

Texas Historical Commission Staff (CJB), 2/26/88, revised 3/25/88

Official Texas Historical Building Marker without post, for attachment  
for wood

Comal County (Order #9071)

Location: Gruene Historic District, New Braunfels

GRUENE'S HALL\*

BUILT IN 1878 AS A SALOON AND  
SOCIAL HALL FOR AREA COTTON  
FARMERS, THIS IS BELIEVED TO BE  
ONE OF THE OLDEST DANCE HALLS  
IN TEXAS. CHRISTIAN HERRY (1854-1917)  
BUILT THE HALL UNDER THE DIRECTION  
OF TOWN DEVELOPER HENRY D. GRUENE,  
FOR WHOM MANY OF THE FARMERS  
WORKED. THE CENTER OF THE COM-  
MUNITY'S SOCIAL LIFE FOR OVER A  
CENTURY, THE LARGE ONE-STORY STRUC-  
TURE FEATURES A "FALSE FRONT"  
ENTRY WITH ASYMMETRICAL WINDOW  
AND DOOR ARRANGEMENTS.\*\*

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK - 1988\*\*\*

\*1/2 inch lettering

\*\*3/8 inch lettering

\*\*\*1/4 inch lettering

Gruene Hall was built in 1878 as a social hall for the tenant farmers. (1854-1917)  
The Hall was built by Christian Herry under the direction of H. D. Gruene. It is a long rectangular building with pitched roof hidden from the street view by the false front. Built before the age of modern conveniences, the hall was powered by gasoline generated electric power. Farmers and their families would come into Gruene on Saturday, shop at the store and stay that night for the dance. Huge barrels of whiskey and beer with spickets lined the dance floor - a shot was 10¢. A large sign advertised "Den Feinstien Schnaps, Das Beste Bier, Becommt Ma Bei Den Heinrich Heir," "The Best Whiskey and the Best Beer, You get at Henry's here."<sup>1</sup> There was square dancing and German Polka music. The music stopped at midnight for a sandwich break and coffee. The women would use the old smokehouse, still in tact at the hall. The group would take a breather in the beer garden around the gold fish pond, and then the fun would continue until day break. The children would bed down in the small side room while their parents danced. Everyone would leave at day break, go home and change and then drive to church in New Braunfels.<sup>2</sup> The hall operated for 40 years as the center of fun for the valley. Special events like the Kinder Masken Ball, a masquerade dance were held there each year. In the twenties, advertisements were placed around the dance floor and are still tact. Gruene Hall was the one business which continued to operate throughout the hard times that beset the town of Gruene.<sup>3</sup> (See General History). In 1976, the Hall was bought by Pat Molak, and to this day continues the Saturday night dance.

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<sup>1</sup>Hammer, Joe, p. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>Hammer, Joe, p. 24-25.

<sup>3</sup>Hammer, Joe, p. 34.

The Gruene Historic District contains examples of late nineteenth century Victorian houses, as well as a few examples of mid-nineteenth century German colonial structures with Victorian additions. The town retains the ambience of a late nineteenth century cotton community, for there has been little construction since the 1920's. Located on the well-traveled road from San Antonio to Austin, Gruene served as a stage stop and by 1900 was a station stop for two railroads. Once the center for two to three hundred people, Gruene represents the ambitions of Henry D. Gruene, founder and developer of the town which bears his name.

The first people to settle in the area now known as Gruene, Texas, were German farmers, arriving in Texas in the late 1840's and 1850's with the Adelsverein, the Society for the Protection of German Immigration.<sup>1</sup> In New Braunfels, the first city to be surveyed and settled by the Society, town lots were quickly sold and new settlers moved north into the surrounding countryside where farm land was rich and fertile. About four miles northeast of New Braunfels, immediately east of the Guadalupe River, a community by the name of Goodwin emerged.

Among the first New Braunfels settlers arriving with the Adelsverein were Ernst Gruene, Sr. and his wife Antoinette, both of Hanover, Germany.<sup>2</sup> After their three children, Ernst, Jr., Henry D., and Joanna were born,<sup>3</sup> the Gruenes moved to Comaltown, an adjoining community between the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers.<sup>4</sup> Ernst Gruene, Sr. continued to acquire additional farm

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<sup>1</sup>Biggers, Don H., German Pioneers in Texas, Fredericksburg, Texas, Fredericksburg Publishing Co., 1925, pp. 21-25.

<sup>2</sup>Biesele, R. L., The History of the German Settlement in Texas, 1831-1861, Austin, Von-Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1930, pp. 11-138.

<sup>3</sup>Comal Co. Census, 1850, County Clerk, New Braunfels, Texas.

<sup>4</sup>Hammer, Joe. Schlaraffenland: Gruene Texas. An unpublished term paper on file at the Archives Division, Texas, State Library, Austin, Texas. p. 7.

lands near New Braunfels. In 1872 when acreage was no longer available in Comaltown, Ernst Gruene, Sr. bought land on the east side of the Guadalupe River. The deep <sup>al</sup>luvial soil was extremely adaptable for the cultivation of grain products and cotton. However, it was Ernst, Sr.'s second son, Henry D., who was to develop a community, later known as Gruene, in this area.<sup>5</sup>

Born in 1850 in New Braunfels, Henry D. Gruene left the area in 1870 to join a cattle drive. Disillusioned after two years, H. D. returned to New Braunfels.<sup>6</sup> In 1872 he married Bertha Simon and built a home on the east side of the Guadalupe River in the settlement of Goodwin.<sup>7</sup> In January, 1873, H. D. Gruene bought his brother's half undivided interest of the property that the two brothers had jointly owned.

Cotton had been introduced into the area in 1852 and by the 1870's was recognized as the number one cash crop. With visions of converting the fertile land into cotton fields, Gruene advertised his need for sharecroppers. Within several months, twenty to thirty families moved onto H. D. Gruene's farm lands and he assigned plots of 100 to 200 acres to each. An educational facility was one of the earliest structures built.<sup>8</sup> Gruene conveyed land for the building of a county rural school, known as "Thorn Hill School" in 1874, and a more centrally located school was built in 1893. In 1878 Gruene established the first mercantile store in a frame building on the road from San Antonio to Austin. Here tenants could buy groceries, canned goods, implements and hardware supplies inexpensively and could buy on credit, if necessary, until harvest time each year.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. p. 12.

Not long after building the mercantile store, H. D. Gruene constructed a cotton gin powered by water from the Guadalupe River. The gin processed raw cotton raised by his tenants and other farmers of the area until the structure burned in 1922. Gruene also set up a lumber yard in conjunction with his mercantile store and sold long-leaf pine used in building barns and the three and four room houses of the tenant farmers.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Gruene built a dance hall and saloon in the 1880's. <sup>(1878?)</sup> Providing entertainment for the tenants and surrounding farmers, Gruene Hall was the center of the community's social life.<sup>11</sup>

By 1890 approximately 8000 acres of land east of the Guadalupe was planted with cotton and foodstuff.<sup>12</sup> A lumberyard served the tenants, New Braunfels people and the rural vicinity; the community had its own educational system and blacksmith shop; and the Guadalupe River provided power for the cotton gin. Since the gin was centrally located in the county, it became one of the most patronized. In addition, H. D. Gruene became the community's first postmaster in June, 1890, operating a post office out of the general store.<sup>13</sup>

Transportation was an important factor in the success of Gruene. The mercantile store was located in the old original north and southbound stagecoach route, the main road between Austin and San Antonio. The Brown Tarbox stagecoach line, as well as other travelers, regularly passed through Gruene and the store provided a stopping point, where provisions and refreshments could be obtained.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>13</sup>From a list of Texas postmasters compiled by Grover C. Ramsey, Austin, Tx.

<sup>14</sup>Bracht, Victor, Texas in 1848. San Antonio, Naylor Printing Co., 1931, pp. 82, 183.

By 1904 the success of the store caused Gruene to construct a large two-story brick commercial building as a new location for the store.<sup>15</sup> In actuality, the store also became a working bank, holding many farm mortgages as well as doing extensive farm financing.<sup>16</sup> Within a few years after building the new store, Gruene added one-story additions to each side to house the banking and post office facilities. The International and Great Northern Railroad built a freight and passenger depot about a mile west of the community in the 1880's and the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas line built another depot in 1901. The railroad facilities allowed H. D. Gruene to branch out into exporting cotton and grain products and importing goods for his general mercantile store.<sup>17</sup>

The community originally named Goodwin, finally changed its name to Gruene after 1903 when the U. S. mail rural free delivery route was established. The name was most appropriate for the economic system as the whole life of the town rotated around the Gruene family.<sup>18</sup> H. D. Gruene and his family dominated the town affairs. He and his two sons Max and Othmar formed a partnership. Upon H. D.'s retirement in 1910, he created an estate with the two brothers as managers. For a while the store was known as the Gruene Brothers store. H. D. Gruene's daughters, Mrs. Fritz Hampe and Mrs. Ella Ogletree and their families all resided in Gruene. Ernst Gruene Sr. and his wife retired from their old home and farm on Rock Street, Comaltown, in 1898, to settle in their son's community and lived there until their deaths in 1914 and 1917.

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<sup>15</sup>Hammer, Joe. p. 20.

<sup>16</sup>The New Encyclopedia of Texas, Dallas, Texas, Texas Development Bureau, 1931. pp. 2138, 2968

<sup>17</sup>Hammer, Joe. p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>Hess, R. B., "Gruene Has A Heritage All Its Own," The Austin American, Aug, 2. 1962, p. 15.

In 1918 there were Spanish influenza epidemics throughout the United States. Max, only in his thirties, died of the plague. Soon afterwards H. D. Gruene discovered he had cancer. He traveled to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for treatment and while there contracted pneumonia and died in 1920.<sup>19</sup>

H. D. Gruene, one of the largest landholders in Comal County, had had grand visions for the town he founded. In 1916 he and a surveyor, Mr. Marbach, had drawn the town off into lots and proposed streets. However, the project never got further than the maps.<sup>20</sup>

H. D. Gruene's death in 1920 marked an end to the period of Gruene's development. For a few years, the town continued its business ventures. In 1922 a fire destroyed most of the Gruene cotton gin, but within a few months a new electric cotton gin was constructed at a new location in Gruene.<sup>21</sup> In 1924 a Chrysler agency, one of the first in the country, opened its doors across the street from the second mercantile store. Economic disaster struck the following year, however, when the boll weevil completely stripped the cotton crop. Not one bale of cotton was salvaged from the crop. The tenants fell into debt and many moved away.

No sooner had they recovered, when the Great Depression began another period of hard times. The 1930's saw a series of unfortunate events. The automobile that had helped bring prosperity and increased mobility to the people of Gruene in 1924 contributed to the town's decline a few years later by increasing the competition with the stores, jobs and amusement in New Braunfels. Declining cotton production brought an end to the tenant system and the closing of the store, the two railroad stations closed and the depots were later destroyed. After World War II the school house was moved just

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<sup>19</sup>Hammer, Joe. P. 26.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. p. 27

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p. 28

outside of New Braunfels to use as classroom space for the newly created Comal County Consolidated School until a new structure was built.<sup>22</sup>

The town did see some activity during this period of decline. Othmar Gruene, aided by Max's son, H. D. Gruene, II, carried on the work of the Gruene estate. A chain store, the Independent Grocer's Association<sup>23</sup> established their business in the old first mercantile store building where the Chrysler Motor Company had been.<sup>24</sup> Lifeless since 1938, Gruene's second mercantile store began housing a series of businesses in the 1950's. Finally, in 1966 the Hadlock and Fox Manufacturing Company of San Antonio, located their establishment in the two-story brick building. One of the four or five U. S. manufacturers of western style saddle trees, the business continued to operate out of Gruene until 1979 and helped to bring new life to the town.<sup>25</sup> The one business which continued to operate throughout the hard times was the Gruene beer hall.

In 1970, an Austin developer bought the township of Gruene with plans to destroy most of the buildings in favor of condominiums and town houses. When interested preservationists approached him about the historical and architectural value of the community, he agreed to sell the historic properties intact and not disturb the area to be designated an historic district. Enthusiasm for the project spread so rapidly, that the houses have all been sold and restoration is in the final stages.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid. p. 30-31.

<sup>23</sup>The Texas Handbook, ed. Walter Prescott Webb, Austin, Texas, State Historical Society, 1952, p. 741.

<sup>24</sup>Hammer, Joe. p. 28.

<sup>25</sup>Stilwell, Hart, "Hopes for Business Brighter at Gruene," San Antonio Light, Feb. 26, 1966, p. 2.

Mr. H. D. Gruene and Max's Victorian homes are now a bed and breakfast inn. The water powered gin is the Gristmill Restaurant. The original mercantile and lumberyard are shops and the second brick store is an antique store. The electric powered cotton gin is the Old Gruene Gin Restaurant and Guadalupe Valley Winery.

## SOURCES

### 1. Books

Biesele, R. L., The History of the German Settlement in Texas, 1831-1861, Austin, Von-Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1930, pp. 11-138.

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### 2. Newspapers

Hess, R. B., "Gruene Has a Heritage All its Own," The Austin American, Aug. 2, 1962. p. 15.

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### 3. Records and Manuscripts

1850 and 1860 Comal County Census Lists.

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Hammer, Joe. Schlaraffenland: Gruene Texas, An unpublished term paper on file at the Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

## "AEROSPACE"- OR "AEROPLANE" ?

In this age of space travel, it is a significant experience for one generation to have witnessed two drastically different modes of travel from terrestrial transportation, to which countless generations of our forebears had been confined. This experience should especially apply to "us old squares" who were here to see man fly for the first time!

Since man first invented the wheel, and too bad we don't know his name or his circumstances in order to honor him with due credit for this great achievement, the following generations were each born into an era boasting the latest streamlined modes of travel, perhaps the cart, wagon, ship, stage, steam train, or the automobile. But breaking the bonds of gravity and entering the air as a new medium of travel, a complete digression from thousands of years of earthbound modes of travel--this was to be the experience of our generation! So in this respect we are a privileged group, perhaps comparable to those who saw the wheel used for travel for the first time.

Regardless of how advanced our air or space travel may become, it will be indebted to the first man to fly an "aeroplane". Many of us today can certainly recall seeing this event for the first time. True, we may not have seen the first aeroplane, or the man that flew it in this country, but as individuals we did for the first time in our lives, see man flying an aeroplane someplace. To most of us I'm sure, this was truly an unbelievable event! I don't know the first time an aeroplane was ever seen in Muskogee, however some readers probably do. There was one at the Muskogee Fair in 1911. In any case, I believe seeing an aeroplane in flight for the first time was more impressionable to us then, than any of the later aerial achievements including our space feats.

One man stands out as the first man to show more Americans the aeroplane in flight for their first time than any other. He was Calbraith Perry Rodgers, flying a spindly Wright brothers biplane, named the "Vin Fiz", from coast to coast! This was a "first" achievement with an aeroplane. His was the first aeroplane I had ever seen. His was probably the first aeroplane that many people in Muskogee had ever seen. He landed here, at the Fair Grounds, at 9:15 AM on October 16, 1911- just 55 years ago! Perhaps it will be of interest to know a little more about this(then) great event.

In 1911 few Oklahomans had ever seen an airplane. It was in October of that year that aviation was first brought to Oklahoma, and many of the other states of the Union, when Cal. P. Rodgers, the first man to fly from the Atlantic to the Pacific, flew across Oklahoma from Vinita to Durant along the Katy railroad tracks, on his way to the west coast. William Randolph Hearst, the publisher, was offering \$50,000 to the person who made the first transcontinental flight in 30 days. When J. Ogden Armour, the millionaire meat packer, said he would finance the project to cash in on publicity for a new soft drink called "Vin Fiz", which he was launching, Rodgers was elated. Armour also hired a special train for this trip, which carried a second EX biplane, spare parts, gasoline, oil, tools and mechanics to support Rodgers flight while at stops along the route. The plane Rodgers flew was called the "Vin Fiz". Some of the conditions covering the flight(as printed in the NEW YORK AMERICAN, October 9, 1910) were that the flight must be made in 720 continuous hours, or 30 days; any type of self-propelled aeroplane, or heavier-than-air flying machine, capable of carrying the contestant, may be used; to all intents and purposes the contestant may rebuild the aeroplane on the way by substituting for damaged or broken parts good parts of other similar machines, but the prize winner must use the same machine throughout; any person regardless of sex, nationality, race or residence, is eligible to compete; the contest opens October 10, 1910, closes October 10, 1911. The Wright EX biplane was 32 feet wide, 21 feet long, and 7 feet high, with spruce framing trussed with solid steel wire. The wings, 32 feet spread and 5 feet chord, were made of rubberized fabric. There were two propellers of laminated spruce covered with linen. The gas tank held 15 gallons, enough to keep the craft aloft for three

and one-half hours. (Rodgers had a second tank installed). The engine was water cooled with a three-gallon radiator. The engine developed 28 horsepower. The whole plane weighed around 800 pounds, was airborne after a run of 60 feet, and was capable of going 62 miles an hour in calm air. The pilot sat out on the front edge of the lower wing, no windshield of any kind, exposed to the weather, and to fly he had to use both hands and both feet. In flight, the machine faintly suggested a box kite. There was no compass or instruments. The coast to coast flight was not so much the accomplishment of the plane, as it was the determination of the pilot that made it happen. He was truly a remarkable man, endowed with the traits of character to overcome the many adversities that plagued him in this undertaking.

He was born in Pittsburgh in 1879 and was the grand nephew of Oliver Hazard Perry, hero of the battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812, and the great grandson of Matthew Calbraith Perry, the American Navy commodore who opened Japan to the West in 1854. His father, an Army captain, had died fighting the Indians in the Southwest. Commander John Rodgers, the Navy flier who was to command the seaplane PN-9 No.1 in a nearly successful flight from San Francisco to Hawaii in 1925, was his double cousin. Calbraith himself would have followed a service career but a childhood attack of scarlet fever had impaired his hearing. Six feet, four inches tall, and weighing about 200 pounds, he had played football at Virginia and Columbia. He liked sailboats, race horses and fast cars. The quiet young man with the quick smile and an addiction to cigars—he smoked in flight—declined to sit at a desk. In June 1911, he went out to Dayton, Ohio, qualified as a pilot after 90 minutes of instruction at the Wright brothers' school, bought himself one of their model EX biplanes, and was ready for new adventures. He was 32; he had money of his own and a young wife who loved him.

His coast to coast flight began when he took off from Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, New York, at 4:18 PM, September 17, 1911. He wore his customary flying gear: cloth cap, goggles, business suit, leather jacket, and long leather leggings. (It has been said that he wore leather gauntlet gloves, and on the cuff of one his wife had sewn a small ladies watch since he had to use both hands to fly—could this have started the wrist-watch fad?) As usual he was smoking a cigar. He waved to the crowd, tilted his cigar jauntily, and sent the plane rolling down a cleared space. California was far away, but he would make it no matter what the scoffers said! He followed the railroad across New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California. He covered 4,251 miles in 49 days. His actual flying time was 82 hours and 24 minutes.

It did not happen just like that however. The record shows that he made 69 stops between Sheepshead Bay and Long Beach, California. There were probably more. We must appreciate the problems and hazards that confronted this man. There was no ground flight assistance of any kind. No weather reports. No landing fields. No markers on the railroads to indicate the main line from branch lines, to name but a few. Mechanical breakdowns plagued him. Perhaps it will interest the reader to read some of these accounts. For example one account states "He was hardly airborne next morning and flying over some trees that bordered the field when the plane lurched and dragged. The nose turned down. His wheels snagged in a branch. The craft plunged and crashed into a chicken coop. Rodgers was thrown loose and suffered a head injury. The plane was wrecked. It was three days before the machine was rebuilt and ready for flight. Rodgers took off safely and made Hancock, New York, 96 miles west, where he landed in a potato field. A crowd of curious country people, eager to see a flying machine, tramped across the field ruining the crop. Rodgers paid for it. When Rodgers left Hancock on the morning of September 22 he was bound for Elmira, New York. But he picked out the wrong tracks, landed in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and nearly lost his plane to souvenir hunters before police rescued him."

His log told the story of delays and misadventures: windbound for a day at Kent, blown off course by driving rainstorm near Huntington, Indiana, wrecked in a ditch at Huntington, three days lost rebuilding the machine, two days windbound at Hammond, Indiana. Once Rodgers was very nearly killed when the ignition wires of his engine worked loose at 2,600 feet. Taking a big chance, he shut off the engine and made a deadstick landing. Another time he flew low over the special train, and saw a hand car on the tracks some distance ahead around a bend. He signaled the engineer in vain

then raced ahead and swooping down shouted at the hand car occupants and pointed up the tracks. The men got the car off just in time. Another occasion his signaling averted a crash between the train and a freight train moving out from a siding. He left Kansas City on October 15 for Vinita, Oklahoma, 190 miles away, and ran into a storm of rain, wind, and lightning that nearly beat him to earth. His body ached, his head throbbed, his eyes burned as the rain drenched him and the winds battered him and tore at the plane. It was the most terrifying part of the whole trip. He had a bad moment while flying between Fort Worth and Dallas, Texas, when he spotted an eagle below him. For 12 miles the bird raced the machine, then soared toward it while Rodgers waited tensely. Just when it seemed a collision was inevitable, the eagle veered off and vanished. The party spent two weeks in Texas. At Fort Worth vandals broke the left wing of the Vin Fiz. A leak developed in the oil tank, a cylinder cracked, the fuel pump connection sheared off, a magneto spring broke. The plane was windbound for a day at Kyle, Texas. At Spofford it was damaged in take-off when it struck a hillock; at Sanderson there was another delay when the high winds blew all day. At Fort Hancock, the post from which his father, Captain Rodgers, had gone to his death, the skids were wrecked. More repairs were required at El Paso. Rodgers and others went off to Juarez, Mexico, across the Rio Grande, to see a bullfight. High above the Arizona desert, he crossed the California border. Then the whole heroic project nearly ended in tragedy. Five thousand feet above the Salton Sea, Rodgers No. 1 cylinder exploded. The plane rocked. Splinters of steel penetrated Rodgers' arm. Gasoline poured out of the cylinder. Another explosion surely would wreck him. Wracked with pain, fearful less of death than <sup>THE END OF</sup> this dogged flight, Rodgers put the Vin Fiz into a wide downward spirals and finally landed beside a railroad station. It took a doctor two hours to remove the splinters and to bandage him. It took Rodgers almost as long to persuade his mechanics that they must remove the shattered engine and install the old one they had long since regarded as worn out. They were dubious, but loyal, and Rodgers had his way. He negotiated the narrow San Geronio Pass with its 6000-foot walls, and on November 5, his luck still holding, he landed in Pasadena, and the end of his trip! Someone remarked, that of the original Vin Fiz only the drip pan and the vertical rudder remained, but that didn't matter. Rodgers had made aviation history and given flying a tremendous boost. Even as he saw his name go into the record books as the first transcontinental flier, Rodgers pocketed no part of the \$50,000 purse offered by Hearst, who had specified that the flight be accomplished in 30 days, and it took Rodgers 49 days! (INSERT ATTACHED PAR)

Five months later, on April 4, 1912, the happy young hero was killed at Long Beach, California, when he plunged 200 feet into the Pacific during an exhibition. He was close enough to shore to be pulled out at once, but his neck had been broken. The New York Herald noted that he was the 127th man—the 22nd American—to be killed since aviation got its start at Kitty Hawk.

Rodgers left a legacy of thrills etched in the memories of the thousands still living who followed his exploits day by day half a century ago. And he left a tangible bequest apart from tons of age-yellow news clippings: his plane, the Vin Fiz, in the Smithsonian Institution!

So, dear readers, many of <sup>you</sup> living in Muskogee today were a witness to this indomitable man and his aeroplane—the first you had ever seen! Perhaps the newsitem in the Muskogee paper will remind you of where you were and your thoughts at the time you saw him:

"Cal. P. Rodgers, the famous coast to coast aviator, landed in Muskogee on the Fair Grounds at 9:15 AM, October 16, 1911. He had flown from Vinita 65 miles away, in exactly 63 minutes! A little more than two hours later at 11:32, by the watch that Rodgers carried on his wrist, he swept away into the air headed for McAlester. It was exactly 9:14 when Rodgers swept over Okmulgee Avenue, and 9:15 when he alighted at the Fair Grounds. As Rodgers stepped from the machine, he asked: "What city is this"? "Muskogee", Mr. Bixby replied. "I thought so", the aviator said. He was almost stiff with the cold and his fingers were numb and lifeless as he shook hands with a reporter. To those who saw Rodgers alight and step from his machine,

there came a sensation as if they had just spoken to a messenger from Mars. Six feet tall, every line of his 190 pounds tells of strength. Rodgers is thirty-one years of age. Twenty minutes behind him, into Muskogee came his special train carrying mechanics and equipment, but most of all his pretty young wife and his aged mother. "I am going to make this flight to the Pacific Coast, if I break up every machine they build me", Rodgers declared. He has already broken three! Rodgers made his splendid flight from Vinita yesterday despite a badly working engine. One cylinder was entirely missing when he landed at Muskogee, a sparkplug broken. The news of Rodgers progress was flashed from town to town along the Katy. As he passed over Wagoner the fire whistle here was blown. To queries of "Where's the fire"? that came into the telephone headquarters, the central replied-"Look out for Rodgers and his airship". People poured into the streets, the roofs of buildings began to blacken with people. Rodgers arrival in Muskogee called out all the fire apparatus of the fire district. Monday morning Chief Templeton was explaining to Superintendent of Schools Monroe, that he had arranged to have the fire whistle blown as Rodgers left Wagoner. "That's a bully time to have a fire-drill", Mr Monroe said. "I'll say nothing about it". So when the whistle blew, the fire signal was given in the Muskogee High School and the fire-drill put into effect. Some good soul living nearby, seeing the children and hearing the whistle, turned in the alarm, Pell mell through the streets crowded with people came three hose companies, two steamers, and an aerial truck. Rodgers looked down from his aeroplane and wondered. People swarmed over the viaduct as they did every accessible high point in the city.

As Rodgers talked of his flight he said, "The winds in the southwest country are the worst I have ever experienced! They have already caused me many aggravating delays".

Rodgers flight yesterday was a triumphant one, great crowds gathering to see him at Wagoner, Muskogee, Checotah, Eufala and McAlester."

(Advertisement)- Rodgers ocean to ocean flight. Photos and post cards made by that man, Amos, 327 W. Okmulgee. Phone 3306

CARUENE, TEXAS

To each of us the amazing spectacle of seeing man & aeroplane in flight for our first time, must assuredly ~~xxxx~~ have made lasting impressions. This was not just a new fad. This was the breakthrough to a new frontier! This was the triumph of man in realizing his wildest wish when he first made the wheel!) I vividly recall this great wonder, insofar as it was my first time to see an aeroplane fly. I was a boy in 1911, living on the bank of the Guadalupe River in Comal, County, Texas.

Some of us boys were down on the river gathering pecans, and occasionally having a cedar bark cigarette rolled in paper-sack paper. It was a cloudy, blustery day. A wet blue norther had gone thru the night before. It was the latter part of October but I dont recall the date. Along about 4:00 o'clock that afternoon, we sacked up our pecans, and started back to my grandfather who had a country store, saloon, blacksmith, etc., in a small village he founded high on the east bank of the river. We got to the store just as the depot agent from the Katy depot, about a quarter mile from the store, came in and announced that he had just got word over his telegraph that an aeroplane flown by Rodgers was going to come over our place some time the next morning, and that he would be following the Katy tracks to San Antonio. To us boys at least, this was unbelievable! Somehow, ~~xxxx~~ with hardly any telephones at that time, the news got around to ranchers and farmers all over our neck of the woods. Starting early the next morning, people were coming in to the store, -horseback, hacks, buggies, wagons, and on foot. It was a beautiful clear, cold morning with a cloudless deep blue sky and a strong wind out of the north. A lot of these people had travelled a long way from ranches up in the hill country. By now someone had decided the best place to see this aeroplane, would be on top of the store. It was two-storied. The top floor was where he kept furniture, buggies, a racing gig or two, wagons, dress making forms, and coffins. This was put up there on a freight elevator in back of the store, which was operated by a hand winch. In order to get to the roof, you had to go up a ladder, thru a trap door in the ceiling, into the attic to another trap door which opened on the roof near the

lowest edge of the roof which went up very steep to the ridge. Also, this was the side that faced the Katy depot and the tracks, which you could see for about two miles going north. Fortunately, the brick walls of the store extended about three feet above the bottom of the roof. On the front of the store and on the ~~top~~ peak of the roof, grandpa had a sixteen foot flag pole. He always said he had the biggest U.S. flag in the whole county, and it was a whopper! Now this flag was only flown on the Fourth of July, Texas Independence Day, and on Presidential Inauguration Day. But this day was something special! Old Glory was up there stretched out in all its splendor!

As people came in, the women folk and children started their shopping in the store, since it was near the first of the month and they took advantage of the trip down. The men being chilly from the early morning ride, began to gather in the saloon across the street from the store. ~~Billings~~, the bartender, a giant of a man, was really busy measuring out Old Sunnybrook and drawing beer. This being a German community, grandpa had a sign behind the bar that read: "Der Feinste Schnapps-Das Beste Bier-Bekommt Man Bei Dem Heinrich Hier!" (The finest whisky-the best beer you get from Henry here) He also had a locker in the saloon, where he kept a supply of fireworks for such occasions as The Fourth of July, New Years Eve, Christmas, and Presidential elections, but the latter would depend on who won!

Well, by early mid-morning, a few cowpokes were getting pretty well along, sort of hanging on the edge of the bar. The bartender used to call it "chinning the bar". Now the saloon never closed except for elections, and other rare occasions, but this day it closed, so the bartender could get on top of the store to see Rodgers. To those customers who still demanded more refreshments, he sold them a bottle to take up on the store, and then locked up, but not until he opened the locker and got two giant skyrockets to take along.

The procession to the top of the store was something to see! Ladies struggling up the ladder on the second floor to the trap door, some got stuck in the opening, while those below pushed and some in the attic pulled, they finally made it. A couple of cowpokes by this time had trouble negotiating the ladder, but with a lot of anxious help from below, they too made it out on the roof. So here we all were straining our eyes north up the Katy tracks in a cold raw northwind. Suddenly someone yelled "Here he comes". Everyone was quiet and looked, but it was a false alarm since what he saw was a buzzard riding the tailwind down over the tracks. The roof was covered with people, and the din of conversation started up again. After a ~~short~~ time, someone yelled for quiet, and the crowd hushed. We could barely hear a sound we had never heard before--a humming whirring sound--and someone yelled "I see him, I see him--look way up the tracks". For the first time in my life I was seeing an aeroplane, it looked like a tiny rectangular cross way up over the tracks! He drew closer and closer, and we could see him good. A great cheering and yelling broke loose. A couple of men had their sixshooters out and were blazing away into the air. Suddenly a skyrocket streaked up into a beautiful arc in front of the plane and burst into a shower of red stars. I could make out the man in the plane very clearly now--he was waving! The noise of the plane and all the people was deafening. This was an awesome sight! Children were crying. One woman was crying. Then too quickly he passed over the crest of the roof, and we could no longer see him. It was just before noon. A tragedy to all this however, befell the two fellows who had trouble climbing the ladder. After they got out on the roof, they stretched out on the incline of the roof, the sun was warm, they went sound asleep and slept thru the whole thing! I always felt sorry for them after that. The bartender was the first down from the roof, in order to open the saloon again. Grandpa was anxious to get everyone off the roof, fearing the weight might break the roof down.

This was certainly no day to waste time eating dinner. With a crowd like this in the saloon, certainly more action should develop there during the afternoon. Now the law did not allow minors in a saloon, but there was no law said we could not stand on the bench outside the big open front window and look in! So here we were. Free lunch had been set up at one end of the bar. Home made bread, cheese, smoked sausage, ham, and pickled pigs feet and mackerel. The last two were not free, and

you had to pay for these. By making signs to the bartender, we got him to slip us a generous sandwich thru the back door. A rancher we all knew well, bought us a lemon soda pop and handed them thru the window to us. He was a fine fellow! The afternoon wore on. Everyone was still talking about the airship they had seen. A few poker games started up. The crowd got louder and louder. A bunch tried singing. Late in the afternoon, two vaqueros were down at the end of the bar near the lunch, which was pretty well scrambled up by now. Then what we had been waiting for began to take form. One of these vaqueros shoved the other away from the bar and was yelling something at him. The other shoved him against the bar and clipped him, and they moved onto the floor. One let go with a haymaker and knocked the other into a poker table, upsetting it with chips rolling all over the floor. The crowd moved back. Then one came at the other with a knife, a wicked looking thing. The other must not have had a knife, so he had only one place to go and that was out. He came thru our window in the prettiest swan dive you ever saw, hit the ground rolling, and rolled under a wagon hitched in front of the saloon. The knife man went after him thru the door, and just about to reach the wagon, when a deafening roar came thru the window over our heads. There was grandpa, framed in the window with his old 44 he had carried on the trail driving cattle to Abilene and Dodge City years before. He always kept it under the bar in his saloon. He fired in front of the man with the knife, the bullet splintering the wagon bed. The man stopped dead in his tracks. He explained to this fellow, that he did not allow any knifefighting around his saloon, and it would be best if he got on his horse and rode on. Somehow the fellow agreed with him, got on his horse and took off in a cloud of dust. Then grandpa called the man under the wagon back in the saloon (he was one of his men) and drew him a mug of beer, told him to drink it and then go home. I guess this seemed like a good time to break up the festivities, so grandpa got on a chair, asked for attention, and made a little speech something like this: "My friends, it is getting late, and I'm going home. Today we have all seen a wonderful thing that we have never seen before. Many of you have a long way to go to get home. So step up to the bar and have one on me, and lets call it a day!" The crowd was willing. The sun was setting on the western horizon like a huge prairie fire, and so ended a glorious day in October 1911!

JAMES D. OGLETREE  
Colonel, U.S. Army Retired  
1002 Mayberry Drive  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74464  
January 20, 1988

# ng Strait into new year

So you call this "History" 7.15

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**George Strait has led a country-music renaissance.**

to a broad number of people from the older folks who remember Wills and the Texas Playboys to the women to the younger people who think his music sounds fresh and new.

### 50-mile radius

While most artists don't think of playing shows within less than a 200-mile radius from one another, George Strait is the only artist who has strength within a 50-mile radius," he said. "In September Strait played the second largest drawing concert in the country music industry this year in Austin, then turned around and played to sellout crowds in College Station in October and then in San Antonio in November. It's amazing, no one has ever done that in country music history. And by the way, the No. 1 drawing arena concert of the year was George Strait in Houston — just before the Austin date.

"In 1988 I see George Strait building and growing in the eastern states and western Canada, where he hasn't had as much exposure," Farrell added. "And I will even predict that

he'll be the largest ticket-selling performer in country music by the end of next year — he's already tied with Alabama this year."

Though Farrell's bread and butter depends upon the growing number of country music fans who are learning to settle into "that good ol' country feeling" in the somewhat restrictive atmosphere of the concert hall, he does not rule out the impetus of the traditional Texas dance hall and its 50-plus years of influence on the direction of contemporary country music.

### 'Have their place'

"I don't think anything will ever take the place of dance halls in Texas," Farrell said. "They help new artists get established and to grow, and they most definitely have their place in country music. But the arenas have their place now, too, and they will grow even stronger in the future."

One area dance hall that has successfully maintained the tradition and ambiance of being "Texas' oldest dance hall" is Gruene Hall in New Braunfels.

In addition to being one of the most popular tourist stops in the state, Gruene Hall prides itself on having helped to establish many local artists in the area who have since gone on to greater fame and larger audiences. Strait was a longtime crowd-pleaser at the club, as was Lyle Lovette and Nanci Griffith in their solo folkie days. And most notably, within the last year Gruene has been sought out by established artists who are looking to recall the dim-lights and thick-smoke days complete with creaking wooden dance floors and Shiner Bock.

"It's ironic," said Mary Jane Nalley, one of the proprietors of Gruene Hall, "but we find that some of the big-name artists who used to play here or some who have just heard of the club seek us out because they miss the close crowd contact and the traditional dance-hall atmosphere. This has been an excellent year for us here and we see things getting better next year."

### Regulars pleased

Nalley suggested that the fact that the dance hall does not lean heavily on hard-core country acts might be what has helped the club maintain its primarily age 30-45 clientele. This, coupled with Gruene's emphasis on original singer/songwriter performers, has kept the hall's regulars pleased along with serving as a breeding ground for some of the hottest new local talent.

"There hasn't been a real change in our booking, but rather a gradual

change as the music market has changed," Nalley said. "We're always looking for new talent — that's what keeps things fresh and alive here — but we don't really look too many of the straight hard-core country acts either, because that isn't what our crowd is really wanting these days."

"The singer/songwriters like Lyle Lovette and Hal Ketchum, who is getting a lot of national recognition these days, are the types of performers that work here," she said. "Dance halls like ours are a vanishing breed, which is why we try to do more than country like booking bands such as Johnny Dee and the Rocket 88s or Bo Diddley or some of the newer breed of country/rock crossovers like Rosanne Cash, Joe Ely and Asleep at the Wheel."

### Booking policy

"But some of the bigger up-and-coming new country acts like Steve Wariner or Dwight Yoakam are still way out of our financial capacity — though we'd love to book those people. However, we do keep our booking policy closer to the country side in the summer months to cater a bit to the tourists. In the spring and fall we bring in the more diverse acts folks in this area and up through Austin have come to expect."

That's where the dance halls of the 1980s come in — Billy Bob's in Dallas, Gilley's in Pasadena and the Blue Bonnet Palace in Schertz. The Blue Bonnet, like those other modern-day dance halls, is clearly the result of country music — not to mention Texas country music — all grown up and respectable-like. The difference being that the Blue Bonnet isn't JUST a dance hall, it's like a country music mall with its combination of a huge concert hall, indoor rodeo arena, rock 'n' roll club with a mechanical bull and this year's addition of an outdoor arena complete with professional bull riders competing almost every weekend.

### Country Jubilee

The most recent attempt to make country music big business in San Antonio will be the Country Jubilee live radio broadcasts scheduled to get under way early in the new year. Geared mainly toward the expected downtown funseeker of the tourist persuasion, the Jubilee will stage two very intimate live country music performances every Saturday night beginning this Saturday with an average of three or four top-name country acts per night along with two or three local performers. This Texas version of the old "Louisiana Hayride" will be simulcast from the Scottish Rite Cathedral on radio station WOAI, which can be heard across the United States, Canada and Mex-

**"EXHILARATING"**

— David Ansen, NEWSWEEK

**HOPE AND GLORY**

SECOND WEEK

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JOHN BOORMAN



Record  
San Marcos, Texas

JUN 4 1995

Comal  
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# Gruene is hopping

## Revitalized ghost town has special roots

It's hard to believe that in 1960, Gruene's population was only 20 people. To look at Gruene today you would never have imagined that this town almost dwindled away during the depression. 1994 marks the 19th year since the revitalization of this old ghost town. It really all began with the reopening of Gruene Hall as a dance hall (the bar has never really closed since 1878) in 1975 and the creation of the Gristmill Restaurant in 1976.

It didn't happen without pain and overcoming obstacles and it certainly didn't happen overnight.

How it did happen is a story with roots deep in the Texas pioneer spirit, pride in the past, and love of old but beautiful things.

When the current co-owner Pat Molak accompanied a friend to Gruene who was interested in buying and restoring a decaying old mansion once the home of H.D. Gruene the town's founder, Pat realized that this rustic old western town that looked like a movie set was the perfect opportunity to set the nostalgic mood of the Old West. Gruene Hall is virtually untouched since 1878. The same open-air dance floor, huge outdoor garden (the wood burning stove when its cold), and the advertisements in the rafters surrounding the dance floor from businesses of 50 years ago. All were part of the original dance hall.

Mary Jane Nalley, co-owner said, "The Hall's age and mystique are what keep people coming back. It's the feeling you get when you walk in the door. It's a real country place-it's the atmosphere created by being an old country joint."

Gruene Hall has featured the best in contemporary country blues and folk music such as Lyle Lovett, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Jerry Jeff Walker, Joe Ely, Asleep at the Wheel and Delbert McClinton. George Strait's first album cover was shot in front of Gruene Hall (and is still posted on

the wall over the bar) and he played there for six years before his super stardom. In 1990 George returned to film three commercials for Bud Light.

In 1988 Jerry Jeff Walker recorded his "Live at Gruene Hall" album there and frequents the Hall.

Located in the ruins of a 115 year old cotton gin is the Gristmill Restaurant, offering a variety of delicious meals including crocks of salads, hamburgers, stuffed jalapenos, 'Gruene Beans', catfish, and H.D. chocolate supreme or strawberry shortcake. Gristmill now open year round offers dining on three levels and on a deck overlooking the River.

The Gristmill and Gruene Hall were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 as a part of the Gruene Historic District, and in 1988 Gruene Hall received it Texas Medallion Plaque from the Texas Historical Commission.

Another ~~one of the original buildings~~ is The Gruene Mansion. The personal home of Mr. Gruene was renovated and opened as a unique Bed and Breakfast. The home was built in 1872 as a one-story stucco brick residence with the second floor being added in 1886. The Gruene Mansion with it elegant gardens an original old "Root Cellar" has grown popular with tourist and locals alike. The mercantile now houses the Gruene Antique Co. attracts collectors from miles around.

Lone Star Country Goods, located next to the Antique Co., specializes in fine Cowboy and Western accessories from custom made furniture, lighting and dinnerware to one of a kind rustic collectibles and Folk art.

One of the newest additions is Cotton Eyed Joe's steeped in Gruene's rustic atmosphere you'll find a great collection of Texas as well as Gruene-themed gifts, souvenirs and, of course, t-shirts!

For information on Gruene please call 210-629-5077.





