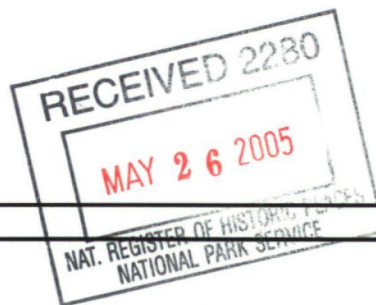


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Rio Grande City

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: Roughly bounded by N. Corpus, E. Wimpy, N. Avasolo, and E. Mirasoles  
CITY OR TOWN: Rio Grande City  
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Starr CODE: 427  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A  
VICINITY: N/A  
ZIP CODE:

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.)

Signature of certifying official

4/21/05  
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

Linda McClelland

July 8, 2005

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**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Private, Public

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Historic District

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	84	67 BUILDINGS
	2	0 SITES
	2	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	88	67 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 2

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** Historic and Architectural Resources of Rio Grande City

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** DOMESTIC= single dwelling, multiple dwelling, secondary structure, hotel, COMMERCE/  
TRADE=Business, professional, organizational, financial institution, specialty store, restaurant, warehouse

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** DOMESTIC= single dwelling, multiple dwelling, secondary structure, hotel, COMMERCE/  
TRADE=Business, professional, organizational, financial institution, specialty store, restaurant, warehouse, GOVERNMENT=City  
Hall, VACANT

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Late Victorian, Early 20th Century Revival Styles, Craftsman

<b>MATERIALS:</b>	<b>FOUNDATION</b>	BRICK, STONE
	<b>WALLS</b>	BRICK, STONE, WOOD
	<b>ROOF</b>	ASPHALT, OTHER=Chipichil
	<b>OTHER</b>	METAL

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-49).



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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

### Summary

The Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District lies somewhat east of its platted center in Rio Grande City, Texas, a small city on the United States-Mexican border nearly midway between Brownsville and Laredo. Composed of three parallel streets, two of which are one-way thoroughfares leading into and/or out of town, and their ancillary streets, the district contains an eclectic mix of property types and styles ranging from small, mid-19th century border dwellings to turn of the 20th century Queen Anne influenced Victorian houses and elaborately detailed brick commercial buildings with articulated brickwork and wrought iron balconies. The district is oriented along the Rio Grande River, which once formed the southern boundary of the town before it was re-channeled further to the south. Britton Avenue which bisects the town north to south was originally intended to be at the center of the town's commercial district but the businesses grew to the east along Main Street and later Second Street, probably to take advantage of the passing travelers along the main roads and the proximity to the former U.S. Army post, Fort Ringgold, on the city's eastern periphery. The district, therefore lies to the east of Britton Avenue, between Corpus and Avasolo streets at the far eastern boundary of the town. The district contains a total of 155 historic and nonhistoric properties, 88 of which are deemed Contributing to the historic district and 67 of which are considered Noncontributing elements. The great majority of the properties are commercial (75) and domestic (66 – including multi-family and domestic auxiliary buildings) with several being combined domestic and commercial structures (9). Noteworthy infrastructural elements such as historic stone walls and landscape elements, such as courtyards, are listed as well. Contributing properties in the district retain a moderate to high level of integrity of design, workmanship, materials, location, feeling, setting and association from its period of significance. Several buildings within the district are already listed in the National Register of Historic Places and others, by virtue of their outstanding architectural merit, would also be good candidates for individual listing.

### Description

The Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District lies in the southeastern quadrant of the City of Rio Grande City, Starr County, in South Texas. Rio Grande City is situated on the north bank of the Rio Grande River, about 90 miles upriver from Brownsville near the Gulf of Mexico. Located on the site of a 1753 Spanish Colonial ranch called Carnestolendas, Rio Grande City was formally founded at the conclusion of the United States-Mexican War in 1848. The historic district encompasses seven blocks of parallel First, Second and Mirasoles streets; First, or Main Street (also shown as Laredo Street on some maps), is the traditional core of the downtown business district, but resources on adjacent Second and Mirasoles streets share architectural characteristics and historic associations with properties on Main Street. The district lies within the original Town site of Rio Grande City platted by founders Henry Clay Davis and Forbes Britton in 1848.

The district includes primarily one- and two-part commercial, domestic and combination commercial and domestic buildings where the family business enterprise either occupied the first floor of a two story building or the main wing of an L-shaped building with residential uses involving the remainder of the building. Many of the district's buildings are examples of vernacular forms that were developed in a relatively compact region of South Texas lying between Brownsville and Laredo during the last half of the 19th century. A handful of extant properties in the town, including the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse-Starr County Courthouse building (to the west of the district) date to the town's earliest period of development beginning in 1848. Several stone structures within the district may be remnants of an earlier ranch complex and thus pre-date the founding of Rio Grande City. Rio Grande City's unique architectural



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

contribution is perhaps best seen in its many outstanding brick buildings. Nearly all are made of handmade yellow or buff-colored brick and feature segmental arch windows and decorative brickwork evident in the parapets, pilasters, cornices and hood molds. Most were built between about 1880 and 1910 and many are contributing features of the historic district. The hand of German immigrant and master brick mason, Heinrich or Enrique Portscheller, is evident in a number of the city's fine brick buildings from this period, among them the Silverio de la Pena building and the convent. Other buildings were undoubtedly influenced by Portscheller's design and bricklaying techniques. In the late 19th and early 20th century, French immigrants influenced architectural tastes in the area. Two-story brick buildings with wrought iron work, particularly in balconies or balconets may be attributed to French design trends sometimes via New Orleans. Francois La Borde reportedly retained a French architect to design his home which was built in stages from the late 19th century to about 1917.

Resources constructed in the early-20th century typically illustrate the more conventional Anglo-American architectural forms that were popular throughout the country in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. Although "American" styles generally reached Rio Grande City late – one of the city's most distinctive late-Victorian houses was built in 1920 – they exhibit of the hallmark features of the trends. Late-Victorian era houses in the district display popular Queen Anne details, such as wrap-around porches and fish scale shingles, and Classical Revival essentials, such as symmetrical facades and full porches supported by Doric or Corinthian columns. However, most are rendered in locally-made brick and have segmental arch windows that tie them visually to the city's earlier properties. When the railroad finally made its way to Rio Grande City in 1925, people could afford milled lumber shipped by rail. As a result, pattern-book bungalows sprang up throughout the city and several are located within the district. During the 1920s and 1930s, Mission Revival features such as stepped parapets began to appear in both residential and commercial properties and they, too, are represented in the district, notably in a service station on Second Street.

Because Rio Grande City has grown at only a modest pace since the 1930s, it retains a significant degree of its historic architectural fabric in the seven-block central business corridor. The district effectively portrays a unique melding of Mexican, American, German, French and other immigrant cultural influences found only in a relatively small area along the border.

### Geographical Setting

The incorporated city of Rio Grande City lies on the former north bank of the Rio Grande approximately 90 miles downriver from Laredo and 90 miles upriver from Brownsville, near the Gulf Coast. Although the Rio Grande generally flows from northwest to southeast into the Gulf of Mexico, it makes a small bend and forms the southern boundary of the City of Rio Grande City. The city is sited on a rise above the river and a large flood plain separates the city's southernmost street, Water Street, from the River.

The town was laid out over slightly hilly terrain with drainage to the south into the river. The natural landscape is sparsely dotted with mesquite trees and various types of cactus, particularly prickly pear. Residential lots are planted in a variety of semi-tropical plants including bougainvillea and papaya and palm trees. Many people have container gardens on and near their front porches. Dozens of terra cotta clay pots filled with flowering plants and cactus may be clustered about the entrance to a house. No trees or plantings line the streets in any planned way except for the esplanade along Britton Avenue. A central, grassy median runs the length of the avenue from Water Street to the Starr County Courthouse at Fourth Street. Concrete sidewalks appear on the main commercial streets (Second and Main) but there are no parkways between the sidewalks and the street. Rio Grande City as the Starr County seat was laid out in a grid pattern reportedly following the plan of Austin, Texas the state capital. Streets run on a nearly north-south, east-west axis. It is slightly



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

skewed. A wide esplanade rises from the "high bank" of the Rio Grande and extends to the courthouse square at the top of a low hill. It divides the city into east and west halves and features a small park with various monuments in the middle. A kiosk occupies a spot at the southern end of the median. Today, the river has retreated and the southern end of the esplanade is occupied by a bank and a small memorial park with flag poles.

### Definition of District Boundaries

The boundaries of the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District include the west side of Avasolo Street beginning at its intersection with Saenz Alley (Water Street) to the rear (north) property line of Second Street; the boundary includes the north side of Second Street from Avasolo, west, to the east side of Corpus Street, then south along the east side of Corpus to Mirasoles; then along the rear (south) property line of Mirasoles from Corpus to Washington, then along the rear (south) property line of Saenz Alley/Water Street from Washington back to Avasolo Street. The district boundaries delineate the most intact region of Rio Grande City's historic downtown mercantile and residential zone. They follow the southern and eastern boundary of the original city plat and include nearly all of the significant late-19th and early 20th century commercial zone as indicated by Sanborn maps (1894-1940) and historic photographs. The boundaries exclude a small residential strand that emerged south of the city's original southern boundary after World War II as it does not relate to the early 20th century history or architecture of the district. Although good examples of commercial and residential properties also lie along Main and Second Streets to the west of Corpus, they are interspersed with new construction, vacant lots and insensitively altered historic properties. While noteworthy exceptions such as St. Mary's Convent and School front onto the Britton Avenue esplanade leading to the Starr County Courthouse, the majority of properties along that boulevard have been altered such that they no longer impart a sense of history. North of Second Street the town is largely residential in character. While many significant residential and institutional properties are scattered throughout this area, it too is pockmarked with new construction and insensitive renovation. The district's boundaries are distinct in that they include a dense concentration of related historic commercial and residential properties. On all sides of the district nonhistoric and noncontributing properties, and vacant lots prevail. The variety and quality of residential and commercial properties within the district accurately portray Rio Grande City's thriving downtown lifestyle in the late 19th and early 20th century, thus supporting the establishment of the boundaries.

### Contributing and Noncontributing Resources

Each property within the district is designated Contributing or Noncontributing for its ability to convey a sense of the architectural or historic fabric that lends itself to the special character of the district. Properties that superbly convey this sense are those which were built more than 50 years ago and have not changed or have changed very little since their date of construction. Properties that adequately support the district are those which were built during the historic period and have suffered little or only moderate alteration since their construction. They should maintain their original roof pitch and form, retain their porches, original fenestration (window and door) patterns and most significant materials and decorative features. These types of unchanged or little changed historic properties are considered Contributing elements of the historic district and are designated by the letter C on the table in the following inventory. Additions to enlarge historic buildings for added space may be done to the rear or to the least façade and thus may not detract from the streetscape view of the property. Thus, the property may yet contribute to the historic character of the district.

Noncontributing properties are those that were built after the period of significance, that is, they are modern or of more recent vintage, or they are historic building that have been so severely altered that they no longer convey a sense of history. Typical changes that render a historic building Noncontributing include bricking in windows and doors on the



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front façade, applying stucco siding to a brick building, removing a pitched roof in order to create a flat-roofed effect. In nearly all cases, the original design is the best design for a historic building. Modern alterations rarely improve historic buildings. Repair and restoration preserve them for another generation to appreciate.

The period of significance for the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District has been set at 1940 because the great majority of resources within the district were built before the outbreak of World War II and there was very little early postwar construction. Besides the restrictions on domestic and non-war related construction during the war years, the abandonment of Fort Ringgold – a great source of income for the city – after the war further dampened construction in the downtown area. Virtually all historic commercial construction was completed by 1940 and did not resume until the 1960s in the district. A number of dwellings, primarily bungalows built in the southeast corner of the district, were built through the 1930s but residential construction also halted for a period of about 15-20 years. Thus, there exists a recognizable distinction between pre-1940 properties and those built beginning in the 1960s. Since there is no sense of continuum of historic fabric into the 1950s, the period of significance is established at 1940 when most major construction in the historic district came to an end.

### Inventory

The following inventory of properties lists all of the properties, both historic and nonhistoric, within the boundaries of the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District. Because few buildings in Rio Grande City display street numbers, site numbers were used to differentiate between properties and to locate them on the district maps. All historic period properties are identified by the site numbers that were assigned to them in the 1996 *Rio Grande City Survey of Cultural Resources* conducted by Hardy Heck Moore & Associates. Nonhistoric resources were given site numbers preceded by the letter N for "nonhistoric" in a 2003 survey conducted by Preservation Central, Inc. The inventory is organized in the following table by site number and relative street address. The east-west arterials are given first, followed by the secondary north-south streets. East-west properties are listed by site number from the easternmost to the westernmost end of the district, regardless of whether they lie on the north or south side of the street. North-south facing properties are organized by site number from the southern end of the district to the northern boundary, again without regard to their location on the east or west side of the street.

Each cultural resource was assessed as to its ability to convey a sense of history. On that basis, they were determined to either add to or detract from the character of the historic district and assessed to be Contributing (C) or Noncontributing (NC) features of the district. All nonhistoric properties in the district are Noncontributing (NC) elements of the district. Property type designations refer to the original use or function of the resource.

Following the table is a narrative description of the properties with greater emphasis on the more noteworthy examples of unique or outstanding building types in the historic district.



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Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

## Inventory of Properties

Site	Address	Date	Property Type	Subtype: Style/Influence	Status
<b>300</b>	<b>Block E. Wimpy</b>				
581	302 E. Wimpy	1920	Domestic	U-Plan	C
588	304 E. Wimpy	1920	Commercial	Mission Revival Grocery	C
<b>200</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
432	200 bl E. Second	1915	Commercial		NC
431	200 bl E. Second	1925/1985	Commercial	Gas Station	NC
430	200 bl E. Second	1925	Domestic	Craftsman Bungalow	C
429	200 bl. E. Second	1890	Domestic		NC
428	204 E. Second St.	1910	Domestic	Classical Revival/Queen Anne	C
<b>300</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
584	300 bl E. Second	1925	Commercial	Funeral Home	NC
427	300 bl E. Second	1945	Commercial		NC
N9	300 bl E. Second	1970	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	NC
426	305 E. Second	1880	Domestic	Classical Revival	C
425	300 bl E. Second	1925	Commercial	Mission Revival	C
424	300 bl E. Second	1915	Domestic	Classical Revival/Queen Anne	C
N8	300 bl E. Second	1960	Commercial	Convenience Store	NC
<b>400</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
N7	400 bl E. Second	1985	Commercial	Convenience Store	NC
422	400 bl E. Second	1915	Domestic	Classical Revival	C
423	400 bl E. Second	1937	Commercial	Mission Revival	C
421	400 bl E. Second	1900/1985	Domestic		NC
N25	418 E. Second	1980	Commercial		NC
<b>500</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
420	500 bl E. Second	1935	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
419	500 bl E. Second	1930	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
N24	500 bl E. Second	1960	Commercial	Restaurant	NC
N23	500 bl E. Second	1970	Commercial	Mansard Roof	NC
N6	500 bl E. Second	1985	Commercial	Mission Revival	NC
N22	500 bl E. Second	1975	Commercial	Mansard Roof	NC
418A	504 E. Second	1920	Domestic	Mission Revival	C
418B	504 E. Second	1920	Domestic:Aux	Garage, Garage Apt.	C



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N21	500 bl E. Second	1960	Commercial	Restaurant	NC
N5	500 bl E. Second	1975	Commercial	Mansard Roof	NC
<b>600</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
417	600 bl E. Second	1925	Commercial	False Front	C
416	600 bl E. Second	1925	Commercial		NC
415	600 bl. E. Second	1900/2000	Commercial		NC
414	605 E. Second	1900/ 1915	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
413	603 E. Second	1900	Commercial		NC
N4	611 E. Second	1965	Commercial	Motel	NC
<b>700</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
412	701? E. Second	1925	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
N3	700 E. Second	2000	Commercial	Mission Revival	NC
411	705 E. Second	1894	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
409	700 bl E. Second	1895	Domestic	L-Plan	C
410	700 bl E. Second	2004	Domestic	New construction replaced historic contributing bungalow	NC
408	711 E. Second St.	1900/ 1925	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
N2	700 bl E. Second	1970	Domestic	Ranch	NC
N1	700 bl E. Second	1970	Commercial	Manufactured Building	NC
<b>800</b>	<b>Block E. Second</b>				
407	800 E. Second	1925	Commercial	Service Station: Mission	C
<b>200</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				
365	200 bl. E. Main	1890	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
366	200 bl. E. Main	1925	Commercial	Mission Revival	C
367A	204 E. Main	1910	Commercial	Storefront	C
367B	200 bl. E. Main	1925	Domestic		C
368	205 E. Main	1890	Domestic		NC
N11	200 bl. E. Main	1970	Commercial	Service Station/Store	NC
369	207? E. Main	1930	Commercial	Movie Theater	C
<b>300</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				



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370	300 bl. E. Main	1950	Commercial	Service Station	C
372	300 bl. E. Main	1935	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	C
373	300 bl. E. Main	1925	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	NC
371	307 bl. E. Main	1920	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
N12	300 bl. E. Main	1970	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	NC
374	300 bl. E. Main	1924	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	NC
375	300 bl. E. Main	1920	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
N28	300 bl. E. Main	1950	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	NC
376	300 bl. E. Main	1940/1965	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	NC
377	300 bl. E. Main	1913	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	C
<b>400</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				
378A	400 bl. E. Main	1900	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
378B	400 bl. E. Main	1900	Domestic:Aux	Vernacular	C
380	400 bl. E. Main	1925	Commercial	Spanish Colonial Revival	C
N13	400 bl. E. Main	1965	Commercial	1-Part Commercial/brick wall	NC
379	400 bl. E. Main	1910	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	NC
384	404 E. Main	1840	Infrastructure	Stone Wall with Door	C
381	400 bl. E. Main	1915	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
382	400 bl. E. Main	1910	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
385	400 bl. E. Main	1880/1910	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
383	400 bl. E. Main	1886	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C
386A	412 E. Main	1910	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	C
386B	412 E. Main rear	1930	Dom: Aux	Auto Garage	C
387A	400 bl. E. Main	1935	Commercial	Bank	C
387B	400 bl. E. Main	1970	Dom: Aux	Auto Garage	NC
388A	420 E. Main	1930	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	C
388B	420 E. Main	1870	Infrastructure	Stone Wall	C
<b>500</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				
389	505-7 E. Main	1890	Domestic	Vernacular	C
390	509 E. Main	1885	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
391	506 E. Main	1915	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
392	508 ? E. Main	1930	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
393	510 ? E. Main	1887	Domestic/ Commercial	Vernacular	C



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<b>600</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				
394	600 bl E. Main	1897	Domestic/ Commercial	Hotel: French, Vernacular	C
395	600 bl. E. Main	1895	Commercial	2-Part Commercial	C
396	600 bl E. Main	1901	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	C
397	600 bl E. Main	1920	Commercial		NC
N14	600 bl E. Main	1970	Commercial		NC
398	605 E. Main	1890	Domestic	Vernacular	C
399	600 bl E. Main	1900	Commercial		NC
N15	600 bl E. Main	1960	Commercial	Service Station	NC
<b>700</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				
N16	700 bl. E. Main	1980	Commercial		NC
401	700 bl E. Main	1890	Domestic	Vernacular	C
N17	700 bl E. Main	1980	Commercial		NC
N26	707 E. Main	1981	Commercial	1-Part Commercial	NC
<b>800</b>	<b>Block E. Main</b>				
402B	800 bl. E. Main	1930	Landscape	Garden	C
<b>300</b>	<b>Block Mirasoles</b>				
320	310 E. Mirasoles	1915	Domestic	Classical Revival	C
N35	300 bl Mirasoles		Commercial		NC
N20	312 E. Mirasoles	1960	Commercial	Barbershop	NC
<b>400</b>	<b>Block Mirasoles</b>				
322	400 bl Mirasoles	1925	Domestic	Vernacular	C
321	402 E. Mirasoles	1925	Domestic		NC
587A	400 bl Mirasoles	1870	Domestic	Vernacular	C
587B	400 bl Mirasoles	1900	Domestic	Vernacular	C
325	400 bl Mirasoles	1900	Domestic	Vernacular	C
585	400 bl Mirasoles	1910	Institutional	Vernacular	C
323	400 bl Mirasoles	1925	Domestic	Spanish Colonial Revival	C
324	414 bl Mirasoles	1890	Domestic	Classical Revival	C
<b>500</b>	<b>Block Mirasoles</b>				
326	500 bl Mirasoles	1914	Domestic	Vernacular	C
N19	500 Mirasoles	1975	Domestic		NC

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329	504 Mirasoles	1920	Dom: Multi		C
<b>600</b>	<b>Block Mirasoles</b>				
332	600 bl Mirasoles	1890	Domestic	Classical Revival	C
N18	600 bl Mirasoles	1940	Domestic		NC
580	600 bl Mirasoles	1925	Domestic	Craftsman	NC
333	600 bl Mirasoles	1925	Domestic	Spanish Colonial Revival	C
<b>700</b>	<b>Block Mirasoles</b>				
N34	700 bl. Mirasoles	1970	Domestic	Ranch	NC
334	702 Mirasoles	1910	Domestic	Vernacular	C
335	704 Mirasoles	1925	Domestic		NC
336	706 Mirasoles	1920	Dom: Multi	Craftsman	C
337	708 Mirasoles	1925	Domestic		NC
<b>100</b>	<b>Block S. Corpus</b>				
163	101 S. Corpus	1935	Domestic	Tudor Revival Bungalow	C
<b>100</b>	<b>Block N. East</b>				
147A	100 bl N. East St.	1890/1920	Domestic	Mission Revival	C
147B	100 bl N. East St.	1920	Domestic:Aux	Shed/Apartment	C
147C	100 bl N. East St.	1930	Domestic:Aux	Garage – Craftsman	NC
146	202 N. East St.	1915	Domestic	National Folk	NC
<b>100</b>	<b>Bl S. Washington</b>				
137A	100 S. Washington	1879	Domestic	Vernacular	C
137B	100 S. Washington	1880	Domestic	Vernacular	C
<b>100</b>	<b>Bl N. Washington</b>				
136	100 N. Washington	1945	Commercial	Restaurant	NC
135	104 N. Washington	1920/1930	Commercial	1-part Commercial block	C
<b>100</b>	<b>Block S. Lopez</b>				
327	205 S. Lopez	1890/1970	Domestic	Vernacular	NC
121	100 bl S. Lopez	1920	Commercial	Barbershop	C
<b>100</b>	<b>Block N. Lopez</b>				
120	100 bl N. Lopez	1900/1990	Commercial	2-part Commercial	C
N36	203 N. Lopez	1960	Domestic	Ranch	NC



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<b>100</b>	<b>Block N. Garza</b>				
100	207 S. Garza	1930	Domestic	Craftsman bungalow	C
97	100 bl N. Garza	1925/1960	Commercial	1-part commercial	C
101	100 N. Garza	1940	Domestic	Georgian Revival	C
<b>100</b>	<b>Block S. Flores</b>				
75	613 Mirasoles? faces S. Flores	1930/1965	Domestic		NC
<b>100</b>	<b>Block N. Flores</b>				
76	100 bl N. Flores	1890/1935	Commercial	1-Part Commercial Vernacular	C
77	101 N Flores	1950	Dom: Multi	Hotel	NC
74	100 bl N. Flores	1880	Domestic	Vernacular	C
73	100 bl N. Flores	1940/1965	Commercial	1-part Commercial	NC
<b>200</b>	<b>Block N. Flores</b>				
79	200 bl N. Flores	1895	Commercial	1-part Commercial	C
N31	200 bl N. Flores	1970	Commercial	1-part Commercial	NC
<b>100</b>	<b>Block S. Avasolo</b>				
48	211 S. Avasolo	1925	Domestic	Craftsman bungalow	C
43	206 S. Avasolo	1925	Domestic	Craftsman bungalow	C
42	204 S. Avasolo	1925	Domestic	Craftsman bungalow	C
49	207 S. Avasolo	1880	Domestic	L-Plan	NC
41	202 S. Avasolo	1925	Domestic	Craftsman bungalow	NC
40	200 bl S. Avasolo	1925	Domestic	Craftsman bungalow	NC
50	105 S. Avasolo	1925	Dom: Multi		NC
<b>100</b>	<b>Block N. Avasolo</b>				
51	101 N. Avasolo	1870	Domestic	Vernacular	C
N30	100 bl N. Avasolo	1960	Commercial	Bakery	NC
N27	100 bl N. Avasolo	1965	Domestic	Ranch	NC
39	100 bl N. Avasolo	1940	Domestic	Bungalow	NC
N29	100 bl N. Avasolo	2003	Commercial	1-part commercial Mission Revival	NC
<b>200</b>	<b>Block N. Avasolo</b>				
52	201 N. Avasolo	1925	Domestic	Craftsman Bungalow	C

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### Individual Property Descriptions

#### *EAST/WEST STREETS*

##### **East Wimpy Street**

*300 block East Wimpy Street*

Site 581 – 302 E. Wimpy Street. Ca. 1920. Domestic. Contributing

This U-Plan board and batten dwelling is an unusual domestic building type in Rio Grande City. The two front-gable wings may have been added to what was originally a vernacular hipped roof dwelling common to Rio Grande City in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. According to Sanborn maps, the wings were added between 1925 and 1940. They display gable vents and louvered shutters. The house is in poor condition but has not been appreciably altered since the gable wings were added.

Site 588 – 304 E. Wimpy Street Ca. 1945. Commercial. Contributing

Site 588 is a small one-bay, one-part red brick commercial building that fronts onto Wimpy Street. Wimpy is little more than an alley between the 300 blocks of E. Second and E. Third streets. The size and location of the building may indicate that it was a neighborhood grocery store. The building features a well-defined stepped brick parapet. It has a sloped roof brick addition extending to the east. Although apparently abandoned, the building is in fair to good condition. It is a good example of a modest Mission Revival commercial building common to Rio Grande City in the early to mid-20th century.

##### **East Second Street**

*200 block East Second Street*

Site 432 – 200 block E. Second Street. Ca. 1915. Commercial. Noncontributing

Once a separate dwelling and a corner store now both are incorporated as one operation. All openings have been stuccoed over on the L-plan dwelling. Some evidence of their window surrounds remains. On the store section are large plate glass windows. A blue Mansard roof over a porch is supported by square posts. The building has been compromised such that it no longer contributes to the district.

Site 431 – 200 block E. Second Street. ca. 1925/1985. Commercial. Noncontributing.

Baldemar Garza Attorney at Law. Former gas station, one story cross gable concrete stucco infill in former garage door bays. Extended service bay remains intact. Building has clay tiles. A large tinted window and wood paneled door have been installed. The building has been significantly altered and no longer serves its original use.

Site 430 – 200 block E. Second Street. 1925/1950. Domestic. Contributing.

The Amado Guitierrez House was built about 1925 and altered about 1950. Originally built as a single-family house, the front-gabled bungalow has been converted to commercial use. It is wood frame with wood siding and displays the exposed rafter ends and tapered box columns typical of Craftsman influenced bungalows throughout the country. It



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has a one-bay integral porch. Alterations include changes to the porch, windows and doors. The wood sash windows were replaced with fixed metal sash and the single door was replaced with aluminum.

Despite its changes, the Amado Gutierrez House is a good example of a cross-gable Craftsman influenced bungalow. It retains its roof pitch and form, porch configuration and sufficient architectural fabric to be considered a Medium preservation priority and is a Contributing element of the Rio Grande City Historic District.

*Site 429* – 200 E. Second Street. Ca. 1890. Domestic. Noncontributing

One-story low pitched hipped roof dwelling with aluminum siding, fixed windows, multi-light aluminum storm door windows covered with aluminum on one side of front. Garage on front. Multiple aluminum coverings and addition of garage on primary façade render this historic property noncontributing. The house could be renovated and the garage removed to restore its historic appearance.

*Site 428* – 204 E. Second Street. 1910/1990. Domestic. Contributing

Santos Sanchez reportedly built the Yandelicio Sanchez House, a Modified L-Plan with a wrap around porch, about 1910. The load-bearing brick house has a hipped roof with gables, boxed eaves, and patterned shingles in the gable ends. Its 3-bay wrap around porch has a hipped roof supported by classical columns on brick piers and topped with Ionic capitals. The windows are 6/6 double hung with metal sash; the wood door has oval glazing. The house is in excellent condition but its windows, porch and exterior sheathing have been altered. Locally made buff-colored bricks called *ochitos* – little eights – because they were eight inches long, were used in its construction.

This is a good local example of a common vernacular house form in Texas. Similar houses were popular during the very late 19th and early 20th centuries. The columns with Ionic capitals reflect the influence of the Classical Revival style. Patterned shingles are displayed in the gable ends. Changes to the windows, porch and exterior sheathing detract from the property's historic integrity. However, the property retains sufficient historic fabric and architectural embellishment that it was listed as a Medium High preservation priority and is considered a Contributing element of the historic district.

### ***300 Block East Second Street***

*Site 584* – 300 block E. Second Street. 1925/1995. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This building has a rectangular form with a flat roof. The original appearance is unknown. It has served as a funeral home since at least 1945 when it appeared as an "Undertakers" building on the Sanborn maps of that year. The flat façade has received the addition of a Greek Revival entablature, Doric columns, shaped concrete balusters, and stone wall with concrete coping. The entire building has been covered with Portland cement stucco. An extensive addition to rear has a service bay supported by Doric columns. The barrel vaulted addition may be used for funeral services. Some part of the historic building on this site may survive but it has been entirely encased in the current faux historic edifice.

*Site N9* – 300 block E. Second Street. ca. 1970. Commercial. Noncontributing.

Edelstein's Better Furniture, built about 1970, is a 2-story building with a brick foundation and a volcanic rock frame which supports large plate glass display windows. It has an applied Mansard roof with wood shingles and a band of concrete stucco on the upper floor. The furniture store was probably built in two stages but it is linked internally and functions as one building. No part of the building was constructed within the period of significance and thus the entire property is determined to be a Noncontributing element of the historic district.



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*Site 427 – 303 E. Second Street. 1945. Commercial. Noncontributing.*

This is a 2-story cinder block building with stone brick on the first floor. Metal bands extend about two feet out from building above first floor suggesting that they once held an awning. The upper story has 2/2 horizontal aluminum windows while the first floor has aluminum windows and a door behind aluminum grillwork. Although the building was constructed within the period of significance, it has been altered significantly over the years and is considered a Noncontributing element of the historic district.

*Site 426 – 305 E. Second Street. 1880. Domestic. Contributing*

The Inez Hinojosa House is a ca. 1880 side-gabled load-bearing brick masonry house with a wood-shingled roof. It has a 5-bay hipped roof wrap around porch supported by fluted classical columns with Corinthian caps. There are 2/2 double hung wood sash windows topped by segmented arches. Two single wood doors with glazing and transoms enter the house from the porch. The house sits on a raised basement.

The Inez Hinojosa House is noteworthy for its combination of vernacular and Classical architectural elements. The columns that support the porch and fully wrap around the front and east side of the house reflect the influence of the Classical Revival style. Doric pilasters mirror the porch columns. An unusual feature of the house is its two front doors with overhead transoms. Five tall, narrow windows with 2/2 lights are spaced across the front façade. A fine and unusual blend of vernacular and Classical stylistic elements, the house is a significant local resource, a High preservation priority and a Contributing resource in the historic district.

*Site 425 – 300 block E. Second Street. 1925. Commercial. Contributing*

This building is a load-bearing brick commercial block with a flat roof and brick parapet suggestive of modest Spanish Colonial or Mission Revival stylistic movements. The masonry work in the pedimented parapet defines two panels. It has a wood canopy, fixed metal sash windows and two single, aluminum doors. The windows and doors have been altered from their original ca. 1925 appearance.

This store is a good local example of a one-part commercial block building. The entrances and storefronts have been slightly modified; however, the parapet with its low pedimented extension and two brick inlaid panels, suggestive of Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic influences, are intact. It was identified as a Medium priority property in the 1996 city survey and Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 424 – 300 block E. Second Street. 1915. Domestic. Contributing*

The Ruben Cruz House is a rare ca. 1915 Modified L-plan house with Classical Revival and Queen Anne features in Rio Grande City. It is built of load-bearing masonry and has both brick siding (*ochitos* – eight inch bricks) with wood shingles in the gable ends. It has a hipped roof punctuated by pitched gables with wood shingles in the gable ends. Classical fluted columns with Corinthian caps support a hipped roof wrap-around porch with a turned wood balustrade. Windows are 9/1 double hung wood sash in segmental arched openings. The single wood door has glazing and is topped with a transom under a segmental arched opening.

The Ruben Cruz House is a good local example of an early-20th century one-story brick dwelling with Classical Revival embellishments. Although this style is usually seen on buildings with symmetrical facades and massing, this building illustrates how stylistic details can be applied to a largely asymmetrical vernacular house form. Like other contemporaneous Rio Grande City dwellings, the house features brick construction and segmental arched windows. It



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retains its leaded beveled glass windows throughout. The house is vacant and is in poor condition. Nevertheless, it is a significant architectural resource and may have important historic associations, as well. It is a High preservation priority and a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site N8* – 300 block E. Second Street. 1960. Commercial. Noncontributing.

The ca. 1960 Mini Mart Food Store is a small scale cinderblock 1-story convenience store with a Mansard roof and asphalt shingles. It has a single aluminum frame door and plate glass windows, all tinted. The property postdates the period of significance and detracts from the character of the historic district.

### ***400 block East Second Street***

*Site N7* – 400 block E. Second Street. ca 1985. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story convenience store and gas station with a freestanding service bay. Finished in concrete stucco, it has a broad, approximately three foot tall awning extending around roofline. Large, plate glass windows and double aluminum frame glass doors. The property detracts from the historic character of the neighborhood and is a Noncontributing element of the historic district.

*Site 422* – 400 block E. Second Street. Ca. 1915. Domestic. Contributing.

The Eduardo Matilde Isaguierre House is a ca. 1915 2-story load-bearing brick house with colossal fluted Doric columns supporting a hipped-roof with boxed eaves. The house features a two-story open portico which wraps around to a two-story gallery that runs along the rear ell of the building. The windows are 1/1 double-hung wood sash with segmental arched openings. Two single wood doors with oval glazing and transoms open from the front façade into separate living quarters. A cast iron balconet similar to those found in other substantial turn-of-the 20th century houses and commercial buildings extends from the upper central opening.

The Isaguierre House is one of the most significant dwellings in the Rio Grande City Historic District but it has been badly damaged by a fire and subsequent neglect. Its future is in question. Despite its poor condition, the property remains significant as one of the few -- and certainly most elaborate -- Classical Revival style dwellings in Rio Grande City. Its two-story Doric columns on the front and side elevations are particularly unusual. Although the Classical Revival influence is generally an "American" stylistic movement, the building's separate entrances, locally-made brick and cast iron balconet are typical of local vernacular domestic and commercial buildings. Designated a High preservation priority, the Isaguierre House retains sufficient architectural fabric to be considered a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 423* – 400 block E. Second Street. 1937/1950. Commercial. Contributing

This one-part commercial building, now called "The International Store", is noteworthy for its Mission Revival stylistic influences evident in the shaped, "Alamo-esque" parapet wall and stucco finish over load-bearing brick masonry. It has a wood canopy, fixed, metal sash windows and aluminum double doors with four storefronts. Alterations have been made to the siding, windows and doors. The parapet shows the date of construction as 1937 but the building appears to have been altered about 1950 and later.

In spite of its alterations, the building is a good local example of a one-part commercial block and is distinguished by its low-slung massing and modest Mission Revival stylistic influence. Although the ground floor has been altered by the replacement of its original fenestration with aluminum-framed windows and doors, the upper section retains its small



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parapet extension. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists R. R. Margo as the property owner but it is remembered as the Rio Grande Variety Store, owned by Martin Garza. There is a similar store in the city of Roma, about 20 miles upriver. This building was listed as a Medium to High preservation priority in the 1996 survey and it is considered a Contributing feature of the historic district.

*Site 421* – 400 block E. Second Street. 1900/1985. Domestic. Noncontributing.

Site 421 is a historic building that has been significantly altered. It was a linear plan building that fronted onto Lopez Street. The 1925 Sanborn map depicts the property as a single-family dwelling but by 1945, it was divided into four separate, two-room dwelling units. The load bearing masonry structure was originally flat-roofed but a pitched roof was recently set inside the low brick parapet wall that circumscribed the rectangular form. Segmental arch window hoods are still visible but window openings have been reduced or eliminated. The property is designated a Noncontributing element of the historic district.

*Site N25* – 418 E. Second Street. ca. 1980. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story stucco commercial building used as dentist's office. It has a flat roof with metal coping and a red clay tile porch roof over arched entry porch. Round arched dark tinted windows are the primary fenestration. It was constructed outside the period of significance and does not contribute to the historic district.

### **500 Block East Second Street**

*Site 420* – 500 block E. Second Street. 1935/1945. Commercial. Contributing.

This 1-story commercial building is constructed of load-bearing masonry sheathed with asbestos. It has a flat, built-up tar and gravel roof with a brick parapet and a wooden canopy supported by metal tie rods. Windows are fixed, wood sash, and the doors are recessed double wood doors with transoms. There are five storefronts with transoms above the storefront doors and windows. The building is a good local example of a one-part commercial block with recessed double-door entrances. This type of building is characteristic of modestly scaled, early 20th century commercial architecture and is noteworthy because of its relative lack of alterations. The eastern half of the building may contain an earlier blacksmith shop within it. It was rated as a Medium priority in the 1996 city survey due to alterations to the windows. However, it retains sufficient architectural fabric and character to be considered a Contributing property in the historic district.

*Site 419* – 500 block E. Second Street. 1930/1945. Commercial. Contributing.

This ca. 1930 one-part commercial block is constructed of load-bearing brick with a flat roof and modest dentil work in the low parapet. It features the transoms, minimal brick detailing along the roofline and marquee awning common in early- to mid-20th century commercial buildings throughout Texas. The canopy is supported by metal tie rods. The building's original storefront has been slightly modified but the building retains sufficient fabric and character to be recognizable to the historic period. It was rated as a Medium priority in the 1996 city survey and is considered a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site N24* – 500 block E. Second Street. ca. 1960. Commercial. Noncontributing.

Letty's Kitchen is a 1-story frame building with brick veneer. The shed roof slopes to the rear. The building features a wooden parapet and a flat metal awning supported by tie rods. It has two aluminum doors and three sliding



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aluminum windows. The altered building is not within the period of significance and does not contribute to the character of the historic district.

*Site N23* – 500 block E. Second Street. ca. 1970. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story cinder block commercial building with a brick veneer on the front façade. It has one double door and one single door with two small windows on the front elevation. A Mansard roof with asphalt shingles covers the building. The building is not compatible with the predominant historic patterns of the district and thus is considered a Noncontributing element.

*Site N6* – 500 block E. Second Street. ca. 1985. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This modern building is sheathed in a pink brick veneer and has a Mission Revival type parapet wall. It also features a brick entablature, a centered aluminum frame door, and aluminum windows with brick surrounds. The building is not within the period of significance and does not contribute to the character of the historic district.

*Site N22* – 500 block E. Second Street. ca. 1975. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story frame manufactured building used for commercial purposes. It is constructed of vertical hard board and has a Mansard type roof with asphalt shingles. Rectangular bay windows flank a single center door. It is not of the historic period and does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site 418A* – 504 E. Second Street. Ca. 1920/1930. Domestic. Contributing

The Vicente Guerrero House was built about 1920 and altered slightly about 1930. It is a 2-story dark (chocolate colored) brick building with a distinctive vertical emphasis that is unusual in Rio Grande City. Stylistically, it borrows from a number of schools, primarily the Spanish Colonial/Mission Revival movement. A distinctive parapet with white concrete coping describes the roofline. It has a partial width porch with cylindrical masonry piers and a parapet identical to the roof. The windows are 1/1 double hung sash with rectangular hood molds while the glazed door has a transom and sidelights. It has inset diamond-shaped ceramic tiles on the façade. It also features a multi-colored concrete tile porch floor and has interior floors rendered in polychromatic concrete tile. A matching garage/garage apartment stands to the south along the alley. They are both Contributing elements of the historic district.

*Site 418B* – 504 E. Second Street rear. Ca. 1920/1930. Domestic auxiliary. Contributing

A 2-story garage with an apartment on the top floor is similar in design to the main house at 504 E. Second Street. It has a definite vertical orientation and Spanish Colonial/Mission Revival motifs like the house and retains its original architectural fabric to a remarkable degree.

*Site N21* – 500 block E. Second Street. ca. 1960. Commercial. Noncontributing.

The Texas Café is a 1-story brick commercial building composed of two sections. One is the café. The front and side are covered by a sloped porch roof with wood shingles. The porch is supported by rustic 4x4 posts. Aluminum windows with dark tinted single aluminum doors enter each section. It does not contribute to the historic character of Rio Grande City.

*Site N5* – 500 block E. Second Street. ca. 1975. Commercial. Noncontributing.



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Therapy Services is housed in a 1-story stucco building topped by a Mansard roof with red wood shingles. Two entry bays on the front have double doors with one side light. They feature aluminum doors and large, dark tinted plate glass windows. The building does not contribute to the historic character of the district.

### ***600 Block East Second Street***

*Site 417* – 600 block E. Second Street. Ca. 1925. Commercial. Contributing

This is one of the few extant frame commercial buildings in Rio Grande City. It is noteworthy because most of the city's commercial buildings featured fairly elaborate masonry detailing but this wood-frame building has minimal ornamentation. It is more typical of the "boomtown" false front building associated with the "old West" than of the South Texas borderlands but Rio Grande City once had a number of such buildings. The front-gabled false front makes the building appear larger than it is. It is difficult to date this building but it was probably built about 1925. Recently it was renovated and is now a coffee shop and book store owned by Mauro and Lucinda Villarreal. It was listed as a Medium priority in the city survey of 1996 and Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 416* – 600 block E. Second Street. Ca. 1925/2000. Commercial. Noncontributing

This structure has a river rock stone façade fashioned to look like the Alamo with a bell in the shaped parapet. There are double entry doors. The building has been completely rebuilt and little if anything of the original fabric remains. It is a Noncontributing element of the historic district.

*Site 415* – 600 block E. Second Street. Ca. 1900. Domestic. Noncontributing

This modest one-story building was representative of vernacular building traditions in Rio Grande City during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Like many other local examples, this building had side-gabled, load-bearing brick walls and segmental arched windows. The building had been changed only minimally since its original construction and the most significant exterior alteration is the enclosure of the central bay on the façade. However, recent renovations have rendered the historic building unrecognizable to the period of significance. Built about 1900 as a dwelling, the building was in good condition and was a good example of its type. It was listed as a Medium-High priority property in the 1996 city survey. It has been replaced by Elsa's Bazaar, a 1-story front gabled commercial building with brick veneer and board and batten in gable ends. Two single doors with two light aluminum display windows on either side. As a result of extensive alterations, the building is no longer considered to be a contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 414* – 605 E. Second Street. Ca. 1900/1920. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing

This is a good example of a two-part brick combination domestic/commercial building with a hipped roof. Several others of this type are located in the city, but this is the best-maintained. Storefront windows and replacement doors have been installed on the ground floor but the upper floor have retained their original segmental arched windows. The building has a full façade one-story porch. Built as a dwelling about 1900 and altered somewhat about 1920, the ground floor was converted to commercial use after 1940. Very recently (ca. 2000), it was renovated and opened for commercial uses. Despite its alterations, it is a good and well-maintained example of Rio Grande City's turn of the century building traditions.



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*Site 413* – 603 E. Second Street. Ca. 1900 Commercial. Noncontributing

This 1-story side gabled brick building has been severely altered. Its segmental arch brick windows surrounds are still evident although the window openings have been shortened. The brick has been painted turquoise. Alterations render the building Noncontributing.

*Site N4* – 611 E. Second Street. ca. 1965. Commercial. Noncontributing.

Bertha's Motel is a typical ca 1965, 2-story rectangular motel with two main sections, two smaller units, and an interior parking area. One of the main wings fronts lengthwise onto Second Street. The second has a wall along Flores Street but its entry is from the interior parking area. Second stories are accessed by exterior stairwells. Upper galleries are supported by aluminum columns and a zigzag patterned awning covers the first floor apartments and entry to the office. Two free-standing units of irregular shape back onto the alley between First and Second streets. Bertha's Flowers occupies space in one or more of the first floor spaces. The entire property is counted as one resource that is Noncontributing in the historic district.

### **700 block East Second Street**

*Site 412* – 701? E. Second Street. ca. 1925 Commercial block. Contributing

This is a 1-story side gabled brick building that has been altered by the addition of widened windows which are now boarded. It has a false front. On the Flores side there is a short awning supported by tie rods. The building is in poor condition. One set of paired aluminum frame windows pierce the building. Despite alterations and its poor condition, the building retains much of its original fabric, associations, craftsmanship, setting and feeling and is considered Contributing to the historic district.

*Site N3* -- 700 E. Second Street. New ca 2000. Noncontributing.

Star Printing Company is a small stucco covered building with a chamfered corner and a Missionesque stepped parapet with concrete coping. It has narrow aluminum windows and an aluminum entry door on chamfered edge. According to Sanborn maps, the building may incorporate an old filling station on site.

*Site 411* – 705 E. Second Street. 1894. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing.

The Renaga-Headley-Edgerton House is one of the city's best examples of brick construction from the late-19th/early-20th century, a period in which decorative brickwork flourished along the lower Rio Grande. The ca. 1894 2-story load-bearing brick building features a central A-shaped parapet and a brick, corbelled cornice. Brick hood molds define segmental arched windows. Double wood-paneled entry doors lie directly under the shaped parapet and second story cast iron balcony. Cast iron *rajas* – thin rails – fill in the transoms above the doors and windows. One has the initials "LR" for original owner Leopoldo Renaga. Renago was married to Emilia de la Pena, sister of Silverio de la Pena, whose house on Main Street is similar to this in many respects. The house is more closely associated with Dr. A.M. Headley, an English surgeon in the Confederate Army, and his daughter, Dr. Mary Ann Headley Edgerton, who was the first female doctor in the lower Rio Grande. It has remained in the Edgerton family. Because the brickwork and detail are so fine, the house has been attributed to Heinrich Portscheller, a German brick mason who worked in Rio Grande City, Roma and Laredo in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although in need of stabilization, the property is a



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superb example of brick construction from this period and was listed as a High priority in the 1996 city survey. It contributes to the historic district.

*Site 410 – 700 block E. Second Street. 2004. Domestic. Noncontributing*

The house presently under construction on this site replaced a historic bungalow that was a Contributing element of the historic district. The house is a work in progress but appears to be a typical suburban dwelling currently popular throughout Texas. It is a 1-story massed plan house with a complex hipped roof with faux gables. Siding material is unknown at this time. It is out of character with the historic nature of the district.

*Site 409 – 700 block E. Second Street. ca. 1895. Domestic. Contributing*

This property is a frame L-Plan house similar to thousands built throughout Texas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but fairly rare in Rio Grande City. It is composed of two intersecting gabled wings, one of which projects forward toward the street. It has an attached porch along the perpendicular wing. Although listed as a Low priority in the 1996 survey, the property has been reevaluated and is considered to be contributing to the historic district.

*Site 408 – 711 E. Second Street. Ca. 1900/1925. Domestic. Contributing.*

Originally built about 1900, this one-story stucco-covered brick building was altered to its current appearance about 1925. It is a good example of the building traditions that were used for both residential and commercial buildings in Rio Grande City in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. Like its contemporaries in the city, it displays finely crafted brickwork in the parapet. It has a simple dentil cornice and segmental arched windows and doors. Although it is shown on early Sanborn maps as a dwelling, local sources report that it was once a store owned by the Eligio Salinas family. In fair condition, it was listed as a High priority in the 1996 city survey and is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site N2 – 700 block E. Second Street. ca 1970. Domestic. Noncontributing.*

This ca. 1970 brick 1-story Ranch style house with side gables, aluminum 2/2 windows and aluminum porch supports. It is incongruous with the historic character of the district's domestic and commercial properties.

*Site N1 – 702? E. Second Street. ca. 1970. Commercial. Noncontributing*

This is a small rectangular manufactured building on a permanent slab used to sell snowcones. It does not contribute to the historic character of the district.

**800 Block East Second Street**

*Site 407 – 800 Block E. Second Street. Ca. 1925 Service Station. Contributing.*

This is a good and relatively intact example of a historic service station in Rio Grande City. It is a 1-story stucco-covered filling station with a partial width extended service bay. It has a shaped Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style parapet and a pent roof with rolled tin tiles to look like clay on the bay. In excellent condition, it was listed as a High priority in the 1996 architectural survey and Contributes to the historic district.



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### Main Street (First)

#### *200 Block East Main Street*

*Site 365* – 200 block E. Main Street. ca. 1890/1960. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing.

This 1-story combination residential/commercial building is built of stucco-covered brick. It has a brick parapet with sophisticated cornice molding featuring a dentil course. The windows are fixed plate glass and the building has double aluminum doors, both probably installed in the 1960s. Some exceptional details remain such as the pilasters and moldings.

Despite a moderate degree of alterations to its exterior, this 1-story domestic and commercial building exhibits masonry work typical of other late 19th and early 20th century properties in Rio Grande City. Known as Gaymar Shops, local sources indicate that it was built by Jacobo Guerra. The building forms a large L-shape that wraps around a corner with a chamfered entry at the corner. The Main Street wing appears on the 1984 Sanborn map as a General Store while the Corpus Street wing was a dwelling. This was a typical combination commercial/residential use for the time. It remains half commercial and half domestic to the present. A brick wall along the rear of the property encloses the courtyard.

*Site 366* – 200 E. Main Street. ca. 1925/1960. One-part Commercial. Contributing

The Ida Reeves Building is a 1-story one-part commercial building of stucco-covered load-bearing masonry. It has a flat roof and slightly pedimented brick parapet. The building has a canopy supported by metal rods. It has fixed metal sash windows and a single aluminum door with sidelights. Alterations have been made to the doors and windows.

This stucco and brick property is a good local example of a one-part commercial block building. Built about 1925 with modest Mission Revival style features, it retains much of its integrity. Storefront changes detract somewhat from the building's historic integrity, but the pedimented parapet is relatively intact. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists Ida Reeves as the owner of this property. It is a Contributing feature in the historic district.

*Site 367A* – 204 E. Main Street. ca. 1910. One-part Commercial. Contributing

Typical of "old West" commercial types, this 1-story front gabled false front store has a wood canopy supported by metal rods and fixed wood sash windows with transom. The double wood door also has a transom.

This frame store is a good and relatively unaltered local example of a one-part commercial building with wood-frame construction and a "boomtown" false front. Early 20th century photographs of Main Street show several such buildings and this is probably one of them. It is one of only two or three surviving buildings of its type in Rio Grande City and is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 367B* – 200 block E. Main Street. ca. 1925. Domestic. Contributing

A ca. 1925 2-story frame house is hidden behind foliage on the south side of Main Street. It has a side-gabled roof with exposed rafter ends and double hung wood sash with 1/1 lights. Other details cannot be discerned due to the vegetation. The house exhibits features that are suggestive of a bungalow with Craftsman stylistic features. From what is visible, it appears to remain relatively unaltered and thus contributes to the historic district.



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*Site 368* – 205 E. Main Street. ca. 1890. Domestic. Noncontributing

Local merchant P. Hinojosa reportedly built this L-shaped building with a rear wrap porch and courtyard similar to those found throughout old Rio City. It is clearly visible on the 1894 Sanborn maps of the city. The house has remained in the original family, most recently as the home of Dora Hinojosa Salinas.

The Hinojosa-Salinas House is a load-bearing, side-gabled masonry building with stucco over brick cladding. Severe alterations have been made to the building over the years that compromise its integrity. Alterations include the addition of a bungalow-type shed dormer in the central portion of the front roof plane and removal of a front porch. The original brick was likely exposed and is now covered with a thick coating of Portland cement. Despite its age and historic associations, the building has lost sufficient architectural integrity to render it a Noncontributing feature of the historic district.

*Site N11* – 200 block E. Main Street. ca. 1970. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This Chevron Station is a 1-story cinder block store building with tinted double aluminum doors flanked by two tinted plate glass windows. There is a freestanding service bay set at an angle to the street. Both the building and service bay feature broad metal awnings atop the structure.

*Site 369* – 207? E. Main Street. ca. 1930/1950. Movie Theater. Contributing.

The Garmon Theater is a 2 1/2-story commercial movie theater with brick exterior and exaggerated geometric-shaped parapet with crenellations and ornamental piers. It has fixed windows and double aluminum doors. The windows have been bricked-in. It has outstanding articulation of the brick façade.

With its stylized geometric architectural detailing, the Garmon Theater is a rare local example of Art Deco architecture. The building has been modified; however, it still retains salient original physical features to make it noteworthy. The site has historically been used for recreation; the ca. 1930 theater replaced a saloon/billiard parlor and cock-fighting pit shown on the 1894 Sanborn map. The property was owned by Miguel Garcia in the early part of the 20th century. The 2 1/2 story theater with its extended marquee dominates the streetscape and is a landmark in the city. It is a High preservation priority and a Contributing element of the historic district.

### **300 Block East Main Street**

*Site 370* – 300 Block E. Main. ca. 1950. Gas station. Contributing.

This small-scale service station has a slab foundation and load-bearing masonry structural system. It is a flat-roofed brick building with extended eaves and no porch. It has a single wood door and its windows have been removed.

Though abandoned and in poor condition, this property is a typical example of a ca. 1950 service station. The building reflects the importance of the automobile in the post World War II era. It is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 372* – 300 E. Main Street. ca. 1935/1965. Two-part Commercial. Contributing

The D.N. Sanchez Building is a 2-story two-part brick commercial building with a flat roof and brick parapet. It has a wood canopy affixed to the building with metal rods. It has fixed metal sash windows and double aluminum doors. The second floor has casement windows and cast coping runs along the top of the parapet. Because of its corner location, the resource has two storefronts.



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This 2-story brick furniture store is an example of a "modern" two-part commercial block building. Sanborn maps show a 2-story commercial building on the site in 1925, but a 1-story building in 1940. The present building may have replaced an early commercial building in this location. The brick exterior walls have been painted and the ground level has been altered; however, the property still retains much of its historic integrity. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists D.N. Sanchez as the owner of this property. Because of its alterations, it is ranked only as a Medium priority but it is a Contributing property in the Rio Grande City Historic District.

*Site 373* – 300 block E. Main Street ca. 1925/1965. One-part Commercial. Noncontributing

Built about 1925, this building received extensive alterations in the 1960s that make it a Noncontributing resource in the historic district.

*Site 371* – 307 E. Main Street ca. 1920/1950. One-part Commercial. Contributing

This 1-story one-part brick commercial block is divided into three storefronts as distinguished by its three brick parapets and articulated brick facades. The size and design of the parapets gives the building a modest Mission Revival stylistic quality. It features a full width wood canopy supported by tie rods attached to star-shaped medallions. Windows are fixed, storefront plate glass. Double aluminum doors access each of the three storefronts.

This grouping of stores represents a good local example of a one-part commercial block building, a common vernacular form in Rio Grande City during the 20th century. The building includes three storefronts, each of which has a pedimented parapet and a recessed entrance and angled display windows. Relatively minor alterations, such as covering transom windows above the storefronts detract minimally from the building's integrity. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists C. Vale as the property owner but this complex, originally known as Valley Hardware, was built about 1935. The building is in good condition and is a Medium to High priority. It is a very good, relatively unaltered example of its type and is a Contributing feature of the historic district.

*Site N12* – 306 E. Main Street. ca. 1970. One-part Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story furniture store with orange brick veneer, stepped parapet, and triangular awning with shingles. Round arched glass entrance flanked by two round arched windows on each side. Six wrought iron and glass carriage lamps are affixed to the brick façade. The date plate displays the date "1970".

*Site 374* – 300 block E. Main Street ca. 1924/1970. One-part Commercial. Noncontributing

Alterations in the modern era render this historic building Noncontributing.

*Site 375* – 300 block E. Main Street ca. 1920. One-part Commercial. Contributing

The C. Vale building is a small-scale one-part brick commercial block with a flat roof and stucco-covered corbelled brick tri-partite parapet. It has a wood canopy across the front façade that is attached to the building with metal tie rods. The diminutive commercial building has three entrances; the central entrance has double wood doors.

This modest 1-story brick store is a good example of a one-part commercial block in Rio Grande City built in the vernacular traditions of the area. Although stucco has been applied over the presumably elaborate brickwork in the parapet, the building retains its original three-bay configuration in the storefront. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists C. Vale as the owner of the property. Built about 1920, the store is a Medium preservation priority and a Contributing feature in the historic district.



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*N28* – 300 block E. Main Street. ca. 1950. One-part Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a small, 1-story brick veneer commercial building wedged between two larger, more substantial commercial buildings on Main Street. It has a single entry and a large plate glass window frame, both of which have been boarded over. A flat-roofed building, it appears to have lost its roof decking. The building is out of character with the historic streetscape on Main Street and is considered Noncontributing to the historic district.

*Site 376* – 311 E. Main Street ca. 1940/1960. Two-part Commercial. Noncontributing

The original section of this building must post-date 1940 since it does not appear on the Sanborn maps. This 2-story commercial building retains its first floor storefront with recessed entry transom and sidelights. It has three large plate glass display windows on each side of entry. The addition of an ill-conceived second floor in 1960s (?) dominates the building and has destroyed its original character and integrity. The connection between the upper and lower floors was poorly executed and it is apparent that the first story is made of brick and the second is cinder block plastered with cement. Upper windows are 6/6 above clerestory windows on first floor have been boarded. The building has been so altered that it is no longer recognizable to its period of significance and is thus a Noncontributing element of the district.

*Site 377* – 300 block E. Main Street ca. 1913/1970. Two-part Commercial. Contributing

This is a two-part commercial block building with brick, stucco and tile exterior materials. It has brick pilasters and some segmental arched windows. It has a chamfered corner with a parapet and elaborate pressed tin nameplate. The building has fixed metal sash windows and retains segmental arched openings on the second story. There are double wood doors with a transom, sidelights, paneling and glazing. The storefront entrance has been altered. It has a metal awning attached to the building with metal tie rods and wraps around the building.

Built in 1913 by P. Hinojosa, this two-part commercial block is a good example of an early 20th century mercantile property in Rio Grande City. The ground floor has been altered to a moderate degree. The painted exterior walls, glazed tile work and aluminum frame doors and display windows detract from the property's historic character. In contrast, the upper floor has changed only minimally, and its segmental arched windows and corbelled parapet are intact. A noteworthy feature is the wrought iron balconet in the chamfered corner under the date and name plate. The only significant alterations on the second floor are the replacement windows. Recently, the owner installed a metal awning that appears very much like the original. Manuel "Albino" Hinojosa is also associated with the mercantile operation.

Despite its alterations, the P. Hinojosa Building is a landmark in the Rio Grande business district, a High preservation priority and a Contributing feature of the historic district.

### **400 Block East Main Street**

*Site 378A* – 400 block E. Main Ca. 1900. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing

The Dr. Crisoforo Solis House and Drug Store is an outstanding and relatively intact example of a combined domestic/commercial building in Rio Grande City. It features the finely crafted masonry work and segmental-arched openings characteristic of the region but it is distinguished by its ornately detailed hoodmolds and parapet. The balcony with its metal grillwork is another distinctive architectural feature. Unlike most contemporaneous commercial buildings in the city, this property retains most of its original storefront detailing. Dr. Solis built the house in 1900 and lived upstairs with his wife, Marie Cecile Lacaze and their children. Also a pharmacist, Solis had his office downstairs; the



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eldest daughter, Alicia, became a pharmacist and dispensed prescriptions here. The eldest son Rene, a doctor, practiced in this building until his retirement in 1984.

This two-story brick building has a brick parapet and elaborate cornice. It features a full-width balcony with a cast iron railing. It has a windowless, honorific façade with 10 doors on the primary façade – five on the first floor and five on the second – with sophisticated arch details. A central double wood door with transom, sidelights and glazing on the first floor leads into the building. A keystone inscribed "C.S. 1900" is over the door. The side and rear yards are walled to enclose a large courtyard. An automobile garage forms part of the rear section of the courtyard.

In good condition, the Dr. Crisoforo Solis Building is an outstanding building in the central business district and a High preservation priority. It is an important historic resource with exceptional architectural significance.

*Site 378B* – 400 block E. Main. Ca. 1900. Domestic auxiliary. Contributing.

This 2-story, 3-bay auxiliary building attached to the Dr. Crisoforo Solis House is of masonry construction and forms part of the courtyard "wall" at the rear of the Solis complex and may incorporate part of a ca. 1900 2-story dwelling that once stood in the yard. The auxiliary building has open bays that face the interior of the courtyard and second story rooms that may be used for storage or as living quarters for domestic help. Whitewashed like the Solis House and courtyard walls, the auxiliary building contributes to the historic district.

*Site 380* – 400 block E. Main. Ca. 1925. Commercial. Contributing

This modest resource is actually two small store buildings connected by a wall. Their stucco exteriors and parapets suggest an influence of Spanish Colonial architectural traditions. Built about 1925 on the grounds of the adjacent Crisoforo Solis Building (Site 378a), the buildings were designated as commercial properties on the 1940 Sanborn maps. Most likely, Solis leased the diminutive storefronts as rental properties. They have pier and beam foundations with load-bearing masonry structural systems and stucco exteriors. They are flat-roofed with two stepped parapets denoting the two separate storefronts. Windows are fixed wood sash and there are two single wood doors opening into the two sides.

In good condition, the property is a Contributing feature of the district. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists C. Solis as the owner of the property.

*Site N13* – 400 block E. Main Street. 1965. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This resource presents itself as a 1-story brick wall with an opening into a courtyard (of Site 137: the Kelsey Building/City Hall). However, the entrance leads directly to a 1-story brick restaurant that occupies the east rear side of the courtyard. An earlier building on the site designated as "storage" on the 1940 Sanborn maps is gone. Because of its size and prominent location direction on Main Street the wall and its attendant restaurant is counted as a resource separate from Site 137; however, its recent age and design features render it a Noncontributing element of the historic district.

*Site 379* – 400 block E. Main. Ca. 1910. Domestic. Noncontributing

This is a 2-story historic building that has suffered from extensive alteration. It is a side-gabled building with notched rafter ends and corbelled chimneys on the end walls. All of the historic fenestration on the first floor has been lost. In its place are a single central wood door and two narrow horizontal windows near top of first floor. The steep pitched roof is supported by corbelled brick columns and covered with red clay tiles. The upper floors have five square dark tinted windows. Five original lintels are still visible. The brick building is covered in Portland cement stucco.



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The current building replaced an earlier 1-story dwelling on the site about 1910. Although it may have been built as a private home, the 1925 Sanborn maps identify it as a "Rooming House" as did the 1940 maps. It is not known when the building was put into commercial use but it still has the form of a domestic property. The building is listed as a Noncontributing element of the historic district due to its extensive, incongruous alterations.

*Site 384 – 404 E. Main Street. Ca. 1840. Infrastructure. Contributing.*

Site 384 is a stone wall along Main Street with a single doorway topped by a substantial lintel. The wall is primarily composed of limestone rubble with chiseled limestone blocks defining the doorway. The doorway was infilled with limestone rubble until about 2002 when a man crashed his automobile into the eastern half of the wall. The City of Rio Grande City hired a contractor to rebuild the wall using the same stones that had broken loose and to open the infilled doorway. The finely chiseled ashlar door surrounds are now more visible and a wooden door with grilles – typical of the city's mid- to late-19th century resources – has been installed in the opening. The ancient mesquite lintel remained in place.

Some researchers have suggested that the wall was built before 1830 (Green 1987: 23) and, in fact, it is similar to structures of that date in the nearby towns of Roma and San Ygnacio. However, little is actually known about its origins. While it is possible that it was built by the de la Garza family on their Carnestolendas Ranch before the town was platted, it is more likely that it was built as part of the large complex of early brick and stone houses associated with Lazaro Lopez and Cruz and Dionicia Lopez Tijerina. The 1894 Sanborn map shows that only a wall existed along the northern line of the Tijerina property by that date. A second stone wall defined the southern boundary and has since been incorporated into part of the Tijerina house (Site 325).

This stone wall is a good example of early settlement construction methods in the region and is significant as possibly the oldest surviving built feature in Rio Grande City. As is true for most vernacular building traditions, the wall makes use of readily available materials, i.e. limestone caliche. Part of the Lazaro Lopez-Cruz and Dionicia Tijerina complex, the wall fronts onto Main Street and partially enclosed the family complex that once contained a general store, various living quarters, a livery and cistern. It is a High priority site and a Contributing feature in the historic district.

*Site 381 – 400 block E. Main. Ca. 1915/1925. One-Part Commercial. Contributing.*

This property is a good local example of a one-part commercial block building with two storefronts and recessed entrances. The 1-story brick building has a flat roof and parapet with a wood canopy attached to the building with metal rods. It has fixed wood sash windows with paneling underneath the sills. Two sets of double wood doors with transoms access the building. The building is noteworthy because, despite its somewhat poor condition, it retains most of its original architectural elements. As such, it survives as a good illustration of the kind of commercial storefront that existed in Rio Grande City during the early 1900s. Built about 1915, it appears to have additions dating to ca. 1925. An early 20th century maps of the city lists A. Leal as the owner of the property. It is a Medium priority and Contributing feature of the historic district.

*Site 382 – 400 block E. Main. Ca. 1910. Domestic. Contributing*

This building is indicative of a vernacular domestic form that was popular in Rio Grande City during the 19th century. Distinctive characteristics include the segmental arched openings and the side-gabled roof with extended brick parapets on the gable ends. The fixed display window on the front represents the most significant exterior alteration. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists Juan Merrid as the owner of this property. Depicted as a dwelling on the



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1894 and 1925 Sanborn maps, this property was converted to commercial use by 1940 when it was the Western Union Telegraph office. It is identified as a domestic property because of its use and form and is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 385 – 400 E. Main Street. Ca. 1880/1910. Commercial. Contributing*

Built about 1880 as a General Store, this one-part commercial block was enlarged to nearly twice its original size about 1910. It is of load-bearing brick construction that has been stuccoed. It has a flat roof with a corbelled parapet and a wood canopy supported by metal tie rods. The windows are wood sash and it has four double wood doors and four storefronts. The stucco exterior covers the original brickwork, but portions of the corbelled parapet are still visible.

This property is an example of a one-part commercial block building of the late-19th and early 20th centuries. Although the parapet over one of the storefronts has been stuccoed, the remaining parapet is relatively unaltered and displays corbelled brickwork. This type of embellishment reflects a locally popular architectural trend in the community around the turn of the 20th century. Historically, the building was part of the large Lopez-Tijerina complex (Sites 384 and 125). The 1894 Sanborn maps depict the eastern half of the building as a General Store. The western half was added before 1925.

The property was a good candidate for High priority listing but was designated as a Medium to High preservation priority due to alterations. It has recently (ca. 2002) undergone renovations and part of the building serves as the office of the Main Street program. It is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 383 – 400 block E. Main. Ca. 1886. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing*

The Silverio de la Pena Building is perhaps the most significant architectural landmark in Rio Grande City. An outstanding example of the work of master brick mason, Heinrich Portscheller, this majestic 2-story building displays superbly crafted and detailed architectural embellishment. The building is a 2-story rectangular plan store and home constructed of brick with a brick parapet, cornice, and frieze above a nearly flat roof. It has a full-width cast iron balcony on the primary façade and once had a round-arched arcade on the second floor. The arches have been infilled. Windows are wood double hung sash and feature brick hood molds with dentil courses. Brick, Doric order pilasters adorn the corners of the primary façade and flat, raked pilasters topped by corbelled brick lintels surround the doors on the front and side elevations. Entrance to the former drug store is through a pair of wood paneled doors while a single wood paneled door leads to an office on the side (east) elevation.

Portscheller came to Rio Grande City via Mexico after the expulsion of Maximillian and exceptional examples of his work survive in both Rio Grande City and nearby Roma. Silverio de la Pena, a German who changed his name from Furstein, commissioned the building as a drug store and home in 1886. It was also a post office from 1890 to 1957. Like many other buildings in Rio Grande City, the family lived upstairs. In only fair condition, the Silverio de la Pena Building is nonetheless an extremely significant architectural property and a Contributing resource in the Rio Grande City Historic District.

*Site 386A – 412 E. Main Street. Ca. 1910. Commercial. Contributing*

This ca. 1910 two-part brick commercial block has a brick parapet and stucco siding. It has a full-width porch with a wood canopy. The double hung, 1/1 wood sash windows have Italianate crowns with segmental arches. Entry is through a single door. Alterations have been made to the windows and doors and there have been additions to the building.



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This store is a good, though altered example of a two-part commercial block building in Rio Grande City. Noteworthy architectural features include the corbelled brickwork in the parapet and the hood molds above the second floor windows. Storefront alterations and the installation of new windows on the second floor detract from the property's overall historic integrity. Built about 1910, the building is shown as a drug store on the 1925 Sanborn map. Local sources recall that Mendando Hinojosa operated a pharmacy on the first floor and lived in the second floor of this building. By 1940, the Sanborn maps show it to be a dance hall. Despite the alterations to the ground floor storefront, the building retains sufficient fabric to be considered a Medium to High priority resource in the 1996 survey of the city. It is a Contributing property in the historic district.

*Site 386B* – 412 E. Main Street (rear). ca. 1935. Domestic: Auxiliary. Contributing

Fronting onto Mirasoles Street, this 1-story, stucco garage features the shaped parapets of the Mission Revival style. The 2-bay garage is large and distinctive in the streetscape and lends itself to the historic flavor of the district.

*Site 387A* – 400 block E. Main Street. Ca. 1935. Commercial. Contributing.

This 1935 2-story vault type brick bank building has a brick parapet and cornice. The cornice has "First State Bank & Trust" inscribed in the frieze. It has double hung metal sash windows and arched openings with keystones. The recessed aluminum double doors are set into a monumental arch that includes a molded keystone, transom, and sidelights. The second story windows are double hung with steel awnings set into large, fixed sashes. Original windows and doors have been altered.

The large round archway that marks the primary entrance is the most distinctive feature on this vault-type bank building. The archway, symmetrically arranged façade and the use of keystones and a cornice suggest a Georgian Revival stylistic influence. Most of the building's original physical features are intact; however, the windows and doors appear to be replacements and detract somewhat from the property's historic character. Regardless, the building is distinguished such that it was identified as a High priority in the 1996 city survey and is a Contributing property in the Rio Grande City Historic District.

*Site 387B* – 400 Block East Main. ca. 1980. Domestic: Auxiliary. Noncontributing

This 1-story modern, multi-bay garage fronts onto Mirasoles Street in one of the city's oldest sections of town. It abuts the Mission Revival garage of Site 386B and presents a large, incongruous plane in the otherwise historic streetscape. It does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site 388A* – 420 E. Main Street. Ca. 1930/1965. Commercial. Contributing.

Built about 1930 and altered about 1965, this is a 2-story, two-part brick commercial building with a brick parapet fronting the street. It features coping along the parapet and cornice molding. It has 1/1 double hung wood sash on the second floor and fixed windows on the first. The storefront is slightly altered.

This property is a good local example of a two-part commercial block building constructed about 1930. Although the second floor and parapet appear to be virtually unaltered, the street level has been modified and includes modern aluminum-framed windows and doors. The row of transoms above the windows and doors retain original small-paned fixed lights. The store housed the C. R. Anthony department store. Despite its first floor alterations, this is an exceptional example of a 1920/1930s storefront type commercial building and it is a Contributing element in the historic district.



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*Site 388B – 420 E. Main Street. ca. 1880. Infrastructure: Stone Walls. Contributing*

Lying at the rear of the former C.R. Anthony Department Store, this stone wall pre-dates the building with which it is associated. It is similar in construction to Site 384, which runs along the 400 block of E. Main Street with large quarried blocks of limestone chinked with caliche. Near the Lopez-Tijerina complex, the wall was probably part of a stone dwelling with a thatched roof that stood on the site in the 1890s. It may date to the earliest period of settlement in Rio Grande City. It is now forms part of an ad hoc auto garage.

*500 Block East Main Street*

*Site 389 – 505-07 E. Main Street. Ca.1890. Domestic. Contributing.*

This ca. 1890 domestic property is built of load-bearing masonry with stucco-covered brick walls and a brick parapet. The building has a wood canopy and 5-bay porch with turned wood supports. It has fixed wood sash and two single wood doors. Alterations have been made to the doors and windows.

This resource is a good local example of a 1-story brick building with a flat roof and corbelled brick parapet. Although the front has been modified, the building still retains much of its architectural integrity and character. Sanborn maps dating from 1894 show this building as a dwelling with a courtyard plan like many other 19th and early 20th century Rio Grande City houses. It also had a full façade porch along Main Street. According to local sources, the historic owners of the house were Ruperto Margo and Francisca Pena. Because of its form and original use, the building is classified as a domestic property. It is identified as a Medium priority property in the 1996 survey and is considered a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 390 – 509 E. Main Street. Ca. 1885. Commercial. Contributing*

This is a ca. 1885 one-part brick commercial block with a two-story dwelling section at the rear west side. It has fixed windows and double wood doors with glazing. Windows and doors have been altered and the brick painted but the building retains its form and materials.

A good local example of a one-part commercial block, this building displays corbelled brickwork in its parapet. Many contemporaneous buildings in the community exhibit similar architectural embellishment. This building is also noteworthy because it retains much of its historic character and integrity. The building appears as a General Store on the 1894 Sanborn map and is attributed to Juan Margo. It is also known as the Francisco Margo Drug Store, but is better remembered as the infamous Margo Saloon where Gregorio Duffy was shot in the alley as he exited the back door in the aftermath of a contested election in 1907. The building possesses local historic significance and, although features have been altered, it is considered Medium to High priority property that Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 391 – 506 E. Main Street. Ca. 1915. Commercial. Contributing*

The Rosa O'Dowd Building is a 2-story, two-part commercial block at the heart of the city commercial district. It is a load-bearing brick building with a flat roof and an elaborate brick parapet. The building sports a wood canopy supported by metal cables. It has fixed wood sash windows with segmental arched windows on the second floor and recessed double wood doors with transoms. A second single-door entrance is on the front façade.

This ca. 1915 property is a good and relatively unaltered example of a two-part commercial block building in Rio Grande City. Although the brickwork on the ground level has been painted, the second floor remains virtually unaltered and its fine brickwork is intact. According to local sources, the historic owner of the building is Rosa O'Dowd. The property was identified as a Medium priority in the 1996 city survey and is a Contributing feature of the historic district.



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*Site 392 – 508? E. Main Street. Ca. 1930. Commercial. Contributing*

The Tarry O'Dowd Building is a small, one-part brick commercial building with a flat roof and brick parapet. It has a wood canopy supported by metal cables. Fenestration is wood sash casement windows and double wood doors. This modest ca. 1930 building is an example of a one-part commercial block that retains its original three-part storefront. According to local sources, the historic owner of the building is Tarry O'Dowd. Because it has only modest architectural merit and because its windows have been altered, the property was listed as a Medium priority in the 1996 city survey. However, it retains sufficient historic fabric to Contribute to the historic district.

*Site 393 – 510? E. Main Street. 1887. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing*

The former Starr Café is a 1-story, one-part combination domestic/commercial building of load-bearing masonry. Depicted on the 1894 Sanborn map of the city as an L-shaped building with a typical Rio Grande City courtyard plan, a 1-story brick unit was added inside the courtyard but attached to the east wing by 1925. By 1940, the addition received a second story but it is only slightly visible from the street. The complex has a flat, built-up tar and gravel roof with a brick parapet and no canopy. Windows are fixed wood-sash with lintels and there are two single doors with transoms. This one-story building has both segmental and flat-arched openings and hoodmolds. Particularly noteworthy are the classically detailed pilasters at the building's corners.

Built in 1887, the building appears in the 1894 and 1925 Sanborn maps as a dwelling. By 1940, however, the building was occupied by a restaurant and several commercial enterprises. By 1940 it was converted to commercial use. It has been identified historically with Juan de la Pena.

For many years this building was painted stark white with bright red trim that detracted from the architectural details. Because of its significant brickwork and integrity of plan and fenestration, it was listed as a Medium High priority in the 1996 city survey. In 2002, the paint was carefully removed revealing the brick corbelling. The building is currently undergoing restoration and the property has been upgraded to a High priority. It is an important architectural resource in Rio Grande City and is counted as a Contributing feature of the historic district.

**600 Block East Main Street**

*Site 394 – 600 block E. Main Street. 1897/1915. Domestic. Contributing*

Among the most well-known buildings in the region, the La Borde House/Hotel is significant for its outstanding design and brickwork. Originally built as a single family house, Rio Grande City merchant Francois La Borde added two, 2-story wings to the front of his home and opened a hotel about 1915. La Borde was originally from New Orleans and the building exhibits the French Colonial influences of his early home in the building's elaborate brickwork and jig sawn woodwork, as well as the wrought iron fences and gates. The main building is a 2-story H-plan structure attached to a 2-story wing across the rear of the property by an exterior staircase and second floor walkway. A large courtyard with tropical plants and a fountain separate the two sections at the first floor level.

The hotel features a variety of architectural details but among the most noteworthy are the extended front-gabled parapets of the projecting front wings. Intricately corbelled brickwork is seen in the parapets and throughout the building. The two-level front porch is situated between the two projecting front wings. It has jig sawn brackets, turned porch posts and chamfered posts. A second floor porch wraps around the rear of the front building and across the upper story of the rear wing. Windows throughout the building are 1/1 double hung sash with brick hood molds. Single wood paneled doors with transoms, sidelights and glazing are at the front and rear of the building.



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The La Borde House is one of Rio Grande City's best preserved historic properties. With extended side wings and a recessed central bay, the building displays the finely crafted brickwork characteristic of Rio Grande City construction during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Francois La Borde built a one-story section of the house about 1897 (the 1894 Sanborn maps show only a couple of *jacales* on the site) and in 1915 had it enlarged and added a second floor designed by San Antonio architect Leo Diehlman. Born in New Orleans, La Borde came to Matamoros, Mexico, with his parents as a boy. He married Eva Marks, whose family had settled in Rio Grande City, and was associated with Louis La Caze in the mercantile business. The hotel is an exceptional resource listed as a High priority in the 1996 city survey. It is a Contributing building in the Rio Grande City Historic District.

*Site 395* – 600 block E. Main Street. 1895. Commercial. Contributing

This two-story, rectangular plan brick building was built by Emilio Block ca. 1895. Stucco has been thickly applied to the first floor but the second story retains its original brick. It has a flat, built-up tar and gravel roof with a finely crafted brick parapet. A wood canopy shades the first floor. The windows are fixed wood sash; the second story windows have beautifully designed brick lintels while the first floor windows have elaborate arched hood molds.

Emilio Block a local merchant built this 2-story, two-part commercial building before 1895. It appears on the 1894 Sanborn map as a general store and in the 1940 map as a restaurant. Although the ground floor has been altered extensively by the application of cement stucco over the brickwork, the upper floor is relatively intact. The brickwork in the lintels and parapet are exceptional and reminiscent of some of the buildings in the Roma National Historic Landmark District. Despite its alterations, the building is significant for its surviving architectural fabric and was identified as a Medium High priority in the 1996 city survey. It continues to Contribute to the historic district.

*Site 396* – 600 block E. Main Street. 1901. Commercial. Contributing.

Emilio Block built a 1-story brick building abutting his earlier 2-story general store. This one-part, load-bearing commercial block is built of brick covered with thick cement stucco. It has a flat, built-up tar and gravel roof with a brick parapet and wood canopy supported by metal cables. The building has fixed wood sashes with hood molds and double wooden doors with transoms. Segmental arches under an elaborate parapet define the front bays. The storefront has been severely altered, however.

Built in 1901, the Emilio Block building is a good, though altered, local example of a one-part commercial block from the turn of the 20th century. Although a modern application of stucco obscures much of the building's original masonry, the segmental arched hoodmolds and parapet detailing are intact and noteworthy. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists E. Block as the owner of this property and the words "Emilio Block – 1901" are inscribed above what was probably the original entry, now a window. Despite the ill-conceived stucco application, the building is a significant feature in the downtown district that Contributes to its overall character. It was listed as a Medium High priority in the 1996 survey of the city.

*Site 397* – 600 block E. Main Street. Ca. 1920. Commercial. Noncontributing

This is a 1-story stucco-covered flat roof commercial building with extended piers above the roofline. All of the original fenestration is gone. It has a shallow, shed roofed porch with a central aluminum frame door and two small bay windows on either side. Two small round lights flank the entry. The entry bay is off-center. This building has been altered significantly and no longer conveys its historic appearance.



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*Site N14* – 600 block E. Main Street. 1970. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story brick building with a central door entrance and sidelights flanked by two, two-light plate glass windows. Built about 1970, it has wood siding on the west side. It does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site 398* – 605 E. Main Street. Ca. 1890. Domestic. Contributing

The C. D. Laffargue (possibly LaFarge) Building is a 1-story one-part commercial block built of stucco-covered load-bearing masonry. The side-gabled building has a wood shingled roof and no porch or canopy. It has double hung wood sash and three single wood doors. Indicative of vernacular building traditions in Rio Grande City during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the earliest part of the edifice may have been constructed as a dwelling with a one-room attached store about 1890. It was identified as a Medium priority property in the 1996 city survey and is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 399* – 600 block E. Main Street (615). ca. 1900. Commercial. Noncontributing

This building is a 1-story, side-gabled historic brick commercial building that has received extensive alteration. The fenestration pattern (windows and doors) has been severely altered. A new brick veneer has been added over the original walls with the dentils, windows and doors changed such that it no longer retains its historic appearance. Thus, though a historic property, it does not Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 400/Site N15* – 600 block E. Main. ca. 1930/1960. Commercial. Noncontributing.

This Exxon station (aka site 400) was apparently built about 1930 and altered to its present appearance about 1960. It is a concrete block building with an attached open service bay supported by metal beams with a wide band awning. Because it no longer appears as a historic building, it is considered to be Noncontributing in the historic district.

### **700 block East Main Street**

*Site N16* – 700 block E. Main Street. ca. 1980. Commercial. Noncontributing

The stucco-covered Refaccionaria is a 1-story, free-standing commercial building. It has a clay-tile pent awning supported by monumental squared stuccoed pillars with squared capitals. Tinted front windows surround a double door entry. Small horizontal windows are placed at the top sides of the building. Four large wrought iron carriage lights are affixed to the front façade. Of recent vintage, it does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site N17* – 700 block E. Main Street. ca. 1980. Commercial. Noncontributing

This 1-part commercial building appears to be a storage facility or warehouse. Of recent vintage, it does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site 401* – 700 block E. Main Street. ca. 1890. Domestic. Contributing

This resource is a brick L-shaped building with a hipped roof on the east side and a gabled roof on the west. The primary façade is flush with the street and the L-wing extends to the rear. It has wood double hung 6/6 light windows with segmental arched openings and paneled doors with transoms and sidelights.

According to local sources, Dr. Mary Ann Headley, the city's first woman physician and a member of one of Rio Grande City's more colorful families, owned this house. The house was depicted as a single-family dwelling in both the 1894 and 1925 Sanborn maps but by the 1940 map, it had been converted to a tri-plex. The exterior features have



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changed little since it was built. Despite its poor condition, the resource is a good example of vernacular building traditions of the region during the late 19th century.

*Site N26* – 707 E. Main Street. 1981. Commercial. Noncontributing.

Borregas Electric is a one-story, one-part brick commercial building. It is a rectangular plan building that features a flat roof and stepped parapet with Rams' heads at the corners. One aluminum door on street façade provides access to the building that has three large tinted glass display windows. The building replaced at least one historic dwelling on the site. Its recent construction makes it a Noncontributing element but its form and design features are not incompatible as new construction in the district.

### **800 block East Main Street**

*Site 402B* – 800 block E. Main Street. ca. 1930. Landscape. Contributing

This landscape feature is associated with Site 401A, a wood frame building that was surveyed in 1996 but is no longer extant, and Site 51, the home of Florence Johnson Scott, a well-known local historian and scholar. The garden lies at the rear of Site 51 which fronts onto Flores Street but the entrance is in the 800 block of E. Main Street. Although overgrown with vines and other volunteer plants, it was a formal garden with entry posts with a wrought iron gate, a tiled threshold and terraced beds. The extant stucco-covered entry posts and corner posts that defined the edges of the garden are inset with colorful tiles. Other features of the garden may be discovered if the site is cleared of debris and undergrowth. Despite the overgrown appearance of the site, it retains important landscape elements that contribute to the historic district. It is also significant for its associations with Florence Johnson Scott, whose scholarship in the area's history, particularly in the understanding of Spanish Land Grants, was considerable.

### **East Mirasoles Street**

#### **300 Block East Mirasoles Street**

*Site 320* – 310 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1890/1915. Domestic. Contributing

The Contreras House was built ca. 1890 and additions were made ca. 1915. It is a 2-story stucco-covered brick house with a low-pitched hipped roof. The two-tiered wraparound porch has a shed-roof and is supported by turned wood posts. It has squared-wood balusters. Windows are double hung 4/4 light wood sash with shutters. The door is wood.

The Contreras House is a noteworthy landmark in Rio Grande City. Hilario Contreras bought the lot in 1879 and built a small brick house to the rear and east of the present house. He may have built the first floor of the current family home in 1890 but the 1894 Sanborn map does not show it. His son, Abundio Contreras, married Mary Howard in 1897 and they moved into the house. In 1915, Abundio Contreras added the second floor and the 2-story wrap-around porches that give the house its present configuration. The family owned Dreamland Theater (razed), which occupied a lot to the east of the house. It is a High priority and contributes to the historic district.

*Site N35* – 300 block E. Mirasoles Street. Date unknown. Commercial. Noncontributing

*Site N20* – 312 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1960. Commercial. Noncontributing.



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This building is a ca. 1960 1-story cinderblock store (barbershop?) with double aluminum doors flanked by plate glass. Brick veneer sheathes the front facade. It replaced a movie theater on this site. The building does not contribute to the historic district.

### ***400 Block East Mirasoles Street***

*Site 321* – 402 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1925. Domestic Single. Noncontributing

This is a ca 1930 front gable bungalow with multiple one- and two-story additions. A garage has been added to the front of the house.

*Site 322* – 400 block E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1925/1940. Domestic. Contributing.

The Rita Salinas House is a 1-story side-gabled brick house with a wood, shed-roofed full width porch. The brick is fully enclosed and it is not possible to see the window and door configuration from the public right of way.

The form, massing and materials of this 1-story brick dwelling indicate that it was similar to other vernacular brick houses with either a hipped or side-gabled roof. Examples of this 19th and early 20th century domestic architectural form in Rio Grande City survive throughout the city, though most have been altered. In this case, a wood shed-roofed addition obscures the building's original form. Still, the main body of the house is an important element of the city's early brick domestic architecture. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists Rita Salinas as the owner of this property. It contributes to the historic district.

*Site 587A* – 400 block E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1870. Domestic. Contributing

This building was not surveyed in the original 1996 effort because it was thought to be part of the adjacent Tijerina Building (Site 325). However, recent renovations to the entire Tijerina-Lopez site have revealed it to be a discrete, linear plan dwelling of very early vintage. Constructed of stone, the building has been dated to ca. 1870 because it is similar to resources in the upriver town of San Ygnacio and to those in Guerrero Viejo, on the Mexican side of the river. At least one stone building of this type dates to ca. 1830 in San Ygnacio and to the late 18th century in Guerrero Viejo. This building may be even older than the estimated 1870; it may date to the period of Carnestolendes Ranch, established about 1830, or to the city's founding in 1848. Its stone, courtyard plan construction and limited access, the high, surrounding stone walls and *zaguan* entrance for wagons and livestock, indicate that the building was part of a fortified complex like others built along the Rio Grande from the late 18th century until about 1875 (such as the Trevino Fort) to protect its inhabitants from Indians and/or bandits. These construction factors also tend to corroborate an early building date that precedes the reestablishment of Fort Ringgold as a permanent military presence in the post-Civil War era. The building's interior features and finishes appear to date from the second half of the 19th century.

The dwelling presents somewhat of an L-shape with a short, one-room wing fronting onto Mirasoles Street and a slightly recessed three-room wing that extends from the rear of the Mirasoles wing northward toward Main Street along the east side of the Tijerina-Lopez courtyard. Its form is unlike other linear plan houses in Rio Grande City because it is accessed by a single door from the street (Mirasoles). Each room leads into the next through a centrally placed door in the interior rooms, similar to the plan of a Shotgun House. However, the building forms one wall of a large courtyard and each room opens directly into the courtyard. In that way, it follows the vernacular tradition. The stucco-covered stone building is flat-roofed with a low parapet wall and features a wide, shallow-pitched shed roof porch along the entire façade fronting onto the courtyard. Simple turned wood posts support the porch. Deeply inset wooden doors with heavy



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mesquite lintels open into the individual rooms directly from the courtyard. A similar door opens into the southernmost room from Mirasoles Street. Windows are likewise set deeply into the stone walls and are 1/1 light double hung sash.

On the north side of the three-room house a second, discrete dwelling is attached that extends almost to Main Street and terminates just before the old stone wall (Site 384) that forms the boundary of the courtyard. This property is thought to have been built to house other members of the Tijerina-Lopez family. Because it is a distinct unit attached to Site 587A, it is given the site number 587B. Other units forming the courtyard possess their own site numbers, such as the Cruz and Dionicia Tijerina House (Site 325), the old wall (Site 384), and the commercial building that fronts onto Main Street but opens into the courtyard on the rear (Site 385).

Site 587 is an outstanding example of an early Rio Grande City dwelling and contains original interior features such as fireplaces, wood plank floors and bulls eye molding on the door and window surrounds. Its construction of quarried indicates caliche is rare and indicates that it predates the development of brick culture that was initiated and flourished in the post-Civil War era when Heinrich Portscheller's work and influence dominated local construction. It is in good condition and contributes significantly to the character and history of Rio Grande City.

*Site 587B* – 400 block E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1900. Domestic. Contributing

Attached to the north side of Site 587A is a discrete, two-room side-gabled house with a full-façade porch facing into the Tijerina-Lopez courtyard. Built of brick, the shallow-pitched roof is covered in wood shingles and the porch is supported by simple wood posts with plain brackets. Both rooms have doors that open onto the courtyard (one room has two exterior doors, one of which may have once been a window) and a door connecting the two rooms on the interior. A single 1/1 light window is set in the northernmost room, which also has an exterior chimney.

There is no opening from this dwelling into the house designated 587A. Site 587B extends the linear form of the original building along the east side of the courtyard and terminates close to the old wall (Site 384) that runs along Main Street and forms the north side of the complex. At one time, there was a small independent room, possibly for storage that closed the gap between Site 587B and the wall but now there is a narrow walkway that connects the Tijerina-Lopez compound with the adjacent courtyard of the Kelsey-Bass House (City Hall). According to Sanborn maps, this property was built after 1894 and is thought to have been built to house later generations of the Tijerina-Lopez family. Because it is a distinct unit attached to Site 587A, it is given the site number 587B. It contributes to the historic district.

*Site 325* – 400 block E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1895. Domestic. Contributing.

Built in the earliest period of development in Rio Grande City, the Lopez-Tijerina House is a 2-story load-bearing masonry building that incorporates both stone and brick construction with a stucco surface over all. The house has a hipped roof with exposed, shaped rafter ends and a full width shed-roofed porch supported by metal pipes. Windows are double hung 6/6 light wood sash and have segmental arch openings. The door is a single wood paneled door.

Recently renovated, the Lopez-Tijerina House is one of the oldest extant structures in Rio Grande City. This 2-story brick, stone and stucco building with its two-story porch is part of a mid-19th century domestic complex established by Lazaro Lopez and continued by his daughter Dionicia and her husband Cruz Tijerina.

This 2-story dwelling associated with Cruz and Dionicia Tijerina lies immediately adjacent to the Lopez House on the west and forms part of the family courtyard. According to Sanborn maps, the house wasn't built until after 1894 but it shares construction and design traditions with other turn-of-the-20th-century dwellings in Rio Grande City and was probably built about 1895 or 1900. Although some quarried limestone is used in the construction of the house, it is



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primarily brick with a stucco finish. The first floor has only one door with a transom at the far west end of the building. There are two 1/1 light segmental arch windows and a shortened segmental arch window. The second story has multiple doors and windows leading to a gallery above the street. From the courtyard, an exterior staircase leads to the second story gallery. Both floors have multiple doors with transoms and 1/1 light windows. The recent renovation added Victorian type railings and brackets to the galleries.

The Lopez-Tijerina House is part of the larger Lopez-Tijerina complex that forms a courtyard between Main and Mirasoles streets. Some of the courtyard boundaries are formed by domestic and commercial buildings while others are formed by high stone walls (Site 384). The complex reflects the rich vernacular architectural traditions of the period and region. Despite additions and some exterior changes, the house exhibits architectural features that evoke a sense of Rio Grande City's early history. A common wall separates the Lopez-Tijerina complex from the Kelsey property, to the west. Cruz Tijerina worked with merchant-rancher John Peter Kelsey for more than 50 years and was a well-respected local businessman in his own right. This property is a High priority site and Contributing feature of the historic district.

### *Site 585 – 400 block E. Mirasoles. ca. 1910-1940. Institutional. Hospital. Contributing*

This 1-story L-plan hospital is wood frame with a porch across the front façade and an attached porch along the rear ell. It has a hipped roof with pressed tin shingles, boxed eaves, and cresting at the ridge. The front porch is shed-roofed and supported by turned wood posts.

Formerly a private hospital noted as "Doctor Rodriguez Hospital" on the 1940 Sanborn maps, this building is a rare example of an early medical facility, relatively few of which survive in Texas. Distinctive characteristics include the hipped roof and segmental arched windows. Because of its abandonment, the building has deteriorated and its structural integrity may be threatened. Nevertheless, the building remains an important landmark in the community. Local sources indicate that a Dr. Medrado Hinojosa may have owned the hospital run by Dr. Rodriguez. The property Contributes to the historic district.

### *Site 323 – 400 E. Mirasoles. ca. 1925. Domestic. Contributing*

Built ca. 1925, this 1-story brick bungalow has Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic features. It has a cross gabled roof and a front gabled, attached porch. The roof is either red clay tile or painted metal to look like tile. It has exposed rafter ends and cresting at the ridge. The porch is partial width with wrought iron supports that may be original. Windows are double hung 1/1 light wood sash with a brick soldier course over the openings. The door is a single wood door with glazing. Decorative corbelled brick arches grace the entrance.

This 1-story brick dwelling is a good local example of a bungalow with Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic features. The most distinctive architectural element is the red tile roof. The only significant change may be the replacement of wood posts and it is possible that the wrought iron posts are original to the house. Otherwise, the building is well-maintained and retains much of its integrity. It is a Contributing feature of the historic district.

### *Site 324 – 414 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1890/1990. Domestic. Contributing*

The John Thompson House is a 1-story brick dwelling with a hipped roof with boxed eaves and wood shingles. It has a full-width, three-bay porch with brick columns and Doric moldings at the capitals. The windows are 1/1 double hung wood sash with segmental arch openings and there is a single wood door with a transom, sidelights and glazing.

This 1-story dwelling is noteworthy because of the fine masonry work exhibited in the Doric porch columns, suggestive of classical architectural traditions. The columns illustrate the sophistication and craftsmanship of brick



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masons who worked in Rio Grande City during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Also noteworthy is the ribbon of closely-placed segmental arch windows along the east façade. An early 20th century map of Rio Grande City lists John Thompson as the owner of this property but it has been more closely associated with Josefina Hinajosa. It is in excellent condition and Contributes to the historic district.

### ***500 Block East Mirasoles Street***

*Site 326* – 500 block E. Mirasoles Street. 1914. Domestic. Contributing

Sanborn maps show a 1-story linear plan house that fronted onto Mirasoles Street on this site in 1894. By 1925, a 2-story L-shaped building appeared that may have incorporated the original dwelling on Mirasoles and included a long wing along Flores Street. Some sources report that the house was built in 1914, but the different brickwork between the two floors indicates that the house was enlarged. The 2-story house as it appears today was probably what was completed in 1914. The linear, L-shaped plan is typical of many domestic and combination domestic/commercial complexes in Rio Grande City. The structure is load-bearing masonry with a hipped roof and boxed eaves. Windows are 1/1 light double hung wood sash with segmental arch openings. The doors are double paneled with transoms and sidelights. Alterations include brick veneer on the first floor.

The house is associated with Domingo Garza and his wife, Donna Norris Garza, daughter of rancher and Starr County Commissioner, Thomas Bryan Norris. The Garzas hosted meetings of the Progressive and New Party (1940s) in their spacious courtyard.

This 2-story brick building retains much of its early 20th century historic and architectural integrity and is a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site N19* – 500 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1975. Domestic. Noncontributing.

This 2-story dwelling built about 1975 has a stucco finish on the first floor and vertical wood on the second. It has 6/6 aluminum windows and a wood door. The front porch is partially infilled by a projecting garage bay. It does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site 329* – 504 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1920/1940. Domestic Multi (duplex). Contributing.

This ca. 1920 frame duplex has a side-gabled roof with wooden shingles and a full-width porch with wrought iron supports. Windows are 1/1 light double hung wood sash and there are three single wood paneled doors on the primary façade. This modest dwelling is a relatively intact example of a duplex with board-and-batten siding. Porch changes including the replacement of original wood posts with aluminum columns compromise the building's historic integrity. Additions appear to have been made ca. 1940. However, it retains sufficient historic fabric to be a Contributing element of the historic district.

### ***600 Block East Mirasoles Street***

*Site 332* – 600 E. Mirasoles Street. ca. 1890/1915. Domestic. Contributing

The Arcadio and Margarita Salinas House combines both local traditions and Classical Revival architectural stylistic elements. It is a 2-story brick house with a hipped roof and wraparound two-story veranda supported by classical columns and featuring a squared wood balustrade. The first floor columns have been altered from the original. The house has segmental arch openings and windows are 1/1 double hung wood sash. The single door is wood with a transom, sidelights and glazing.



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This stately 2-story residence is reflective of Rio Grande City's rich brick masonry traditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like so many other local contemporaneous residences, the house features segmental arched openings. The two-tiered wraparound porch with its columns and balustrade suggests an influence of the Classical Revival style, an architectural expression that gained popularity in the early 20th century. The house in its current configuration was built about 1915 and is associated with Margarita G. de la Salinas and family, prominent local ranchers and cotton farmers. It is an architectural landmark in the city and contributes to the historic district.

*Site N18* – 600 block E. Mirasoles Street. Domestic. Noncontributing.

This is a cross-gabled brick veneer house of undetermined date. It appears to be a modern house but may be an older home that has been extensively remodeled to include veneer. The front gabled porch is supported by brick columns. Wood siding is in the gable ends and a carport is attached to the house on the west side. It is Noncontributing in the historic district.

*Site 580* – 600 block E. Mirasoles Street. 1925. Domestic. Noncontributing

This modest, front gabled frame bungalow has a double roof and other alterations that make it a Noncontributing element in the historic district.

*Site 333* – 600 block E. Mirasoles. ca. 1925. Domestic. Contributing

With its stucco finish, flat roof, arched doorways, clay tile roof and canales or drains, this modest bungalow exhibits many typical Spanish Colonial Revival style features. Built about 1925, the bungalow plan house has a partial width circular porch. Although its double hung wood sash windows appear to have been somewhat altered, the dwelling retains much of its historic integrity and is a good local example of the style. It contributes to the historic district.

### **700 Block East Mirasoles Street**

*Site N34* – 700 block Mirasoles Street (799). ca. 1970. Domestic. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story, side-gabled Ranch style house made of cinder block and accented with vertical hardboard. It has a full façade porch supported by carved columns and aluminum posts. Due to its recent age and design, it is Noncontributing to the historic district.

*Site 334* – 702. E. Mirasoles. ca. 1910. Domestic Single. Contributing

This side-gabled brick house has a partial width, gabled porch with wrought iron supports. It has single-hung 2/2 light metal sash windows and a single wood door with a transom. Alterations have been made to the porch and windows.

Despite a variety of relatively cosmetic architectural changes to the exterior, this building is representative of Rio Grande City's vernacular building traditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Distinctive characteristics include the load-bearing masonry construction, segmental-arched openings and a transom above the central door. Sanborn maps show that the bungalow type porch was added by 1940. Decorative wood shingles cover the side-gabled ends, a relatively rare feature in Rio Grande City and particularly unusual in this type of dwelling. It is a Contributing feature in the Rio Grande City Historic District.

*Site 335* – 704 E. Mirasoles ca. 1925/1940. Domestic Single. Noncontributing



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This dwelling is a front-gabled frame bungalow with a front-gabled porch. The porch has been replaced. Partly infilled replacement windows aluminum windows exist throughout the house. Alterations such as these render the house a Noncontributing element in the historic district.

*Site 336 – 706 E. Mirasoles. ca. 1920. Domestic Multi (duplex). Contributing*

This property is a 1-story Craftsman-influenced duplex. It is a wood frame house with cross gables and exposed rafter ends. It features a partial width gabled porch supported by both square and turned posts on brick pedestals. The house has double hung 1/1 wood sash windows and two single wood doors with glazing.

This modest bungalow retains its integrity to a high degree and is noteworthy because it reflects the abandonment of vernacular building traditions in favor of popular architectural forms in Rio Grande City during the early 20th century. Although it displays Craftsman-inspired characteristics such as paired windows and exposed rafter ends, the house has the delicate turned porch posts, brackets and fish scale shingles popular in earlier Victorian era dwellings.

*Site 337 – 708 E. Mirasoles. ca. 1925. Domestic Single. Noncontributing.*

A one-story front gable frame bungalow with false bevel siding, this house has a flat porch supported by wooden open work posts. The house features notched rafter ends. It has been altered significantly and no longer contributes to the historic character of the district.

### ***NORTH/SOUTH STREETS***

#### **Corpus Street**

*Site 163 – 101 S. Corpus. ca. 1935. Domestic. Contributing.*

The Ida Reeves House is a front-gabled brick and stucco Tudor Revival bungalow with a partial width porch. The brick appears to have been an added feature but at an early date and is an important element in the building's present appearance and character. It contributes to the historic district.

#### **East Street**

*Site 147A – 100 block N. East Street. ca. 1890/1920. Domestic. Contributing.*

Although the textured stucco exterior and porch are not original, this dwelling retains most of its salient features. Noteworthy elements include segmental-arched windows and hood molds. The series of small Mission Revival style parapets across the top of the building were probably added in the early 20th century. A stone wall surrounds the property and the building forms a U-shaped courtyard. The house may have been enlarged to its present configuration from a smaller masonry dwelling depicted on the 1894 Sanborn map. An early plat map indicates that C. Valle owned three adjacent lots containing this dwelling, a garage (Site 147C) fronting Second Street and a small auxiliary building on the alley, which is listed as 147B. Despite alterations, the building contributes to the historic character of the district.

*Site 147B – 100 block N. East Street. ca. 1920. Domestic: Auxiliary. Contributing*

An auxiliary to the house at 100 N. East Street, this is a single room frame building possibly used for storage or as a tiny dwelling at the rear of a primary residence (Site 147A). It appears little changed from its original construction and contributes to the historic district.



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*Site 147C* – 100 block N. East Street. ca. 1930. Domestic: Auxiliary. Noncontributing.

Site 147C is a front gabled, frame garage with exposed rafter ends on pier and beam foundation. It is one of the few historic garages identified in the 1996 survey of Rio Grande City's cultural resources. At that time it retained its original hasp-hung doors, which were salient features of the building. They have since been replaced with modern doors rendering the garage Noncontributing in the historic district.

*Site 146* – 202 block N. East Street. ca. 1915. Domestic. Noncontributing.

This hipped roof National Folk house has been so altered that it no longer contributes to the historic character of the district.

### **Washington Street**

*Site 137A* – 100 S. Washington. 1879. Domestic/Commercial. Contributing.

This load-bearing masonry building with noteworthy dentil brickwork was constructed in 1879 by John P. Kelsey, one of the city's early residents. Brick wings formed an L-shape and brick walls completed a courtyard to enclose the yard. A two-story section for guests was added to the complex in 1914. In 1952, the house was sold to the Bass family who renovated it. Though altered, the building is one of Rio Grande City's most important architectural landmarks and serves as the City Hall. It retains its courtyard, arched galleries and gardens and contributes to the historic district.

*Site 137B* – 100 S. Washington. ca. 1890. Domestic. Contributing

A 1-story brick building lies along the southern boundary of the Kelsey courtyard. It appears to have been a dwelling or office, originally, although it served as storage space by 1940. The buff-colored brick linear-plan building has a side-gabled roof with wood shingles. It has segmental arched, multi-light windows and single doors that front onto the courtyard. In good condition, the building contributes to the historic district.

*Site 136* – 100 block N. Washington. ca. 1945. One-part Commercial. Noncontributing.

Although this building may have been built within the historic period, its materials, fenestration pattern, set back and form impart a modern feeling and the building does not contribute to the historic character of the district.

*Site 135* – 104 N. Washington. ca. 1920/1930. One-part Commercial. Contributing.

This 1-story commercial block building is constructed of load-bearing masonry and displays modest Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic influences. It has a brick-faced exterior surface – as do many of the fine Rio Grande City buildings – rather than a stucco finish more typical of Spanish Colonial and Spanish Colonial Revival buildings. The building's storefront has been altered but the brick parapet displays finely crafted masonry work. The double entry doors topped with transoms are noteworthy. The site has served commercial purposes for more than 100 years; a restaurant and carpenter's shop occupied the site in 1894, according to Sanborn maps. The south half of the store was built about 1920 and the north half was added about 1930. An early 20th century plat map shows C. Gonzales as the property owner. It contributes to the historic district.

### **Lopez Street**

*Site 327* – 205 S. Lopez. ca. 1880/1970. Domestic. Noncontributing



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This 1-story, side-gabled vernacular dwelling may date as early as 1880 as it has received numerous additions and has been obscured from site by multiple screening devices. It appears to have been significantly altered in the 1970s and no longer contributes to the historic district.

*Site 121* – 100 block S. Lopez. ca. 1920. Commercial. Contributing.

The Juan Gonzales Building in the 100 block of S. Lopez is a diminutive ca. 1920 wood frame building with a low-pitched hipped roof covered in corrugated metal. It has exposed rafter ends. The building has no porch. It has single hung 2/2 metal sash and double, paneled wood doors. Alterations have been made to the windows and the porch has been removed.

This modest building is distinctive because of its scale and massing. It originally served as a barber shop. An early 20th century map shows Juan Gonzales as the owner of this property. It is a Medium preservation priority and a Contributing feature of the historic district.

*Site 120* – 300 block N. Lopez. ca. 1900/1990. Two-part. Commercial. Contributing

The Gutierrez-Galindo Store is a ca. 1900 2-story, two-part brick commercial building. The roof is flat with a low parapet. It features a corbelled, paneled brick cornice. Windows are 9/6 light double hung metal sash with arched openings. The doors are double paneled wood with a transom. Alterations have been made to the siding, windows and doors. Modern stone has been added to the lower story.

This property is a good, though somewhat altered, example of a two-part commercial block building in Rio Grande City. The upper floor and parapet display fine craftsmanship; however, remodeling and changes on the ground floor detract from the building's overall integrity. Built about 1896 and known as the Alberta Gutierrez Store, it served as a Lodge Hall in the 1940s. The building has been known as the Juan B. Galindo Store since the 1950s. It contributes to the historic district.

*N36* – 203 N. Lopez. ca. 1960. Domestic. Noncontributing

An example of an early Ranch style house lies at the southeast corner of N. Lopez and Wimpy. It is of brick construction and has a nearly flat roof that slopes slightly to the rear. Although it may have been built within the period of significance, it is incongruous with the historic character of the district and is designated a Noncontributing feature.

### Garza Street

*Site 100* – 207 S. Garza. ca. 1930. Domestic. Contributing

This 1-story frame bungalow appears to have been built about 1930 but it may have been moved to the site or relocated from behind the Salinas House (Site 332) to front onto Garza Street. The cross-gabled dwelling features paired bungalow-type windows and has a front-gabled projecting porch supported by tapered posts on brick piers. The windows appear to have been replaced with aluminum sash but the openings appear unchanged. The bungalow has been altered very little since its construction in the early 20th century. It contributes to the historic district.

*Site 97* – 100 block N. Garza. ca. 1925/1960. One-part Commercial. Contributing

The A. Gutierrez Building is a one-part brick commercial block with a load-bearing masonry structural system. It has a flat roof with a brick parapet and wood canopy affixed to the building by metal rods. Windows are fixed metal sash



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and there are two double aluminum doors. Alterations have been made to the windows and doors. The building has two storefronts with decorative brickwork in the parapet.

This building, which includes two storefronts, is a good illustration of a one-part commercial block. The stepped brick parapets above each storefront are mildly suggestive of the Mission Revival style. An early 20th century map shows A. Gutierrez as the owner of this property. It is a Medium priority and Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 101* – 100 N. Garza. ca. 1940. Domestic. Contributing.

The F. Vizcaya House is a ca. 1940 cross-gable dwelling with Georgian Revival stylistic influences. It is a wood frame house with brick veneer siding. A three-bay inset porch with segmented archways and box columns extends across most of the front façade. Windows are double hung 6/6 light sash. The entrance is through a single wood door.

This brick dwelling is a good illustration of a house with modest Georgian Revival features. This architectural expression is rare in Rio Grande City. An early 20th century map shows F. Vizcaya as the property owner of the house. Although it was not built until after 1940, according to the Sanborn maps of that date, it was probably built shortly afterward. It is in excellent condition and Contributes to the historic district.

### **Flores Street**

*Site 75* – 613 Mirasoles?. ca. 1930/60. Domestic. Noncontributing

This domestic property fronts onto Flores Street but apparently has a Mirasoles address. It appears to be a ca. 1930 house that was extensively remodeled in the 1960s to a contemporary, Ranch-type appearance. This dwelling is a 1-story side-gabled house with a stucco finish. The house features a wood paneled door with colored glass sidelights and has multi-light aluminum windows. It no longer contributes to the historic district.

*Site 76* – 100 block N. Flores. ca. 1890/1935. One-part Commercial. Contributing.

Built about 1890 and altered slightly about 1935, this is an exceptional example of Mexican borderlands vernacular architecture. The 1-story brick building is partially covered with a thin stucco coating but the brick corbelling at the cornice is still visible. Once called Café Mexico as evidenced by the painted sign on the facade, the building has 1/1 light double hung wood sash and brick hood molds. It has one set of double paneled wood doors with a transom and sidelights and several single doors. The 1-story brick commercial building occupies a corner lot.

Café Mexico is an outstanding local example of a commercial building exhibiting elements characteristic of Spanish Colonial-influenced architectural traditions. It is an exceptional example of a once-common building type in Rio Grande City during the late 19th century. A small historic sunburst mural on the exterior wall is similar to those seen on buildings in nearby Roma. The parapet brick courses provide accomplished architectural detailing. This building is clearly identified as a General Store on the 1894 Sanborn maps but has been remembered more recently as a restaurant and the words "Café Mexico" are painted on the front façade. It is a High preservation priority and Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 77* – 101 N. Flores. ca. 1950. Domestic Multi: Hotel. Noncontributing.

This is a 2-story brick building with a side-gabled roof and exposed rafters. Windows on the upper floor are 2/3 lights and there are no windows on the first floor. A large neon-type arrow indicates the door, which is boarded. It was built about 1950 (it doesn't show up on the 1940 Sanborn maps) and may have been part of a gin complex that included a



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warehouse at the rear of the property to the east. Possibly an office building, it was converted to a hotel at a later date. It does not contribute to the historic character of Rio Grande City.

*Site 74* – 100 block N. Flores. ca. 1880. Domestic. Contributing.

Built about 1880, this is a 1-story load-bearing masonry building with brick walls. It is flat-roofed and has no porch. Windows are 2/2 double hung metal sash with shallow arches. There is one double door and two single doors. All are wood with shallow arches over the single doors.

This 1-story brick building serves as a good illustration of a once-common vernacular form in Rio Grande City during the later 19th and early 20th centuries. The flat roof, brick coping along the roofline and segmental archways illustrate an influence of Spanish Colonial architecture. It was originally built as a dwelling but has been in commercial use. It contributes to the historic district.

*Site 73* – 100 block N. Flores. ca. 1940/1965. One-part Commercial. Noncontributing

*Site 79* – 200 block N. Flores. ca. 1895. One-part Commercial. Contributing.

Built ca. 1895, this one-part brick commercial building has a hipped roof and no porch or canopy. Its windows are covered and it has double wood paneled doors. This building is a rare but altered example of a hipped roof combination domestic/commercial building in Rio Grande City. The property type is mildly suggestive of French Colonial architectural traditions and may reflect the influence of the many French immigrants to Rio Grande City from northern Mexico in the mid- to late-19th century. It contributes to the historic district.

*Site N31* – 200 block N. Flores Street. ca. 1970. Commercial. Noncontributing.

The Herb and Candle Store is a 1-story brick commercial building with a circular form on its east side. The building originally featured a curved window but it is now boarded with vertical hard board. Double aluminum doors with sidelights provide access to the building. A sloped awning curves around the side of the building. It is incongruous with the historic character of Rio Grande City and does not contribute to the district.

### **Avasolo Street**

*Site 48* – 211 S. Avasolo. ca. 1925/1990. Domestic Single. Contributing

The Theodore Carerra Garza House is a one-story, cross-gabled wood frame bungalow with wood siding. It has composition shingles and exposed rafter ends. The partial width, gabled porch has tapered box columns. Windows are 1/1 light double hung wood sash and the entrance has a single wood door. Built about 1925, it has recent, ca. 1990 additions.

This house is a good example of a bungalow with Craftsman-inspired architectural features such as exposed rafter ends and paired windows. The building is also noteworthy because it is in such good condition and retains its integrity to such a high degree. Theodore Carerra Garza once owned this house. He worked for the nearby ice company (Site 62). The house is a Medium priority and a Contributing element of the historic district.

*Site 43* – 206 S. Avasolo. ca. 1925/1990. Domestic Single. Contributing

Built about 1925, the Camille Block House is a front-gabled bungalow with a brick pier and beam foundation and wood siding. It has a partial width, gabled porch with brick columns and a brick balustrade. Windows are single hung



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2/2 light metal sash. The single door is wood and is topped by a transom. Alterations have been made to the windows and door and additions were made about 1990.

This house is a good example of a modest front-gable bungalow with a partial-width integral porch. It closely resembles the house next door at 204 S. Avasolo. Camille Block owned this house as a rental property. She was the daughter of Solomon Block, one of several prominent French Jewish merchants and large landowners in the city. The bungalow is a Medium priority site and a Contributing element in the historic district.

*Site 42 – 204 S. Avasolo. ca. 1925/1990. Domestic Single. Contributing*

Nearly identical to the bungalow next door at 206 Avasolo, the house at 204 S. Avasolo was also built about 1925 and received additions about 1990. It is a front gabled frame bungalow on a concrete block foundation. It has wood siding and exposed rafter ends. The partial-width porch has box columns and a brick balustrade. Windows are single hung 6/6 metal sash and the entrance is a single wood door with a transom. The windows have been altered from their original wood sash.

This house reflects the widespread acceptance of popular 20th century architectural forms and is a modestly altered example of a front gable bungalow with Craftsman features. Camille Block, daughter of a local developer, Solomon Block, owned the house as a rental property. The Block family was one of several prominent Jewish merchants in Rio Grande City from the late 19th through the early 20th centuries. The house Contributes to the historic district.

*Site 49 – 207 S. Avasolo. ca. 1880/1990. Domestic Single. Noncontributing*

This very old, historic dwelling has been extensively altered and is Noncontributing to the historic district.

*Site 41 – 202 S. Avasolo. ca. 1925/1990. Domestic Single. Noncontributing*

This ca. 1925 bungalow has received such extensive alterations that it no longer contributes to the historic district.

*Site 40 – 200 block S. Avasolo. ca. 1925/1990. Domestic Single. Noncontributing*

Alterations have rendered this bungalow a Noncontributing resource in the historic district.

*Site 50 – 105 S. Avasolo. ca. 1925/1990. Domestic Multi (duplex). Noncontributing*

This historic duplex built about 1925, was significantly altered and is considered Noncontributing to the historic district.

*Site 51 – 700 block E. Main Street. ca. 1890. Domestic. Contributing*

The Isaac Villarreal/Florence Johnson Scott House may have been built as early as 1870 as a store and home for the Villarreal family (Greene 1987: 32). It is a side-gabled brick house with extended end walls that form squared parapets. Similar buildings were constructed in the early 1870s at nearby Fort Ringgold for infantry and cavalry barracks. Smaller versions of the extended end-wall buildings appeared on Main Street at about the same time. It is a type that appears to be peculiar to the Rio Grande City vicinity. The house retains its 6/6 double hung wood sash and segmental arch openings. The door is a single wood paneled door topped with a transom and segmental arch and sidelights.

Despite its poor condition, this resource is a good example of vernacular building traditions of the region during the last quarter of the 19th century. Noteworthy features include the segmental arched windows and wide entry. According to local sources, this house was owned by Dr. Mary Ann Headley Edgerton at one time. The property is most



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closely identified with Florence Johnson Scott, a renowned local historian and Spanish land grant scholar. Mrs. Scott's garden is also noteworthy for its gate with inset Mexican tiles (Site 402B). The house is significant for its architecture and for its historic associations with Florence Johnson Scott. It was listed as a High priority in the 1996 city survey and is a rare, important example of an early Rio Grande City dwelling that pre-dates most outside influences.

*Site N30* – 100 block N. Avasolo Street. ca. 1960. Commercial. Noncontributing.

El Valle Bakery is a 1-story commercial building with a stucco finish and additions to the rear. It has a large brick chimney at the back of the building. The chamfered entrance contains an aluminum door with side lights. There are multiple window types throughout the building.

*Site N27* – 100 block N. Avasolo Street. ca. 1965. Domestic. Noncontributing.

This is a 1-story, low pitched hipped roof brick house built about 1965 in a modest Ranch style. It has an inset porch, aluminum columns, and casement windows. It is a Noncontributing element of the historic district.

*Site 39* – 200 block N. Avasolo. ca. 1940. Domestic. Noncontributing

This is a 1-story front gabled bungalow with asphalt shingle and wood replacement siding. It has a concrete porch and aluminum columns. It may be an older house that has been enlarged. Windows are 1/1 paired lights but the front windows are boarded up. The building does not contribute to the historic district.

*Site N29* – 100 block N. Avasolo. 2003. Noncontributing

This multiple unit commercial building resembles a small-scale strip shopping center. It is a 10 story, cement stucco building whose façade is pierced by large, dark-tinted plate glass windows and aluminum-frame entry doors. It is distinguished by its stepped parapet wall which mimics the Mission Revival style popular in Rio Grande City's early 20th century commercial buildings. It is a Noncontributing feature in the historic district.

*Site 52* – 201 N. Avasolo Street. ca. 1925. Domestic. Contributing

Built about 1925, this front-gabled bungalow displays some of the hallmarks of the Craftsman style. It is a frame house with a stucco finish. It has a gabled, partial width porch with a concrete floor and brick piers with boxed columns. Windows are 1/1 light double hung sash and are covered with screens with vertical slats. Entry is through a single wood door.

This property is a good, well-maintained example of a front-gabled Craftsman influenced bungalow in Rio Grande City. Distinguishing Craftsman elements include its exposed rafter ends and brick piers surmounted by tapered porch posts. Its most noteworthy feature is the use of petrified wood, found in several local mid-20th century houses, as lintels over the windows. Despite the incompatible addition, which detracts from its integrity, the property's essential design and construction elements are intact. It is a Medium to High priority building and Contributes to the historic district.

*No Site Number* – Various Places in Rio Grande City. 1860-1900. Landscape: Courtyards. Contributing.

Throughout the city are found walled courtyards that sometimes incorporate the walls of dwellings and commercial buildings and often include the homes of several family members. Such courtyards are significant features in Rio Grande City's architectural composition and therefore they are listed as a group as contributing elements in the



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historic district. Noteworthy courtyards are part of the Lopez-Tijerina complex, the Kelsey complex (City Hall), the Solis House, the La Borde House and numerous other sites throughout the city.



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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**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, Community Planning and Development, Ethnic Heritage

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** c.1840-1940

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1848

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** NA

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** NA

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** Heinrich Portscheller, Frederick Ellert, Narciso Pena

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-50 through 8-64).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-65 through 9-66).

**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:



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### Introduction

Rio Grande City is one of the oldest towns in the lower Rio Grande region and the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District contains the most concentrated and intact collection of historic commercial buildings in the Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas. The district lies at the heart of the South Texas border town of Rio Grande City and contains the city's best collection of commercial, domestic and combination commercial/residential properties dating from its earliest period of development, ca. 1840, to the end of construction in the district, about 1940. It includes 144 properties in the eastern half of adjacent Wimpy, Second, Main, and Mirasoles streets, and their intersecting side streets, an area which comprised the main part of the downtown shopping district throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rio Grande City has a long and colorful history dating from its 18th century origins as a Spanish land grant ranch to its role in the Mexican and American Civil wars and as a cavalry post through the first half of the 20th century. As isolated as it was during the 19th century and much of the 20th century – it had no rail service until 1925 – the city boasted a cosmopolitan business populace comprised of Spanish/Mexican, German, French, Swiss, Jewish and Anglo-American residents. All played a role in the city's development and construction traditions as demonstrated by the variety of surviving building fabric in the downtown district. The district is particularly notable for its superb collection of vernacular architecture identified with the South Texas/Mexican borderlands region. These properties are largely distinguished by their rooflines – some are flat with brick or stone cornices but more are side-gabled with extended end parapets – their brick construction and their decorative brickwork in the cornices, window and door surrounds and parapets. In fact, the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District has one of the finest concentrations of such buildings in the Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Corridor which extends from the upriver city of Laredo, about 100 miles west of Rio Grande City, to the downriver city of Brownsville, near the Gulf of Mexico, about 90 miles east of the city. The district is comprised primarily of 1- and 2-story brick commercial and combination commercial/residential buildings in which resident owners lived in one wing of a one-story L-shaped building or in the upper story of a two-story building. Today, the district remains remarkably intact with few modern intrusions and the city actively supports the restoration of historic buildings through its participation in the Texas Main Street Program. The City was also designated a Certified Local Government (CLG) by the Texas Historical Commission in 2002. The City's Historic Preservation Commission led the effort in being recognized as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District has an excellent concentration of historically and architecturally significant buildings that reflect the city's development trends and building traditions throughout its historic period. Furthermore, it is one of the most distinctive collections of borderlands architecture in the Spanish settlement corridor extending from Laredo to Brownsville. Rio Grande City features the full spectrum of nineteenth and early twentieth century vernacular brick buildings that appeared along the Rio Grande during the early American settlement period. Set in a concentrated downtown district, the architecture collectively conveys an extraordinary sense of historic South Texas borderlands development. Its finely crafted buildings also reflect the combined efforts of Spanish Colonial descendants and French, Jewish and German immigrants to create a unique architectural palette. Because it outstandingly conveys the architectural aesthetic of the borderlands during a pivotal time in its history, it is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for Community Planning and Development and under Criterion C for Architecture, at the state level of significance.



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Because the district reflects the cultural interplay of several distinct ethnic groups, in particular the French, German, Spanish and Mexican settlers who largely defined its architectural traditions, it is also nominated under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage, also at the state level of significance.

### Historic Background of Rio Grande City

The land that encompasses present Rio Grande City was part of a Spanish land grant given to Jose Antonio de la Garza Falcon in 1767. Land grants on the lower Rio Grande Valley were long, narrow ribbons known as *porciones*. *Porciones* spanned the river cross-wise to give each property owner at least a modicum of river frontage. Although their property lay on both sides of the Rio Grande River, nearly all of the landowners lived on the south side of the river, in present Mexico, and conducted only modest ranching operations on the north. One of the principal reasons was that there were more established communities or *villas* with greater numbers of people to guard against Indian attacks on the south side of the river. Indian attacks on isolated ranching outposts on the north side of the river were relentless throughout the 18th and well into the 19th centuries. The north bank *villas* had been established by the Spanish colonizer, Jose de Escandon between 1747-1749. The *porciones* containing present Rio Grande City was aligned with the Spanish *villa* of Camargo, Escandon's first settlement and presently a town that lies a few miles across the river from Rio Grande City.

### *Carnestolendas*

By the 1830s, the property that would become Rio Grande City had passed to one of De la Garza Falcon's descendants, Francisco de la Garza Martinez. By then, political changes made the land subject to Mexican rule instead of Spanish. About 1753, De la Garza Martinez apparently established a ranch named *Carnestolendas*<sup>1</sup> in the section of *porcion* 80 that lay on the north side of the river at or very near the site that would become Rio Grande City. He and his family resided in the *villa* of Camargo, and it is not known whether he made any substantial improvements on his property. It is probable that at least some huts or *jacales* and possibly corrals were built as shelters for his workers and animals. A very old stone wall (Photo 9) with two doorways (one infilled) in the 400 block of E. Main Street appears to be a contemporary of other early-to-mid-19th century stone structures found in the region. It is possible that it dates to the ranching period and, if so, it may pre-date the city's first sustained settlement by Henry Clay Davis and his wife Hilaria de la Garza in the late 1840s. It has been given the tentative date of 1840. No other properties are known to pre-date the platting of the town by Henry Clay Davis in 1848 although some sources have reported that there were ranch buildings at *Carnestolendas* which they identified as being somewhat east of the house site – possibly associated with the old wall – that Davis eventually chose (Starr County Scrapbook).

### *Henry Clay Davis*

Although *Carnestolendas* was an established ranching outpost, it apparently did not support a large or substantial populace, and it was an American, Henry Clay Davis, who initiated the first town-building effort at Rio

<sup>1</sup> Spanish for the three-day carnival (Mardi Gras) preceding Ash Wednesday. According to legend, *Carnestolendas* Ranch was founded during this festival (Starr County Scrapbook).



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Grande City. Clay Davis, as he was known, was a young adventurer from Kentucky who reportedly appeared in Camargo in the 1830s on a horse-buying mission to the lower Rio Grande. As the war with Mexico took shape and Zachary Taylor moved his men to South Texas, Davis married Francisco de la Garza Martinez's granddaughter, Hilaria de la Garza, on March 24, 1846. According to family sources, Davis and his bride were asked to settle on the family ranch at *Carnestolendas*, on the north side of the Rio Grande, possibly to establish occupancy on the land in the event that the Americans would win the war and the Mexican family's ownership would be called into question (Greene 1987:1). Shortly after he married, Davis built a 2-story house (demolished 1995) with a store on the first floor near the steamboat landing he established on the river bank (Greene 1987:3). A few other buildings were erected and the site became known as Davis Landing, Rancho Davis, or simply Davis.

Davis hoped to capitalize on the site, selling goods to Taylor's army at the steamboat landing. Throughout the war, Taylor shipped troops and goods upriver to Davis Landing and Camargo by steamboat. From there, the army traveled overland to the Mexican interior. During the Mexican War, Davis leased part of the ranch to the U.S. Army for an encampment. Named Camp Ringgold for the first American killed in the Mexican War, the property lay on the north bank of the Rio Grande, just east of the present town. The camp was served by steamboats that came 350 river miles upriver from Brownsville near the mouth of the Rio Grande. Brownsville was only about 90 miles away by land but the territory was served by little more than a trail and Indian attack was a constant threat. Davis understood the economic advantages in having a nearby military post and after the war he offered to sell the property to the army. The army post was a built-in customer for Davis's various businesses. At least one, and possibly two, frame buildings survive on the grounds of Fort Ringgold from the Mexican War period (Fort Ringgold NR).

After the war, Taylor elected to set up a quartermaster system along the newly determined international border to supply his occupying army of Northern Mexico. His decision was embraced as a great opportunity for Anglo-Americans entrepreneurs, some of who had traveled to the region as soldiers, steamboat captains, or civilian employees in the quartermaster corps. Many opportunities were available to them with new, pristine markets and undeveloped lands. According to historian David Montejano, many of the soldiers discharged at Camargo married into landed Mexican families to take advantage of the uncertain title situations when the international boundary made half their property subject to United States law. Montejano cites Clay Davis as an example (Montejano 1987: 41). It is obvious from historical record that many American men who moved to the area at that time married the daughters of well-to-do Mexican families but it is also a matter of record that many of those unions resulted in stable, life-long citizens of Rio Grande City who have descendants still living in the region today. And if the purpose was to keep the land in the family: it worked. Without such alliances, unconnected Mexican property owners often lost their lands to unscrupulous lawyers and land developers because they could not prove ownership in the years that followed the Mexican War.

At the close of the war and with the international boundary fixed at the Rio Grande River in 1848, Davis and others lobbied to have a new border county carved out of Nueces County. Starr County was named for Dr. James Harper Starr, Secretary of the Treasury of the Republic of Texas. Davis became the first County Clerk. Not coincidentally, Davis petitioned to have the county seat established at a new town he was platting at Rancho Davis, next to Fort Ringgold. Designating the new town as the county seat would enhance its role in the region, drawing professionals such as lawyers and clerks to the town, as well as merchants and service providers. Davis and his partner, steamboat Captain Forbes Britton, platted the town of Rio Grande City on part of the former



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*Carnestolendas* Ranch. Reportedly, Davis fashioned the town after the Texas State capital of Austin. They surveyed a broad 150' wide promenade leading from the steamboat landing on the river bank to a courthouse square at the top of a hill. The plan corresponded to the Texas capital where Congress Avenue led from the Colorado River to the capitol building at the top of a hill overlooking the city. Davis named the avenue for his partner, Captain Britton. Clay Street on the west side of town is named for Henry Clay Davis. People arriving by steamboat would have an unobstructed view of a stately courthouse at the top of the hill, although a courthouse wasn't built until 1888.

The rest of the town was laid out in a grid-like fashion basically following the cardinal directions. Two main streets intersected at what was intended to be the business center of town: Britton Avenue, the central north-south street (Photo 3), and Main Street, the major east-west arterial (Photo 11) that passed through town between Laredo, to the west, and Brownsville, to the east. The town plat included 100 blocks with provisions for six east-west streets and six north-south streets including the broad central avenue connecting the courthouse square to the river. Lots were reserved for a church, a cemetery and a plaza. Water Street, which ran parallel to the river, was to house the early business buildings. Davis' own home and other residential lots were also clustered near the river. The steamboat landing – known for the next fifty years as Davis Landing – lay at the south end of Britton Avenue (Marjorie Johnson 1991: 31). One of the first buildings was a warehouse associated with the steamboat trade. The Mifflin Kenedy warehouse also served as the county courthouse for many years and is one of the few buildings of this period still standing in the waterfront region. This building is the oldest structure in Texas to have been used as a county courthouse.

Along Water, Second Street and Main Street, east of Corpus, 35' to 50' x 115' lots were platted with the narrow side fronting onto the main east-west streets. West of Corpus on Main and Second streets, the lots were platted lengthwise but building patterns defied the plan and two or three buildings often occupied a single lot in order to have Main Street frontage. Along most of Britton Avenue lots fronted onto the esplanade.

To promote his new venture, Davis placed an advertisement in a Matamoros newspaper, the *American Flag*, for town lots in Rio Grande City. He set himself up as a broker and commission agent and extolled the virtues of his riverfront site. The promotion attracted a number of bachelor Mexican War veterans who had recently returned from duty in Mexico. Some wished to try their luck at town-building on the frontier and saw an opportunity to get in on the ground floor in Rio Grande City. Davis sold dozens of business lots to former soldiers and they busily went to work setting up temporary buildings to serve as saloons, gambling houses and commission offices for the steamboat trade. Nearby Fort Ringgold, adjacent to the city on the east, supplied a steady stream of customers for Rio Grande City's fledgling businesses. Like Davis, many of the former U.S. soldiers married into old Camargo families thus initiating the blended culture that still exists in Rio Grande City (Marjorie Johnson 1991: 31).

Davis intended Britton Avenue to be the main commercial thoroughfare. However, it did not develop into a major commercial arterial, possibly because the courthouse that was intended for the top of the street wasn't built for 40 years after the town's initial development. Instead, Britton Avenue grew into a mixed use street with a handful of large houses, a few *jacales*, a couple of office buildings – including the newspaper office – and, most notably, the Catholic Church, Convent and Parochial School. The few commercial ventures on the street tended to cluster near its intersection with Main and Water streets where most of the town's business activities took place. Mifflin Kenedy's warehouse, near the steamboat landing on Water Street, served as the courthouse for decades



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until one was finally built in the block reserved for it in 1888, the same year as the dedication of the present state capitol. By then, steamboat traffic on the Rio Grande had been reduced to a trickle and there were few passengers to disembark and gaze up the grand promenade at its glory. So, while Davis apparently intended Britton Avenue, the widest boulevard in town, to be Rio Grande City's most important street, it never achieved the status its founder sought.

In the early years of the town's development – from about 1848 to about 1870 – most of the commercial activity was focused on the waterfront within a few blocks of the steamboat landing at the intersection of Water Street and Britton Avenue. The Davis House, Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse, Decker House, Julian Stewart House and Lopez-Tijerina House were all built within a few blocks of the commercial hub along the waterfront. In fact, many of the city's early houses served both as residences and commercial offices or mercantile stores and the waterfront area was the center of commercial and domestic activity. As time passed and water levels in the Rio Grande diminished, steamboat traffic dwindled accordingly. At the same time, the road known as the Military Highway developed through town along Main Street and new business buildings were constructed on its frontage. The Military Highway connected the principal cities of the lower Rio Grande – Laredo and Brownsville – and all major points in between. Like Water Street, Main Street paralleled the river but its buildings focused on the street traffic to attract passing travelers rather than on the riverfront. Eventually, when Second Street became the main highway through town in the 20th century, commercial buildings sprang up along it, although most of the street remained residential in character. Likewise, Mirasoles Street, which ran between Main and Water streets, developed as a residential avenue. For most of its history, Water, Mirasoles, Main and Second streets, along with intersecting Britton Avenue, have comprised the bulk of Rio Grande City's development.

### *The Mexican War to the Civil War: 1846-1860*

Despite Davis' plans for the city, the upriver town of Roma received a greater share of the border and steamboat trade in the early years after the war, and Rio Grande City grew but slowly. Captain Britton moved away from the border but Henry Clay Davis and his family remained. Eventually, the little town grew to fill many of the blocks in Davis' original plat. Among the earliest residents were Mexican-Americans such as Lazaro Lopez and Cruz and Dionicia Lopez Tijerina (1860); Anglo-Americans including Peter Dowd (1852), John P. and Amanda Brooks Kelsey (1849), Samuel Julian Stewart (1850); French settlers Stephen and Tiburcia Salinas Cenac (1860), Juan George Decker (1860s), the LaFarge, Louis Lacaze, and Francois and Eva Marks La Borde families (1870s); German immigrants Silverio de la Pena (Furstein) and Heinrich Portscher (1860s and 1870s). Several of the French settlers were also Jewish and they were joined by later Jewish residents, the Marks and Block families (1890s). A number of early Anglo settlers, including city founder Clay Davis, married Mexican-American women whose families dated to the area's earliest Spanish colonists. Notable among women were sisters Antonio and Hilaria de la Garza, who married Judge Julian Stewart and Henry Clay Davis, respectively.

Most of the early residential and commercial development in the 1840s and 1850s occurred on the streets closest to the river – Water and Mirasoles streets – between Clay and Garza. Davis built a home for his family above his business at the rear of a lot at the intersection of Water Street and Britton Avenue, and Mifflin Kenedy, a partner of Richard King of King Ranch fame, built a warehouse on Water Street near the steamboat landing, about 1854 (Greene 1987: 11). The platted city's first building was probably the house of Clay and Hilaria de la Garza Davis (ca. 1846, demolished 1995), but it was soon followed by those of Samuel Julian and Antonia de la Garza



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Stewart (ca. 1850), the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse-Courthouse (1854) and Peter Dowd-Juan George Decker House (ca. 1852, demolished 1981). All of these houses were two-story buildings and most were brick with hipped or side-gabled roofs and balconies. Two very early buildings that were located several blocks east of the steamboat landing were the complexes begun by Lazaro Lopez (1830-1860) and John Peter and Amanda Catherine Brooks Kelsey (1852). The adjacent compounds were built between Mirasoles and Main streets just east of Washington Street. The Lopez-Tijerina complex began with a one-story stone building, possibly dating to the same period as the stone wall (Photo 9) to which it is attached. The wall and one-story house could have been built as early as 1830 on the Carnestolendas Ranch. In that case, it would pre-date the establishment of the town. Other buildings, including the two-story Cruz and Dionicia Lopez Tijerina House (Photo 4), were added at later dates to form an enclosed courtyard.

These were the homes of the more prosperous citizens of Rio Grande City, however. When naturalist John Woodhouse Audubon traveled through the town during the 1849 Gold Rush, he stated that most of the people of the region lived in *jacales* and described "Davis' rancho" as having only a few buildings including the Armstrong Hotel – a long room with 20 beds – a gambling house and a few individual houses. There were few permanent buildings at Camp Ringgold during this period and his overall opinion was that the place was forlorn and monotonous (Audubon 1906: 77). Conditions must have improved within the next few years as Teresa Viéle, an army wife who lived at Camp Ringgold with her husband, described Rio Grande City as a "prosperous village" of about 1,000 residents of mixed heritage – "Americans, Mexicans and a few Spaniards" in 1854 (Viéle 1858: 147). She agreed with Audubon that most of the Mexican families lived in *jacals* but she also noted that Americans had a number of brick stores, that the city had a bakery, billiard room, an "eating saloon", and a pharmacy with a soda fountain. She commented that Davis' house and storerooms fronted onto a plaza where there was a daily market and that social life centered on an open-air "fandango court" where residents danced, drank and gambled (Viéle 1858: 149). Viéle had visited many frontier communities with her husband and she considered Rio Grande City a place of "considerable importance" and, apparently, not nearly as monotonous as Audubon had a few years earlier (Viéle 1858: 149). This could be due in part to the expansion of the village in the years since Audubon's sojourn and his misadventures including a bout with cholera and the theft of his capital while in Rio Grande City.

### *Fort Ringgold*

Rio Grande City owed much of its existence to adjacent Fort Ringgold. Fort Ringgold was originally established as a U. S. Army post on October 26, 1848 at Davis Landing at the end of the Mexican War. Camp Ringgold was named to honor the first officer killed during General Zachary Taylor's campaign against the Mexican Army at Palo Alto Battlefield, near Brownsville, Texas. After the war, the name was changed to Ringgold Barracks until it received permanent status as a fort. Its site on the north side of the Rio Grande had obvious observation value as it was situated on the river opposite the well-fortified old Mexican town of Camargo. When established, the site near Rancho Davis was at the head of steam navigation on the Rio Grande and was intended to serve as a transfer point for men and supplies to be carried into the Mexican interior if necessary. The original encampment that existed from the end of the Mexican War through the Civil War lay very close to the river and consisted primarily of log and frame buildings and not a few tents. One, and possibly two, frame buildings -one of which is called the Lee House because it is thought to have been Col. Robert E. Lee's



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headquarters when he traveled through the area in 1860- survive from this initial period of construction. Although it is questionable that Lee actually occupied the building, it is the only building known to date to the earliest period of the fort's history, and thus it has extraordinary traditional and architectural associations with the early post.

The early commercial and social life of Rio Grande City was largely dependent on nearby Fort Ringgold, so when Federal troops were withdrawn on March 3, 1859, it dealt a serious blow to the merchants and service providers in the city. Troops briefly occupied the fort again between December 29, 1859 and March 7, 1861 to guard against incursions by a notorious Mexican patriot/bandit<sup>2</sup>, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, who had been raiding settlements along the border from Brownsville to Rio Grande City. Troops were withdrawn again in 1861 with the outbreak of the Civil War. Throughout the war, Confederate troops occasionally camped at the fort and it was used by the famous John "Rip" Ford as a staging ground for raids against Federal troops further downriver at Brownsville and Brazos Santiago. Except for these ad hoc instances, the fort lay dormant until after the war. It was decommissioned in June, 1865, after the South surrendered<sup>3</sup>.

In response to various concerns including outlaws of all kinds, renewed Indian hostilities, political unrest in Mexico and the possibility of a re-invigorated Southern assault from south of the border, the U.S. Government decided to refortify Fort Ringgold and embark on a permanent building campaign for the outpost. The decision was made to build the new fort on a level plain slightly back from the river bank. German brick mason Heinrich (a.k.a. Enrique) Portscheller is thought to have been engaged to design and build the fort's first brick buildings which were set around a central parade ground. Construction began in 1869 but funds ran short when military appropriations were cut, and the first phase was still not finished in 1874 when the fort was inspected. Subsequent construction phases continued through the early 1890s and included brick barracks for four companies of infantry and cavalry troops, a hospital, officers and NCO quarters, quartermaster's buildings, a bakery, infirmary, stables, magazines, parade grounds, jumping stands, guard houses and other buildings and structures necessary to a fully functional fort. Revitalization and new construction at the fort corresponded directly with new growth and development in Rio Grande City.

### *1865-1900: Post-Civil War and Late-19th Century Development*

One of the greatest immigrations to Rio Grande City since its inception occurred after 1865 after the Battle of Santa Gertrudis during Mexico's struggle to overthrow Maximillian. According to some accounts, the Mexicans promised to spare the lives of foreign Catholics but vowed to kill the Jews who had traveled to Mexico with Emperor Maximillian. Whether true or not, many French Jewish merchants and their families fled from Mexico to the north side of the border after the French were overthrown, and some found themselves in Rio Grande City. Other Jewish families joined them from other parts of the country, especially New Orleans. Among the Jewish merchants were families who would be instrumental in the development of the city during the latter half of the 19th century. They include the La Borde, Bernheim, Block, Mernitz, Lacaze, and Lafargue families (Salinas

<sup>2</sup> Cortina was considered a bandit by authorities in both the United States and Mexico but he was considered a patriot and champion of those who had lost their lands in the Mexican War by many Mexican residents along the border.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Clay Davis was reportedly shot by a Union soldier garrisoned at Fort Ringgold in an accidental hunting accident (Lott 1953: 88). Lott states that the accident occurred near the end of the Civil War but Greene records Davis's death as 1866 (Greene 1987:3).



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interview, 1995). Most were merchants who quickly established businesses and built shops in the town. The merchants had a ready source of income with the United States Army.

In addition to the new people who were attracted to the city and the numbers of buildings being constructed, new building styles and brick designs began to appear. Along with the French immigrants came a number of German immigrants including brick mason Heinrich Portscheller and carpenter Frederick Ellert. Both fled compulsory military service in their native Prussia only to be conscripted into Maximilian's Imperial army when they arrived in Mexico. Portscheller reportedly deserted and fought for the Mexican patriots at the Battle of Santa Gertrudis. He lived in Camargo, Mexico where he perfected local brick-making techniques and was then hired to build the brick buildings at Fort Ringgold when the permanent fort was commissioned. Portscheller eventually moved to Roma where some of his most outstanding work still survives, but there are a number of elaborately detailed brick buildings in Rio Grande City that are attributed to him or to his influence. In particular, the Silverio de la Pena Building (Site 383, 1886), built for another German émigré (de la Pena changed his name from Furstein), with its intricate brick molds, pilasters, and window surrounds appears to be a stellar example of Portscheller's work.

Although most of the earliest development occurred near the waterfront and steamboat landing, much of the post-Civil War era construction began to string out along Main Street toward Fort Ringgold, possibly to be closer to potential customers; Main Street ran directly past the fort. By the mid-1890s, when virtually all of the permanent construction had been completed at Fort Ringgold, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps depicted a distended image of Rio Grande City as a three-block by four-block wide core near Water and Britton Avenue, with a narrow six-block extension along Water, Main and Second streets stretching east toward Fort Ringgold. By 1893 when the town had a population of about 2,200, a visitor described Water and Laredo (Main) as the city's principal streets, with Laredo (Main) being the main street. Main Street was said to be "built up quite closely with stores and dwellings. The appearance of this street is quite interesting. It extends for about half a mile from east to west, and the scenes which meet the eye are tinged with the Mexican characteristics which predominate throughout the town" (Chatfield 1893: 43).

In fact, the types and styles of buildings were an eclectic mix of Mexican borderlands vernacular types that had been richly influenced by French, Spanish and German stylistic trends and building traditions. Some 1-story brick houses had flat roofs similar to the adobe dwellings of the southwest while others had extended parapet walls and segmental arch windows (Photo 8). Two-story brick buildings sometimes featured articulated cornices and wrought iron balconies similar to those found in New Orleans' French Quarter and the Central Mexican colonial cities of Guanajuato and Zacatecas (Photo 17; Photo 5). The brickwork associated with Portscheller and his followers appears to be the result of individual talent, local clay characteristics and brick-making techniques, and, possibly, German design traditions. Thus, while it is true that, as Chatfield observed in 1893, the buildings were tinged with "Mexican characteristics", the architecture was certainly influenced by other cultures that had come to settle in Rio Grande City, as well.

Written sources, historic photographs and Sanborn maps show that downtown Rio Grande City was comprised of a mixture of residential (Photo 12), commercial and institutional properties, of elegantly detailed brick buildings and simple thatched roof *jacales* at the end of the 19th century. Although the *jacales* would eventually disappear, the pattern of mixed residential, commercial and institutional use in the downtown area and the disparity in building condition established in the district by the 1890s continued throughout the 20th century to



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the present. By 1888, the courthouse had finally been built at the top of Britton Avenue and was said to have a "commanding site on a hill overlooking the town . . . [and] a very imposing and attractive appearance when viewed from the lower end of Britton Avenue" (Chatfield 1893: 43). Immaculate Concepción Church (demolished 1966), shared the hill a little south and west of the courthouse. It was described as "a handsome brick structure, built in 1868" with a spire and three bells (Chatfield 1893: 43). It had some similarities, including extended end wall parapets like the barracks buildings then under construction at Fort Ringgold, and it is possible that Portscheller may have had a hand in its design or construction. Adjoining the church was the Convent of St. Joseph, built in 1887 (Site 173). It, too, shared design features of the church and fort buildings, notably in the extended end parapets and corbelled brickwork.

Other institutional buildings were constructed in the town during last quarter of the 19th century. While only ten students attended the Convent School, Rio Grande City boasted three public schools with a total of 200 pupils in 1893. The city had a post office and customs office with Silverio de la Pena serving as both Postmaster and Deputy Collector of Customs (Chatfield 1893: 44) from his 2-story home and drug store on Main Street. The old 2-story Kenedy Warehouse and original Starr County courthouse building on Water Street was converted to a boy's school by 1894 and a "Mexican School" stood on Main Street between Lopez and Garza streets (Sanborn maps, 1894)

As late as the 1890s, the town was still known as Davis, Davis' Ranch, or Rancho Davis, after its founder. In fact, some people who lived within twenty miles of Rio Grande City claimed never to have heard of the place though they had often visited the town they knew as Rancho Davis (Chatfield 1893: 43). Most of the permanent buildings that lined Main Street in the 1890s were commercial or combination domestic/commercial buildings. There were at least eight general stores in the seven blocks of Main Street between Britton Avenue and Avasolo Street, at the eastern edge of town. Among the commercial enterprises in that range were two barber shops, two drug stores, two bakeries, two cobblers, a tailor shop, a printing office and a restaurant. There were also a couple of saloons, a billiard parlor and a cock fighting pit at the southwest corner of Main and East streets. Corner lots often housed L-shaped buildings with a commercial wing fronting onto the main street, such as Main, Second, or Water, and the residential wing facing the secondary streets. These were generally linear-plan dwelling/businesses, often with doors leading from individual rooms to an interior courtyard. Scattered among the larger homes and shops were small buildings noted as "Mexican Shanties" and "jacals" (Sanborn Maps 1894).

Rio Grande City's prospects for economic growth looked moderately promising in the last decades of the 19th century. Indian raids had ceased and greater border security kept banditry at bay. Fort Ringgold maintained a permanent military force and therefore was a reliable source of income. Although steamboats could travel upriver to the city of Roma when the river was high, Rio Grande City remained the head of year-round steam navigation on the Rio Grande. As a result, a lot of trade passed through Rio Grande City between ships anchored in the Gulf and the Mexican interior, particularly the city of Monterrey, Mexico. The trade proved vital to Rio Grande City's economic growth and the city's architectural fabric is well-represented by buildings of this period.

### *1900-1925: Early 20th Century to the Railroad*

Although it seemed to have good prospects in the last decades of the 19th century, Rio Grande City suffered several setbacks at the turn of the century and lost trading ground to Brownsville and Laredo. The railroad had already arrived in Laredo, 100 miles to the west, by 1881 and in 1904 it made its debut in



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Brownsville, 90 miles to the east. Both rail lines extended into Mexico making Laredo and Brownsville major transfer points for international trade. In contrast, Rio Grande City was accessible only by the rough road (Military Highway) that paralleled the Rio Grande, or by increasingly unreliable steamboat. By the turn of the century, steamboat travel to Rio Grande City had all but ceased. Always shallow, treacherous, and unpredictable, the river became even more difficult to navigate and in 1905, the last steamboat, *The Bessie*, plied the river (Kelsey 1952)<sup>4</sup>. After that time, the only way to get to Rio Grande City was by horse or horse-driven vehicle and 14 days was considered to be a *good* rate of travel between Laredo and Rio Grande City by carriage or wagon (Starr County Scrapbook). In the rapidly modernizing world of the early 20th century, Rio Grande City had become virtually isolated from major markets and transportation routes. While some trade continued between Rio Grande City and Monterrey, Laredo and Brownsville reigned as the major regional trading centers for trade with Mexico. As its founder's dreams of prodigious steamboat traffic and trade failed to materialize in the early 20th century, Rio Grande City was rendered a quaint, but sleepy, little border town.

As county seat, however, Rio Grande City remained the center of regional economic and political power, a fact that led to political turmoil and factionalism in Starr County. Political parties were divided into the Reds (Republicans) and the Blues (Democrats). It was said that leaders of each party put their constituents in corrals for three or four days before elections in order to keep them from taking bribes to vote for the other party. There were outright battles between parties on Main Street in Rio Grande City, particularly in 1905 and 1906. The Margo Saloon (Site 382) was the site of an especially infamous shootout in which several participants were killed. The situation became so dire that County Judge Stanley Welch, a well-known county politician was murdered by political rivals in 1906, and Governor Lanham ordered the Texas Rangers to investigate the incident. They encountered a party of local citizens on the way to Rio Grande City and ended up killing five of them. When they reached Rio Grande City, they took possession of the town and began an inquest. Hostilities cooled considerably after the Rangers arrived (Vela, Starr County Scrapbook).

In this context, it is no wonder that Rio Grande City was still viewed as a frontier town in the early 20th century. Increased growth and development in new downriver communities such as McAllen, Mission, Mercedes, and Harlingen with their railroad, irrigation and land development consortiums contrasted sharply with Rio Grande City during this period. Despite the advances the city had made in the mid- to late-19th century, the other communities had outstripped them, booming in population and growth. The downriver communities were especially adept at promoting their agricultural potential with midwestern farmers seeking new homes in warm climates. Rio Grande City had neither irrigation nor railroad, and its strong cultural ties to Mexico, and possibly France and Germany, may have further discouraged a large influx of new Anglo home seekers such as those who flooded into the new communities of Hidalgo and Cameron counties. The downriver communities were "new" – carved out of barren land subdivided for the purpose of building new farmsteads and towns – and the newcomers could make fresh starts. They may have viewed Rio Grande City as a foreign town with an old, entrenched culture by comparison. As a result of these factors, the town remained isolated with few prospects for growth and development in the early 20th century.

Even as so many new Midwestern farmers hurried into South Texas in the first decades of the 20th century, turmoil in Mexico in the form of the Mexican Revolution and a period of border raids and unrest known

<sup>4</sup> Another source gives the year as 1903 (Valle, Starr County Scrapbook).



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as the "bandit era", caused consternation among new and old citizens throughout the border region. Mexican patriots and outlaws alike criss-crossed the border, alternately seeking shelter, food, arms and generally causing havoc among the U.S. citizens who didn't differentiate between them. American soldiers and cavalry were dispatched to quiet the border, but on the eve of World War I, the events appeared chaotic and possibly aligned, adding to fears and rumors that Germany was seeking an alliance with Mexico. International commerce was interrupted and the modest trade between Rio Grande City and Monterrey was curtailed, to the detriment of Rio Grande City merchants.

Despite major political unrest in the city at the turn of the 20th century, some of the finest commercial and residential buildings were built in the historic district between 1900 and 1920. Main Street was the most prominent commercial thoroughfare, followed by Second Street, and both drew commercial and combination commercial and domestic properties. Among the most outstanding are the Dr. Crisoforo and Marie Lacaze Solis Building (Site 378, 1900; Photo 5), the La Borde House (Site 394, 1895-1917; Photo 7), and the P. Hinojosa Building (Site 377, 1913; Photo 10). The 2-story Solis building follows the tradition of the somewhat earlier Renaga-Headley-Edgerton and Silverio de la Pena buildings in its brick construction, hood molds, and cornice detailing. Like them, its owner, Dr. Solis, operated a business – a doctor's office – on the first floor and had his living quarters on the second floor. The Francois La Borde family was thought to have built at least part of their building in 1877 but Sanborn maps do not show a building on the site before 1894. The original courtyard-plan house had a 2-story section across the rear and two 1-story wings extending toward Main Street. In 1917, La Borde added a second story to the wings and built a connecting unit to bring the building to its present appearance.

The building displays extended parapet walls with detailed brickwork along the parapets (Photo 1). It has segmental arched windows and Victorian-era porch posts and brackets. P. Hinojosa built a 2-story brick commercial building with a wrought iron balconet over a chamfered entrance on a prominent corner on Main Street in 1913. It remains a landmark business building in downtown Rio Grande City and retains its original form and many of its original details.

As the era progressed, local citizens began modifying their older homes to resemble some of the popular designs then in vogue in the rest of the country. The trend may be due to the increase of troops stationed at Fort Ringgold during the Mexican Revolution and the "bandit era" and the outset of World War I. During this time, old houses like the Arcadio Salinas House (Site 332) originally built in the late 1800s and the Hilario Contreras House (Site 320) built about 1880 were completely remodeled to their present Classical Revival appearances in 1915 (Greene 1987: 21, 29). Other houses were built in Queen Anne or Classical Revival styles in the historic district during this period. On Second Street, in particular, are good examples of popular domestic styles rendered in local brick. Narciso Pena built two late examples of 1-story Queen Anne/Classical Revival-influenced houses with wrap-around porches at 204 E. Second Street (Site 428) and in the 300 block of E. Second Street (Site 424) in 1915 (Photo 14). A 2-story hipped roof combination commercial and domestic building built about 1900 (Site 414) appears to have been remodeled about 1915. The segmental arch windows and hipped roof may date to the remodeling effort. The buff-colored bricks for all of these buildings were called *ochitos* because they are eight (*ocho* in Spanish) inches long (Pena interview, 2003).



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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

### *1925-1940: Railroad to World War II*

In the 1920s, Rio Grande City started to become a modern town. The first railroad, the Missouri and Pacific line, came into Rio Grande City on August 23, 1925 (Valle, Starr County Scrapbook). When it did, the city lost its dubious distinction as the largest "inland" city without rail access. Many of the town's citizens credited the arrival of the railroad with the city's subsequent growth spurt. Indeed, Rio Grande City experienced a remarkable increase in population and development beginning in the mid-1920s.

On September 26, 1926, with a population of about 3,000 residents, the city incorporated for the first time and elected a mayor and two commissioners. The railroad had finally connected the frontier town to the outside world and agriculture boomed. The town boasted two banks, numerous general stores, two moving picture theaters, two hotels, several restaurants, several filling stations, two automobile agencies, an ice, water and power plant, soda factory and a cotton gin. Increased development spawned four lumber yards and two yards. The town supported two printing companies, one of which published a combined English-Spanish weekly paper and the other which published a Spanish language weekly newspaper. Rio Grande City was the center of trade for settlements in Starr County as well as for some of the territorial jurisdiction of Camargo, the Mexican town opposite Rio Grande City. The state highway – then named State Highway 12-B – passed through the center of the town. It was graded and graveled to the boundary line of Starr and Hidalgo County on the east, and as far as Roma on the west (Valle, Starr County Scrapbook). Despite these advancements, none of Rio Grande City's streets were paved by the mid-1920s. Only Second Street, which at that time was an extension of the highway, was graveled. Unlike many border towns, however, Rio Grande City had wide, straight streets, an artifact of Henry Clay Davis's careful planning.

The arrival of the railroad brought new building materials to Rio Grande City and new building types and styles began to appear in the old town. Milled lumber was readily available by rail for the first time, and frame buildings began to appear throughout the city. Brick remained popular but milled wood was used to trim the windows, doors and porches. With pre-milled components available by rail, residents were able to indulge in the latest "American" building fashions, and Craftsman bungalows, Tudor and even a Georgian Revival style house were built in the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District. Perhaps because of the region's Spanish heritage, Spanish Colonial and Mission Revival styles were among the most popular styles for both domestic and commercial architecture throughout the city between 1920 and 1940.

One of the most noteworthy examples of Spanish Colonial/Mission Revival style houses in the city is the ca. 1920 2-story V. Guerrero House (Site 418A) at 504 E. Second Street (Photo 16). It has a flat roof with a shallow crenellated parapet wall capped with white concrete and wide, stylized concrete hood molds above the windows. A narrow, arched arcaded entrance under a 1-story crenellated parapet and supported by two round columns leads to the front room. Diamond shaped concrete tiles are inset in the brick façade. One of the district's best examples of an unaltered bungalow has both Craftsman and Spanish Colonial Revival features. The yellow brick house in the 400 block of E. Mirasoles (Site 323, ca. 1923) has a red tile roof and paired windows. The district also has a modest example of a brick Georgian Revival house built about 1940 (Site 101) in the 100 block of N. Garza Street.

One of the most fantastic works of architecture built in Rio Grande City during this period lies outside the historic district but deserves mention as part of the history of the city's development. At the southeast corner of



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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Britton Avenue and Fourth Street, just north of and adjacent to the present Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, rises a large model of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes based on the grotto in Lourdes, France. The grotto was reportedly inspired by the horrors of World War I and the hope for a lasting peace. Begun about 1926 under the supervision of Reverend Gustavo Gollbach, the grotto stands about thirty feet above an eighty foot base. It is built of large stones and petrified wood and is imbedded with shells, colorful rocks, and planted with native plants, especially cactus. About half-way up the artificial mountain are two caves that hold statues of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette, both fabricated in a studio in Lamus, France (Starr County Scrapbook). The grotto was completed in 1928 and has been one of the city's most enduring tourist attractions.

Toward the end of this era of this decade of optimism and growth, several noteworthy buildings appeared on Main Street. The Art Deco style Garman Theater, built in 1937 (Site 369) at 207 E. Main Street (Photo 13), and a restrained Mission Revival style 2-part commercial building (Site 388), also built about 1930 at 420 E. Main Street, reflect the relative prosperity and economic expansion enjoyed by Rio Grande City into the 1930s. Another major building project yielded the 3-part Mission Revival style Valley Hardware Store (Site 371), now the Triple L Carpet Center. Built about 1935 at 307 E. Main Street, the brick complex (Photo 2) features three recessed storefronts under Mission-esque parapets.

Rio Grande City bustled with activity during the 1920s, and although the Great Depression affected the economic growth of the community, a number of businesses remained in operation and new buildings were constructed during the 1930s. Citizens were urged to patronize local businesses as newspaper headlines exhorted them to "Buy at Home! . . . Trade in Rio Grande City" (*Rio Grande Herald*, June 12, 1936). Some of the businesses that continued to advertise during this period were the Solomon Block Lumber Company, City Cash Grocery, City Drug Store, Vicente Guerrero Store, J. de la Paz Garcia General Merchandise Store, the H. & H. Café, the Rainbow Club, A. J. Sanchez Funeral Home, O.S.T. Service Station, Ponce's Dry Goods Store, and Starr Pharmacy (*Rio Grande Herald*, June 12, 1936).

Civic improvements were undertaken, as well. In the mid-1930s, the city's plazas were beautified and Main Street was paved for the first time (*Rio Grande Herald*, May 10, 1935). A new Starr County Courthouse was built in 1936 and Art Deco-styled Water Filtration (1931) and Ice Plant (1935) buildings were built about the same time. All of these public works lie outside the district. Among the noteworthy new buildings constructed in the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District during the Depression were the Mission Revival style International Store (Site 423, 1937) in the 400 block of E. Second Street (Photo 15), the First National Bank and Trust building (Site 387) built about 1935 in the 400 block of E. Main Street (Photo 6), and a 1-part commercial building (ca. 1935) in the 500 block of E. Second Street. Residential properties were also constructed including a Tudor Revival bungalow at 101 S. Corpus (ca. 1935) and other single family residences such as the house in the 100 block of N. East Street (Site 149A, ca. 1935).

### *Fort Ringgold Decommissioned in Postwar Period*

With the outbreak of World War II in 1941, nearly all domestic construction throughout the country was curtailed so that precious material and human resources could be reserved for the war effort. Predictably, there are no cultural resources in the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District that appear to date from the war era. Toward the end of the war, however, the city suffered an even greater blow to its future growth and development. Nearby Fort Ringgold had always been one of Rio Grande City's most reliable customers for all types of retail



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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

goods and services, so when the 124th Cavalry was transferred to Fort Riley, Kansas, and the fort was declared surplus on May 15, 1944, the city lost a major source of revenue. In addition, at least 100 civilian jobs at the post were lost. Although Fort Ringgold had been deactivated several times before, the cavalry was a thing of the past, and the fort would not be recommissioned. In 1947, the property was transferred to the Rio Grande City Independent School District.

The loss of Fort Ringgold was devastating to the city's economic health. Little new construction took place within the city limits between 1941 and 1955 – except the USO (the Round Up Club) – and almost no new construction occurred in the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District for nearly 20 years – between 1941 and about 1960. Not even the Great Depression had such a dampening effect on construction within the downtown district. As a result, the period of significance for the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District ends at 1940, before the onset of World War II and the closure of Fort Ringgold.

Although the loss of Fort Ringgold was a major blow to Rio Grande City, agriculture continued to play an important role in its economy in the postwar era. In the 1960s one of Texas' only farm workers' strikes took place in Rio Grande City. Local farm workers formed a union and went on strike June 1, 1966. San Juan Plaza was the rallying point for strikers and for the distribution of food and clothing to their families. During the strike, workers burned the Los Olmos Arroyo Railroad Trestle to stop the Missouri Pacific Railroad from transporting agricultural produce from Starr County. It was a pivotal event in the strike and in the history of Starr County (Salinas interview, 1995). None of these events took place in the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District. In fact, most of the changes that took place in the district in the 1960s included the addition of restaurants and filling stations and the alteration of existing buildings to accommodate new uses. Bertha's Motel at 611 E. Second Street is one of the more distinctive buildings of the 1960s (Site N4) and a few Ranch style houses (Site N27, 100 block N. Avasolo) typical of the period elsewhere in the country are found in the district, as well.

In addition to agriculture, the oil and petrochemical industries grew into large employers that sparked a building boom in the 1970s. A spate of construction from the 1970s is evident in the historic district and several commercial buildings in the 500 block of E. Second Street display the Mansard roof treatment typical of commercial buildings of that era (Site N5, Site N22, Site N23). Although the boom was followed by a bust in the 1980s, oil began to make a comeback in the mid-1990s and there are several new buildings in the district including a Mission Revival building in the 200 block of Avasolo Street (Site N29, 2003) and another Mission Revival style commercial building in the 700 block of E. Second Street built in 2000 (Site N3). In addition to the new construction, some historic buildings have recently undergone complete renovations, only some of which are compatible with their historic characters.

Today, Rio Grande City is a bustling border town that stretches out along Highway 83 both east and west. Fast food restaurants and convenience stores crowd the entrances to the old city from both directions, and traffic through the town – east on Main Street and west on Second Street – is continuous, with goods going downriver to Brownsville and upriver to Laredo. NAFTA trade is busy and an international bridge lies just east of the original Town site. New subdivisions have sprung up around the old city, especially to the north. Despite the spate of new construction on the city's fringes, the core of Rio Grande City retains its historic buildings and traditional setting to a large degree. It conveys a sense of time and place that is left behind once the traveler enters the city limits and weaves through the streets of brick and stucco buildings with their detailed window surrounds and wrought iron



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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

balconies. Evidence of Spanish, Mexican, French, German and American culture and building traditions are all found within the historic district.

### Conclusion

The Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District contains the greatest concentration of historic residential and commercial properties in the city of Rio Grande City, Texas. The streetscapes within the district convey a true sense of the historic period that extends for 100 years – from 1840 to 1940 – from the earliest period of settlement to the end of significant construction in the district. Historic buildings and structures include walls, gardens, houses, stores, banks, theaters, and combination domestic and commercial buildings that line the primary arterials (Main, Second, and Mirasoles) and infill lots on the side streets. Building materials are largely brick. Most buildings can be described as a vernacular peculiar to a specific region of the lower Rio Grande. Decorative features and building types are reminiscent of both Colonial Mexico and New Orleans' French Quarter architecture and are probably derivatives of the styles early French and Spanish/Mexican settlers admired. Buildings on Main and Second streets are predominantly flat-roofed or side-gabled, with little or no set-back from the street. Corner buildings typically "wrap" around the corner in an L-shape to form a courtyard in typical Mexican hacienda style. Main and Second streets are paved, but Mirasoles and the southerly side streets fade into dirt as they did at the turn of the century. Native plants in pots or small gardens adorn individual yards, courtyards and balconies and are typical of the South Texas landscape.

In all, the Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District, with its dense collection of mixed use properties displaying a unique blend of cultural and architectural traditions, exudes an extraordinary sense of place. The history of the entire town can be read in the buildings of this district, from the modest two-room brick dwellings with segmental arch windows, like the Florence Johnson Scott House, to the exuberant brick manses like the Reynaga-Headley Edgerton and La Borde houses, and the mainstays of the district, the one- and two-story commercial and domestic/commercial buildings with decorative brickwork.

The Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District exhibits the complex and colorful history of the South Texas borderlands in its architecture. In fact, it has one of the best concentrations of historic vernacular architecture in the heritage corridor that extends from Laredo to Brownsville. The dense grouping of finely crafted brick buildings conveys a remarkable sense of the frontier city that evolved on the banks of the Rio Grande at a time when the U.S. Cavalry still patrolled the area in search of Indians, bandits and revolutionaries. Because its resources so outstandingly portray the growth and development of the South Texas border region, it is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Community Planning and Development and under Criterion C for Architecture at the state level of significance. Because the town and its architecture are also associated with distinct ethnic groups, particularly its Spanish/Mexican, French, Jewish and German immigrants, it is also nominated under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage, also at the state level of significance.



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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** Multiple acres

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
	1 14	519080	2917600	3 14	519560	2917160
	2 14	519660	2917400	4 14	518980	2917360

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheet 10-67)

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** (see continuation sheet 10-67)

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

---

**NAME/TITLE:** Terri Myers, Historian

**ORGANIZATION:** Preservation Central, Inc.

**DATE:** August 29, 2003

**STREET & NUMBER:** 823 Harris Avenue

**TELEPHONE:** (512) 478-0898

**CITY OR TOWN:** Austin

**STATE:** Texas

**ZIP CODE:** 78705

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see continuation sheet Maps 68 through Maps 70)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheets Photo 71 through Photo 72)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

---

**NAME:** City of Rio Grande City

**STREET & NUMBER:** 101 S. Washington Street

**TELEPHONE:** (956) 487-0672

**CITY OR TOWN:** Rio Grande City

**STATE:** Texas

**ZIP CODE:** 78582



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

### Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the northeast corner of Lot 1, Block 83 of the City of Rio Grande City, proceed in a westerly direction along the rear property line of E. Second (including the south side of Wimpy) Street to the northwest corner of Lot 2, Block 17; thence proceed south along Corpus Street to the southwest corner of Lot 7, Block 13; thence proceed east along Water Street (a.k.a. Mirasoles) to the northwest corner of Lot 6, Block 53; thence south to the southwest property line of Lot 6, Block 53; thence east to Lopez Street to include all of Lots 1-5, Block 53; thence north to Saenz Alley; thence east to Avasolo Street, to the southeast corner of Lot 6, Block 57; thence north to the point of beginning, along the rear property lines of properties along the east side of Avasolo Street.

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries contain the southeast quadrant of the original plat of Rio Grande City. The boundaries describe the core of the city's late 19th and early 20th century downtown district. They also include some of Rio Grande City's most significant domestic and combination domestic/commercial properties of the period. The boundaries follow the Rio Grande/Mirasoles Street on the south and Avasolo on the east, two of the city's original limits. Although some houses have been built between Mirasoles and the Rio Grande, they are of more recent vintage and have been excluded from the district. On the north, the rear property line of East Second Street forms the boundary because it separates the distinctive downtown urban environment from a more residential setting and also because there is greater loss of integrity north of Second Street. Corpus Street forms the district boundary on the east because it marks the beginning of a good concentration of historic commercial and residential properties on Main, Second, and Mirasoles. West of Corpus, are a number of vacant lots, new construction, and altered historic buildings that detract from the character of the historic district; therefore, Corpus is the dividing line for the beginning of the district.



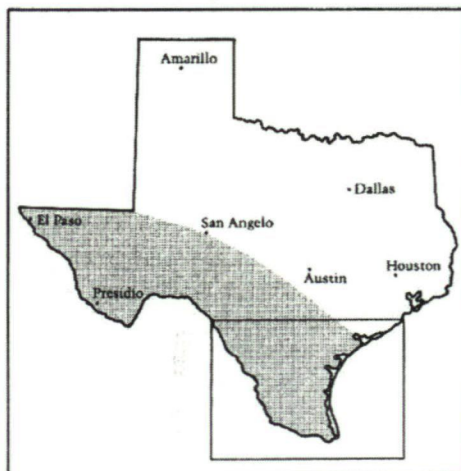
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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Map 1: South Texas Map



The greater border region



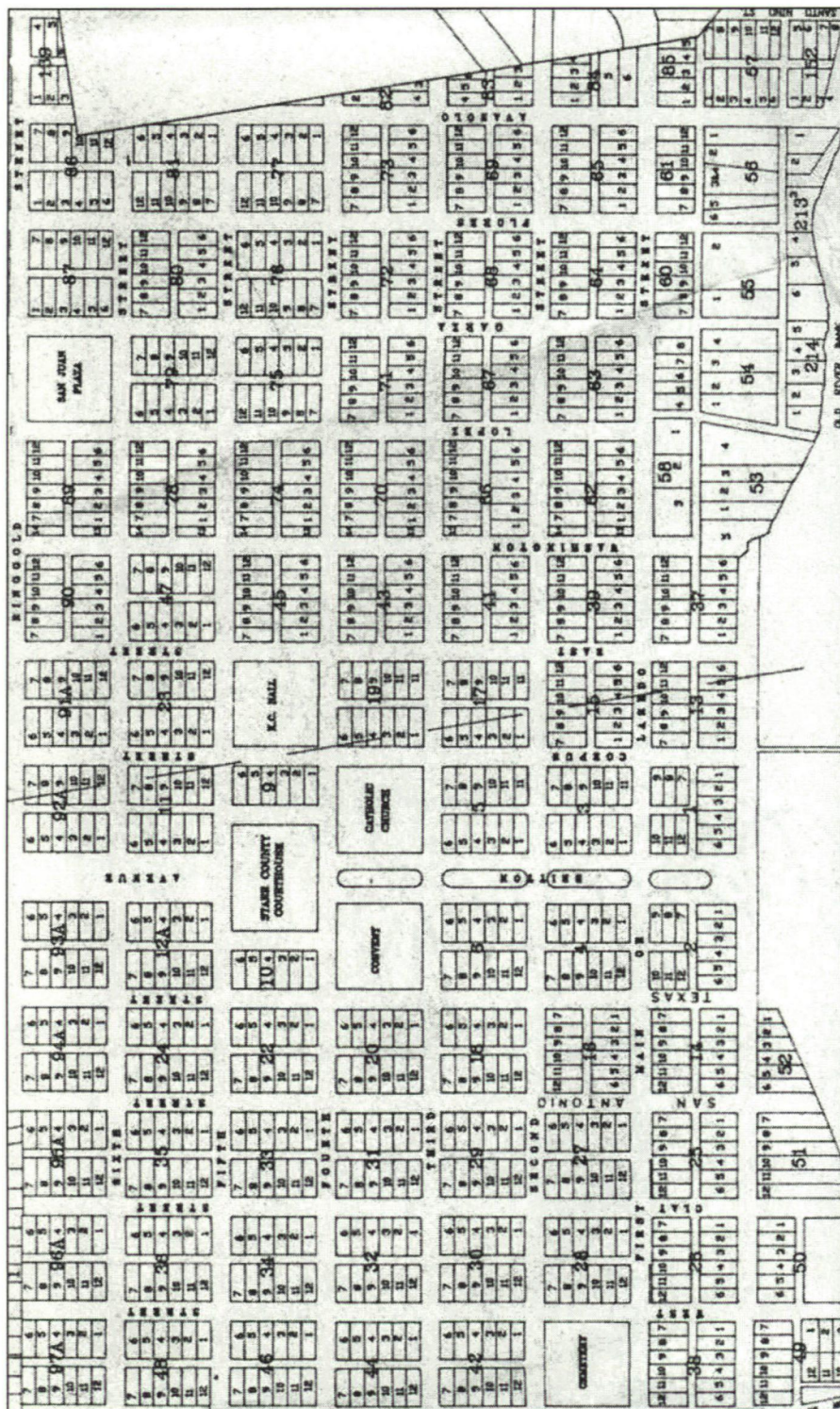


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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas



Map 2: Rio Grande City Plat Map



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

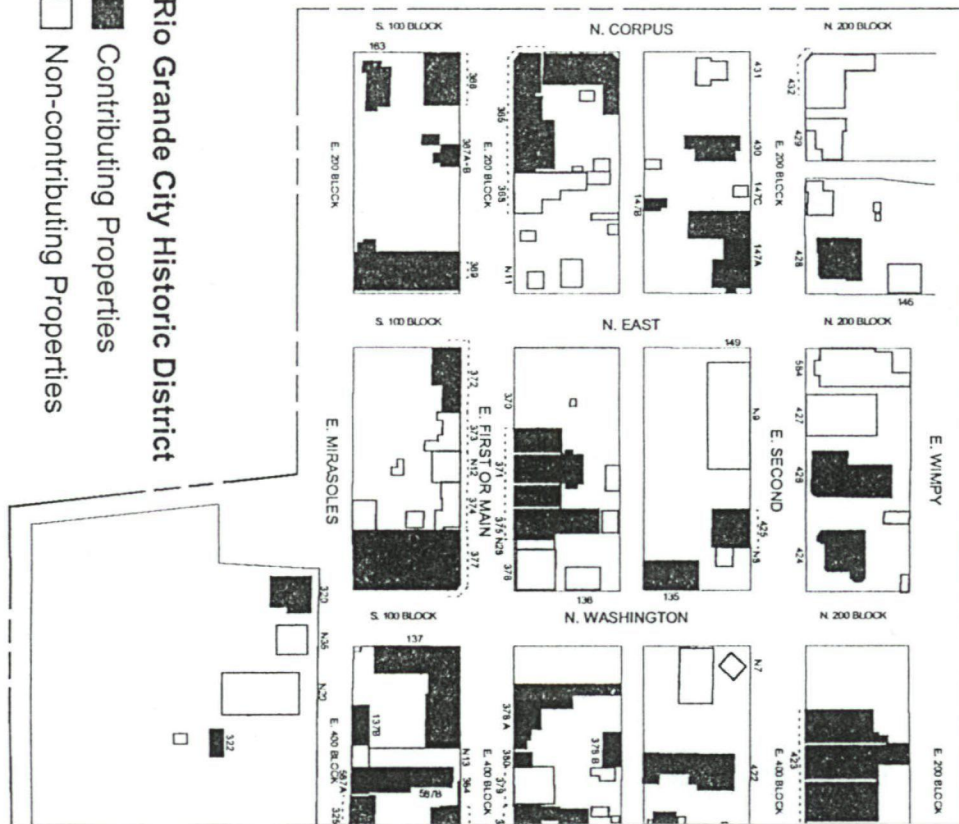
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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Map 3: District Survey Map

Properties are identified by site number.  
Map: Preservation Central, Inc. 2004

**Rio Grande City Historic District**  
☒ Contributing Properties  
☐ Non-contributing Properties





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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas  
All photographs by Terri Myers  
Date  
Negatives on file with Terri Myers, Preservation Central

**Photo 1**

LaBorde House, 600 block F. Main Street  
Parapet Detail, South elevation  
Camera facing north

**Photo 2**

Valley Hardware, 307 E. Main Street  
West and South elevations, oblique  
Camera facing northeast

**Photo 3**

View of Rio Grande City from Starr County Courthouse (Mexico in background)  
Esplanade  
Camera facing south

**Photo 4**

Lopez-Tijerina House, 400 block E. Mirasoles Street  
South and East elevations, oblique  
Camera facing northwest

**Photo 5**

Crisoforo Solis House, 400 block E. Main Street  
West and South elevations, oblique  
Camera facing northeast

**Photo 6**

First State Bank and Trust, 400 block E. Main Street  
North elevation  
Camera facing south

**Photo 7**

La Borde House, 600 block E. Main Street  
West and South elevations, oblique  
Camera facing northeast

**Photo 8**

Villarreal-Scott House. 101 N. Avasolo  
West and South elevations, oblique



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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
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Camera facing northeast

**Photo 9**

Lopez-Tijerina Complex Wall, 404 F. Main Street  
Door Detail, North elevation  
Camera facing south

**Photo 10**

P. Hinojosa Building, 300 E. Main Street  
East and North elevations, oblique  
Camera facing southwest

**Photo 11**

Streetscape, 500-400 blocks F. Main Street  
Camera facing west

**Photo 12**

Site 382, 400 E. Main Street  
South elevation  
Camera facing north

**Photo 13**

Streetscape, 200-300 blocks E. Main Street. Garmon Theater in foreground  
Camera facing southeast

**Photo 14**

Ruben Cruz House, 300 block E. Second Street  
South and West elevations, oblique  
Camera facing northwest

**Photo 15**

International Stores, 400 block E. Second Street  
South elevation  
Camera facing north

**Photo 16**

V. Guerrero House, 504 E. Second Street  
North and West elevations, oblique  
Camera facing southwest

**Photo 17**

Renaga-Headley-Edgerton House, 405 E. Second Street  
West and South elevations, oblique  
Camera facing northeast



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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 05000656

Property Name: Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

County: Starr State: Texas

Multiple Name: Rio Grande City MPS

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

July 8, 2004  
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8: Significance

The subcategories "European" and "Hispanic" are hereby added to the entry for ETHNIC HERITAGE under Areas of Significance.

Section 10: Geographical Data

"Approximately 36 acres" is hereby entered for Acreage.

-----  
The Texas Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

**National Register property file**

**Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

MULTIPLE NAME: Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas MPS

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Starr

DATE RECEIVED: 5/26/05 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/10/05  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/25/05 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/09/05  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 05000656

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 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Thirty-six acre historic district in small city on the U.S.-Mexican border contains the most concentrated and intact collection of historic commercial buildings. It also includes domestic architecture - much of it vernacular in origin - reflecting city's history from ca. 1840 to ca. 1940. A diverse population has historically marked the city's populace and

RECOM./CRITERIA

REVIEWER

DISCIPLINE

TELEPHONE

DATE

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

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

(Town plan is intact and district has a number of distinctive landscape features.)

German, French, Swiss, Jewish, & Anglo-Americans - all playing an important role in community life.







Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

Photo 1 of 17



TRIPLE  
CARPET L CENTER  
CARPET • VINYL • PARQUET FLOORING  
SALES & INSTALLATION  
"FREE ESTIMATES"

EASY  
EASY  
TERMS

TRIPLE  
CARPET L CENTER





Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

Photo 2 of 17







Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District  
Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX  
Photo 3 of 17







Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co, TX

Photo 4 of 17







Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

Photo 7 of 17







Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

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1937

# International Stores

**LSE** INC.

**LSE** INC.

Electronics · Fabrics · Novelty · Ready to Wear · Tennis



Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

Photo 15 of 17





Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., TX

Photo 16 of 17





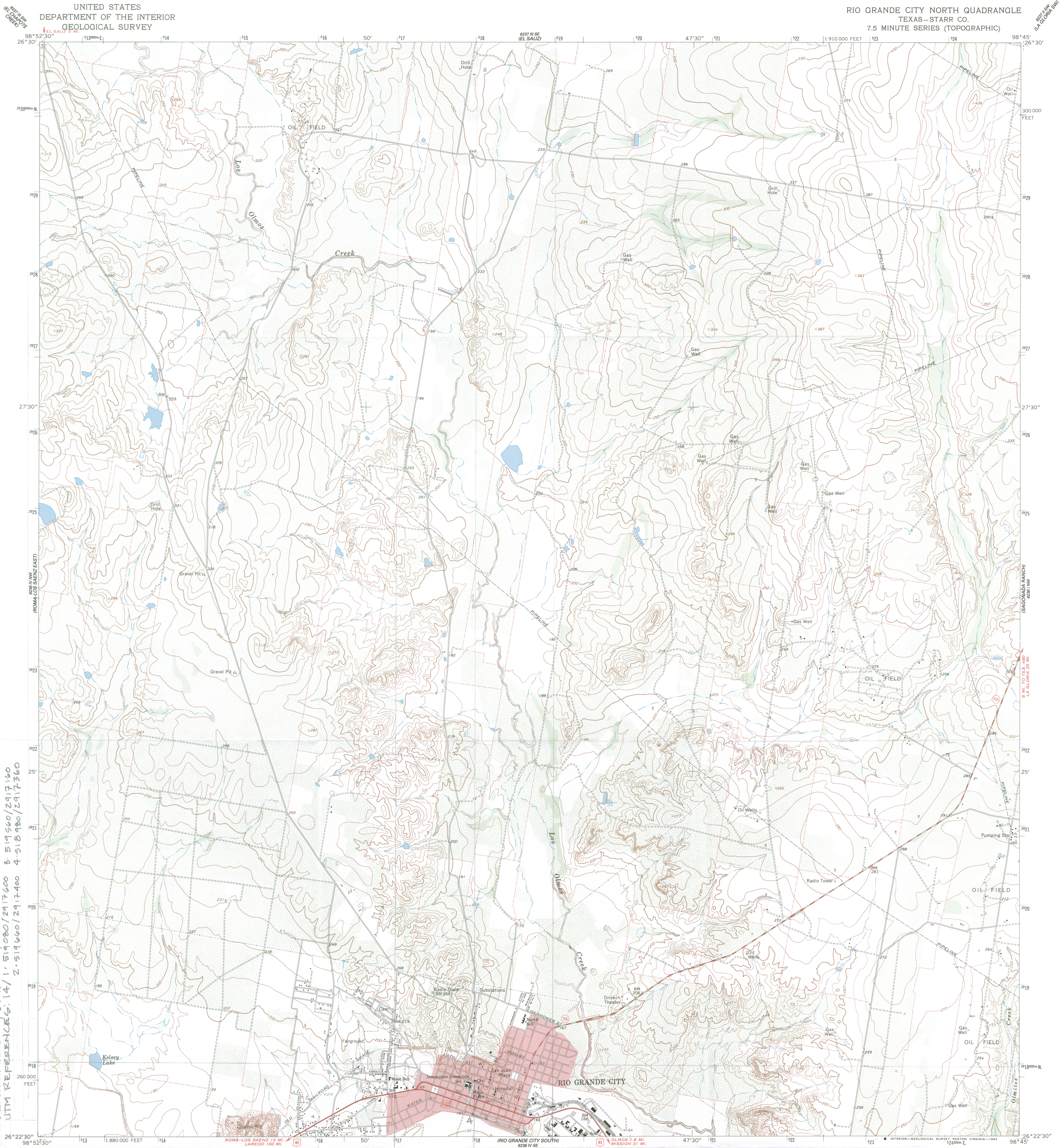
Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

Rio Grande City, Starr Co., Tx

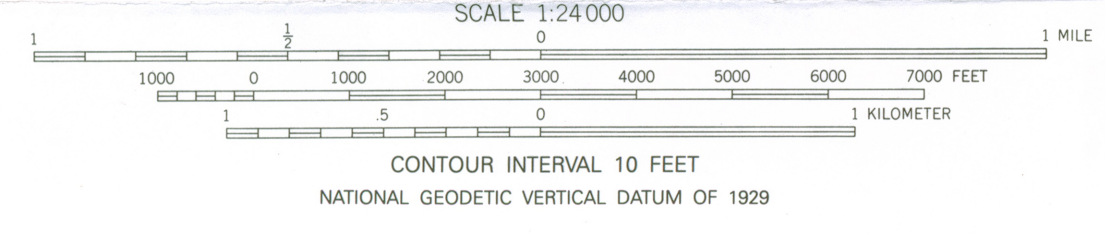
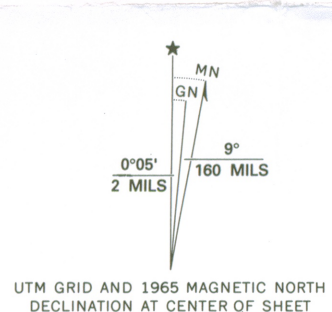
Photo 17 of 17



RIO GRANDE CITY DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT  
ROUGHLY BOUNDED BY N. CORPUS E. WIMPY, N. AVASOLO & E. MIRASOLES  
RIO GRANDE CITY, STARR CO., TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCES: 14/ 1.519080/2917600 3.519560/2917160  
2.519660/2917400 4.518980/2917360



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and International Boundary  
and Water Commission  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1964. Field checked 1965  
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  
The difference between 1927 North American Datum and North  
American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) for 7.5 minute intersections is  
given in USGS Bulletin 1875. The NAD 83 is shown by dashed  
corner ticks  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines



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



2698-234

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

RIO GRANDE CITY NORTH, TEX.  
26098-D7-TF-024

Map photoinspected 1980  
No major culture or drainage changes observed

1965  
PHOTOINSPECTED 1980  
DMA 6236 IV NE-SERIES V882





# TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Rick Perry • Governor

John L. Nau, III • Chairman

F. Lawrence Oaks • Executive Director

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

TO: Janet Matthews, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Hannah Vaughan, Historian  
Texas Historical Commission

RE: Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District, Rio Grande City, Starr Co. TX

DATE: May 24, 2005



The following materials are submitted regarding: Rio Grande City Downtown Historic District

X	Original National Register of Historic Places form
___	Resubmitted nomination
___	Multiple Property nomination form
X	Photographs
X	USGS map
___	Correspondence
	Other:

## COMMENTS:

\_\_\_ SHPO requests substantive review

\_\_\_ The enclosed owner objections (do \_\_\_) (do not \_\_\_) constitute a majority of property owners

\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_