

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

# **National Register of Historic Places**

## **Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

### **1. Name**

historic      Old Masonic Hall

and/or common      Old Masonic Lodge Building

### **2. Location**

street & number      15 N. Masonic Street

N/A not for publication

city, town      Bellville      N/A vicinity of

state      Texas      code      048      county      Austin      code      015

### **3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
	being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
			<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>vacant</u>

### **4. Owner of Property**

name      The Bellville Historical Society

street & number      P.O. Box 67

city, town      Bellville      N/A vicinity of      state      Texas      77418

### **5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.      Office of County Clerk, Austin County Courthouse

street & number      1 East Main Street

city, town      Bellville      state      Texas

### **6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title      Historic Sites Inventory      has this property been determined eligible?       yes       no

date      (in process)       federal       state       county       local

depository for survey records      Texas Historical Commission

city, town      Austin      state      Texas

For NPS use only

received **JUL 18 1986**  
date entered **AUG 14 1986**

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			N/A

as21 A AIA

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Old Masonic Lodge Building is one of two frame, non-residential buildings from the 1800s that is still standing in Bellville. The structure has a purely functional design well suited for its historical purpose as a lodge meeting place (second floor) and a community center (ground floor). The later additions on the ground floor are now (1986) being removed and the original doors and windows reinstalled. The remainder of the building has retained its historical integrity to a very high degree, preserving the original millwork, doors, windows, wainscoting, floors, and ceilings.

The Old Masonic Lodge Building sits in a small-town, urban location facing west at 15 N. Masonic Street in the City of Bellville. Directly across Masonic Street is St. Mary's Episcopal Church. To the south and east are parking areas surrounded by commercial buildings, with the main square of Bellville a half block to the east. To the north are residences and small commercial buildings. The historic structure is a separate, rectangular, two-story building on brick piers measuring 26 feet on Masonic Street and 50 feet in depth. The small porch on the south side (post 1925), as well as the additions to the north (1950s) and east (1950s), are being removed and will not be described. The description which follows is of the historic walls now being rebuilt using the original windows and doors that have fortunately survived. New interior and exterior siding will replicate the original where needed, on about 15% of the total wall area.

The exterior walls are lapped siding with wooden framing around the doors and the double-hung windows. There are transoms over each of the doors. The only exterior decorations are circular medallions and brackets on the cornice, scalloped trim over the doors, and a very simple 2 X 23-inch trim on the ground-floor doors and second-floor windows. The roof is hipped at the east and west ends, and has composition shingles over a full deck. One chimney protrudes through the roof.

The staircase is in a separate room on both floors, having 15 treads and two landings (and is reportedly of some significance in lodge activities). The treads, risers, banisters, newels, and rail are all of varnished pine. The newels are square except for turned knobs on the top of each.

The second-floor, with 12.5-foot ceilings throughout, was designed as the lodge meeting place. In addition to the room containing the stairwell, it has a small room which was used for storage and possibly robing. The remainder of this floor is a large unobstructed area. Except for the additions of some cabinets and closets, this entire floor is unchanged from

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the original. The ceiling is of painted bead-board. The 46-inch-tall wainscot on all walls consists of bead-board with top and bottom trim. The upper walls exhibit wallpaper over gauze supported on horizontal siding with a crown molding at the ceiling. The floors are of pine tongue-and-groove boards. The doors and windows, the architrave, and the wainscoting are also of varnished pine. Low platforms are located in the middle of three walls in the main room: of one step on the west wall, of two steps on the south, and three steps on the east. The wainscoting tracks these platforms.

On the center of the east wall above the raised wainscot, there was originally an arch with two pedestals formed from nominal one-inch-thick pine. This, with the raised platform of three steps, was the dais for the Worshipful Master in lodge ceremonies. The arch and pedestal was transferred to the new lodge building in 1967 and is currently used by Lodge No. 223. The arch and pedestal are varnished pine made from nominal 6-inch-wide stock. The pedestals are carved to simulate columns with Ionic capitals. The overall outside dimensions are 80 inches tall and 85 inches wide. In the center of the arch is a removable keystone which overlaps both sides of the arch. Gold 4-inch letters on the arch state "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" with the "TO" being on the removable keystone.

The trim above the windows and doors on the second floor reflects the Eastlake manner of interior millwork. A single chimney with a hole for a metal stovepipe is located in the southwest corner of both floors.

The first floor has the room for the stairwell and an additional room which became a kitchen. The remaining ground-floor space is one large room used for civic and other meetings. There are four posts in the center which support the second floor. There is no ornamentation on this floor. The ceiling is of painted bead-board, the floor is pine tongue-and-groove, and the walls have wallpaper over gauze and horizontal siding.

Approximately half the boards used as horizontal siding under the wallpaper of the stair well and upper floor (the lodge area) are reused. Some are painted blue, some white or black. It is postulated that these boards are from the predecessor building of 1858.

The porch addition on the southwest corner bears no resemblance to the original architecture. The east addition used external and internal siding very similar to the original, and reused the original windows of the historic structure. The north addition used similar siding but windows of a later era. Fortunately, the double, exterior, rear doors of the original were retained and the original windows can be reclaimed. Upon completion of the restoration, the configuration and the visible surfaces will follow the original design.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below							
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)				
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention						

Specific dates 1886 (after 1925,  
1950s)

Builder/Architect J. J. Stopple

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The predecessor or Masonic Lodge Building (1858) and the Old Masonic Lodge Building (1886-87), the subject of the present nomination, both occupy the same historic site on Masonic Street in Bellville, and have played important roles in church, school, civic, and community life in this city. The lodge members who utilized the buildings for its meetings until 1967 were also prominent in Bellville history and development.

A petition to form the Bellville Lodge of the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons was made in 1857, and in 1858 was authorized by the Texas Grand Lodge as Bellville Lodge No. 223. Two of the petitioners were John P. Osterhout and Zimri Hunt.<sup>1</sup> In two separate land transactions in 1857, lot 9 and 20 feet from lots 10 and 11 were acquired by "Alexander Glenn, Zimri Hunt and John P. Osterhout, trustees of and building committee for the erection of a School House and Masonic Hall in the Town of Bellville...."<sup>2</sup> The first building on this site was built in 1858, and the ground floor of that structure was used as a school building and for other community activities.<sup>3</sup> St. Mary's Episcopal Church held its first service in Bellville in the Masonic Hall on February 16, 1861,<sup>4</sup> and is believed to have continued using the hall for services until its first church building was completed in 1881. Senator A. Chesley used the ground floor as a place to give music lessons.<sup>5</sup> In 1881, the senator was instrumental in passing the legislation which allowed unincorporated communities to form independent school districts in Texas, and Bellville was one of the first communities to organize such a district in 1881. The school was subsequently moved to Unity Hall,<sup>6</sup> after which the School District retained ownership of half the property until 1885, when this half was sold to Bellville Lodge 223.<sup>7</sup>

During this period, Senator Chesley was intimately involved in the affairs of the lodge, the Episcopal Church, and the community as a whole. He was Master of the Bellville Lodge in 1867, 1873, 1874, 1875, 1876, 1884, and 1885.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, he was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1876; represented his county in the lower house of the legislature upon two occasions, and was later sent to the State Senate. At his funeral at St. Mary's in 1907, "many members of the Masonic Order, of which he was for long years a member, were present from the local lodge and others in the county, "... and his obituary stated that "to him is due much of the credit for the present, well-conducted school of the town, he by many being regarded as the father of the same."<sup>9</sup>



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The fate of this first Bellville lodge building is a mystery. Newspaper sources show that it existed in 1883.<sup>10</sup> The 1885 map of Bellville prepared by the Sanborn Map Company depicts the site as vacant, although a building of the proper dimensions appears on the 1891 map.<sup>11</sup> The "Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas" for 1887 records a special dispensation from the Grand Master "April 6, 1887, to Bellville Lodge No. 223, to hold their meetings in a rented hall (until they could rebuild on the site where the old hall stood), they having the exclusive use of the same."<sup>12</sup> There are no records in the Bellville Lodge No. 223 or the Grand Lodge on the reasons for rebuilding.

In 1895, a newspaper article reported as follows:

The first Masonic Hall was built in 1858, the lower floor of which was used for school and church purposes from that time up to 1881. In the year 1886 the present Masonic temple was erected at a cost of about \$2,000. J.J. Stopple was the architect and contractor and did a splendid job, and the building would ornament any city three-fold the pretensions of Bellville. Bellville Masonic Lodge is No. 223, the date of the charter being June 16, 1858.<sup>13</sup>

There are hand-written names with an 1887 date on the interior siding beneath the wallpaper on the second floor: C.T. Sanders, J.G. Wessendorf and J.K. Stone. All three were lodge officers in 1887. There is also a handwritten note "Stopple Builder" without a date. Mr. Stopple was the Lodge Master in 1886<sup>14</sup> and also the architect and builder of the J.B. Lewis home in Bellville (1873) which is still standing.<sup>15</sup>

The ground floor of the building continued to be used for community activities such as church business meetings, Chamber of Commerce meetings, school banquets, and individual parties. In World War II, a holly was planted in commemoration of an Eastern Star member who served in the Women's Army Corps<sup>16</sup>, and can be seen on the accompanying historic photograph. It is believed that the two major additions were made in the 1950s. The building was used continuously as the meeting place for Lodge No. 223 from 1887 to 1967, the year a new facility was built in Bellville. The building and the historic site were acquired at that time by private interests.<sup>17</sup>

In 1984, the building was under threat of being moved or dismantled, and was acquired on a reduced portion of the historic site by the Bellville Historical Society.<sup>18</sup> The later additions are in the process of being removed and the historic building is being returned to its original configuration. Upon restoration, the Old Masonic Lodge Building will be used by the above-mentioned society and other civic organizations in Bellville.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Letter from Harry C. Byrd, Grand Secretary, Masonic Grand Lodge and Museum of Texas, to W.R. Crick, May 29, 1985.
- 2 Austin County Deed Records, Volume I-J, Pages 699, 700, 717, 718.
- 3 "Bellville, Her History and Her Hopes," The Austin County Times, September 15, 1883, Vol. 4, Number 44, Page 3.
- 4 "A History of St. Mary's Church," Pamphlet commemorating the 100th anniversary of same in 1961; on file at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Bellville, Texas
- 5 Interview with Jack Bader by Frank Cheely, June 23, 1984.
- 6 "Bellville School," The Austin County Times, September 15, 1883, Vol. 4, Number 44, Page 4.
- 7 Austin County Deed Records, Volume 3, Page 10.
- 8 Brief History of the Origin of Bellville Lodge No. 223, Pamphlet commemorating the centennial, October 7, 1958.
- 9 "A. Chesley," The Bellville Times (July 19, 1907) Vol. 29, Number 29, Page 1.
- 10 "Bellville Schools," The Austin County Times, September 15, 1883, Vol. 14, Number 44, Page 4.
- 11 Insurance map of the Sanborn Map Company on file at the Barker Texas History Center, The University of Texas at Austin.
- 12 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas (1887) on file at the Masonic Grand Lodge and Museum of Texas in Waco, Texas.
- 13 "Bellville - The Proud Capital of a Prosperous County," The Bellville Times, January 18, 1895), Volume 16, Number 48, Part Second (no page numbers shown).
- 14 Brief History of the Origin of Bellville Lodge No. 223, loc. cit. (see item 8)
- 15 Texas Historical Marker, 206 S. Masonic Street, Bellville, Texas.
- 16 Interview with Mrs. Hillia Donahue, June 28, 1985.
- 17 Austin County Deed Records, Volume 294, Page 97.
- 18 Austin County Deed Records, Volume 509, Page 15.

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Bibliography continued -

"Bellville, Her History and Hopes," The Austin County Times, Volume 4, Number 44, September 15, 1883, Page 3.

"Bellville, The Proud Capital of a Prosperous County," The Bellville Times, Volume 16, Number 48, Part Second, January 18, 1895 (pages not numbered).

"Bellville Schools," The Austin County Times, Volume 4, Number 44, September 15, 1883, Page 4.

Interview by Frank Cheely with Jack Bader, June 23, 1985.

Interview by Frank Cheely with Mrs. Hillia Donahue, June 28, 1985.

Letter from Harry C. Byrd, Grand Secretary, Masonic Grand Lodge and Museum of Texas to W.R. Crick, May 29, 1984.

"Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas," on file at the Masonic Grand Lodge and Museum of Texas in Waco, Texas.

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Verbal Boundary Description continued -

of the Plat Records of Austin County, Texas, John Nichols Survey, A-73, Austin County, Texas, subject tract being a portion of that tract designated as Tract 2.

BEGINNING at a 1/2" iron rod set in the Easterly line of Masonic Street (50-foot right-of-way) and being the Northwest corner of the herein described tract. From said iron rod the common corner of Lot 9 and Lot 8, Block "D", City of Bellville, the same being the Northwest corner of the above-mentioned Tract 2, bears N 25° 22' 00" E 18.00 feet;

THENCE S 64° 17' 30" E a distance of 58.52 feet to a 1/2" iron rod set for the Northeast corner of the herein described tract;

THENCE S 25° 42' 30" W 32.30 FEET to a 1/2" iron rod set for the Southeast corner of the herein described tract;

THENCE N 64° 17' 30" W 42.28 feet to a 1/2" iron rod set for corner;

THENCE S 25° 42' 30" W a distance of 5.50 feet to a 1/2" iron rod set for corner;

THENCE N 64° 17' 30" W a distance of 16.02 feet to a 1/2" iron rod set in the Easterly line of Masonic Street and being the Southwest corner of the herein described tract;

THENCE N 25° 22' 00" E with the Easterly right-of-way of Masonic Street a distance of 37.80 feet to the place of beginning and containing 0.045 acre of land.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

86001611

Old Masonic Hall  
Austin County  
TEXAS

JUL 18 1986

resubmission  
 nomination by person or local government  
 owner objection  
 appeal

Entered in the  
National Register

Working No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Fed. Reg. Date: 2/3/87  
Date Due: 8/14/86 - 9/1/86  
Action: ACCEPT 8-14-86  
RETURN  
REJECT  
Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Substantive Review:  sample  request  appeal  NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria \_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_  
Discipline \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for:  technical corrections cited below  
 substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

7. Description

Condition

excellent  deteriorated  
 good  ruins  
 fair  unexposed

Check one

unaltered  
 altered

Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

summary paragraph  
 completeness  
 clarity  
 alterations/integrity  
 dates  
 boundary selection

---

## 8. Significance

Period      Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates      Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References

Verbal boundary description and justification

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_\_\_ state      \_\_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title      date

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## 13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



(1)

Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo ca. 1950, photographer unknown,  
copy with Frank Cheely, Bellville  
Historical Society, Bellville, Texas

Southwest corner of building, looking  
northwest

Photo 1 of 11



RESERVED DENTIST OFFICE

RESERVED DENTIST OFFICE

RESERVED DENTIST OFFICE

Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, May 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

View of neighborhood showing the Episcopal  
Church, looking west and north

Photo 2 of 11



(3)

Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, May 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

Front view, looking east

Photo 3 of 11



(4)

Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas

Photo by Frank Cheely, March 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

Southwest corner, looking northeast

Photo 4 of 11



Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, March 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

Northwest corner, looking southeast

Photo 5 of 11



Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, March 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

Northeast corner, looking southwest

Photo 6 of 11



Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, March 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

Southeast corner, looking northwest

Photo 7 of 11



Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, March 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

View of second floor interior - east wall,  
looking east

Photo 8 of 11



⑨

Old Masonic Hall

15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas

Photo by Frank Cheely, May 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

View of second floor interior - typical door  
and architrave, looking west

Photo 9 of 11



Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, May 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

View of second floor interior - typical trim  
above windows, looking north

Photo 10 of 11



111

Old Masonic Hall  
15 N. Masonic Street, Bellville,  
Austin County, Texas  
Photo by Frank Cheely, March 1985,  
negative with Texas Historical Commission,  
Austin

View of stairway from second floor.

Photo 11 of 11



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial

photographs taken 1962. Field checked 1963

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum

10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, south central zone

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,

zone 14, shown in blue

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines

To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983

move the projection lines 20 meters south and

24 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks

Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled from

aerial photographs taken 1978 and other source data

Map information not field checked. Map edited 1981

UTM GRID AND 1983 MAGNETIC NORTH

DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

24 MILS 124 MILS

1° 20' 7'

24 MILS 124 MILS

1° 20' 7'