

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1211



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: McElroy-Severn House

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 109 N. Loop 4
CITY OR TOWN: Buda
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Hays

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A
ZIP CODE: 78610

CODE: 209

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

8-30-2002
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

10-27-02

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	3	1 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	1	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	4	1 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: Rural Properties of Hays County

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT: Post Office; DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling; Hotel

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: VACANT, WORK-IN PROGRESS

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: OTHER: Center-Passage; One-Room

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION STONE
WALLS WOOD; STONE
ROOF ASPHALT; METAL
OTHER CONCRETE

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-9).

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Description

The Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House complex rests on a high bluff above Onion Creek, about one quarter of a mile east of the small, Central Texas city of Buda. Buda lies about 13 miles south of Austin, in the northeast quadrant of Hays County where the gently rolling blackland prairie begins to give way to the rocky Texas Hill Country. The city-owned complex occupies a 51-acre tract of land on the north side of Loop 4, which connects the city of Buda to IH-35, about one mile to the east. Set back about 150 feet north of Loop 4, the building complex lies on a fairly flat site at the edge of bluff that drops to the creek along its north and east sides. It is reached by a slightly curved dirt road flanked by a few trees and agave (cactus) plants. The high, level part of the site is covered with native grasses and dotted with ancient Live Oaks. The site drops sharply downward toward the creek on the east and is only slightly less steep on the north, where the slope is overgrown with thick vegetation. Buildings consist of a rambling frame house with a center-passage dwelling at its core, a one-room cut limestone post office building with a metal shed attached to the rear elevation, a frame garage, and a frame shed. The house and post office are the site's most significant extant resources.

Upon approach, the frame McElroy-Severn House (stagecoach house) dominates the view (Photo 1); it obscures the much smaller stone post office building that is attached at the rear, northeast corner of the house, by an open ad hoc canopy. Although they date to the early settlement period in Hays County's history, the house and post office are very different in plan, form, function, embellishment and building materials and should be treated as separate entities. Each of the two buildings has alterations and additions that will be discussed according to their importance and their relationship to the buildings they modify. Secondary buildings include a frame auto garage, which lies at the end of the driveway, just north of the northwest corner of the house, and a dilapidated frame shed that is nearly hidden in the dense undergrowth on the downhill, north slope of the site. Remnants of old foundation plantings, concrete walkways and paving survive around the house and post office buildings. A cistern and concrete trough lie a few feet east of the post office building and contribute to the historic character of the site.

Although the post office was established in 1875, a stone lintel bearing the date 1876 indicates that the building was completed in that year. Dating the components of the center-passage house is more difficult. Anecdotal references indicate that a stagecoach house was built in the mid-1870s, at the same time as the post office, but a cultural resources survey conducted in 1992 dated the building to ca. 1885. The building type was popular in Texas from throughout the mid-19th century and could reasonably have been built by 1875. Certainly the postmaster/stagecoach operator would have required a larger shelter than the tiny stone post office afforded. As the building is restored and more recent building fabric is removed, more evidence as to the dates of its original construction and alterations may be uncovered.

In addition, archeological investigations may yield additional historic and prehistoric resources on the site. Early Anglo settlers in the region reported finding arrowheads and stone tools along nearby sections of Onion Creek, indicating Native habitation in the area. Historic archeological resources that may be discovered on the property include evidence of an old stagecoach bridge and road leading across the branch of Onion Creek at the northeast corner of the site and the remains of an earlier (pre-1875) post office that apparently lay closer to the old bridge. Evidence of old barns, privies and other outbuildings should exist on the site, as well. Because this property may contain very significant historic and prehistoric resources, professional archeological investigations should precede any redevelopment activities.

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Stagecoach/McElroy-Severn House

Current Appearance

The McElroy-Severn House is a five-bay, side-gabled frame dwelling with a five-bay hipped roof porch stretched across the entire front (south) façade (Photo 1). Shed-roofed additions extend to the north (Photo 2). An "extra" room attached on the east side lends an elongated appearance to that elevation. All sections of the rambling house rest on pier and beam foundations of cedar posts on limestone blocks with hand hewn pegs for joinery. The fireplace footings and perimeter foundation are dry-stack limestone. The chimneys most likely are of limestone construction; they have been plastered with concrete. Some of the interior walls are framed with cedar posts and roof framing is of cedar post and milled lumber. Original roofing material was probably cedar shake shingles but it has been replaced over the years with composition shingles. Although all sections feature wood siding, they are of different types; the two-room eastern section is sheathed with a flush fitted siding sometimes called German Siding, while the center-passage section to the west is covered with a 4 1/2" exposure lapped siding. Asphalt shingles have been added to the east facade. The five-bay, full facade front porch unifies the primary elevation by incorporating the two distinct sections under its canopy.

Evolution of the Stagecoach/McElroy-Severn House

The frame house was constructed in several different building campaigns beginning with a ca. 1875 "dogtrot" or center-passage house oriented on an east-west axis at the rear (north end) of the site (Plan 1). Remnants of an early porch under the present kitchen suggest that the house faced north, toward the creek and former stagecoach road. About 1885, the open breezeway appears to have been enclosed and a new porch added across the south elevation (Plan 2), changing the orientation of the house to face south, toward Loop 4, instead of north, toward the creek and post road. The original porch may have been enclosed at that time. This alteration coincides with the closure of the Onion Creek Post Office and the establishment of a new post office in Buda. A second, two-room wing appears to have been attached to the east end of the original house by 1900 (Plan 3). Only one room wide and two rooms deep, it lies perpendicular to the center-passage dwelling with its front room aligned flush with the south (front) facade of the original house. The effect was an elongated primary wing with a short ell extending to the north, from the east end of the original building.

By 1920, a third major building campaign added two rooms on either side of the original porch (Plan 3). The wing stretched across the north (rear) facade of the center-passage house and attached to the west side of the two-room wing. This rear shed-roofed wing included a bedroom on the west, a kitchen extending from the central hall, and a bathroom and storage space behind the east room of the original center-passage house. Later additions to the stagecoach house include a small, partially enclosed porch projecting from the kitchen and a single room with an exterior door attached at the rear of the ell extension. At some point in the fairly recent past, this room was linked to the stone post office building by an overhead canopy (Plan 4).

A near-full facade porch probably extended across the front of the original center-passage house, shading the south-facing glass windows. When the two-room wing was added, the roof was extended to cover it at the same pitch with the front cornice return retained at the end wall. The rear return was lost due to the change in roof slope. Original 4/4 light windows may have been pulled from the east wall of the original house, since it was being converted to blank wall, and installed on the new wing. When the third addition was in place, the roofline retained its original pitch over the front

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rooms but was sloped to accommodate the multiple rear additions. From the side, the house looks somewhat like a New England "Saltbox house".

When the roof was extended to cover the two-room addition, the porch was also extended across the length of the façade to cover the new front room. Small grade changes between wings were addressed by installing a concrete porch floor and creating a step down from the two-room section into the center-passage section. The porch probably had squared, chamfered posts that may have been replaced with turned porch posts or the existing square Doric column type. It appears that the surviving columns have suffered rot from standing water and their bases have been truncated and set upon tapered concrete blocks. Although the front room of the addition had its own entry door, there was no access to the main house directly from this room. Today, the roof and porch stretch across the two front wings as seamlessly as possible and the effort unifies the primary façade.

Dogtrot (ca. 1875) and Center-Passage Section (ca. 1885)

The core dwelling consisted of two rooms connected by a central hall. While it appears to be a center-passage house (central hall flanked by two chambers) there is some evidence that the house originally had an open breezeway ("dogtrot") that was later enclosed as a hall with doors on each end. The frame house was covered by a steeply pitched, side-gabled roof with stone chimneys centered on the two end walls. Front and rear double doors provided access to the central hall which opened to two spacious rooms (east and west rooms), each containing a fireplace on their exterior walls. When open, the large front and rear doors captured the breezes that wafted up from the creek. Existing fabric in the west room suggests that each of the side chambers had two, 4/4 light windows spaced at equal intervals on both the front (south) and rear (north) façades, and matching windows flanking their fireplaces. A large porch appears to have been attached on the north side of the house, suggesting that its original orientation was to the creek.

When the breezeway was enclosed, the house was probably symmetrical in appearance; both front and rear elevations contained central doors flanked by two regularly spaced windows. Each of the side elevations contained a stone chimney centered on the ridgeline of the roof and flanked by a pair of windows matching those on the front and rear. Probably in the 1920s, the east room had its two front windows replaced with tripartite one-over-one double-hung ribbon windows. Its east windows which would have been placed on either side of the fireplace have been covered, possibly to accommodate the two-room ell extension.

Two-Room Addition (ca. 1900)

Around the turn of the century, a two-room addition was attached to the east elevation of the original house. Oriented on a north-south axis at a 90 degree angle from the older building, the addition is one room wide and two rooms deep. It is accessed by its own door, which is centered on the front (south) façade. One 4/4 light window lies to the east of the door and two matching 4/4 light windows punctuate the east façade. A door at the back of the front room leads directly into the second room, which has a single 4/4 light window on the east wall. The two rooms are single wall construction and the window boxes are wider than the opening. Thus the frames extend into the room, beyond the interior wall. This odd placement, and the fact that they match those in the center-passage section, suggests they may have removed from the original portion of the house that was now covered by this addition. The front room has horizontal board and batten ceilings while the rear room has shiplap ceiling partially covered with acoustical tile. The rear room has an oddly curved downward sloping ceiling as to those in the third major addition. Wide pine board flooring extends from the front to the rear room in this addition. The front room has a brick fireplace with decorative tiles and a wood mantel

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and shares a chimney with the east room fireplace. The addition transformed the original exterior end wall chimney to an interior one serving back-to-back fireplaces. Although the front room of the addition had its own entry door, there was no access to the main house directly from this room. Rather, one has to go into the rear room to enter the main body of the house. The rear room also had its own exterior door that now leads to a later, one-room extension on the back. Doors throughout this two-room addition display 2-panel wood doors with knobs and escutcheons popular in the 1920s.

Rear Wing (ca. 1920)

The third major addition appears to have been built in the 1920s and kitchen and bathroom updates made as modern conveniences were available from the 1930s through the early 1950s. The wing appears to incorporate the original porch in the central kitchen section (Little, personal communication, 2001). The wing contains three functional sections. On the west side is a large bedroom. The middle section holds the kitchen which extends directly back from the original hall and appears to have incorporated some of the hall to increase the space. The third section contains a bathroom and hall with storage rooms, cabinets and linen closets. The cabinets may have worked as a pantry. Built in closets and drawers in this area have small glass pulls and metal hardware common to bungalows of the 1920s. The bathroom floor is covered in low-pile carpeting and has a toilet, lavatory and tub that appear to have been installed in the 1950s. The kitchen floor is covered with decaying linoleum tile and has a wall mounted sink that appears to date from the 1930s and 1940s. Board and Batten ceiling extends into the kitchen from the shortened hall, further indication that the kitchen took some that space, and the remainder of the ceiling is shiplap. The bedroom is the only room with exposed wood floors in this wing. It also has a board and batten ceiling.

Later Additions (ca. 1950)

Two smaller additions were tacked onto the rear of house after the three major wings were in place. A partially enclosed back porch leads off the kitchen to the north. Of frame construction, it suffers extensive rotting, particularly in the wood flooring, due to exposure. A single frame room was also attached to the rear of the two-room wing. Its wood sheathing and floors are deteriorating, again due to exposure. The exterior door in this room faces the separate post office entrance behind the house to the north. An interior door opens to the rear room of the two-room wing. Original window configuration is unknown. The exterior door is unsecured, windows have been broken and sashes removed, leaving the room open to the weather, animals and vandals. Both the porch and the single room are later additions that appear to have been built in the early- to mid-20th century. They probably served good, functional purposes for the household but their inferior construction materials and lack of maintenance indicate that they were of secondary importance.

Onion Creek Post Office

Oriented on a north-south axis perpendicular to the house, the ca. 1876 post office building is a small, front-gabled one-room building constructed of cut limestone blocks (Photo 4). A single door faces the rear east wing of the stagecoach house and a small, single-pane window with a two-part lintel is cut out of its east wall. It is an unusually well-constructed building for its time and isolated, rural setting. Chiseled blocks of dressed ashlar, measuring about 18" long, 10" high and 12" deep, form the base of the building to ceiling height. Smaller blocks form the gable ends. In addition to its solid limestone construction, the early post office is distinguished by its carved lintel and keystone. One tops the single window on the building's east wall. It is comprised of two rectangular limestone blocks with a floral design and three-link chain carved into the stone. The carved links separate the numbers 18 and 76, likely the date in which they were carved.

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A keystone arrangement of three blocks caps the entrance on the south wall. A carved eagle is the central figure in the keystone and simple flowers are etched in each of the two supporting stones. The date and eagle suggest commemoration of the nation's centennial that was being celebrated that year. A fairly recent metal-roofed canopy connects the post office to the one-room extension at the rear of the two-room stagecoach house addition. Concrete buttresses shore up the south wall of the building and a partially enclosed metal pump shed has been attached to its rear (north) side. The building is in fair to poor condition and has lost its door and much of its roof. Rubble covers the floor. Its survival is due, no doubt, to its stone construction that now requires stabilization. Regardless, the post office is a rare building type for area, displaying fine craftsmanship in the stonework and interesting embellishment. Its historic associations with Hays County's early stagecoach and mail routes further distinguish it.

Auxiliary Features

Other historic resources on the site include a garage (Photo 5), shed, brick and limestone well, a concrete trough and concrete walkways and gardens. The frame one-car garage and storage shed building lies to the west of the old stagecoach house. It is in fair to good condition and appears to have been built in the 1940s. A dilapidated frame building, either a small barn or large shed lies on the downhill north slope of the site and is overgrown with weeds. Just east of the old post office are a stucco-covered brick well with limestone rubble shaft and a concrete water trough. The metal shed attached to the rear of the post office is a pump house. A concrete walkway extends about 30' south from the front door of the center-passage portion of the stagecoach house. Two concrete curbs run parallel to the walkway on either side and once defined flower beds. The walkway terminates at the bough of an ancient Live Oak Tree and appears to have been the original entrance possibly until the garage was built just west of the house. The faint trace of an earlier dirt road can be seen leading from the end of the walk across the grassy field toward the entrance from Loop 4. Today, the dirt road extends from the entrance off Loop 4 to the west side of the house and terminates at the garage which lies at the northwest corner of the house. Giant Live Oaks are clustered to the east and southeast of the yard near the edge of the bluff.

Restoration and Site Development Plans

The City of Buda acquired the property for development as a historical museum and community center. In 1999, Austin architect Emily Little developed a Master Plan for the site that includes restoration of the Stagecoach House and Post Office. Interior space will be renovated for a museum and community center. Proposed site development includes restoration of flower beds, a parking lot, pole barn for outdoor exhibits and a hiking trail linking the property to other historic sites in the Buda area. Restoration costs are projected to exceed \$500,000 (American Restoration Inc., January 2000) and development plans are pending until funding can be secured. The property is currently vacant. Although a chain link fence surrounds part of the site and the front windows are boarded, the buildings are unsecured and subject to vandals and further deterioration.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: SETTLEMENT, ARCHITECTURE

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1875-1921

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1875, 1876, 1880

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: unknown

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-15).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-16).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- 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*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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Statement of Significance

The ca. 1875 Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House are significant for their associations with the earliest period of development in the vicinity of present Buda, in northeastern Hays County, Texas. Authorized in 1875 and completed in 1876, the small one-room post office is noteworthy for its diminutive size, fine craftsmanship, solid limestone construction and carved stone lintels. It is a rare and unusual building in context; Onion Creek remained an entirely rural, almost frontier settlement in 1875 and the free-standing post station with its skillfully rendered stone construction and decorative detailing is an anomaly for the period and setting. More typical of Central Texas frontier building traditions, the adjacent McElroy-Severn House (Stagecoach House) is nonetheless an outstanding example of a late-19th century modified center-passage dwelling. Since the first rooms were built contemporaneous with the post office, about 1875, the building has undergone several major remodeling campaigns that have substantially enlarged the house, altered its form and changed its orientation from creek to the highway. However, most of the alterations date to the historic period and represent significant architectural trends and building techniques in their own right.

Together the buildings recall Buda's beginnings as a collection of isolated homesteads scattered along Onion Creek united by a rural mail and stagecoach stop on the old San Antonio Road. This post road was the principal route between Austin and San Antonio for thirty years before the railroad pushed through the county in 1880-1881, spawning new development along its tracks and rendering the stagecoach obsolete. In 1880, when mail service moved to the new railroad town of Du Pre (Buda), only a quarter mile to the west, the Onion Creek post office and stagecoach stop closed. Although the station served the Onion Creek community only five years, it played a pivotal role in its development and in the location of the Du Pre (Buda) townsite. After the post office moved to Du Pre, the former station house was converted to a private residence and served as headquarters for family ranching operations for more than 100 years before the City of Buda acquired the property in 1997. The McElroy-Severn House, as the dwelling is also known, reflects a century of Buda's agricultural heritage that has been, and largely remains, its economic foundation. Therefore, the Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its associations with Buda's earliest period of settlement and under Criterion C for its outstanding vernacular architecture in a rural setting.

Historic Background and Significance

Located in Central Texas, between urban counties dominated by Austin to the north and San Antonio to the south, Hays County remained largely rural until the 1980s when developers began subdividing ranch and farmland to house the overflow populations of its neighbors. Since the 1990s, the trend has intensified with the booming "high tech" economy to the extent that formerly discrete communities in northern Hays County are fast becoming "bedroom" suburbs of Austin.

Current trends represent a distinct departure from the county's early history which was characterized by slow, even halting, development for more than a century. Although Native Americans occupied the area and established seasonal campsites at springs and along creeks in Central Texas for more than 10,000 years, the nomadic tribes did not build permanent settlements in present Hays County. The Spanish attempted the first European colony in present Hays County in the early 19th century, but San Marcos de Neve survived only a few, disastrous years plagued by floods and repeated Indian attacks. Texians and Americans, too, were slow to move into the region until the Mexican War (1846-1848) brought United States military presence to the area and Texas attained statehood.

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Despite the greater protection afforded by the army, the county grew slowly, largely because the rocky central and western sections did not lend itself to the type of farming with which most settlers were familiar and because the eastern blackland prairie had not yet been recognized as good cotton land. As new settlers flocked to Texas in the years immediately following the Civil War, however, Hays County's population increased dramatically; previously isolated frontier enclaves grew into villages and new agricultural communities emerged throughout the county. Still, few good transportation routes penetrated the region and settlements in the immediate postwar era grew along waterways such as Onion Creek or the San Marcos and Blanco rivers and along post and stagecoach roads.

From the 1840s, when Americans first began to settle the county, until 1880, when railroad track was laid along its eastern boundary, transportation was limited to horse-drawn conveyance over bad roads subject to flooding and erosion. Commercial stagecoach lines brought mail, passengers and limited freight to isolated communities throughout the rural county, connecting its residents to the outside world. The San Antonio Road linking Austin with San Antonio, was one of the state's most frequented highways and a primary stage route through Hays County. One of the earliest stage stops in the Buda area was established about by the 1840s at Manchaca Springs, on the road between Austin and the county seat of San Marcos. According to Dobie, no other settlements lay between Manchaca Springs and Thomas McGehee's homestead at the confluence of the Blanco and San Marcos rivers, eighteen miles to the south near present San Marcos, in 1846 (Dobie 1932: 16). The Manchaca Springs siting, a few miles south of Onion Creek reflects the fact that a third of the county's population of 387 lived in the vicinity of present Buda and along the creek in 1850 (Dobie 1932: 39-40; Schwartz 1986: 360). It is not known what type of resources such as corrals or shelters existed at Manchaca Springs initially, but its function as a change and watering station for stage horses is well-documented and it must be assumed that there were at least rudimentary facilities at the way station. In 1851, Mississippi native Adolphus Weir purchased 452 acres of land surrounding the springs and built a home for his family on a hill above the site (Schwartz 361-362). The Weirs operated a stage stand and stables that continued to serve the passing stagecoach (Dobie 1932: 39-40). Weir's sons changed the horses and took in the mail in the years before a postmaster was appointed. Occasionally, passengers spent the night at the stop (Schwartz 361-362).

In response to the population increase, other stage stops were established in the Onion Creek area within a few years of the Manchaca Springs site. The Victor Labenski cabin, just west of present Buda, was one such site. In 1850, Labenski purchased 320 acres of land in Hays County where he established a farm, built a cabin and set up a blacksmith shop. In wet weather, the stagecoach route ran west of present Buda, past the Labenski home and then south to Mountain City. It was a good place to leave mail and water horses (Stovall, et al., 1986: 360). Most likely, Labenski's blacksmith shop served the stagecoach, as well. By 1860, the county's population had increased to 2,126 (Dobie 1932: 60), and other stage stops and rural postal stations sprang up to serve the emerging communities.

After the Civil War, refugees from the old south flocked to Texas and Hays County began to expand from a handful of isolated frontier enclaves into a more populous agricultural region. In 1867, the increased population around Manchaca Springs warranted the appointment of a postmaster, John S. Spence, and the stage stop and post office site was officially named the Onion Creek, Texas, post office. By 1870, the county's population had nearly doubled from the previous census to 4,008 (Dobie 1948: 66). The increase no doubt led to the location of a new post office in the Onion Creek area, near present Buda. On April 3, 1875, the new post office and stage stop were established on Onion Creek, a few miles north of Manchaca Springs on the San Antonio Road. George W. Waters was appointed postmaster. Appropriately, the new site took the name Onion Creek post office and the Manchaca Springs post office regained its

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original name (Schwartz 1986: 365). According to the application made to the U.S. Post Office Department, the station anticipated serving 500 people (Newlan 1992: 4), a substantial, if scattered, population in Hays County at that time.

The new Onion Creek station was sited on a high bluff above the creek, about a quarter mile east of present Buda on the north side of Loop 4. The Austin-San Antonio Post Road and Stagecoach Route followed the old San Antonio Road (Hays County Road 117) south from Austin to Onion Creek where it crossed the creek below the station, to the northeast. From the creek bed the road climbed a steep grade to top of the bluff where the post office and stage facilities lay. From the station, the road turned west approximating present North Loop 4 through present Buda and then veered south toward Mountain City (Newlan 1992: 9). Exact dates for the buildings are not known but a "dogtrot" house oriented to the post road may have been constructed by the mid-1870s when the site was designated as a post office (Little, February 28, 2001). A common domestic form throughout Texas and much of the South during the frontier and early settlement periods, the "dogtrot" house typically consisted of two rooms connected by an open passageway (Plan 1). The frame building doubtless functioned primarily as the postmaster/relay station operator's home and only occasionally sheltered travelers enroute to Austin or San Antonio, much like the Adolphus Weir residence at the Manchaca Springs post office. Mail was probably delivered to the postmaster's residence before the stone office building was completed.

Although the Onion Creek post office was authorized for this site in 1875, a stone lintel over a small window on the east wall bears the date 1876 which is assumed to be the year of its construction (Photo 4). The front-gabled stone building measures about 10' x 16' along its perimeter but the thick limestone block walls considerably reduce the interior space (Photo 4). A single door opens to the south, facing the rear of the dwelling, and a small rectangular window faces east, toward the creek. In addition to its finely crafted stone construction, the building is noteworthy for its decorative stone carvings above the window and door. A date, three-link chain, and flowers appear in two rectangular blocks over the narrow window and an eagle carved into the keystone is flanked by two supporting blocks featuring a floral design (See page 30). The "1876" lintel inscription and the eagle motif in the keystone suggest that they may have been rendered in commemoration of the nation's centennial. Oddly, the carvings appear to have been created by different artists; the lintel seems to be the work of a professional and may have been commissioned or purchased elsewhere while the keystone, with its eagle and simple floral design, may be the work of a talented amateur, possibly the postmaster. Overall, it was an extraordinary building in terms of materials, decorative details and level of craftsmanship for a frontier post office.

The post office and stage station served the Onion Creek community only a few years before the railroad dramatically altered the county's historic development and transportation patterns. In 1876, the International and Great Northern Railroad (I. & G.N.R.R.) arrived in Austin, opening the Texas capital to new markets and spawning a building boom throughout the city. Further rail expansion into Hays County was hampered by construction problems on the Colorado River bridge. Four years passed before building resumed on the Austin to San Antonio connector; the 1880 census reported that several railroad crews were working on that section of the I. & G.N. line in the county. On September 1, 1880, the I. & G.N. reached the site of present Buda and on April 1 of the following year, Cornelia Trimble donated land for streets, alleys and public right-of-way to plat the townsite of Du Pre (Buda) along the railroad frontage (Schwartz 1986: 376). Trimble immediately began selling town lots for both commercial and residential use. A commercial node emerged near North Main and San Antonio streets where the I. & G. N. crossed the old San Antonio Road (Newlan, 1992:4). Mercantile stores, a boarding house, railroad hotel, restaurants, and a blacksmith shop were among the town's first businesses. One of the town's first mercantile stores was moved from Mountain City to take advantage of increased opportunities associated with railroad towns (Schwartz 1986: 378). Hays County followed the statewide trend; the railroads created new towns like Buda and Kyle, ensured growth for existing ones like San Marcos,

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Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

through which they passed, and doomed those it bypassed, like Mountain City, to obscurity. Previously thriving communities along Onion Creek were deserted as their inhabitants moved to the newly created railroad towns.

One casualty of Du Pre's success was the Onion Creek post office and stagecoach house. Only a few years after it opened, the station closed in deference to the new post office and lodging amenities at Du Pre, a quarter mile to the west. J. A. Chandler, who served as postmaster from 1878 to 1884, purchased the first town lot sold in Du Pre where he built a store (Schwartz 1986: 380) in Block 1 where the railroad and San Antonio to Austin Road crossed. Block 1, at present Main and San Antonio streets, was the town's first commercial block (Giberson, personal communication October 24, 2001). During his tenure as postmaster, Chandler moved the post office to his store in Du Pre and the Onion Creek station was closed. A few years later, in 1887, the town was named Buda when postal authorities learned that there was already a Du Pre in East Texas (Newlan 1992: 5).

After the post office closed and the railroad eclipsed the stagecoach for transportation and mail delivery, the former way station became the headquarters of a ranch. New owners enclosed the open "dogtrot" and enlarged and remodeled the house (Plan 2), as befitting the area's transition from frontier outpost to railroad settlement. At the same time, physical evidence indicates that they may have reoriented the house to face south by adding a hipped-roof porch across most of the south elevation. The house then fronted the road (now Loop 4) leading to Buda, the new community center, rather than the abandoned stagecoach crossing on the creek. The little stone post office became a storage barn for the ranch that developed on the site.

Buda quickly emerged as the commercial and social hub of the Onion Creek area but its focus remained centered on agriculture with its businesses, school, churches and industries serving the surrounding farms and ranches. Only a quarter mile east of Buda's commercial zone, the former post and stage station became home to several families who engaged in mercantile, land development and ranching activities that contributed to town's development. All raised livestock and, with direct access to Onion Creek, they had fertile soil and water to cultivate garden vegetables and forage. Among the most well-known early residents are T. E. and Ada McElroy (1886-1906), John and Ann Severn (1906-1921) (Younts n.d.), Boone and Zoe Heep (1930s) Mr. and Mrs. M. F. White (1940s) and General Whitaker (1950s) (Giberson notes, n.d.). Sam E. and Eliza Bunton Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson's grandparents, lived on the adjoining ranch to the east from about 1873 until 1887, when they moved to Blanco County. Their son, Sam E. Johnson Jr., father of the future president and himself a state legislator, was born in Buda (Giberson notes, n.d.).

It is difficult to trace the earliest owner/occupants of the ranch because many deed records were destroyed in the 1908 Hays County courthouse fire. However, it is known that T. E. McElroy was already living on the site in 1886 when he purchased the 234-acre parcel that includes the post office building and stagecoach house from S.B. Babcock. It is not known whether Babcock occupied the site before his sale to McElroy. About the same time he acquired the Babcock ranch, McElroy also bought nearby property from E. E. Walling and the Chandler Estate and in 1888, he bought the adjacent Sam E. and Eliza Bunton Johnson farm to the east (Younts n.d.). McElroy has been credited with building the original section of the "stagecoach" house about 1885 but it is possible that he completely remodeled the existing dogtrot dwelling by enclosing the center passage and refining both the interior and exterior finishes with materials made available by the advent of the railroad. Physical evidence in the attic and crawlspace, including hand-hewn joists, pegged joints and stone endwalls on either side of the central hall indicate the building's pre-railroad construction date and original dogtrot form with a porch on the rear (north) elevation (Little, personal communication, 2001). Considering McElroy's relative wealth and aspirations, it appears that he is responsible for transforming the early rough cabin into an elegant and pleasant family home (Plan 2).

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Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
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By 1888, McElroy had amassed more than 1,000 acres of land along Onion Creek where he raised livestock. In addition, he was among Buda's earliest land developers and platted two city, known as the McElroy Additions One and Two, east of the railroad tracks (Younts n.d.). Unfortunately, McElroy's ambitions were cut short when he died on May 9, 1898, leaving a widow and two young sons at home. In 1906, John and Ann Severn purchased the ranch from the McElroy Estate and continued to raise livestock. The Severns were active in civic affairs in Buda (Schwartz 1986: 409) and it was most likely they who updated the interior of the house to its present appearance and made other early 20th century improvements including the addition of the east wing and the enclosure and expansion of the rear porch (Plan 3). Mrs. Severn passed away in 1919 and John Severn followed two years later, in 1921 (Younts, n.d.).

After the Severns died, the ranch passed through several hands with few changes to the house or post office. During the 1930s, Zoe and Boone Heap, a local rancher, lived in the house and grazed cattle on the property but they were forced to give it up in order to save their other property during the Great Depression. They moved to their property on the old San Antonio Road, on Onion Creek. M.F. White, his wife and sons, owned the property in the 1930s and 1940s and a General Whittaker and his wife lived in the house in the 1950s. The Whittakers may have built the garage and poured the concrete porch, sidewalks and garden pavers as well as the rear room and canopy attaching it to the post office (Plan 4). In 1964, brothers Victor and Joe Stanzel of Schulenberg purchased the ranch as investment property that they rented first to a group of "hippies" and later to members of the Franke family. The last occupant was Buda resident Bobby Montague who lived in the house from 1984 to 1991 (Giberson notes, n.d.). Since then, it has been vacant.

Over the years, the old house and post office building deteriorated and the once-substantial McElroy Ranch was divided into smaller parcels and sold for various uses, including the Nighthawk food processing plant. As the local high-tech economy boomed in the late 1990s, Austin's growth expanded into northern Hays County and pressures increased to subdivide and develop the property. Local preservationists mobilized to obtain and save the historic site and in December 1997, Victor Stanzel announced his intention to donate the post office and dwelling to the Old Town Buda Association. In 1998, the Stanzel Brothers Trust transferred title to the building site and 51 acres of the original McElroy ranch to the City of Buda with the condition that the house be restored and used for community purposes (Ledbetter, March 9, 2000: 5; Giberson personal communication February 27, 2001). In 1999, Emily Little Architects was commissioned to develop a Master Plan that will include a museum, community center and hiking trail linking the property to other historic sites in the Buda area. Project costs are estimated to exceed \$500,000 (American Restoration Inc., January 2000). Restoration and development plans await funding and implementation at this time.

Built about 1876, the Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach Inn pre-date the founding of Buda on the I & GN Railroad line between San Antonio and Austin. They are rare surviving resources associated with Hays County's early transportation and postal systems in the years before rail travel and with Buda's earliest period of settlement. Although the two primary resources have been altered by later additions, various changes in materials and an ad hoc canopy attaching the stagecoach inn to the post office, both buildings retain their most distinguishing architectural characteristics. Restoration plans proposed by Austin Architect Emily Little include removing nonhistoric additions and fabric and returning the buildings to their ca. 1920 appearance. The complex is being held for future development as a historic interpretive and recreational site to promote heritage tourism and for use by the community of Buda. The complex is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A for its historic associations with Buda's earliest period of settlement along the stagecoach and postal route through rural Hays County and with its continued ranching heritage which extended

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Continuation Sheet

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Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

beyond the end of the historic period. It is also nominated under Criterion C as rare, outstanding examples of vernacular architecture reflecting the county's early settlement and economic development.

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Section 9 Page 16

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

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- Younts, Barbara. "McElroy-Severn House" undated manuscript in possession of Mary Giberson, Buda, Texas.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: approximately 52.3 acres

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	##	#####	#####	3	##	#####
2	##	#####	#####	4	##	#####

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheet 10-17)

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION (see continuation sheet 10-17)

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Terri Myers, Historian

ORGANIZATION: Hardy Heck Moore & Myers

DATE: July 30, 2000

STREET & NUMBER: 1414 W. 6th Street

TELEPHONE: (512) 478-8014

CITY OR TOWN: Austin

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78703

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see continuation sheets Map-18 through Map-22)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-31)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheets Figure-23 through Figure-30)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: City of Buda; Contact: Grey White

STREET & NUMBER: 121 N. Main Street

TELEPHONE: (512) 295-6331

CITY OR TOWN: Buda **STATE:** Texas

ZIP CODE: 78610

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Section 10 Page 17

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Legal Boundary Description:

For a 1.895-acre tract of land (tract one) and a 50.401-acre tract of land (tract two) being out of the S.V.R. Eggleston survey in Hays County, Texas, said 1.895-acre tract (tract one) being a part of the remnant portion of that certain 71.72-acre tract of land conveyed to Victor Stanzel and Joe Stanzel by instrument recorded in volume 247, page 79 of the deed records of Hays County, Texas. Said 50.401-acre tract (tract two) being a part of the remnant portion of that certain 71.72-acre tract of land conveyed to Victor Stanzel and Joe Stanzel by instrument recorded in volume 247, page 19 of the deed records of Hays County, Texas and all of the remnant portion of that certain 71.70-acre tract of land conveyed to Stanzel and Joe Stanzel by instrument recorded in volume 247, page 83 of the deed records of Hays County, Texas.

Boundary Justification: Nomination includes all contiguous property owned by the City of Buda that was historically associated with the property.

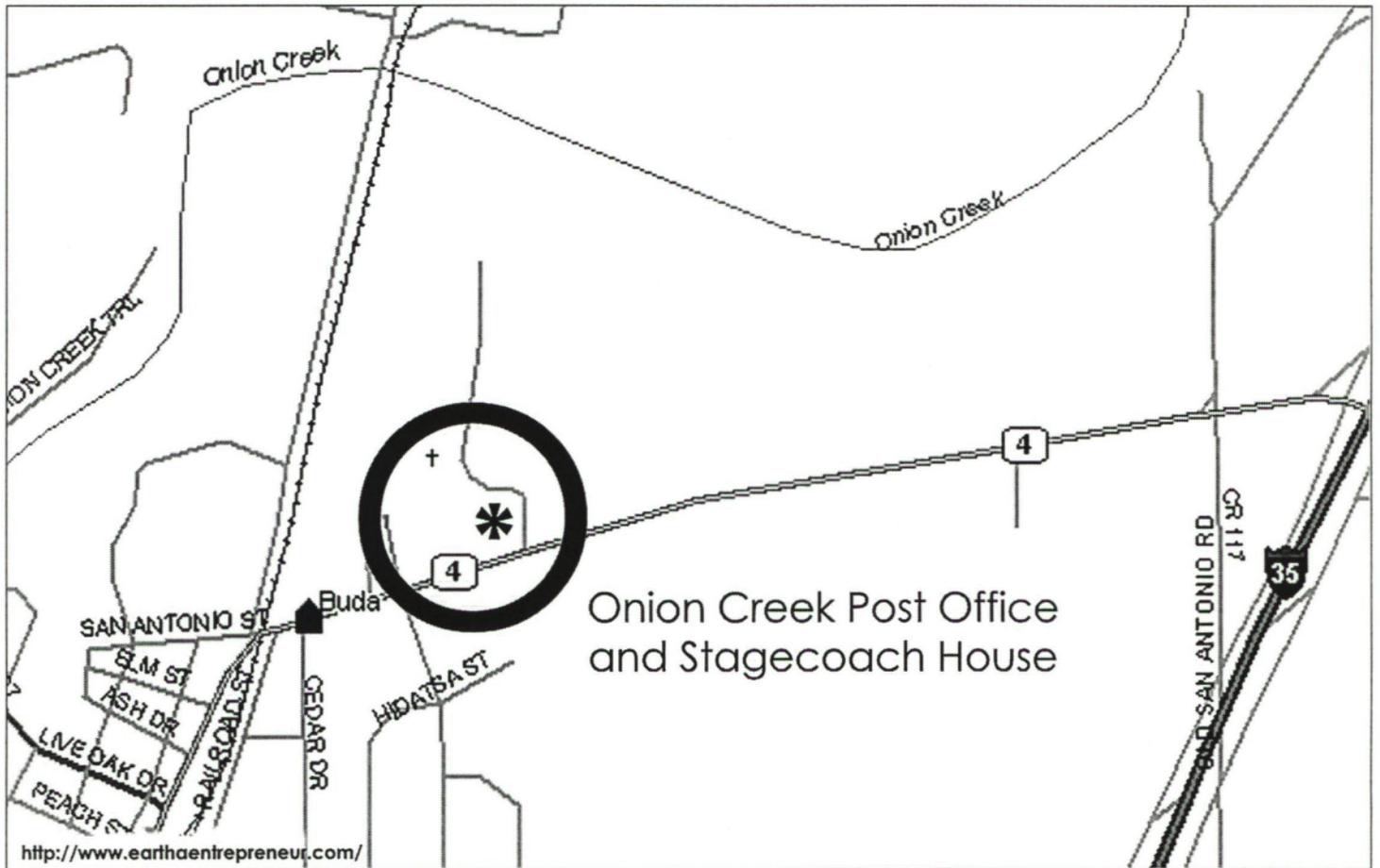
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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAPS Page 18

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Map 1: Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House relative to Buda, TX and IH-35
Source: Modified by Wayne L. Pendley, March 2001



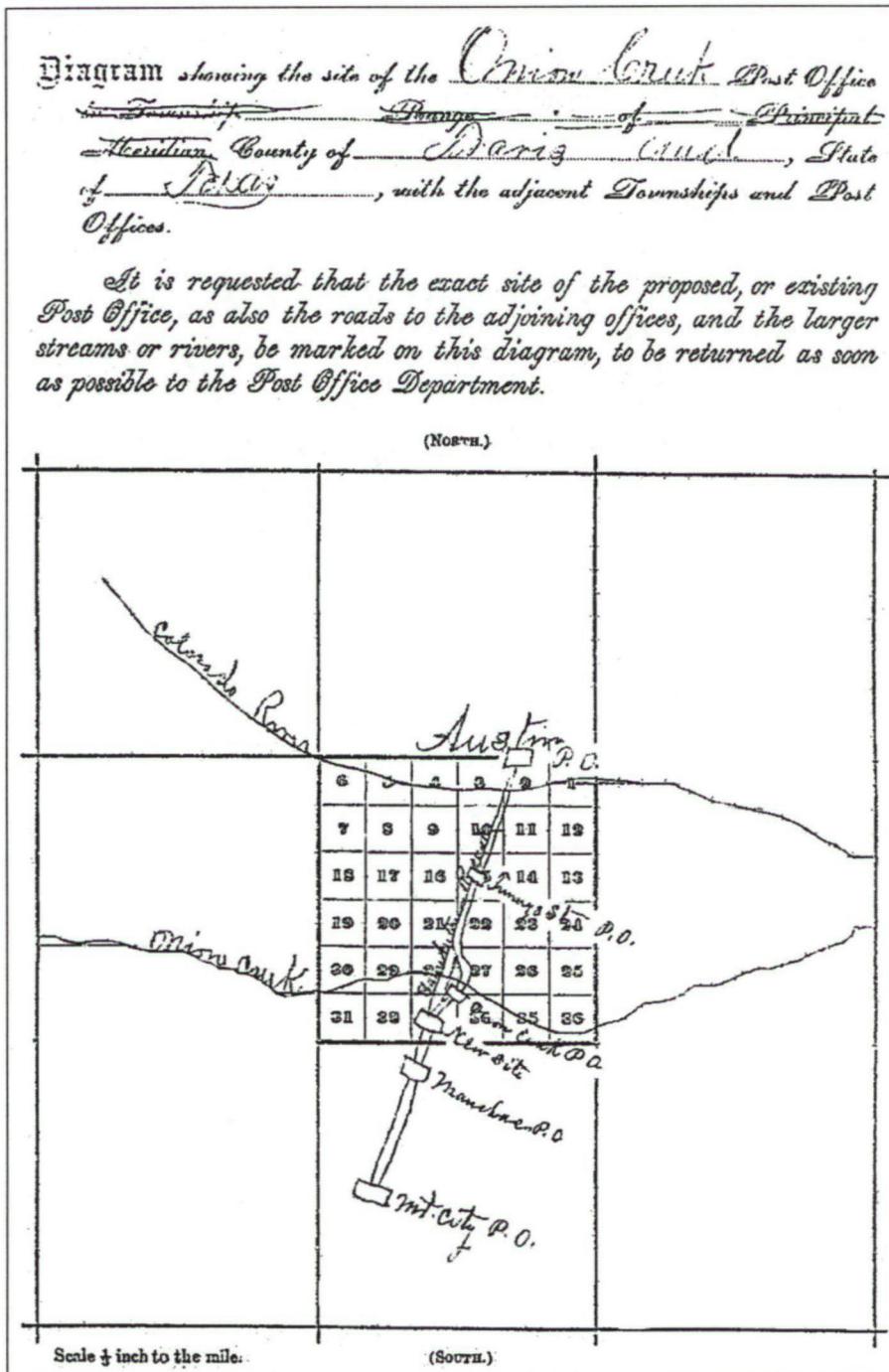
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Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Section MAPS Page 19

Map 2: Proposed Location of Onion Creek Post Office, 1875, showing Austin, Manchaca & Mountain City post offices
Source: U.S. Postal Records, Hays County Vertical Files, Austin History Center, Austin, Texas



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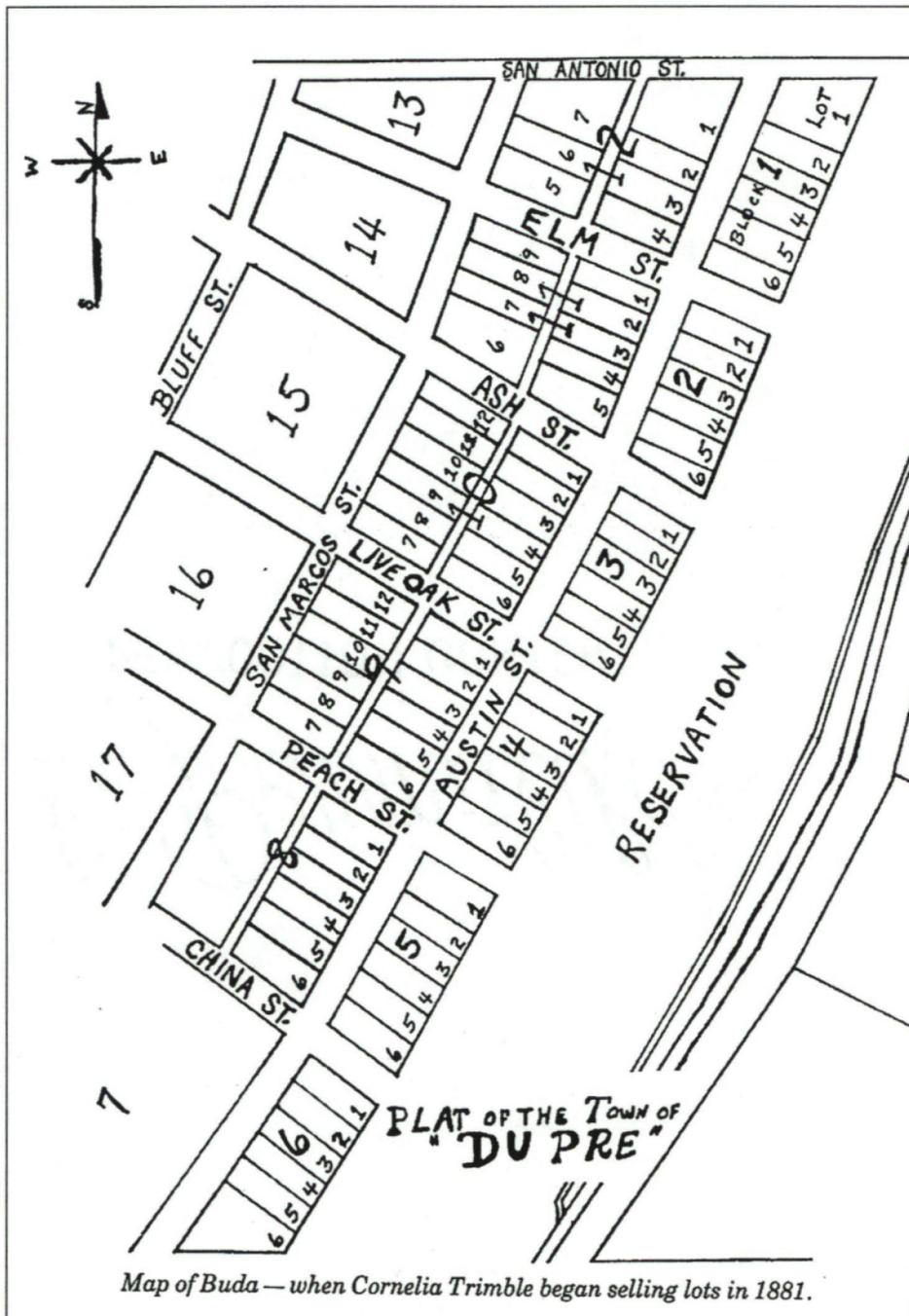
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAPS Page 20

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Map 3: Plat of the Town of Du Pre, (renamed Buda) ca. 1881

Source: Stovall, Frances et al., Clear Springs and Limestone Ledges, A History of San Marcos and Hays County, 1986



Map of Buda—when Cornelia Trimble began selling lots in 1881.

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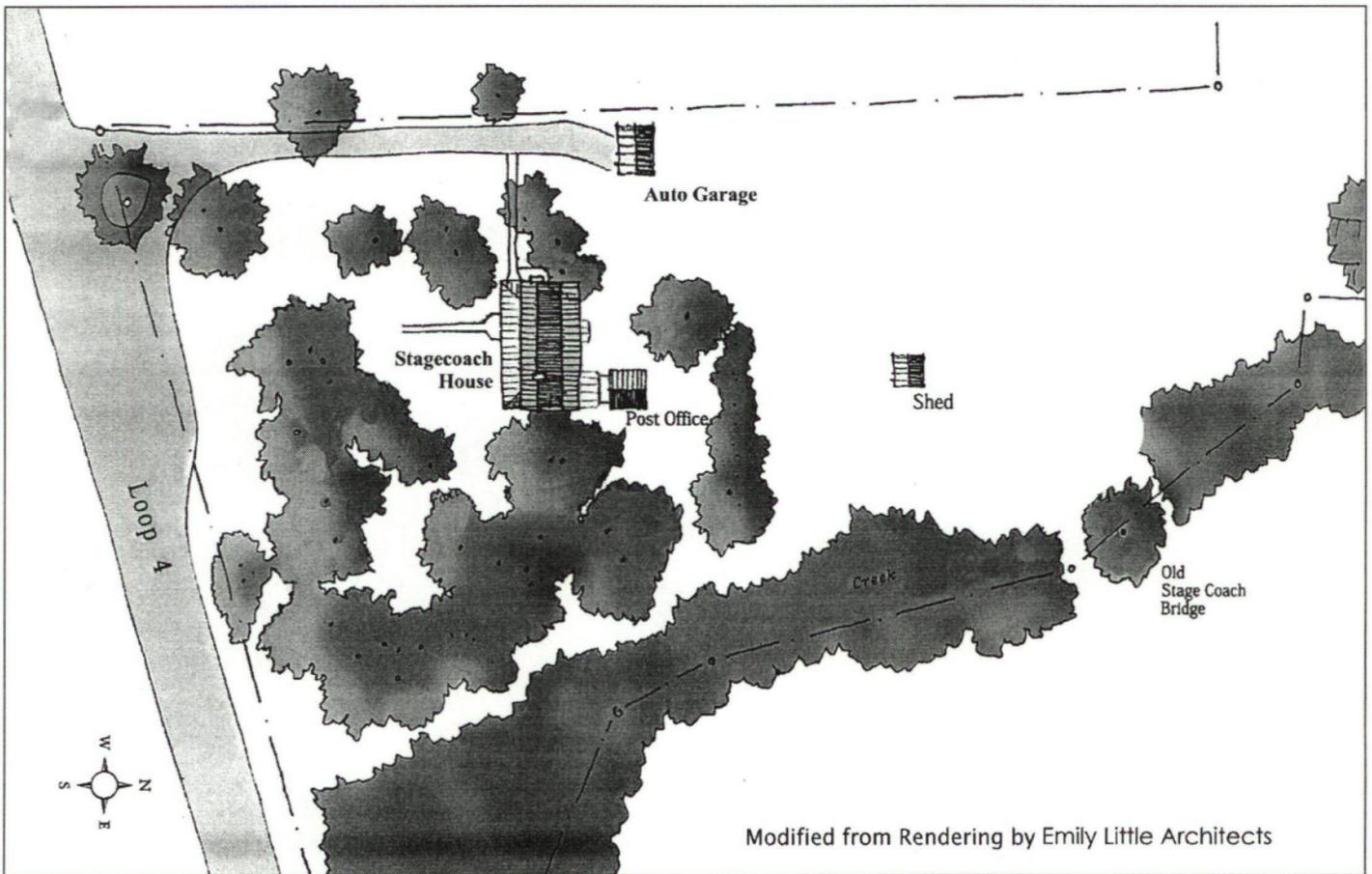
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAPS Page 21

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Map 4: Existing Site, 2001

Source: Modified from the Proposed Site Plan developed by Emily Little Architects, Austin, Texas, ca. 1999



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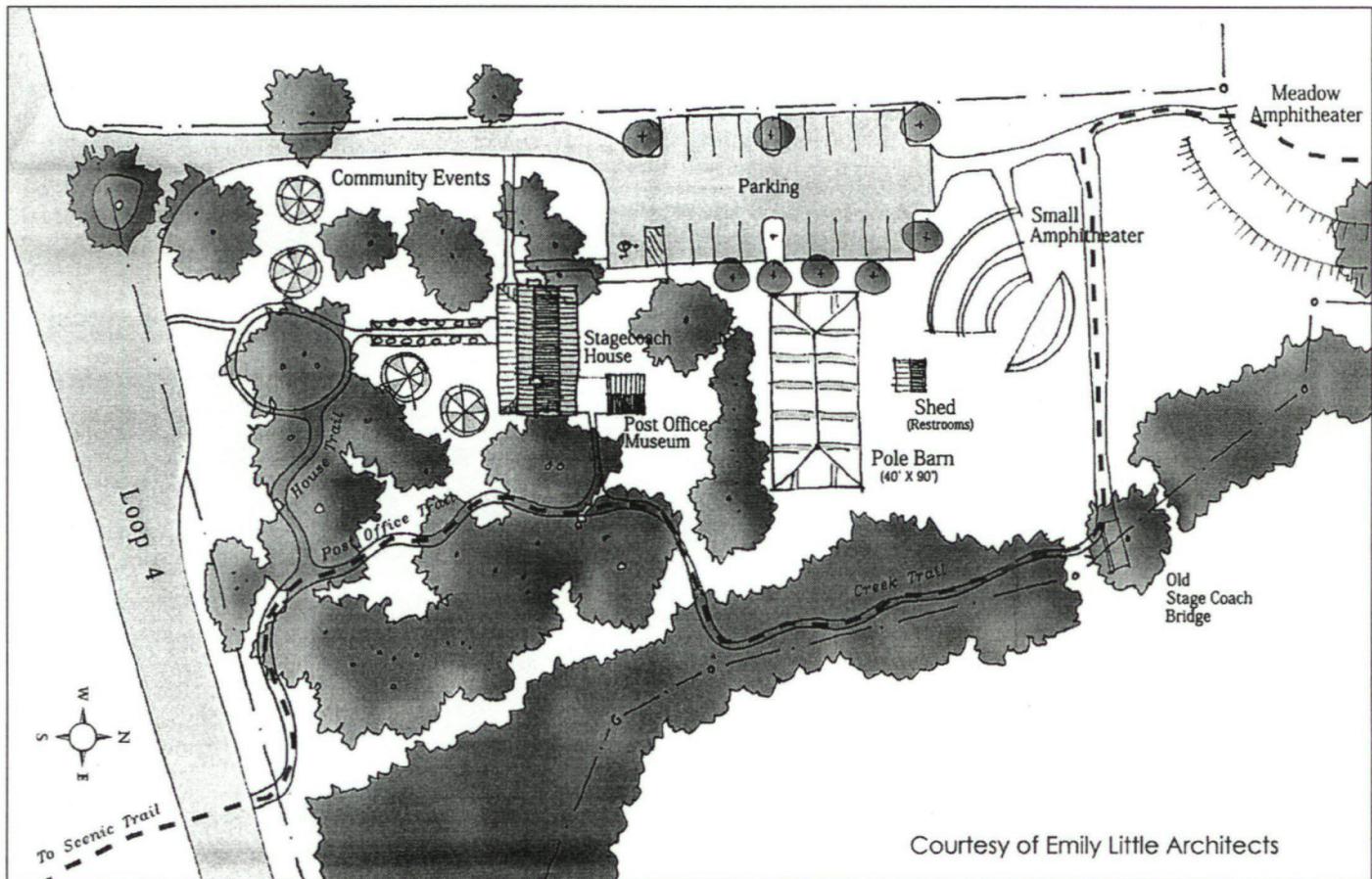
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Section MAPS Page 22

Map 5: Proposed Site Plan for Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House, drawn 1999

Source: Emily Little Architects, Historic Stagecoach House & Onion Creek Post Office: A Restoration Master Plan



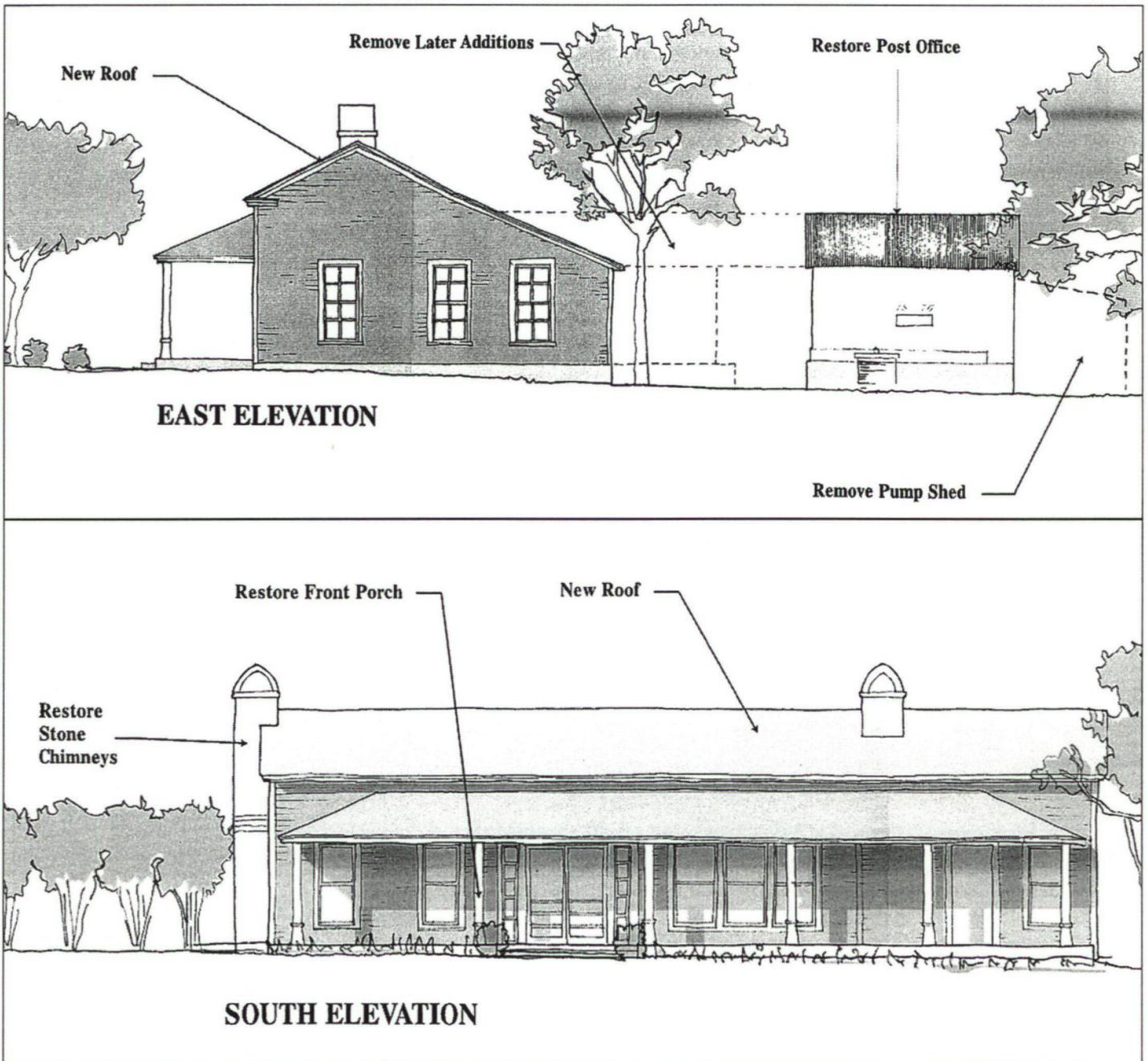
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Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Section FIGURE Page 23

East and South Elevations, Severn-McElroy House (Onion Creek Stagecoach House), Existing, drawn 1999
Source: Emily Little Architects, Historic Buda Stagecoach House & Onion Creek Post Office: A Restoration Master Plan



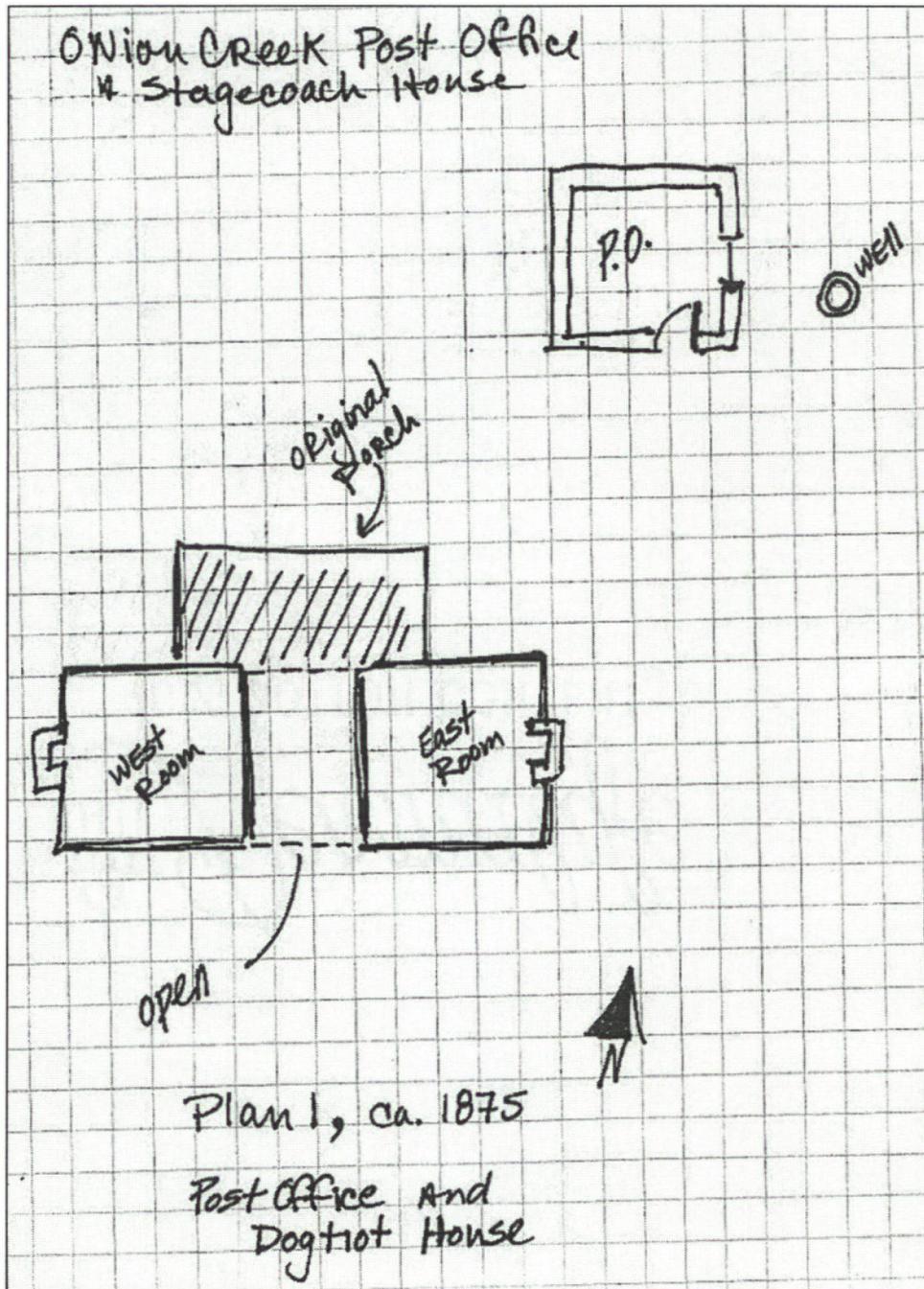
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Section FIGURE Page 24

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Plan 1, Post Office and Dogtrot or Center-Passage House, ca. 1875
Source: Drawn by Terri Myers in consultation with Emily Little, 2001



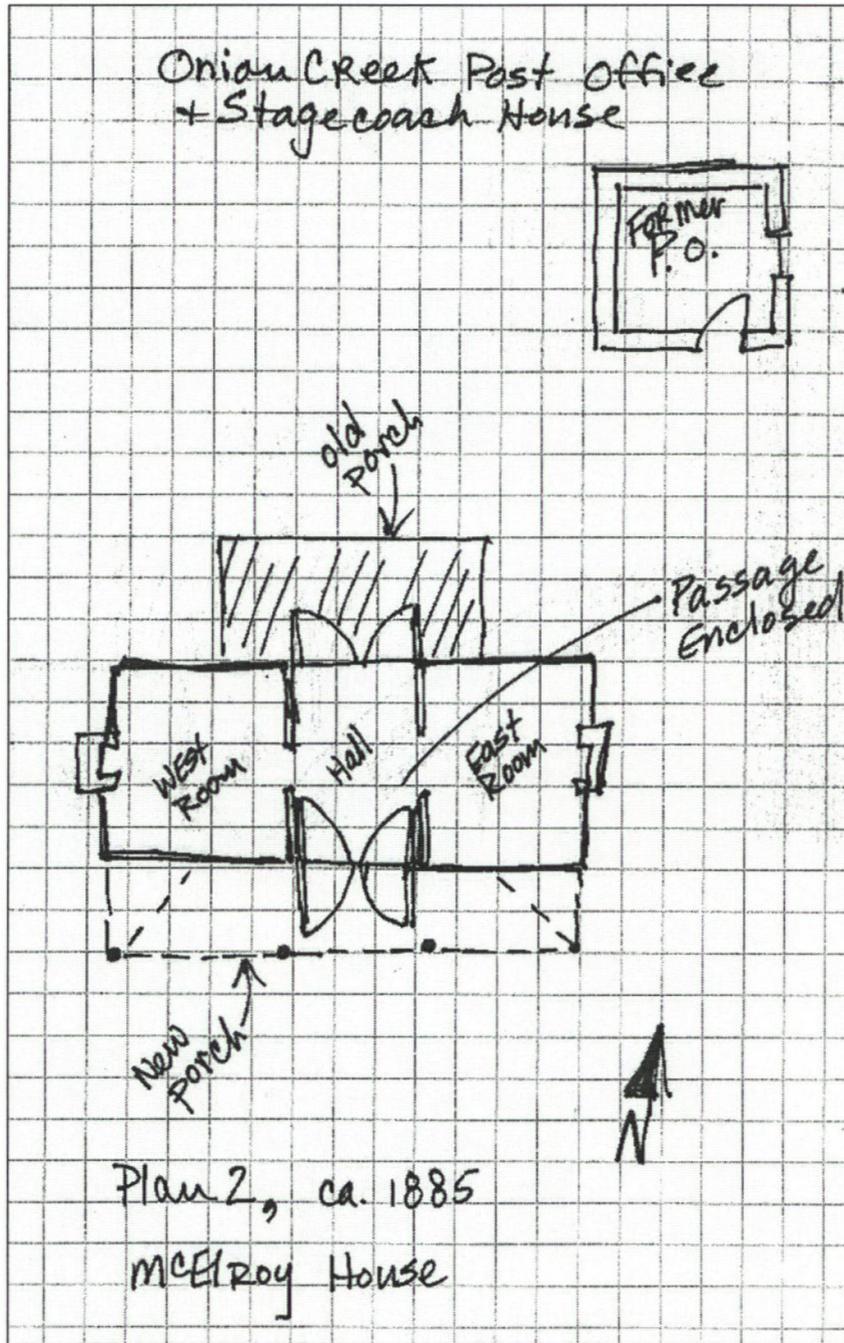
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Section FIGURE Page 25

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Plan 2, McElroy House, ca. 1885
Source: Drawn by Terri Myers in consultation with Emily Little, 2001



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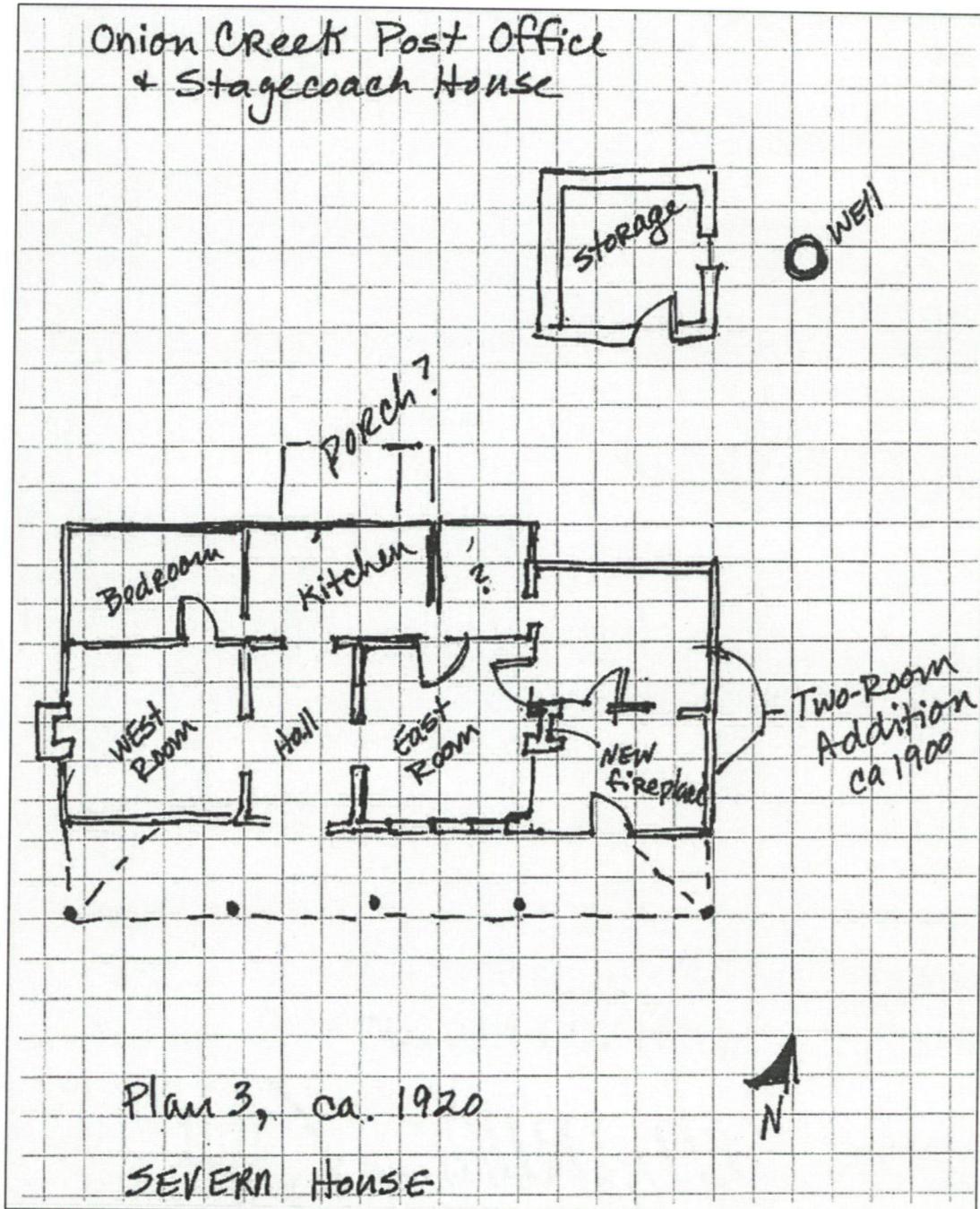
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 26

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Plan 3, Severn House, ca. 1920

Source: Drawn by Terri Myers in consultation with Emily Little, 2001



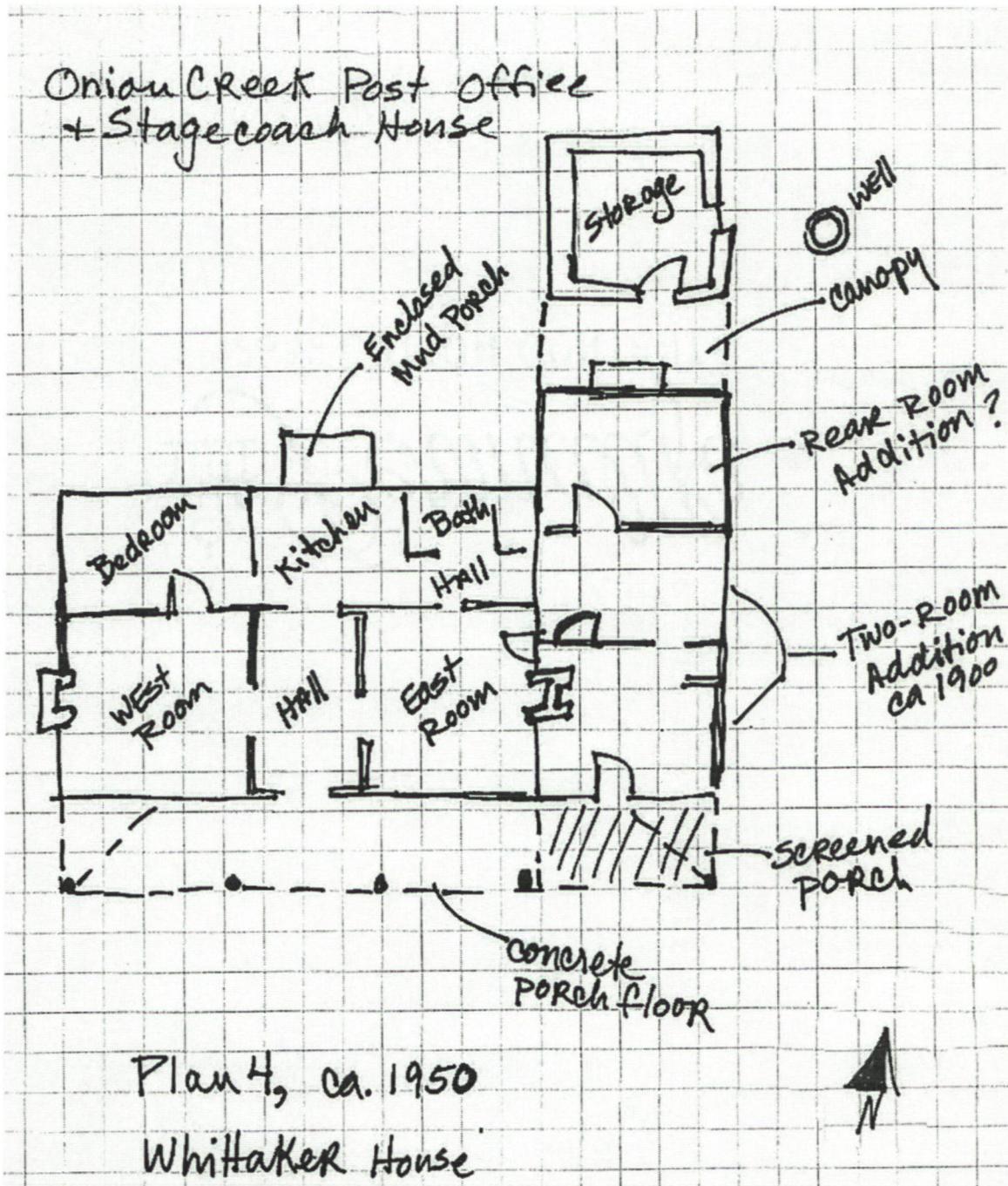
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Section FIGURE Page 27

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Plan 4, Whittaker House, ca. 1950
Source: Drawn by Terri Myers in consultation with Emily Little, 2001



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Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
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Lintel Detail (1876 carved on either side of floral design), Post Office



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Section FIGURE Page 29

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Fireplace Mantel, Interior of Stagecoach House



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Section FIGURE Page 30

Union Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Hand-carved Keystone Detail, Post Office



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Section PHOTO Page 31

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
Buda, Hays County, Texas

Photo Log

Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House
109 N. Loop 4, Buda, Hays County, Texas
Terri Myers, Photographer
June 2000 and January 2001

Photo 1: Severn-McElroy House (Onion Creek Stagecoach House)
West and South Elevations, Oblique
Camera facing Northeast

Photo 2: Severn-McElroy House (Onion Creek Stagecoach House)
East Elevation, Post Office at Rear
Camera facing West-Northwest

Photo 3: Severn-McElroy House (Onion Creek Stagecoach House)
Southeast Elevation, Post Office at Rear
Camera facing Northwest

Photo 4: Onion Creek Post Office, Well to the Right,
South and East Elevations, Oblique
Camera Facing Northwest

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Onion Creek Post Office and Stagecoach House

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Hays

DATE RECEIVED: 9/12/02 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/04/02
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/20/02 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/27/02
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 02001211

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT _____DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

house
Former stagecoach and post office
on 51-acre parcel are associated
with early transportation and postal service in
50 or so acres of rural Hays
Property includes the entire bluff-side
parcel historically associated with
these resources and were subdivided from
the large ranch once owned by T.E. Ekroy. ~~Part~~
~~SLR includes~~ *UtM attached are missing*
map

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept a+c

REVIEWER McClure

DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE 202-354-2258

DATE 10/25/02

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y N see attached SLR Y N

*Period of
Significance is
(-1921)
Parcel to patch
historic
boundaries
need
OK
Classification
Review*



ONION CREEK POST OFFICE
& STAGECOACH HOUSE

109 N. LOOP 4

BUDA, HAYS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 4



ONION CREEK POST OFFICE
& STAGECOACH HOUSE

109 N. Loop 4

BUDA, HAYS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 4

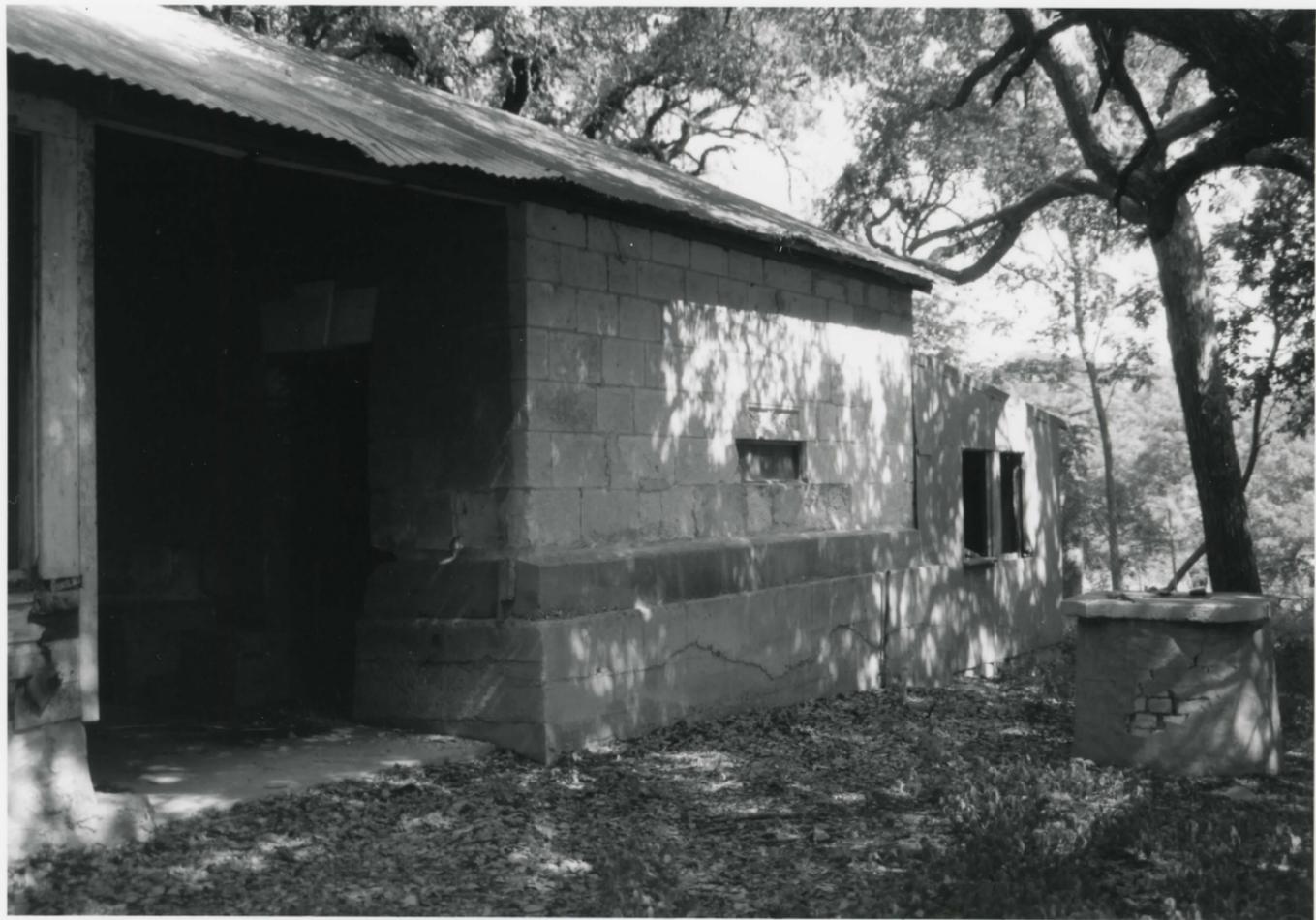


ONION CREEK POST OFFICE
& STAGE COACH HOUSE

109 N. LOOP 4

BUDA, HAYS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 4

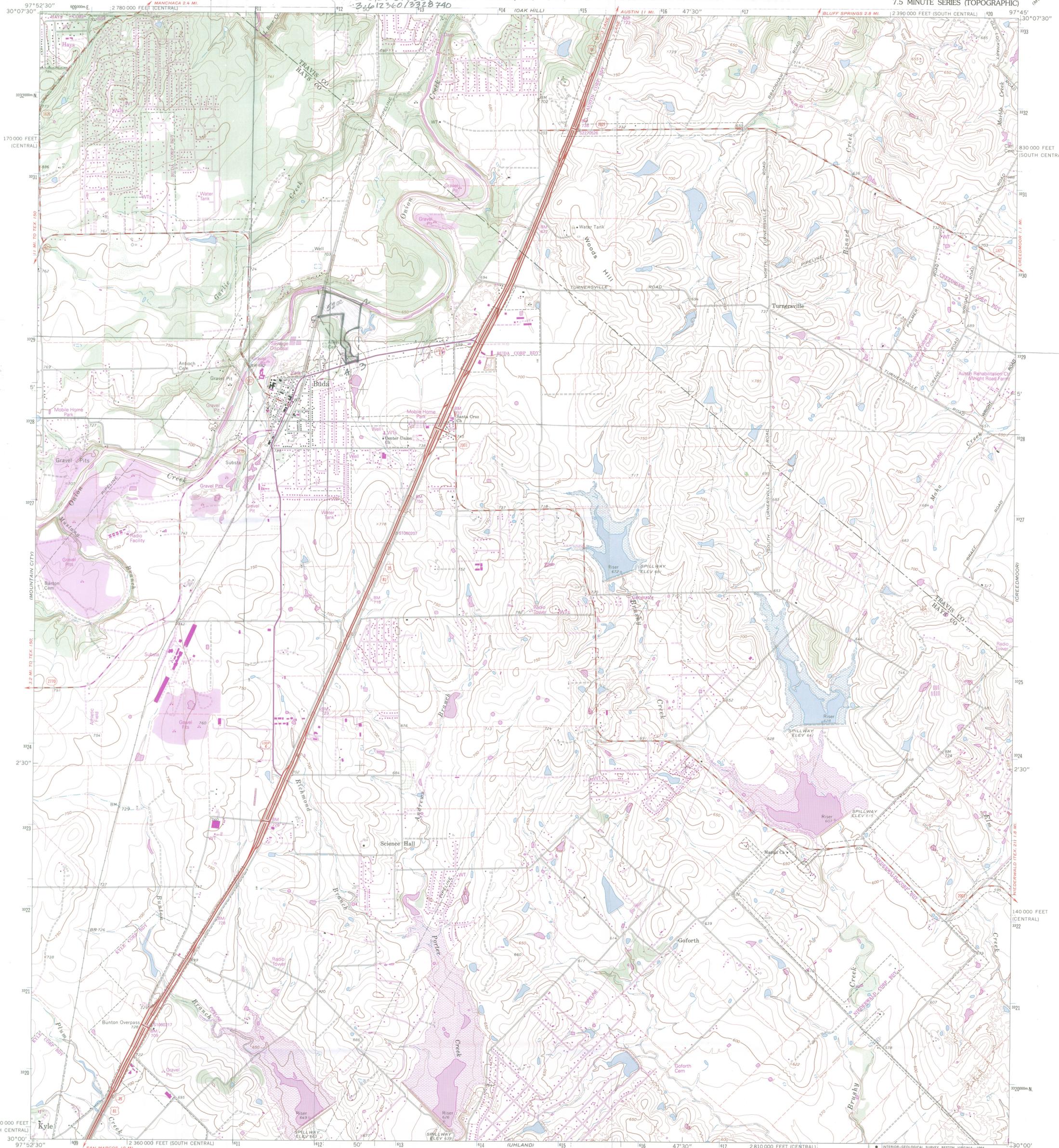


ONION CREEK POST OFFICE
& STAGECOACH HOUSE

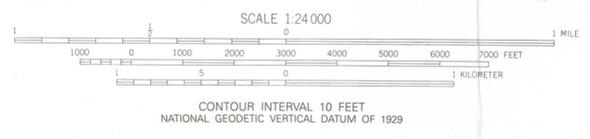
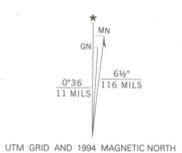
109 N. Loop 4

BUDA, HAYS CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 4



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA and Texas Department of Highways
and Public Transportation
Compiled from aerial photographs taken 1967. Revisions shown
in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1986 and
other sources and have been field checked. Map edited 1994
Conflicts may exist between some updated features and
previously mapped contours
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection:
Texas Coordinate System, south central zone (Lambert Conformal Conic)
10000-foot ticks: Texas Coordinate System south central and central
zones. Blue 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator ticks, zone 14
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed
corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83
for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic
Survey NADCON software
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

3097-221

MAPSCO, INC.
6118 CAMP BOWIE
FORT WORTH, 76116 817/731-1666

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30097-A7-7F-024
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DMA 6444 III SE-SERIES V882