less; its structural stability, particularly in high winds; and its suitability and adaptability for Central Texas and the Turnverein.<sup>81</sup> The form itself offered ventilation through the cupola, and more windows (typically not included in the barn designs) could be added to each façade. The round form also offered the Turnverein space for meeting and exercise, and was well suited for the circular German dances, including the *schottische*, a slower polka, and waltzes.<sup>82</sup> Hintz's ability, though, to adapt the form—adding more windows, eliminating the second story, and reorganizing aspects of the roof support and truss system—is a testament to his ability and resulted in a building type unique to Central and South Central Texas.<sup>83</sup>

After constructing the building for the Bellville Turnverein in 1897, Hintz built two more round halls using the Bellville example as the prototype. Both Peters-Hacienda Community Hall, constructed for the local Schuetzenverein in 1900, and Cat Spring Agricultural Hall, built for the local agricultural society in 1903 are in Austin County and extant, though neither retain the high degree of integrity of the Bellville Turnverein (Figures 10-11). The Peters-Hacienda Community Hall, roughly halfway between Bellville and Sealy to the southeast, is similar in design and materials to the Bellville pavilion, though its size and roof framing differentiate it from the nominated building. Eight-sided, as opposed to Bellville's 12 sides, Peters-Hacienda Hall had a smaller footprint and different roof framing system. Like the Bellville pavilion, the hall was built with a central interior post, was topped with a sectional cone roof with a cupola and had three window openings per bay. Non-historic-age alterations to Peters-Hacienda Hall, including the extension of several walls by 18 feet, as well as other additions, including a covered entryway and patio, on all sides of the building detract from its integrity. In Cat Spring, Hintz constructed a "twin" to the Bellville pavilion.<sup>84</sup> Twelve-sided and similar in size, the hall in Cat Spring was also built with the same materials, roof, cupola, and window openings per bay. While the two halls share a similar roof framing system, the Cat Spring hall was constructed with a full-height, central "silo" support system "in which the lower section comprised a gazebo-like bandstand," later replaced with a single center column similar to Bellville.<sup>85</sup> Alterations over the years include the construction of 4,000 square feet (as built it was roughly 5,800 square feet) in the form of multiple extensions and additions, as well as the addition of a metal roof. Of the three, the Bellville Turnverein's building retains the most integrity.

Over the next 40 years, other societies and builders adapted Hintz's form, constructing 14 variations of the round dance hall (10 are extant).<sup>86</sup> Six-, eight-, and 12-sided, the round dance halls are mostly similar on the exterior to the Bellville Turnverein, though variations in the interiors and framing exist. Though built into the 1930s (the last one was constructed in 1937), the non-orthogonal form was never as popular as orthogonal halls, possibly due to the intricacies of the roof support, as well as the complications of adding onto the building while maintaining the geometric form and

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<sup>78</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 27-29.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Triumpho, *Round Barns of New York*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 57.

<sup>80</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 20.

<sup>81</sup> Aeschbacher, Yancey, and Aeschbacher, "Turnverein 'Gut Heil' Pavilion," Draft NRHP Inventory/Nomination Form, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Kenneth Hafertepe. *The Material Culture of German Texans*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2016).

<sup>83</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," vii.

<sup>84</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 65.

<sup>85</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 31.

<sup>86</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 1.

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roofline.<sup>87</sup> The round dance halls built in Texas are roughly located along a line (State Highway 36 and the historic Gulf Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad alignment) from Buckholts in Milam County south to East Bernard in Wharton County. In this cluster, Austin County is home to the most round dance halls: seven. Roughly four miles southwest of the Bellville Turnverein, Coshatte Hall (extant), built in 1928, is one of the county's seven round dance halls (Figure 12). The other round dance halls in Austin County are Liedertafel Hall in Sealy (built in 1914, extant), Mixville Sunrise Hall near Wallis (built in 1928, extant), and the American Legion Hall in Wallis (built in 1937, extant). All but the Mixville Sunrise Hall, which suffered flooding during Hurricane Harvey, remain in use and none are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>88</sup>

### Joachim Hintz (1841-1920)

Credited by Stephanie McDougal in her comprehensive thesis on Texas's round dance halls with introducing and popularizing round dance halls in Texas, Joachim Hintz was a significant figure in the development of a rural landscape and built environment commonly associated with German communities in Central and South Central Texas. Despite his significant contribution to the rural Texas landscape, much of what is known of Hintz comes from his great-granddaughter, Carolyn Zapalac. Since no drawings or written records associated with Hintz exist or survive, questions, particularly where and how Hintz acquired the skills to design and build, remain unanswered.

Born Johann Joachim Heinrich Friedrich Hintz in 1841 in Ziesendorf in northern Germany, Hintz was 14 when he emigrated to Texas with his parents, grandparents, and five siblings. Arriving in Galveston in 1855, Hintz and his family settled and farmed land on Clear Creek near Millheim, between Cat Spring and Bellville, in central Austin County.<sup>89</sup> Conscribed into the Confederate Army in 1862, Hintz was taken a prisoner of war in Missouri in 1863.<sup>90</sup> Hintz spent time at camps in Memphis, St. Louis, and Indianapolis before returning to Austin County in 1865. By 1880 Hintz was married and living near his parents in Millheim. Listed as a carpenter in census records from 1880, 1900, and 1920, Hintz was also listed as a farmer in the 1910 census. Though he made his livelihood through building and carpentry, only four projects can be attributed to Hintz. The earliest of these known projects was the Opera House (demolished) in Bellville where he worked with architect Eugene Heiner in the late 1880s. Hintz followed the Opera House job with three round dance halls: Bellville Turnverein (1897), Peters-Hacienda Community Hall (1900, extant), and Cat Spring Agricultural Hall (1903, extant) for the society of which he was a member. Hintz died in 1920 and is buried in Millheim Cemetery.

### **Conclusion**

The property is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage/German and Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. The period of significance spans from 1897 to 1974.

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<sup>87</sup> Cynthia Falk, *Barns of New York: Rural Architecture of the Empire State*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 57-58.

<sup>88</sup> Texas Dance Hall Preservation, Inc., "TDHP News & Happenings," *Texas Dance Hall Preservation Newsletter*, no. 5, November 2018, [Texas Dance Hall News by Texas Dance Hall Preservation - Issue](#).

<sup>89</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 38.

<sup>90</sup> McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas," 38.

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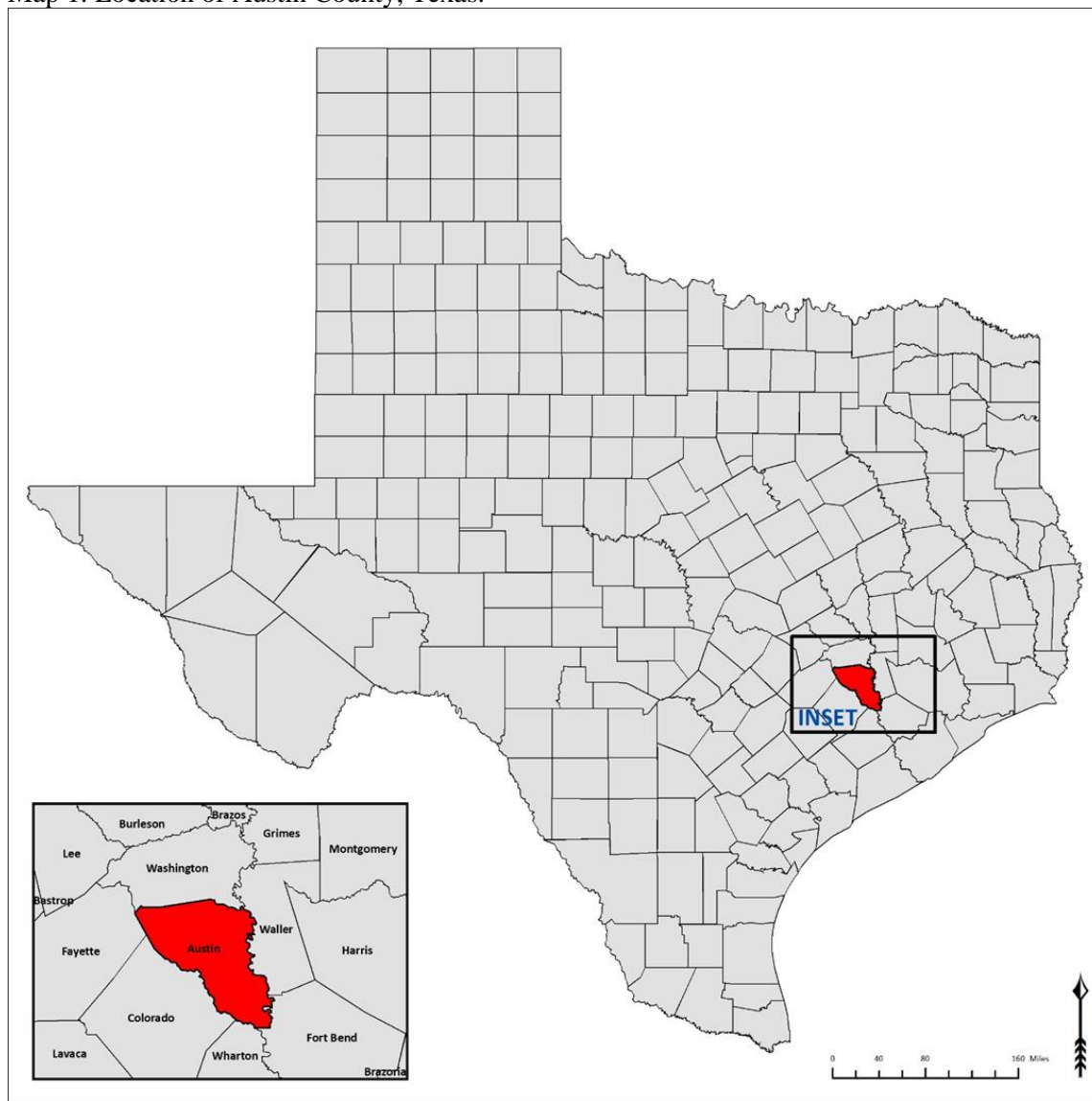
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## Additional Documentation

### Maps

Map 1. Location of Austin County, Texas.





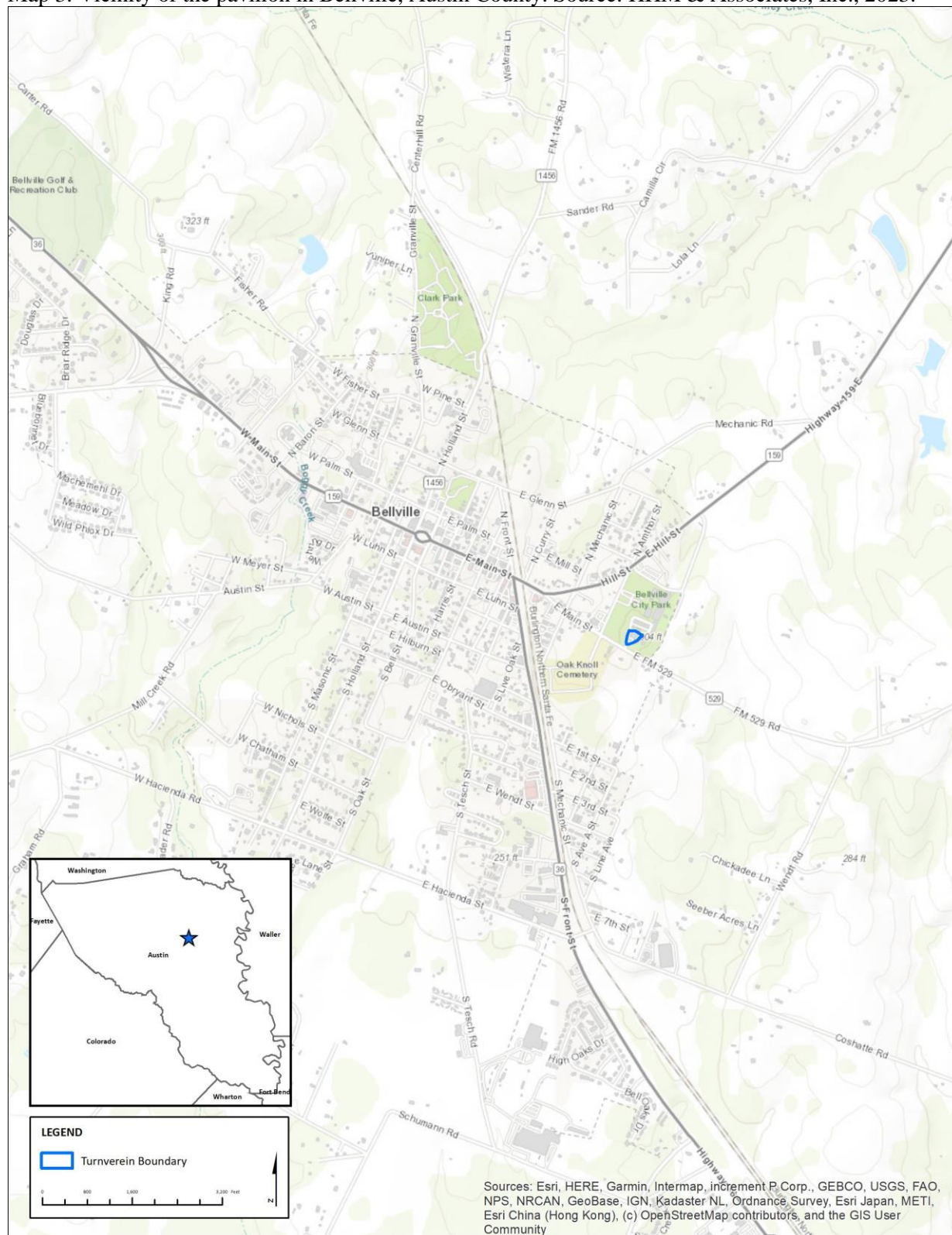
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Map 2. Aerial view of the Bellville Turnverein's pavilion in Bellville, Austin County showing the boundary and coordinates of the central point. Source: HHM & Associates, Inc., 2023.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

Map 3. Vicinity of the pavilion in Bellville, Austin County. Source: HHM & Associates, Inc., 2023.

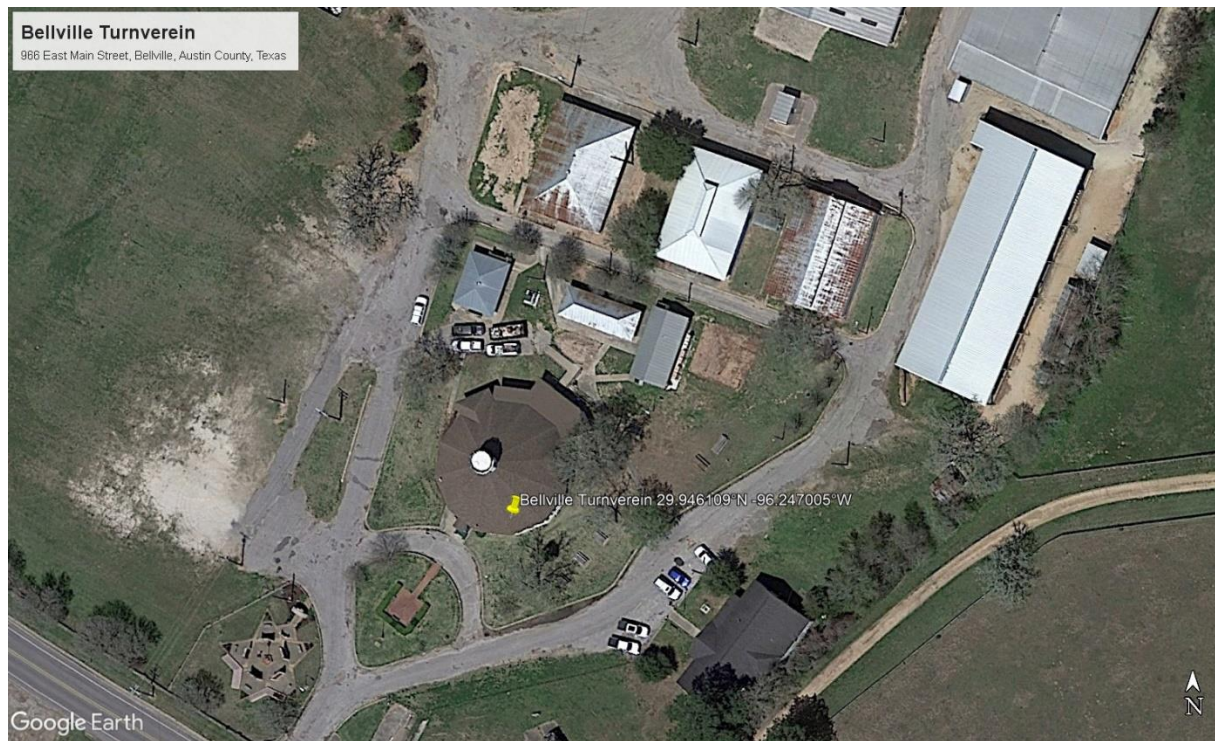




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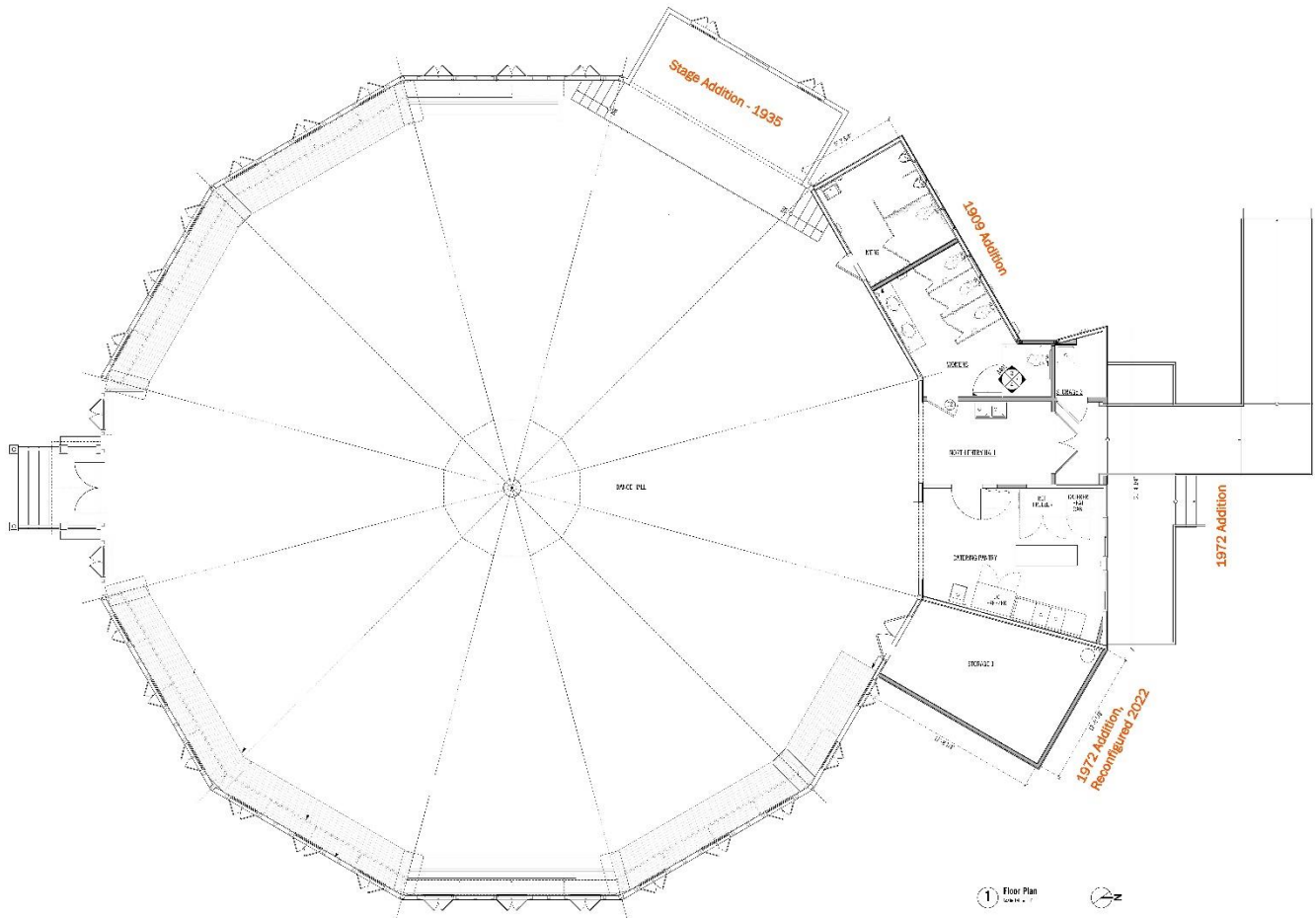
Map 4. Google Earth Map, accessed August 3, 2023.



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## Figures

Figure 1. Stern and Bucek Architects drawing of the current floor plan of the pavilion with additions identified in orange. Source: Stern and Bucek Architects, 2020, provided by Tom Baron.

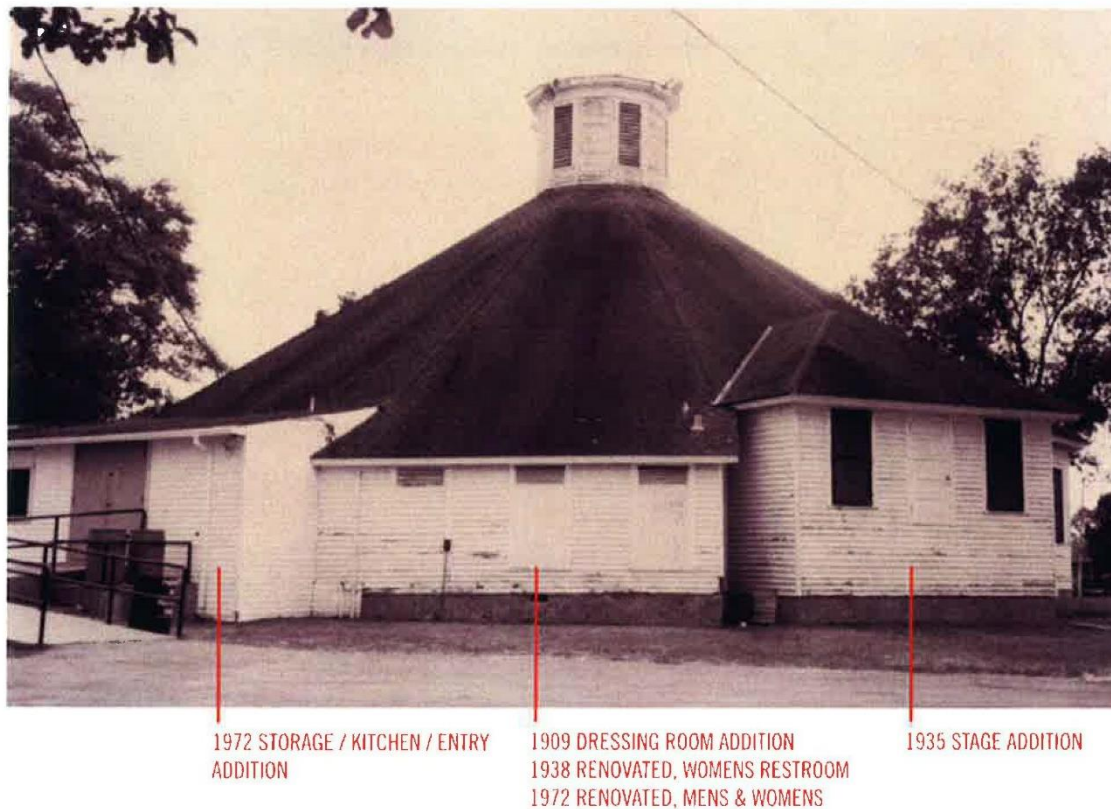


<b>Stern and Bucek Architects</b> 10000 N. Loop West, Suite 100 Houston, Texas 77057 Tel: 281.460.1234 Fax: 281.460.1235 www.ssternandbucek.com	
Project: Bellville Turnverein Pavilion Drawing: Floor Plan Date: 10/20/2020 Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"	
Bellville Turnverein Pavilion 10000 N. Loop West, Suite 100 Houston, Texas 77057 Tel: 281.460.1234 Fax: 281.460.1235 www.ssternandbucek.com	
Floor Plan	
A-102a	

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Figure 2. The rear northwest side of the pavilion in 1996 showing the configuration of additions. Source: From Stern and Bucek Architects, "Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1," May 2018, 6.





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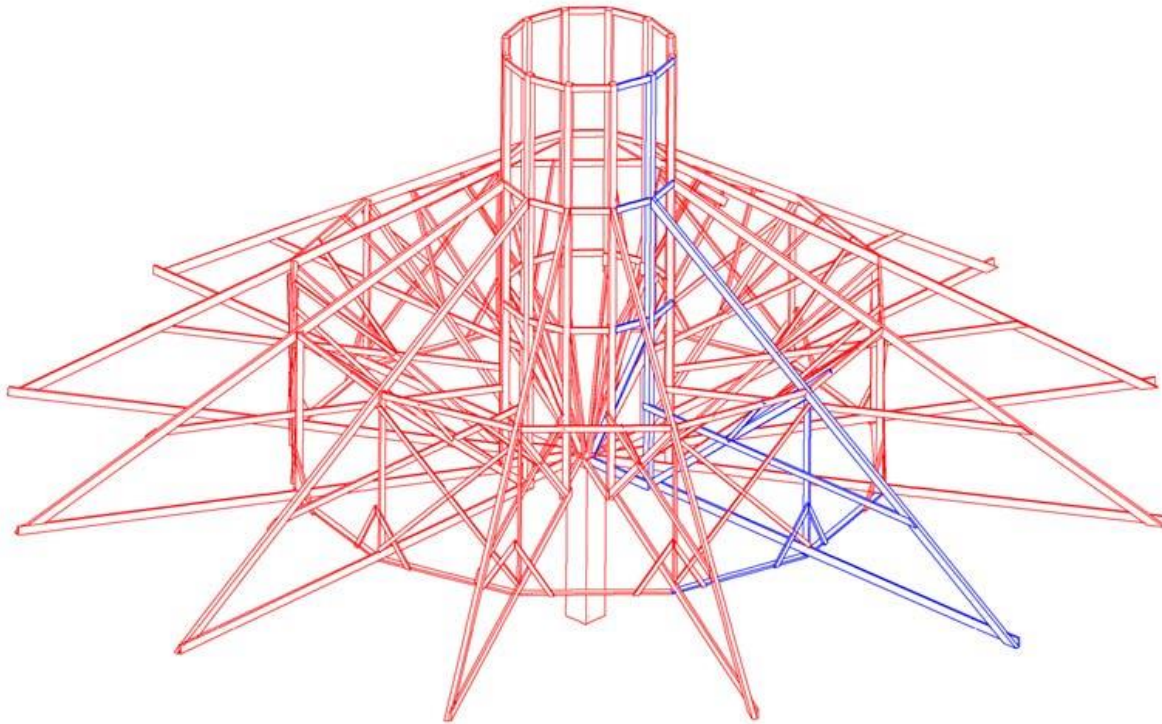
Figure 3. Front south entry of the pavilion in 1996. Source: Portal to Texas History, crediting the Texas Historical Commission, accessed April 27, 2023,  
<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth480045/m1/1/?q=bellville%20pavilion>.



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Figure 4. Roof structural system drawing of the pavilion. Source: Models by Alan McDougal, from Stephanie McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas: History of a Building Type, 1897-1937," 2008, p. 51.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Figure 5. South primary façade of the pavilion in 1907. Source: From Stern and Bucek Architects, “Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1,” May 2018, 3.





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Figure 6. South primary façade of the pavilion around 1910 during a celebration. Source: From Stern and Bucek Architects, "Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1," May 2018, 4.



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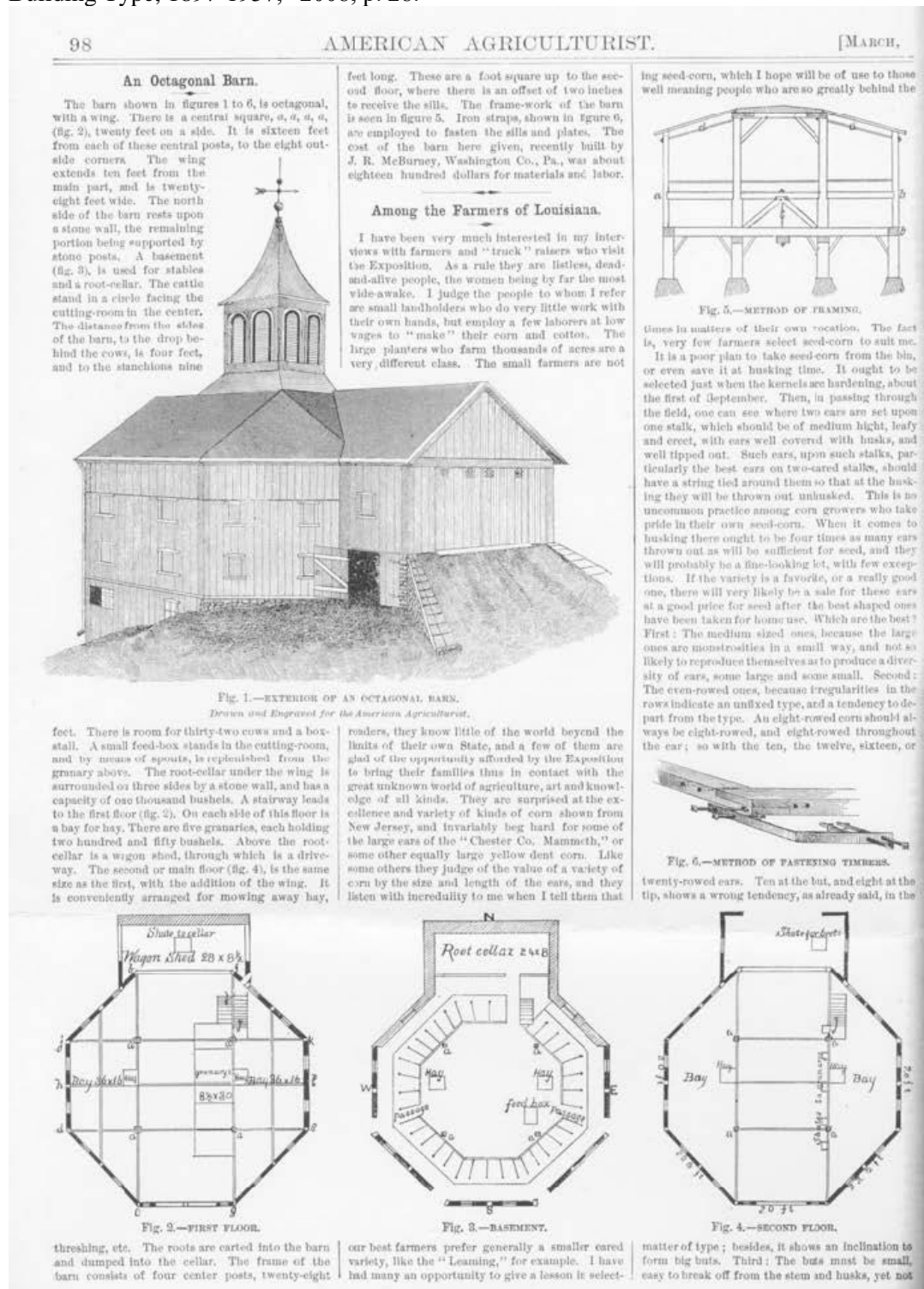
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Figure 7. Southeast façade of the pavilion during a celebration, possibly for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Source: From Stern and Bucek Architects, "Bellville Turnverein Pavilion, Exhibit 1," May 2018, 4.



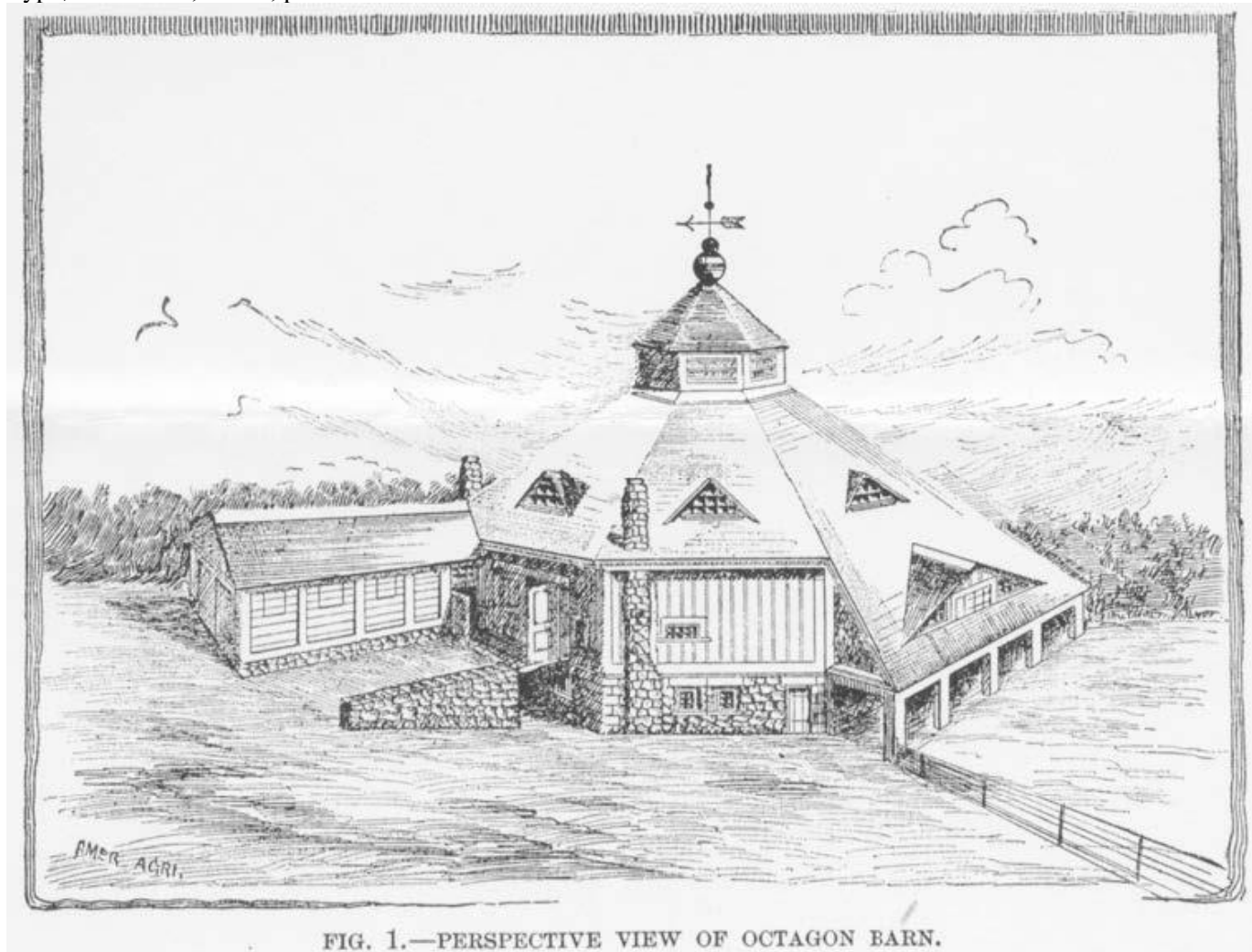
Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

Figure 8. Plans and drawings for three octagonal barns published in *American Agriculturist* in 1885. Source: *American Agriculturist*, March 1885, from Stephanie McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas: History of a Building Type, 1897-1937," 2008, p. 28.



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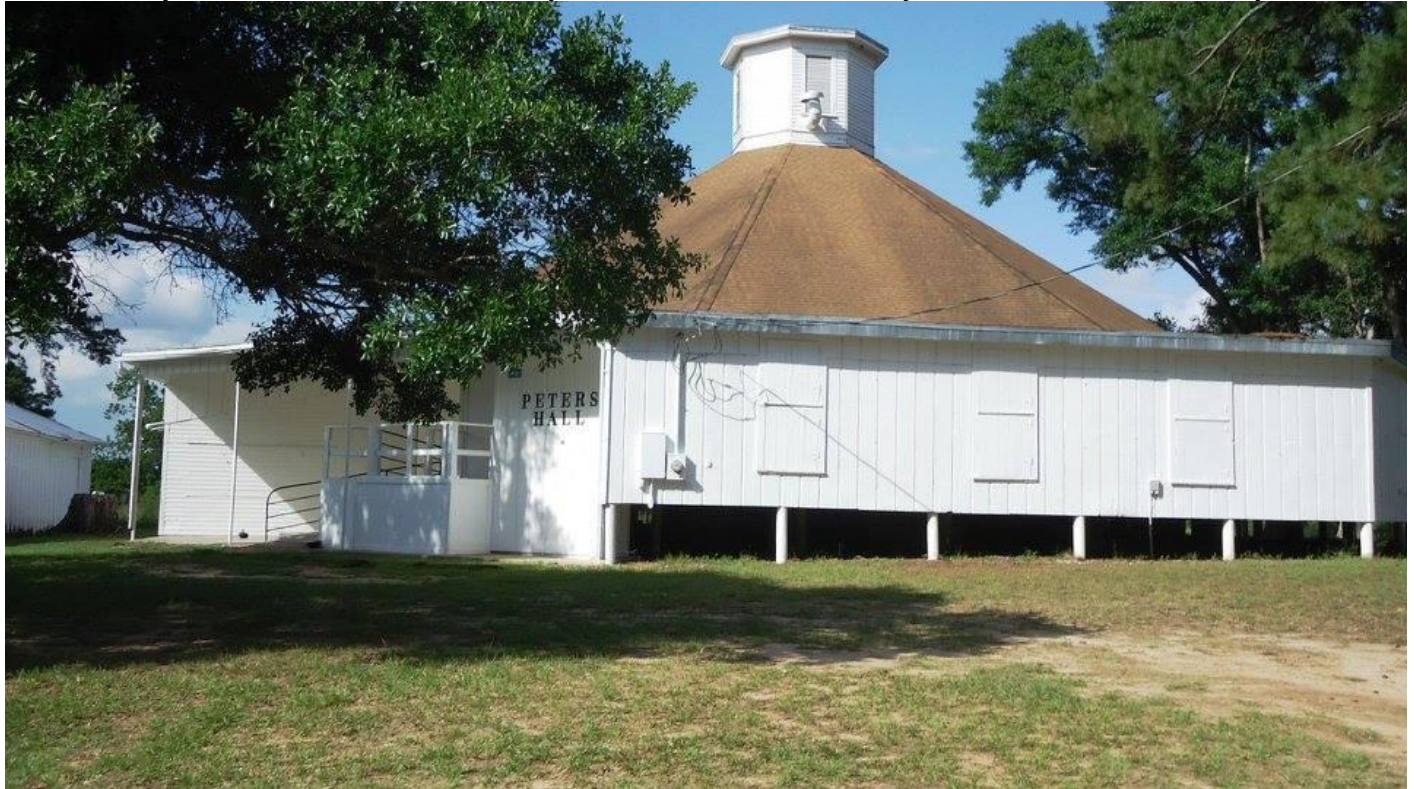
Figure 9. Drawing of an octagonal barn published in *American Agriculturalist* in 1888. Source: *American Agriculturalist*, October 1888, from Stephanie McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas: History of a Building Type, 1897-1937," 2008, p. 29.



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Figure 10. Peters-Hacienda Community Hall, built in 1900 by Joachim Hintz. One of seven round dance halls in Austin County. Source: Historic Austin County, [Peters-Hacienda Community Hall](#) | Historic Austin County in Texas.





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Figure 11. Cat Spring Agricultural Hall, built in 1903 by Joachim Hintz. One of the seven round dance halls in Austin County. Source: Historic Austin County, <http://historicaustincounty.com/venue/cat-spring-agricultural-hall/>.



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Figure 12. Coshatte Hall, built in 1928 near Bellville. One of the seven round dance halls in Austin County. Source: Stephanie McDougal from Stephanie McDougal, "The Round Dance Halls of Texas: History of a Building Type, 1897-1937," 2008, p. 87





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## Photos

Photo 1. Oblique of Bellville Turnverein including lawn with flagpole and curbing. Camera facing north.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 2. Façade of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing northeast.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 3. Rear of Bellville Turnverein in background with fairground buildings in foreground and middle. Camera facing south.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 4. Historic entrance at southwest corner of park, at East Main Street (FM 529) and N. Amthor Street, with Bellville Turnverein in background. Camera facing northeast.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 5. Entrance on East Main Street (FM 529) with historic stone wall and curbing. Camera facing northeast.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 6. Lawn with walkway and flagpole in front of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing southwest.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 7. Picnic tables at east side of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing southwest.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 8. Rear of Bellville Turnverein showing (left to right) 1972 addition, 1909 addition, and 1935 addition. Camera facing south.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 9. West side of Bellville Turnverein with 1935 stage addition at the left. Camera facing east.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 10. Rear entrance. Camera facing southwest.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 11. East side of Bellville Turnverein with reconfigured rear addition to right. Camera facing west.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 12. Interior of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing north.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 13. Detail of original flooring at perimeter and bench near historic primary south entrance. Camera facing southeast.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 14. Interior of Bellville Turnverein with bench around perimeter. Camera facing northeast.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 15. Detail of roof framing in interior of Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing east.





Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 16. Stage in Bellville Turnverein. Camera facing northwest.



Bellville Turnverein, Bellville, Austin County, Texas

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Photo 17. North rear entrance and window into kitchen. Camera facing northeast.

