

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form****1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building

Other name/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 355 W. Elizabeth Street

City or town: Brownsville

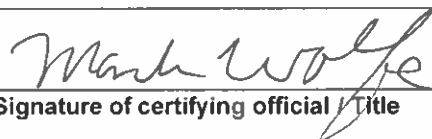
State: Texas

County: Cameron

Not for publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3.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 at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ localApplicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

6/28/22

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

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: NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

Current Functions: COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

7. Description

Architectural Classification: MID-CENTURY MODERN NONRESIDENTIAL

Principal Exterior Materials: BRICK, CONCRETE, STEEL, OTHER: MOSAIC TILE

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-10)

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Commerce, Community Planning and Development, Architecture (*local*)

Period of Significance: 1947-1972

Significant Dates: 1947, 1960, 1964

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Woolridge, A. H., (architect, 1947); Hughes, J. B., (general contractor, 1947); Bowman Swanson Hiester (architects, 1959-1964); Ferguson & Sons, W. D., (general contractor, 1959-60)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 11-23)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 24-25)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. Part 1 approved on (date)
- ☐ 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, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre (0.4132 acres)

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 25.911632°N Longitude: -97.509786°W

Verbal Boundary Description: STILLMAN EXTENTION BROWNSVILLE LOTS 4-6 BLK 70A (Property ID: 57044), Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas, as recorded with the Cameron County Appraisal District. Data accessed July 22, 2021 (Map 4).

Boundary Justification: The nominated boundary follows the current legal parcel.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Stephen Fox, Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas and Juan Vélez, Historic Preservation Manager

Organization: Anchorage Foundation of Texas and City of Brownsville

Street & number:

City or Town: State: Zip Code:

Email: sfox@rice.edu; juan.velez@brownsvilletx.gov

Telephone: 832 361-1952; 956 548-6142

Date: July 2021

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets 26-31)

Additional items (see continuation sheets 32-42)

Photographs (see continuation sheets 5-6, 43-67)

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photograph Log

Name of Property: Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building
City or Vicinity: Brownsville
County: Cameron County
State: TX
Name of Photographer: Juan Velez
Date of Photograph: February 17, 2022
Location of Original Files: 1717 Palm Blvd., Brownsville, TX 78520

Photo #1 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0001)
Northeast façade (right) and southeast elevation (left), camera facing west.

Photo #2 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0002)
Northeast façade (left) and northwest elevation (right), camera facing south.

Photo #3 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0003)
Northwest façade (left) and southwest elevation (right), camera facing east.

Photo #4 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0004)
Northern portion of southwest façade, camera facing north.

Photo #5 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0005)
Southern portion of southwest façade, camera facing north.

Photo #6 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0006)
Southeast façade (left) and northeast elevation (right), camera facing northwest.

Photo #7 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0007)
Northeast façade, camera facing southwest.

Photo #8 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0008)
Northern portion of northeast façade, camera facing southwest.

Photo #9 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0009)
Central portion of northeast façade, camera facing southwest.

Photo #10 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0010)
Southern portion of northeast façade, camera facing southwest.

Photo #11 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0011)
Main entrance, camera facing southwest.

Photo #12 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0012)
Detail of original windows next to the entrance doors, camera facing northwest.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #13 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0013)

Detail of canopy, camera facing northwest.

Photo #14 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0014)

Detail of southeast façade (left) and northeast elevation (right), camera facing west.

Photo #15 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0015)

Detail of rear staircase and metal trim, camera facing northeast.

Photo #16 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0016)

Detail of metal trim, camera facing northeast.

Photo #17 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0017)

Detail of main hall.

Photo #18 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0018)

Detail of main right corridor of 1st floor parallel to the main façade.

Photo #19 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0019)

Detail of right corridor of 1st floor perpendicular to the main façade.

Photo #20 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0020)

Detail of rear corridor of 1st floor perpendicular to the main façade.

Photo #21 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0021)

Detail of rear corridor of 1st floor parallel to the main façade.

Photo #22 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0022)

Detail of left corridor of 1st floor parallel to the main façade.

Photo #23 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0023)

Detail of mosaic tile mural located on staircase to 2nd floor.

Photo #24 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0024)

Main corridor of 2nd floor parallel to the main façade.

Photo #25 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0025)

Common space on Tower Area of 2nd floor

Photo #26 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0026)

Left corridor of 2nd floor perpendicular to the main façade.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Narrative Description

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building at 355 W. Elizabeth Street in Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas, is a one- and two-story, flat-roofed, 21,018-square-foot corporate office building constructed in three phases in 1947, 1959-60, and 1963-64. It served as the headquarters for the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company. The 1947 portion was designed by A. H. Woolridge, and Bowman Swanson Hiester designed the 1959-1964 additions. The Modern building architecturally reflects the period of its 1959-60 and 1963-64 expansions and alterations in the shallow concrete canopy with segmentally arched roof vaults of its entrance loggia, and in the repetition of the vaults in the roof of the building's three-story tower. Additional character-defining features are its exterior walls faced with red Roman brick divided into panels by recessed courses of black glazed brick, the turquoise-colored Mexican mosaic tile on exterior wall panels, flat roof, U-plan, courtyard, and intact fenestration pattern. These material attributes are characteristic of buildings of Modern architectural design erected in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They are especially characteristic of buildings designed by architects Bowman Swanson Hiester. On the interior, the building retains its historic floor plan and many original finishes including an intricate mosaic tile mural. The building occupies the northwest corner of a block on West Elizabeth Street, the northwestward continuation of Brownsville's historic main street, East Elizabeth Street. West Elizabeth Street emerged in the 1920s as a suburban, car-oriented extension of Brownsville's downtown business district, an identity reinforced by new construction during the postwar, mid-twentieth-century period. Despite additions and alterations over the years, the building retains a high level of historic integrity.

Location and Setting (Maps 1-7)

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building occupies Lots 4, 5, and 6 of Block 70-A in the Stillman Extension subdivision in the West Brownsville sector of Brownsville, Texas. The site is at the southeast corner of W. Elizabeth Street and W. 4th Street about a mile northwest of downtown Brownsville. West Elizabeth Street emerged in the 1920s as a suburban, car-oriented extension of Brownsville's downtown business district, an identity reinforced by new construction during the postwar, mid-twentieth-century period. West Elizabeth Street was Brownsville's most important suburban retail center, second only to downtown. The building is currently surrounded by commercial and residential development, with an open lot across the street to the northwest, and a parking lot directly to the southeast. National Register-listed properties in close proximity include The Manautou House (NRHP 1983), Morris-Browne House (NRHP 2006), Browne-Wagner House (NRHP 1977) and the Brownsville City Cemetery and Hebrew Cemetery (NRHP 2008).

Exterior

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building was constructed in three phases: 1947, 1959-60, and 1963-64. The 1959-60 phase entailed externally refacing and internally remodeling the 1947 building to integrate it into the new design. The 1963-64 addition continued this process, which entailed building a second-story above the one-story 1959-60 wing and extending the height of the courtyard tower added in 1959-60.

Primary (Northeast) Elevation (Photos 1-2, 7-14)

The building is configured in a U-plan around a landscaped entrance courtyard that faces W. Elizabeth Street. The one- and two-story, flat-roofed building is built up to a narrow planting strip parallel to the sidewalk along the primary (W. Elizabeth St.) elevation, to the sidewalk on the W. 4th St. side, and to the property line on the east side. The one-story wing at the 4th-Elizabeth corner is the original 1947 steel frame masonry building, as refaced in 1960. Its fifty-foot wide Elizabeth St. front is divided by projecting, vertical cast stone mullions into eight vertically proportioned bays

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

(Photo 8). Panels between mullions are surfaced with turquoise-colored mosaic tile. The narrow end bays of the one-story block are faced with a mixed blend of red Roman brick laid in common bond. Brick sills, three courses deep, project beyond the recessed concrete base of the 1947 building, so that the turquoise colored bays seem to float. Blank panels painted turquoise face what were originally street-level, plate glass display windows in the one-story, 1947 wing.

To the left of the one-story corner wing of the primary elevation, in the middle of the complex, is the recessed entrance courtyard, part of the 1960 addition (Photos 9, 13). A canopy, consisting of five, segmentally arched concrete vaults supported on thin square steel piers and thin tapered steel beams, forms the roof of a loggia facing the Elizabeth St. sidewalk and encircling a shallow, open-air courtyard centered on a raised brick planting bed. From the two outer bays of the canopy, sidewalks paved with polished terrazzo lead from the street into and around the courtyard planter. A pair of replacement aluminum-framed glass doors approached from beneath the westernmost vault constitutes the main entrance (Photo 11). To visually identify the location of the entrance from the street, the two-story-high front wall of the recessed court wing is surfaced, above the entrance doors, with a pair of panels faced with turquoise Mexican mosaic tile (Photo 9). The three street-facing wall bays to the left of the tile panels are finished with red Roman brick. The southeast elevation of the one-story corner wing contains three windows at sidewalk level, separated by white cast stone mullions (Photo 12). The mullions rise above the level of the canopy vaults to frame wall planes of turquoise mosaic tile. The three tiled panels are framed to either side by panels of red Roman brick.

The other side of the courtyard contains the three-story tower, part of the 1960 addition but raised in height in 1964 (Photos 7, 10). The tower is an oblong rectangle in plan. Its four corners are framed with concrete structural piers that rise to an oversailing roof vault configured in profile like the sidewalk-level canopy vaults. The walls of the tower are divided by a pair of mullions into three bays. There are window openings at the second-floor level on the street front and the courtyard side elevations of the tower. The top level is open-air.

The remaining third of the primary elevation, to the left of the entrance courtyard and tower, is a windowless two-story expanse of wall faced with red Roman brick (Photos 7, 10). The wall plane is modulated by vertical and horizontal reveals formed by recessed courses of black glazed brick that divide the wall plane into stacked panels. The vertical reveals are the width of a brick header and contain bricks stacked head-on-head. The horizontal reveals are a soldier course of side-by-side headers.

Side (Northwest and Southeast) Elevations (Photos 1-3, 6)

The northwest-facing W. 4th St. side elevation of the one-story 1947 wing contains three vertical bays faced with turquoise mosaic tile, originally set above three sidewalk-level plate glass display windows (currently covered with panels), part of the 1960 refacing. These occur at the north end of the elevation, adjacent to the W. Elizabeth St. corner, and mirror the location of the trio of windows looking from the 1947 wing into the courtyard. The rest of the W. 4th St. elevation is a running line of twenty-three bays of red Roman brick divided by vertical reveals of dark glazed brick. Upper level rectangular vent panels are the only openings in the brick-faced portion of the 4th St. elevation.

The southeast-facing side elevation consists of seventeen bays of red Roman brick divided into stacked panels by vertical reveals and bisected by single, continuous horizontal reveal. There are no openings on this side of the building inasmuch as this wall marks the site's southeast property line.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Rear (Southwest) Elevation (Photos 4-5, 15-16)

The rear (southwest) end of the building abuts an alley parallel to W. Elizabeth St. that bisects Block 70-A. A minimal effort was made to treat this elevation architecturally with the 1960 and 1964 additions, which continue the pattern of stacked panels of face brick. The alley elevation does reveal the varied spatial organization of the 1947 building, which was T-shaped in plan, with a rear wing that projected across the back side of Lot 5 and crossed over the lot line to Lot 4 but did not go all the way back to the rear lot line along the alley (Map 7). There is garage door on the southeast elevation of the 1947 portion. The rear elevation of the 1947 portion is characterized with painted red brick. Original door and multi-light window openings facing the alley relate in their placement to interior requirements. The 1964 second-story addition is T-shaped in plan because no attempt was made to build atop the 1947 component of the building. At the south end of the rear wing is a roofed, open-air, steel-framed fire stair serving the centered corridor of the 1964 second-floor addition. An expanded metal grill on the side of the stair unit facing the alley is detailed architecturally as a solar screen (Photos 15-16). An archival photo showing the W. Elizabeth St. front of the building following the 1960 alterations and additions shows a patterned grill enclosing the upper stage of what was, at that point, the two-story tower. It appears probable that this metal grillwork was transferred to the rear fire stair following the 1964 additions, which resulted in raising the height of the tower (Figure 9).

Interior

Floor Plan (Figures 1-3, Photos 17-26)

The interiors of both floors are laid out in accordance with the building's use as an office building. Offices spaces open from double-loaded corridors on both floors. The 1947 wing is subdivided by a central corridor parallel to W. 4th Street. This first floor corridor turns at a right angle near the rear end of the building to follow the alignment of the rear wing, parallel to the rear alley. At the southeast end of that wing, the rear corridor continues as the corridor of the 1959-60 addition. The rear corridor makes a right angle turn to follow the long dimension alignment of the 1959-60 wing, parallel to the building's southeast, side property line. This corridor makes a right-angle turn to parallel the W. Elizabeth St. front of the property. The front corridor is accessible from the main, courtyard entrance to the building and connects back to the corridor of the 1947 building.

A stair from the 1959-60 wing to the 1963-64 second-floor addition above is accessible from the front corridor adjacent to the main courtyard entrance. The spatial organization of the second floor mirrors that of the 1959-60 wing below with slightly larger offices. Men's and women's restrooms are located off the corridor in the rear of both the 1947 wing and the 1959-60 wing, with another pair above in the 1963-64 second-floor addition. The restrooms are located along stub corridors off the rear corridor on the first floor. Both stub corridors have access to the rear alley.

Finishes (Photos 17-26)

Specifications for the 1963-64 second floor addition identify interior finishes. Interior partitions are of gypsum board on wood frames surfaced with vinyl wall coverings. Doors in the 1947 portion of the building are wood paneled doors. Some have an upper light of obscured, translucent glass. Some have a louvered lower panel. Doors in the 1959-60 and 1963-64 additions are solid slab doors faced with polished hardwood plywood, with side jambs and fixed overdoor panels similarly finished. The portals rise all the way to the ceiling. Horizontal rubber bases line the bottoms of the walls. Floors are finished with dark blue, speckled vinyl tile. The front corridor alcove of the 1947 wing possesses a higher ceiling height than the adjoining 1959-60 building. The walls of this corridor are finished with polished plywood paneling to match the doors. Some offices also contain wood paneled walls. Ceilings are suspended acoustical tile ceilings incorporating lay-lights for the fluorescent ceiling lighting.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Stair (Photo 23)

The most architecturally distinctive feature of the building's interior is the stair. The stair is of concrete construction finished with ground and polished terrazzo paving. The back wall of the landing contains a mosaic tile mural installed at the time of the 1963-64 addition. The artist of the mural is undocumented.¹ Displaying a subdued color palette of green, brown, gray, blue, and silver tiles, highlighted with gold and orange tiles, the wall is divided in two by an irregular vertical column of blue that represents the Río Grande. To the left are four stacked panels representing images of Mexico. From bottom to top, these are a jaguar mask, a stepped pyramid, an agave plant, a mission church, and a sunburst. To the right of the irregular column of blue are stacked panels representing the "eternal" blue flame icon adopted to advertise the American natural gas industry, the piping of a gas well, a fruit-bearing Ruby Red grapefruit tree, a farmer in front of a rail fence, and a longhorn steer, generic images evoking the Lower Río Grande Valley borderlands.

Alterations

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company had some alterations since original construction, the majority of which are now considered historic alterations. The building was constructed in three phases: 1947, 1959-60, and 1963-64. In 1959-60 the building was externally refaced and the interior of the 1947 building was also remodeled and the footprint was expanded. The 1963-64 addition consisted of a second-story above the one-story 1959-60 wing and extended the height of the courtyard tower (Figure 8-9). At the same time, the patterned grill enclosing the upper stage of the tower was moved to the rear stair. The principal alterations that have occurred since 1972 are street-level display windows of the 1947 wing now have plywood panels painted to match the turquoise-colored tile panels above. These plywood panels also appear in the display windows at the street-level within the tower on the primary elevation. A steel security fence was added between the W. Elizabeth St. sidewalk and the courtyard and some doors were replaced. The Rio Grande Valley Gas Co. signage was removed at an unknown date (Figure 9).

Integrity

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building is remarkably intact and retains the architectural integrity associated with its period of historical significance to a high degree. The building remains a great example of the mid-twentieth-century Modern architecture of the firm of Bowman Swanson Hiester. It remains in its original location and the historic setting is largely intact. Integrity of design, materials, and workmanship are exhibited in the intact U-plan, flat roof, fenestration pattern, red Roman brick exterior with recessed courses of black glazed brick that divide the walls vertically and horizontally, projecting cast stone vertical mullions separating panels faced with turquoise Mexican mosaic tile, canopy with segmentally arched concrete vaults, three-story tower, courtyard, sidewalks of polished terrazzo, some original doors and windows, and metal stair with patterned grill along the rear elevation. The floor plan is intact and the interior office portions of the building retain their integrity visible in many of the intact finishes. These include the gypsum board, vinyl wall coverings, wood paneled doors, polished plywood paneling, blue speckled vinyl tile, stair with polished terrazzo paving, and the distinctive mosaic tile mural. All of these intact features combined provide the feeling of a mid-twentieth century corporate office building. The property is no longer associated with the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company.

¹ Little information was found on the mural. However, Shirley Voekrodt may have been the artist as she designed the midcentury mosaic tile murals in the remodeled Harlingen National Bank and Narro-Sánchez Clinic in McAllen, both designed by architect John G. York. Voekrodt and York worked together before they eventually married. Given the relationship between York and architect Walter Bowman, and the strikingly similarity of this mural to Voekrodt's other works, it's probable she was the artist. Voekrodt created murals in several of York's commissions. See "Harlingen National Bank Tile Mural," *RGVMOD*, accessed June 21st, 2022, <https://rgvmod.com/2019/11/26/harlingen-national-bank-tile-mural/>.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Statement of Significance

The Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building is located at 355 W. Elizabeth Street in Brownsville, Texas. Built in 1947, expanded and refaced in 1959-60, and expanded again in 1963-64, the Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building was built to serve as the headquarters of the public utility corporation that, beginning in 1927, supplied natural gas to customers in the far south Texas counties of Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron in the Lower Río Grande Valley. The building was constructed in Brownsville's major mid-twentieth-century suburban business corridor, West Elizabeth Street in West Brownsville, a mile northwest of the historic downtown business district. Alterations and additions in 1960 and 1964 transformed the original, symmetrical, one-story modernistic building with two-story construction, a garden courtyard and tower, concrete canopy, red Roman brick, and turquoise mosaic tile. These architectural attributes give the building its distinctive, mid-twentieth-century Modern appearance. The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at a local level of significance in the areas of Commerce and Community Planning and Development for its association with the Río Grande Valley Gas Company, the regional natural gas distribution corporation, and its impact on the development and administration of public utility services in Brownsville and the Río Grande Valley in the post-war period. The building is also nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at a local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a remarkably intact and distinctive example of the mid-twentieth-century Modern architecture of Bowman Swanson Hiester of Harlingen and Brownsville, the building's primary architects, and one of the chief exponents of the "Harlingen school" of mid-twentieth-century modern architecture. In April 1968, the Río Grande Valley Gas Company was sold to Coastal States Gas Producing Co. of Corpus Christi, but the company operated under its historic name as a subsidiary of Coastal States until 1979. The period of significance spans between construction in 1947 and 1972 which adheres to the NPS 50-year cutoff.

Founding of the Community: Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Brownsville, county seat of Cameron County, Texas, is a city of more than 180,000 people. Brownsville is located near the mouth of the Río Grande at the southmost tip of Texas, across the border from its sister city, Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico (founded 1784), and twenty miles west of the Gulf of Mexico. Brownsville was founded in 1848 at the end of the U.S.-Mexico War in order to establish a U.S. trade gateway opposite Matamoros, which had risen to prominence as a Gulf port in the 1820s. During its first twelve years of existence, Brownsville was one of the largest cities in Texas. As the site of the U.S. Army's Fort Brown, Brownsville was occupied by both the Confederacy and the U.S. during the Civil War. Because Matamoros was not subject to the U.S. Naval blockade of Confederate ports, it became the gateway for funneling Confederate cotton to Europe and the U.S. between 1862 and 1865, generating immense wealth for the merchants participating in this trade. After the war, Brownsville lost its commercial primacy as railroads linking Texas and Mexico were built in the early 1880s much farther upriver, bypassing the entire southern tip of Texas until construction of the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway, which linked Brownsville to Corpus Christi and Houston in 1904-07. Railway construction opened the Lower Río Grande Valley (comprising the four southmost counties in Texas) to rapid change as developers bought tens of thousands of acres of arid ranch land and installed steam-driven irrigation systems to transform the fertile alluvial delta of the Río Grande into highly productive agricultural real estate but, in the process, marginalizing the region's dominant Mexican-descended population. Developers encouraged the immigration of Midwestern farmers and investors in the 1900s and 1910s and founded thirteen new towns and associated farming tracts in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties to accommodate the newcomers. During the 1920s, the focus of development shifted from agricultural real estate to urban real estate in the Valley's small towns. Brownsville, the largest city in the Valley, saw its population grow from 11,791 in 1920 to 22,021 in 1930.²

² Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, Austin: Eakin Press, 1991.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

The West Elizabeth Street Suburban Commercial District

The Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building is located in Brownsville's West Elizabeth Street suburban commercial district. Reflecting broad patterns associated with the suburbanization of American commercial space beginning in the 1920s, this area also developed in response to the appearance of automobiles in Brownsville. In 1908 and 1909, the New York & Brownsville Improvement Co., owned by the family of Brownsville's founder Charles Stillman (1810-1875), participated in the development of some of its large real estate holdings by subdividing the adjoining additions of West Brownsville (1908) and the Stillman Extension (1909), collectively known in Brownsville as West Brownsville.³ This real estate lay northwest of the Original Townsite of Brownsville, platted by Charles Stillman in 1848. West Brownsville is separated from the Original Townsite by Brownsville's first divided boulevard, which in 1916 was named Palm Boulevard. The northwest-to-southeast oriented streets in West Brownsville are continuous with the presidential streets of the Original Townsite and the streets that run parallel to them: Elizabeth, Levee, St. Charles, St. Francis, and Frontón. These streets simply switch from "East" to "West" designations when they cross Palm Boulevard. The blocks of West Brownsville were first mapped individually in the 1926 edition of the Sanborn Map Co.'s fire insurance maps. Succeeding editions (1930, 1949, and 1970) trace the spatial evolution of the West Elizabeth Street commercial corridor, spanning the eight blocks between Palm Boulevard and Central Boulevard, from the 1920s to the 1960s.

Because the block-and-lot system of the Original Townsite was simply extended to the northwest when the Stillman Extension and West Brownsville were platted, the perceptible distinctions between the Original Townsite and the West Brownsville additions have to do with patterns of development and the chronology of new construction. What was typical of West Brownsville was the randomness of new construction, since, despite the growth of Brownsville's population in the early twentieth century, the quantity of real estate on the market exceeded the demand for it. The 1926 Sanborn Map 15 shows that, with the exception of Brownsville High School (1916, Atlee B. Ayres, architect) at W. Elizabeth Street and Palm Boulevard, the Church of Christ, Scientist, at W. 1st. and W. Elizabeth Street (demolished), and a gas station across W. Elizabeth from the church (demolished), all buildings were identified as single-family houses. But only the 500 block, between W. 5th and W. 6th, was fully built out with houses (two of which survive at 517 and 535 W. Elizabeth).

The 1930 maps of this portion of West Brownsville, Maps 24 and 25, document construction of the First Presbyterian Church (1927, Kelwood Co., architects) at W. Elizabeth and 435 Palm Boulevard, across from the school, and the Church of the Advent (1927, Thomas MacLaren, architect) at 104 W. Elizabeth and W. 1st, west of the school, as well the two-story La Verne Apartments (1927, E. G. Holliday, architect) at 135 W. Elizabeth across from the church, the one-story Model Laundry & Dry Cleaning plant (1928, Page Brothers, architects; demolished) at 314 W. Elizabeth, and the St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico Railway's Belt Line railroad track, constructed in 1910 along the right-of-way of W. 3rd Street to connect the railroad's main line to the Río Grande Railroad line in the north part of the Original Townsite.

The Belt Line railroad (now called the Belden Trail) attracted industrial, warehouse, and distribution businesses to locate alongside it. In 1925, The Terrace, described as a "drive-in confectionary, luncheonette, and neighborhood drug store" was built at 707 W. Elizabeth (William D. Van Siclen, architect; demolished).⁴ The Terrace was followed by the two-story M System grocery market building at 608 W. Elizabeth (1927, E. G. Holliday, architect), which contains apartments on its second floor.⁵ Reflecting the popularity of Spanish architecture during the 1920s, all of these

³ "West Brownsville Sub-Division," *Brownsville Herald*, 11 April 1908, p. 1; "Much Progress Over On West Side," *Brownsville Herald*, 15 October 1908, p. 1; "\$50 Lots," *Brownsville Herald*, 16 November 1909, p. 2.

⁴ "Contract Let for 'Terrace' Building," *Brownsville Herald*, 31 July 1925, p. 3; "The Terrace To Open Tomorrow," *Brownsville Herald*, 10 September 1925, p. 3.

⁵ "Building Hits Steady Pace," *Brownsville Herald*, 10 July 1927, p. 4; "New 'M' Store Gets Praise," *Brownsville Herald*, 30 October 1927, p. 2.

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buildings except the First Presbyterian Church featured stucco walls and tile roofs. West Brownsville was the city's primary zone of new middle-income residential expansion in the 1920s. It housed the locally affluent market to which new commercial development responded.

Brownsville's economy contracted severely after the onset of the Great Depression. The wood-framed Bell Service Station serving Humble products closed after the Black Thursday.⁶ The oil company did not want to lose the property so they signed a lease in 1930.⁷ Frequent changes of name through the first years of the 1930s as service stations opened at this address, then closed, bespoke the economic instability of the period.⁸ Magnolia finally signed a lease in 1935 and built the brick-faced, tile-capped, two-building complex at 202-204 W. Elizabeth Street.⁹ The Harlingen-based regional grocery market operator Howard E. Butt constructed a one-story commercial building containing slots for two businesses, one occupied by the Piggly-Wiggly-Butt Co.'s Piggly-Wiggly No. 2 store, in 1931 at 712-714 W. Elizabeth (demolished), across Elizabeth Street from The Terrace. Reporting on the opening of the store, the *Brownsville Herald* noted that "The new store will have a more suburban location than the downtown place, and will be more convenient to shoppers from outlying parts of the city."¹⁰ The Jitney Jungle grocery market opened a second Brownsville store in the M System Building at 608 W. Elizabeth in 1932, where it remained until 1946.¹¹

During the 1930s, pharmacies joined grocery markets in gravitating to W. Elizabeth Street. When the Piggly-Wiggly-Butt Grocery Company's lease on 712-714 W. Elizabeth expired in 1936, it was not renewed. Dennis Elliott and Royce Russell leased the building for their newly organized Den-Russ Pharmacy, which opened in April 1937.¹² W. A. Rasco opened Rasco's Drugs at 556 W. Elizabeth in May 1937.¹³ The Depression decade slowed development in the West Brownsville commercial district. But it demonstrated the strength of the suburbanizing trend as retailers sought to move closer to their middle-income customers and to attract them with ample parking. The Terrace, Piggly-Wiggly No. 2/Den-Russ Pharmacy, and Rasco's Drugs were not built to their front property lines, as were the M System and Model Laundry buildings (and business buildings in downtown Brownsville). Instead, they were set back from the front property line to accommodate on-site, head-in, parallel parking.

The post-World War II period, when the first phase of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building was constructed, was the pinnacle of W. Elizabeth Street's tenure as Brownsville's most important suburban retail center, second only to downtown. For a time in 1946, business owners advertised collectively in the *Brownsville Herald* under the headline "Shop in West Brownsville: More Merchandise, Plenty of Free Parking."¹⁴ Car dealerships stood out for their prominence along W. Elizabeth St. in the postwar period, followed by grocery markets, pharmacies, and doctors' and dentists' offices.

⁶ Cameron Appraisal District Records, Affidavit with Recorded Date 10/18/1929 between Grantor John Gregg and Grantee George Bell; Cameron Appraisal District Records, Corrected Affidavit with Recorded Date on 11/07/1929 between Grantor John Gregg and Grantee George Bell.

⁷ Cameron Appraisal District Records, Lease with Recorded Date on 08/08/1930 between Grantor John Gregg and Grantee Humble Oil & Refining Company.

⁸ "Business Men Hail Future," *Brownsville Herald*, 14 February 1930, p. 8; "Best Service Station," *Brownsville Herald*, 29 June 1930, p. 9; "Houses for Sale," *Brownsville Herald*, 30 December 1932, p. 9; "Firestone Service Stores, Inc. Ad," *Brownsville Herald*, 11 May 1934, p. 2.

⁹ Cameron Appraisal District Records, Lease with Recorded Date on 05/25/1935 between Grantor Wilson Realty Company and Grantee Magnolia Petroleum Company.

¹⁰ "New Building Contract Let," *Brownsville Herald*, 14 November 1930, p. 1; "Piggly Wiggly Story Told: Brownsville Piggly Wiggly Store Number 2 To Open: First Piggly Wiggly Store Established in Year 1916: West Elizabeth Store Location," *Brownsville Herald*, 15 January 1931, p. 1.

¹¹ "Jitney Jungle's Seventh Birthday and Opening of New Store are Celebrated," *Brownsville Herald* 12 October 1934, p. 7.

¹² "Drug Chain Is Foreseen Here," *Brownsville Herald*, 21 April 1937, p. 6; "McKay's Drug Store To Open on Wednesday," *Brownsville Herald*, 27 July 1937, p. 14; "Notice of Dissolution of Partnership," *Brownsville Herald*, 15 September 1937, p. 9.

¹³ "New Building To Be Started Here," *Brownsville Herald*, 23 May 1937, p. 11; "Rasco Drugs Will Open At New Location," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 July 1937, p. 10.

¹⁴ "Shop in West Brownsville: More Merchandise and Plenty of Free Parking Space," *Brownsville Herald*, 24 June 1942, p. 1.

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In 1942 Glen E. Herman, formerly affiliated with Piggly-Wiggly-Butt, opened his Glen's IGA (Independent Grocers Association) market at 446 W. Elizabeth.¹⁵ In 1944 Landreth Auto Service left downtown to move into the ex-Best Service Station at 202-204 W. Elizabeth.¹⁶ In 1946 Eagle Pharmacy, one of the oldest drug stores in Brownsville, moved out of downtown to its new building at 416 W. Elizabeth.¹⁷ That same year George Walker doubled the size of the ex-Rasco Drugs Building at 556 W. Elizabeth to convert it into the new Jitney Jungle No. 2 market, reserving a full lot alongside the building for customer parking.¹⁸ And T. B. Ewing moved his De Soto-Plymouth car dealership from downtown to a freestanding showroom he built at 645 W. Elizabeth.¹⁹

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company moved into its Modern, one-story new building in 1947. In 1948, the Johnson Nash Co. opened its showroom and maintenance garage on a three-lot site at 305 W. Elizabeth, sharing the block front with the gas company building.²⁰ Across the street at 358 W. Elizabeth, Keith Tuggle built a new showroom for his Tuggle Motor Co. Studebaker dealership.²¹ A pair of side-by-side retail buildings, each containing two lease spaces, were constructed in the 400 block of W. Elizabeth. Lydia's and the Lovely Lady Shoppe, both women's clothes stores, occupied 427-429 W. Elizabeth.²² Modern Interiors and the K. Welch photo studio occupied the Welch Studio Building next door at 433-435 W. Elizabeth.²³ American Cleaners leased the two-space building constructed by George Goff at 524 W. Elizabeth.²⁴ And at 35 W. Elizabeth, sharing the block with the First Presbyterian Church, a compact one-story brick medical office building was occupied by Doctors Carlos F. Calderoni and A. C. Render.²⁵ In 1950, three additional one-story medical professional buildings filled out the rest of this block to form a continuous row: Dr. Ikbal Krishna at 37, Dr. Francisco F. Calderoni at 47, and Dr. Frederick De Stefano at 55.²⁶

Complementing this line-up of individual doctor's offices was the larger, one-story Medical Arts Center professional building across W. 1st Street from Dr. De Stefano at 105 W. Elizabeth, completed in 1952 on the former site of the First Church of Christ, Scientist.²⁷ In 1950, George Ury moved his Dodge dealership from downtown to the one-story building constructed two years earlier as a bottling plant at 254 W. Elizabeth. In 1950, Easterling & Van Tyne took over the Johnson Nash Co. premises at 305 W. Elizabeth for its Pontiac, Oldsmobile, and Cadillac dealership.²⁸ The last major retail building constructed in the West Brownsville commercial district was a new Piggly Wiggly store, built by John H. Snow, who acquired the Piggly Wiggly franchise when Howard E. Butt reorganized his grocery market chain under the HEB name in 1944. In 1949 Snow bought Brownsville's two Jitney Jungle markets. In 1956-57 he built a new, 10,000-square foot Piggly Wiggly No. 2 store next to the Jitney Jungle No. 2 at 556 W. Elizabeth. Reflecting the continuing expansion of spatial requirements, the new Piggly Wiggly market was more than twice the size of the adjoining Jitney Jungle, which had been doubled in size in 1946. Upon completion of the replacement building, Snow demolished the nineteen-year-old Rasco Drugs/Jitney Jungle building to clear its property for an on-

¹⁵ "Notice! We Will Be Open for Business Tomorrow (Thursday) June 25," *Brownsville Herald*, 19 September 1946, pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ "1939 Model," *Brownsville Herald*, 31 August 1944, p. 11.

¹⁷ "Announcing the Grand Opening of the New Eagle Pharmacy on 416 West Elizabeth Street, Tuesday, April 16th, at 2PM," *Brownsville Herald*, 15 April 1946, p. 6.

¹⁸ "Jitney Jingle 2 To Open Thursday," *Brownsville Herald*, 17 April 1946, p. 12.

¹⁹ "Ewing Motors Branch Owned by Valley Oldtimer," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 July 1950, p. 10.

²⁰ "Johnson Nash Company to Build \$30,000 Structure," *Brownsville Herald*, 11 April 1948, p. 9; "Elizabeth Street Reflects Nearly Million in Building," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 May 1948, pp. 1 and 12.

²¹ "New Studebaker Plant Ready To Serve Automobile Owners," *Brownsville Herald*, 19 September 1948, p. 7.

²² "Apparel Shop to Open," and "New Shop Opening Set," *Brownsville Herald*, 26 August 1948, p. 17.

²³ "Elizabeth Street Reflects Nearly Million in Building," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 May 1948, pp. 1 and 12; "Announcing the Formal Opening of the Welch Studio Building Attend Our Open House," *Brownsville Herald*, 11 June 1948, p. 11.

²⁴ "Elizabeth Street Reflects Nearly Million in Building," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 May 1948, pp. 1 and 12.

²⁵ "Dr. C. F. Calderoni," *Brownsville Herald*, 8 October 1948, pp. 13; "Dr. A. C. Render," *Brownsville Herald*, 13 October 1948, pp. 11.

²⁶ "Medical Corner," *Brownsville Herald*, 31 December 1950, p. 6C.

²⁷ "Medical Arts Center," *Brownsville Herald*, 23 March 1952, p. 5.

²⁸ "Newest Design," *Brownsville Herald*, 4 June 1950, p. 18.

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site, 225-car parking lot.²⁹ By the time Snow's Piggly Wiggly No. 2 opened, Glen's Food Shop had opened a second store in 1950 at 1803 Boca Chica Boulevard. Brownsville's first two planned shopping centers—the Justin McCarty Center at 758-64 Boca Chica Boulevard and Palm Village Shopping Center at 1552 Palm Boulevard—had opened in 1953.³⁰ And the HEB No. 2 store opened at 2336 Boca Chica in 1954.³¹ These locations were not only much farther removed from the historic center of Brownsville, they also occupied buildings with more square footage, offered customers more off-site parking, and were closer to new middle-income neighborhoods developed along the cross-axis of Boca Chica Boulevard in the 1950s.

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building was constructed in the West Elizabeth St. commercial district during the peak years of its development in the postwar 1940s and early 1950s. West Elizabeth St. exemplifies the effects of the cyclical fluctuations of the American retail economy on the organization of what was perceived at the time as suburban commercial space, especially in the rapidity with which the West Brownsville district came to seem by the 1960s more like a disconnected extension of the downtown business district than an alternative to it. The uniformity of street widths and block-and-lot configurations, the presence of alleys and the railroad track, and the proximity to residential neighborhoods, especially on W. Levee St., which Block 70-A adjoins, made W. Elizabeth St. seem much less suburban than Central Boulevard (the northbound San Benito highway), which begins where W. 8th St. intersects W. Elizabeth, or Boca Chica Boulevard even farther to the north.

The expansion of the gas company building in 1959-60 and 1963-64 introduced mid-century Modern architecture, as practiced in the Lower Río Grande Valley, to the mix of 1920s Spanish and 1930s and '40s modernistic architecture that otherwise prevailed on W. Elizabeth Street. Construction of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building in West Brownsville outside of the downtown business district reflected broad patterns associated with the suburbanization of U.S. cities in the mid-twentieth century as business owners sought to attract customers with the ease of location and abundant parking.

Criterion A: Commerce and Community Planning and Development - Natural Gas in the Lower Río Grande Valley

Economic expansion in the 1920s prompted Charles S. Lasby (1873-1934) and James L. Crawford (1879-1957), two entrepreneurs based in one of the new railroad towns, San Benito, Texas, twenty miles northwest of Brownsville, to promote construction of a natural gas distribution network to serve towns in the Lower Río Grande Valley. The San Antonio lawyer John W. Gaines (1864-1939) sought financing for this venture, contracting with the Hope Engineering & Supply Company of Mount Vernon, Ohio, to construct and operate a distribution system transporting natural gas from fields in Webb and Jim Hogg counties, 170 miles northwest of Brownsville.³² In 1927 the Río Grande Valley Gas Company was chartered. Under the direction of Pennsylvania-born engineer Ralph M. Lloyd (1886-1948), Hope Engineering built a pipeline originating at the Carolina-Texas Field near Mirando City in Webb County and the Cole Field in Jim Hogg County as well as delivery infrastructure for the communities the gas company would serve. Franchise agreements were negotiated to supply Alamo, Donna, Edinburg, McAllen, Pharr, San Juan, and Weslaco in

²⁹ "H.E.B. Food Stores," *Brownsville Herald*, 10 February 1944, p. 17; "Piggly Wiggly Store No. 2," *Brownsville Herald*, 14 November 1949, p. 16; "Johnney Snow Veteran Grocery Man," *Brownsville Herald*, 14 November 1949, p. 17; "New Piggly-Wiggly Construction Begins," *Brownsville Herald*, 28 August 1956, p. 7; "New Piggly Wiggly Store Grand Opening Set Today," *Brownsville Herald*, 20 February 1957, p. 2-B, and "New Piggly Wiggly Is Modern Store Throughout," *Brownsville Herald*, 20 February 1957, p. 7-B.

³⁰ "New Shopping Center Nearly Completed," *Brownsville Herald*, 29 October 1953, p. A-3 and "Success to...Cactus Package Store, Miller's Foods Co. 2, and Justin McCarty...for this new Shopping Center," *Brownsville Herald*, 29 October 1953, p. B-4; Work Scheduled Monday on New Shopping Center," *Brownsville Herald*, 3 May 1953, p. 6;

³¹ "New Supermarket Will Open Monday," *Brownsville Herald*, 8 August 1954, p. 7.

³² Paul Cottrell, "Completion of Gas Pipe Lines a Boon to Valley Industry," *Brownsville Herald*, 13 November 1927, p. 8.

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Hidalgo County and Brownsville, La Feria, and San Benito in Cameron County (Harlingen, in Cameron County, joined the network in 1928).³³

When the company began operation in September 1927, its main office was located in McAllen. Judge Gaines was the gas company's first president. Directors included two officers of Hope Engineering & Supply—B. E. Hepler, president, and R. J. Lindsey, vice-president—as well as C. S. Lasby. C. O. Rockwell was the first general manager. Like many of the gas company's officials, Rockwell was associated with Hope Engineering.³⁴ In 1932, the general offices of the company were transferred from McAllen to Brownsville. Contemporary newspaper reports do not give a reason for the move. But construction of the Brownsville Ship Channel and the growth of Pan American Airways' engine maintenance and repair operations at Brownsville International Airport suggest an expanded industrial market to supplement the company's delivery of gas for local domestic use. The gas company located its headquarters at 445 E. Elizabeth Street, explaining that it chose to open its offices outside the downtown business district in order to ensure adequate parking for customers.³⁵

In 1935 the Río Grande Valley Gas Company, unable to maintain bond payments to its creditors, filed for bankruptcy.³⁶ From 1936 until 1946, the company operated as a subsidiary of Hope Engineering.³⁷ This corresponded to the time period, 1935 to 1946, that Joseph C. Jordan (1876-1955) was the company's Brownsville-based general manager.³⁸ By 1941, the Stamford, Connecticut business executive Odbert Patton Wilson was president. Arlen O. Swiger and Newton B. Schott, partners in the New York law firm of Swiger, Kelley, Harragan & Schott, had begun their long tenures on the board. They were joined by Walter E. Meub, an officer of Youngstown Sheet & Iron Co., of Youngstown, Ohio.³⁹ O. P. Wilson remained as president after he and another member of the board, the Columbus, Ohio, coal operator Sumner Cottingham, negotiated an end to the company's association with Hope Engineering in 1946, presumably because it had satisfied the terms of its bankruptcy re-organization.⁴⁰

In 1946, Jordan retired as general manager and vice-president of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company after a career of nearly thirty years with Hope Engineering.⁴¹ Jordan was succeeded as general manager by a Texan, Lewis Oscar Vogelsang (1902-1986).⁴² During his twenty-two-year-long tenure as, first, general manager, then president, then chairman of the board of directors of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company, O. L. Vogelsang presided over all three phases of the Brownsville building's construction. He was chairman until April 1968, when the business and assets of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company were sold to Coastal States Gas Producing Co. of Corpus Christi.⁴³ The gas

³³ "Gas Company Is Preparing to Start Work: Propose to Have Pipe Line into Valley Early in Winter Contract Gas Supply," *Brownsville Herald*, 1 February 1927, p. 1; "Work of Gas Distribution in City Starts," *Brownsville Herald*, 4 May 1927, p. 1; "Gas Firm's History Covers 33 Years," *Brownsville Herald*, 28 February 1961, p. 7-D.

³⁴ Cottrell, p. 8.

³⁵ "New Residents To Arrive Here Soon From Valley Town," *Brownsville Herald*, 18 September 1932, p. 5; "In Our Valley," *Brownsville Herald*, 28 September 1932, p. 10.

³⁶ Alicia M. Dewey, *Pesos and Dollars: Entrepreneurs in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1880-1940*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014, p. 205.

³⁷ "In the Matter of Hope Engineering Company, O. P. Wilson and Sumner Cottingham, Voting Trustees under 'The Río Grande Valley Gas Company' Common Stock Voting Trust Agreement of December 12, 1938," Río Grande Valley Gas Company, Promulgated May 20, 1946," *Decisions and Reports by United States Securities and Exchange Commission*, 1953, pp. 825-826.

³⁸ "Gas Company Chief Named," *Brownsville Herald*, 19 February 1935, p. 1.

³⁹ "Gas Company Shows Gain," *Brownsville Herald*, 12 March 1941, pp. 1, 6.

⁴⁰ "In the Matter of Hope Engineering Company, O. P. Wilson and Sumner Cottingham, Voting Trustees...."

⁴¹ "J. C. Jordan Honored at Party," *Brownsville Herald*, 29 August 1946, p. 14; "Joseph C. Jordan," *Brownsville Herald*, 1 September 1946, p. 12.

⁴² "Vogelsang Takes Over," *Brownsville Herald*, 19 September 1946, p. 4; "Vogelsang Named Utility Director," *Brownsville Herald*, 11 March 1948, p. 11; "Gas Firm Has New Directors," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 April 1961, p. 7-A; "Gas Company Elects Officers, Directors," *Brownsville Herald*, 5 April 1964, p. 16-C.

⁴³ "RGV Board OKs Sale to Coastal," *Brownsville Herald*, 5 January 1968, pp. 1, 5; "Rio Grande Has Sold to Coastal at Price Estimated at \$24.5 Million," *Brownsville Herald*, 16 April 1968, p. 1.

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company operated in the building under its historic name as a subsidiary of Coastal States until 1979, when Coastal combined the company with other assets to form a new corporation, the Valero Energy Corporation. In 1993, Valero sold the Río Grande Valley Gas Company to the Southern Union Co., which, since 2003, has operated it under the name Texas Gas Service.⁴⁴ In 2002, the Southern Union Gas Co. sold the Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building in Brownsville to its present owners, Dora and Alfredo Bermúdez.

The significance of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company can be evaluated in terms of broad patterns associated with the historical development and administration of public utility services in Texas from the postwar 1860s to the 1970s. The historian Harold L. Platt in his book, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830-1915*, identifies the time frame in which various modern public services—gas lighting, street-car-based public transit, electrical lighting, telephone communication, a water distribution system, and a sewer system—were introduced in Houston, historically one of the largest cities in Texas. Platt identifies the legal structure through which city governments awarded franchises to business corporations to construct and operate various types of public utility services, as well as the political tensions and controversies entailed in the administration of these services.⁴⁵

In this context, Brownsville stands out for initially failing to offer residents modern city services, but also for the progressive way it did deliver such services once they were belatedly made available. Houstonians had access to electricity and telephones beginning in 1882 (although Platt stresses that service was both expensive and unreliable). Not until 1908 were residents of Brownsville able to avail themselves of electricity and piped water. In 1907, the Brownsville city government hired the Kansas City engineer W. P. Bullock to design an electric light and water system, built by the American Light & Power Co. of Kansas City in 1908.⁴⁶ This system was owned and administered by the City of Brownsville. Since 1960 it has operated as a public corporation, the Brownsville Public Utilities Board. Ownership by the city government was an early-twentieth-century, Progressive-Era response to dissatisfaction with the performance of privately owned and administered utilities in the United States. Brownsville's historical experience differentiated it from the rest of far south Texas, as well as segments of the Texas Coastal Bend region to the north, which were served by the investor-owned Central Power & Light Co., based for most of this period in Corpus Christi, Texas.⁴⁷

With respect to other utilities, the City of Brownsville pursued a more conventional course. In 1906, the city awarded a franchise to the Brownsville Telephone Company to provide local telephone service. In 1909 the city awarded a franchise to the Brownsville Sewerage Co., which in 1910 built and put into operation a sewage system. And in 1911 the city awarded a franchise to Col. Sam Robertson, the founder of San Benito, to build and operate the Brownsville Street & Interurban Railway, Brownsville's first modern public transit system.⁴⁸ In these instances, public services were provided by granting private corporations operating franchises.

⁴⁴ "Our Name Has Changed," *Brownsville Herald*, 18 May 2003, p. C10.

⁴⁵ Harold L. Platt, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830-1915*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.

⁴⁶ "Engineering Contract Awarded to W. P. Bullock of Kansas City" and "City Does Good Work," *Brownsville Herald*, 26 June 1907, p. 1; "The Waterworks Survey," *Brownsville Herald*, 5 August 1907, p. 1; "The Contract Is Awarded," *Brownsville Herald*, 24 August 1907, p. 1; "Brownsville May Be Proud: When Electric Light Plant Is Finished," *Brownsville Herald*, 15 January 1908, p. 1; "Water and Light Plant Thriving," *Brownsville Herald*, 16 September 1908, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Bill Walraven with Margaret Walraven and Grady Phelps, *Corpus Christi: The History of a Texas Seaport*, Woodland Hills: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982, pp. 126-127; Murphy Givens, "Police Building Was CPL's Longtime Headquarters," *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 17 November 2017.

⁴⁸ "Ordinance Co.--," *Brownsville Herald*, 3 March 1906, p. 3; "Stegman Building Now Finished," *Brownsville Herald*, 4 July 1912, p. 2; "Granting Franchise to Sewerage Company," *Brownsville Herald*, 28 December 1909, p. 6; "Sewerage Co. Lets Contract For Machine For the Sewerage Disposal Plant," *Brownsville Herald*, 19 November 1910, p. 1; "Sewer System Almost Ready," *Brownsville Herald*, 8 December 1910, p. 1; "Franchise Granted S. A. Robertson," *Brownsville Herald*, 1 August 1911, p. 1; "Street Cars Are Popular" and "Message From Sam Robertson," *Brownsville Herald*, 8 January 1913, p. 1..

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The use of natural gas as a new source of domestic and industrial fuel in Texas was a phenomenon of the 1920s, when natural gas supplanted manufactured gas, used since the 1860s. Texas had what were, in the 1920s, the largest known reserves of natural gas in the United States.⁴⁹ The Lone Star Gas Co., chartered in 1909, was a pioneer among Texan gas companies. By 1926 it was supplying both Fort Worth and Dallas.⁵⁰ Drawing on the same natural gas fields as the Río Grande Valley Gas Company, the Southern Gas Co. of Houston built a pipeline to supply the Public Service Corporation of San Antonio with natural gas in 1921-22.⁵¹ The Houston Pipe Line Co. built a 300-mile-long distribution line from McMullen County to supply Houston with natural gas in 1926, at the same time that the Houston Gulf Gas Co. contracted with Hope Engineering & Supply to build a pipeline from Refugio County to supply Houston and Galveston.⁵² El Paso Natural Gas Co., chartered in 1928, began operation in 1930.⁵³ Natural gas retail operations, such as the Río Grande Valley Gas Company, not only constructed and operated gas distribution systems, they also promoted the use of natural gas as evidenced by in multiple advertisements.⁵⁴ J. C. Jordan and L. O. Vogelsang were prominently involved in promoting regional industrial development from the 1930s to the 1960s. Little information is available on the company during the post-war years but development, progress, and dependable natural gas service were widely marketed by the company in this period.⁵⁵ Like other gas companies, Rio Grande Valley Gas Company also had showrooms where they spotlighted appliances and domestic technologies fueled by natural gas, such as gas ranges, dryers, lights, grills, and air conditioning, a popular trend that continued the late 1960s (Figures 4-6, 10-11).⁵⁶

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building is significant for its association with the organization of natural gas public utilities in Texas, and with the extension of this dependable, economical public utility to the Lower Río Grande Valley of far south Texas throughout the mid-20th century. It is especially associated with the development of public utility services in Brownsville. Despite changes in ownership, this is the only natural gas company to have served Brownsville and the Lower Río Grande Valley.

Criterion C: Architecture - Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Architecture in Brownsville

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building embodies the distinctive architectural characteristics of the mid-twentieth-century period, which reflected very different design premises than did the first phase of the building in 1947. The Río Grande Gas Company Building possesses high design values and represents the regionally distinctive Modern architectural practices associated with Bowman Swanson Hiester, the firm founded in 1958 by Walter C. Bowman, E. Lester Swanson, and James W. Hiester of Harlingen, Texas.

⁴⁹ Roger M. Olien, "Oil and Gas Industry," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed May 29, 2020,

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/doogz>. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Modified on May 9, 2019. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; "Consumption of Texas Gas Is Enormous," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, 6 July 1925, p. 9.

⁵⁰ "Enserch Corporation," <https://www.encyclopedia.com/books/politics-and-business-magazines/enserch-corporation>, accessed 5 June 2020.

⁵¹ "Letter from the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission Transmitting in Response to Senate resolution No. 85, Seventieth Congress, A Monthly Report on the Electric Power and Gas Utilities Inquiry," Volume 8858, No. 83, 15 December 1935, p. 2162.

https://books.google.com/books?id=6s5GAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA2182&lpg=PA2182&dq=southern+gas+company+san+antonio+history&source=bl&ots=sXB6Mp6dW&sig=ACfU3U2ds1VQhM01NIm5avt28IUtyFlnEg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjOy_m5997pAhVPXq0KHUZ6BekQ6AEwB3oECAgOAQ#v=onepage&q=southern%20gas%20company%20san%20antonio%20history&f=false, accessed 5 June 2020.

⁵² "Houston Will Have Natural Gas by 1926; Pipe Line Concern Files Application for Charter," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, 18 March 1925, p. 11; "Gas Line Work Will Start in September," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, 20 August 1925, p. 1; "Advent of Natural Gas is Celebrated," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, 1 January 1926, pp. 1, 2.

⁵³ William Helm and Paulina Lagos with Gregory Smith, National Register of Historic Places Nomination for El Paso Natural Gas Co. (Blue Flame) Building, El Paso, Texas, April 2017,

https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/national_register/final/EI%20Paso%20Blue%20Flame.pdf, accessed 5 June 2020.

⁵⁴ "Hidden 'Lifelines' to Valley Progress," *El Heraldo de Brownsville*, June 4, 1961, p. 5; "What Makes the Valley Grow," *The Brownsville Herald*, February 26th, 1947, p. 6.

⁵⁵ "In Pace with Progress," *The Monitor*, October 14, 1954, p. 25; "Partners in Progress," *The Brownsville Herald*, December 31, 1954, p. 3;

⁵⁶ "Heavenly Hamilton Holiday Sale," *The Brownsville Herald*, October 21, 1966, p. 2; "Lighten up your Life with Gas Lights," *The Brownsville Herald*, June 20, 1965, p. 21; "Buy Gas Air Conditioning Now," *The Brownsville Herald*, November 11, 1965, p. 9.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

When L. O. Vogelsang acquired property for the gas company's new building in 1946, he bought three contiguous lots in Block 70-A of the Stillman Extension. The *Brownsville Herald* reported that this site was chosen because company officials believed it would be the commercial center of the emerging city.⁵⁷ The 9,000-square-foot building constructed in 1947 filled out the corner lot, Lot 6 at W. 4th and Elizabeth (Figure 5). The building also contained a rear wing that projected perpendicular to the long dimension of the corner portion of the building, across the width of the middle lot, Lot 5, and slightly over the line onto the third, easternmost lot, Lot 4, giving the gas company building a stubby, asymmetrical T-plan. The building was conservative, occupying its corner lot like a conventional downtown retail building. It was also architecturally conservative, with a three-bay symmetrical street front facing Elizabeth: a central entrance portal flanked by side bays spanned with plate glass display windows. A long, plate glass display window faced the vacant portion of the site on the east side of the building as well as the west side along W. 4th Street. A photo published in the *Brownsville Herald* at the time of the building's opening in 1947 shows that the unbuilt portion of the site was landscaped and that the rear wing was illuminated with steel casement windows, organized three per bay. What appears to be a freestanding advertising billboard was located at the juncture with the rear wing.⁵⁸ The 1949 edition of the Sanborn map shows that the building was primarily of steel-frame construction with masonry exterior walls (Map 7). A storage vault in the west rear portion of the building was color coded in the Sanborn map as being of fireproof construction. The building's side wing was set back from the alley frontage, leaving enough space to park several cars side-by-side, the only off-street parking on the site. The building was designed to provide space for customers to pay their monthly gas bills, transact other types of business, and to display new gas-fueled products and technology. The building provided office space for the company's staff. It was centrally air-conditioned.

Vogelsang commissioned Brownsville architect A. H. Woolridge to design the building. Alexander Hamilton Woolridge (1893-1985) was a Virginian who came to the Lower Río Grande Valley in 1917. Woolridge practiced in McAllen from 1919 until 1936, when he relocated to Brownsville, where he would spend the rest of his career.⁵⁹ Woolridge designed houses in Los Ebanos, Brownsville's first garden suburban neighborhood, for R. D. Sauber (1937), Lee B. James (1937), and Malcolm P. McNair (1937, NRHP, 2015). He and his partner Frank E. Torres designed additional houses in Los Ebanos for future mayor Herbert L. Stokely (1941) and Dr. James L. Rentfro (1941), as well as the country house of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, drilling contractor, S. Miller Williams (1941), built on a small estate on Old Port Isabel Road. In the postwar period, Woolridge designed the Hotel San Antonio in Matamoros, Tamaulipas (1948), the first hotel built outside the historic center of Matamoros, Manske Motors (1946, demolished), the Treon (now Casa de Palmas) Apartments in Los Ebanos (1947), a small law office building downtown for Judge J. T. Canales at 355 E. 10th Street (1949), side-by-side retail buildings for R. M. Duffey at 813 and 827 E. Elizabeth Street downtown (1951, 1948), and Palm Village Shopping Center (1953). Woolridge was a conservative architect.

The symmetrical composition of the Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building, the modernistic detailing of vertical piers subdividing the street front into center and end bays, and the building's yellow brick facing (as described in the *Brownsville Herald*) affiliate it with other late modernistic commercial buildings constructed in Brownsville in the postwar 1940s.⁶⁰ These conservative practices were visible in other buildings nearby designed by the Brownsville architects C. Lyman Ellis & Co. (Eagle Pharmacy, 1946; Johnson Nash, 1948) and Ellis F. Albaugh & Associates (Welch Studio, 1948 and the Dr. Francisco F. Calderoni Building, 1950). In the W. Elizabeth Street district, Woolridge also designed the education building of the First Presbyterian Church at 25 W. Elizabeth (1950) and the education building of the Church of the Advent (1956) on W. 2nd Street.

⁵⁷ "RGV Gas Company to Occupy New Office Building Monday," *Brownsville Herald*, 17 August 1947, p. 19; "Gas Company Gets Permit To Build," *Brownsville Herald*, 10 April 1947, p. 1.

⁵⁸ "RGV Gas Company To Occupy New Building Monday," *Brownsville Herald*, 17 August 1947, p. 19.

⁵⁹ "\$200,000 Land Transaction Is Made Here," *Brownsville Herald*, 27 May 1936, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *Texian Who's Who*, ed. by Sam H. Acheson, Herbert P. Gambrell, Mary Carter Toomey, and Alex M. Acheson, Jr., Dallas: Texian Co., 1937, p. 517.

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The 1947 building was constructed by J. B. Hughes. During the ten years that he worked in Brownsville as a general contractor, Hughes was responsible for building the Eagle Pharmacy at 416 W. Elizabeth (1946), the Sears, Roebuck & Co. store at 925 E. Elizabeth downtown (1948), R. M. Duffey's Western Auto store building downtown at 827 E. Elizabeth (1949), Dolly Vinsant Hospital in San Benito (1949), Harlingen City Hall in Harlingen (1951), Immaculate Conception Catholic School at 1235 E. Jefferson St. in Brownsville (1952), and the Lualarm Manor retirement home in Brownsville (1958, demolished).

The additions designed for Vogelsang by Bowman Swanson Hiester in 1959 and 1963 adhered, at least schematically, to what the *Herald* article described as the ultimate configuration of Woolridge's building, with a second wing on Lot 4 matching the 1947 wing in plan and a recessed planting area, open to W. Elizabeth Street, between the two wings.⁶¹ The 1959-60 one-story, 6,200-square-foot building was based on an asymmetrical T-plan configuration that reciprocated the plan configuration of Woolridge's building (Figures 8-9). Bowman Swanson Hiester completely refaced Woolridge's building. None of the 1947 architectural detail is visible.⁶² Bowman Swanson Hiester refaced the existing building and clad new construction with a mixed blend of red Roman brick laid in common bond. Specifications for the 1963 second-floor addition describe the brick as a hard-burned, dark red face brick of Río Grande City clay produced by the Valley Brick & Tile Co. at their Río Grande City plant.⁶³ Exterior wall surfaces are subdivided by indented courses of glazed black brick to form vertical and horizontal reveals. The 1963 specifications describe this as smooth charcoal glazed brick produced by the Elgin-Butler Brick & Tile Co. These reveals divide the walls into panels (stacked panels on the two-story portions of the building). Panelization is especially evident on the long, exposed east-side party wall, which borders Easterling & Van Tyne's open car lot and is therefore visible from W. Elizabeth St. Panelization enabled the architects to give the gas building a visually consistent architectural treatment, especially along an exposed party wall that might otherwise have been left architecturally unfinished.

Bowman Swanson Hiester's buildings from the late 1950s and first half of the 1960s are characterized by the practice of dividing wall planes into panels. In many of the firm's buildings, this was a way to generate architecture from the processes and materials of construction, a fundamental precept of the Modern Movement in twentieth-century architecture, which rejected the practice of basing the design of new buildings on historical models (exemplified by the Spanish style buildings of W. Elizabeth St.). In Brownsville, Walter Bowman's refacing of The Popular at 1240 E. Elizabeth Street downtown (1957, altered), the firm's own studio building at 1801 Central Boulevard (1958, demolished), the Griffey & Simmons Clinic at 825 Lakeside Boulevard (1961, altered), the S. S. Kresge Store at 1405 E. Elizabeth Street downtown (1961, demolished), Brownsville Savings & Loan Association Building at 701 E. Levee Street downtown (1962), Our Mother of Perpetual Help Rest Home at 519 E. Madison Street (1962, partially demolished), the Corrigan Dispatch Company Building at 735 International Boulevard (1961, demolished), Villa María Elementary School at 244 Resaca Boulevard (1962), Ferguson Motors at 2101 Central Boulevard (1963, demolished), and the Camille Sams Lightner Student Center (1966) and Arnulfo Oliveira Library (1966, altered) at Texas Southmost College display panelized wall surfaces.

Bowman Swanson's Hiester's use of concrete vaulting for the roof canopy of the building's W. Elizabeth St. loggia, and of an exposed frame of thin columns and tapered beams to support the vaults, represented their experimentation with the materials and processes of construction in order to achieve maximum economy. The firm employed curved, arched roof panels of concrete, each precast on the ground as a full bay, then lifted into place by a crane, for Coakley Junior High School in Harlingen (1962). They designed angled, folded-plate (rather than curved) precast roof segments supported on concrete columns and beams at La Feria High School in La Feria, Texas. And at Los Fresnos High

⁶¹ "RGV Gas Company To Occupy New Building Monday," *Brownsville Herald*, 17 August 1947, p. 19.

⁶² "Río Grande Valley Gas Co. To Enlarge Building," *Brownsville Herald*, 2 August 1959, p. 4; "Building Is on Upsurge in the City," *Brownsville Herald*, 5 May 1960, p. 1; "Gas Firm's History Covers 33 Years," *Brownsville Herald*, 28 February 1961, p. 7-D.

⁶³ "Specifications for Second Floor Addition to Río Grande Valley Gas Co. Building, 335 West Elizabeth Street, Brownsville, Texas, Dated: 2 May 1963," in possession of current building owners; "To Add Second Floor at RGV Gas Building," *Brownsville Herald*, 29 April 1963, p. 8.

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School in Los Fresno, Texas (1963), they clustered thin-shell concrete hyperbolic paraboloid vaults to construct sculptural “parasol” shade structures in the school’s patio.⁶⁴ At Wesley United Methodist Church in Harlingen, Bowman Swanson Hiester used up-curved, glue-laminated wood beans to produce the ascending sweep of the church’s interior worship space as well as the distinctive curved exterior profile of its roof. For the now-demolished Ferguson Motors in Brownsville, they deployed a line of freestanding, down-curved suspended canopies in front of the showroom building to shade the new and used Volkswagens on display.

The architects’ use of panels of turquoise Mexican mosaic tile introduced changes in texture, color, and proportion to the brick walls of the gas company building that did not violate the modern proscription against decoration. The 1963 specifications refer to “Mosaicos Italianes S.A. of San Antonio,” which seems to be Mosáicos Italianos of Mexico City, the tile production firm that supplied the tiles for the Guatemalan-Mexican artist Carlos Mérida’s mural at Hemis Fair ‘68 in San Antonio.⁶⁵ The tile panels made it possible for Bowman Swanson Hiester to cover up Woolridge’s architecture (and especially to diffuse the symmetry of its W. Elizabeth St. façade) while accommodating the location of existing display windows in the 1947 building. Tile panels also enabled them to emphasize the location of the new main entrance, which is recessed inside the courtyard loggia. At the Brownsville Savings & Loan Association Building, Bowman Swanson Hiester incorporated translucent marble panels in the building’s aluminum-framed glass curtain wall to screen the interior.⁶⁶ They used clay tile solar screens as sunshading devices in the Medical and Dental Clinic at 321 S. 13th Street in Harlingen. Not afraid of strong color, they faced the Hospital Shopping Center at 780 Central Boulevard in Brownsville (1960, altered) with brilliant green glazed brick from Monterrey and Our Lady of Guadalupe School (1964) with blue glazed brick.⁶⁷ The use of tile facing to give straightforward modern buildings material and textural richness and color can also be seen at the one-story W. Vernon Walsh Building at 910 E. Levee Street in downtown Brownsville (1959), designed by the Harlingen architects Tommy T. Carruth and Robert W. Cline for Edward J. Romieniec & Associates with a façade of Venetian mosaic glass tile.⁶⁸

In compliance with modernist practices, the courtyard loggia and planting bed integrate nature and architecture, obscuring the fact that there are no windows in Bowman Swanson Hiester’s additions except around the courtyard. Complete reliance on fluorescent lighting and central air-conditioning was a key attribute of the architecture’s modernity. Windowlessness underscored the substitution of a natural gas-fueled mechanical system for the vagaries of natural ventilation. Bowman Swanson Hiester’s office buildings of the 1960s—the Griffey & Simmons Clinic and Corrigan Dispatch Co. buildings in Brownsville, and the Central Power & Light Co. Office and Service Center at 311 E. Van Buren Ave., the Medical and Dental Clinic, and Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building at 1300 E. Harrison Ave., all in Harlingen—feature extensive expanses of solid wall, inasmuch as these buildings also relied on fluorescent lighting and air-conditioning for interior climate control rather than daylight and passive ventilation. Brownsville High School at 2615 Price Road (1967, now Homer Hanna High School) by Bowman Swanson Hiester, Wilhite & Winans, and Robert E. Velten, treated windowlessness as a defining modern attribute: the school was Brownsville’s first centrally air-conditioned school building.

Bowman Swanson Hiester

Bowman Swanson Hiester was organized in 1958 by Walter Clarkson Bowman (1912-1966), Ellis Lester Swanson (b. 1927), and James Wallis Hiester (b. 1929). Bowman, born in Waterproof, Louisiana, was a 1934 graduate of Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in engineering and a 1939 graduate of the University of Texas in architecture. In 1945 Bowman

⁶⁴ “The Coastal Bend Revolution,” *Texas Architect*, 13 (September 1963), pp. 5-6.

⁶⁵ Lloyd Larrabee, “Muralist Likes Work: Visits HemisFair,” *San Antonio Light*, 21 November 1967, p. 70.

⁶⁶ “A Bright New Address: You are Invited to our Open House, Now Through July 10,” *Brownsville Herald*, 1 July 1962, Section C.

⁶⁷ “Modern Hospital Shopping Center Formally Opened,” *Brownsville Herald*, 7 August 1960, p. 1-C; “Guadalupe School Job Underway,” *Brownsville Herald*, 3 December 1963, p. 9; “Sister Mary Annunciata, IWBS...,” *Brownsville Herald*, 25 August 1964, p. 4.

⁶⁸ “Walsh Building Combines Beauty with Service,” *Brownsville Herald*, 4 December 1959, p. 8.

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moved to Harlingen, twenty-five-miles northwest of Brownsville, to start an architecture practice in partnership with his former employer, the San Antonio architect Bartlett Cocke (1901-1992), who remained in San Antonio.⁶⁹ In 1948 Bowman persuaded an architect who attended the University of Texas at the same time he did, John G. York (1914-1980), to move to Harlingen and join the practice of Cocke & Bowman. In 1949, the firm was reorganized as Cocke, Bowman & York. John York was a brilliant and ambitious Modern architect. By the end of 1950, Cocke, Bowman & York's buildings began to be published in the national architectural press. The firm was involved with planning Harlingen's first garden suburban neighborhood, Laurel Park. In 1951, Cocke, Bowman & York's Laurel Park demonstration house won a national design award from the American Institute of Architects. Cocke, Bowman & York's buildings were published in Faber Birren's *New Horizons in Color* (1955), Katherine Morrow Ford and Thomas H. Creighton's *Designs for Living* (1955), Paul Hayden Kirk and Eugene D. Sternberg's *Doctors' Offices and Clinics* (1955), and John Peter and Edward A. Hamilton's *Aluminum in Modern Architecture* (1956). In June 1955, *Progressive Architecture* magazine produced a fourteen-page profile of Cocke, Bowman & York and buildings they had designed in Harlingen, Brownsville, and Corpus Christi without acknowledging that the firm had split up six months earlier because of a dispute between York and Bartlett Cocke.⁷⁰

Bowman started independent practice in Harlingen in 1954. Although not as charismatic a personality as John York, he was respected for his professional discipline, skill, and trustworthiness. It was Bowman, rather than York, to whom Harlingen's public school district, and other school districts in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for whom the firm had worked, turned.⁷¹ In late 1954 Bowman hired E. Lester Swanson to assist him. Born in San Antonio, Swanson was a graduate of the University of Texas (BArch 1952) and had recently married a woman from Brownsville.⁷² In early 1955, Bowman also hired James W. Hiester. Born in Brady, Texas, Jim Hiester was a graduate of Texas A&M College (BArch '53).⁷³ An economic recession in 1957 led Bowman to open a second office in 1958 in Brownsville, where he had continued to receive commissions from the Brownsville Consolidated Independent School District. Bowman made Swanson and Hiester partners and Hiester moved to Brownsville to run the office there. In 1958, David M. Wilson (1929-2002), an Oregonian who came to Texas to attend graduate school at Rice University, joined the firm.⁷⁴ In 1963, Wilson was made a partner and opened a branch office in Corpus Christi. In 1962, the economy of Harlingen, which had been quite robust in the 1950s, contracted sharply after the U.S. government closed Harlingen Air Force Base. Between 1960 and 1970, Harlingen lost nearly twenty percent of its population. Bowman's strategy of geographic diversification would be pursued in 1968, when the firm opened a fourth office in Dallas.

Walter Bowman died unexpectedly in March 1966 of a heart attack at age fifty-three. In 1967, the firm was reconstituted as Swanson Hiester Wilson Boland.⁷⁵ It was reorganized again in 1972 as Swanson Hiester Wilson Claycomb, which opened an office in Houston in 1974. Subsequent offices were opened in Reston, Virginia (1980), Temecula, California (1992), Montgomery County, Maryland (1996), and Austin and Fort Worth (1997). In 1995, the firm was reorganized as SHW Group. It specializes in school design. In 2014, SHW Group was acquired by Stantec, a

⁶⁹ George S. Koyl, editor, *American Architects Directory* (New York, 1955), p. 56; George S. Koyl, editor, *American Architects Directory* (New York, 1962) 71. E. Lester Swanson, *A Historical Journey into the Legacy of the SHW Group*, Houston: privately printed, 2006, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁰ *American Architects Directory* (New York, 1955), p. 625; *American Architects Directory* (New York, 1962), p. 786; "Laurel Park Takes Shape as Exclusive Home Area," *Valley Morning Star*, 12 June 1949, p. 12 and "House Designed for Today's Living On View Today," *Valley Morning Star*, 12 June 1949, p. 13. "National Honor Awards, 1951, Residential Classification: Award of Merit to Cocke, Bowman & York, Architects, for W. B. Uhlhorn Residence, Harlingen, Texas," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 16 (December 1951), pp. 259-260; ⁷⁰ "The Architect and His Community--Cocke, Bowman & York: Harlingen, Texas," *Progressive Architecture* 36 (June 1955), pp. 102-115, 153.

⁷¹ Swanson, *A Historical Journey*, pp. 3-5.

⁷² *American Architects Directory* (New York, 1962) 689; John F. Gane, editor, *American Architects Directory, Third Edition* (New York, 1970), p. 897.

⁷³ *American Architects Directory* (New York, 1962) 311; *American Architects Directory, Third Edition* (New York, 1970), p. 404.

⁷⁴ Swanson, *A Historical Journey*, pp. 6-8; *American Architects Directory, Third Edition* (New York, 1970), p. 999.

⁷⁵ Swanson, *A Historical Journey*, pp. 6-8.

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global design firm founded in Edmonton, Alberta. The firm closed its Harlingen office in 1984, its Corpus Christi office in 1988, and its Brownsville office in 1998.⁷⁶

Bowman Swanson Hiester, along with John G. York and Alan Y. Taniguchi (1922-1998), a California-born architect who practiced in Harlingen from 1952 to 1961, constituted a “Harlingen school” of mid-twentieth-century Modern architecture. Charles B. Croft (b. 1927), Tommy T. Carruth (1928-2014) and Robert W. Cline (1928-1976) in Harlingen; William H. Lambeth, Jr. (b. 1928) in Harlingen and McAllen; Gayle D. Wilhite (1922-2011), Robert E. Velten (1929-2016), and Marvin L. Boland, Jr. (1932-2017) in Brownsville; Gene P. Hobart (1928-2018) in Mercedes; Merle A. Simpson (1919-1993) in Weslaco and McAllen; and J. B. Hancock (1921-1978), Max E. Burkhart, Jr. (b. 1924), and David P. Ashcroft (1934-1993) in McAllen are other architects who practiced in the Lower Río Grande Valley in the 1950s and ‘60s and whose work is affiliated with the Harlingen school.⁷⁷ The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building exemplifies the precise, economical, tectonically disciplined practices of the Harlingen school of mid-century modern architecture in its crisp linearity, subdued but affective materiality, and its lyrical contours. The building stands out in the W. Elizabeth St. commercial district because of its Modern architectural attributes. It remains substantially intact.

The 1959-60 addition was constructed by the Brownsville general contractor W. D. Ferguson & Sons. William Denson Ferguson (1887-1961), founder of W. D. Ferguson & Sons Construction Company, built the J. C. Penney Co. store (1949), alterations and additions to the Brownsville City Market House (1949, NRHP 2019), the R. M. Duffey Building at 813 E. Elizabeth Street (1949), Neisner Brothers building downtown (1953), Ebony Heights and Cromack elementary schools (1954), Johny Snow’s Piggly Wiggly No. 2 (1956), Stell and Faulk middle schools (1957), the Pan American State Bank Building (1957), the Hospital Shopping Center (1960), The Vogue of Brownsville (1960), the refacing of the King Mart supermarket (1963), and the Arnulfo Oliveira Library and Camille Sams Lightner Student Center at Texas Southmost College (1966) in Brownsville.⁷⁸ After his death, Ferguson’s practice was carried on by his son, Donald D. Ferguson (1927-2008).

Conclusion

The Río Grande Valley Gas Company Building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Community Planning and Development at a local level of significance for its role as the corporate headquarters of the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company which supplied natural gas to communities in far south Texas between 1947 and 1972. It is significant for its impact on the development and administration of public utility services in Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley. The property is also nominated to the National Register under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the mid-twentieth-century period in U.S. Modern architecture, methods of construction associated with that period, and represents the distinctive work of the Brownsville and Harlingen architects Bowman Swanson Hiester, who contributed substantially to the formation of a “Harlingen school” in the 1950s and ‘60s. The property remains one of the few remaining, and substantially unaltered, commercial buildings in Brownsville designed by Bowman Swanson Hiester. The period of significance is 1947 to 1972.

⁷⁶ Swanson, *A Historical Journey*, pp. 15-49, II-VII.

⁷⁷ Larry Rowe, “City’s Modernist Architecture Withstands Test of Time,” *Valley Morning Star*, 25 September 1993; Michael Dailey, “Harlingen’s Niche Found in Its Buildings: York, Taniguchi Built City’s Reputation for ‘50s Modernism,” *Valley Morning Star*, 20 May 2001, p. C-3; Isaac García, “Architecturally Significant: Local Homes Built by Nationally Known Architects Showcased,” *Valley Morning Star*, 27 March 2011, p. 1; Michael Dailey, “Harlingen Should Protect, Promote Unique Architecture,” *Valley Morning Star*, 5 June 2011.

⁷⁸ “Fergusons City Hall Builders,” *Brownsville Herald*, 27 May 1949, p. 2B; “Ferguson Services Wednesday,” *Brownsville Herald*, 24 October 1961, p. 1.

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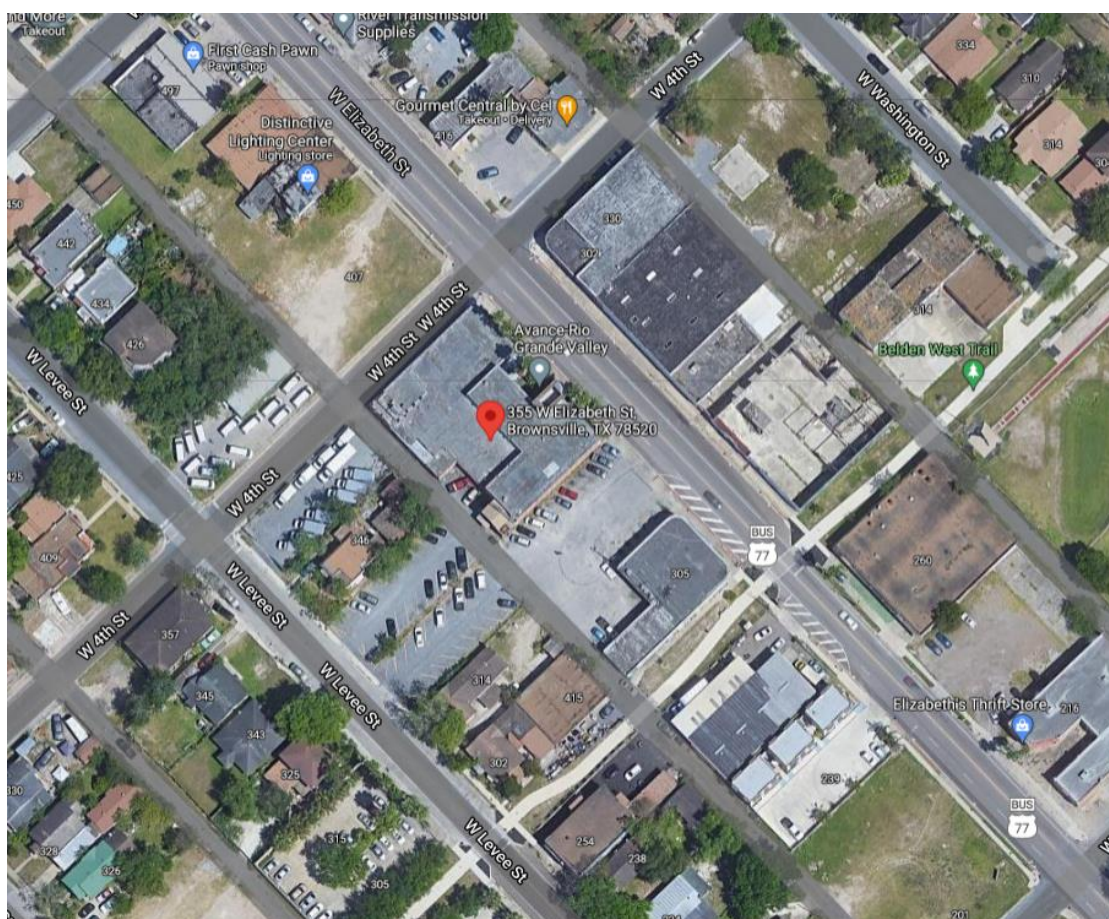
Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

MAPS

Map 1: Cameron County, Texas

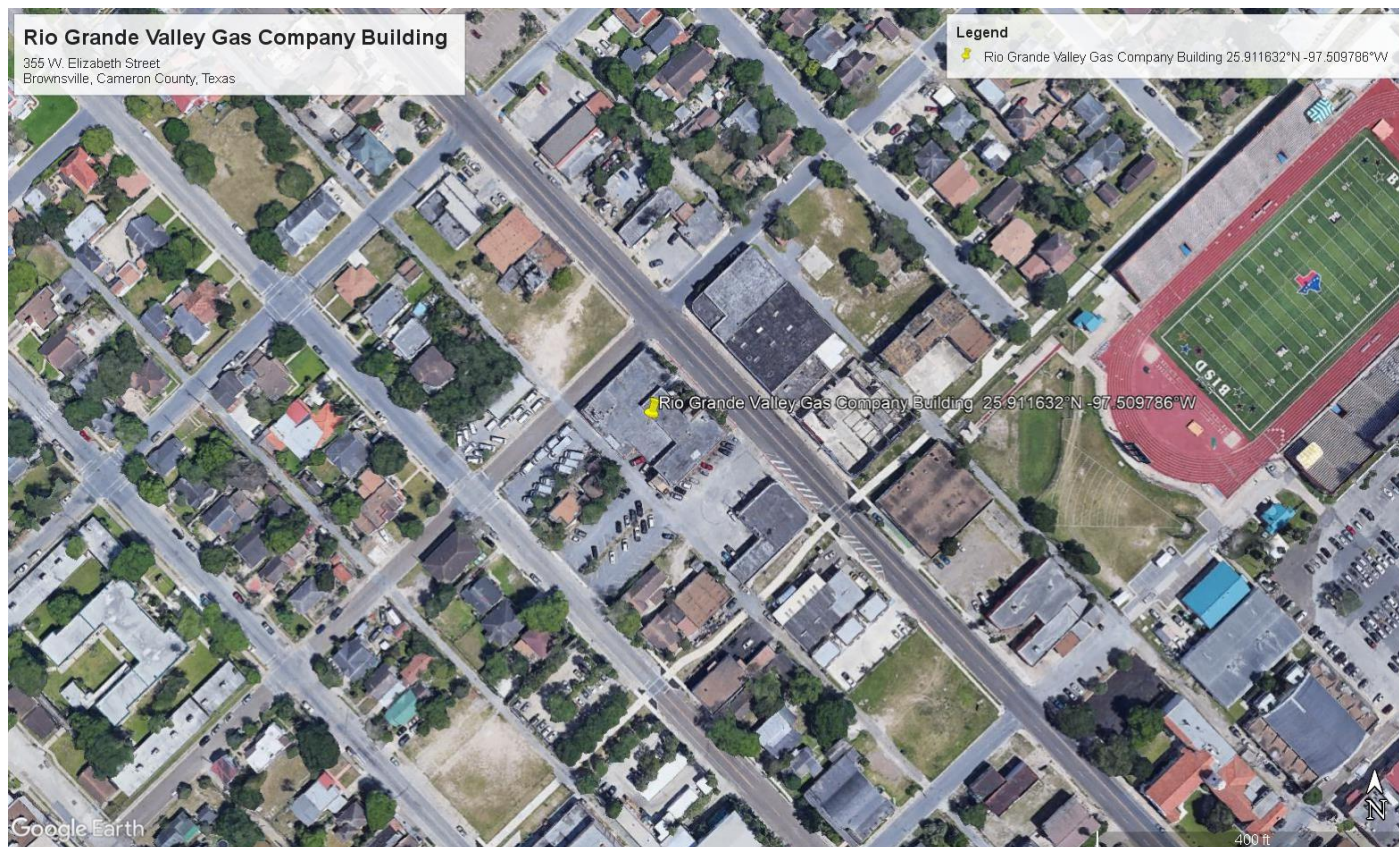


Map 2: Google Map, accessed July 22, 2021.



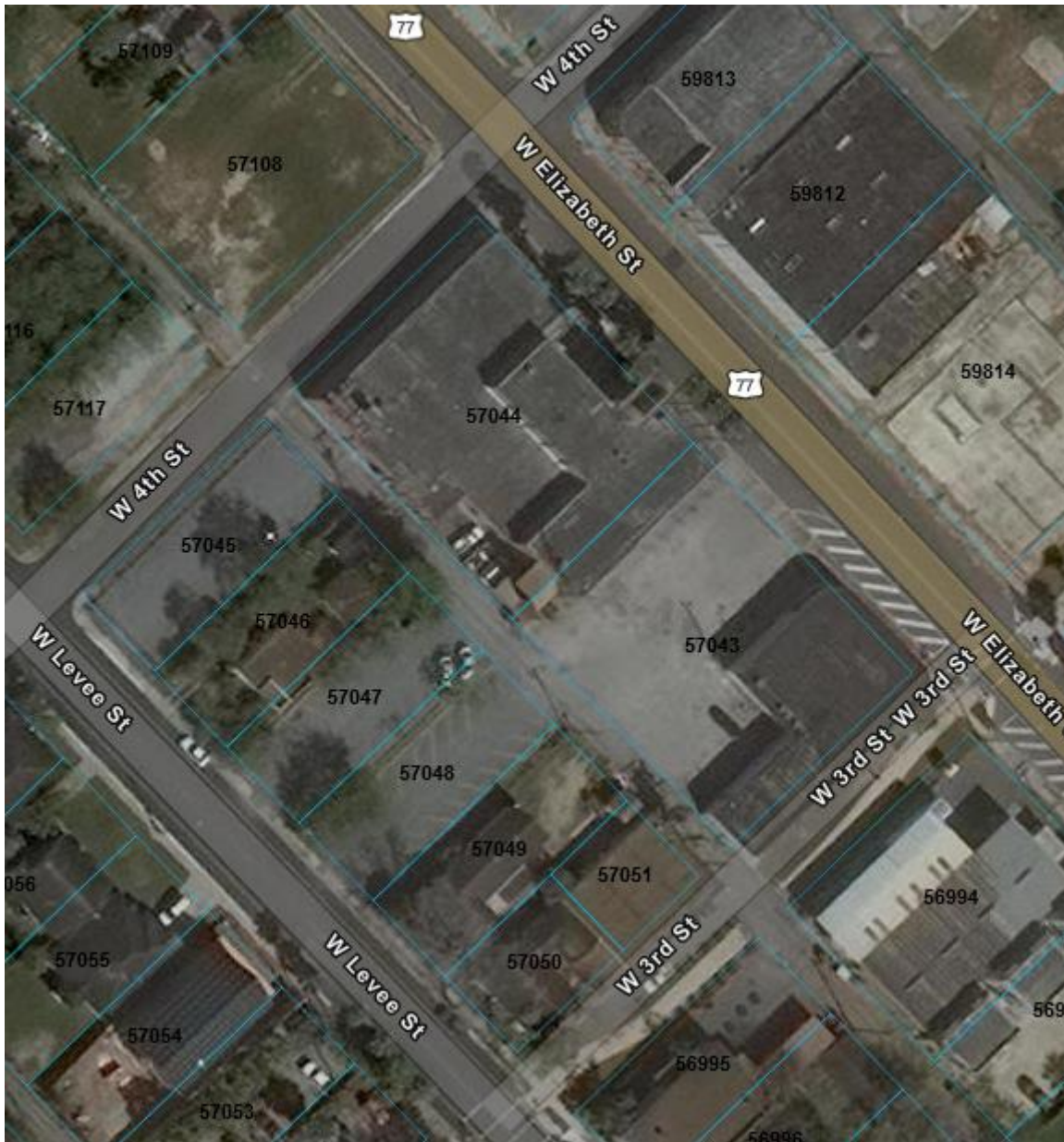
Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Map 3: Google Earth Map, accessed July 22, 2021.



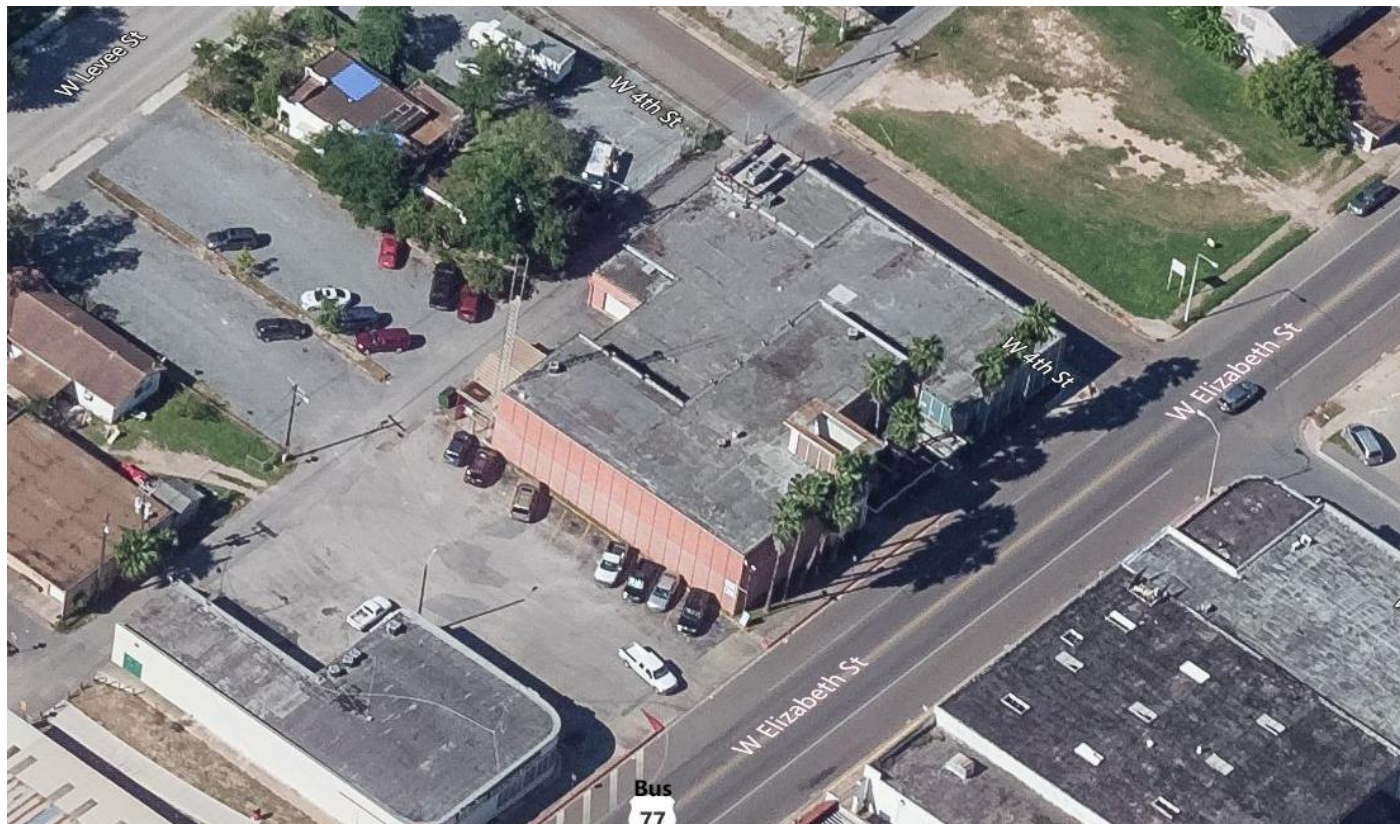
Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Map 4: Cameron Central Appraisal District showing nominated boundary which follows the current legal parcel. STILLMAN EXTENTION BROWNSVILLE LOTS 4-6 BLK 70A, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas, (0.4132 acres) (Property ID: 57044). Data accessed July 22, 2021.



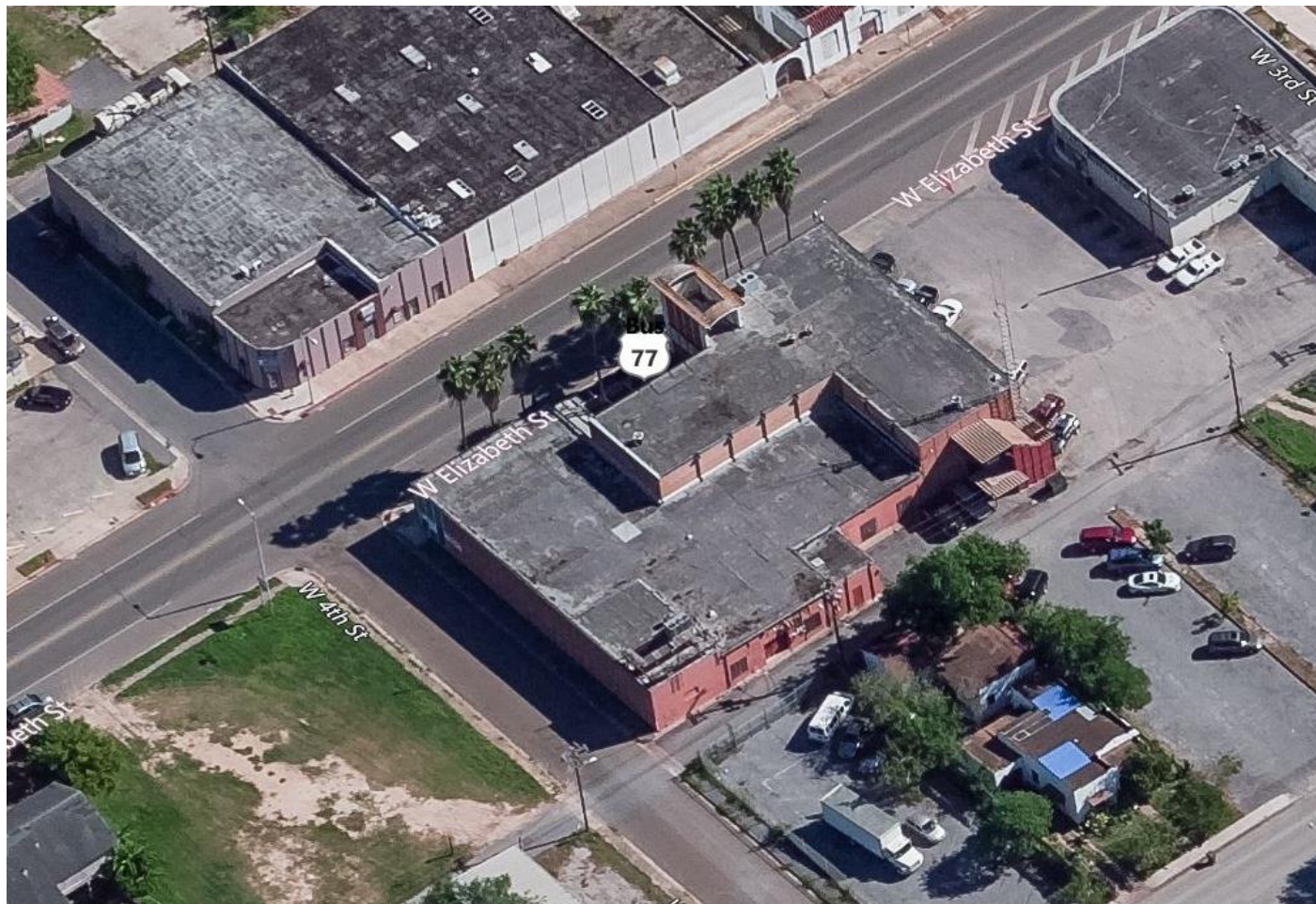
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Map 5: View of North Elevation, Bing Maps, accessed July 22, 2021.



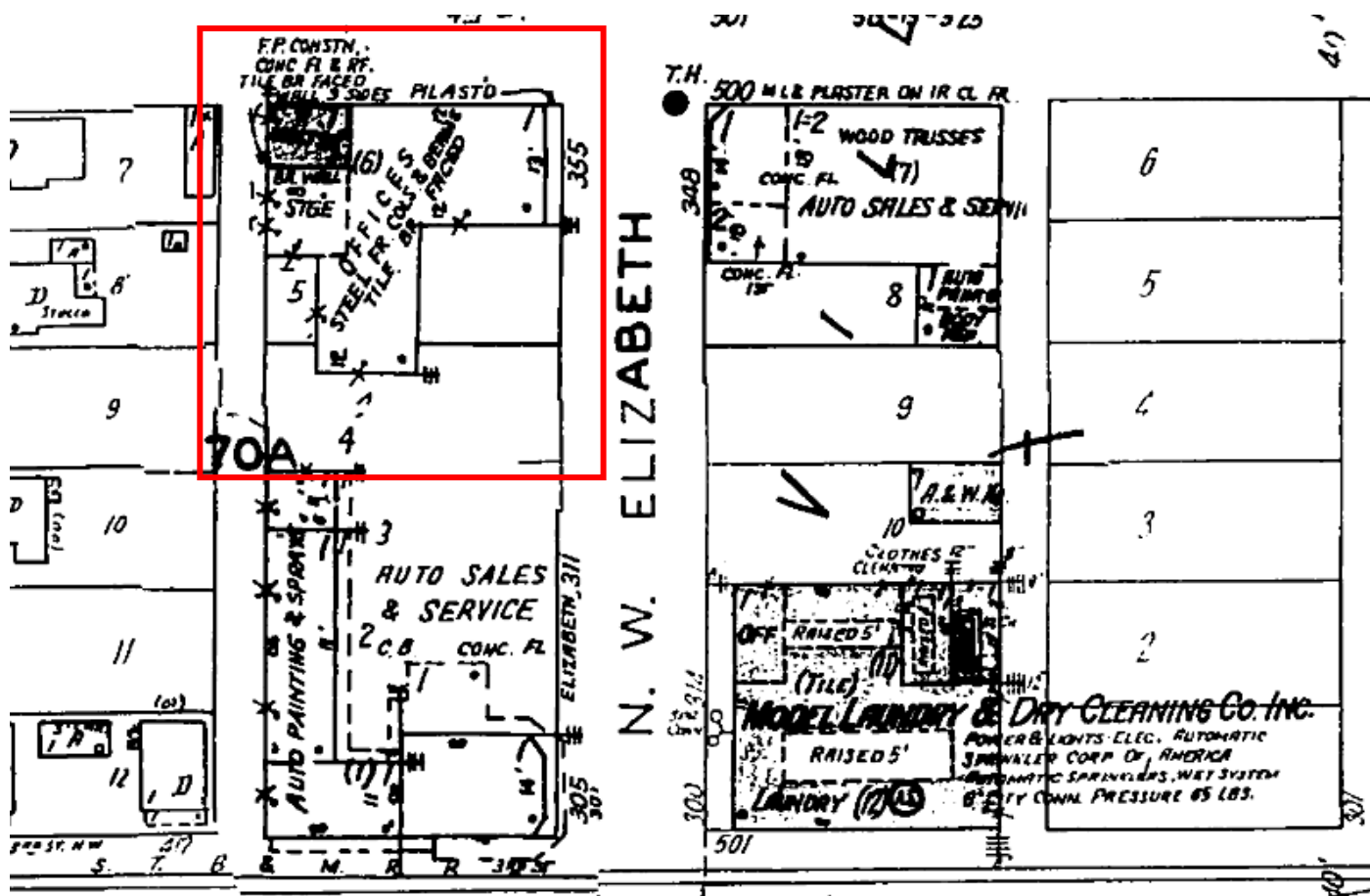
Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Map 6: View of south elevation, Bing Map, accessed July 22, 2021.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

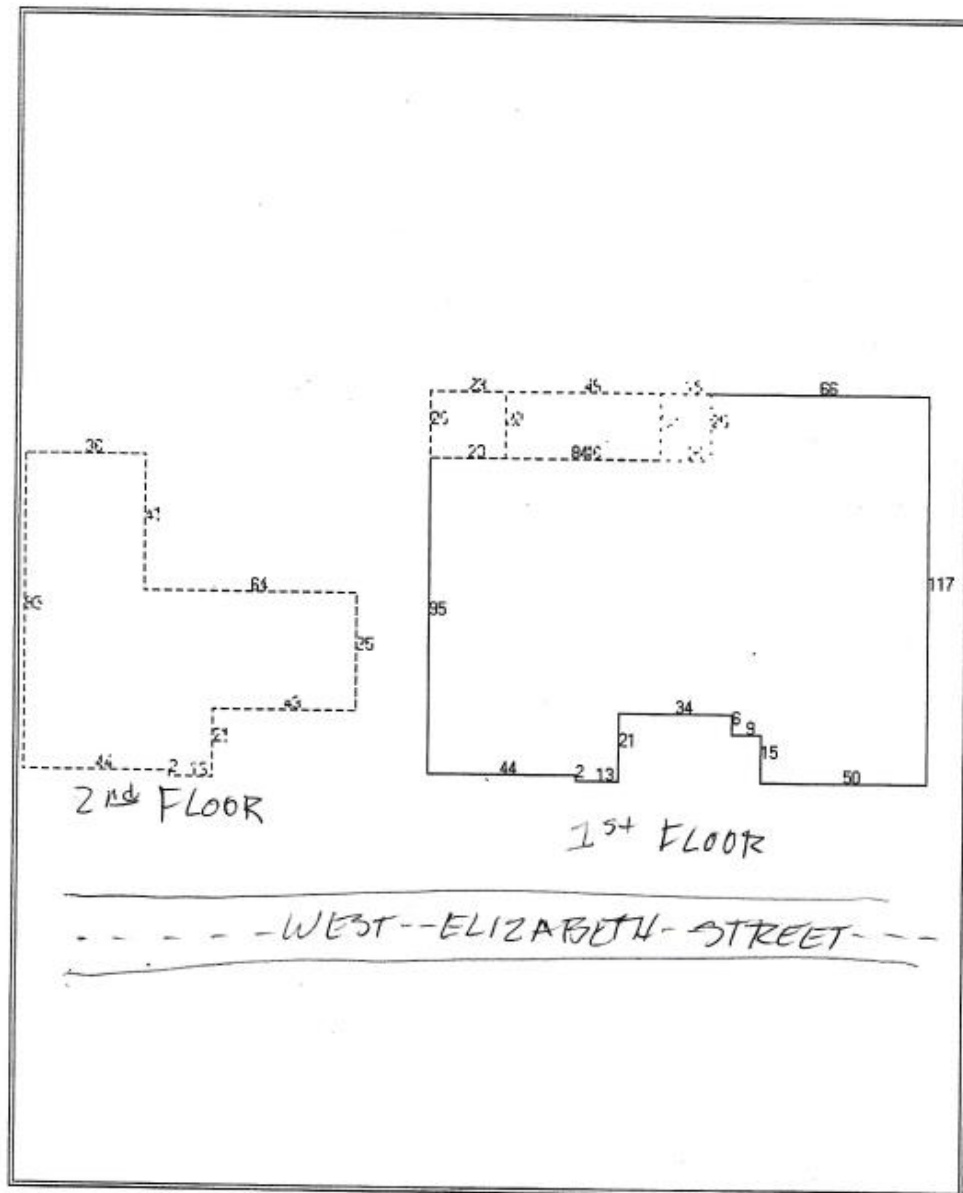
Map 7: Original 1947 footprint. Brownsville Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sept. 1930-Feb. 1949, Sheet 24, Courtesy ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

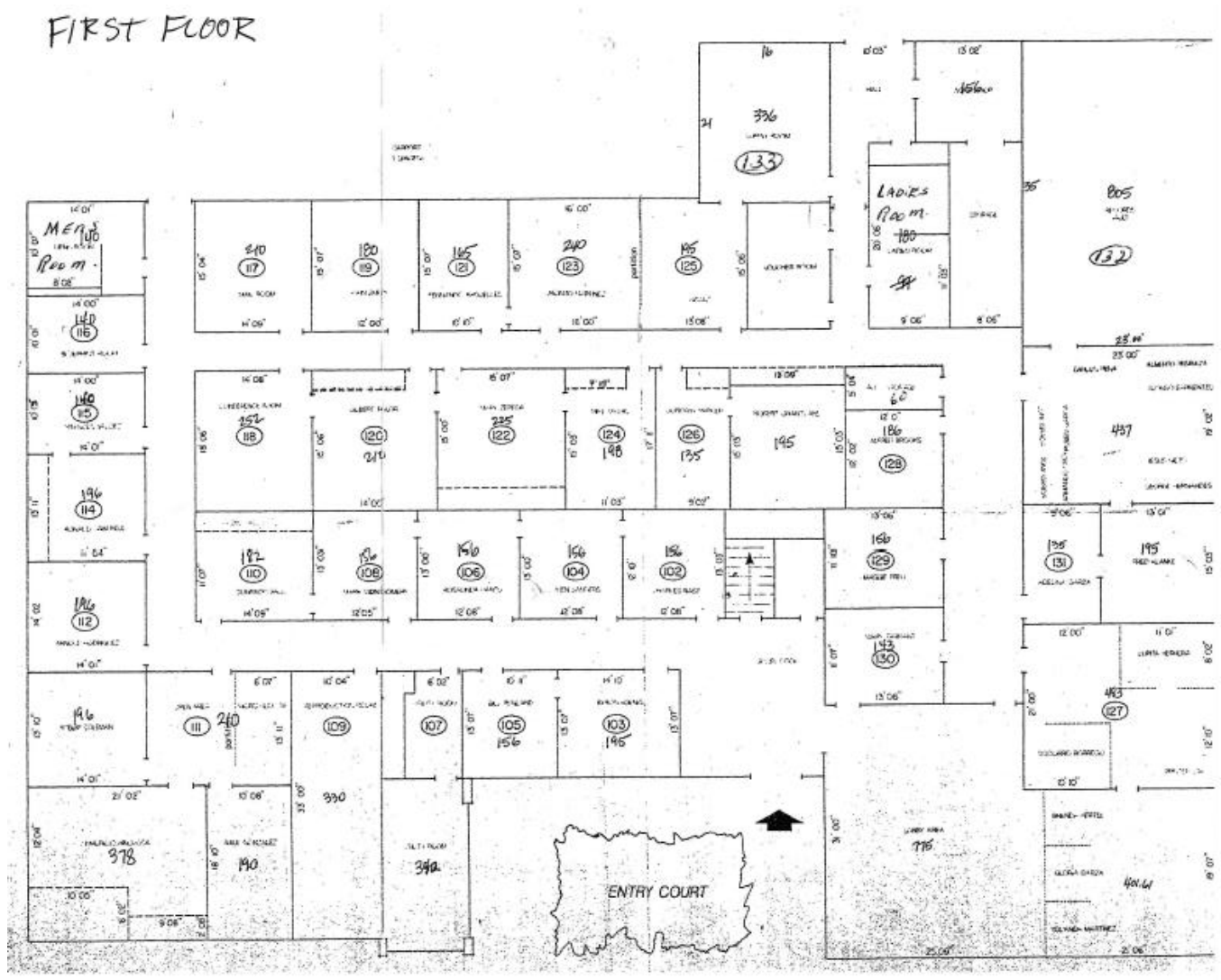
FIGURES

Figure 1: First and Second Floor Plan



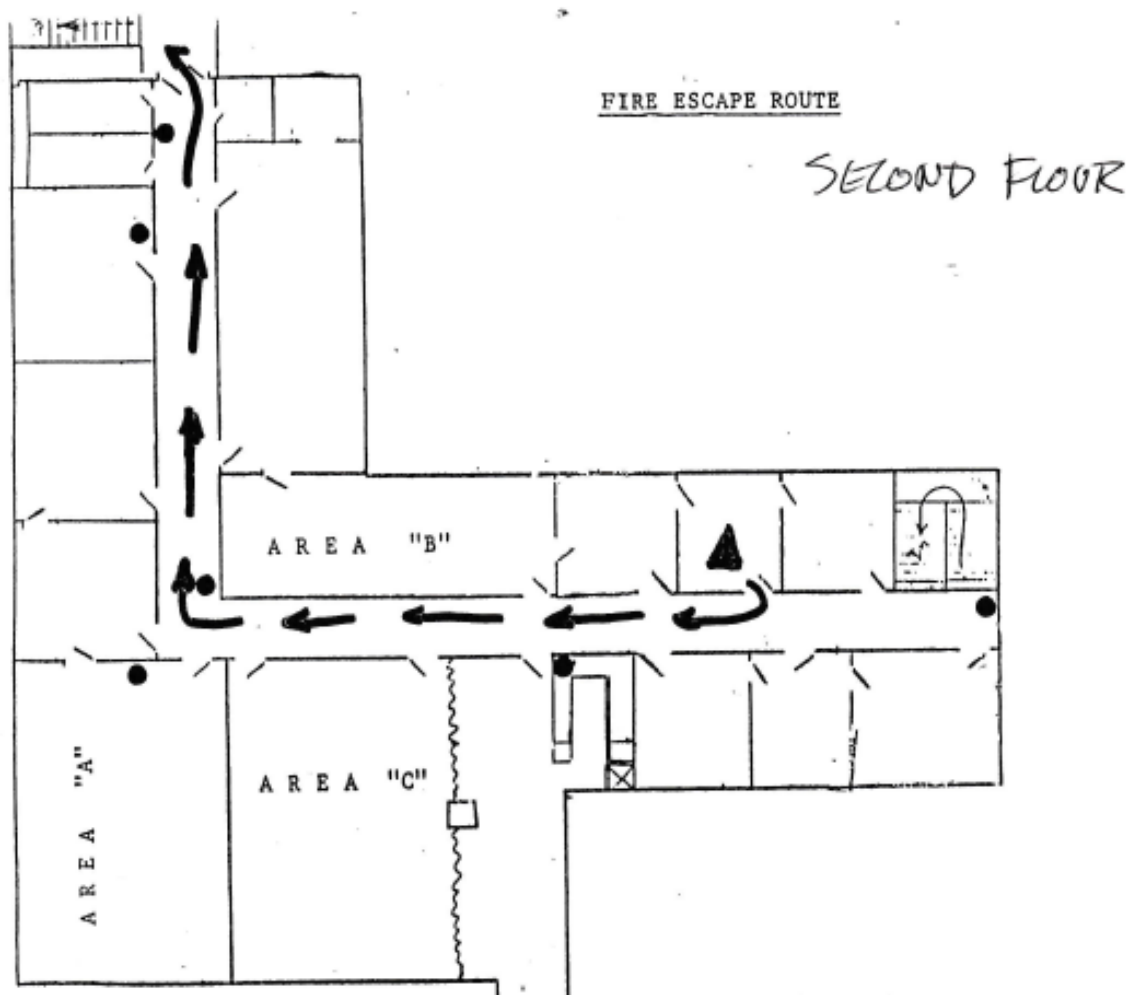
Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 2: First Floor Plan



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 3: Second Floor Plan



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 4: Advertisement for Rio Grande Valley Gas Company, *The Brownsville Herald* (Brownsville, Texas), Wed, Jan 29, 1947, Page 15.

Comfort Is Our Business; Too

Part of our business is to make certain that you'll be comfortable at home and at work during chill, disagreeable days, such as we have experienced already this winter.

It is our business to see that you always have a ready supply of natural Gas for Heating whenever you want it, just as we see that you have plenty of reliable natural gas for cooking, for refrigerating, for operating your business or your cannery.

It takes much planning and many operations to assure you of this supply. For instance, your Gas Company . . .

Patrols pipe lines constantly to detect leaks . . .

Inspects all measuring and regulating equipment to keep the supply constant . . .

Continuously plans new lines, and replacement of old . . .

Consults with all utility firms through its associations to assure the latest, most modern methods of providing service . . .

It is only through constant vigilance that your Gas Company can be sure, on cold disagreeable days, that you can turn a little valve, and . . . Presto! Have instant comfort.

RIO GRANDE VALLEY GAS COMPANY

" . . . if it's done with Heat, you can do it BETTER with Gas."

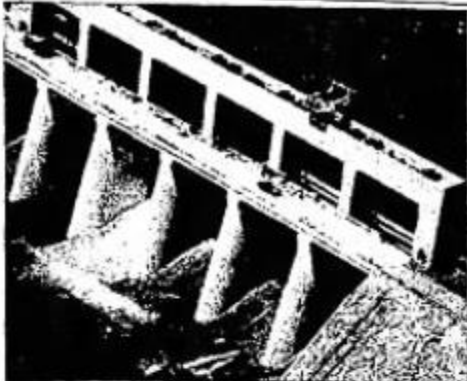
Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 5: One-story Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building in 1947, *The Brownsville Herald*, August 17, 1947, Page 19.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 6: Advertisement for Rio Grande Valley Gas Company, *The Brownsville Herald* (Brownsville, Texas), Sun, Oct 18, 1953, Page 12.




Falcon Dam . . .

a turning point in the Valley's History

Here, in this fabulous "land of manana", tomorrow has always promised a better day . . . yet nature, in the past few years, has often turned tomorrow into disappointment and personal tragedy for our Valley farmers and for those whose industry depends on the farmers' produce. That's why October 19, is so important to all of us . . . because this dedication of Falcon Dam marks the beginning of a new era in the Valley's history . . . a period in which "manana" will mean more to American and Mexican citizens alike . . . more security, more wealth, more progress and more closely knit bonds of friendship between our nations.

We of the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company feel particularly concerned with the significance of Falcon Dam, because for 26 years we have worked so closely with our Valley farmers. There is another reason, too. Back in 1927, your dependable, economical natural gas service also was hailed as an important milestone in Valley progress . . . and we have known the responsibility of living up to the standards expected of us. Much is expected, too, of Falcon Dam . . . we are certain it will effectively fulfill the ambitions which our good neighbor governments have always had for this rich and fertile land that is known as the Magic Valley.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 7: Advertisement for Rio Grande Valley Gas Company, *The Brownsville Herald* (Brownsville, Texas), Fri, Dec 31, 1954, Page 3.



DEDICATED to Valley progress for 27 years, the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company has been working hand in hand, with the Valley's people and industries in developing the rich region of the lower Rio Grande.

Here in this land so favored by nature are unlimited opportunities for a good and bountiful life. One of the richest agricultural areas on earth, the Magic Valley also is a land of promise for business and industry. Cotton, cattle, grains, oil, seafood, ores and minerals—all are here to add to the magic of our Valley.

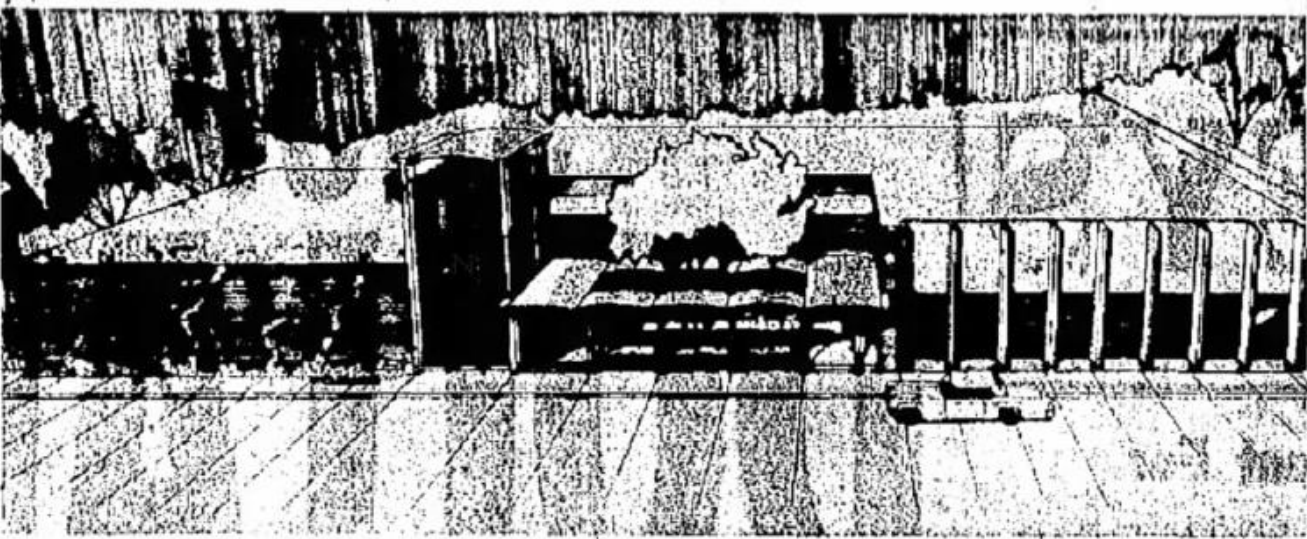
Along with Valley growth, natural gas service, too, has marked its own road to progress, bringing to the Valley's people more conveniences in daily living, a happier, easier way of life... and bringing to the Valley's business and industrial firms better facilities for expansion.

The Rio Grande Valley Gas Company has faith in the future of the Valley. Because of that faith, we have throughout this company's history, continued to improve our facilities and service to Valley homes and industries. To provide dependable gas service at the lowest possible cost will continue to be our aim... as the Valley continues its march forward.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 8: 1959 Architect's sketch showing alterations, *The Brownsville Herald*, August 2, 1959.



The sketch shows a long, single-story building with a series of vertical columns or pillars along its right side. The building is set against a background of trees and a hill. The foreground shows a paved area with some markings.

To be ready next February
Architect's sketch shows enlarged quarters of Rio Grande Valley Gas Co. at 355 W. Elizabeth St.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Co. To Enlarge Building

Plans are being drawn to modernize and enlarge Rio Grande Valley Gas Company's building at 355 W. Elizabeth St. to about twice its present size. It was announced Saturday by L. O. Vogelsang, president and chief executive officer of the company.

The building houses both the Brownsville district office and the general offices that serve the entire gas system. Construction is scheduled to start early in September and the building will be completed about next February.

"Our present building was constructed in 1947 and since that time the company has grown to where present facilities will no longer accommodate our personnel," Vogelsang said. "The additional office space will relieve the present crowded condition and provide room for anticipated future expansion," he stated.

"Improved facilities in that section of the building occupied by the local office will enable us to give better service to our Brownsville customers," Vogelsang added.

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 9: Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, c. 1959-1960 before 1963-1964 addition. Note metal grillwork likely transferred to rear elevation when tower was elevated to three stories. Name of Photographer: Purnell Commercial Photos



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 10: Advertisement for Rio Grande Valley Gas Company, *El Heraldo de Brownsville* (Brownsville, Texas), Sun, Jun 4, 1961, Page 5.

HIDDEN "LIFELINES"



to Valley Progress

Unseen below the Valley's fertile fields is a web of pipelines that carry natural gas, the fuel so vital to Valley progress. Day and night, the year round, these pipelines make possible the comfort and convenience of gas appliances in the home, the economy and efficiency of gas operation in industry. The construction and maintenance of these pipelines is the continuous responsibility of your gas company . . . one of the *many* important responsibilities involved in maintaining a high standard of dependable, economical natural gas service.



RIO GRANDE VALLEY GAS COMPANY
SERVING THE VALLEY SINCE 1927

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Figure 11: Advertisement for Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, *The Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, Texas), November 22, 1964, p. 6.

EVERYBODY WINS!

You're sure to win one way or the other during Rio Grande Valley Gas Company's SAVE ON SIX SALE

You'll win with big savings on the purchase of any one of six great gas appliances from Rio Grande Valley Gas Company. Or, you may win with a free prize in the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company drawing. You just can't lose during this spectacular sale. Rio Grande Valley employees are now contacting friends and neighbors to tell them about this great sale. And they are also telling folks how they can register for the free prizes shown below. If you haven't been contacted yet, call or visit any Rio Grande Valley Gas Company office. No obligation, of course.

FIRST PRIZE IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY GAS COMPANY DRAWING...

YOUR CHOICE...

Complete Home Laundry Center

OR...

O'Keefe & Merritt Contender Range

Or Outstanding Combination:
Easy gas dryer with a 20 power coat of flame retards. 20% more than any other dryer. Fast automatic water heater a Marine warranty on the hot water heater and tankless heater. Works 40 gallon water heater offers high performance and long life features.

Beautiful gas range gives you
some that function. Double burner back without venting. Offers complete hot water and faster, **glide away** counter, sharp looking, convenient work area.

2ND PRIZE: Easy Automatic Gas Dryer
First clothes like new after a just leave them... with plenty of air and little heat. Come back to service. Kinder to clothes. Reduces ironing time.

3RD PRIZE: Patio Group
Charming Patio gas grill is aluminum and provides all your needs in the back. Great outdoor "charcoal" food. Two Charming Gas Lights are finished solid copper finished in solid black, forged steel.

4TH - 10TH PRIZES: Cable Gas Light
Handsome. Refined. Has low expensive mantle which prevents shock, resulting in durability and long life. Can be easily mounted or attached to wall.

These prizes will be given away November 30. Anyone can register. Ask any gas company employee for information.

CHOOSE AN APPLIANCE AND LAY IT AWAY FOR CHRISTMAS


RIO GRANDE VALLEY GAS COMPANY

Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

PHOTOS

Photo #1 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0001)

Northeast façade (right) and southeast elevation (left), camera facing west.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #2 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0002)

Northeast façade (left) and northwest elevation (right), camera facing south.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #3 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0003)

Northwest façade (left) and southwest elevation (right), camera facing east.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #4 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0004)

Northern portion of southwest façade, camera facing north.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #5 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0005)

Southern portion of southwest façade, camera facing north.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #6 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0006)

Southeast façade (left) and northeast elevation (right), camera facing northwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #7 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0007)

Northeast façade, camera facing southwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #8 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0008)

Northern portion of northeast façade, camera facing southwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #9 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0009)
Central portion of northeast façade, camera facing southwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #10 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0010)
Southern portion of northeast façade, camera facing southwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #11 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0011)

Main entrance, camera facing southwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #12 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0012)

Detail of original windows next to the entrance doors, camera facing northwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #13 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0013)
Detail of canopy, camera facing northwest.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #14 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0014)

Detail of southeast façade (left) and northeast elevation (right), camera facing west.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

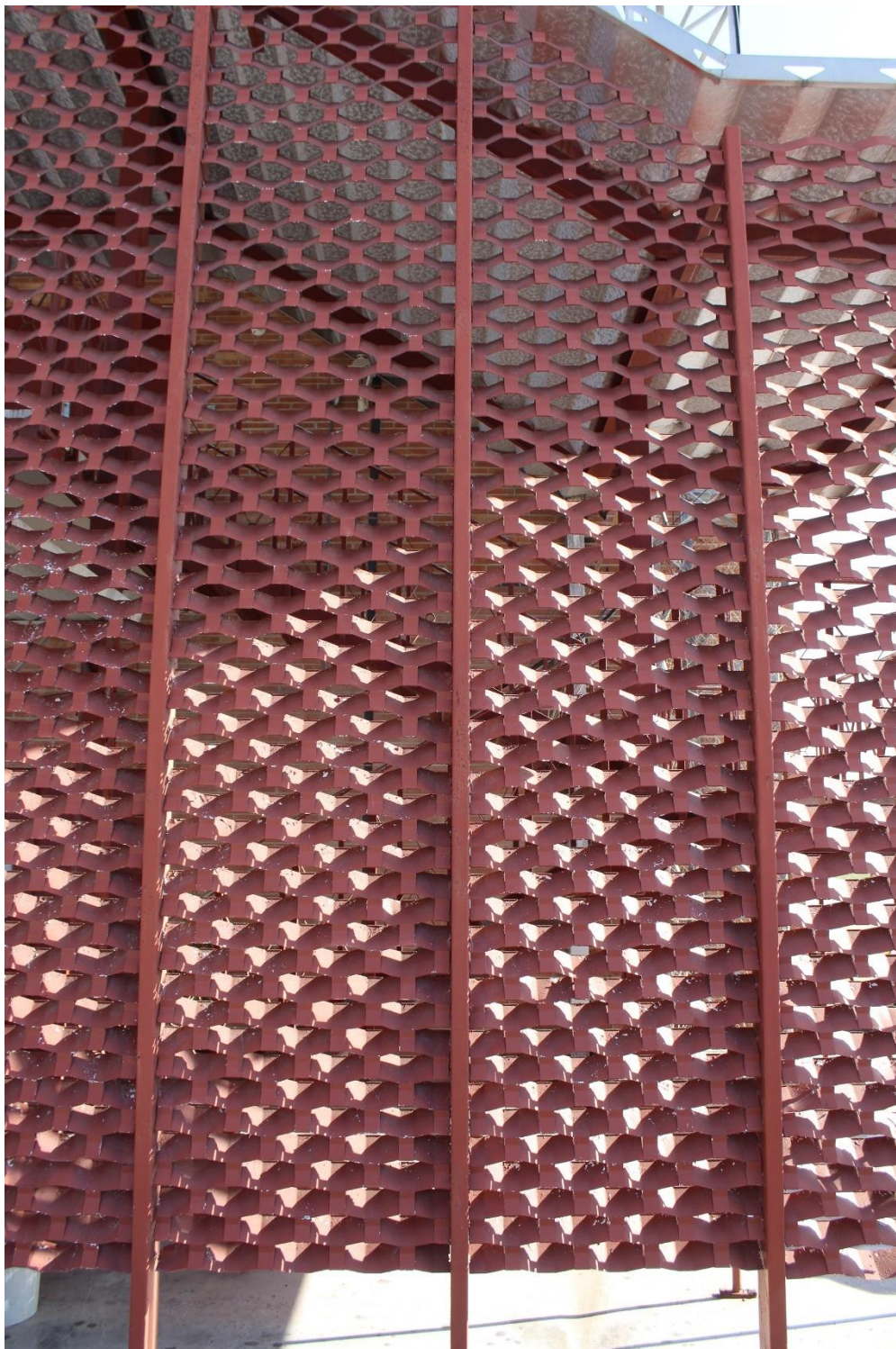
Photo #15 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0015)

Detail of rear staircase and metal trim, camera facing northeast.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #16 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0016)
Detail of metal trim, camera facing northeast.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #17 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0017)
Detail of main hall.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #18 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0018)

Detail of main right corridor of 1st floor parallel to the main façade.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #19 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0019)

Detail of right corridor of 1st floor perpendicular to the main façade.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #20 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0020)

Detail of rear corridor of 1st floor perpendicular to the main façade.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #21 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0021)

Detail of rear corridor of 1st floor parallel to the main façade.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #22 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0022)

Detail of left corridor of 1st floor parallel to the main façade.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #23 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0023)

Detail of mosaic tile mural located on staircase to 2nd floor.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #24 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0024)
Main corridor of 2nd floor parallel to the main façade.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #25 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0025)
Common space on Tower Area of 2nd floor.



Rio Grande Valley Gas Company Building, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo #26 (TX_CameronCounty_RGVGasBld_0026)
Left corridor of 2nd floor perpendicular to the main façade.

