

Early Round Rock: "Old Town"

The Round Rock



Scan for sources and information about Historic Preservation in Round Rock

Crossing at Brushy Creek

In 1840, President Lamar of the Republic of Texas tasked Colonel William Gordon Cooke with establishing a military road from Austin northward to Fort Inglish (Bonham) on the Red River. The military road crossed Brushy Creek at a low water crossing marked by a round rock. It was near this crossing that Brushy, later known as Old Town, emerged as the original commercial settlement in the Round Rock area.

Colonel Cooke's Military Road

Note that Kenney Fort was the only manmade landmark recorded between Austin and Waco Village.



[Sketch of Col. Cooke's Military Road expedition from Red River to Austin], from Texas General Land Office Map Database and Store.

Jacob Harrell: Mayor of Austin and Developer of Old Town

Jacob M. Harrell (1804-1853) was a prominent early resident of Old Town who had a strong impact on the history of the Round Rock area and Austin. Harrell served in the Texas army and his family was the first to homestead in Waterloo (present-day Austin) in 1838. Harrell was also Austin's first blacksmith. In 1847, Harrell was elected mayor of Austin. Harrell selected land for his headright where Cooke's military road crossed Brushy Creek at a round rock and moved to the land in 1848. Harrell likely chose this land because of its proximity to a major road and a water source. Harrell was also known to fish in Brushy Creek.

Between 1848-1853, Harrell sold off parts of his headright in one-acre lots, where the residences and businesses of Old Town would be built. On his remaining land along Brushy Creek, Harrell built a log cabin, a blacksmith shop, and other services for travelers.

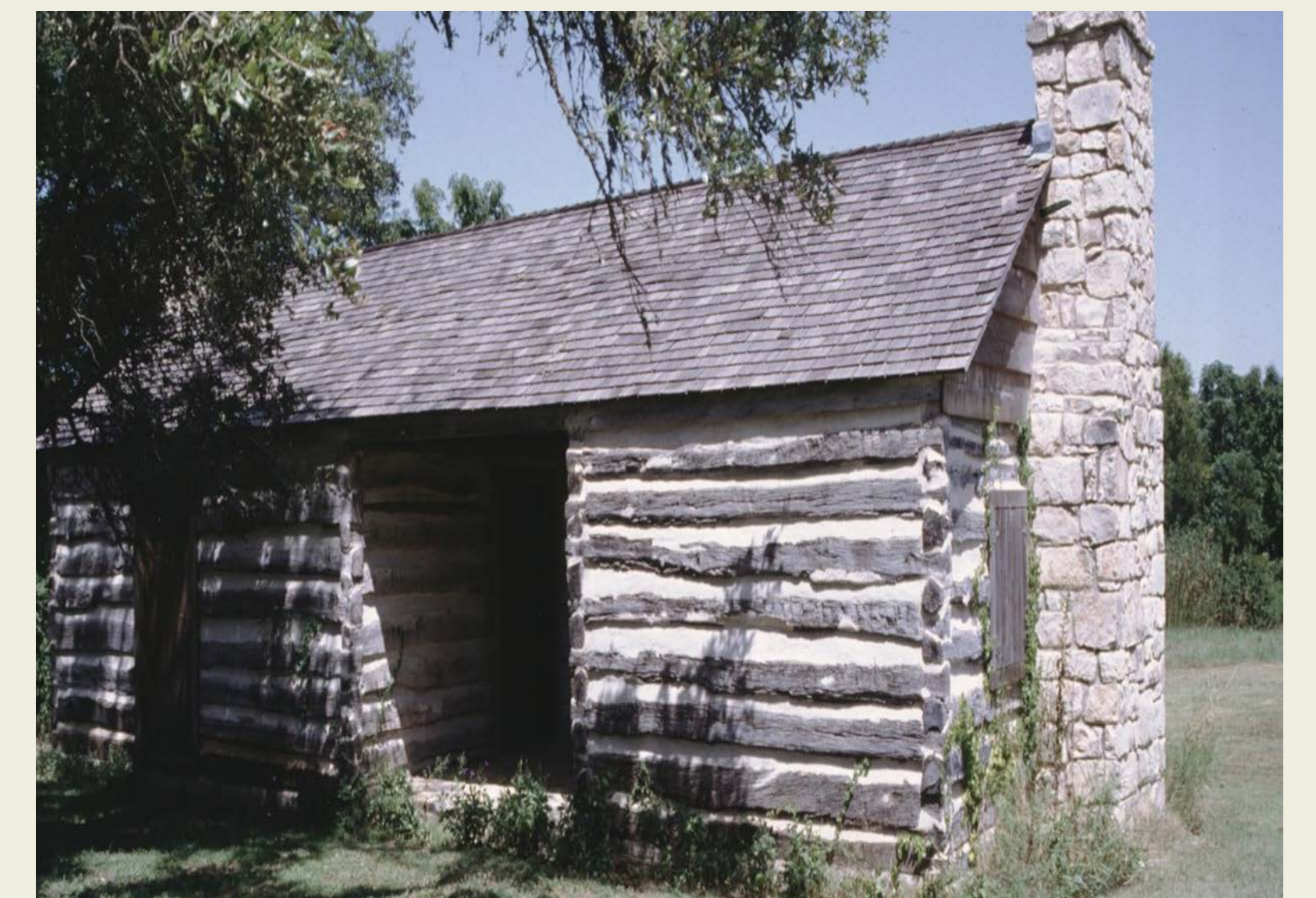
Williamson County's first school was a log cabin built in 1848, located 2 miles southwest of present-day Round Rock. The school taught Mr. Harrell's children and those of other early settlers.

Harrell died at his home in 1853. Harrell is buried at the cemetery he established for his family, which is located at the present-day intersection of Bowman Road and I-35.



Jacob M. Harrell (1804-1853)

Photo from Thompson, Karen R., 2002, Round Rock, Texas: From Cowboys to Computers.



Jacob Harrell's original cabin. The cabin was relocated to Old Settlers Park.

Photo from 1992 historic resources survey, Texas Historical Commission.

Development of Old Town and the Naming of "Round Rock"

In 1851, Thomas C. Oatts established the Brushy Creek Post Office. On August 24, 1854, the town of Brushy was renamed Round Rock by Oatts after the rock in Brushy Creek where he and Jacob Harrell fished.

Old Town was on a trail network in Texas known as the Shawnee Trail. In 1864, the Shawnee Trail was connected to the Chisholm Trail, making Kansas stockyards accessible to local cattle ranchers.

In 1871, the following businesses could be found in Old Town: an insurance agency, two blacksmith shops, a wagon shop, a book seller, a saddle shop, a tombstone business, and John Kirkpatrick's Round Rock Hotel and restaurant. By 1872, a dry goods, grocery and "receiving house" business had been opened by G.W. Davis, J.B. Davis, and H.C. Maddox.

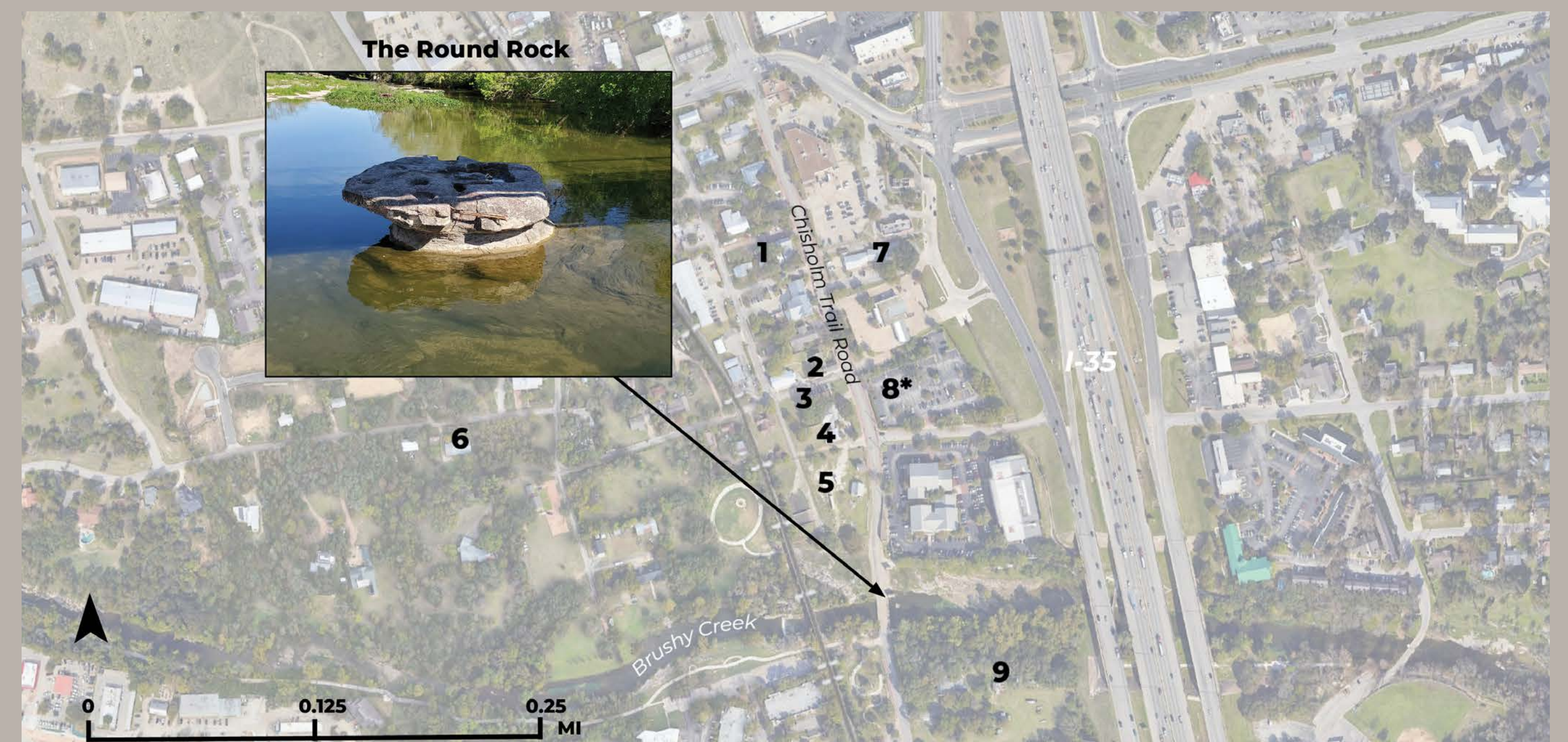
Chisholm Trail Bridge



Wooden bridge leading to Old Town Round Rock in the 1890s.

Photo from UNT Portal to Texas History.

Notable Architecture in Old Town



1. Sellstrom House



Built 1853-1860
Additions in 1930s and 1970s

2. St. Charles Hotel/Post Office



Post Office built 1851, Hotel built 1870
Both are national and Texas landmarks

3. Harris-Ross House



2-room house built 1849
Addition added later

4. Sansom House



Built 1850-1876
Roof replaced 2011

5. Stagecoach Inn



Built 1848-1853
Relocated from 901 RM 620 in 2018

6. Barker-Porter House



Built 1872
Recorded Texas Historic Landmark

7. Inn at Brushy Creek



Built 1850-1862
National Register of Historic Places

8*. Mays & Black Store



Built 1851
Delapidated in 1930s, later demolished

9. McNabb-Quick House



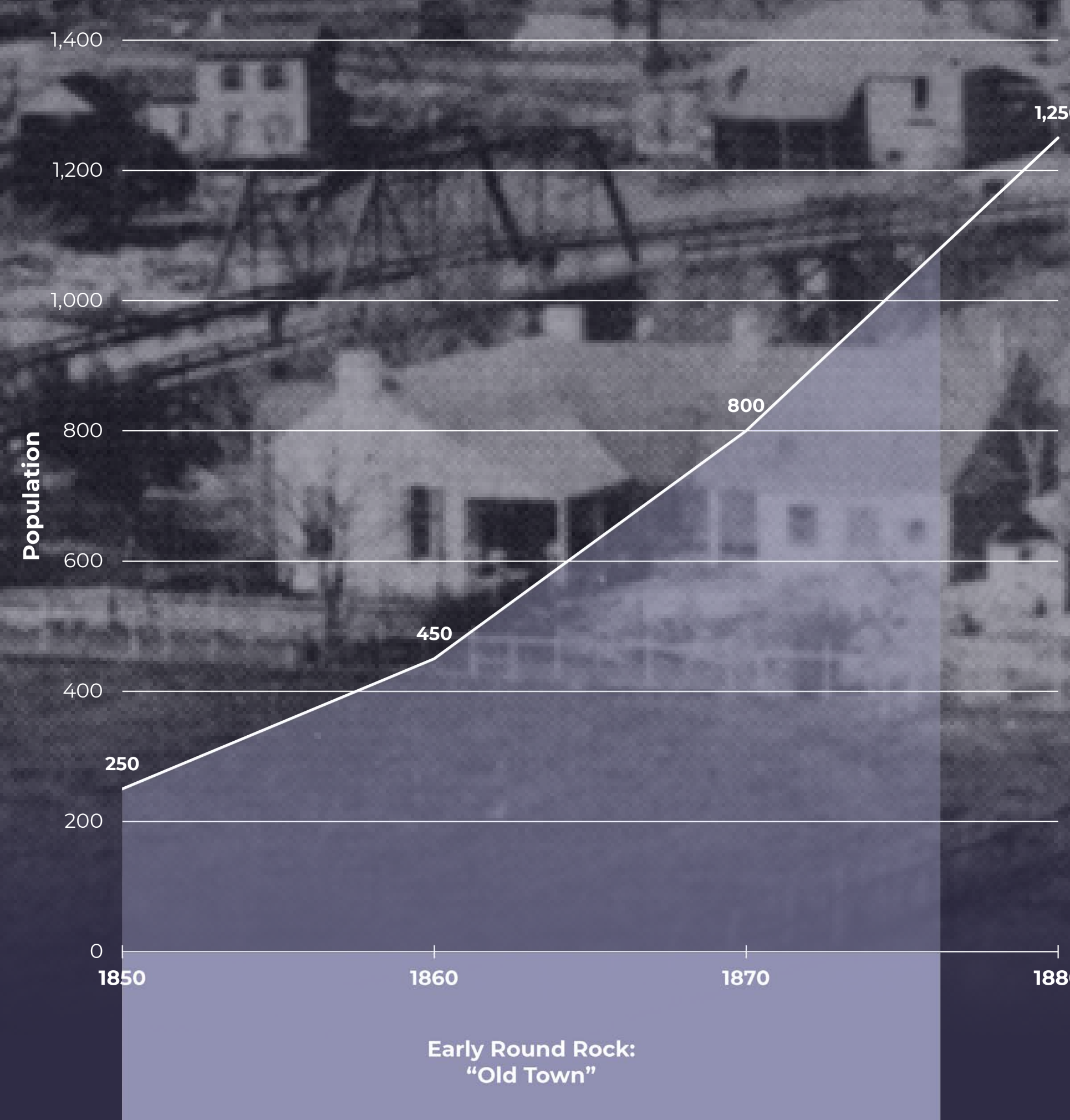
Built 1852-1853
Recorded Texas Historic Landmark

* denotes a demolished property

Development Shifts to New Town

In 1876, the International and Great Northern Railroad arrived in Round Rock. Most commercial activity moved to the newly platted subdivision east of Old Town, which locals called "New Town." Old Town was largely abandoned until the middle of the twentieth century, when individuals took care to restore the many historic stone structures in the area.

Population, 1850-1880 Census



View of old Round Rock circa 1890 from the top of the Round Rock Institute.

Photo from Martin Parker.