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Coupland Inn & Dancehall Coupland, Texas

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HONKY-TONK SPIRITS ; Couple says old hauntin Coupland has some unwanted guests

Camille Wheeler, AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

987 words

9 July 2004

[Austin American-Statesman](#)

B1

English

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COUPLAND -- The Old **Coupland Dancehall** was dark and quiet. Kathleen Kelso had just unlocked a pool table and was getting ready to dump a drawerful of quarters into a beer pitcher. Suddenly, an electric fan standing in a corner roared to life. Just a power surge, Kelso thought, listening to the thunder one day last spring.

She looked at the wall. The fan wasn't plugged in.

Just as suddenly, the fan shut off.

Terrified, Kelso says she raced upstairs to the inn next door.

"Talk to them!" she shrieked at her husband, who owns the century- old buildings that house Coupland's dance hall, inn and restaurant.

Larry Kelso remembers inspecting the cord.

Unplugged.

He called out to the spirits: "Are y'all unhappy we're here? . . . Are you unhappy here?"

Silence.

"Damn it, if you're here, give me a sign."

The fan came back on, and Larry bolted.

Since Larry Kelso bought the two buildings in this tiny Williamson County town about 25 miles northeast of Austin in 2002 and 2003, customers and employees have described run-ins with ghosts.



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The Kelsos say they've grown comfortable with the notion that white, jellyfish-looking orb spirits, visible only in photographs, are floating through the air. Two amateur paranormal investigators from Austin Area Ghost Watchers, John and Lisa Tracy of Jarrell, have captured infrared video footage showing what they say could be orb spirits zipping around the old buildings.

Skeptics dismiss this all as spooky nonsense.

"Those people are amazingly willing to accept anything whatsoever," said University of Texas physics professor Rory Coker, whose "pseudoscience" classes challenge students to weigh scientific evidence against undocumented claims.

Nevertheless, theories abound from those who swear there's spooky stuff happening in Coupland.

One is that the Kelsos' ongoing renovation of the inn -- a building that once held doctors' and dentists' offices, a drugstore and possibly a brothel -- has stirred up old spirits.

Another is that a mother, distraught over her child's death, hanged herself a century ago in what now is a guest room at the inn. Or maybe some of the familiar items in the dance hall, such as the antique bar that sports buckshot scars, keep dead folks coming back.

Some orbs might be spirits who simply like it here, said John Tracy, a database administrator by day.

"It may be someone not ready to move on who just wants to hang around," he said.

That might explain the growing number of orbs that appear to be popping up in photographs taken on the dance floor, he said.

"Any band that plays the 'Cotton-Eyed Joe,' the dance hall is packed with them," Larry Kelso said.

No orbs were visible in photos taken by the American-Statesman on June 30 and July 2.

The Tracys spent the night at the Coupland Inn on July 2. "We're not ghost busters," said Lisa Tracy, who works in the Williamson County clerk's office. "We're just trying to scientifically prove that paranormals exist."

The Tracys said they documented paranormal activity the first time they visited the dance hall, in September.



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John Tracy said his electromagnetic field meter showed an unusually high reading when he sat in an old shoeshine chair. The Kelsos said a young boy recently refused to go near the chair because he insisted there was a man sitting in it.

Lisa Tracy's infrared film footage showed a most curious thing: As soon as her husband sat down, a shimmering white orb appeared to shoot through his body and toward the ceiling.

"That film clip, combined with that high EMF reading, to me is an indicator of paranormal activity," John Tracy said. (A word of caution to would-be ghost photographers, though: Lots of things, including insects, pollen and dust particles, can cause orb images, he said.)

The Tracys use a thermal probe to detect cold spots supposedly created by spirits when they draw energy from people or other sources.

Customer James "Cricket" Grant said he once saw the ghost of a brown-haired girl standing near the restaurant's cash register.

Waitress Donna Tiemann said she's seen water turn on by itself in the women's restroom at the back of the dance hall.

Then there was "Freaky Thursday" last August, when a liquor delivery man said three ghosts climbed into his vehicle.

Later that day, water pipes inexplicably broke, the large Texas flag secured with concrete nails fell from its perch above the bar, and controls on the dance hall's sound-board system were moved into the wrong positions.

Also that night, customer Don Meine said he saw the kitchen door swing open by itself, and his wife, Cathy, said an invisible hand lightly tapped her head.

"None of the ghosts have gone up to somebody and said, 'Let me tell you all about it,' " Kathleen Kelso said. "I wish they would."

Music scene is alive and kickin' ; Who needs Sixth Street? County's clubs are tuneful venues Series: SUMMER FUN IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY

Melissa Ludwig, AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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1

English

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Williamson County isn't exactly a nightlife hot spot. Unlike Austin, there are no streets lined with slick dance clubs where the music is thumping and trendy young adults stand on illuminated platforms sipping pricey cocktails. And that's just fine with most residents, who will take a good old-fashioned honky-tonk over the club scene any day.

It might require a drive, but those seeking a good time this summer are sure to find something among the county's offering of bars, dance halls and coffeehouses.

If live music is what you want, downtown Round Rock is a good place to start. Hole in the Wall, a new neighbor on historic Main Street, offers live music inside the restaurant and outside on the patio Wednesday through Sunday, and serves happy-hour drink specials during the week.

Just up the street, Saradora's Coffeehouse & Cafe boasts almost a full week of musical performances, from garage bands to jazz musicians.

And, of course, there's the Main Street Stroll the first Thursday of the month, where artisans and food vendors set up shop along the sidewalks and musicians play in the open air.

"It's Round Rock's version of Sixth Street, but with a family atmosphere," Hole in the Wall Assistant Manager Dillan Knudson said. "You never have to worry about obscene music or anything being too loud."

If you want a "Cheers"-like neighborhood bar, check out Shenanigans near Austin, the Roadhouse Bar & Grill in Round Rock and the Office Lounge in Georgetown. Owner Bill Fischer said all three have live music, karaoke, pool tables and a dance floor.

If boot-scootin' and steak-eatin' are your pleasure, head east to Granger's Cotton Club & Steakhouse, a 100-year-old building with a stamped metal roof and a stage that hosts acts such as the Derailers, Cooder Graw and the Weary Boys.

In Coupland, a few miles south of Taylor, you'll find much of the same at the Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall. Just don't blink; you might miss this historic gem.

Done up in a period decor that owner **Larry Kelso** dubbed "Victorian brothel," the historic dance hall and inn draws big country acts as well as Hollywood cameras.



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"Lonesome Dove" and "Varsity Blues" are just a couple of the movies that have filmed there, he said.

"All ages are welcome," Kelso said. "It's good to see a 70-year-old grandpa teaching his 3-year-old daughter how to two-step."

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(box)

A summer sampling

Most establishments close at 10 or 11 p.m. on weekdays and midnight or 1 a.m. on weekends. Call for hours, music schedules and cover charges.

The Cotton Club & Steakhouse 212 E. Davilla, Granger, (512) 859-0700,
www.cottonclubandsteakhouse.com .

Dale's Essenhaus Families are welcome at this restaurant and beer garden, located in the German community of Walburg, a few miles north of Georgetown. The outdoor garden seats more than 1,000, and basketball courts keep the kids entertained, owner Dale Cockerell said. On weekends, the German "eating house" features free live music and dancing. 3900 FM 972, (512) 819-9175.

Hole in the Wall Two words: Frito pie. And happy hour. Check out this Austin institution's Round Rock location at 119 E. Main St., 310-7777.

Saradora's Coffeeshouse & Cafe Coffee, pastries and sandwiches give way to beer and margaritas if you stay late for live music. 101 E. Main St., Round Rock, 310-1200.

Main Street Grill Elegant dining and Dixieland jazz are a good mix at this downtown eatery at 118 E. Main St., Round Rock, 244-7525.

Monica's 701 -- This upscale restaurant in downtown Georgetown shares the same owner and great food as the Main Street Grill. If you are lucky, you might catch singer-songwriter Sarah Sharp playing an acoustic set. 701 S. Main St., 931-2438.

Roadhouse Bar & Grill -- Pub grub. Pool tables. Karaoke. 1103 Wonder Drive, just east of Interstate 35 in Round Rock, 218-0813.

Shenanigans -- Located just outside the Austin city limits at 13233 Pond Springs Road, 258-9717, www.shenanigansnightclub.com .



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Office Lounge -- 1207 Leander Road in Georgetown, just west of Interstate 35, (512) 869-1137.

Old Coupland Inn & Dancehall -- Located at 101-103 Hoxie, off Texas 95 between Elgin and Taylor. (512) 856-2226, www.couplanddancehall.com .

Rattlesnake Inn -- This old watering hole recently reopened after renovations. In Florence at 6060 Texas 95, (254) 793-2922.

Snuffy's -- Biker-friendly joint at 204 Highway 79 in Hutto, 759- 1925. Owner Perry Savard says the grill offers staples such as chicken-fried steak and hot wings, and features live music six days a week.

MY FABULOUS 50 [Corrected 08/17/05] ; For my next birthday, I've come up with one nearby must-see attraction to represent every year

Denise Gamino, AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

1283 words

6 August 2005

[Austin American-Statesman](#)

E3

English

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It's my party and I'll cry "Enough!" if I want to. No more zipping through life with a lazy "one of these days I'm gonna to do that" attitude.

I turn 50 this year. But I have no urge to climb Mount Everest, jump out of an airplane or hang glide over the Grand Canyon. I spent my 40th birthday in a mystical hot springs near Mount Fuji in Japan. Exotic, I've done. I've been to all 50 states. Adventures, I've had. I know every region of Texas. Blue highways, I've seen.

Now, I'm finally going to explore the leftover parts of my own backyard, soaking up local things I've always wanted to see and do but never made the time to because there's always tomorrow.

Like jumping the fence for a midnight swim in Barton Springs. Visiting the O. Henry Museum. Hiking Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve. Going to Fiesta in San Antonio. Spending a night in the Driskill Hotel.

And, of all things, how did I miss the round rock in Round Rock?



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Where have I been? What was I thinking?

So, I'm giving myself a birthday present: a list of 50 things I haven't yet done in the past 21 years in Austin. I've always wanted to do them, but got too busy doing the more obvious things.

Call them lower-priority desires.

At first, I figured I'd do all 50 this year. So far, I've squeezed in only a dozen or so. But I made the list, so I can make the rules -- and deadlines. So what if it takes way longer than a year?

What counts is that I'm finally doing them. And it's the best birthday party ever. Part of the fun is dragging pals along.

It doesn't get much better than a barbecue picnic with friends under a majestic live oak in the Texas countryside before seeing "Hamlet" performed in a historic open-air hay barn. The University of Texas' Shakespeare at Winedale, with student actors, beckoned me for years but I kept forgetting to go until this summer. (Oh, I am fortune's fool!) Finally hearing Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy -- a haunting performance by Bob Jones - in the soft darkness of a summer night stirred my soul.

My trip to the Old **Coupland Inn** and Dance Hall turned into a riotous private tour that lasted two hours. As we drove up, I was crushed to see it closed. Owner Larry Kelso and his extravagantly curly Fu Manchu mustache were just leaving but stopped by our car to chat. I gave him a big pouty face. "You have to be open," I whined. "I'm turning 50 and I made a list of 50 places I want to see. And this is one of them."

Kelso bit. He just turned 50 in March and wanted to help a fellow 1955 baby. Besides, he's giddy-proud of what he calls "The Last True (blankety blank) Honky Tonk Dance Hall, Falling Down Restaurant and Dilapidated Inn in the State." He fired up the mechanical bull for me, showed off the old bordello, told tales of famous customers and recited the place's entire 95-year history. This guy almost beats the taped tour of the Louvre.

And that round rock in Round Rock? It's gorgeous. It's big. It's inviting. And it really is round, like a mushroom gone flat in the middle of Brushy Creek. It's just off Interstate 35 at a spot I've passed so many times it would hurt to count. I could have waved. Dozens of people visited the rock while we were there, and one asked me to take a photo of him in front of the rock. I don't need a photo. I'm never forgetting this limestone gem. I waited too long for the privilege.



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So here's my list of things I'm doing, in no particular order. It ranges from the modest to the more involved -- missing pieces of my personal puzzle.

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(box)

1. Picnic under the most beautiful (and secret) cypress on Town Lake 4
2. Sneak into Barton Springs at midnight
3. Visit Elisabet Ney Museum
4. Swim in Jacob's Well in Wimberley
5. Hike Lake Georgetown 4
6. Spend a night at the Driskill Hotel
7. Peek at poet Walt Whitman's papers at the Harry Ransom Center
8. Go to Zilker Summer Musical
9. Tour the missions in San Antonio
10. Visit Bright Leaf State Natural Area
11. Learn to knit a hat at Hill Country Weavers 4
12. Go to Shakespeare at Winedale near Round Top 4
13. See Honey Creek State Natural Area north of San Antonio
14. Visit Gorman Falls in Colorado Bend State Park
15. Go to McNay Art Museum in San Antonio 4
16. Learn to whistle (OK, this is not a place, but I need to do it sometime.)
17. Tour the Blue Bell ice cream factory in Brenham
18. See Old **Coupland Inn** and Dance Hall 4



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19. Visit Poodie's Hilltop Bar & Grill 4
20. Go to the spa at the Crossings
21. Tour the O. Henry Museum
22. Go to the St. John branch library (part of my quest to visit all Austin libraries)
23. Go to the Milwood branch library 4
24. Visit Lake Austin Spa Resort
25. Watch 'The Star of Destiny' film on Texas history at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum
26. See Michael Dell's house (I'm not a stalker; I'm just curious about where it is and what I can see from the street.)
27. Take an Austin Duck Adventures tour
28. Tour Austin on a Segway
29. Visit the library in Lockhart where a librarian camped on the rooftop dome to raise money 4
30. Bike Reimer's Ranch
31. Attend Fiesta in San Antonio 4
32. View original poems by Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning at Baylor University
33. Go see the South San Gabriel River dinosaur tracks
34. Walk the Waller Creek Walkway near downtown Austin
35. Spend Valentine's Day at Valentine Lakeside Resort in Kingsland 4
36. Visit the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg
37. Hike Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve 4



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38. Take the Lower Colorado River Authority's Light o' the Moon full moon raft trip down the Colorado River
39. Take in a concert at Zilker Park's Rock Island
40. Take my found arrowhead to Identification Day at Texas Memorial Museum
41. Picnic under the 1,000-year-old live oak at Fall Creek Vineyards
42. Visit Nightengale Archaeological Center at Kingsland
43. Visit the Austin Zoo
44. Visit the French Legation
45. Swim at Blue Hole in Georgetown
46. Watch the Easter Fires pageant in Fredericksburg
47. Walk across the 1870 Waco Suspension Bridge over the Brazos River
48. Go see the round rock in Round Rock 4
49. Bike the hill behind Toys R Us (Wish me luck.)
50. View the New Deal wood sculpture murals in the U.S. Courthouse in Waco

-- Denise Gamino

COLOR PHOTOS; Photo: AMERICAN-STATESMAN photos; Segway tour at the Bullock Most beautiful cypress on Town Hilltop Bar & Grill The spa at the Crossings Fiesta in San Antonio The round rock in Round Summer Musical The Old **Coupland Inn** and Dance Hall

They're sitting pretty ; Residents of Coupland say their homes come already furnished with spectacular views of the countryside

Bob Banta, AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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1

English

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COUPLAND -- Take a leisurely drive along Texas 95 south of Taylor and watch the village of Coupland pop up on the horizon like a jack-in-the-box. The community perches atop a high hill that appears suddenly above gently rolling fields and offers a view of southeastern Williamson County that must have been as attractive to its first settlers in the mid-1800s as it is to the people who live there today.

"It's our little burg," said Wells Mason, 35, as he crafted a tall bookcase with white maple doors and wrought-iron handles in his downtown woodworking business. "My shop looks over miles and miles of farmland, and from my house at the top of the hill we have a full view of the countryside to the east and west. It's a great place to be."

Mason and his wife, Lisa, 36, moved from Austin to Coupland (pronounced Cope-land) three years ago, looking for a place to blend business, beauty and a sense of history. They are not alone in their choice of this old railroad town as a place to start anew.

"We went to a lot of locations, looking for a place to open a restaurant, but my husband fell in love with Coupland," recalled Barbara Worthy. For nearly a decade, she and husband Tim have operated the popular Old **Coupland Inn** and the adjacent dance hall, which has been featured in several Hollywood movies and is a venue for performers such as Willie Nelson and David Allan Coe.

Worthy points to the inn's pressed tin ceiling tiles and thick timber flooring. "This building dates back to 1904," she said. "The dance hall was built in 1910. People who come here love the history."

Although there were German and Swiss settlers in the area, the history of the town begins with Theodore Van Buren Coupland, who moved from Alabama to Texas after the Civil War to build a home on land inherited from his uncle. In 1887, Coupland and two other men mapped out parcels of property at a spot along the Bastrop and Taylor Railway tracks to sell as part of what they called "Coupland City."

In 1905, C.W. Pfluger started the private Bank of Coupland, and other businesses, including grocery stores, a livery stable, lumberyards, saloons and blacksmith shops followed. By 1921, the town had a population of 150.

The core of Coupland's social life is St. Peter's United Church of Christ, a mix of Congregationalist, Methodist and Presbyterian worshippers who organized in 1894 and built the white wooden structure that became their spiritual home in 1906.



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The church stands on one of the highest points of the hill on which the town was platted by Coupland and his real estate partners. Visitors to Sunday morning services can watch storm clouds form in the distance or catch a refreshing breeze -- even in summer -- as it blows across the fields below.

Jewel Johnson, a former pastor of the church, published a history of Coupland in 1974 called "A City on a Hill." Johnson, 76, is retired and lives at Lake Travis. He said one of the most interesting experiences he had compiling his book was listening to reminiscences of the older residents. "I worked on the book in the early 1970s when there were still people living who remember what the town was like even before 1900," Johnson said.

One aspect of social life that was recounted to him by members of an old Coupland family involved relations between the German and Swiss residents and black families in the area. White and black children could work together in the cotton fields but were forbidden by their parents from playing with each other. That prohibition, however, was not always followed, Johnson was told.

"On Saturday all the grown-ups of both white and Negro families on the farm went off to town to do the weekly trading," Johnson wrote. "When the wagons were safely out of sight, all the children . . . white and black . . . made a sliding board on the tin roof of a farm building, one by one zipping down the roof into the loose hay below. One of their number, chosen to be a look-out, perched on top of another out-building near the road. At the first sight of the approaching wagons, the look-out whistled a signal, and all the children scurried to their respective houses. When the grown-ups pulled up in their yards, both sets of parents, white and Negro, were greeted by docile and obedient children on the front porch."

Descendants of the old German families felt a discrimination of their own, especially during World War I, said Johnson, when U.S. and German troops faced each other on the battlefields of Europe. In researching church council minutes, Johnson learned that the German language -- in which sermons were still given -- became offensive to some Central Texans.

"A super-patriotic organization actually sent spies into the St. Peter's congregation," Johnson said.

In his book, he wrote: "The fever of war had created an uneasy tension between the 'Germans' and other citizens of the area who were simply called 'Americans.' Monitors were assigned to the worship services at church to see that nothing subversive or unpatriotic was said."



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Johnson said church records show that by 1925, ministers at the church had to be able to preach in English as well as German to accommodate the younger generation. By 1955, sermons were all in English.

Longtime residents such as Bill Pfluger remember a quiet and rustic life after the war. Pfluger, 86, took over the Coupland bank started by his father and ran it until 1987.

"Even though people here had automobiles by the 1920s, the roads through and around Coupland were just dirt. Whenever it rained, the only way to get from one place to another was by a wagon drawn by horses or mules," Pfluger recalled. "I can very easily remember the little pony I rode to school. The schools had sheds where you could keep your horse while you were in class."

Edgar Thiele, 80, also remembers those days. "When I finished seventh grade at the Pear Valley school, my father put me on a cultivator, and I went to work farming," Thiele said. "I spent a lot of time picking cotton, which is the hardest job in the world. You picked it in July and August, the hottest months of the year, dragging those sacks made of a heavy ducking material. Some of the pickers dragged bags behind them that were up to 12 feet long. It was backbreaking."

Another problem was lack of electricity. Coupland had a small electrical generating plant in town as early as the 1920s, and some homes had lights powered by a set of batteries charged by a small diesel engine. But many of the outlying farms had no electricity until the 1930s, Thiele recalled.

"We read by the light of kerosene lamps, cooked our food on kerosene stoves and heated the house in winter with a cast-iron, wood-burning heater," Thiele said. "We used kerosene for a lot of things. If you cut yourself, you poured kerosene on the cut."

Today, Pfluger and Thiele enjoy the more modern aspects of life in Coupland, such as a recent fish fry held at the Old **Coupland Inn** to raise money for the Coupland Civic Organization. And they take comfort in the fact that many of Coupland's biggest boosters are younger people who moved there to start a business.

Among them are Deborah Samuelson and her husband, Martin, who own M-D Custom Floors. The company, housed in a large building not far from the railroad tracks, has 21 workers and is the town's largest employer. "We wouldn't have been able to afford a big office like this in Austin," said Deborah Samuelson. "And the property taxes aren't bad. But the biggest reason we chose Coupland is that we think of this area as home."

Kurt and Lisa Schroder, both in their early 30s, have also found a home in Coupland, mainly to get away from the traffic in Austin, where Kurt Schroder is a physicist with a technology firm.



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"We moved here last October from a subdivision in Austin," Lisa Schroder said. "We were just itching to get out into the country. We live in a house built in 1891.

"I think the older people in Coupland are glad to see younger people coming in, because a lot of us are moving into the old homes. We certainly feel welcome here."

Everything old is inn again

210 words

25 May 1995

[Austin American-Statesman](#)

33

English

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The soda fountain that adorned the former drugstore is long gone, but the original pressed-tin ceiling tiles still add Texas charm to the historic OLD COU PLAND INN, which reopened May 12 in the tiny town between Elgin and Taylor. Owners Barbara and Tim Worthy took over the 100-year-old building a year ago (after opening the adjoining Coupland Dance Hall two years ago) and have decorated exclusively with antiques from the 1800s. There's even a picture of Coupland's semi-professional baseball team in 1904. The original barbecue and mop- sauce recipes that made the Old **Coupland Inn** famous were obtained from the previous owner, Jack Sutton, and are being served again, family-style. Barbara is adding a touch of her Cajun heritage to the homemade potato salad, cole slaw and beans. Though the restaurant eventually will offer steaks, she said the menu will stay simple. The Inn is open two days a week for now, from 6 to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Drive out U.S.

290 East to Elgin; go left on Texas 95 toward Taylor about seven miles. There's a tiny sign to Coupland, which is about two blocks off Texas 95. Call (512) 856- 2226.

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