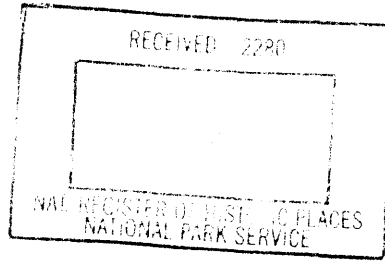


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Cain's Dancing Academy

other names/site number Cain's Ballroom; Louvre Ballroom

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number 423 North Main not for publication N/A  
city or town Tulsa vicinity N/A  
state Oklahoma code OK county Tulsa code 143  
zip code 74103

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 X nationally      statewide      locally. ( N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official

7-21-03  
Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO  
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      [Signature] 9/4/03  
         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 (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: music facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: music facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movement  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
roof ASPHALT  
walls SANDSTONE  
BRICK  
other GLASS BLOCK  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====  
8. Statement of Significance  
=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- 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 values, 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 (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1935-1953  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)  
=====

Significant Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Bob Wills

Cultural Affiliation N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder UNKNOWN  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====  
9. Major Bibliographical References  
=====

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
10. Geographical Data  
=====

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>15</u>	<u>230740</u>	<u>4005730</u>	3	—	—
2	<u>N/A</u>	—	—	4	—	—

N/A See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====  
11. Form Prepared By  
=====

name/title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for Dr. Jim Rodgers

organization Savage Consulting date March 2003

street & number Rt. 1, Box 116 telephone 405/459-6200

city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079

=====  
Additional Documentation  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage  
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====  
Property Owner  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Cain's LLC

street & number 4033 S. Xanthus telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Tulsa state OK zip code 74105



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section   7   Page   9  

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====

SUMMARY

Cain's Dancing Academy, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is a one-story, rectangular, sandstone and brick, commercial building with a pitched roof. Constructed in 1924, the building is best classified as Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movement. The building has an unusual tall parapet with merlons which lends a strong castled influence to the exterior. Located prominently on the parapet is a neon sign which reads "CAIN'S BALLROOM DANCING." Above this on the roof is another neon sign which simply reads "CAIN'S." Unlike the preponderance of buildings in the area which are red brick, Cain's is painted white with contrasting dark green trim. The majority of windows have been boarded over but three are filled with glass blocks and the two attic-level ventilation windows have louvers. The concrete window sills have all been painted green. The doors are for the most part wood paneled but there are some metal slab as well. The front doorways all have nonoriginal, green, cloth canopies. Typical of commercial architecture of the period, the facade is the only elevation decoratively treated. Alterations to the exterior of the building after the period of significance include changing the window material, an iron gate over the south entry and new canopies above the front doorways. The interior of the building has a high degree of integrity with the most notable alterations being the post-1960 addition of the bar area in the northwest corner of the ballroom and modifications to the stage area at an unknown time.

The setting of Cain's remains much as it was historically. The building is located on the fringe of the central business district, separated from the main downtown by railroad tracks to the south. To the immediate west and south of Cain's are several historic, red brick, two-story, commercial buildings, as well as a couple of one-story, brick, commercial buildings. The buildings to the north of Cain's have been demolished and the elevated Inner Dispersal Loop now provides a major visual and physical barrier separating this area from the few commercial/warehouse buildings and larger historic residential area on the north side of the Loop.

The building has always functioned as a dance hall. There are reports that it was built for use as a garage but it never opened as such. Although the frequency of use has fluctuated through the years, the ballroom continues very much in use. Recently the building came under new ownership with plans for rehabilitation. Chief among the planned work is the addition of air conditioning and expansion of the bathrooms to meet current standards.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 10

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====  
The facade of the building is the only elevation which was decoratively treated. Although possessing a number of original window openings, the majority have been blocked to facilitate use of the building as a nightclub. A photograph of the exterior in the late 1940s indicates the windows were multi-paned but painted to obstruct the light. At an unknown time after this and probably for security reasons, the majority of the eight windows were covered with boards while three windows, lighting the office areas, were filled with glass blocks. The building currently has three door openings on the front. The north door has been boarded, the middle door is double, wood, paneled and the south door is a single, wood, paneled with an iron gate. The middle door is the primary public entry for the building. In addition to the double doors, the entry includes glass blocks around the perimeter of the doors and a nonhistoric cloth awning. The late 1940s photograph of the building reveals at that time there was a wood and asphalt shed roof over the entry which extended to the end of the sidewalk and over both the single windows flanking the doorway. The wooden entry roof was removed between 1987 and 1994. On the north side of the facade, two of the boarded windows were probably originally door openings, evidenced by the lower, painted, brick sills and brick infill in the bottom portion of the opening. The doors were changed to windows probably after 1960 when the bar area was added to that corner of the interior.

The fenestration pattern of the facade from north to south consists of a single boarded window; then a larger, nonoriginal, double window; then the boarded single doorway with a canopy; then another larger, nonoriginal, double window; then a single boarded window; then the primary entry; then a single glass block window with an air conditioning unit high in the window; then a boarded, double, original window; then a single glass block window; then a double glass block window; then the single, wood, paneled entry secured by the black iron gate. The sidewalk in front of the building is sloped to the south so that the primary entry is accessed at-grade but the south entry is a few steps up. Connecting the openings across the painted sandstone walls are three wide, recessed, horizontal lines which break at each opening and have been painted a contrasting dark green. The top line is one row of stone below the top of the window. Each of the other two lines are three rows down.

Cain's features an unusual brick and sandstone parapet. In 1934, the parapet's red brick was unpainted; however, by the late 1940s, the brick was painted

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<sup>1</sup>Charles R. Townsend, San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 1976), 260e. See also The Covington (Oklahoma) Record, 17 December 1987 and The Tulsa (Oklahoma) World, 9 September 1994.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 11

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

white to match the sandstone.<sup>2</sup> Separating the parapet from the lower wall is a triple row of bricks with the uppermost row being projected and painted green. A projected painted green row of bricks ornaments and connects the top of all the various parapet elements. At either end of the parapet are two tall brick merlons flanking a shorter section of sandstone capped with a pitched metal covering. Large, decoratively laid, brick triangular pieces connect the outer two elements to the two large, central, sandstone elements of the parapet. Like the outer elements, the central sandstone elements have brick merlons on either side of a shorter sandstone projection. Inside of this are large areas which are filled with a combination of brick and window-sized ventilation openings covered with painted wood louvers. The top of this area is ornamented with a double set of four rows of bricks separated by a projected top row. The brick sill below the louvered opening is the length of the opening so the surrounding brick is likely original. The central element of the parapet is brick. It features five, small, uneven merlons which step up from each side to the middle. Projecting from the center of the element is an historic, white on red background, neon sign which vertically reads "CAIN'S" with horizontal "BALLROOM/DANCING" below this. Behind the neon sign, on the parapet itself, is a large inscription stone which reads "18 AD 90/BRADY/1924". The inscription stone is set into the middle of a painted, green, brick star. The sign, stone and star all appear in the late 1940s photograph of the building.

On the pitched roof, centrally located above the parapet, is another neon sign. This sign simply reads "CAIN'S" horizontally along the length of the building. The sign is set on tall metal bracing which allows it to be seen for quite a distance.

The south elevation of the building adjoins a one-story, painted, brick, commercial building. The north elevation is painted and is a combination of brick and rough stone with the brick towards the front. There are four, small, boarded windows spread across the length of the wall. Roughly in the middle, there is a set of double, metal, slab doors. The doors are below grade with a space in the concrete just large enough to accommodate the swinging doors before stepping up to grade level. Just to the east of the doorway, there is a sizeable tree. The north elevation is blocked from street view by a wooden fence.

The east elevation of the building is painted rough stone. There are three openings on this wall. Towards the north side, there is a set of double, wood,

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<sup>2</sup>Ruth Sheldon, Bob Wills Hubbin' It, (Nashville, Tennessee: Country Music Foundation Press, 1995), 54j. See also Townsend, San Antonio Rose, 260e.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 12

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

slab doors. To the south of this, there is a small opening containing an air conditioning unit for the interior dressing room. Farther south, there is a single, oversize, metal, slab door which functions as the emergency exit.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

From the west, one enters through a small foyer. The ceiling of the foyer is barrel arched and the walls are plaster. Two painted, red, wrought iron light fixtures with glass shades ornament both the north and south walls. There is a ticket window on the south wall, towards the east. On the east wall remains an historic sign which reads "WELCOME/TO/CAIN'S/TULSA'S/PIONEER/BALLROOM/DANCING/EVERY/THURSDAY." The bottom of the sign is obscured by a painted red cabinet but it likely says "AND/SATURDAY" as these were the days dances were held for years. Towards the bottom of the sign, on either side, are dancing figures, the historic logo for Cain's Dancing Academy. On either side of the sign are single, wood, paneled doors which allow access to the ballroom. South of the entry foyer are three wood paneled offices. (See floor plan, page 15)

The ballroom measures 79 feet by 90 feet. The highlight of the room is the historic, spring-loaded, curly maple dance floor which is laid in a "log cabin" or concentric square pattern. The historic, painted, white, drop ceiling is ornamented with painted red diamonds. The existing ceiling is pictured in an article in The Tulsa Tribune from 6 February 1938. Lighting the dance floor is a four foot, blue and red neon star which was likely added circa 1950 when other changes were made including the addition of the photographs lining the walls. The walls are plaster and painted red towards the top and white below this. Decorating the north and south wall are numerous, signed, oversize, wood framed pictures of the various musicians who played Cain's, including Bob Wills, Johnnie Lee Wills, Ernest Tubb, Ted Williams, Kay Starr and Tennessee Ernie Ford, as well as matching photographs of O.W. Mayo, long-time manager and owner of Cain's and Howard Turner, long-time dance instructor at Cain's. In between the pictures are black lyre-shaped light fixtures which contain a single red bulb. On the west side of the dance floor remain several, historic, wooden benches. In the northwest corner of the ballroom is a small, padded, curved bar. The bar was probably added after 1960 when it became legal to sell liquor in Oklahoma's dance halls. Just south of the bar is the lighting booth, with a small storage closet to the west of that and a larger walk-in storage area against the west wall. These areas are also likely not original to the ballroom.

Centrally located on the east wall is the elevated stage with an arched ceiling decorated with painted red musical notes. The stage has been modified to accommodate modern bands and a small rear dressing room. Originally, the stage was part of a bandshell. The east section of the bandshell has been walled off

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 13

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

to create a narrow dressing room. The narrow, rectangular, sunken, dressing room has wood paneled walls autographed by numerous artists. Also decorating the walls are various posters from different years. The room is lit with a fluorescent light. On the south end is a small bathroom with a sink on the south wall of the dressing room. The front portion of the stage has been lengthened to allow for modern equipment and arrangements. It is unknown when the stage was modified.

South of the stage along the east wall is the mens bathroom. The ladies restroom is located north of the stage. To the east of both bathrooms are the rear exit doors along short hallways. In the extreme northeast corner of the building, directly north of the ladies room, is the power room. In the extreme southeast corner of the building, directly south of the men's room, is the heater room.

ALTERATIONS

The exterior of Cain's Dancing Academy maintains a good degree of integrity. Changes to the facade include replacement of the window material, removal of the wood shed roof over the entry and addition of a metal gate to the south entry. The majority of the painted, multi-paned windows have been boarded with three being filled with glass block. It is unknown when this change occurred. The wood shed roof was removed between 1987 and 1994. The roof was replaced with a smaller cloth awning which does not cover the flanking single windows. Overall, the exterior maintains its integrity to ably convey its historic significance.

The interior maintains a high degree of integrity. The hallmark dance floor, spring-loaded by heavy automobile springs, and dropped ceiling remain intact, as does much of the original decor. The modifications to the stage occurred at an unknown time, while the bar area with adjacent storage and lighting booth was probably added after 1960. Despite these changes, the interior possesses a remarkable degree of feeling and association.

Overall, Cain's maintains its integrity of location, setting, design, material and workmanship. The building's integrity of feeling and association remain particularly high, especially on the interior.

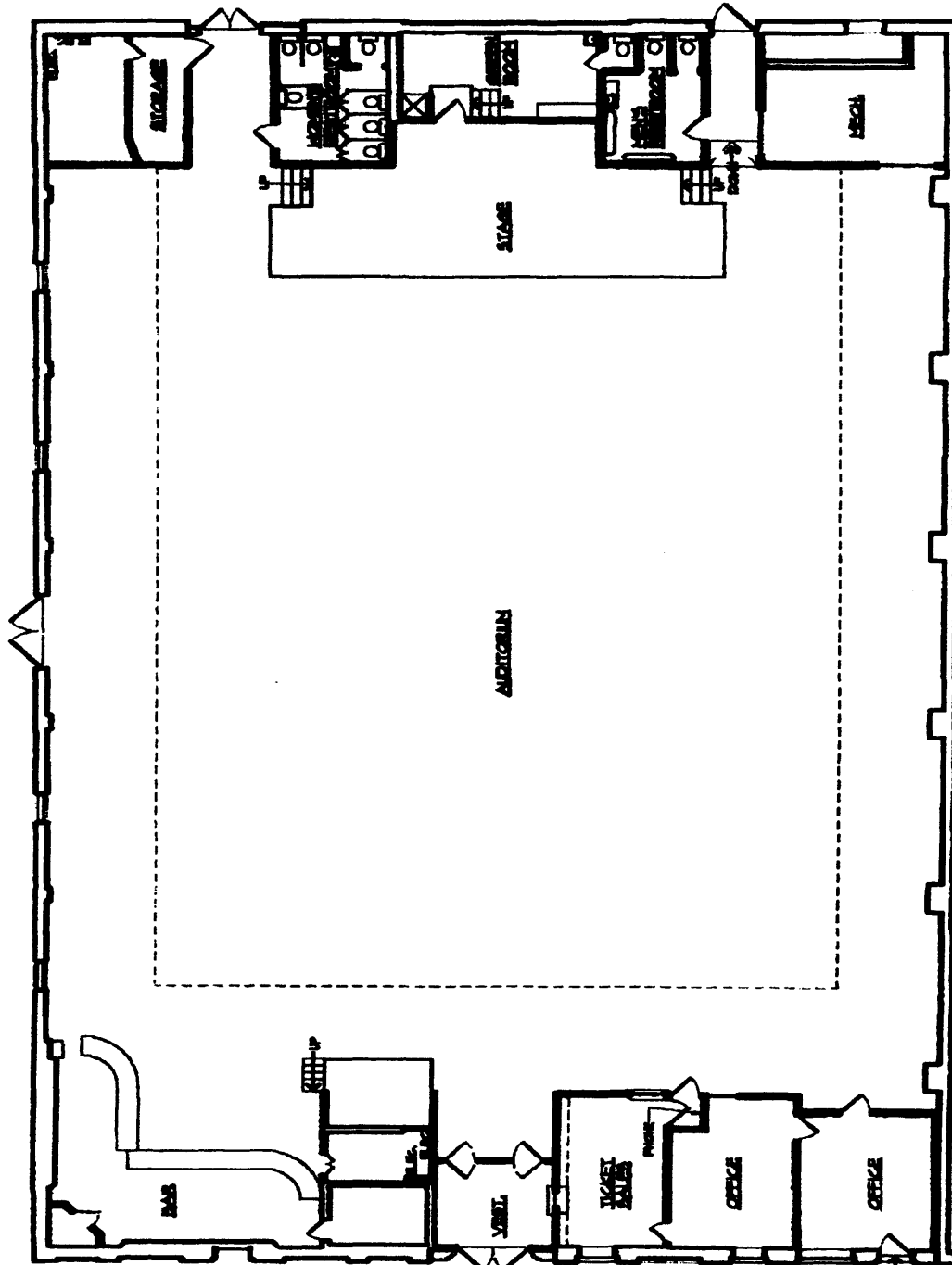
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 14

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

North



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 15

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

SUMMARY

Cain's Dancing Academy, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B for its association with Bob Wills. Wills, known as the "King of Western Swing," made a significant contribution to American music beginning in the 1930s through the 1960s. He has been inducted into both the Country Music Hall of Fame (1968) and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1999). Wills' band, the Texas Playboys, was composed of more than six hundred members during the approximate thirty-five years he had his own group. Although the band was critical to Wills' success, Wills himself was the driving force that popularized their music nationwide, the new sound of Western Swing.

As the home of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, Cain's Dancing Academy is nationally significant. The period of national significance for Cain's Dancing Academy extends from 1935 when Wills first played at the building through 1953, the current National Register fifty-year mark. In addition to regularly playing the twice weekly dances at Cain's from 1935 through 1942, Wills broadcast a midnight radio show from the dances and, beginning in late 1935, his daily noon hour program from the building. After 1942, Wills toured nationally and moved his base of operations several times between California, Oklahoma and Texas. However, Wills maintained a strong association with Cain's throughout his career, returning to play innumerable dances and, for a short time in the late 1950s, to the radio broadcasts. According to Wills' daughter Rosetta, "...Cain's and my father are one."<sup>3</sup>

Cain's Dancing Academy is the only resource remaining that has a strong connection to Wills' productive life. Over his career, Wills played in numerous places nationwide. Besides Cain's, there are only two other places that Wills had a significant career association with, Wills Point and the Bob Wills Ranch House. Wills Point, near Sacramento, California, was a recreational center, including a ballroom, swimming pool and amusement area, that Wills owned from 1947 until 1956. Critically, Wills was unable to play a sustaining program at Wills Point due to national touring demands and the ballroom at Wills Point was destroyed by fire in June 1956. The Bob Wills Ranch House, located in Dallas, Texas, was operated by Wills for only a short time beginning in 1950. Forced to continue his nationwide tours to support the Ranch House, Wills sold the building to Jack Ruby in January 1952.

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<sup>3</sup>Rosetta Wills, The King of Western Swing: Bob Wills Remembered (New York, New York: Billboard Books, 1998), 161.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 16

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

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The building at 423 West Main is widely known today as "Cain's Ballroom." However, this is not the historic name of the building. Until the late 1950s, the building was commonly referred to as either "Cain's Dancing Academy" or "Cain's Academy of Dancing." In support of this is the autographed photograph of Spade Cooley on the wall which reads "Best Wishes to Cain's Academy and Mr. Mayo..." Further supporting the use of "Cain's Dancing Academy" for this nomination are the local telephone directories. The earliest use of "Cain's Ballroom" appeared in the 1957 Polk's Tulsa City Directory. The other two local directories, the Southwestern Bell Directory and the Tulsa Criss-Cross Directory first utilized the new name in 1959. From 1933 to the early 1940s, the building was listed in the directories as "Cain's Academy of Dancing." Between about 1941 until 1957, the directories used "Cain's Dancing Academy." The latter is used for this nomination because newspaper articles from the 1930s commonly referred to the building as Cain's Dancing Academy.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The town of Tulsa existed as early as 1879 when a post office was established on the Perryman Ranch in the Creek Nation. The town, first called "Tulsey Town," grew slowly. During the early 1880s, the town was a haven for gamblers and "bad men" due to its isolation. At the time of the first government townsite survey in Indian Territory in 1900, Tulsa's population stood at merely 1,390.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after this survey, a momentous event occurred near Tulsa, Indian Territory. This event not only had a major impact on Tulsa but the entire state of Oklahoma. In 1901, the state's first important commercial oil well blew in. Located in Red Fork, this landmark well was across the Arkansas River from Tulsa. Two years later, the Secretary of the Interior allowed the leasing of restricted Indian Territory lands under Department of the Interior supervision. The oil rush was on as oil men from Pennsylvania and other states flocked to Indian Territory. In 1904, three men built a toll bridge over the Arkansas River connecting Red Fork and Tulsa. In addition to allowing Tulsa to benefit from the Red Fork strike, the toll bridge also enabled the town to profit from the fabulous Glenn Pool strike which blew in in 1905. Within months of the discovery, the Glenn Pool field was "famous throughout the industry as the richest small field in the world."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The WPA Guide to 1930s Oklahoma (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1986), 206-208.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 208. See also Angie Debo, Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press,



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 17

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====  
In 1910, Tulsa's population stood at 18,182 and a building boom was well underway in the city with brick plants working at capacity. Hotels, office buildings and fine residences were under construction as the streets were paved. By 1920, Tulsa's population had grown to 72,075, a tremendous increase in merely ten years. Nearly doubling in the ensuing decade, Tulsa's population by 1930 was 141,258 and the city was the second largest in the state. Although oil drilling activity occurred all over eastern Oklahoma, the oil companies' headquarters were generally located at Tulsa and that is where the oil men in charge made their homes. As such, Tulsa became known as the "Oil Capital of the World."<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in about 1912, a new movement in social dancing swept the nation. In the two year period between 1912 and 1914, over a hundred dances to music, including the Fox Trot, Cakewalk, Texas Tommy, Kangaroo Dip and Camel Walk, were introduced. By the end of World War I, construction of dance pavilions, road houses, night clubs, dance halls and public ballrooms, loosely classified in the general property type of ballrooms, occurred in both urban and rural areas. During the 1920s, with increasing exposure from records and radio, dance bands played to ever larger crowds in ballrooms that were frequently used during the day as dance studios to teach the latest moves. The popularity of ballrooms reached their height in the 1930s and 1940s with the craze beginning to ebb following World War II. During the heyday of the ballroom, people came to hear and dance to popular music, mingle with old and new friends and court their sweethearts. They were attracted to the ballrooms by radio broadcasts, releases from fan clubs, magazine and newspaper articles about band leaders, vocalists and sidemen, and movies featuring the musicians.<sup>7</sup>

In the midst of the roaring twenties, Tulsa entrepreneur W. Tate Brady and his wife Rachel constructed a brick and sandstone building on lots on North Main they had owned since 1910. Brady prominently inscribed his name on the building, along with the date of construction, 1924, and the date Brady first moved to Tulsa, 1890. Generally modern newspaper articles indicate the building was constructed for automobile-related use, as either a dealership or garage. However, it first appeared in the Tulsa City Directory in 1925 as a dance hall called the Louvre, under the management of the Tulsa Amusement

1943), 86-88.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 208-209. See also Debo, Tulsa, 88 and 97.

<sup>7</sup>Ann Fuhrman, National Register Nomination for The Silver Dome Ballroom, Hewett, Wisconsin, (Available from the National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.: 1996), 8:6-12.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 18

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

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Company. The following year, the Abel School of Dancing was located in the building which continued under the name Louvre. The Abel School of Dancing moved out of the building sometime in 1929. In 1930, the Tulsa telephone directory included listings under the heading of Dance Halls and Pavilions for the first time. At that time, only the Louvre Ball Room and Savoy Ball Room were included. Notably, the building at 423 North Main was not listed under the heading of Dancing Academies and Teachers for the first time in five years. Through the 1932 directory, the Louvre was listed only under Dance Halls and Pavilions.<sup>8</sup>

Between May 1932 and January 1933, Cain's Academy of Dance moved into the building. Madison Cain, a graduate of the Castle Normal School of New York City and a member of the National Institute of Social Dancing (Arthur Murray Director) first opened a dance academy in Tulsa in 1924 at 114½ South Boston. At that time, Cain taught all of the latest dances, including the "Raggedy Ann," with public dancing on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. In 1926, Cain's Academy moved to 917½ East Second, where it remained until mid-1932. Contrary to most modern newspaper articles, Cain never purchased the building. Rachel and W.T. Brady continued to own 423 North Main until 1944 when it was sold to Cody Mayo, wife of Wills' former business manager O.W. Mayo.<sup>9</sup>

Although experiencing periods of disuse over the seventy-five-plus-year history of the building, Cain's Dancing Academy has never remained shutdown for long. The ballroom swung through the 1950s featuring a number of prominent country-and-western stars. The 1960s brought waning crowds as all of downtown Tulsa experienced a slide. The Mayos retained ownership of Cain's until 1972 when they sold it to Marie L. Myers and associates. Wanting to return the building to its glory days as a dance hall, Myers struggled with low attendance until selling the ballroom in 1976 to rock promoter Larry Schaeffer. Schaeffer altered the venue, bringing in a variety of shows ranging from country-rock group Marshall Tucker to trendy acts like the British punk rock band the Sex Pistols. Owning the building for over twenty years, Schaeffer once again

<sup>8</sup>Grantee/Grantor Records, Tulsa County Clerk's Office, Tulsa County Courthouse, Tulsa, Oklahoma. See also Polk City Directories for Tulsa, Oklahoma, (Available Tulsa Public Library, Tulsa, Oklahoma) 1925-1932.

<sup>9</sup>Polk Directories, 1925-1933. See also Southwestern Bell Telephone Directory, Tulsa Oklahoma (Available Tulsa Public Library, Tulsa, Oklahoma), May 1932 and January 1933; The Tulsa World, 23 September 1924; 30 September 1924; 14 October 1924 and 4 November 1924; Grantee/Grantor Records, Tulsa County Clerk.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 19

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====

returned Cain's to prominence as an active concert venue. Coming under new ownership again within the past year, Cain's continues to open its doors to music lovers of all types. Despite the changes in ownership and musical styles, the building has been called Cain's since 1932.<sup>10</sup>

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

In 1934, Bob Wills, his manager O.W. Mayo, and his band, the Texas Playboys, moved from Waco, Texas, to Oklahoma. Initially, they tried their luck in Oklahoma City with a broadcast program on WKY. Lasting only a week, the program was taken off the air due to pressure brought by W. Lee O'Daniel and Burris Mills, Wills' former employer. WKY's program director, Daryl McAllister, however set up a meeting for the band with the management of the new radio station KTUL in Tulsa, the state's other major city. KTUL went on the air in Tulsa on 22 January 1934, broadcasting at 500-watts during the day and 250-watts at night. Seeing a better opportunity with KVOO, Tulsa's premier station which broadcast at 25,000-watts, Wills and Mayo met with the KVOO station manager, W.B. Way, on 9 February 1934. Way agreed to allow the band to play a one hour program that day beginning at midnight. Liking what he heard, Way then hired the band for a sustained program. First broadcasting from 7:30 to 8 in the morning, the band than alternated between a morning broadcast and an evening one at 5 or 6. In September 1934, the band began playing the Crazy Water Crystals program every day, except Sunday, at 12:30 p.m. Fourteen months later, Wills purchased the prime 12:30 p.m. slot from the station and negotiated his own deal with Red Star Milling Company to advertise his own brand of flour, Play Boy. Despite nighttime engagements in towns hundreds of miles away, Wills and his band continued their daily noon hour broadcasts on KVOO from 1934 through 1942 when the band was temporarily disbanded. After 1942, Johnnie Lee Wills took over the daily broadcasts on KVOO, continuing them until 1958.<sup>11</sup>

The Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys radio broadcasts on the KVOO channel, noted on their own letterhead as "The Most Powerful Station between St. Louis, Dallas and Denver," and, subsequently, other stations, were critical to the success of the band. Radio was at its height of popularity in the 1930s as the Great Depression rocked the nation. At the time, "Radio was the cheapest form of entertainment available, and it brought both solace and security to anxiety-

<sup>10</sup>The Tulsa World, 19 May 1973; 5 March 1979; 9 September 1994; and, 1 August 2002. See also Grantee/Grantor Records, Tulsa County Clerk.

<sup>11</sup>Townsend, San Antonio Rose, 88-95.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 20

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

riden Americans who sought escape in its programming." The Crazy Water Crystals program that Wills' played in Tulsa was only one program sponsored by the firm out of Mineral Wells, Texas, that produced basically a laxative which was touted "...as a curative for a wide array of ailments." In the 1930s, Crazy Water Crystals "...was the premier national advertise of country music."<sup>12</sup>

The unprecedented move of Bob Wills to purchase his own radio time and find a company willing to provide a product to advertise is noteworthy. In this unusual arrangement, Red Star Milling Company, a subsidiary of General Mills, agreed to pay a royalty to Wills for each barrel of Play Boy flour sold. First marketed in November 1935, Play Boy flour had proven its viability within two years by selling as well as more established brands. In addition to the broadcasts which advertised the flour, Wills and Mayo sold franchises to bakeries in Oklahoma, Kansas and Arkansas to bake Play Boy bread. The band played at openings of grocery stores and bakeries which sold Play Boy flour or made Play Boy bread. Although Play Boy flour and bread were discontinued after 1938, General Mills continued to sponsor the noon hour KVOO broadcasts until 1958.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to aiding the careers of various musicians, radio also spurred the spread of regional music across the United States. According to Bill C. Malone, "By 1941 radio had made much of the nation aware of the folk-derived music of the South through the broadcasts of the Mexican border stations, such 50,000-watt American stations as WBAP in Fort Worth and WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia, and the Grand Ole Opry on NBC each Saturday night." However, also disseminating regional music such as western swing was the general population migration occurring during the period. Seeking more stable employment in other regions, migrants frequently "...took their musical preferences with them and permanently implanted them in the new little...enclaves around the United States."<sup>14</sup>

Likely directly related to the rise in the nationwide popularity of Wills and his band was the exodus of Oklahomans from the state in the 1930s. Due to the

<sup>12</sup>Sheldon, Bob Wills, x. See also Bill C. Malone, Southern Music: American Music, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 71-73.

<sup>13</sup>Townsend, San Antonio Rose, 93-95. See also The Tulsa (Oklahoma) Tribune, 6 February 1938.

<sup>14</sup>Malone, Southern Music, 86.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section   8   Page  21 

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====  
inclement economic conditions within the state, migration out of Oklahoma became so intense during the Great Depression the term "Okie" became a popular name for the dispossessed workers searching for work in others states, particularly California. Not coincidentally, Wills moved his base of operations among Oklahoma, Texas and California throughout his career.

On New Year's night, 1935, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys played their first dance at Cain's Dancing Academy. Later that year, the band began playing regularly scheduled dances at Cain's every Thursday and Saturday nights. Additionally at midnight, the band would broadcast an hour-long program from the dance over the KVOO channel. With the equipment on-site, in late 1935, Wills began broadcasting his noon show from Cain's as well. Wills continued this pattern from 1935 through 1942, when he was inducted into the Army. During this eight-year period, Wills played Cain's more than ninety times a year every year, more than twice that of any other place he played. In 1937, average attendance at the Thursday night dance ranged from seven to eight hundred with twelve to fifteen hundred coming for the Saturday night dance. By 1939, Wills and Mayo had taken over management of the establishment with the band's business offices located in the building as well.<sup>15</sup>

In late December 1942, Wills disbanded his group as he and other members of the band were being drafted into the United States Army for service during World War II. Wills' brother Johnnie Lee took over at Cain's, continuing both the daily broadcasts and bi-weekly dances. Following his discharge from the army in July 1943, Wills moved his base of operations from Oklahoma to California. However, he continued to play Cain's at various times after this and returned to the daily broadcasts with Johnnie Lee for a short period between 1957 and 1958.<sup>16</sup>

Wills' years in Tulsa have been called his "glory years." The band during this time, having enough instruments to boast both horn and string fronts, has been described as "...the best Wills ever had." In 1936, newspapers in both Tulsa and Oklahoma City referred to the band as "Oklahoma's nationally famous orchestra." That same year, the band's records outsold all others on their label, a trend they continued through the 1940s and on two other labels, including Columbia. By the late 1930s, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys were the most popular dance band in the Southwest. In 1938, they were reputed to have more than 3600 selections in their repertory covering the multitude of

<sup>15</sup>Townsend, San Antonio Rose, 134, 150, 150a and 201. See also Polk City Directory, 1940.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 225-228, 269.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 22

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====  
music types popular at the time. It also became obvious during this period that "Regardless of how good his band was, without Wills it was just another good swing band."<sup>17</sup>

It was also during the so-called "Tulsa years" that "...the most important single occurrence..." in Wills' career occurred. In 1940, Wills and the Texas Playboys recorded "New San Antonio Rose." Wills had first recorded the tune in November 1938 under the name "San Antonio Rose." Attracting the attention of the distinguished musical publishing firm Irving Berlin, Incorporated, of New York in early 1940, Wills agreed to write lyrics for the song. The band recorded the new composition at a recording session in Dallas in April with the addition of "New" to the title. Also changed from the original was the use of only one stringed instrument, a guitar, with horns being dominant. As such, "The recording sounded just like all the other contemporary swing bands." "New San Antonio Rose" was "An immediate hit in most commercial fields of American popular music" and earned Wills a gold record the same year it hit the airwaves. Additionally, it was this song that is credited with making Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys national figures in American music.<sup>18</sup>

Further bringing Wills to national attention in 1940 was Wills' first role in a Hollywood movie. Titled "Take Me Back to Oklahoma," the movie actually starred veteran western actor Tex Ritter. Although having a devoted following for years on the radio, this was the first time many of Wills' fans actually saw their hero. Having some lines in the movie, "...it was obvious before he spoke half a dozen of them that he would never win any Academy Awards." Nonetheless, he was cast in more than twenty-five films after this and "All this helped business at Cain's and at other dances."<sup>19</sup>

Besides resulting in a six-month stint in the armed forces, World War II also "...marked a watershed in Wills's music." Forced to put together a new band in 1943, Wills never had a horn section as strong as during the pre-war years. Due to a combination of factors, after 1944 Wills relied more on stringed instruments than before, although he continued to have horns in the band. As such, the "...watershed was a matter of emphasis, not of basic musical or stylistic changes."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 149-152, 207.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 190-194.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 207-208.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 237.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 23

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

After his release from the army in 1943, Wills moved his headquarters to California. Personal reasons were largely responsible for the move. Wills and his fourth wife, Betty, felt their marriage would fare better away from Oklahoma. Moving to California in September 1943, Wills and his band quickly became regulars at the Mission Beach Ballroom in San Diego. In 1944, the Music Corporation of American (MCA) took over management of Wills' band. In November of the same year, Wills' left on his first cross-country tour which would characterize much of the rest of his career.<sup>21</sup>

In 1947, Wills purchased the Aragon Ballroom near Sacramento, California. Changing the name to Wills Point, Wills added a swimming pool, amusement park and some apartments for band members and their families. Wills also broadcast a program over the local 50,000 watt KFBK station. These attempts to build a dominant venue for the band similar to what he had in Tulsa were unsuccessful primarily due to the time away on national tours or other engagements on the West Coast.<sup>22</sup>

Two years after buying Wills Point, Wills moved his operation back to Oklahoma, this time Oklahoma City. Once again, demands of the road kept Wills away from home. A year later, Wills moved to Dallas and opened the Bob Wills Ranch House, "...one of the largest buildings for dancing anywhere in the country." Leasing the newly constructed building, Wills finished the interior to fit his own standard, including stalls for horses which were shod with special rubber shoes to enter the building. Unable to support the operation without the national tours, Wills sold the Ranch House in January 1952 and temporarily broke up his band. Returning to California for a short time, Wills then moved to Houston, Texas, the same year. By early 1953, Wills was back at Wills Point before heading to Amarillo, Texas. Once again, Wills returned to Wills Point in 1954. Two years later, Wills leased the operation of Wills Point and moved again to Amarillo. Shortly after this, on 15 June 1956, the ballroom at Wills Point was destroyed by fire.<sup>23</sup>

Wills continued on the move through the late 1950s. In 1957, Wills moved to Abilene, Texas. Late the same year, Wills moved back to Tulsa to combine his band with that of his brother Johnnie Lee. Faced with declining crowds due to changing entertainment habits, most particularly television, the brothers hoped to rebuild the venue to what it had been in the 1930s. Operating once again

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 229, 231 and 239.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 252-253.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 261-269.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 24

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

from Cain's Dancing Academy, the brothers broadcast a daily show on KVOO. However, by 1958, Wills' manager had booked him into a sustaining show at the Showboat in Las Vegas, Nevada. This was followed by more shows at Las Vegas' Golden Nugget in 1959 and later at Lake Tahoe. The engagements in Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe each ran between four and five weeks and took up about seven months of the year. They were broken up by national tours. Wills' base of operations continued to be in Nevada until 1961 at which time it was moved back to Tulsa, although Wills continued to play engagements in Las Vegas through 1962.<sup>24</sup>

By 1963, Wills moved to Fort Worth, Texas, but continued to play all over the Southwest and on several cross-country tours. His second heart attack in 1964 finally ended Wills' career as a bandleader. Although he continued to play and record, Wills only fronted other bands for the rest of his career.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of his career, Wills had produced records that sold 20 million copies, wrote and recorded 470 songs and starred in 26 films. In the 1940s, Wills was "...reportedly the highest paid bandleader in the U.S., with an annual income...estimated at \$350,000." Wills learned to play the guitar, mandolin and fiddle from his father as a child in Texas. Although a cotton farmer by trade, Wills' father John played fiddle at "kitchen dances" throughout Wills' childhood. Wills joined his father in playing the dances in 1915 at the age of ten. Previous to 1931, Wills worked as a barber, lay preacher, blackface medicine show entertainer and zinc smelter worker. In 1931 at the age of twenty-six, Wills took a job with W. Lee O'Daniel, working at the Burris Flour Mill and playing with the Lightcrust Doughboys, the band sponsored by the flour mill. Wills departed ways with O'Daniel in 1932, taking many of the band members with him to Waco where they became the "Texas Playboys."<sup>26</sup>

Although frequently classified as country-and-western, Wills' music is more accurately described as "Western Swing." According to Guy Logsdon, noted music historian and authority, western swing is very much its own genre as it is foremost dance music. Although defying a simple description, western swing is described as a "...dynamic hybrid of New Orleans jazz, blues, and folk fiddle music...". Largely coming out of the dance halls of Oklahoma and Texas, western swing bands brought "...the sensibility of country to a big-band lineup...(and)...were distinctive for their horn sections and jazz-influenced

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 268-273.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 277-278.

<sup>26</sup>The Tulsa World, 14 May 1975.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 25

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====

rhythms." Not the first or only musician working with this type of music in the 1930s through the 1960s, Wills has been acknowledged as the King of Western Swing. Wills, according to the Country Music Hall of Fame, "...led the premiere western swing band of the thirties and forties."<sup>27</sup>

Despite being outside the popular country music movement of the first half of the twentieth century, Wills and his music had a strong influence on numerous subsequent country-and-western musicians, including such well-known stars as Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and George Strait. According to Bill C. Malone, the influence of Wills and the Texas Playboys "...on the whole field of country music is incalculable." In 1968, Wills was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. Notably, not believing that he would be included in the Hall of Fame, Wills was scheduled to play at Cain's the evening of the awards presentation. Later that same year, Wills' was voted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in recognition of "...his contribution to America's Western music lore." At the time, Wills was only the second performer to be so honored.<sup>28</sup>

Wills contribution to American music was broader than country-and-western music. For example, in the mid-1950s, Chuck Berry used Wills' version of "Ida Red" as a basis for his mega-hit "Maybellene." Bill Haley also drew upon Wills and his western swing for his early 1950s music. Additionally, Fats Domino reported that "...he had patterned his rhythm section after that of Bob Wills." Wills has been called "the first great amalgamator of American music." Styles of music played by Wills include jazz, hillbilly, boogie, blues, big-band swing, rhumba, mariachi, jitterbug music, among others. According to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Wills' "...enthusiasm and mastery were such that he assimilated disparate (sic) genres into what might best be termed American

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<sup>27</sup>Guy Logsdon, telephone interview with author, 2 April 2003. See also Townsend, San Antonio Rose, front flap; "Bob Wills," Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, <<http://www.halloffame.org/hall/mem/bob-wills.html>>, accessed 5 March 2003.

<sup>28</sup>Wills, The King of Western Swing, front flap. See also Malone, Southern Music, 83; Townsend, San Antonio Rose, 283; and "The Rise of An Industry: Country Comes of Age," Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, <<http://www.countrymusicHalloffame.com/hist/time.essay3.htm>>, accessed 5 March 2003;

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section   8   Page  26 

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====

Music." In recognition of his influence on American music, Wills was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1999.<sup>29</sup>

As the "Home of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys," Cain's Dancing Academy is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The ballroom is nationally significant for its association with Bob Wills. Wills is acknowledged as "...the driving force behind Western Swing, a form of country & western that was broader in scope than the parent genre." Wills' influence on artists of various music types of the 1950s and later is widely recognized. Beginning in 1935, Wills played bi-weekly dances at Cain's with an hour-long broadcast beginning at midnight. Additionally, Wills broadcast his well-known daily noon hour radio show from the building which was received from the beginning as far away as California. Although not as frequently after 1942, Wills continued to play Cain's throughout the remainder of his career. Importantly, Cain's is the best remaining resource nationwide associated with Wills' productive career. The only other place that Wills played for more than a short period was Wills Point in California. Even then, due to a demanding tour schedule, the association was never as strong as that with Cain's Dancing Academy. Additionally, the ballroom at Wills Point burned in 1956, destroying the significant association.

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<sup>29</sup>Wills, The King, 170-171. See also "Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys" Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum <<http://rockhall.com/hof/inductee.asp?id=212>>, accessed 6 March 2003.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section   9   Page  27 

  Cain's Dancing Academy    
name of property  
  Tulsa County, Oklahoma    
county and State

=====

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9, 10 Page 28

Cain's Dancing Academy  
name of property  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

North 23 feet Lot 6, part Lot 7 (Beginning in the northeast corner, then south 65.2 feet, then west 140 feet, then north 65.1 feet, then east 140 feet to point of beginning) and west 10 feet of vacated alley adjacent on east, Block 7, Tulsa Original Town, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the building.