

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

OK 402



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Cine El Rey
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 311 S. 17th Street
CITY OR TOWN: McAllen
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Hidalgo CODE: 215 ZIP CODE: 78501
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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
 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally
 statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Handwritten Signature]

Signature of certifying official

4 MARCH 2002
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):

[Handwritten Signature]
Signature of the Keeper
Edson B. Beall

Date of Action

4/26/02

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	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: RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater; WORK IN PROGRESS

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Moderne

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION CONCRETE
WALLS STUCCO; METAL; OTHER/porcelain enamel
ROOF OTHER/composite
OTHER

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

The 1947 Cine El Rey ("The King Cinema") is a rectangular three-story commercial building in downtown McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas. It faces west on the east side of South 17th Street. The building features a projecting neon marquee, neon and metal canopy, bold colors, geometric patterns and enamel panels on the lower part of the front façade, all of which contribute to its Moderne design. From May 1947 until its closing in 1988, the theater served as the center for Spanish-language entertainment in McAllen. In its early years the Cine El Rey was South Texas' most luxurious "Mexican Theatre," but in more recent years (1996-98), it served as a community outreach church. Except for later paint schemes, some water-damaged ceilings and plumbing/electrical upgrades to meet city requirements, the Cine El Rey retains its original appearance.

The theater has a rectangular plan, approximately 175 feet deep and 50 feet wide, and the front façade rises 25 feet above grade. The primary (east) elevation façade utilizes the Moderne Style. The upper portion of the façade is covered in an ivory-colored painted stucco finish and is trimmed with a reveal in a stepped pattern. A red and white rectangular metal sidewalk canopy projects from the structure and separates the upper façade and marquee from the ground floor façade. Five cables and turnbuckles support the canopy. The three sides of the canopy are delineated with a row of yellow neon. The metal ceiling of the canopy was decorated with flashing neon tubing, much of which is broken or missing and will be replaced.

A projecting red and white metal marquee is centered on the upper portion of the façade. The double-sided metal marquee is located above the canopy and consists of two faces reading "Cine El Rey" that angle and converge to a point centered over the canopy, thus providing visibility from the north, south and west. The two nameplates include white, rear illuminated title bands insets. A smaller curved metal and neon panel at the point of convergence joins the two larger name panels. The decorative design on this section is repeated on the seat standards in the balcony section. The outline of the marquee and the Cine El Rey letters are delineated in red, white, blue and yellow neon. Much of the neon tubing is broken or missing and will be replaced.

The street front walls are covered with smooth red and ivory porcelain enamel plates. The pieces are screwed to lumber attached to the brick facing underneath. White grout seals the seams between the panels. The two missing plates from the façade have been found and will be returned to their original places. Four aluminum and glass poster cases flank the entrance. The original burgundy fabric backing used to pin the posters was discovered under plywood placed in the cases in the 1970's. The material is in excellent condition.

The walls of the central recessed open-air foyer are also covered with smooth red and ivory metal plates. There is a poster case on the north side of the foyer. The hexagonal ticket booth, with its red and ridged metal panels dominates the south side of the irregularly shaped foyer. The ticket and change machines seen in photos from the 1947 opening were still in the booth. Period photos indicate that the walls in the ticket booth were painted to look like Mexican zarape. The foyers' ceiling is decorated with red, white and blue neon. There are three sets of red wood and glass double doors that lead into the concession area. Vertical tubular steel handles accent the right door in each set. The interior side of each door has a horizontal flat metal handle. Metal kick plates are on the interior and exterior of each door. The foyer floor is gold, terracotta and salmon colored terrazzo that is continued throughout the lobby area with the addition of a design motif consisting of a terracotta-colored circle bisected by two parallel lines. The motif is repeated throughout the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

building, twice in the concession area's terrazzo floor, twice in the bathroom lounges' terrazzo floors and painted on the north and south auditorium walls.

The only other exposed elevations are the rear (west) of the building and a portion of the north and south walls. These surfaces are also ivory painted stucco. The top edge of the north and south walls are designed with a stepped pattern. The top edges are trimmed with curved terra cotta tiles. The rear wall contains two sets of double exit doors that allow access in and out of the auditorium and stage area. Two large vents for the original air conditioning system dominate the upper part of this elevation.

Interior

The sets of double doors in the foyer lead into the lobby. Each exit is marked with an illuminated metal sign. The theater's current cream and red color interior scheme is introduced in this area. El Rey's first manager, Mr. Antonio Balderas, verified that the salmon color found under the lobby's poster cases was the original color. The wood trim and doors, now painted with red enamel, were stained with a wood stain or varnish. A recessed stucco ceiling is outlined by a blue plaster trim. This recessed ceiling had five 48" Fluorescent lamp housings. When the fluorescent lights were removed the outline of five lamps was revealed. The broken remains of two of these lamps were found in the theater's storage room. They are identical to the lamps found in the curving stairwell and hallways described later. The rehabilitation calls for the original lamps to be duplicated as closely as possible.

The lobby area contains a number of rooms, entrances and exits. Red wooden doors on either side of the entry (west wall) lead into the manager's office and another storage room the door into the ticket booth is through the manager's office. The storage room was also used as a dressing room for the usherettes working at the theatre. The egress door from the balcony's emergency stairwell is next to the storage room wall in the northwest corner. A curved staircase provides access to the balcony. This concrete staircase is located in the lobby's southwest corner. Most of the wooden banisters are still intact. A missing section was found in the storage room. The banister will need restoration work and reinforcement.

Four poster marquees decorate the north, south and west lobby walls. The original ceramic tile work and drain for the water fountain is still on the east wall. The original water fountain had been replaced by a modern one in the 1970's. The original is missing. Rehabilitation plans call for the original fountain to be replaced with a period ceramic piece.

On either side of the lobby's east wall are entrances into the lounges. These lounges also contain the same type of lamps and terrazzo floors as the concession area. Chrome tubing and red fabric Art Deco sofas were in these lounges. The lounges served as a rest or waiting area outside the toilets. Red wooden doors accented by a vertical tubular steel handle and small circular porthole windows connect the lounges to the toilets. The toilets contain the original partitions, sinks, urinal, terrazzo floors and ceramic tile work. The original lighting fixtures were replaced with fluorescent lighting. The rehabilitation calls for the original fixtures to be duplicated as closely as possible.

Access to the main auditorium is through two ramped carpeted hallways that open between the north and south ends of the east wall. Part of the balcony is directly above these hallways and the storage area is accessible through

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 7

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

doors in each of these hallways which were closed with velvet curtains. This served to keep the daylight and street sounds from entering the auditorium. These halls lead to a small carpeted open area that allows traffic to flow to either side of the theater. This small area is separated from the body of the auditorium by three wood-trimmed, red colored plaster partitions that form four-foot tall walls behind the three seating sections.

The auditorium section of the building extends down a sloping grade, with two carpeted aisles dividing the seats into a large center section and two smaller side sections. The floor is painted concrete. The auditorium level contains 406 seats. The seats date from the 1948 period, with curved wooden backs, upholstered cushions and decorative standards at row ends. Aisle lighting was installed on the standards intermittently. The standards in the balcony section are a pink color and are painted with a Moderne pattern of curves and lines. According to the original manger and his wife, these are indicative of the original standard and seat colors. The standards in the auditorium had been painted over at some point. The rehabilitation calls for the motif and color to be duplicated as closely as possible.

The painted plaster walls are ivory-colored. A wide red wainscot with wooden molding is designed with a stepped pattern that accents the changing slope of the floor. The geometric symbol that is found on the terrazzo floor in the concession area is repeated in blue and red paint on the north and south walls. All walls and molding are original. The acoustical ceiling is ivory and accented with a blue trim around the perimeter with blue and red stripes along its center. Six incandescent lighting fixtures provide illumination for the auditorium. Water leaks damaged part of the original ceiling in the 1980's. It was repaired with plaster and has not been re-painted.

Two plaster walls flank the proscenium opening. Each wall has entrances decorated with blue colored plaster columns and accented by four blue vertical lines that reach the ceiling. These entrances lead to hallways next to the north and south interior walls of the building. The original speaker locations and fabric grills are located above the entrances. The burgundy colored velour entry drapes that served as light and sound buffers had deteriorated and have been removed. The rehabilitation calls for the drapes to be duplicated as closely as possible. These hallways provide emergency exits to the rear alley.

There is a closet in each of these halls. One is empty and the other (south) houses electrical boxes. A small wooden ladder in each hallway provides access to the back of the stage area. The north hallway and closet was used as a dressing area by visiting celebrities.

The stage itself has an elevated and curved concrete floor. The stage was dressed with a velour act curtain, an off white back traveler and two sets of teasers. These drapes had deteriorated and have been removed. The rehabilitation calls for the drapes to be replaced. Wooden ladders attached to the east (back) wall of the stage provide access to two storage rooms that are located directly over the two exit hallways. These rooms housed the original air conditioning equipment. Stage access is through doors and ladders that exit into the exit hallways.

A concrete balcony is at the rear of the auditorium. It is accessible from the lobby's southwest corner through a curving carpeted staircase and on the north side through the balcony's emergency exit. These steps lead to a carpeted open area that allows traffic to flow to either side of the balcony. This small area is separated from the body of the auditorium by three red colored plaster partitions trimmed in wood. These partitions form walls behind the three seating sections. There are 274 seats in the balcony. The ceramic tile work and drain for a water fountain is still on the west wall

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 8

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

of the balcony section. The original water fountain is missing. The rehabilitation calls for the original fountain to be replaced with a period ceramic piece.

Like the auditorium section, the balcony extends down a sloping grade, with two carpeted aisles dividing the seats into a large center section and two smaller side sections. A red concrete and pipe partition serves as a protective barrier. The lobby, bathrooms, lounges, and a large storeroom are located under the balcony.

There are three doors on the west wall behind the balcony. These, left to right, lead to the air conditioning room, stairs to the projection room and a closet, and the fire exit stairwell. The air conditioning room is divided into two sections. The first houses the modern air handlers and circuit breakers. The second, and smaller, room was used to house the original air conditioning machinery and provides access, through a hinged grill, to the marquee. The marquee letters and equipment are stored there. The second door provides access to the emergency stairs. These are concrete steps with wooden banisters that lead down to the lobby.

A single flight of concrete stairs, through the third door, leads up to a hallway on the third level. A black metal door to the left opens to a small closet and access to the roof. The black metal door at the end of the hall opens into the projection room. Five projection windows overlook the auditorium and balcony. There is a small private restroom that was used by the projectionist. A dumbwaiter shaft with wooden doors connects the manager's office with the projection room. This was intended to transfer meals and the heavy film containers and reels to the projectionist but according to the original manager, Antonio Balderas, it was never completed. This room is directly above the air conditioning room. A hinged metal cover in the floor provides direct access to the smaller air conditioning room.

In conducting the proposed rehabilitation, the owners, Luis and Ann Muñoz, will retain as much original material as feasible, and will duplicate the few missing elements as closely as possible. The owners wish to create a performing arts center that creates the atmosphere of a 1940's "Mexican Theater" while meeting the expectations of the present.

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: Architecture; Entertainment; Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1947-1952

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1947

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Plans provided by Texas Consolidated Theaters (Dallas); W.E. Crawford, contractor

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-16).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheets 9-17 through 9-18).

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
- Other -- Specify Repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 9

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

The Cine El Rey symbolizes the significance of the Spanish language Film Theater (Mexican Theatres) in the Hispanic-American culture. Opened as a theater in downtown McAllen, Texas in 1947, the "El Rey" served the city's Hispanic community for forty years. Although it is simple in design and ornamentation, it is a good example of a small-town, downtown movie theater in Texas in the 1940's and was important in the life of McAllen's Hispanic community during its four decades of operation. The theater is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment and Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic, as a "Mexican Theatre" built to capitalize on the demand for Spanish-language entertainment created by the influx of Mexican *Braceros* into the United States during the 1940's. It is also eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a good local example of a well-preserved movie theater with Art Moderne influences.

In June 2001, the National Trust for Historic Preservation identified the Caminos del Rio Heritage Corridor and historic American movie theaters among the "America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places." The Cine El Rey fits into both categories, but fortunately, the theater will once again play a role in the city's history and in the revitalization of the 33-block downtown district through its rehabilitation.

McAllen is in the geographic center of the region most recently termed "the Borderplex," which includes the four Rio Grande Valley counties (Cameron, Willacy, Hidalgo and Starr) and the Northern Mexico border cities from Matamoros to Ciudad Mier. The Borderplex is a bicultural, bilingual, international metropolitan area. It is expected to reach or exceed a population of 2.5 million by the year 2001, placing it among the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. It is in the midst of unprecedented change, perhaps greater than any other area of its size in America.

Fifty years ago, McAllen had a rural, agriculture-based economy characterized by sporadic growth. Today, the area is being transformed into a major international trade area by developing first-rate commercial, retail, office, industrial, medical, retirement, and educational facilities. The promotion of international and retail trade, tourism and manufacturing is among the most successful along the U.S. Mexico Border.

The McAllen Townsite Company was launched on December 5, 1904. It was established on the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad rail line eight miles north of the Mexican border. On February 27, 1905, its railroad depot was opened and the first buildings were erected by 1908. That year the area had a population of more than 300. By the end of that year, the Main Street area had five stores, two taverns, two lumberyards and a Presbyterian Church. It was incorporated on February 20, 1911.¹

By the beginning of the 1920's, McAllen established itself as the leader in broomcorn production. The population had grown to 5,331. The rate of urban growth was partly due to the increasing service and supply needs of the agricultural economy.² By that time, McAllen had two movie theaters in the downtown area, the Columbia and the Queen. In 1920, the Columbia, managed by McAllen theater pioneer L.J. "Shine" Mason,³ was renovated to provide a

¹ "An Outline of History for McAllen, Texas and the Surrounding Area," McAllen Memorial Library, Oct. 2001. 3 Oct. 2001. <http://www.mcallen.lib.tx.us/history/MC_HIST.HTM>

² An Outline of History for McAllen.

³ Balderas, Antonio, Personal interview, 1 November 2001.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 10

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

70-foot stage with dressing rooms to receive the same attractions that were touring into the Grand Opera House in San Antonio. That same year, the local newspaper reported that a \$25,000 pipe organ was installed in the Queen Theatre.⁴

By the 1930's, McAllen had added the Palace Theatre on Main Street (Photo 37 and 38), also managed by Mr. Mason, and the Anahuak Theatre. Karl Hoblitzelle's Texas Consolidated Theatres owned The Palace. Mexican engineer Jacobo Garza, built the Anahuak at 17th Street and Beaumont. Mexican diva Esperanza Iris made a personal appearance its opening night. It closed down during the depression and was purchased and remodeled by the Texas Consolidated Theatres many years later. They renamed it the *Azteca*.⁵ The Queen continued to operate as a part of the Texas Consolidated chain until 1952.⁶ The Azteca closed on November 28, 1948 and was later sold to the Ruenes family.⁷

By the end of World War II, the United States and Mexico had established the *Bracero* program. This program was created to help with a shortage of agricultural workers in the United States and poor economic conditions in Mexico. Each Mexican state was given a quota for the number of those workers to be contracted from their state. Workers were sent to recruitment centers and turned over to the U.S. Department of Labor, who placed the workers in U.S. farms. 4.6 million contracts were issued during the life of the program.⁸

Many Texas cafes, barbershops, and in some instances theaters, however, refused the entry or service to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.⁹ Some theatres, like the Capitol in Austin, Texas, showed the Mexican movies after midnight. Others, like the Ropes in Ropesville, Texas, segregated the Mexicans by requiring them to sit in the balcony.¹⁰ A report from the "Home Theatre in Whiteface, Texas, reports that the "Exhib (exhibitor) believes in segregation."¹¹ In Texas, some of the larger towns and towns with a large Spanish-speaking population had theaters where Spanish-language films were exhibited. These operated mostly in the southern part of the state. Their houses were mostly small, poorly ventilated and were cursed with third rate equipment.¹² Field representatives for Spanish-language film distributor Clasa-Mohme described many of these theatres as "shacks" and "tents."¹³ These little houses charged extremely low rates, fifteen and twenty cents, where American houses in the same cities were charging thirty-five and

⁴ "Silent Films Entertained McAllen Theater Fans of Four Decades Ago." The McAllen Monitor, 1961.

⁵ Balderas, Antonio, Personal interview, 1 November 2001.

⁶ "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - 1952," Interstate Theatre Archives, Dallas Public Library.

⁷ "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - 1948," Interstate Theatre Archives, Dallas Public Library.

⁸ Rodriguez, Michael D., "The History of Mexican Immigration to the United States," De Paul University, 1997. 14 Sept. 2001, <<http://shrike.depaul.edu/~mrodrig5/history.html>>

⁹ Kibbe, Pauline R., "How Texas Treated the Braceros," Latin Americans in Texas, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1946, Dec. 1999. 14 Sept. 2001, <<http://www.farmworkers.org/bracintx.html>>

¹⁰ Clasa Mohme field representative, Memo to office regarding visit with owners of the "Ropes" Theatre in Ropesville, Texas, 9 October 1951.

¹¹ Clasa Mohme field representative, Memo to office regarding visit with owner of the "Home Theatre" in Whiteface, Texas, 19 October 1951.

¹² "The Spanish-Language Movies," The Texas Spectator, 16 August 1946.

¹³ Clasa Mohme field representative, Memo to office regarding visit with owner of the "El Mexicano" in Odessa, Texas, 5 October 1951.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 11

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

forty cents. Even with the lower rates, they often had small houses. Income for many of the Mexican families had income ranging eight to ten dollars per week.¹⁴

The arrival of the Bracero had a tremendous impact on the growth of the Mexican population in the United States. In the 1940's and 1950's, Spanish language film distributor Clasa-Mohme's field salesmen were continuously analyzing census data to estimate the Mexican population in Texas cities. The Clasa-Mohme archives are full of reports on the arrival of farm workers into potential markets. This new audience was looking for entertainment. The standard American fare being supplied to the local cinemas did not supply the Mexicans with the rough comedy, lusty singing and blood and thunder they got with *charro* films (Mexican westerns) and comedies produced in Mexico starting in the late 1930s, and whose rate of production grew dramatically during the 1940s.¹⁵ These films make up *El Siglo de Oro del Cine Mexicano* ("Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema").

The *Texas Spectator*, (August 16, 1946) reported that "a new industry is developing in Texas, and the monopolies are getting ready to take it over," referring to the Spanish-language theater industry. The major theater chains had been watching this growth but had not expanded into it:

...But now the battle for the Spanish-language film industry is on. Independents here and there in the state, particularly in the larger cities ... are battling with Interstate, and at the moment are holding their own. ... Everybody in the theatre business who stands and checks the flow of patrons into one of these houses is trying to muscle into the industry. Here is something new --- everybody is trying to get in on it while the money is flowing. And Interstate is preparing to protect itself. Interstate is beginning to expand.¹⁶

In 1946, the Interstate Theatres, through Texas Consolidated, owned three properties in McAllen: the Palace, Queen and Azteca theaters.¹⁷ That same year, Texas Consolidated Theatres purchased land on the 26th block of South 17th Street in McAllen from Severo and Rumalda Barrera.¹⁸ Seventeenth Street, *La Dies y Siete*, served as the heart of the downtown area that serviced the city's Hispanic community. The land would be used to build a state of the art theatre to provide Spanish-language features for McAllen's Mexican community.

According to Interstate records, the company assigned the theatre a manager almost a year later on May 1, 1947. The city manager, L.J. "Shine" Mason, oversaw operations for the four theaters in the McAllen.¹⁹ Mr. Mason, known as McAllen's theater pioneer, had been a resident of the city since 1917.²⁰ Mr. Mason appointed Antonio J. Balderas to manage their new property. Mr. Balderas had been working with the Texas Consolidated Theatres since 1937., beginning

¹⁴ "The Spanish-Language Movies," *The Texas Spectator*, 16 August 1946.

¹⁵ *The Texas Spectator*.

¹⁶ *The Texas Spectator*.

¹⁷ "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - Nov 1947," *Interstate Theatre Archives*, Dallas Public Library.

¹⁸ Land Deed, Barrera to Texas Consolidated, 1946, Hidalgo County Courthouse.

¹⁹ "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - Nov 1947," *Interstate Theatre Archives*, Dallas Public Library

²⁰ "Mason on Leave as Theatre Manager," *Valley Evening Monitor*, 22 May 1947: A1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 12

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

at age 17. After returning from duty in World War II he received the El Rey assignment.²¹ Texas Consolidated's Dallas offices supplied the architectural plans and hired McAllen contractor W.E. Crawford to build the facility. The Saturday before the inauguration of the building, Mr. Balderas was working at the Azteca, two blocks away. It rained very hard that night. After closing the Azteca that evening, Mr. Balderas walked down the street to check on the new building. When he entered, he discovered that the roof had leaks and that the rain had caused the auditorium's ceiling to collapse. Shine Mason was contacted and Crawford and his crew came in that night and by the next day the ceiling had been replaced. The theatre opened on the following Thursday, May 1, 1947. Invitations, printed in Spanish, read:

*Queda Ud. Cordialmente invitado a la Solemne
Inauguracion de nuestro
Cine El Rey
de esta ciudad que se verificara el Jueves Iro. de
Mayo de 1947 a las 7:30 P.M.
Se pasara por la pantalla la Pelicula por el
Genial Actor Comico
Tin Tan
"Hay Muertos Que No Hacen Ruido"
Interstate Circuit, Inc. - - McAllen, Texas*

("You are cordially invited to attend the solemn inauguration of our Cine El Rey of this city that will take place Thursday 1st of May of 1947 at 7:30 P.M. Showing on the screen will be the film by the Genial Comic Actor Tin Tan "There Are Dead People Who Make No Noise" Interstate Circuit, Inc. - - McAllen, Texas"). According to Noe Mendoza, a lifelong resident of 17th Street, the opening night was *fue el evento del año* ("the event of the year"): "All the ushers were dressed in Mexican folk costumes. My sister was one of them. *Este cine era de nosotros* ("This was our theater") I spent a lot of time in here."²²

The star of the opening night film, German Valdes ("Tin Tan") was a Mexican comic actor of mythic proportions, often playing the streetwise *pachuco* ("Zoot Suiter"). Valdes appeared in 103 films between 1944 and 1977.²³ He was the first of many of Mexico's greatest actors and actresses made personal appearances on the El Rey stage.²⁴ Some of these included El Trio Los Panchos, Pedro Infante, Pedro Armendariz, Sara Garcia, Antonio Aguilar, Tito Guizar and Lucha Villa.²⁵

Advertising for the theater was in the area's Spanish newspaper "El Echo." The first piece of advertising for the theatre in an English newspaper is found in the May 22, 1947 issue of The McAllen Evening Monitor.²⁶ The ad reads, "*En Persona! Wu Li Chang - Fu Le Ming 'Famoso Ilusionista,*" ("In Person! Wu Li Chang - Fu Le Ming 'Famous

²¹ Balderas, Rosabel Smith, Telephone interview, 23 October 2001.

²² Mendoza, Noe, Personal interview, 23 October 2001.

²³ "German Valdes." *Internet Movie Data Base* <<http://us.imdb.com>>. Accessed 1 Nov 2001.

²⁴ Balderas, Rosabel Smith, Telephone interview, 23 October 2001.

²⁵ Balderas, Antonio, Personal interview, 1 November 2001.

²⁶ Cine El Rey, advertisement, *The McAllen Evening Monitor*, 22 May 22, 1947: A2.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Illusionists"). Advertising for the theater stopped by June 1 and did not reappear until April 22, 1948 and then appeared regularly. Local artist Feline Perez painted large posters by hand for each new film. He continued painting these boards until 1951.

The theatre continued to serve as the entertainment center for the city's Hispanic community for the next forty years. Jaime Castillo, who started work at El Rey in 1954, remembers that the theatre was the center of the "barrio's activities." The neighborhood children were given free passes and bags of candy on Christmas Eve.²⁷ Local talent competed for prizes at theatre sponsored talent shows.²⁸ "Chi Cho" Delgado, who composed the classic *La Estrellita* and composer Rafael Ramirez often accompanied the local talents on piano. These contests were extremely popular and continued well into the late 1980's.²⁹ After 47 years in the theatre business, Jaime continues to work as a projectionist in Corpus Christi, Texas.

In 1973, Eduardo Izaguirre, whose parents owned several theatres in the McAllen area, purchased the theatre from what had by then become ABC-Interstate. The Izaguirres continued showing Spanish-language product but the Mexican motion picture industry had slowed down and by the mid 80s the theatre turned to showing second-run American features. Unable to compete with the larger multiplexes, Mr. Izaguirre closed the El Rey in 1988. It was used as a religious outreach center from 1996 to 1998.³⁰

Architectural significance

The Cine El Rey is significant not only for its associations with Spanish language entertainment on the Texas-Mexico border, but also as an exceptionally well-preserved example of a post World War II theater displaying the Art Moderne styling which had become popular for commercial design in the 1930s. Although commonly associated with the earlier decade, postwar architects and designers returned to the style after the wartime lull in commercial construction. The theater features Moderne elements such as a polygonal entrance, porcelain enamel panels, terrazzo floors, geometric patterns below the relatively large marquee and on the parapet, and an extensive use of neon not only in the sign but as a decorative element under the canopy. The bold geometric patterns in terrazzo and neon serve as a visual invitation into the building.

Downtown Revitalization and Cine El Rey Preservation

The City of McAllen has developed a "Master Plan" for the revitalization of downtown McAllen. The Downtown Improvement District (DID) is a 33-block area with almost 300 businesses. These businesses draw from a customer base of more than 500,000 in Hidalgo County, Texas and 750,000 people in nearby Reynosa, Mexico. The purpose of the revitalization is to develop an environment that will be "inviting, visibly secure and in turn help to enhance the

²⁷ Izaguirre, Eduardo, Personal interview, 6 June 2001.

²⁸ Saenz, Lupita and Blanca Ramos, Personal interview, October 27, 2001.

²⁹ "Aficionados En Cine Rey," *El Observatory*, 1 January 1 1986: A 3.

³⁰ Eduardo Izaguirre, Personal interview, 6 June 2001.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

profitability of all those that have businesses or investments in McAllen.” Part of the plan is the attraction of new “entertainment type” business “such as a cultural arts center.” to the DID.³¹

Luis and Ann Muñoz purchased the theatre from Mr. Izaguirre in June of 2001 for \$150,000. Using their own money and an SBA loan, they plan to perform a Certified Rehabilitation to the Secretary of Interior’s Standards under the direction of the Texas Historical Commission. The facility will serve as a performing arts center and will be used for smaller theatrical tours, concerts, film festivals, historical films and lectures, meetings and will house the local community college’s Hispanic theatre company. The owners feel that this rehabilitation will not only serve to recapture the qualities of an Art Moderne theater built for the exploding Mexican bracero population but that it can also serve as a cornerstone to McAllen’s downtown revitalization efforts.

³¹“Downtown Improvement District - Master Plan,” City of McAllen, 2001. 14 Sept 2001,
<http://mcallen.net/economic_development/did-masterplan.html>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 15

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Cine El Rey, c.1957-51
Source: Collection of Tony Balderas, McAllen, Texas



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 16

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Cine El Rey, 1948
Source: Collection of Tony Balderas, McAllen, Texas



El Rey Theatre
McAllen

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 17

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Works Cited

- "Aficionados En Cine Rey," El Observador, 1 January 1 1986: A 3.
- "An Outline of History for McAllen, Texas and the Surrounding Area," McAllen Memorial Library, Oct. 2001. 3 Oct. 2001. <http://www.mcallen.lib.tx.us/history/MC_HIST.HTM>
- Balderas, Antonio, Personal interview, 1 November 2001.
- Balderas, Rosabel Smith, Telephone interview, 23 October 2001.
- Barrera to Texas Consolidated, Land Deed, Hidalgo County Courthouse 1946.
- Cine El Rey, advertisement, The McAllen Evening Monitor, 22 May 22, 1947: A2.
- Clasa Mohme field representative, Memo to office regarding visit with owners of the "Ropes" Theatre in Ropesville, Texas, 9 October 1951.
- Clasa Mohme field representative, Memo to office regarding visit with owner of the "Home Theatre" in Whiteface, Texas, 19 October 1951.
- Clasa Mohme field representative, Memo to office regarding visit with owner of the "El Mexicano" in Odessa, Texas, 5 October 1951.
- "Downtown Improvement District - Master Plan," City of McAllen, 2001. 14 Sept 2001, <http://mcallen.net/economic_development/did-masterplan.html>
- "German Valdes." Internet Movie Data Base. 1 Nov 2001. <<http://us.imdb.com>>
- Izaguirre, Eduardo, Personal interview, 6 June 2001.
- Kibbe, Pauline R., "How Texas Treated the Braceros," Latin Americans in Texas, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1946, Dec. 1999. 14 Sept. 2001, <<http://www.farmworkersorg/bracintx.html>>
- "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - 1947," Interstate Theatre Archives, Dallas Public Library.
- "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - 1948," Interstate Theatre Archives, Dallas Public Library.
- "Managers List - Interstate Theater Circuit - 1952," Interstate Theatre Archives, Dallas Public Library.
- "Mason on Leave as Theatre Manager," Valley Evening Monitor, 22 May 1947: A1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 18

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Mendoza, Noe, Personal interview, 23 October 2001.

Rodriguez, Michael D., "The History of Mexican Immigration to the United States," De Paul University, 1997. 14 Sept. 2001, <<http://shrike.depaul.edu/mrodrig5/history.html>>

Saenz, Lupita and Ramos, Blanca, Personal interview, 27 October 2001.

"Silent Films Entertained McAllen Theater Fans of Four Decades Ago." The McAllen Monitor, 1961.

"The Spanish-Language Movies," The Texas Spectator, 16 August 1946.

Other References

Faust, Katherine and Paul B. Beck, Interstate Theater Collection MS-5 Archival Register, Interstate Theater Collection, Dallas Public Library, 1980.

Hershfield, Joanne and David R. Maciel, Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999).

Karl Hoblitzelle and Interstate Theatre Circuit, (Austin: Hoblitzelle Interstate Theatre Circuit Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin).

Pildas, Ave, Movie Palaces: Survivors of an Elegant Era, (Santa Monica: Hennessey + Ingalls, 1980).

A Shared Experience: Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Project and the Texas Historical Commission, (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1994).

Valentine, Maggie, The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Vine, Katy, "Screen Gems," Texas Monthly, October 2001: 88-95.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES Zone Easting Northing
 14 576160 2898080

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Lot 9, Block 26, Original Townsite of McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION Nomination includes all property historically associated with the building

11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Gregory W. Smith, THC Historian)

NAME/TITLE: Luis & Ann Muñoz

ORGANIZATION: El Rey Entertainment LLC

DATE: October 29, 2001

STREET & NUMBER: 308 Lark Ave

TELEPHONE: (956) 686-8170

CITY OR TOWN: McAllen

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78504

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-22)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheets Plan-19 through Plan-21)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME Rey Entertainment LLC

DATE: October 29, 2001

STREET & NUMBER: 308 Lark Ave

TELEPHONE: (956) 686-8170

CITY OR TOWN: McAllen

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78504

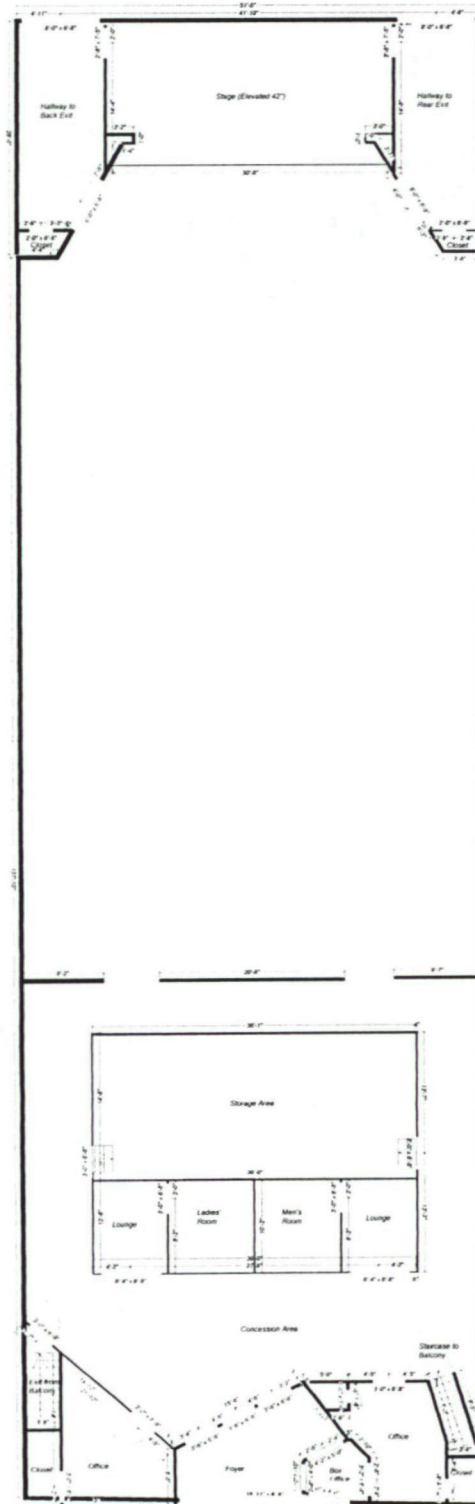
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PLAN Page 19

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Ground floor



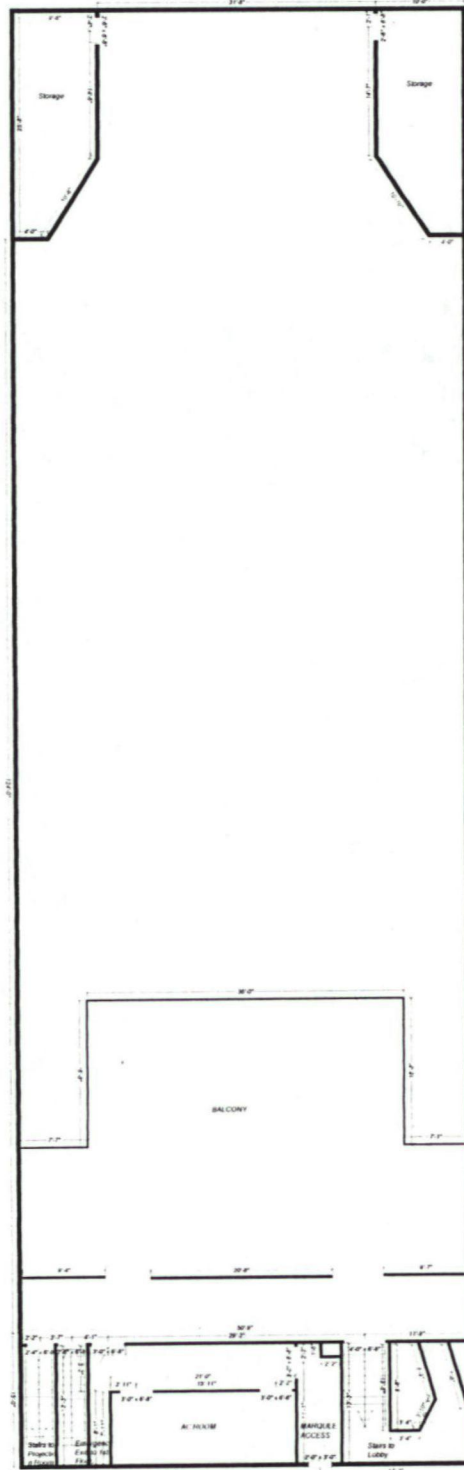
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PLAN Page 20

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Balcony



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Section PLAN Page 21

Projection room



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section PHOTO Page 22

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas

Cine El Rey
McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas
Photographed by Luis Muñoz
May 2001
Negatives on file with property owner

Theater primary façade
Camera facing east
Photo 1 of 3

17th Street streetscape
Camera facing south
Photo 2 of 3

Interior – auditorium
Camera facing southeast
Photo 3 of 3

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Cine El Rey
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Hidalgo

DATE RECEIVED: 3/11/02 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/01/02
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 4/17/02 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/25/02
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 02000402

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 4/26/02 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Entered in the
National Register*

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

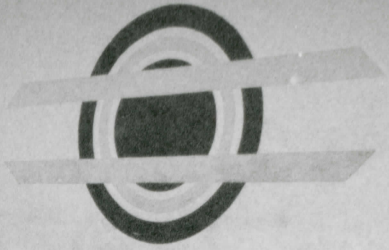
DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



CINE EL REY
McALLEN, HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS
PHOTO 1 of 3



CINE EL REY
McALLEN, HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS
PHOTO 2 of 3



NO SMOKING

NO SMOKING

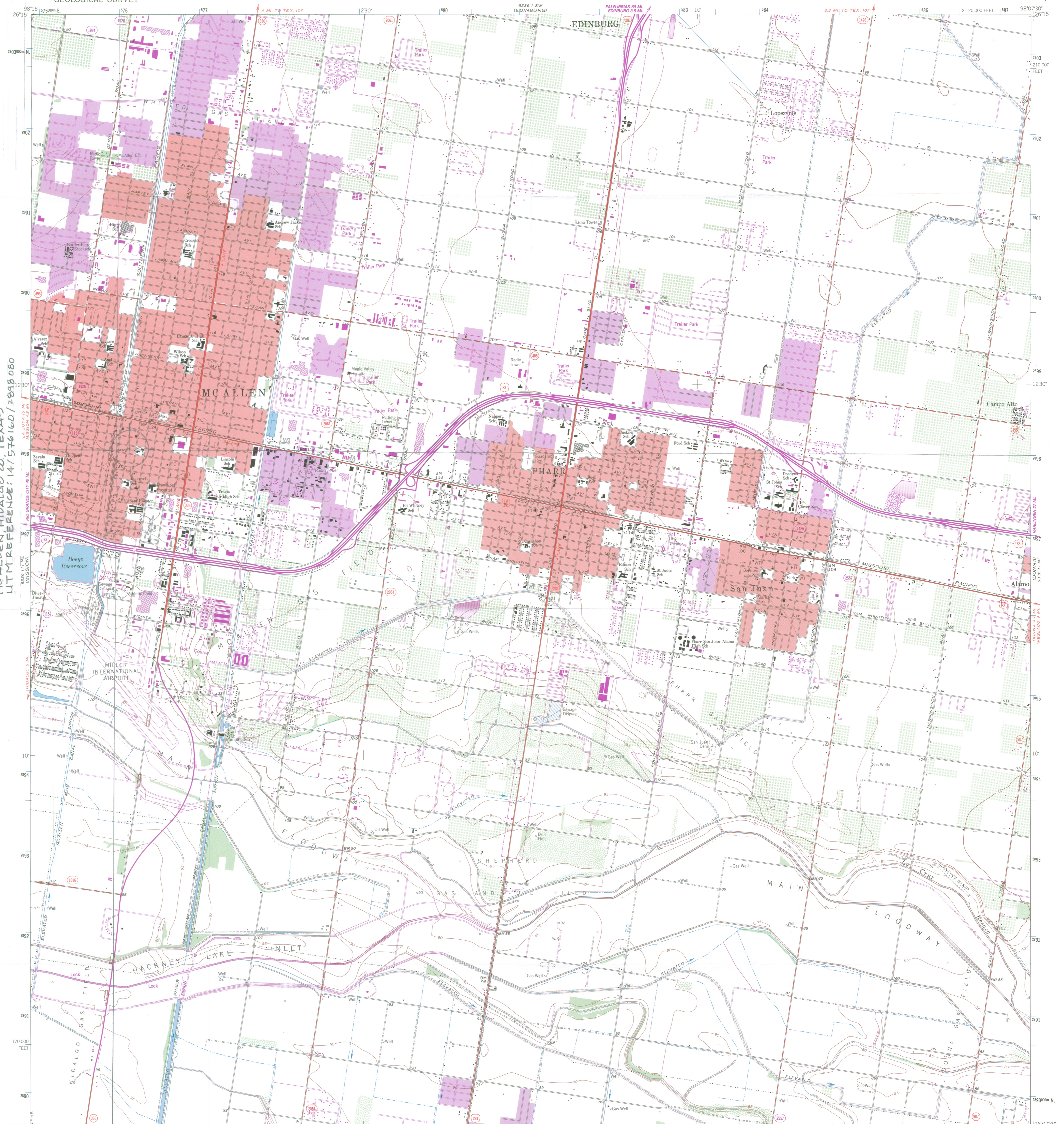
LUNES

CINE EL REY
McALLEN, HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS
PHOTO 3 of 3

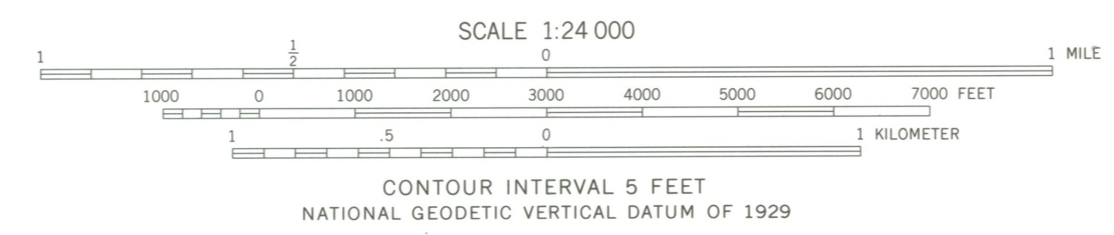
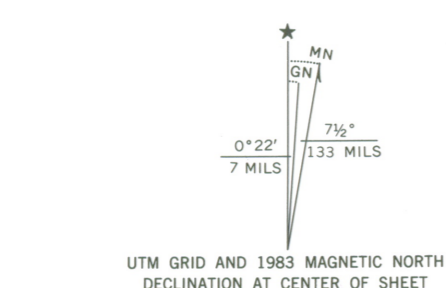
6336 11 SE
LA BLANCA

6336 11 SE
LA BLANCA

CINE EL REY
211 SOUTH 17TH STREET
MCALLEN, HIDALGO CO., TEXAS
LIT M REFERENCE: 14/576160/2898080



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1961. Topography by planetable surveys 1963
Polyconic projection 1927 North American Datum
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, south zone
1000 meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 14, shown in blue
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983
move the projection lines 33 meters south and
28 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



ROAD CLASSIFICATION	
Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
U.S. Route	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

2698-113

PHARR, TEX.
N2607.5-W9807.5/7.5
1963
PHOTOREVISED 1983
DMA 6336 11 NW-SERIES 9882

6336 11 SE
LA BLANCA