

HEERMANN STORE  
(Heermann General Store)  
4308 West Loop 1604  
Somerset vicinity  
Bexar County  
Texas

HABS TX-3545  
*HABS TX-3545*

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

ADDENDUM TO:  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### HEERMANN STORE

HABS No. TX-3545

Location: 4738 West Loop 1604, 0.8 mile west of the intersection of Hwy 1604 and Highway 16, in the vicinity of Somerset, Bexar County, Texas. Located in the southeast corner of Survey No. 50, County Block 4203, the building faces northwest towards Highway 1604.

USGS Thelma 7.5' Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 14.0539102.3233719 (North American Datum 83)

Present Owner: Felix C. Flores

Present Use: Storage

Significance: The Heermann Store stands as one of the few surviving examples of the commercial buildings of rural south Texas. It has served multiple functions throughout its history. During the first few years after its construction, this building was a combination general store, post office, and residence (1892 to 1896). As a general store and post office, it would have served the community of Oak Island, with an estimated population of 600 agriculturalists scattered throughout the area. The building later served as a residence for farmers (ca. 1910 to 1939), and between 1945 and 1970, possibly a support building for a cotton gin. In addition to the main building, the Heermann Store site also includes ruins of an historic building reported to have been a saloon, and possibly at one time a gristmill. The saloon likely operated sometime between 1910 and 1920. The overall property may have been the site of commercial activities serving the Oak Island community for much of the time between 1892 and 1920. Rural general stores throughout this area were often short-lived business ventures, and many of them were abandoned after they ceased to be stores. The Heermann store demonstrates the early rural commercial building's inherent adaptive characteristics.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1892. A date stone is located above the doors on the front façade.

2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and subsequent owners: Theodore Heermann, 1855 to 1896; Felix Heermann, 1898 to 1910; John Easterly, 1910-1939; Robert and Lillian Koch, 1945 to 1970; and Felix C. Flores, 1970 to present.
4. Original and subsequent occupants: At the time the building was constructed in 1892, the owner was Theodore Heermann. Mr. Heermann died in 1896, and his land holdings were subsequently partitioned between his two sons, Felix and Alfred, in 1898. Felix Heermann received the land on which the Heermann store is located (BCDR Book 193, Page 54). Theodore or Felix Heermann may have operated the store. Oral tradition suggests that the family that operated the store lived in the basement. In 1894 Felix Heermann completed an application to operate the "Valmont" post office where the Heermann Store is located (Post Office Department 1894, National Archives microfilm publication M1126, Roll 565). Post offices were often located in stores in rural areas. However, an obituary for Theodore Heermann (San Antonio Daily Express, April 8, 1896) states that Theodore Heermann died "at his home, Valmont Post Office," possibly indicating that it was Theodore Heermann who lived in the store. According to secondary sources (Long n.d., Wheat n.d.), the Valmont Post Office stopped operating in 1896, the year Theodore died. It is not known if the Heermanns continued to operate the store after Theodore's death. Felix Heermann sold 168.4 acres of land on which the store is located to John Easterly in 1910 (BCDR Vol. 328, Page 135). The family of Maximilian Hernandez, sharecroppers, lived in the former store during the time John Easterly owned it. Ignacio Hernandez was born in the building in 1920 (Oscar and Ignacio Hernandez to Pat Castanon, November 11, 2007). Mr. Easterly died in 1939, and after some time in probate, the property was purchased by Robert and Lillian Koch in 1945. Interviews with relatives of the Kochs suggest that the building may have been used to support a cotton gin at one time (Jana Melton to Anna Wulfe, June 2009). The current owner, Felix C. Flores, uses the building for storage.
5. Suppliers:  
  
Lumber (rafters): Frank J. Beitel Lumber Company of San Antonio, Texas  
Cast Iron: Alamo Ironworks of San Antonio, Texas  
Stone: Possibly from quarry on Klemcke family land in the community of Senior, Texas, approximately 2.9 miles southwest of the Heermann Store.
6. Original plans and construction: Photos of the structure provided by the Hernandez family (ca. 1910-1939) show that the building has changed very little since that time. No additional documentation is available for the building.

7. Alterations and additions: Flashing remains as evidence of a previous addition to the west wall of the building (date unknown). The addition, however, has since been removed.

B. Historical Context:

Theodore Heermann owned the land at the time the building was constructed. The date stone is engraved 1892. Construction of the building probably began as early as 1891, as evidenced by Theodore Heermann's checkbook stubs from that year documenting the purchase of lumber, a boiler engine, and seed cotton from Beitel Lumber Company. Beitel Lumber Company is labeled as the supplier of the building's rafters.

In 1855, Theodore Heermann purchased the land on which the Heermann Store is now located. This land was part of Survey No. 50 out of the Nicholas Mosby Dawson headright grant of 1838 (BCDR Book N1, Page 635). The Heermann portion of Survey No. 50 encompassed approximately 738 acres, which formed a long narrow strip of land bounded on the north by the Medina River. In 1856, Theodore Heermann commissioned the construction of his first structure on his Survey No. 50 lands, near the Medina River. Subsequent construction on his land near the Medina River is well documented (Highley and Hindes 1995).

The impetus for building construction near the southern end of the Heermann's Survey No. 50 lands may have been road development across the Heermann farm. In 1884 the Bexar County Commissioners Court proposed rerouting the Rockport to Castroville Road, known locally as simply the Rockport Road, in such a way that it would cut off part of the Heermann farm. By the 1930s several houses are clustered near the Heermann Store on both sides of the Rockport Road (Stoner System ca. 1931). As late as the 1930s, the two main areas of development on the Heermann Survey No. 50 lands were clustered around the Medina River and the Rockport Road, two miles apart.

In addition to being a store, the building was a post office from 1894-1986. In December 1894, Theodore Heermann's son, Felix, applied to the Post Office Department to operate the Valmont Post Office. The map provided for its location places it on the Heermann Store property location (Post Office Department 1894, National Archives microfilm publication M1126, Roll 565). The post office was named after the Heermann family farm and ranch, which had long been known by the name "Valmont," a name that was probably derived from Theodore Heermann's brother, Valentine Mott Heermann (Highley and Hindes 1995). The application to establish the Valmont Post Office states that it is in the neighborhood of Oak Island, which is defined as "a scattered neighborhood which can poll 150 or more votes[,and]... on the basis of 4 to a family about 600 inhabitants." The application also states that the post office is not on a regular route, and it is listed as a "special office" that is to be supplied by the Senior Post Office.

William Klemcke operated the post office in the community of Senior, Texas, 2.9 miles southwest of the Heermann Store. It was located in the Klemcke family's Senior General Store. There are entries in the Senior General Store records showing that the Heermann's purchased supplies from the Klemcke family as late as 1890 (Janie Cadena, pers. comm. June 22, 2009). Additionally, across from the Senior Post Office, on land previously owned by the Klemckes, is a quarry of the red sandstone, which matches the stone that was used to build the Heermann Store. It is possible that the stone was purchased from the Klemckes (Janie Cadena, pers. comm. June 22, 2009).

Theodore Heermann was a physician, who traveled throughout Bexar County to see patients well into the early 1890s (Heermann Family Papers). It is possible that he may have seen patients at the Heermann Store building. Oral tradition indicates that the family who operated the store lived in the building on the basement level. There is some question as to whether Theodore and his wife, Felipa lived there or Felix Heermann and his wife. The Valmont Post Office only operated from 1895 to 1896, (Long n.d., Wheat n.d.). Its operations ended the year of Theodore Heermann's death. An obituary for Theodore Heermann (*San Antonio Daily Express*, April 8, 1896) read that Theodore Heermann died "at his home, Valmont Post Office". There is no documentation to support that the store continued to operate after 1896.

Alfred Heermann inherited the remaining Heermann lands in the vicinity of the Medina River (BCDR Book 193, Page 54). Both Felix and Alfred Heermann appear to have continued to live on the family farm lands for some time, but their mother Felipa Heermann moved away from the farm sometime between 1896 and 1900. In the 1900 census records, Felipa Heermann is listed as head of household at a residence in San Antonio, and she was living with three boarders (U.S. Census Bureau, Justice Precinct 2, Sheet No. 15, 1900). The 1900 census lists Felix Heermann as having a residence with his wife and three children in Bexar County outside the city limits of San Antonio, and his occupation is listed as "farmer." His brother Alfred, who inherited the lands adjacent to Felix Heermann's Survey No. 50 lands, is listed as a farmer on the same census sheet (U.S. Census Bureau, Justice Precinct 5, Sheet No. 18, 1900). In the 1910 census records, Felix Heermann is listed as a rancher, but his residence is in San Antonio. Also in 1910, Felix Heermann sold John Easterly the parcel of land on which the Heermann Store is located (BCDR Book 328, Page 135).

During the time that John Easterly owned the Heermann Store, it was used primarily as a residence for farmers. Interviews with Ignacio Hernandez, who was born in the store in 1920, indicate that his father, Maximilian Hernandez was a sharecropper for John Easterly (Oscar and Ignacio Hernandez to Pat Castanon, November 11, 2007). Ignacio Hernandez recalls that the family grew cotton, blackberries, plums, watermelons, cucumbers and several other types of vegetables. The Hernandez family took the products to the market, first by wagon, next by Model T, and then by Model A. The Hernandez family lived in the building until 1939, when John Easterly died, and the land went into probate.

The 1910 census shows John Easterly's occupation as "saloon keeper." Two locals consulted about the Heermann Store property have both suggested that the ruins of a building less than 150 feet from the store are the remains of what was once a saloon. Janie Cadena (pers. comm., June 22, 2009), who is a member of the Klemcke family and who maintains the Klemcke family's historic papers, stated that she had always heard that the ruins were a saloon. A member of the Ernst family, who lived on the adjacent property and who was born in the area ca. 1913, also stated in a 2009 interview (Jana Melton to Anna Wulfe June, 2009) that the ruins were a saloon, the cotton gin was located in the store itself, and cotton bales were stored in the basement of the store.

The current landowner, Felix C. Flores, believes the ruin was a gristmill, because it was near a pond that could have served as overflow, and because there is a well adjacent to it. Another local consulted about the property also believed the ruins were a mill of some kind (pers. comm. Freddie Hooter, June 9, 2009). The structure differs greatly in construction and design from the Heermann Store. The ruins are the remains of a large (approximately 40 feet by 50 feet) stone masonry structure. The structure was constructed of different sandstone than that on the Heermann Store, probably a locally available fieldstone. The stones are a mix of irregularly shapes and sizes in a random to semi-coursed pattern. A wing wall less than five feet high off the main structure may have been a perimeter wall spanning several hundred feet. The current owner states that the wall ran parallel to the old Rockport Road (pers. comm. Felix C. Flores, June 14, 2009). An opening in the north wall is large enough to have accommodated a wagon, but it also would be approximately the size expected of a rough opening for double doors. The building suffered a fire, as evidenced by scorched sandstone surfaces on the interior walls.

In 1945, Robert and Lillian Koch purchased the Heermann Store property from John Easterly's estate (BCDR Book 2117, Page 5). Lillian Koch was a member of the Ernst family, who owned several of the parcels surrounding the land on which the Heermann Store sits. It is likely that the reference made by an Ernst family member in 2009 to the use of the store as a cotton gin may have dated to the time period that the Kochs owned the property. In an interview with a member of the Somerset Historical Society, Freddie Hooter (pers. comm., June 9, 2009), stated that she had worked with one of the Ernst family members, Fred Ernst, for thirty years and he had mentioned throwing bales of hay [sic] in the basement. Fred Ernst may have been referring to the bales of cotton noted by another Ernst family member.

Robert Koch sold the Heermann Store property to Felix and Dora Flores in 1970 (BCDR Book 06331, Page 0347). The Flores family has used the building for storage since they purchased the property. The Flores family makes necessary repairs to keep the structure stable.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Heermann Store is masonry rural commercial building constructed of rough-coursed red sandstone blocks. The storefront has a parapet façade and features central double doors with windows on either side of the door. Openings on the front and rear façade are accented by brick arches.
2. Condition of Fabric: Overall, historic fabric has good integrity and most of the structure and remaining historic fabric appears stable. More detailed condition descriptions are listed for specific features under the appropriate headings.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 28 feet, 11 inches by 54 feet, 0 inches. The building is one story with a basement. The storefront façade forms a parapet wall above a shed roof. The front façade measures 17 feet, 9 inches above the finished floor. This is referred to herein as the north wall. The west wall measures 12 feet, 8 inches above the finished floor. The east wall measures 17 feet, 9 inches above the finished floor. The south wall varies from 12 feet, 8 inches to 17 feet, 3 inches above the finished floor. The finished floor measures 8 feet, 9 inches above the basement floor on all four walls.
2. Foundation: The stone masonry basement walls are 24 inches thick from the basement floor to the water table. The walls are constructed in a semi-coursed pattern with rough-cut dark red coarse-grained sandstone blocks. Some chinking stones are placed randomly throughout the walls. The water table is concrete sloped on top to shed water. Walls are mortared with rough mortar joints of lime-based, coarse-sand-tempered mortar. Foundation walls appear to be in good condition with only minor areas of eroded mortar, primarily near the ground surface. The concrete cap at the water table has hairline cracks periodically running perpendicular to walls. Vents between the ground surface and the water table are braced with vertical iron rounds and horizontal iron plates. Fine-sand-tempered Portland cement appears to be applied by trowel onto the bottom interior surface of these vents and sloped to shed water. Galvanized steel mesh covering some of the vents is imbedded in this Portland-cement-based concrete. Based on these observations it is likely that these features are not original to the building.
3. Walls: The stone masonry walls are constructed of rough-coursed sandstone blocks in a semi-coursed pattern with chinking stones located randomly

throughout. Similar sandstone used in this building can be found within three miles of the site. There is one quarry site for this stone located on land previously owned by the Klemcke family, who were known to have been business associates of the Heermanns (Janie Cadena pers. comm. June 2009). Walls are 18 inches thick above the water table and are mortared with rough joints. Exterior mortar is decoratively scored along mortar joints. Interiors of walls are covered primarily with plaster. Brick arches are located above all four windows and both double door sets. The bricks on the front façade are yellow brick, while interior and south wall arches are constructed of orange brick. The date stone above the front façade wall doors is a cut limestone block. In the east wall, attic vents are lined with milled lumber. Wall conditions are good. Most of the exterior mortar joints between masonry blocks are intact, though much of the rough mortar has eroded. On the north wall façade there are two large vertical cracks above the date stone and doorway arch. There is greater mortar erosion between the water table and windowsills than elsewhere. On the west wall, a vertical crack runs from the roof down to the top of the water table at a point approximately 5 feet from the north wall. There is evidence of water infiltration, possibly due to a previous roof leak along the west wall. Approximately 40% of this wall is covered with moss on the exterior and approximately 10% of interior wall (opposite the vertical exterior crack) is covered with algae. On the south wall, much of the mortar has eroded above the window near the southeast corner of the building. The east wall is in very good condition.

4. Structural systems, framing: The masonry walls are all load bearing. The floor system is supported by posts, which are spaced along the length of the building. These posts are notched to receive a center span beam running lengthwise. Posts, beams, and joists are a mixture of rough-sawn and plane-sawn lumber. Many of the members of the structural system have been replaced. Beams are constructed of a mix of two by twelve and two by ten boards sistered together to form four inch wide beams, as well as a section of two by six boards, three boards wide, forming a six inch wide beam. Rough sawn six inch diameter wood posts appear to be original. The structural system supporting the floor is unstable and in need of minor repair. The shed roof system is constructed of plane-sawn rafters built into the stone masonry walls and fastened to ceiling joists on the low end of the west wall. Ceiling joist ends are visible from the exterior of the west wall and sit on ledges atop both the east and west walls. Ceiling joists are also plane sawn and are braced to rafters with vertical members and fastened to the rafters at their ends at the west wall. The roof system appears to be in very stable condition.
5. Openings: The north elevation facing Highway 1604 features double doors in the center of the façade a window on either side of the double doors. The south wall mirrors this arrangement of doors and windows.
  - a. Doorways and doors: Each of the four doors in the building is a three-panel style. The upper two panels are removable above the lock rail. This

removable piece fits into the top of the door with a metal pin and has a handle at the bottom for removal. On the interiors of doors opposite the removable piece are the remnants of three-light, fixed windows with two horizontal muntins. No glass remains in the windows. The doors are painted red on their exteriors and unpainted on the interior. There are no layers of paint underlying the red paint. Interior door trim is simple, unpainted, plane-sawn wood with mitered joints. Thresholds or top stoops outside both sets of doors are cast iron plates that bear the name "Alamo Iron Works." The doors are in fair to good condition, with the rear door set showing the most wear at the bottom of the doors where the pair meet.

- b. Windows: Exteriors of windows have sloped concrete. Bars on the exteriors of windows are vertical iron rounds with horizontal iron plates. Window jambs and interior trim are likely original, and grooves in the side jambs indicate operable sash. All original window sashes are missing. A photograph from the Hernandez family (ca. 1910-1939) shows that the windows were double hung, but only one four-light outer sash is visible. The window is probably opened in the photograph. Each window has been replaced with two (top and bottom) one-over-one aluminum windows, framed with scrap lumber fastened to the original jambs. The interior casing trim is simple, unpainted, plane-sawn wood with mitered joints. Window trim includes an apron of simple plane-sawn wood and a stool with rounded edges. Although the sashes are missing, the remaining window elements are in good condition.

- 6. Roof: The roof deck is constructed of shiplap plane-sawn boards of varying sizes with the majority measuring 12 inches wide. Some boards are replacement boards, but most appear to be original. The original roofing material has been replaced with composite shingles. The side of the north wall parapet facing the shed roof is stuccoed and has a pre-finished metal cap flashing. The stucco is carried up to the top of the parapet and forms a coping to shed water from the top of the parapet wall. The east wall forms a 6-inch parapet above the roof that is covered with a metal cap.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: There are no partition walls in the building. There is a full basement with a dirt floor.
- 2. Flooring: The wood floors vary in width. Most of the historic flooring is 3" wide, with other planks that are six and twelve inches wide. The flooring is nailed directly to the floor joists. Several areas of flooring have been replaced with plywood.

3. Stairways: The stairway to the basement is of newer construction. It is located in an area of the floor covered by plywood, therefore, not clearly identifiable as the original location of the stairway. The stairway is constructed of two by six stringers and treads.
4. Decorative features and trim: Remnants of wood plugs in the stone onto which baseboards would have been nailed are evident, but none of the baseboard trim was observed. A few remnants of the tongue-in-groove bead board ceiling were identified.
5. Hardware: When facing the front façade, the door on the left has a lockset, which is likely original. The lockset accommodates a skeleton key. The broken door knob for the lockset was found. The doorknob handle was red ceramic with a thick black or very dark green/brown glaze.
6. Mechanical equipment: Remnants of older electrical wire were hanging from nails on the walls.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape: The site retains much of the character of its historic rural landscape, but no specific historic landscape features were identified. The surviving historic elements of the site are the Heermann Store building and the ruins of another historic building that may have been a saloon (Janie Cadena, pers. comm. June 2009, Jana Melton to Anna Wulfe, June 2009), and potentially a gristmill or cotton gin at one time (Felix Flores, pers. comm. June 4, 2009). The standing walls of the ruins sit approximately 165 feet northwest of the Heermann Store. Both buildings historically faced Rockport Road, which is no longer visible on the landscape, because it has been realigned to form the present Highway 1604.
2. Outbuildings: All outbuildings on site are recent additions, and no historic outbuildings remain.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: Photographs have been provided by the Hernandez family who lived in the building ca. 1910 to 1939. These photographs are on file at the San Antonio Conservation Society.

B. Interviews:

Cadena, Janie. Interviewed by Deirdre Remley of the University of Texas at San Antonio, by phone on June 22, 2009.

Falbo, Jacqueline "Jackie". Interviewed by Pat Ezell and Pat Castanon of the San Antonio Conservation Society Farms and Ranches Committee, at her home on January 13, 2007.

Flores, Felix C. Interviewed by Brita Pearson, Deirdre Remley, and Anna Wulfe of the University of Texas at San Antonio, at his home on June 4, 2009.

Flores, Felix C. Interviewed by Brita Pearson, Deirdre Remley, and Anna Wulfe of the University of Texas at San Antonio, throughout the site on June 14, 2009.

Hernandez, Oscar and Ignacio. Interviewed by Pat Castanon of the San Antonio Conservation Society Farms and Ranches Committee, by phone on November 11, 2007.

Hooter, Freddie. Interviewed by Deirdre Remley of the University of Texas at San Antonio, by phone on June 9, 2009.

Melton, Jana. Interviewed by Anna Wulfe of the University of Texas at San Antonio, by phone on June 2009.

C. Bibliography:

Bexar County Deed Records (BCDR). Accessed online at  
<http://www.countyclerk.bexar.landata.com/>

Bexar County Commissioners Court

1884 Road Notice (Rockport to Castroville Road). Document on file in Applewhite Reservoir cultural resources study, University of Texas at San Antonio, Center for Archaeological Research.

Heermann Family Papers

n.d. Documents on file at Jacqueline Falbo Residence. Cited from notes of Pat Castanon and Pat Ezell of the San Antonio Conservation Society, Farms and Ranches Committee.

Highley, Cheryl L. and V. Kay Hinds

1995 41BX527: The History of Property Ownership with an Emphasis on the Residency of Theodore Heermann. In *La Tierra*. South Texas Archaeological Association.

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n.d. Valmont Texas. In *The Handbook of Texas Online*,  
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/VV/hrvbg.html>, accessed on  
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Post Office Department

1894 "Location Paper," (Valmont Post Office). National Archives Microfilm  
Publication M1126, Roll 565 (on file at San Antonio Main Library, Texana  
Department).

San Antonio Daily Express

1896 Theodore Heermann Obituary, April 8, 1896. Document transcribed by Pat  
Castanon. Document on file, San Antonio Conservation Society, Farms and  
Ranches Committee.

Stoner System

1931 Map 1123, ca. 1931. Document on file, Bexar County Infrastructure Services  
Department. San Antonio, TX.

U.S. Census Bureau

1900 Documents on microfilm, San Antonio Conservation Society.

Wheat, Jim

n.d. Post Masters and Post Offices of Bexar County, TX.  
<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txpost/bexar.html>, accessed online on June  
17, 2009.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

1. Census records 1920 and 1930 for John Easterly.
2. Obituary for John Easterly.
3. Additional interviews with Ernst family.
4. Additional interviews with Hernandez family, regarding the nearby ruins.
5. Post Office Department records indicating the closure of Valmont Post Office.
6. Senior Post Office/Store records regarding Heermann accounts.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted under the direction of Sue Ann Pemberton, FAIA. Most of the historical research was provided by Pat Castanon and Pat Ezell of the San Antonio Conservation Society, Farms and Ranches Committee. The survey was completed by graduate students in the College of Architecture at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Historic documentation was prepared by Deirdre Remley and edited by Nancy A. Bryant. Field documentation and drawings were generated by: Ricardo A. Alarcon, George A. Barrera, Mario A. Cantu, Andy S. Castillo, Christopher Castillo, Jennifer E. Deller, Dorian M. Gutierrez, Eduardo A. Hernandez, Adekunle A. Lufadeju, Sonal Oswal, Brita K. Pearson, Judith M. Ruvuna, Justin M. Scanio, Ryan P. Schmidt, Mathew Thompkins, Shayna L. Thompson, George Torres, and Anna R. Wulfe. Drawing and final documentation was completed by Keishi Matsunaga, Ryan P. Schmidt, Nancy A. Bryant, K. Jordan Morgan, Marzieh Rostami and Dean A. Wiederstein.