

Revisiting Cherry Springs, Texas' Forgotten Dance Hall

For decades, this venue in Fredericksburg welcomed music legends like Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley

By [Daniel Orr](#)

November 22, 2024

In October 1955, an advertisement ran in *The Radio Post*, a weekly newspaper in Fredericksburg. The syndicated radio program *Louisiana Hayride* announced it was bringing its popular show to the Hill Country, broadcasting live from a dance hall located about 17 miles north of Fredericksburg in a town called Cherry Spring. Listed on the bill was an unfamiliar performer, “Clovis Presley.” On the night of Oct. 9, a crowd packed Cherry Springs Tavern. The line dancing and fiddle playing stopped as attention turned to the announcer on the mic. “Ladies and gentlemen, there’s a very special young man I want to introduce to y’all tonight,” he said. “Give a big Texas

welcome to Mr. Elvis Presley.” On the 12-foot stage in the dance hall off US 87, a musical revolution took the Hill Country by storm.

What we think of as Texas music began in dance halls. Conjunto, Western swing, outlaw country, they all took shape in the hot, sweaty dance halls around the state. Venues like Gruene Hall, Luckenbach, and Dallas’ Longhorn Ballroom remain living monuments to that history, connecting past to present every night folks two-step onto the dance floor.

Cherry Springs Dance Hall

17662 US 87, Fredericksburg

By contrast, the dance hall of Cherry Spring (population 75 in 2010) hangs to the side of US 87 as a quiet reminder of what arguably was once the most storied dance hall in the state. In the 1950s and early ’60s, Cherry Spring was a mainstay of the Texas music circuit. Johnny Cash sang there the same night as Elvis Presley. Hank Williams and Patsy Cline are rumored to have played there. Nat King Cole, Chuck Berry, Bob Wills, Asleep at the Wheel, Marty Robbins, and George Jones brought their varied talents to the out-of-the-way venue, too. Ernest Tubb even wrote a song, “Our Baby’s Book,” about a car crash that killed his infant son that took place outside of Mason on the same highway as the dance hall. And, of course, Willie also played there.

This was a history that Evelyn Weinheimer, archivist of the [Pioneer Museum in Fredericksburg](#), was surprised to learn. Weinheimer spent part of her childhood in Cherry Spring, where her great-grandparents helped found the limestone Christ Lutheran Church, the largest structure in Cherry Spring, and her great-great-great grandmother donated the land for the German community’s school in 1905. In

Weinheimer's childhood, Cherry Spring was a quiet town that reflected the piety and austerity of the German families who settled it in the mid-19th century. A raucous dance hall was the last thing those early families would countenance. It was only fitting, then, that Herman Lehmann was its founder.



Subscribe

Lehmann had a rather ordinary life for a boy in the German Hill Country, but all that changed on May 16, 1870, when Mescalero Apaches kidnapped the 10-year-old in a raid on the farms around Loyal Valley in Mason County (7 miles north of Cherry Spring). Lehmann lived with the Mescalero Apache tribe and trained to be a warrior until he joined the Quahada Comanche, whose leader, Quanah Parker, adopted him into his family. A Texas Rangers raid returned him back to Mason County, where he would spend the rest of his eventful life (he died in 1932) between the worlds of Anglo-German Texas and the Comanche.

In Loyal Valley, Lehmann tried his hand at different trades, but none of them stuck. "According to the locals," Weinheimer said, "Lehmann spent most of his time drinking, gambling, and fighting." Around 1890, Lehmann got the money together to start a dance hall just across the county line in Cherry Spring. Lehmann's dance hall would shock the community in much the same way that his life had. For more than a century, the dance hall, going under different names (but which all insisted on the

plural Cherry Springs), would bring dancing and drinking and music to the Hill Country.

Bought in 1994 by a local, D.C. Owens, the dance hall for years remained a musical hub north of Fredericksburg. But between declining business and declining health, operations slimmed down and, by Owens' death in 2022, ceased altogether. Today, the building is a shadow of its former self. Patti Fikes, who owns a vacation rental in a structure that was previously the liquor store next door, has seen the dance hall's fortunes sink over the last decade. When I visited, Fikes drove me in her sleek pickup across the parking lot full of chest-high grass to take a peek inside the hall. "It's just so sad," she said, "it used to be so beautiful."

Inside, the decaying walls, piles of old furniture, and the mahogany bar baked under the rusty tin roof. Looking at the "CHERRY SPRINGS TAVERN" sign hanging off the right of the splintered dance floor, Ronald McGuffin's paintings of longhorns, and the blue stage where giants in the history of music once performed, I was able, for a moment, to imagine the dance hall throbbing with people, taking in the greats of American music, amazed that the house Herman Lehmann built could shake the Hill Country like nothing else had.