

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



657

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse and Old Starr County Courthouse
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 200 Block W. Water Street
CITY OR TOWN: Rio Grande City
STATE: Texas **CODE:** TX **COUNTY:** Starr

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A
ZIP CODE: 78582

CODE: 427

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

Edson H. Beall

Date of Action

7/8/05

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public - Local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

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

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: Historic and Architectural Resources in Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: COMMERCIAL: Warehouse; EDUCATIONAL: School; GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: GOVERNMENT: Government Offices (Municipal Court and Public Works)

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: NO STYLE

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION
WALLS BRICK/STUCCO
ROOF ASPHALT
OTHER WOOD

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-9).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

INTRODUCTION

The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse was constructed soon after the original platting of Rio Grande City, Texas in 1848. Estimated dates of construction range from 1848 to 1856. The building is an example of utilitarian construction with no ornament and minimal finishes; no architectural style was employed in its design. The massing, plan, and orientation of the building (also manifest in its fenestration pattern) speak to its function as a warehouse. It is located on Water Street fronting the former bank of the Rio Grande. During the second half of the nineteenth century the river rose fully to Water Street, and the city revolved around the steamboat landing at the intersection of Water Street and Britton Avenue, one block east of the warehouse's site. The original building's orientation toward Water Street, its linear plan, and its unobstructed interior spaces evidence its warehouse function. The building has undergone a number of alterations, most notably replacement of original doors and stucco covering the original brick on the ground floor of the façade, and a contemporary addition housing a carport and small residential apartment abuts the east elevation of the original building. The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse, however, retains sufficient integrity of design and materials to be legible as a mid-nineteenth century warehouse, and its integrity of location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association are fully intact and clearly communicate the building's prominence in the prosperous and cosmopolitan society nascent in Rio Grande City in the mid-nineteenth century.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse is located mid-block in the 200 Block of West Water Street in Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas. The city block is bound by Water Street to the south, Texas Avenue to the east, First or Main Street to the north, and San Antonio Avenue to the west. Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (1894, 1925, 1940) designate the site as Block 14, Lots 2 and 3 (Map 1); surveys conducted in 1995-1996 and a National Register Historic District Nomination assigned the site number 281. When the city was originally platted in 1848, Water Street was intended as the main commercial street, but since that time First or Main Street has assumed that role. Britton Avenue, located one block east of Texas Avenue, historically was intended to become the major north-south avenue and commercial strip. Although it is located within close proximity of a dense commercial district, the block on which the warehouse is located has been largely residential and industrial throughout the city's history. The surrounding streetscape is irregular, with varied building heights and roof forms and continuous streetwalls interspersed with freestanding buildings and large tracts of open land. The topography of the site is flat, and vegetation is very sparse.

The elongated, rectangular footprint of the warehouse is set up against the Water Street edge of a large lot. It fully extends across the eighty-four foot width of the lot but extends only about twenty-two feet in depth, allowing for a large enclosed rear courtyard measuring about eighty-two feet in width by about ninety-two feet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

in depth (Figure 4). When the building was occupied as a boys' school, from about 1884 until about 1940, the yard was used for sports. It is noted as basketball courts on the 1940 Sanborn map, and a 1934 HABS photograph shows basketball hoops (Figure 6). The 1894 Sanborn map shows a dwelling abutting the buildings' western elevation (Map 1); in the 1925 and 1940 maps a lumber shed has replaced the dwelling and a lumber yard has sprung up at the corner of Water and San Antonio. The 1894 Sanborn map shows no construction on the lot immediately to the east, but it does not appear that the building could be accessed from this side. A contemporary addition abuts the eastern side elevation; it is set about ten feet back from Water Street (Photo 4).

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Massing

The building is an elongated, rectangular mass measuring about eighty-four feet wide by about twenty-two feet deep. It is two stories in height, measuring about twenty feet high from the ground to the cornice line (Figure 2). It is set at grade with the sidewalk and the foundation is not elevated. The building mass is capped with a hipped roof with a slope of approximately thirty degrees with no overhanging eaves. Shingles currently are synthetic composite but originally were wooden. The large courtyard at the rear of the building is enclosed by a masonry wall, ten feet high and one foot thick. Today, a non-original addition measuring about ten feet square protrudes from the eastern side of the building (Photo 4).

Structure

The building structure is a hybrid of masonry bearing walls and wood (probably mesquite) beams. The limited height of available wood for beams likely determined the building's long, narrow dimensions. An open space would be needed to facilitate warehousing, but truss structures were not common to the area (Figure 1). The masonry walls are constructed of buff brick laid in common bond. This color is characteristic of local clay, but the bricks probably were brought in via steamboat from nearby, as a brick kiln was not built in Rio Grande City until the 1870s. Similar brickwork can be seen in mid-nineteenth century buildings in Camargo and such buildings in Rio Grande City as the Silvario de la Pena house.

South (Front) Elevation

The south elevation of the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse fronts on Water Street, the primary commercial street in Rio Grande City at the time of construction (Photo 1). The elevation is constructed of load-bearing buff brick. Today the ground floor of this elevation is covered with white-painted stucco, and HABS drawings show that it was white-washed as early as 1933 (Figure 2). The elevation is composed of five bays and is marked by a regular fenestration pattern of door – window – door – window. There are some irregularities between the second floor fenestration and the ground floor fenestration, indicating an open plan on second floor and separate rooms on the ground floor. Doors feature wood (probably mesquite) lintels and surrounds (Photo 3). The lintels

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 7

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

and door surrounds in place today are non-original but are of the same architectural character as the originals. The original wood sash windows with a four-over-four lights on the second floor and six-over-six on first floor are largely intact, as documented by comparison of existing conditions with 1933 HABS drawings. The only exception is the easternmost window on the ground floor, which has been boarded up to accommodate storage on the interior. The smaller first-floor window at the western end of the elevation indicates a separate room on the interior. The herringbone wood doors in all of the door openings on the front elevation, except the easternmost on the ground floor are non-original but compatible with the character of the building. The five-panel wood door in the easternmost ground floor opening is identical to those shown on the second floor in the 1933 HABS drawing of the elevation, and was probably moved down to this opening (Figure 2). However, this is not an original door, and probably dates to a 1919 Knights of Columbus renovation project. An exterior stair and continuous balcony extend across the length of the south elevation (Photo 2). This feature is similar to the *gallerias* seen in many buildings of the same era (most notably the Davis House). The balcony here is cantilevered with wooden brackets, while most other examples of *gallerias* are supported by posts from below level and use brackets only for reinforcement. It is likely that this feature has undergone significant alteration. The roof cornice features cornea molding. HABS documentation, however, shows wood paneled doors at second floor and back-braced wood plank doors at ground floor; along with wood plank shutters on ground floor windows (Figure 2, Figure 5). The non-original addition is visible at the eastern end of the south elevation, but it is set back from the plane of the original south elevation by about ten feet.

West (Side) Elevation

The west elevation is a windowless load-bearing brick wall, partially covered by stucco today (Photo 4). According to HABS drawings, there were no openings on west the elevation in 1933, perhaps because an adjacent building existed at the time of construction, or perhaps because the small enclosed room behind this elevation on the ground floor was used as a safe or for cold storage (Figure 2). A ten-foot high masonry perimeter wall, topped with sharp glass shards set in mortar, extends from both side elevations and continues around the full perimeter of the rear courtyard (Figure 2).

East (Side) Elevation

Today the east elevation of the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse is entirely concealed by a contemporary addition (Photo 4). The addition consists of a carport on the ground floor and an apartment on the second floor. Toward the south (front) elevation the apartment is constructed of brick and covered in Portland Cement stucco painted a southwestern peach color; toward the north (rear) elevation the apartment is frame with wood siding in a similar peach color. A curved exterior stair constructed from brick with heavy, neo-Romanesque proportions leads up to the apartment. Three window openings are punched in the eastern elevation of the addition, and each is filled with a one-over-one aluminum window. The ground floor has no windows. As documented by HABS drawings in 1933, the east elevation was similar to the west except for differences in

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 8

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

fenestration. Both were constructed of brick and whitewashed. HABS drawings show that the east elevation originally featured a single two-over-two wood sash window at second floor and two transom lights at ground floor. Again, the fenestration pattern seems to have been motivated by a need for security at the ground floor. The original east elevation is intact behind the addition, and no new openings have been punched in the original fabric to allow for interior doors (Figure 2).

North (Rear) Elevation

The north elevation is seen from the rear courtyard and is constructed of brick (Photo 5). Unlike the other elevations, the wall surface has not been stuccoed, but remnants of past whitewashing are evident. Like the south elevation it is composed as five bays. On the second floor, original four-over-four wood-sash windows are concentrated in a group of three at the center; to the left there is another single window; to the right there is a boarded-up door. Presumably this door originally opened to an exterior stair or a hoist was in place. On the ground floor the bays are fenestrated as door-window-door-window-door, as on the first floor. The easternmost window has been boarded over, and the easternmost door opening has been filled with brick. HABS drawings document this opening had been filled as early as 1933 (Figure 2). Non-original metal doors fill the additional ground-floor openings. An open shed leans against the rear addition at the western end.

Interior Floor Plan and Finishes

The interior of the building currently serves as offices for the City of Rio Grande City Public Works and Municipal Court. The original open interior floor has been subdivided with partition walls and service counters. HABS drawings completed in 1933 show the interior plan to be entirely open, with the exception of a small, sunken, and enclosed room at the western end of the ground floor (Figure 1). The difference in the fenestration of this room from the rest of the south elevation indicates that it was enclosed in the original design (Figure 2). The original floors and exposed ceilings are intact. HABS drawings also note that interior finishes were limited to pine floorboards of irregular width, exposed ceilings with wooden joists, and white-washed plaster walls. The small, enclosed room also featured plain baseboards, contributing to the assumption that it could have been used for cold storage.

ALTERATIONS

A number of alterations indicate the building's varied but continuous use. From circa 1885 until the present, the building has been owned and occupied by either the City of Rio Grande City or Starr County. A number of alterations occurred in 1919 when the Building served as a school and the Knights of Columbus sponsored a renovation. Its maintenance seems to have been sporadic, and repairs and renovations seem to have been performed irregularly, when funds became available. The overall condition of the building is fair, but it is structurally sound and a large part of its original fabric is intact. Although some insensitive alterations have been performed, original fabric is often disguised beneath, or alongside non-original elements, and the integrity

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 9

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

of the structure remains sufficiently intact. The original design of the building and alterations were deduced using historic Sanborn maps (1894, 1925, 1940) and HABS documentation from 1933.

Exterior Alterations

The ground floor of the south (front) elevation and portions of the west elevation have been covered with Portland Cement stucco. (Photo 1, Photo 4). Although there is no documentation of when the stucco was applied, it probably dates from the 1960s when the City of Rio Grande City lost its charter and ownership was transferred to Starr County. A number of signs and mechanical vents scar the wall fabric, and these probably also date to the 1960s (Photo 1). The original wooden shingles have been replaced with synthetic composite shingles. The easternmost door and window openings on the south and north elevations have been enclosed, and as early as 1933 HABS drawings documented enclosed door openings on both the south and north elevations (Figure 2). It is unclear whether the window openings on the original east elevation, at the joint with the contemporary addition, were enclosed or merely encased with drywall. Decayed wooden lintels and door surrounds have been replaced in a compatible character. With the exception of the windows that have been enclosed, the wood sash windows remain intact. All of the original doors have been replaced. On the south elevation, compatible herringbone wood doors have been used. On the north elevation the original ground-floor doors have been replaced with incompatible metal doors, and the second floor door has been boarded up.

Although HABS drawings and photographs enable s unclear whether the 1933 condition of the building was the original condition. A 1915 renovation by Knights of Columbus seems to have significantly altered the building's character (Greene 11), and some of the non-original elements extant in the building today may be more compatible with the building's original character than those introduced in 1915. For example, HABS drawings show Classical Revival paneled doors, carved columns, and iron brackets on the second floor balcony (Figure 1, Figure 2). Today, these have been replaced with herringbone doors, no columns, and simple wooden brackets (Photo 2, Photo 3). 1934 HABS photographs of the Henry Clay Davis House Jose Ramirez House document original herringbone wooden doors and argue that the contemporary, non-original doors on the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse are compatible with the character of the early architecture of Rio Grande City.

Additionally, a 1987 account stated that "the balcony [had] fallen off" (Greene 11). Comparison with other buildings constructed around the same time as the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse and also documented by HABS – especially the Davis House (Figure 7) – suggests that these recent alterations are more in character with the architecture of the 1850s than were the 1915 alterations.

A contemporary addition abutting the east elevation appears to date from the 1980s. The addition consists of an apartment, a carport, and a brick exterior stair (Photo 4). Although this addition changes the character of the original design when viewed from the southeast, it is not visible from the southwest, and much of the wall fabric at joint appears to be intact. (No interior door openings are apparent.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 10

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Interior Alterations

Surveys conducted in Rio Grande City have not entailed interior investigation, but it is safe to assume that modern mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems have been inserted into the building's interior, along with the type of synthetic institutional finishes typically applied to government buildings in the mid-twentieth century. Restrooms likely were inserted as well.

EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY

The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse retains its original massing and roof form, as well as much of its original fabric and the essence of its original fenestration pattern. While a number of elements such as doors and windows have been replaced, these were utilitarian features rather than character-defining stylistic elements in the original building. Although much of the original brick was historically white-washed and more recently has been covered with stucco, it is still intact and can be restored. Similarly, although some doors and windows have been enclosed, the original fenestration pattern could be recreated using the HABS documentation and ghosts left in the masonry. Moreover, while some architectural features have been altered since the 1933 HABS documentation – namely the classical revival brackets, paneled doors, and columns at the *galleria* – these elements probably were not original. In fact, the simple wooden brackets and posts and the herringbone doors that exist today are more consistent with the architectural character of the warehouse's period of significance (circa 1850-1884) than the Classical Revival elements were.

The contemporary addition abutting the eastern elevation is incompatible with the architectural character and quality of the original warehouse, but it does not obscure the original design. Because of the deep set back between the south elevation of the original and the south elevation of the addition, the original design easily can be distinguished from the addition. The change in materials from brick to wood paneling further separates the original from the addition. Although fenestration changes have damaged the original fabric of the eastern elevation, the addition appears to merely abut the brick. There is no communication between the interior space of the original warehouse and the interior space of the addition, so the function of the warehouse still can be read in its plan.

The site and surrounding streetscape appear and function largely as they did in the mid-nineteenth century. The orientation and configuration of the building continue to convey its original program as a warehouse. The original brick walls are intact, and replacements such as the lintels and door surrounds have been made using compatible materials and workmanship. The community focuses a good deal of civic pride and shared memory on this building, and even the insensitive changes that have been made were intended to keep the building functioning and vital as a civic institution. The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse possesses integrity of location, setting, design, association, workmanship, materials and feeling, and remains a source of civic pride. The design, materials, and construction methods found in the Mifflin Kenedy warehouse are extremely rare in contemporary Rio Grande City and are very valuable to the community.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- ☒ **A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- ☐ **B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- ☐ **C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- ☐ **D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: POLITICS & GOVERNMENT; COMMERCE

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: circa 1850 - 1885

SIGNIFICANT DATES: circa 1850

SIGNIFICANT PERSON:

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: N/A

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-15).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-16 through 9-17).

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 11

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse is important for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Rio Grande City history. From circa 1850 until circa 1874 the warehouse functioned as a distribution and holding center for goods in the steamboat trade along the Rio Grande, serving an integral role in developing the economy of Rio Grande City. It subsequently was used as the Starr County Courthouse until circa 1885. From circa 1885 until the present, the building has been owned and occupied by either the City of Rio Grande City or Starr County. Its built form and alterations document Rio Grande City's long history of mixed uses within the downtown core. When a HABS team came to Rio Grande City in 1933-34, they determined that the structure was significant enough to be one of only four buildings that they documented. The building's original owner Mifflin Kenedy was a prominent entrepreneur and a partner in the King Ranch who speculated that steamboat trade would bring economic prosperity to Rio Grande City. In addition to its association with the steamboat trade, the Mifflin Kenedy warehouse is significant as the site of Rio Grande City's first courthouse. Historic American Building Survey (HABS) documentation from 1933 names the building the "Old Courthouse," and locals claim that the building is the oldest extant courthouse in Texas. Estimated construction dates range from 1848 to 1856. The State Legislature of Texas chose to name Rio Grande City the County Seat of Starr County precisely because of the political presence of influential Anglo-Americans like Mifflin Kenedy (WPA Historical Records Survey), and thus the building's use history illustrates the link between commercial and political power in Starr County. The historic context surrounding the construction of the Mifflin Kenedy and the rise of steamboat trade in Rio Grande City is documented in Section E of the Historic and Architectural Resources of Rio Grande City Multiple Property nomination. That context also notes the prominence of the Water Street site in the original 1848 plat of the city. The period of significance for the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse ranges from its construction circa 1850 until the construction of a new Starr County Courthouse circa 1885. The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level for in the areas of commerce, and politics and government.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The warehouse was designed to be used in tandem with the steamboat owned by entrepreneur Mifflin Kenedy to conduct trade to and from Mexico. With the steamboat landing and most of the early stores in the city clustered at the confluence of Britton Avenue and Water Street, it seems that goods to be consumed by Rio Grande City residents were distributed directly to the stores while goods intended for international trade went to the warehouse. This distribution pattern probably continued during the Civil War, when Kenedy and his partner Richard King, brought southern cotton to Rio Grande City via steamboat to avoid interception by Union troops.

The building also was used as the first Starr County Courthouse (Greene 10-11). On February 10, 1848 the Texas State Legislature approved the establishment of Starr County and awarded the County Seat to Rio Grande City, largely because of lobbying efforts by town founder Henry Clay Davis and arguments that Rio Grande City had more politically powerful Anglo-Americans than Roma (WPA Historical Records Survey).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Section 8 Page 12

Although no primary sources that document the use of the building as a courthouse have been located, Shirley Brooks Green and many other community historians recall that the building served as a courthouse from circa 1850 until circa 1884. Courthouse activities took place alongside warehousing activities in the building until the 1870s, when steamboat trade faded and the building became exclusively a courthouse. This continued until the permanent courthouse was built in 1885 on a site at the crest of Britton Avenue, as designated by the original 1848 Henry Clay Davis plat. Starr County Commissioners' Court Minutes note that the old courthouse and lot upon which it stood were ordered sold on November 13, 1886 (WPA Historical Records Survey). Although the minutes do not refer to the site's location or to the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse building specifically, this does document the existence of an earlier courthouse.

The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse was then transformed into a school, and is designated as such in Sanborn maps through 1940.¹ Mr. Thomas Hart served as the school's teacher, and although it began as a boy's school, it later became the town's first co-educational facility (Green 11). The Knights of Columbus reportedly used the building as well and renovated it in 1915 (Greene 11). Starr County currently owns the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse. The City of Rio Grande City holds a long-term lease on the building and uses it for the offices of the Municipal Courts and Public Works offices.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Steamboat trade was central to the founding and development of Rio Grande City. Steamboats were introduced on the Rio Grande during the Mexican War, when they were used to transport soldiers and goods. City founders Henry Clay Davis and Captain Forbes Britton centered their plat for the city on the steamboat landing, which was sited at the intersection of the two major streets, Water Street and Britton Avenue. The resources for the early development and construction of the city – including the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse – came from mercantilism enabled by the steamboat trade. Although the economic prosperity brought by the steamboat trade could not sustain Mifflin Kenedy or Rio Grande City long past the Civil War, its influence continues to be evident in the built environment of the city and the lineage of its residents.

The warehouse's namesake, Mifflin Kenedy (1818-1895), is largely responsible for bringing steamboat trade to Rio Grande City. Kenedy is an exemplar of the adventurous Anglo-American who settled in South Texas in the wake of the Mexican War. Kenedy was born to Quaker parents in Downingtown, Chester County, Pennsylvania. His wanderlust led him to travel and work throughout the United States and in India. He learned to navigate river steamboats, and "From 1842 to 1846 he sailed as clerk or substitute captain on the *Champion*, plying the Apalachicola and Chattahoochee rivers" (Ashton). During this time he met Richard King and U.S. Army Major John Saunders, both of whom would be very influential in his future in South Texas. Saunders hired Kenedy to help secure riverboats for use in the Mexican War. Kenedy soon enlisted and transported troops and supplies up the Rio Grande for transport into the Mexican interior. His experience in the Mexican War convinced Kenedy of South Texas' potential for mercantile development, and after the war he formed a partnership with several men – including Richard King – and purchased an ex-military steamboat (Montejano 42). "In 1850 Kenedy and King formed a steamship partnership called M. Kenedy and Company" that carried goods into the Rio Grande valley for trade with Mexico (Ashton). It is during this period that Henry Clay Davis platted Rio Grande City and Mifflin Kenedy constructed his warehouse within two blocks of Davis'

¹ The exact dates of the building's use as a school are unknown; Green states that school use continued only until 1915 (11).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Section 8 Page 13

steamboat landing. Kenedy's prosperity exploded during the Civil War, when transporting southern cotton up the Rio Grande and over land through Mexico to the Gulf became the most expeditious way to avoid the Union naval blockade of the coast. His success even engendered resentment among smaller merchants, who considered him a 'monopolist' (Montejano 96). The M. Kenedy Company continued steamship navigation on the Rio Grande until 1874, when the firm dissolved. Kenedy additionally is historically significant for his land speculation in South Texas – most notably for his partnership with Richard King in acquiring the ranches that would be consolidated into the King Ranch. He was influential in bringing the railroad to South Texas, and he is the namesake for Kenedy County, Texas.

ARCHITECTURAL BACKGROUND

The early architecture of Rio Grande City was a remarkably cosmopolitan fusion of Spanish, German, and French tastes, all firmly rooted in masonry culture. Although a brick kiln was not established in Rio Grande City until about 1868, brick from nearby Roma would have been available by 1848. The buff colored brick molded from the clays lining the banks of the Rio Grande defined the character of the region's architecture. While surrounding cities like Roma preferred to paint brick buildings in bright, Mexican-influenced colors, Rio Grande City's tastes were more restrained, and the buff brick typically was whitewashed or left unfinished. In addition to the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse, the Henry Clay Davis House (demolished in 1995) and the Jose Ramirez House (demolished in the 1960s) expressed this aesthetic. Both were constructed using local buff brick to artfully create corbelled cornices. The Davis House was located on Britton Avenue and Water Street and was documented by HABS in 1934. Like the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse, the Davis House was a two-story brick building with an exterior stair supported by wooden posts and a rear courtyard enclosed by a high brick wall. Unlike the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse, the Davis House had a hipped roof, its balcony wrapped around the corner of the building, and it exhibited the extended parapet wall on the gable end wall typical of many buildings in Rio Grande City, including the Yzaguirre-Longoria House. The Jose Ramirez House was located at Corpus Avenue and Third Street and documented for HABS by Eugene George in 1961. The Ramirez House was also constructed of brick, with a side-gabled roof like the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse's, and a rear courtyard enclosed by a high brick wall. Like the Davis House, the gable-end walls of the Ramirez House extended above the roofline forming parapets and the doors were constructed in a herringbone pattern. The Ramirez House also features segmental-arched door openings, another brick construction technique common to Rio Grande City architecture. The Davis House, the Ramirez House, and the Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse all illustrate the restrained taste and subtle attention to detail characteristic of architecture in Rio Grande City from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

CONCLUSION

The Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse is significant for its association with commerce and as a document of the steamboat trade in Rio Grande City and the initiative of Mifflin Kenedy, one of South Texas's most influential early entrepreneurs. In its current role as Municipal Court and Public Works offices, the building continues to foster the development and vitality of Rio Grande City. The many layers of history exhibited in alterations to its fabric communicate its continued use over time. It is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of politics and government and commerce at the local level.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Bibliography Page 14

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

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Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX. 4 measured drawings, 2 b&w photos, 1 data page plus cover page. Library of Congress Call No. HABS, TEX,214-RIGCI,1-. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?pp/hh:@field\(SUBJ+@od1\(TEXAS++Starr+County++Rio+Grande+City\)\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?pp/hh:@field(SUBJ+@od1(TEXAS++Starr+County++Rio+Grande+City)))

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- 1894
- 1925
- 1940

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- Commissioners' Court Minutes, Volume B.
- Deed Records.
- Gammel's Texas Laws, Volume 3 (24).
- Outline of Starr County History.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: Less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing
	14	517707	2917654

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION City of Rio Grande City Block 14, Lots 3 and 4

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION These are the lots that historically have been associated with this property.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Terri Myers, Historian and Emily Thompson, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: Preservation Central

DATE: July 15, 2004

STREET & NUMBER: 823 Harris Avenue

TELEPHONE: (512) 478-0898

CITY OR TOWN: Austin

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78705

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see continuation sheet Map-17)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-18-23)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS (see continuation sheet Figures-24-32)

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Judge Eloy Vera, Starr County

STREET & NUMBER: Starr County Courthouse

TELEPHONE: (956) 487-0672

CITY OR TOWN: Rio Grande City

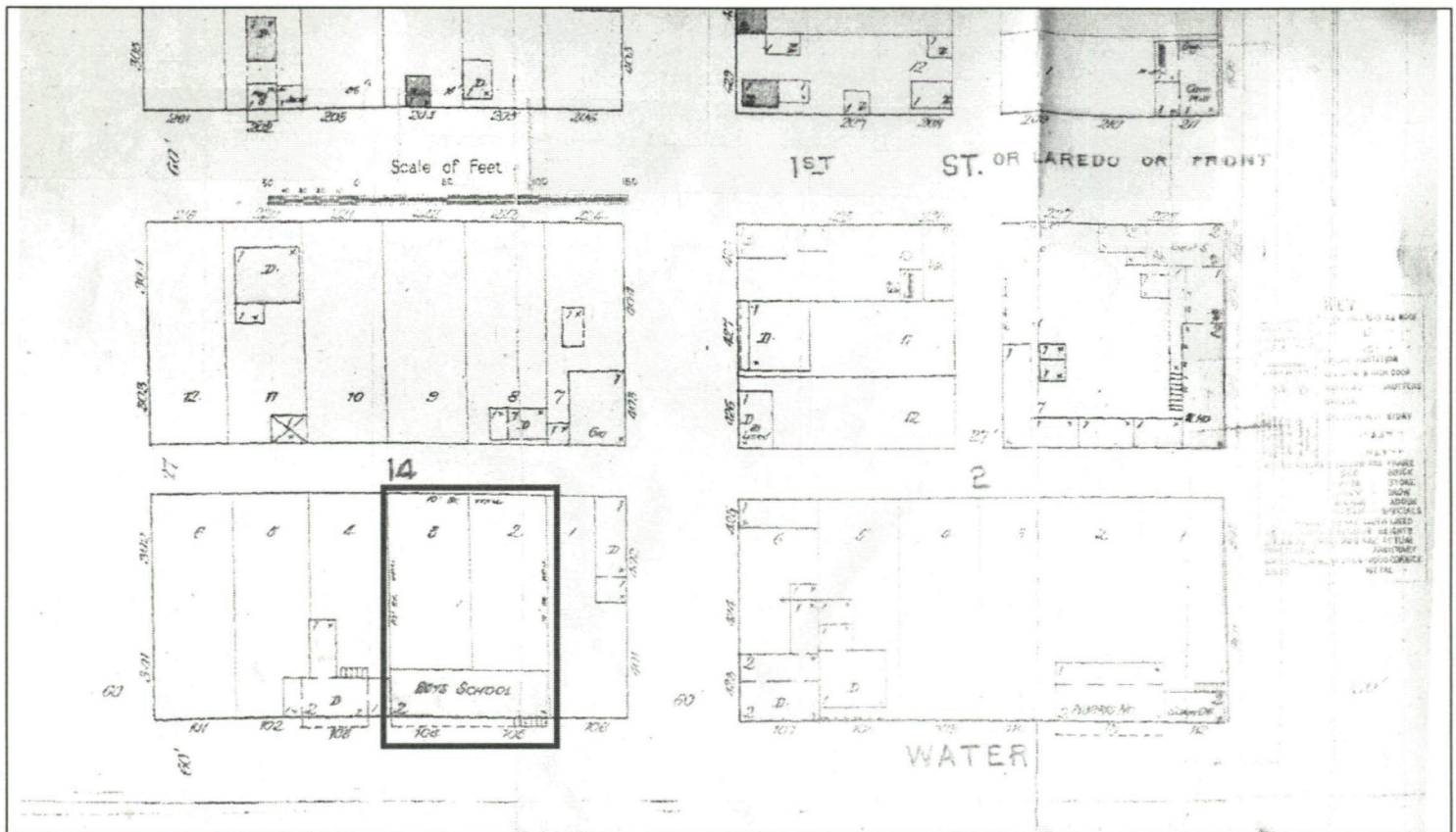
STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78582

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Map Page 15

Map 1: 1894 Sanborn Map of Rio Grande City, Starr Co., Texas. Page 1.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 16

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Photo 1: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
South Elevation, Front
Camera Facing Northwest
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
September 2002
Negatives: Terri Myers



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 17

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Photo 2:

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Detail of Stair, South Elevation
Camera Facing West by Northwest
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
September 2002
Negatives: Terri Myers



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 18

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Photo 3: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Detail of Door and Window, First Floor, South Elevation
Camera Facing North
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
September 2002
Negatives: Terri Myers



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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 19

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Photo 4:

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
East Elevation with Addition
Camera Facing West
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
September 2002
Negatives: Terri Myers



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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 20

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Photo 5: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
North Elevation
Camera Facing South
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
July 2004
Negatives: Terri Myers



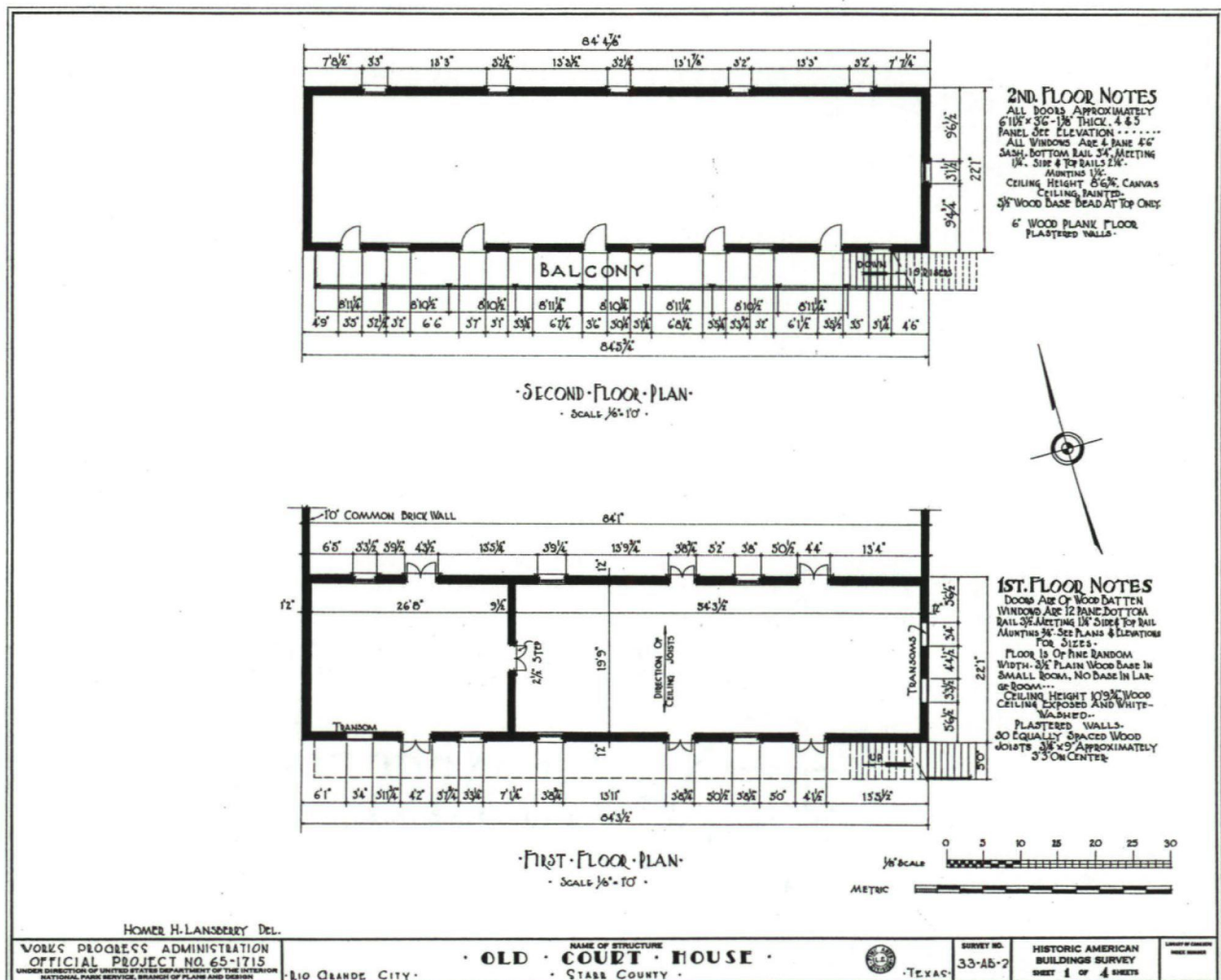
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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figures Page 21

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Figure 1: Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
Floor Plans
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Homer H. Lansberry, Draftsman
1933
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0264/sheet/00001r.tif>



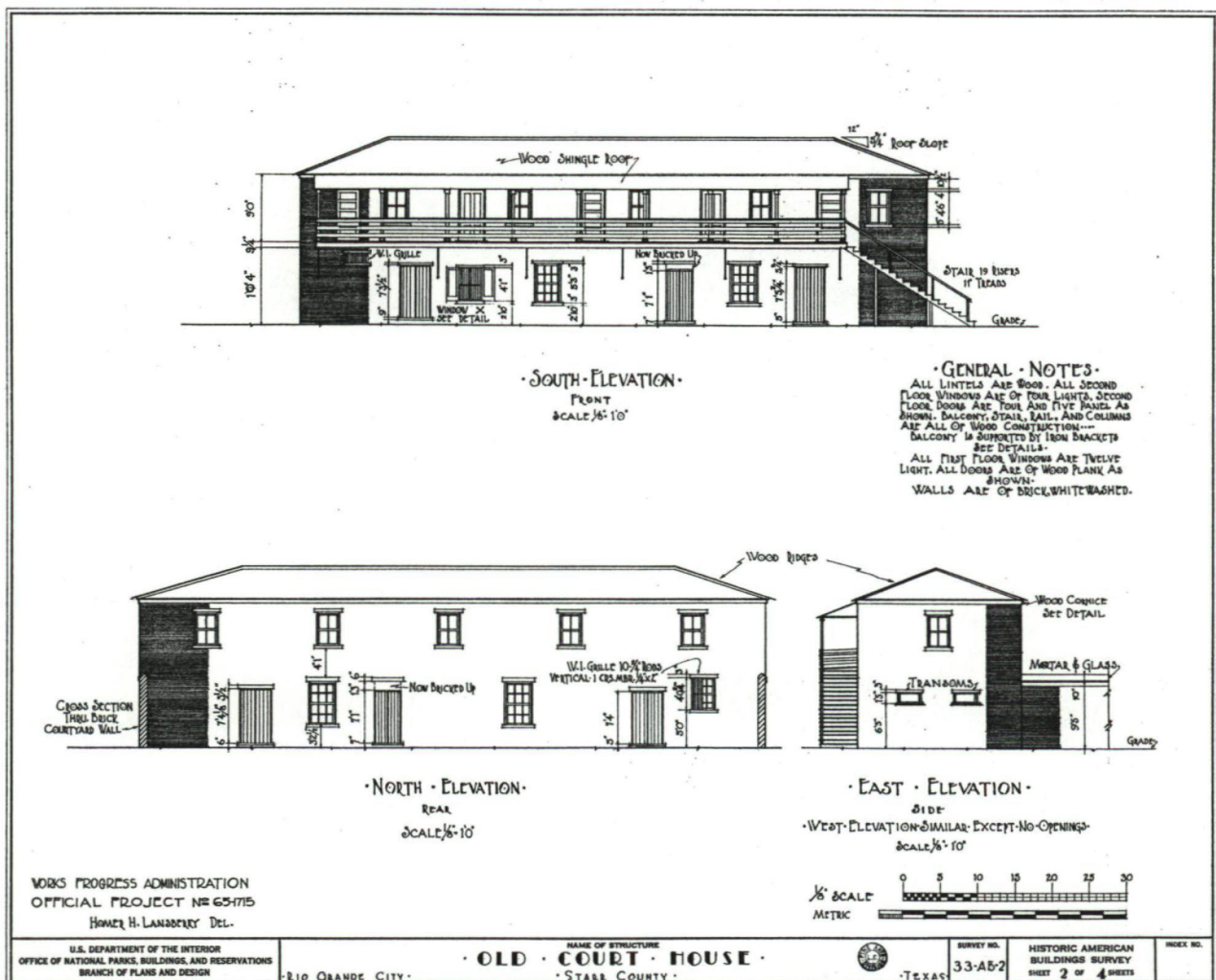
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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Section Figures Page 22

Figure 2: Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
Elevations
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Homer H. Lansberry, Draftsman
1933
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0264/sheet/00002r.tif>



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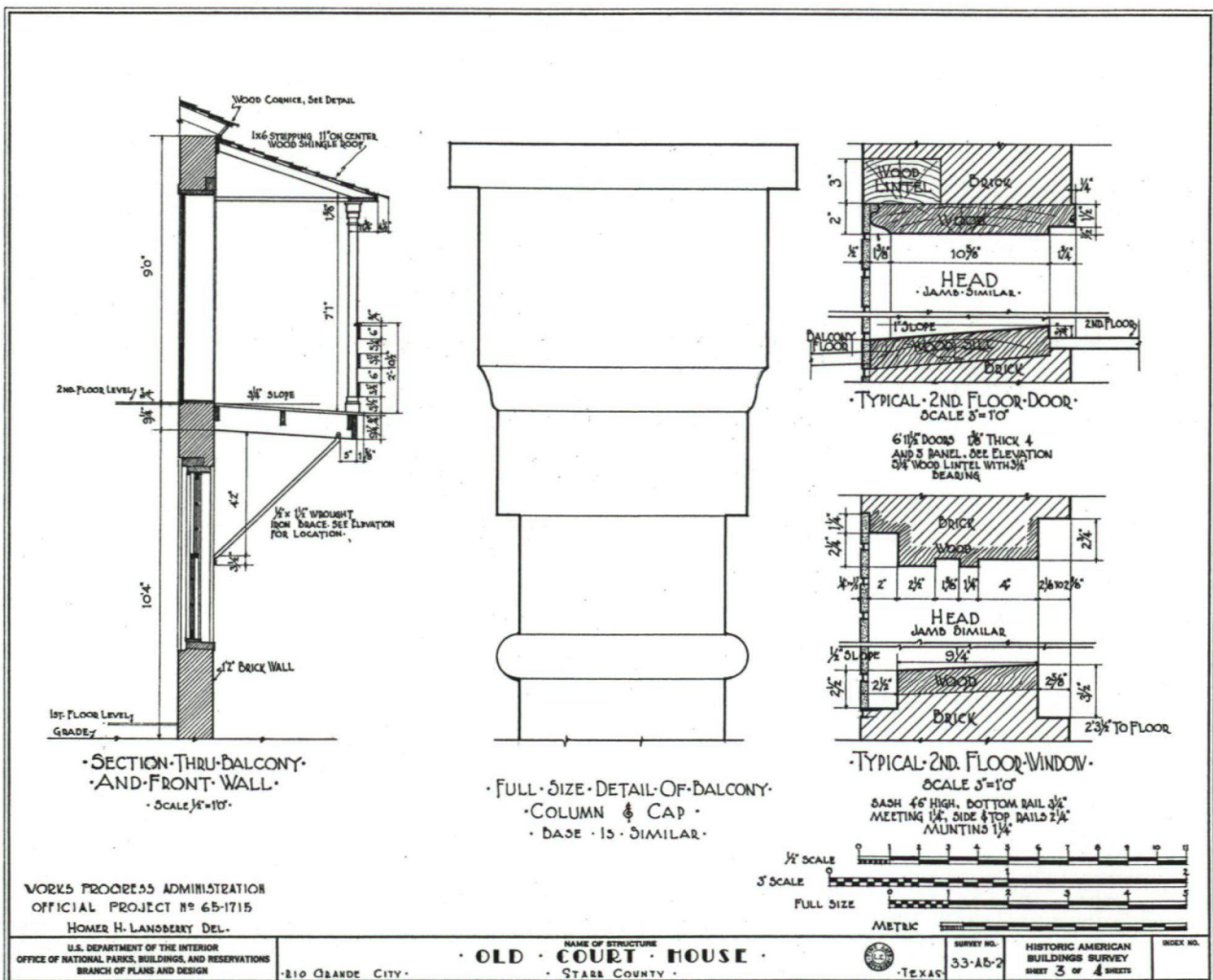
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figures Page 23

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Figure 3:

Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
Details and Sections
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Homer H. Lansberry, Draftsman
1933
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0264/sheet/00003r.tif>



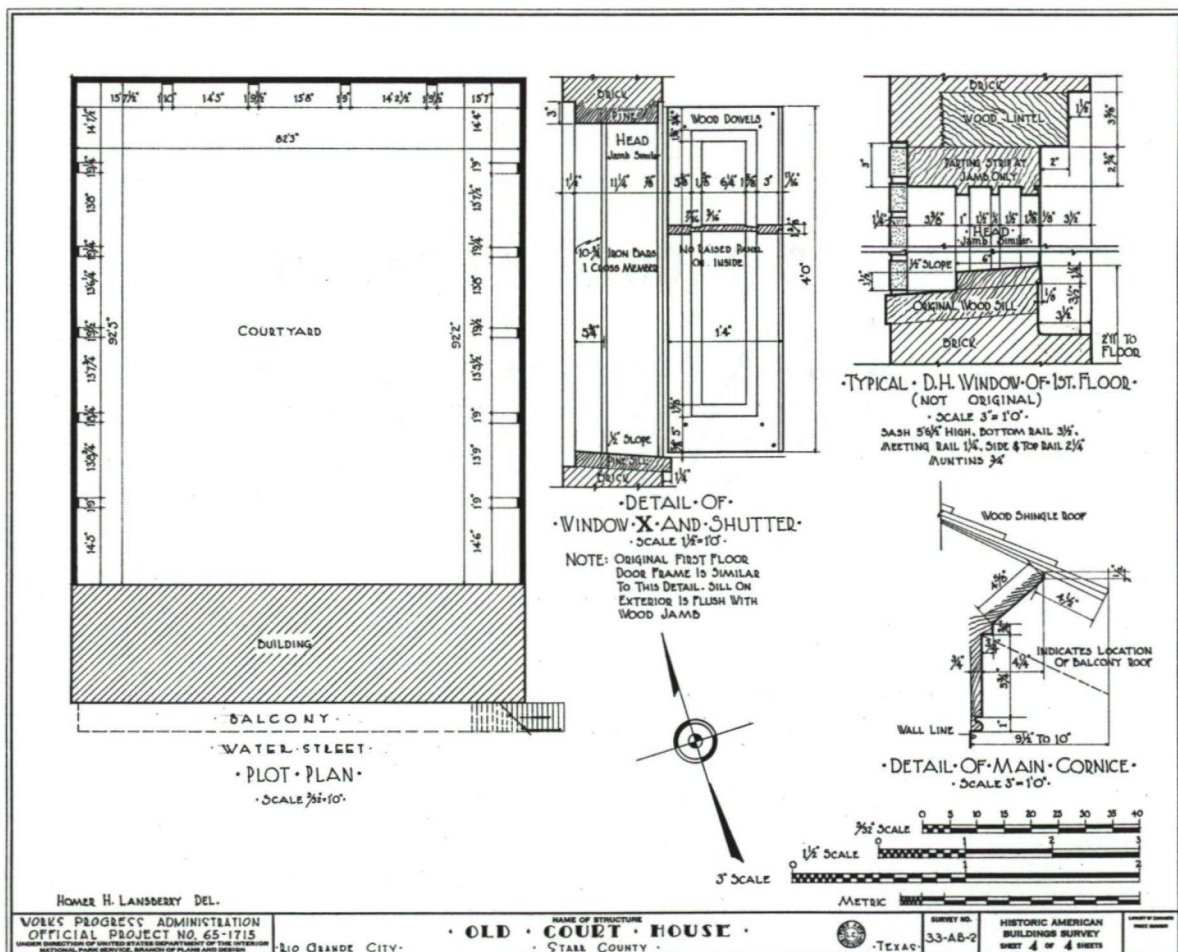
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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figures Page 24

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Figure 4: Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
Plot Plan and Details
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Homer H. Lansberry, Draftsman
1933
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0264/sheet/00004r.tif>



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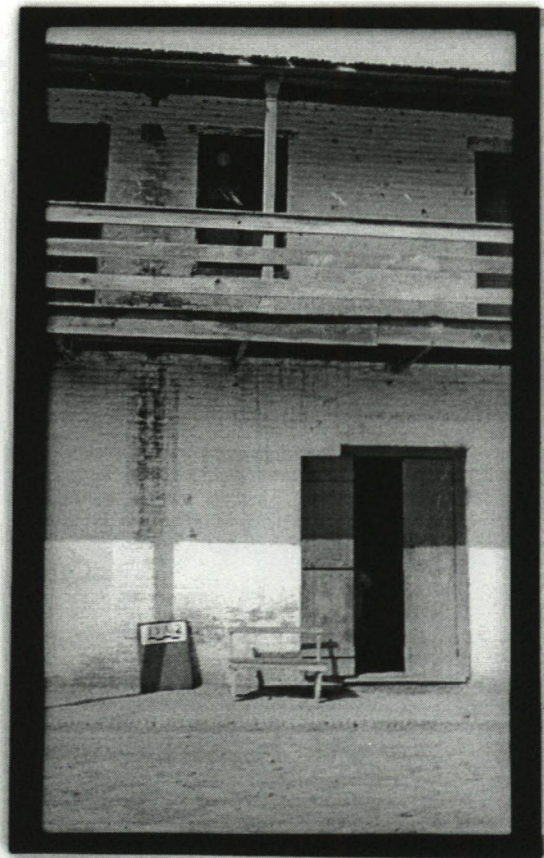
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figures Page 25

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Figure 5:

Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
Detail of South Elevation, Front
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Bartlett Cocke, Photographer
March 22, 1934
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0264/photos/156078pv.jpg>



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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figures Page 26

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Figure 6: Old Courthouse, Water Street at Texas Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
North Elevation (Rear)
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Bartlett Cocke, Photographer
March 22, 1934
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0264/photos/156079pv.jpg>



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Figures Page 27

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Figure 7: Henry Clay Davis House, Britton Avenue, Rio Grande City, Starr County, TX
General View from Southwest
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Bartlett Cocke, Photographer
March 22, 1934
Original: Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/tx/tx0200/tx0265/photos/156080pv.jpg>



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section Photo Log Page 28

Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

PHOTO LOG: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse, Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

Photo 1: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
South Elevation, Front
Camera Facing Northwest
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
September 2002
Negatives: Terri Myers

Photo 2: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
South Elevation, Front
Camera Facing Northeast
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
September 2002
Negatives: Terri Myers

Photo 3: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
North Elevation
Camera Facing South
200 Block West Water Street, Rio Grande City, Texas
Terri Myers, photographer
July 2004
Negatives: Terri Myers

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse and Old Starr County Courthouse

MULTIPLE
NAME:

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: 05000657

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 7/8/05 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

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

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



Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, TX
1 of 3



Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, TX
2 of 3



Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse
Rio Grande City, TX
3 of 3



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: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse and Old Starr County Courthouse, Rio Grande City, Starr Co. TX

DATE: May 24, 2005

The following materials are submitted regarding: Mifflin Kenedy Warehouse and Old Starr County Courthouse

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 _____