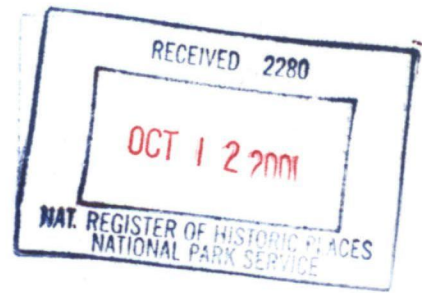


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1264



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: President's House

OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Texas A&M University-Commerce Heritage House

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: Southwest of Circle Dr., north of Stonewall St., between Campbell and Bois D'Arc streets

CITY OR TOWN: Commerce

VICINITY: N/A

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

STATE: Texas

CODE: TX

COUNTY: Hunt

CODE: 231

ZIP CODE: 75429

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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    nationally    statewide x locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

9-19-2001  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

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    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 the Keeper

Date of Action

11/21/01

---

**5. CLASSIFICATION**

---

**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** public

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** N/A

---

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

---

**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** EDUCATION/education-related = president's house

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** EDUCATION/education-related = reception and office building

---

**7. DESCRIPTION**

---

**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Georgian Revival

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION CONCRETE  
WALLS BRICK, WOOD  
ROOF ASPHALT SHINGLE  
OTHER

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-12).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---

The President's House (1927) is the second oldest surviving building on the Texas A&M University-Commerce campus. The two-story Georgian Revival style house is located on the southern part of the campus, just southwest of Circle Drive, in Commerce, Texas. The frame structure is faced with red brick laid in a running bond. A square entry porch decorated with a white cornice, two pairs of Doric demicolumns, and a black iron balustrade around the porch roof, dignify the asymmetrical primary (north) faced. The porte cochere on the east side and the smaller porch on the west side reflect the geometry and detailing of the front porch. The back door on the south side exits through an enclosed wood frame porch, creating a storage area and servants' entrance. The President's House exterior remains essentially unchanged from the time of its construction in 1927. The house is in good condition and retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

---

The President's House is located in the old (pre-1947) part of campus. It is offset slightly to the southwest from Circle Drive, an oval drive that was once the center of campus. To the rear (south) is Stonewall Street, with Campbell Street to the east and Bois D'Arc Street to the west. On the northwest, facing Circle Drive, is the old Education (now Social Sciences) Building (1925). Immediately east, across Campbell Street, is an older building, built as the first heating plant and now housing the maintenance offices, and a newer Journalism building. A parking lot is directly south of the house, across Stonewall Street.

Georgian Revival, a variation of the perpetually resurrected American Colonial Revival, was popular from the end of the nineteenth century to around 1930. Often built of red brick, with asymmetrical front facades—unlike original Georgian period homes—these liberal interpretations of eighteenth century houses wear superimposed detailing inspired by colonial precedents. Mandatory columns range from correct classical orders to simple implications of bases and capitols made of molding. Columns and windows may be paired, as they never were originally, and doors may have sidelights but no fanlight.

### North façade

The primary (north) elevation of the President's House is asymmetrical with the entrance and entry porch offset to the east. The entrance is recessed. Two rectangular brick pilasters and two rectangular brick columns support the square, single-story, flat-roofed porch. Two sets of white, coupled demicolumns, resting on square, concrete-capped piers, decorate the face of the square columns. A flight of four poured concrete steps leads to the concrete slab entry. The architrave cornice (lacking a frieze) features an entablature with a square element on the architrave above each capital. Between the entablature and cornice is a narrow dentil molding. The porch roof is crowned with a narrow black iron balustrade, with a circular element in the center front, and topped at the corners and at major vertical elements by metal finials. The doorway is comprised of sixteen rectangular lights framed with white-painted wood, flanked by eight-paned sidelights. There is no transom or fanlight.

Attached to either end of the porch and paralleling the façade is a metal balustrade matching that on the porch roof (but with no finials or circular elements). The balusters are set into a base of poured concrete below a single row of soldier bond bricks, capped with a concrete coping. On either end, and in the center of the west balustrade, is a low brick pier with a single decorative soldier course just below a concrete cap.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

Beneath all windows on both floors are brick sill courses. Above each first-floor window is a soldier course lintel. The second-floor windows are flush with the fascia board beneath the eaves. On the first floor, east of the entrance, is a set of 1/1 double-hung double windows. To the west is a row of four single 1/1 double-hung windows. Above the double windows, on the second floor, is an identical set. All sets of double windows on the house are decorated on the center portion of the surround with molding suggestive of the capitols and bases of columns. Between the first-floor and second-floor windows is a decorative pattern-bond brick rectangle. Two single 1/1 double-hung windows are centered above the entrance. To the west is a row of shorter 1/1 double-hung windows that matches the first-floor row. Between each upper and lower window is a pattern-bond brick square. These pattern-bond elements repeat the geometry of the piers and entablatures, and appear only on the primary façade.

Window screens in wood frames once covered all windows except those on the back porch. Although the windows were (and remain) 1/1, the screens were divided by fake muntins into sixteen sections. From the exterior the windows appeared to be 8/8s (Figure 7-3.) This may have been a cost-saving method of making stock 1/1 windows conform in appearance to the multi-light revival style. The screens were removed at an unknown date, and aluminum storm windows placed on the exterior; however, the original windows in their wood frames are still in place.

The medium-pitched gabled roof is shingled with white asphalt shingles similar in size but lighter in color than the originals. The eaves are finished with a simple cornice. White gutter on the two long facades drain into white leaders on both ends. Old photographs show a finial at the point of each ridge (Figure 7-3). Still visible in 1957, they had disappeared by 1972.

President Samuel Whitley, who occupied the house from 1927 to 1946, at one point added nonfunctional decorative green shutters to the north façade, but only on the outer end of each row or pair of windows. He also put large ornate planted urns on the three low front piers. During the administration of Dr. James G. Gee (1947-1966) the shutters and iron balustrades were painted white and the urns removed. Also, Ca. 1950, rigid white awnings were installed over the windows on all but the primary façade, and over the second story door and porch on the east side. As part of the 1993-94 rehabilitation, the shutters and awnings were removed and the white paint cleaned from the ironwork.

### East façade

The outstanding feature of the east façade is a once-functional porte cochere attached to the north end of the wall; the shape and detailing echo the entry porch (Figure 7-4). Concrete-capped brick piers (but with no classical demicolumns) support the flat roof, with a low brick wall, capped with concrete copping, between them. The roof is decorated with a cornice and an iron balustrade, taller than the one on the porch, with finials but no circular element. A sixteen-light wood frame door leads from the porte cochere to the interior of the house. A concrete driveway once ran from Circle Drive in front of the house, through the porte cochere, to a garage in back (now removed). Now, a wheelchair ramp, installed as part of the 1993-94 rehabilitation, runs from the southeast (back) corner of the house, along the façade, to the door. The ramp is brick, capped with concrete to match the piers, with a black metal railing that matches the original iron balustrades. In addition to a hanging lamp in the center of the porte cochere soffit, two brass-colored "coach lamp" style

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 7

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

bracket lamps now illuminate the ramp. A concrete driveway now runs from the street behind the house up to the porte cochere.

On the first floor, to the rear of the east façade, is a 1/1 double-hung double window. In the center, between the double window and the door, is a small single 1/1 double-hung window. The second floor displays three sets of 1/1 double-hung double windows, symmetrically spaced. As on the north façade, all of the windows have brick sill courses, the lower windows have soldier course lintels, and the upper windows abut the fascia.

Above the cornice the gable end is finished in wood lap siding, painted white. In the center is a Palladian window with a simple surround. The three equal-width windows are now filled with fixed louvers, but a 1929 photograph clearly shows multiple-paned glass windows (Figure 7-3). By 1938 the louvers were in place. The juncture of the roof and gable end is finished with a simple cornice ending in short cornice returns.

### South façade

Extending from the west side of the south (rear) façade is a single story room with a hipped roof and a small 1/1 double-hung window in the center of the wall (Figure 7-5). The brick veneer covering this room abuts the brick on the main part of the structure, indicating that it was probably added at a later date (see West façade, below). Extending from the east end of the room is an enclosed porch or sunroom covered with wood lap siding painted white. Most of the porch wall is filled with two sets of 1/1 double-hung triple windows (totaling six windows). The surrounds on these are not trimmed to indicate columns. The roof abuts the roof of the small room, but has a much lower, nearly flat pitch. A single unbroken cornice, identical to those on the entry porch and porte cochere, runs along all three sides of the room and porch unit.

Most of the enclosed porch rests on a poured concrete foundation, but what appears to be a brick pier extends from the east end of the small room, abutting the porch foundation (Figure 7-5). This discontinuity implies an original shorter porch, resting on the brick pier and under the same hipped roof as the room. The porch was probably extended at an early, unknown date, with windows and siding installed all at once along the entire side. This is evidenced by a 1929 photograph showing, in the rear façade, a set of double windows and a door with a short flight of steps that are now enclosed by the porch and by the location of a sidewalk indicated in an early site plan. In the narrow east end of the porch is a door with side lights and a wall-mounted lamp (identical to those on the east façade) in the center above the door (Figure 7-5). A stoop with four concrete steps is perpendicular to the door; along the outer edge is a black metal railing similar, but not identical to, the original balustrades. Immediately east of the steps, flush with the top of the foundation and framed by a white painted wood surround, is a square opening to the sub-floor crawlspace.

In the east end of the main structure façade, flush with the end of the porch, is a 1/1 double-hung double window identical to the one now enclosed by the porch. Two sets of identical double windows are positioned on the second floor directly above these two first floor windows. Further west on the wall is a small 1/1 single window, and on the west end of the façade is a medium 1/1 double-hung double window. The visible first floor window has a soldier bond lintel course, the upper floor windows are flush with the eave cornice fascia, and all windows have brick sill courses.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 8

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---

### West façade

A small porch on the west façade repeats the theme of the front entrance and the porte cochere (Figures 7-5, 7-7). The flat roof, supported by two square concrete-capped brick pillars, displays an identical cornice and a high iron balustrade. Unlike the porte cochere roof, this one is intended to function as a balcony. The raised floor of the porch is built of brick topped with concrete; three concrete steps descend from the center between two brick piers that are the same height as the porch floor. Beneath the roof is a sixteen-light door, with a white wood frame and surround, a concrete sill, and a soldier course lintel. The door opens to the left. North of the door, within the porch enclosure, is a 1/1 single double-hung window.

Just outside the porch, to the north, is the exterior of the chimney, which extends from the wall only the width of one brick. Just below the throat, level with the soldier course lintels on the first floor windows, is a decorative soldier course the width of the lower section of chimney. As it rises, the chimney is alternately in front of the eave cornice fascia, but behind the corona, in front of the lap siding on the gable end and the gable cornice fascia, but behind the gable cornice corona. The top of the chimney is corbelled and ends at the same height as the roof ridge.

Next to the chimney, on the north end of the façade, is a 1/1 single double-hung window. Below it is a square crawlspace opening identical to the one on the south. To the south of the porch are two 1/1 single double-hung windows, offset into the nearest half of the remaining wall space. Below these is a narrow, horizontal opening to ventilate the crawlspace. On the second floor, a 1/1 single double-hung window is centered above each of the windows on the bottom. Above the lower door is a door leading to the roof balcony; however, the upstairs door is recessed. The recess is finished with white painted wood siding, narrower than that on the gable ends. A 1/1 single double-hung window with a wood surround is in each side wall of the recess, perpendicular to the door. The door is a single large pane of glass in a wood frame with a wood surround, both painted white. The gable end on the west side is identical to the one on the east, including the louvered Palladian window, with the exception of the chimney running up the north end.

A brick two-car garage was built, at President Whitley's request, behind the house in 1928 or 1929. Glimpses of it can be seen in photographs as late as 1989. It had a side-gabled roof and a white eave cornice matching the house. At some point a rigid, split-level canopy, supported by round metal posts, covered the sidewalk between the door of the covered porch and the garage door. Both garage and canopy have been removed.

The house retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The interior originally contained fourteen rooms—two bathrooms, a dining room, a living room, four bedrooms, a storage room, and an enclosed porch. Although the interior of the house has been modified with the installment of an elevator (to conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act), and the former bedrooms are modified into offices, it retains its original dimensions, doors, and all of the original windows. With the exception of a ramp on the east side for handicapped access, and changes on the interior, the materials—brick and wood siding—are intact. The house, surrounded by several classroom buildings, still conveys its education-related function. Although no longer used as a residence for the sitting president, the President's House continues its legacy as a place for visitors and alumni who come to the campus.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 9

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---



Figure 7-1. President's House illustrated in the 1929 Locust, the ETSU yearbook. View facing southwest. Photographer unknown.



Figure 7-2. Primary (north) façade in 1996. Photographer unknown

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 10

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---



Figure 7-3. East façade, 1929.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 11

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---



Figure 7-4. East façade with porte cochere.



Figure 7-5. South and west facades.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 12

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas



Figure 7-6. Added porch on south façade.



Figure 7-7. West façade

---

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

---

**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- 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 VALUE, 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:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Education, Architecture

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1927-1951

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1927

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** George Lindsey & Roy Kilmer, architects

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-13 through 8-18).

---

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

---

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheets 9-19 through 9-20).

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- 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 (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University *Texas A&M University - Commerce*
- Other -- Specify Repository:

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

The President's House (now the Heritage House) is located on the campus of Texas A&M University-Commerce, a historically state supported university in Commerce, Texas. (Texas A&M University-Commerce is the second largest campus in the Agricultural and Mechanical University System.) This modified Georgian Revival house was constructed in 1927 during the administration of Dr. Samuel Whitely, the third president of the institution. It retains a high degree of integrity and is nominated to the National Register of Historical Places under Criterion A for its association with the history of Texas A & M University-Commerce in the area of education, and Criterion C in the area of architecture as an excellent example of Georgian Revival style, both at the local level.

Professor William L. Mayo, a Kentucky-born educator who had taught school in Pecan Gap, Texas, briefly in 1888-89, chartered Mayo's College in Cooper, Texas, in 1889, as a private proprietary teacher's institution. Like many other small struggling private colleges of the time, Mayo's College depended on multipurpose administration/classroom room buildings and wood frame dormitories. The building that served as the first home of the college was a two-story frame T-shaped structure with a large front porch and bell tower. A disastrous fire in 1894 burned it to the ground. This presented Professor Mayo with the opportunity of moving the school to a new location. Encouraged by liberal offer of money and land from the citizens of Commerce, he opened the doors of the school, now called East Texas Normal College, in downtown Commerce in September 1894.

The next year the college moved to a ten-acre site southwest of the downtown area. College Hall, the first building constructed on the Commerce campus, with its auditorium, classrooms, library, physics and chemistry labs, served as the principal education facility. Later Mayo added several wooden dormitories for the growing student population. On January 28, 1907, disaster struck when College Hall burned to the ground. With help from the citizens of Commerce, Mayo replaced the building with a new brick structure to house administration offices, classrooms and an auditorium. On January 7, 1911, yet another fire hit the college. This time the flames destroyed the three oldest dormitories on the west side of campus. All together, the citizens of Commerce subscribed to funding three separate times to underwrite the costs of reconstruction after the fires, as well as construction of the campus's original buildings. Later, when the state assumed control of the college in 1917, most of the new buildings on campus were constructed of brick and concrete and based on standard architectural plans. These buildings were separated enough to prevent fires from spreading easily.

Despite these setbacks, ETNC became the largest private teachers college in Texas, offering both regular courses during the fall, winter, and spring semesters, and a special normal-institute session in the summer for teacher certification. Mayo's dream of providing education for aspiring teachers in northeast Texas in the 1880s and 1890s coincided with plans by the state of Texas to promote and finance public schools throughout the state. The demand for trained teachers—especially in the rural schools of Texas—skyrocketed.

In 1917, because of poor health and a desire to insure the continuation of his normal college, Mayo wanted the state to buy the school. He and his influential friends convinced the legislature and governor to purchase the college for \$100,000 from the Mayo family. The Board of Regents of State Normal Colleges appointed Randolph B. Binnion, first assistant state superintendent of public instruction in the State Department of Education, president of the now renamed East Texas State Normal College. Binnion moved quickly to upgrade the rapidly deteriorating physical plant and to find funds to construct new classroom buildings, a heating plant, and a library. In addition, Binnion sought state appropriations to

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

construct a president's house on campus. The main argument in support of a president's house—an argument used persistently by both Binnion and his successor Dr. Samuel Whitley—was that all the other state institutions of higher learning in Texas had houses for their presidents.

On December 4, 1924, Binnion resigned to become provost at Peabody College. Samuel Whitley, dean of the college, became president. Whitley had served as interim president in 1923—1924 when Binnion was temporarily absent working on a master's degree. The college had been renamed East Texas State Teachers College in 1923. Although some surviving ETNC bulletins indicate that limited graduate level work was offered as early as 1912-1914, ET began offering a regular program leading to masters' degrees in 1936 (and later doctoral degrees in 1962 under President James G. Gee.) During World War II, President Whitley supported programs to train Army and Navy servicemen and members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps on campus. A number of students and faculty enlisted and served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the war. During Whitley's tenure the college's physical plant expanded with the addition of the Education Building, the Library, the Hall of Science, Mayo Hall (a men's dormitory and cafeteria), East Hall (a women's dormitory), and the remodeling of several other buildings. In addition, he finally succeeded in getting \$15,000 appropriated by the state legislature for construction of a president's house.

Two well-known builders, George Lindsey and Roy Kilmer of neighboring Greenville, Texas, were selected as architects for the home. Kilmer, born in Gypsum, Kansas, February 28, 1889, received his degree in architecture from Kansas State College (now University) in 1910 and moved to Hunt County around 1918. He worked for several years with Lindsey, who was older and licensed, on buildings requiring a licensed architect. Together they designed the Kavanaugh United Methodist Church, Greenville YMCA, the City Library, the Washington Hotel, St. Williams Catholic Church, Greenville High School, and the Greenville National Bank Building, as well as numerous office buildings, private residences and school buildings. Kilmer became the 494<sup>th</sup> architect licensed in Texas on January 8, 1938.

Foundation work began on the President's House in late September 1927, and the Whitley's moved in on December 27, 1927, on their twenty-third wedding anniversary. The house originally had a kitchen, two bathrooms, a living room with a fireplace, a dining room, a pantry, and several bedrooms upstairs. There were five exterior doors on the first floor and one exterior door upstairs leading to the balcony over the west side porch. There were two staircases, one off the main entrance and the other between the pantry and the southeast room, leading up to the landing and the upstairs bedrooms and bath.

The house had a black iron railing that went from the porch toward the porte cochere on the east side, and an iron rail extended across the front of the porch to the northeast corner of the porch. A sidewalk went across the front of the house and around the west side of the door. The house was heated with steam heat from the old Heating Plant and had 1/1 double-hung windows with screens. A curving concrete sidewalk went from Circle Drive to the front door and a curving concrete driveway extended from the drive through the porte cochere to the garage, but did not extend to the street beyond. Several years after completion of the house, Whitley put green shutters on the north (primary) façade.

Other than the Heating Plant directly to the east, the President's House was the only building on the south side of the campus (Figure 8-2). Industrial Hall, the Gymnasium, the Women's Building, Old Main and the Training School were all

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 15

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

on the north side of campus, while the Education Building, completed in 1925, bridged the north and south sides of the campus between the President's House and Industrial Hall (Map-i, p. 24). South of campus was open land with only a few private residences. Although many of the buildings constructed on campus in the 1920s and 1930s were faced with the same red brick as the President's House, no others were in the Georgian Revival style.

Many of the celebrations and activities of the school—May Fête, training school drills, special programs, and class photographs—occurred in front of the Education Building and the President's House. After the Library was built on the southeast side of campus, graduating seniors assembled there and walked past the President's House on the way to the Education Building auditorium for commencement exercises. Most of the women's clubs in Commerce at one time or another held meetings in the house, and the Whitleys held dinners and socials there.

Entertainment for the Whitley family also meant hosting outside visitors to the campus in their house, especially as Commerce lacked nice hotels and restaurants. The first notable guest to stay overnight was John Phillip Sousa, who gave two concerts on campus on November 17, 1928. Miss Marjorie Moody, who sang soprano with the Sousa band, and one of the first female singers to travel with a band, stayed in the Whitley's house. Mrs. Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor under Franklin D. Roosevelt and the first woman cabinet member, was a houseguest on December 3, 1935. She stayed in the upstairs southwest corner guestroom. Other famous politicians, educators, members of the Board of Regents of the State Teachers Colleges, entertainers, bankers and religious leaders stayed overnight in the President's House. Even those notables who did not stay overnight were often invited to visit the Whitleys for lunch or just a social call.

During the Whitley years the house underwent only minor repairs and alterations. Mr. E.L. Hawley of the Fake Furniture Company in Dallas redecorated and refurbished the interior in the summer of 1944. The *East Texan*, the school newspaper, gave a detailed description of the house after the changes:

The basic color is rose and the harmonizing colors are all pastels. The living room walls are a soft shade of blue gray, the dining room walls are rose and the president's study has apple-green walls. The draperies are a large design of deep rose, maroon and white with a touch of green. The rugs are rose. There are some beautiful paintings, copies from the known pictures. One of the pictures in the living room is the "New England Winter Scene by Courier." Another is "For a Song," painted from the poem by Omar Khayyam.<sup>1</sup>

In 1946, Whitley died of a heart attack while on a hunting trip to East Texas. Dr. Arthur C. Ferguson, dean of the college, took over the reigns of the institution until he reached mandatory retirement age of seventy in 1947. Because his tenure was so short, he never formally occupied the house. Dr. James G. Gee, who came from Sam Houston State Teachers College to assume the duties of president, followed him. Continuing in the tradition of the Whitley's, Dr. Gee invited commencement orators and guest speakers on campus to come over to the house for a visit or for lunch. The reception for graduating seniors and their families continued to be held at the house under the Gee administration. Like the Whitleys earlier, President Gee and his wife held dinners and receptions for faculty at the home.

<sup>1</sup> "President Whitley's Home Redecorated," *East Texan*, October 20, 1944.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 16

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

The Gees made some minor changes in the appearance of the President's House. They had the ironwork and shutters painted white; and had a large brick wall built on the back southwest side of the lot to provide privacy. The wall connected to a hedge on the far west and north sides of the lot forming an enclosed area west of the house. Window air conditioners were installed, and about 1949 or 1950 large distinctive white awnings were added on the east, west and south sides to protect the interior from the hot summer sun.

Gee is credited with further expansion of the school's physical plant during the invasion of the returning veterans who were taking advantage of the G. I. Bill of Rights. He also expanded the course offerings to include more liberal arts and sciences courses, and upgraded the academic credentials of the faculty by insisting that those without an earned doctorate return to graduate school to get their terminal degree. In 1957, in recognition of the expanding curriculum, the school was renamed simply East Texas State College, and in 1965 became East Texas State University. Historian Donald Reynolds has noted that "By the mid-Sixties, as Gee approached the mandatory retirement age of seventy, he could look back on his nineteen years as president with a good deal of satisfaction." He had also transformed the appearance of the campus with construction of new classroom buildings and dormitories.<sup>2</sup>

In 1966 Dr. Whitney Halladay, the final university president to reside in the President's House, took over the reins of the school. Halladay reorganized the administrative structure of the university into three separate colleges. He also expanded degree programs and added new services for students. ETSU continued substantial post WW II growth through the late 1950s and 1960s and into the 1970s. Federal support for construction of dormitories and classroom buildings fueled the expansion of campus facilities westward and across Highway 24/50. Under Halladay's administration the University built a new President's House south of Commerce on the highway. The Halladays moved out of the old home and to the new one in May 1968.

After some modest renovations, including new carpeting, and paneling, the Alumni Office moved into the former guest bedroom and the dining room on the first floor of the President's House. Dr. Jarrell Gray, Secondary and Higher Education faculty and head of the student teaching program, his secretary and a student assistant occupied the two largest former bedrooms on the second floor. The Department of Education Administration took up quarters in other parts of the house. In 1970 these offices moved to other buildings and the living and dining rooms became a faculty lounge. The Creative Services department subsequently used the house as offices for retired university administrators, and as the Honors Program office and graduate student library.

By the late 1980s general neglect and rough use by students and faculty had left the house in a state of disrepair. At about the same time, alumni and staff proposed turning the house into a heritage center for use by alumni, the community, and visitors. In 1989 the Heritage Center Subcommittee of the A&M University—Commerce Centennial Steering Committee recommended that the President's Old House (as it was called by then) be restored to its early 1930s appearance. Gary and Sandra Fernandez, alumni, donated a grant of \$250,000 to partially cover the costs of restoring the structure and grounds to their original appearance. Help from Friends of the University supplemented the Fernandez's gift to complete the \$500,000 project. The award winning architectural firm of Lake and Flato, of San Antonio, oversaw the restoration.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Reynolds, *Professor Mayo's College: A History of East Texas State University*.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 17

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

Work began in late 1993 and was completed in 1994, in time to celebrate the centennial of the college in Commerce. To emphasize the university heritage, the structure was renamed the Heritage House. Today it is used for receptions, special dinners and meetings on a restricted basis, with the Development Office occupying offices on the second floor. It is also a venue for displaying university and northeast Texas historical memorabilia. The University acquired a mirror, teacart, teapot and dining room furniture used during the Samuel Whiney tenure from the Mary Lou Whitney estate. Other original furnishings are being sought. The President's House is one of three structures surviving from the 1920s and is the second oldest extant building on campus. It was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1997.

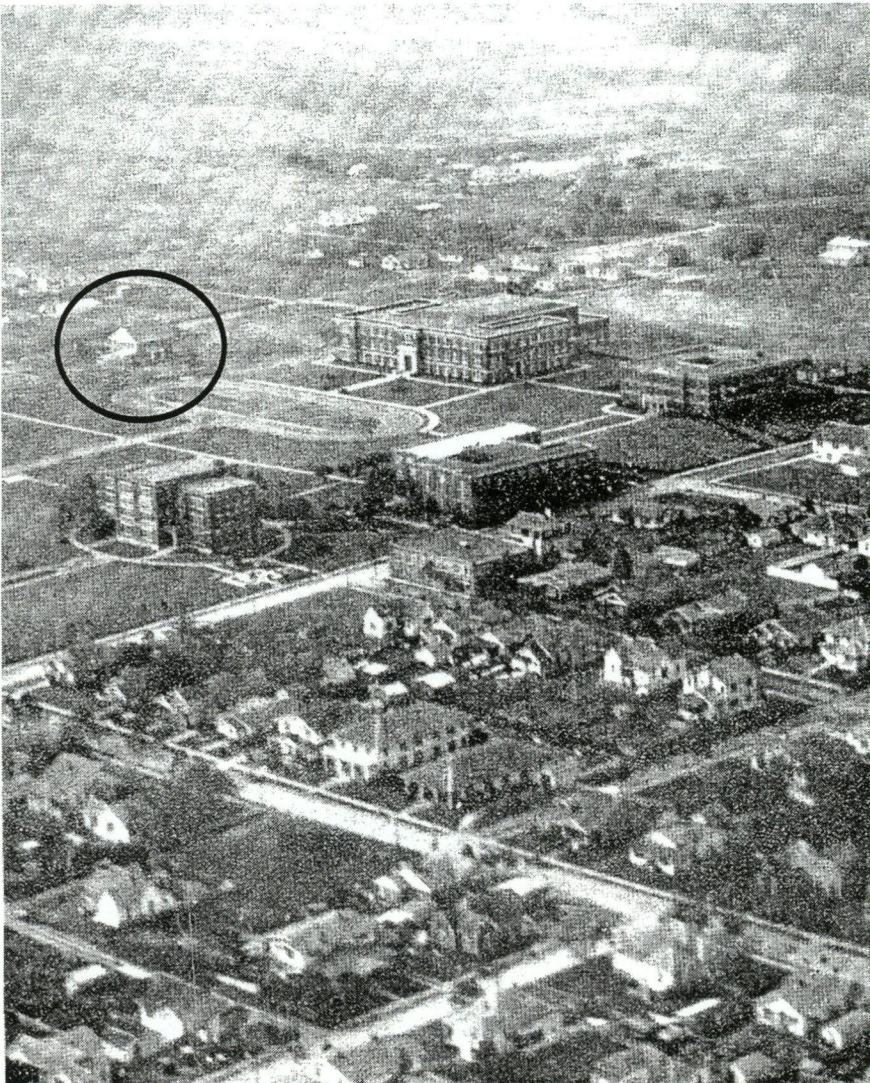


Figure 8-1. Aerial view, c. 1928.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 18

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---



Figure 8-2. Aerial view from 1930 Locust. President's House on right; power plant on left.



Figure 8-3. Aerial view, 1960. President's House, left center.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 19

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---

### **Bibliography**

Bledsoe, James. *A History of Mayo and His College*. Commerce, Texas, 1946.

Conrad, James. "A History of the President's House." Commerce, Texas: James G. Gee Library, 1990.

Grinnan, James. "The History of the East Texas State Teacher's College During World War II," MA thesis, East Texas State Teacher's College, 1947.

Howe, Barbara J., Dolores A. Fleming, Emory L. Kemp and Ruth Ann Overbeck. *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1987.

*The Peabody Reflections and Alumni News*, November 1934, P. 369.

Reynolds, Donald. *Professor Mayo 's College: A History of East Texas State University*. Commerce, Texas: East Texas State University Press.

Sawyer, William S. *History of East Texas State University*. Commerce, Texas: Henington Publishing Company, 1979.

Spencer, Otha and Billie, editors. *The Handbook of Commerce 18 72-1985*. Commerce, Texas: Friends of the Commerce Public Library, 1985.

*Then and Now: Class of 1940 Golden Reunion*. Compiled and produced by East Texas State University Printing Facility. Commerce, Texas, 1990.

### Archival Material

Bmnnion, Randolph B. Papers. East Texas State University Archives, James G. Gee Library, Commerce, Texas.

Gee, James G. Papers. East Texas State University Archives, James G. Gee Library, Commerce, Texas.

Halliday, D. Whitney. Papers. East Texas State University Archives, James G. Gee Library, Commerce, Texas.

*Laws of Texas 1916-1917 (XVIII) Sessions Laws, Regular Session*.

News release, East Texas State Teachers College, December 17, 1927. Whitley Collection, Library, Texas A&M University-Commerce.

Minutes, meeting of the Board of Regents, State Teachers College, June 23, 1950.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 20

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---

Memorandum, Larry Goddard to Heritage House Renovation Committee, July 27, 1999. Foundation Files, Archives, Texas A&M University-Commerce: The Heritage Campaign, East Texas State University Foundation.

Whitley, Samuel. Papers. East Texas State University Archives, James G. Gee Library, Commerce, Texas.

### Interviews

Jack Bell, interviewed by James H. Conrad, April 27, 1990, Commerce, Texas.

### Newspaper Articles

"President's House Under Construction." *East Texan*, September 28, 1927.

"President Whitley's Home Redecorated." *East Texan*, October 20, 1944.

---

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

---

**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** less than one acre

**UTM REFERENCES**      Zone Easting    Northing  
                                 15    229320    3681740

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** Lots 1, 2, and 3 of Block A, College Hill Addition, City of Commerce

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building

---

**11. FORM PREPARED BY** (with assistance from Sandra Marshall, THC Historian)

---

**NAME/TITLE:** Dr. James H. Conrad, Archivist

**ORGANIZATION:** Texas A&M University-Commerce

**DATE:** October 2000

**STREET & NUMBER:** Library, PO Box 3011

**TELEPHONE:** 903-886-5737

**CITY OR TOWN:** Commerce

**STATE:** TX

**ZIP CODE:** 75429-3011

---

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

---

**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS**

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-22)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** (see Plan-21)

---

**PROPERTY OWNER**

---

**NAME:** Texas A&M University-Commerce (Dr. Keith McFarland, President)

**STREET & NUMBER:** PO Box 3011

**TELEPHONE:** 903-886-5106

**CITY OR TOWN:** Commerce

**STATE:** TX

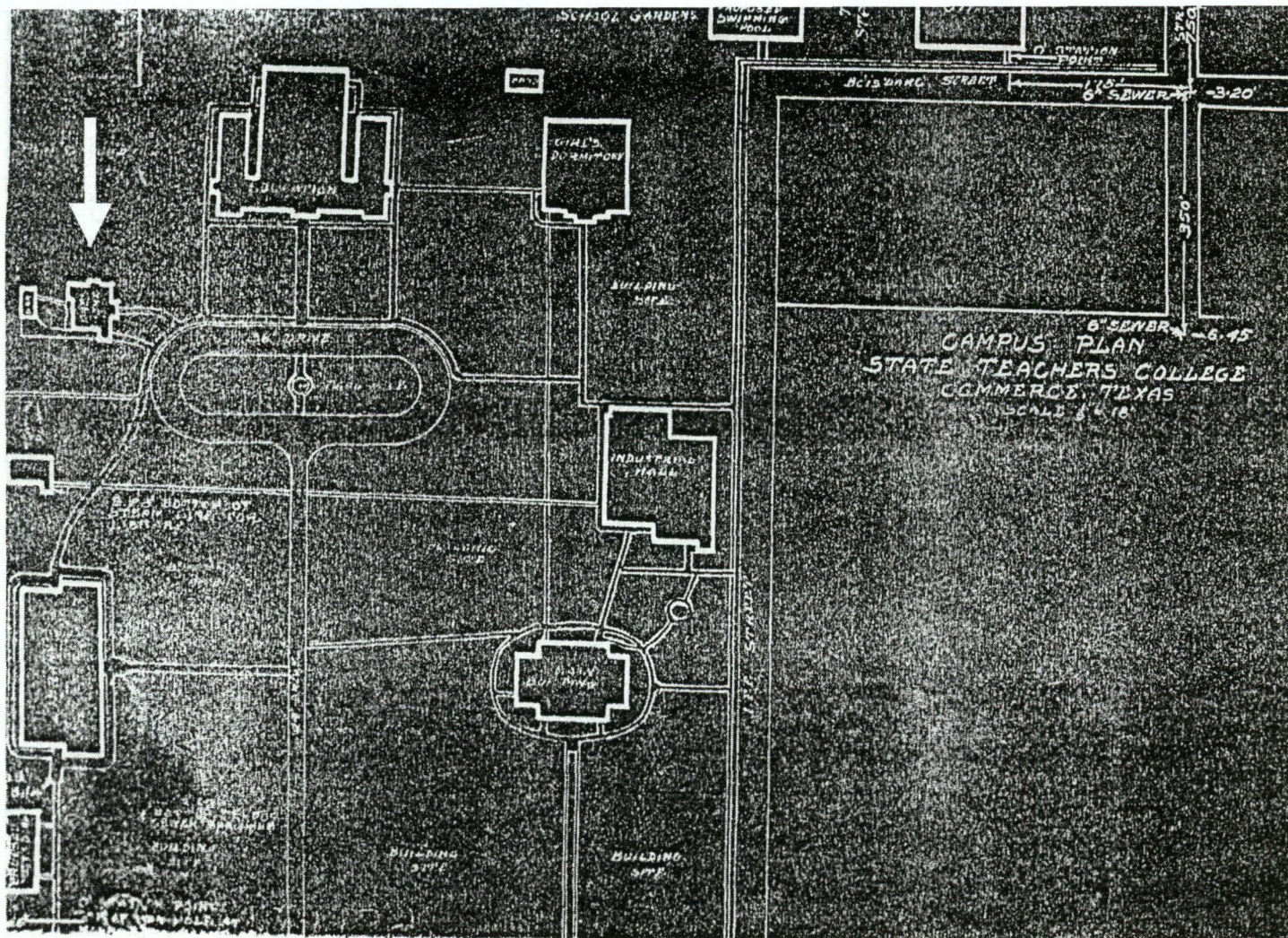
**ZIP CODE:** 75429-3011

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PLAN Page 21

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas



Campus master plan, c. 1929. President's House indicated by arrow

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 22

President's House  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas

---

President's House  
Texas A&M University-Commerce  
Commerce, Hunt County, Texas  
James H. Conrad  
April 2001  
Negatives on file with the Texas Historical Commission

Photograph No. 1 of 5  
North (primary) façade  
Camera facing south

Photograph No. 2 of 5  
East façade  
Camera facing west

Photograph No. 3 of 5  
Oblique angle: east and south (rear) façades  
Camera facing north-northwest

Photograph No. 4 of 5  
Oblique angle: east and south (rear) façades  
Camera facing northwest

Photograph No. 5 of 5  
West façade  
Camera facing east

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: President's House

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Hunt

DATE RECEIVED: 10/12/01      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/05/01  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 11/21/01      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/27/01  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01001264

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    11/21/01 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the  
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



PRESIDENT'S HOUSE

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE  
COMMERCE, HUNT CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 5



west side, tyran

PRESIDENT'S HOUSE  
TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE  
COMMERCE, HUNT CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 5



PRESIDENT'S HOUSE

TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE

COMMERCE, HUNT CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 5



PRESIDENT'S HOUSE

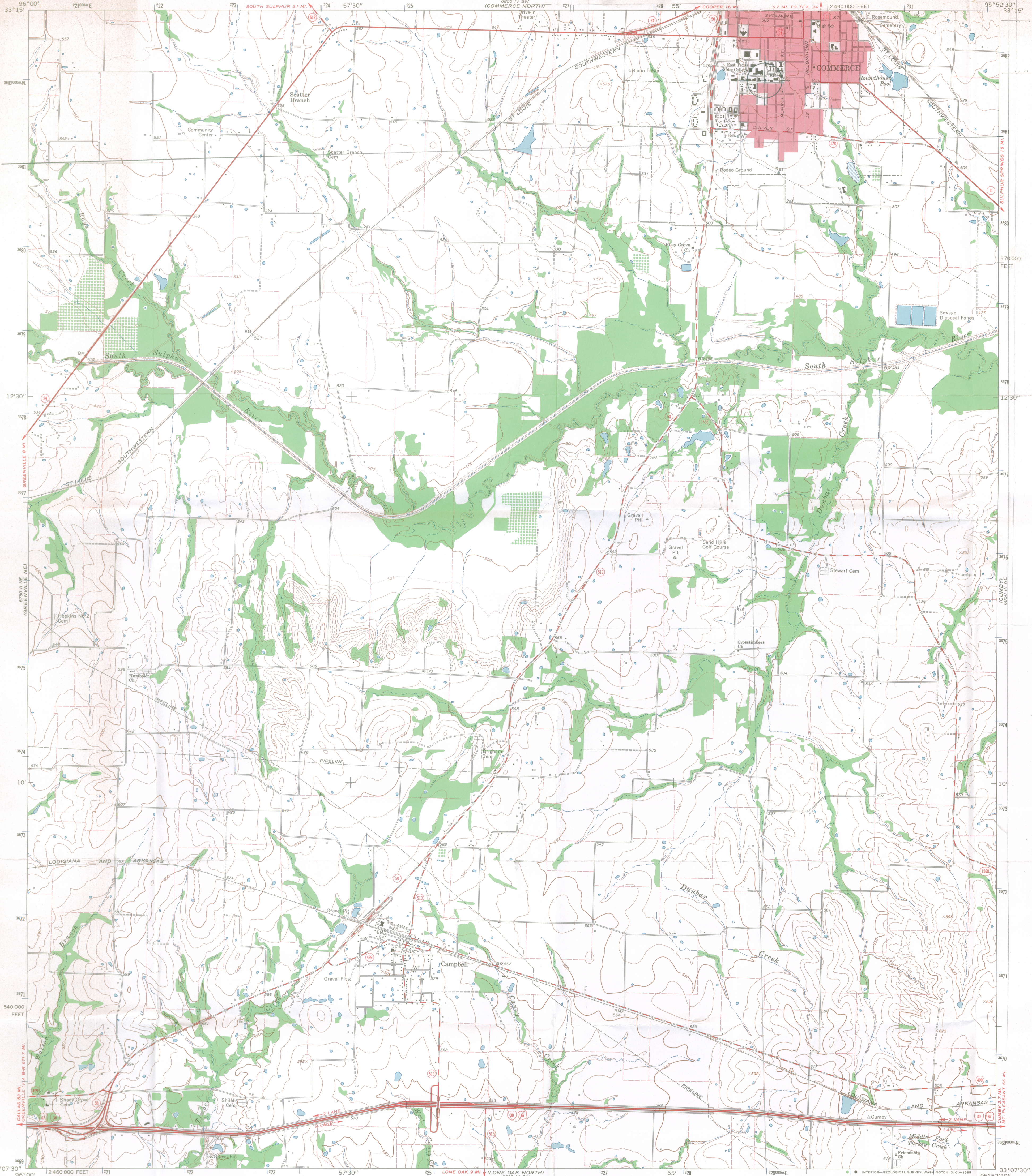
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE

COMMERCE, HUNT CO., TEXAS

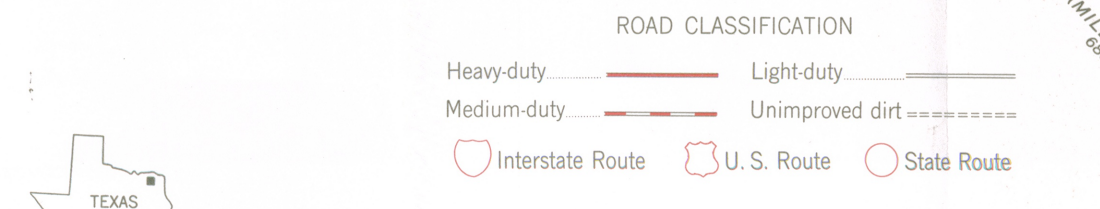
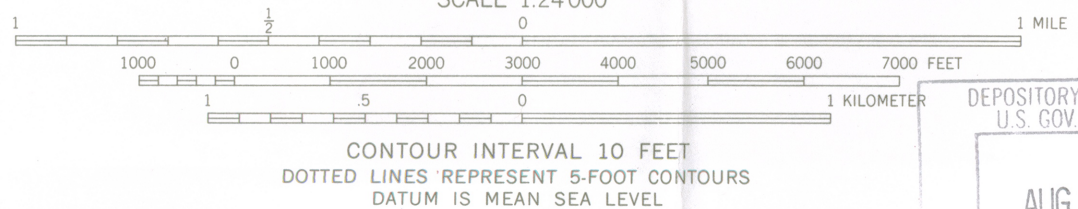
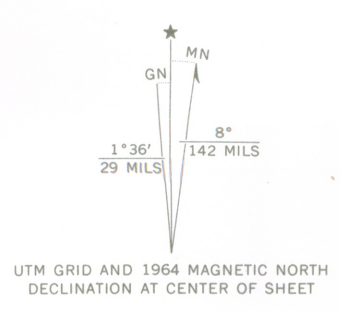
PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 5



PRESIDENT'S HOUSE  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY - COMMERCE  
COMMERCE, HUNT CO., TEXAS  
PHOTOGRAPH 5 of 5



Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1964. Field checked 1964  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,  
north central zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 15, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines



DEPOSITORY LIBRARY NO. 599  
U.S. GOV. PUBLICATIONS  
AUG 25 1998



COMMERCE SOUTH, TEX.  
N3307.5—W9552.5/7.5

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225 OR WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST