

Texas Historical Commission Staff (FR), 3/26/84

Official Texas Historical Building Marker without post for
attachment to stucco over stone

Comal County (Order #7726)

Location: 1275 Gruene Road, New Braunfels

GRUENE MANSION*

THE SON OF GERMAN IMMIGRANTS,
HENRY D.GRUENE WAS BORN IN NEW
BRAUNFELS IN 1850. IN 1872 HE BUILT
THIS HOME, IN WHAT WAS THEN THE
TOWN OF GOODWIN. GRUENE BECAME A
LEADER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
COMMUNITY, WHICH LATER WAS
RENAMED FOR HIM. ALTHOUGH THE
TOWN DECLINED AFTER GRUENE'S DEATH
IN 1920 AND NOW IS PART OF NEW
BRAUNFELS, THIS VICTORIAN HOME,
WITH ITS ELABORATE EASTLAKE DETAIL-
ING, STANDS AS A MONUMENT TO HIS
CONTRIBUTIONS.**

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK - 1984***

*1/2 inch lettering

**3/8 inch lettering

***1/4 inch lettering

APPROVED

Frances Rickard
5/24/84

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Christian Herry

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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. 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. After their three children, Ernst, Jr., Henry D., and Joanna were born, the Gruenes moved to Comaltown, an adjoining community between the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers. Ernst Gruene, Sr. continued to acquire additional farm 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 eluvial soil was extremely adapted 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.

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. In 1872 he married Bertha Simon and built a home on the

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east side of the Guadalupe River in the settlement of Goodwin. 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 share-croppers. 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. 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.

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. In addition, Gruene built a dance hall and saloon in the 1880's. Providing entertainment for the tenants and surrounding farmers, Gruene Hall was the center of the community's social life.

By 1890 approximately 8000 acres of land east of the Guadalupe was planted with cotton and foodstuff; a store and 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.

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Transportation was an important factor in the success of Gruene. The mercantile store was located on the old original north and southbound stagecoach route, the main road between Austin and San Antonio. The Brown and 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. 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. In actuality, the store also became a working bank, holding many farm mortgages as well as doing extensive farm financing. 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.

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, the whole life of the town, rotated around the Gruene family. H. D. Gruene and his family dominated the town affairs. He and his two sons Max and Othmar joined 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.

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.

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,

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Mr. Marbach, had drawn the town off into lots and proposed streets. However, the project never got further than the maps.

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. 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 amusements in New Braunfels. Declining cotton production brought an end to the tenant system in 1938. In addition, the mercantile store closed that same year when the route of the old north/south road was moved a few miles east. With the end of 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 outside of New Braunfels to use as classroom space for the newly created Comal County Consolidated School until a new structure was built.

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, established their business in the old first mercantile store building where the Chrysler Motor Company had been. 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 continues to operate out of Gruene and has helped to bring new

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life to the town. The one business which continued to operate throughout the hard times was the Gruene beer hall.

Recently, 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 projects are in the beginning stages.

7 DESCRIPTION

7726

CONDITION

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED

GOOD RUINS

FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED

ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE

MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Four miles northeast of New Braunfels in Comal County is Gruene, Texas. Situated on the east bluff overlooking the Guadalupe River, the small township retains its atmosphere as the nucleus of a late nineteenth century cotton community founded by the town's namesake, Henry D. Gruene. Typical of the rural village center the town contains one fine home, known as the H. D. Gruene Mansion, the more modest one story homes that H. D. Gruene built for his family and employees, and the various structures Gruene built to house his commercial enterprises. In addition to the structures built by Gruene, the district contains some examples of mid-nineteenth century German Colonial fachwerk and stucco homes with late nineteenth century Victorian additions.

The historic district is bounded by the Guadalupe River on the west; on the south follows the property lines of the old Othmar Gruene House (2), the old Ernst Gruene, Sr., House (1) and the structures along the old Austin road (10, 11, 14-17); continues on the east by encircling the property of the old electric cotton gin (17) and an employee's cottage (18); and on the north follows New Braunfels Street to the river including the houses along the north side of the road (19-22). The district has retained a unique nineteenth century quality, for since the late 1920's when the town began its economic decline, there has been little new construction. Gruene remains isolated, surrounded by acres of farm land, despite the fact that cars speed along major highways only a few miles to the north, east and south.

At the southern tip of the district is the old Ernst Gruene, Sr. House (1). From Seguin Street, the house appears to be a typical ell-shaped Victorian cottage. However, the Victorian portion was added to a ca. 1850's German Colonial fachwerk home which encompasses the east wing of the house. Rectangular in shape, with an enclosed porch across the south facade and late nineteenth century additions across the north facade, the fachwerk portion contains two rooms with six over six light windows, stuccoed interior and exterior walls, low ceilings and doors and a large stone cellar, 8' by 12'. The ell-shaped Victorian portion on the west side of the house has high ceilings, tall narrow two over two light windows, a bay window in the projecting pavilion with shingled gable, and a one-story gallery within the ell, elaborated by turned posts and Victorian trim. The Victorian enlargement was probably added in 1898 when Ernst Gruene, Sr. moved to Gruene from nearby Comaltown. Just

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across the road is the old Othmar Gruene home (2) built by H. D.'s son in the late 1920's. The 1½-story brick home is probably the most recently constructed home in Gruene.

The most spectacular dwelling in Gruene is the H. D. Gruene Mansion (3). The original home was a one-story stuccoed brick residence on a cut stone foundation built in 1872. The main facade has an ABABA pattern of six over six light windows and single doors. The interior plan has four connecting rooms, the northeast and northwest rooms being larger than the adjacent rooms on the south. In 1886 Gruene hired Christian Herry, a masterbuilder who had immigrated to New Braunfels from Germany in 1875, to enlarge his house. A frame second floor was added encircled by Victorian galleries on three sides. The second floor has a symmetrical plan containing a central hall flanked by two rooms on each side. The east, south and west facades are surrounded by elaborate two-story galleries with one-story turned posts, punched spandrels, balustrade and brackets, a central roof gable and a shuttered belvedere at the corner of the second floor gallery. The first floor gallery on the south and west facades were enclosed at a later date to create additional interior space. The three doors on the main facade have an upper panel of etched glass and a lower panel of carved cypress. To the rear (west) facade a one-story T-shaped structure was added at the same time to provide for kitchen and dining space. In addition, an ell-shaped building was constructed at the rear as a servant's quarters (4).

At the intersection of Seguin and Austin Streets are the commercial structures also built by Christian Herry under the direction of H. D. Gruene. Gruene Hall(5) is a long rectangular building with pitched roof hidden from the street view by the false front. Across Seguin Street is the first mercantile store building (10), built in 1878. To the narrow frame pitched roofed building with false front a brick addition was built on the west side in 1914. To the east a barn (11) was added ca. 1920. The second mercantile store was built on the northwest corner of the intersection in 1904. The original shape was a two-story brick rectangular building with an angled southwest corner. On the first floor an arched entry with fanlight pierced the angled corner, while the remainder of the facade contained large display windows and two bayed entrances. The second floor contained three large round arched openings and a flat arched window. The

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175. The Gruene House, Gruene - Camal Co

