United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Belton Commercial Historic District

2. Location

eight blocks in downtown Belton centered around the County Courthouse Square [NA] not for publication

street & number [NA] vicinity

city/town Belton [NA] vicinity

state Texas code TX County Bell code 027 zip code 76513

3. Classification

Ownership of Property Category of Property Number of Resources within Property Contributing Noncontributing
[XX] private [ ] building(s) 46 21 buildings
[XX] public-local [XX] district
[ ] public-State [ ] site
[ ] public-Federal [ ] structure
[ ] object

Number of contributing resources previously listed in NR 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Community Development in Belton, Texas, 1850-1945

Total 46 21
4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [XX] 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 [XX] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register Criteria. [ ] See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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 Keeper

Date of Action
6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMERCE/TRADE: retail</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOVERNMENT: courthouse</td>
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Current Functions

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOVERNMENT: courthouse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Description

Architectural Classification

| LATE VICTORIAN |
| MODERN MOVEMENT |

Materials

| foundation |
| walls: STONE: limestone |
| BRICK |
| roof: ASPHALT |
| other: |

Describe present and historic physical appearance. [XX] See continuation sheet.

The Belton Commercial Historic District comprises approximately eight city blocks radiating from the County Courthouse in the town’s center. The district consists primarily of 2-story brick and limestone commercial buildings constructed between 1870 and 1930. The district includes 70 resources: 47 Contributing and 23 Noncontributing. The character of the district is cast by the many Victorian-era and early 20th century vernacular commercial buildings. The district also includes prominent public buildings in revival styles of architecture, including the county courthouse, post office, and the library.

The Belton Commercial Historic District includes portions or all of eight city blocks and comprises most of Belton’s downtown commercial area. All of the streets in the district are arranged in a grid pattern running in the four approximate cardinal directions. The district is roughly rectangular and is bounded on the north by 1st Avenue, on the west by Main Street, on the south by Avenue A, and on the east by Penelope Street. The terrain is generally flat, with a gentle southward slope toward Nolan Creek which flows along the southern and western edges of the downtown area. Along several blocks, most notably along the west side of Main, the sidewalks are raised to compensate for small differences in the terrain. The principal streets in the district are paved, with concrete or stone curbs and gutters. Surrounding the Courthouse at the southern end of the district is a grassy area with a number of deciduous trees; otherwise, the area is largely devoid of vegetation.

No single architectural style dominates the district’s physical character. Although it contains several examples of architect-designed government and public buildings, the bulk of the properties in the district are 2-story storefront commercial buildings. These structures, built during the late 19th and early 20th century, share a common vernacular form. They are rectangular in plan with the narrow side facing the street and shared party walls. Virtually all have load-bearing walls of limestone rubble or brick, and flat roofs behind a shallow parapet. A few of the commercial buildings exhibit recognizable stylistic ornamentation, such as Romanesque arched windows (notably in the 200 Block of East Central), but none follow stylistic influence beyond simple motifs and ornamentation. Many of the buildings have been moderately altered over the years, with the majority of the storefronts having been covered or rebuilt. In most cases, however, the upper facade remains intact. Several of the buildings have been restored or rehabilitated within the past five years, partly in response to the city’s participation in the Main Street Project.

The earliest buildings constructed in Belton were false-front, impermanent frame structures with little or no decoration. By the 1880s and 1890s these structures were replaced by brick or stone structures with decorative facades. The majority of the surviving commercial buildings in the district were constructed during Belton’s cotton boom years between the 1870s and the late 1920s. After the arrival of the railroads in the 1880s, standardized construction materials were used on the buildings, such as cast iron columns, pressed metal cornices and ceilings, and prefabricated doors and windows.
The commercial buildings of Belton may be loosely classified into three architectural types related to their period of construction: the late-Victorian era commercial building, the early 20th century commercial building, and the Art Deco or Moderne style. These three groupings roughly correspond with the three principal periods of building activity in Belton before World War II—the periods from 1870-1910, 1910-1928, and 1928-38.

The late-Victorian commercial type was built from the 1870s through the turn of the century and appeared as late as World War I. This period of construction is characterized by strongly vertical proportions. Although most of the buildings show influences of one or more architectural styles, such as Italianate or Renaissance Revival, the structures cannot appropriately be classified under a single style and many show an eclectic combination of influences. Segmental arched windows, decorative quoins, and large decorative parapets of brickwork or pressed metal are common. In some cases pilasters are used to enhance the verticality of the facade. Original storefronts, where they survive, may use cast iron columns or pressed sheet metal. Examples of the latter include the buildings at 100 and 102 West Central Avenue. Although no particular Belton style appears, a large number of the buildings, especially those along East Central Avenue and East Street, repeat the motif of Romanesque arched windows on the lower or upper facades. Some storefronts are also heightened by high quality limestone masonry work. Good examples of buildings of this type are concentrated on East Central Avenue and include the rusticated limestone building at 200 East Central Avenue, and the 3-story pedimented store at 213 East Central Avenue.

The second principal architectural classification in the district is the early 20th commercial building. Generally speaking these buildings use less ornament than those built in the Victorian era and show a less marked verticality. Arched windows are less common and what ornament is used is typically based on geometrical designs. Although similar to the Victorian commercial type in many ways, the 20th century commercial building begins to reflects new stylistic influences, among them the Prairie School, the Spanish Colonial and the Mission revival styles. As in case of the Victorian-era commercial building, pure examples of a particular substyle are rare, and any stylistic influence appears simply as ornamentation to an established vernacular building form. These buildings are usually brick with concrete or steel structural members. Much of the construction in Belton during this era was associated with industries based on the automobile and many of the buildings represent auto-related businesses such as gas stations, auto dealerships, and garages. The few extant warehouses from the period usually follow a very simple, utilitarian design. Among the best surviving examples of early 20th century commercial buildings are the gas station at 220 N. Main and the warehouse at 203 N. East Avenue.

The Belton Commercial District also contains several examples of Art Deco and Art Moderne buildings. Art Deco became fashionable in the late 1920s and was applied to a variety of building types, but it is most commonly found on commercial and institutional buildings. Distinctive features include zigzag or chevron moldings, rounded corner windows, and a smooth-textured finish. Modernistic architecture, in contrast to late Victorian architecture, acquired a strongly horizontal emphasis. Larger single panes of glass were available and large plate glass windows became common in storefronts. A particularly good example of this style is the former bus station, at 206 N. Main Street which features unusual octagonal windows on either side of the entry and large aluminum door handles on the main doors.
The most architecturally significant structures in the district tend to be the public buildings. While they make up only a small percentage of the properties in the district, they form a very visible element due to their size and prominent siting. In contrast to the commercial structures, which were generally a local builder’s interpretation of an architectural style applied to a vernacular form, the public buildings were all designed by architects. They are larger, free-standing on prominent sites, and are characterized by a more sophisticated treatment of architectural form and style.

Occupying the center of the public square at the heart of the district is the 3-story Bell County Courthouse (1876, N.R. 1976). Built in 1876 to the design of J. N. Preston and Sons, the limestone structure has undergone some alterations, including the removal of the central tower, but it remains a fine example of the Renaissance Revival style. Other examples of architect-designed public buildings include the Classical Revival Public Library, built in 1905 to the design of Smith and Moore (201 North Main Street), and U.S. Post Office, designed by James A. Wetmore and built between 1915 and 1918 (200 Main Street).
## Section number 7

**Belton Commercial Historic District Page #3**

### CONTRIBUTING AND NONCONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES IN BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

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Registration Requirements

Commercial properties defined as Contributing elements of the district must retain integrity of location, setting, materials and association. Integrity of design, workmanship and feeling may be may be minimally compromised as long as principal character-defining architectural elements survive. Specifically, the upper level of the facade should be substantially unaltered with window openings and cornice intact. The storefronts may have undergone alterations over the years, as was common to update the appearance of a building, without precluding Contributing status. Since commercial buildings typically undergo significant changes over the years, the appearance of several architectural influences on a single facade is common. Additions or alterations were evaluated on an individual basis for their overall effect on the building’s integrity of feeling and design, taking into consideration the structure’s period of significance. However, buildings were disqualified if they showed evidence of removal or alteration of major architectural features.

A somewhat more rigorous standard was applied to public buildings in the district since they are less likely to undergo wholesale changes. Generally, buildings were considered as contributing if, on balance, they had substantially retained their original appearance. Particular attention was paid to whether the buildings had retained their overall form and exterior materials, and had their original windows, doors, and decorative features intact.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7  Page 5

BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
BELTON, BELL COUNTY, TEXAS

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES
NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES
DISTRICT BOUNDARY
NORTH
8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [XX] locally


Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) [ ]A [ ]B [ ]C [ ]D [ ]E [ ]F [ ]G NA

Areas of Significance

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State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. [XX] See continuation sheet.

The Belton Commercial Historic District is an excellent example of an evolutionary late 19th and early 20th century commercial downtown area. Contextually it relates to Agriculture in Texas, specifically the cattle and cotton industries, for which Belton served as a regional center at various times in its history. The nomination is submitted in conjunction with the Historic Context "Community Development in Belton, 1850-1945" and relates to the statewide Community and Regional Development context as an example of the rapid growth experienced by many Texas towns and cities in the period between 1880 and 1930. The district is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, significant in the areas of Commerce and Politics/Government, for its association with events central to the history of Belton. It also meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a collection of late 19th and early 20th century commercial and public buildings which typify the distinct periods of Belton’s historic growth.

The history of the Belton Commercial District is closely tied with growth and development of Belton during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Founded in the early 1850s, Belton emerged by the time of the Civil War as an important regional trading and governmental center. As the county seat and the largest settlement in Bell County, the town served as a supply point for area farmers and ranchers and as a processing center, shipping center and marketplace for agricultural products. (For a more comprehensive treatment of the town’s history and development see the associated context statement).

Belton’s earliest mercantile businesses were housed in crude log and clapboard buildings around the courthouse square. During the early years of the town’s settlement many of the buildings also served as residences for storeowners’ families. More permanent structures began to be built after the Civil War when Belton became an important stopover point for cattle drives heading north. The Chisholm Trail, the main route for cattle drives through central Texas, passed along the eastern edge of the city. During the peak years of the cattle drives during the late 1860s and early 1870s the business district expanded rapidly and many of the earlier wooden structures were torn down to make way for larger, more permanent limestone buildings. A major fire in 1879 destroyed much of the business district directly north of the courthouse, but by the early 1880s, most of the area had been rebuilt. A bird’s eye view of the city produced by Augustus Koch in 1881 shows that the eight city blocks comprising the Commercial Historic District were substantially built up by that time.

Railroads reached Belton during the 1880s, further spurring the development of the business district while influencing the direction of its growth. The depot for the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe was built more than a mile north of the courthouse square beyond the city limits and therefore had little impact on the development of downtown itself, other than to heighten the prominence of North Main Street as the north/south arterial. When the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad agreed to build a spur line into Belton, however,
the depot was built downtown where the line terminated three blocks northeast of the courthouse. A second MKT depot, built in 1899, survives one block north of the square on North Main Street.

The arrival of the railroads also allowed for the inexpensive shipment of building materials from the industrial cities of the North and Midwest. As a result a variety of pre-fabricated materials—cast iron, pressed sheet metal, milled lumber—began to be used on storefronts in the downtown area. Brick was locally produced after the Civil War and during the latter half of the century brick increasingly replaced native limestone as the principal building material in the downtown area.

During the decade of the 80s, cotton replaced cattle as the basis of the local economy. Belton’s merchants came increasingly to rely on cotton farmers for a substantial portion of their business. A number of cotton-related businesses—brokerage firms, shippers and cotton processors—opened in the downtown area. Despite the growth of nearby Temple (that replaced Belton by the early 1890s as the county’s largest city), the town’s merchants continued to prosper through the 1920s, in large measure due to the cotton business. By the early 30s, however, cotton began to decline in importance, and the downtown area began a slow decline. Many businesses were forced to close and little building took place between 1930 and the end of World War II.

The construction of Camp Hood west of the town in the 1940s temporarily helped to buoy the downtown economy and after the war many new businesses opened. As a result of the post-war craze to "modernize," the facades of many commercial buildings were covered or reconstructed in an attempt to emulate new construction, thereby destroying the architectural detailing on a number of buildings. Belton has also had many historic buildings razed, most notably the block directly west of the courthouse.

Despite these changes, the Belton downtown area remains a fine example of a late 19th and early 20th century commercial district. A significant number of the stores and other businesses built during Belton’s heyday between 1870 and 1920 have survived and the area appears substantially as it did at the turn of the century. Several blocks, particularly the 100 and 200 blocks of Central Avenue, the 100 block of N. East Avenue, and the 100 block of N. Main Street, retain much of their turn-of-the-century character.
9. Major Bibliographical References

[ ] See continuation sheet.

Please see bibliography accompanying context statement "Community Development in Belton, Texas, 1850-1945."

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA
[ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
[ ] previously listed in 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:
[XX] State historic preservation office
[ ] Other State agency
[ ] Federal agency
[ ] Local government
[ ] University
[ ] Other

Specify repository:
Texas Historical Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 15 acres

UTM References
A [14] [646620] [3436880] B [14] [646860] [3436820]
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
C [14] [646540] [3436560] D [14] [646760] [3436480]

Verbal Boundary Description
[XX] See continuation sheet

The boundary of the Belton Historic Commercial District runs as follows (directional references are approximate): beginning at the intersection of East Street and Second Avenue; then south 1/2 block along East Street to the midline of the block; continuing east one block along the midline to Penelope Street; then south two blocks along Penelope Street to the midline of the block between Central Avenue and Avenue A; then west along the midline to East Street; continuing south along East Street one block to the alley between Nolan Creek and Avenue A; then west one block along the alley to Main street; then north 1 1/2 blocks along Main Street to Central Avenue; then west 2/3 block along Central Avenue to the lot line west of 108 West Central; then north to the rear lot line of the buildings facing Central, then east 1/3 block to the rear lot line of the buildings facing Main Street; then north two blocks to Second Avenue; then east on Second Avenue to East Street.

Boundary Justification
[XX] See continuation sheet

The district is loosely bounded on the south and west by Nolan Creek, which has traditionally defined the limits of the downtown area, and to the north and east by residential neighborhoods. The district boundaries include the most intact and concentrated area of commercial buildings related to the development of Belton in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of the properties immediately outside the district date from after 1940. The few historic structures outside the boundary were either poorly preserved or have had undergone considerable recent alterations.

11. Form Prepared By

(based on research by Sally Victor, Victor & Victor Consultants)

Name/Title Chris Long, Historian (with Tory Laughlin Taylor, Architectural Historian)
Organization Texas Historical Commission, NR Programs
date August 1990
Street & Number P.O. Box 12276 Capitol Station
telephone 512-463-6094
City or Town Austin
state TX zip 78711
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

Belton MPS Bell County, TEXAS

COVER

1. Austin, F. K. and Mary, House
2. Baggett, Ele, House
3. Baggett, Silas and Ellen, House
4. Baylor Female College Historic District
5. Beamer, William, House
6. Belton Academy
7. Belton Commercial Historic District
8. Belton Farmers' Gin Coop
9. Belton Standpipe
10. Belton Yarn Mill
11. Birdwell, T. Hamp and Beulah, House
12. Burford, R. F. and Lena, House
13. Cornelison House
14. Elliott, Joel, House
15. Faye, Dr. R. S., House [removed]
16. Ferguson, James A., House
17. Ferguson, James E. and Mirian, House
18. First Christian Church Parsonage
19. Frazier, Dr. Jacob Moore, House
20. Gray Rental Houses
21. Hammersmith, John P., House

DATE LISTED

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REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Belton Commercial Historic District

NAME:

MULTIPLE Belton MPS

NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Bell

DATE RECEIVED: 11/14/90 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/30/90

DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/16/90 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/29/90

DATE OF WEEKLY LIST: 

REFERENCE NUMBER: 90001868

NOMINATOR: STATE

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: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

\[\text{ACCEPT} \quad \text{RETURN} \quad \text{REJECT} \quad 12/26/90 \quad \text{DATE}\]

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entering in the National Register
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
COURTHOUSE SQUARE
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
VICTOR & VICTOR CONSULTANTS, INC.
1985
NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
CAMERA FACING NORTHWEST
PHOTO 1 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
100 BLOCK OF N. MAIN
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
VICTOR & VICTOR CONSULTANTS, INC.
1985
NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
CAMERA FACING NORTH NORTHWEST
PHOTO 2 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
206 N. MAIN
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS

NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
CAMERA FACING NORTHWEST
PHOTO 4 OF 18

Site No. CBD-84
Address 206 N. Main
View Northwest

Belton, Texas
Historic Site Survey, 1985
VICTOR AND VICTOR CONSULTANTS, INC.
P.O. Box 26189
AUSTIN, TEXAS
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
100 BLOCK E. CENTRAL
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS

NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
Camera Facing Northeast
Photo 5 of 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
301 BLOCK N. EAST
BELTON, BELL Co., TEXAS
CAMERA FACING NORTHEAST
NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
PHOTO 6 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
201 BLOCK E. CENTRAL
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT CAMERA FACING SOUTHEAST
PHOTO 9 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
200 BLOCK E. CENTRAL
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS

NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
CAMERA FACING SOUTHWEST
PHOTO 10 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
100 BLOCK N. EAST
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
VICTOR & VICTOR CONSULTANTS, INC.
1985 (NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT)
CAMERA FACING NORTHEAST
PHOTO 11 OF 18
 Historic & Architectural Resources of Belton, Texas
Belton Commercial Historic District
201 Block N. East
Belton, Bell Co., Texas

Negative with consultant camera, facing southeast
Photo 12 of 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
201 BLOCK N. EAST
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
CAMERA FACING NORTHEAST
PHOTO 13 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
E. 1ST AVE.
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS

NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT CAMERA FACING NOR SOUTHWEST
PHOTO 15 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
100 BLOCK E. AVE, A
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
VICTOR & VICTOR CONSULTANTS
1985 (NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT)
CAMERA FACING SOUTHWEST
PHOTO 16 OF 18
HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF BELTON, TEXAS
BELTON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
101 E. AVE. A
BELTON, BELL CO., TEXAS
NEGATIVE WITH CONSULTANT
CAMERA FACING SOUTHEAST
PHOTO 17 OF 18
Site No.__________________________
Address. 100 Block N. Main
View. West

Belton, Texas
Historic Sites Survey, 1985
VICTOR AND VICTOR CONSULTANTS, INC.
P.O. Box 26189
AUSTIN, TEXAS
Please refer to the map in the Multiple Property Cover Sheet for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64500627