

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Sour Lake Downtown Historic DistrictOther names/site number: N/AName of related multiple property listing: N/A**2. Location**Street & number: Three blocks in downtown Sour Lake centered around Sixth Street and S. Merchant StreetCity or town: Sour LakeState: TXCounty: HardinNot 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 level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 x A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

Private: ☒

Public – Local: _____

Public – State : _____

Public – Federal: _____

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Category of Property

Building(s): ____

District: x

Site: ____

Structure: ____

Object: ____

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions : COMMERCE/ TRADE, RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions: COMMERCE/ TRADE, RELIGION: religious facility

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: ITALIANATE
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY: AMERICAN COMMERCIAL
MID 20TH CENTURY: MODERN
20TH CENTURY: MISSION REVIVAL

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; STUCCO; GLASS; CORRUGATED
STEEL; CAST STONE

Narrative Description Summary Paragraph

The Sour Lake Commercial Historic District in Sour Lake, Hardin County, encompasses a small cluster of 14 buildings that represent the town's historic economic core. Developed between 1903 and 1966, the district reflects typical small-town Texas commercial architecture of the early to mid-twentieth century. Most buildings are one-part brick commercial blocks with parapets, a common form during the period. Although very few historic photographs exist to guide restoration efforts, repairs and alterations to contributing buildings have generally aimed to preserve their historic character. These changes are typically reversible and do not obscure key features, forms, or materials. While some buildings have been altered or constructed outside the period of significance, the district as a whole remains the best and most intact representation of Sour Lake's early commercial development.

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Narrative Description

Note: Photo ordering in the photo continuation sheets (beginning on page 56), follows the order of parenthetical references within the narratives in Section 7 and Section 8 below. For geographically arranged thumbnail photos, refer to the inventory table at the end of this section.

Geography and Topography

Sour Lake is located in the southeast corner of Hardin County. According to the *Handbook of Texas Online*:

Hardin County, in the Big Thicket of Southeast Texas, is part of the larger East Texas Timberlands region. The county's center is sixty-eight miles northeast of Houston, twenty-three miles northwest of Beaumont, and fifty-four miles from the Gulf of Mexico... Surface soils consist of a sandy loam, and the subsoil is red clay. Quicksand pits are found within forested areas. The elevation rises from thirty to 200 feet; the terrain is level in the west and undulating in the east. In addition to timber, oil and gas, sand, gravel, and salt domes are found within the county.¹

Sour Lake is encompassed in the Beaumont-Port Arthur Metropolitan Statistical Area. Its location approximately 40 miles northwest of Port Arthur provides a strategic position for shipping-related commerce. Oil is abundant in the surrounding land, and the eponymous "Sour Lake" is rich in sulfur.

The lake, which is in fact a two-acre pond, is to the northwest of the present-day town of Sour Lake. The proposed Downtown Sour Lake Historic District occupies the northwest corner of Sour Lake's current city limits (Maps 1-2).

Evolution of the Downtown Sour Lake Historic District

Sour Lake's earliest buildings were wood-frame construction (Figure 1), including the 1883 Sour Lake Springs Hotel, a beacon of Sour Lake's time as a health resort.² In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the earliest buildings constructed in town included stores and saloons. However, it was the 1903 discovery of an oil gusher at nearby Sour Lake Field that spurred the development of the area. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Sour Lake saw the construction of post offices, schools, and churches in response to the oil

¹ Patricia L. Duncan, "Hardin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 10, 2023.

² Renée Hart Wells, *Hardin County: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Co., 2009), 11.

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boom – all wood-frame (Figure 1). Citing the long-term success of oilfields in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, local advocates sought to follow their example by constructing more permanent structures, which would “create confidence in the growth and permanency of the town.”³ It was not until 1903, however, that the first brick building was constructed in downtown Sour Lake.⁴ Over the next few decades, the old, wood-frame buildings comprising the town were replaced with more permanent construction. Most of the contributing resources in the proposed district were constructed during this time. Though a circa 1950 Occupancy map shows a dense and thriving downtown (Figure 2), the 1966 Texas Fire Insurance Department Map shows that the density of downtown Sour Lake had thinned dramatically over the following 16 years (Figure 3). The buildings and empty lots characterizing downtown Sour Lake in 1966 are mostly extant today. The town clusters at the intersection of Sixth and Merchant streets. These streets are the most intact in the downtown area; they are surrounded by large vacant lots that lie outside the proposed historic district boundaries. These vacant lots and the general lack of density in downtown Sour Lake indicate the economic decline following the town’s oil boom.

Layout and Circulation Pattern Development

Downtown Sour Lake is situated immediately south of Texas State Highway 105 just one-half mile from its junction with Texas State Highway 326. Historically, the Southern Pacific Railroad line passed through Downtown Sour Lake; it is no longer extant (Figure 4). Texas State Highway 105 runs west to east and forms the northern boundary of the district, where it is a four-lane wide highway (Maps 1-2). The city streets are organized into a grid system with streets running west to east and north to south. Sixth Street is the primary west-to-east artery, and Merchant Street is the primary north-south artery. Sidewalks with brick pavers line the streets (Photo 4), and parking lots and empty fields are common (Photos 5-6).

Relationships of Buildings to One Another

The 14 buildings comprising the district cluster around the intersection of Sixth and Merchants Streets. Most are part of commercial blocks and share party walls with neighboring buildings. Only one of these resources is two stories: the Carpenter Building at 730 Sixth Street (Photo 1). Four resources are free-standing: the building at 104 Merchant Street is surrounded by a parking lot to the south and State Highway 105 to the north (Photo 7); the Radley Electric Workshop at 650 Sixth Street is set back from the street and surrounded by a grassy lot (Photo 8); the Post Office at 665 Sixth Street is surrounded by

³ “Contracts Signed Up: Five More Brick Buildings Are to be Erected At Once,” *Oil City Visitor*, July 15, 1916, Vol. 9, No. 2.

⁴ “Contracts Signed Up: Five More Brick Buildings Are to be Erected At Once.”

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empty lots (Photo 9), and the First M.E. Church South at 615 Sixth Street is at the far east end of the district, separated from the majority of resources by a field (Photo 6).

Range and Distribution of Construction Dates

The proposed District contains 14 buildings constructed between 1903 and 1966. Of these, six were constructed between 1916 and 1920 (125-135 Merchant Street, Photo 11 and 675-695 Sixth Street, Photo 12). One resource was constructed in 1921 (First M.E. Church at 615 Sixth Street, Photo 2), two in the 1930s (758 Sixth Street, Photo 13 and 690 Sixth Street, Photo 14), two in the 1950s (104 Merchant Street, Photo 7 and 650 Sixth Street, Photo 3), and two in the 1960s (680 Sixth Street, Photo 14 and the Post Office, Photo 15). Three of the noncontributing buildings received alterations in 2008 (165 Merchant Street, Photo 16 and 680 and 690 Sixth Street, Photo 14).

Property Types and Building Forms

Overall, the proposed Sour Lake Downtown Historic District is characterized by commercial properties. Six of the 10 contributing buildings are one-part commercial blocks, many of which have distinctive parapets: 675 Sixth Street, 685-689 Sixth Street, 695 Sixth Street (Photo 12), 104 Merchant Street (Photo 7), 125 Merchant Street, and 135 Merchant Street (Photo 11). The Carpenter Building (730 Sixth Street, Photo 1) is the only two-part commercial block. The remaining three contributing resources are a warehouse (650 Sixth Street, Photo 3), First M.E. Church (615 Sixth Street, Photo 2), and an oblong box U.S. Post Office⁵ (665 Sixth Street, Photo 15). The 1921 First M.E. Church, with its impressive architectural design and substantial size, reflects a period of economic prosperity, and despite serving a different function than surrounding buildings, its ties to the area's commercial development make it a contributing resource to the district.

Common Construction Materials

The majority of resources in the district are brick masonry, with the exception of two contributing buildings: the building at 104 Merchant Street has cinderblock masonry walls (Photo 7), and the Radley Electric Workshop at 650 Sixth Street has corrugated steel siding (Photo 3). Three noncontributing buildings are clad in a combination of stucco and stone (680 and 690 Sixth Street and 165 Merchant, Photos 7, 14, and 16). The one remaining noncontributing building is clad in vinyl siding (758 Sixth Street, Photo 13).

⁵ As of 2026, the U.S. Post Office operates within a privately-owned building.

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Architectural Styles

Most resources in the Downtown Sour Lake Historic District embody the American Commercial movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Carpenter Building at 730 Sixth Street exemplifies this movement and also embraces Italianate influences of the late Victorian era (Photos 1, 17), with character-defining features including narrow second-story windows, a parapet with corbelled brackets, and rusticated stone detailing. The First M.E. Church South at 615 Sixth Street displays the Mission Revival style, characterized by a molded parapet and round-arched central window (Photo 2). The Post Office at 665 Sixth Street provides the district's only example of Mid-century Modern architecture, with a character-defining flat roof, cantilevered canopy, and wall of large metal-framed fixed windows (Photo 15).

Architectural Description of Contributing and Noncontributing Resources

104 Merchant Street (Contributing) Resource 1

Constructed in 1950, the building at 104 Merchant Street is a free-standing one-part commercial block building with painted cinderblock walls and a flat parapet (Photo 7). The building is at the southwest corner of Merchant Street's intersection with State Highway 105, and its primary elevation faces east toward Merchant Street. Historically, the building most likely shared a party wall with a neighboring building to its south that is no longer extant—a parking lot now occupies this space. The north elevation, which faces State Highway 105, would have always been exposed. The primary entrance to the building is situated at the east end (left side if looking at the building) of the elevation and contains a fully glazed aluminum door flanked by skylights. There is a single-pane aluminum display window at the west (right) side of the elevation. Four square wood posts support a sloped, red-painted corrugated metal awning that spans the elevation over the entrance and window. The north elevation facing State Highway 105 features a painted mural containing four images including the 1883 Sour Lake Hotel (non-extant). The now exposed south elevation has a line of punched window openings. Historically, the building functioned as Q.P. Grocery.⁶

111 Merchant Street (Noncontributing) Resource 2

The building at 111 Merchant Street was constructed around 1965 as a restaurant. The building faces west toward Merchant Street, and its north side elevation faces Highway 105. Today, a surface parking lot is located between the building and Highway 105 (Photo 25); it is likely that the buildings historically in this location were demolished around the

⁶ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 18.

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time of the restaurant's construction to create the adjacent parking lot. The building's form is a one-part commercial block with brick exterior walls and a flat roof. Extensive alterations ongoing in 2023 significantly altered the building's appearance. On the front façade, the original front storefront and window have been enclosed with fiber-cement siding and glass block, the doors have been replaced, and the canopy has been replaced. On the north elevation, new window and door openings have been installed. The historic brick masonry has been painted on all visible exterior wall surfaces. Because no materials or architectural features from the historic period remain visible today, the building lacks integrity to contribute to the district's historical significance.

*135 Merchant Street (Contributing) **Resource 3***

The building at 135 Merchant Street is a part of a long contiguous one-part brick commercial block building with five storefronts that occupies the east side of the 100 block of Merchant Street (Photos 10, 12). 125 Merchant Street comprises the rest of the commercial block (discussed above). 135 Merchant Street contains the first bay (north, left if looking at the building) and second bay (center); the second bay has a parapet, making it taller than the flanking bays (Photo 23). The first bay contains three recessed panels above the intact row of transoms; the northernmost panel is wider than the rest of the panels comprising 135 and 125 Merchant Street, and the storefront below is the same width. The center bay has two recessed panels over intact transoms. The entrances on 135 Merchant Street are flush with the elevation rather than recessed as on 125 Merchant Street. The circa 1950 Occupancy Map Shows that the first bay (north) contained the Royal Café, P.A. Childress Cleaning and Tailor Shop, and F.D. Smith Quality Cleaners.⁷ The center bay contained Gorden's Furniture Store, J.W. Parr Furniture Store, Frank Swain Hardware, White-Luce Hardware, Western Auto, and Ernie's Ace Hardware.⁸

*758 Sixth Street (Noncontributing) **Resource 4***

The building at 758 Sixth Street is one story with a slanted shed roof (Photo 13). It is located on the north side of Sixth Street and shares a party wall with the Carpenter Building (730 Sixth Street) to the east. Originally constructed in 1930 as a one-part brick commercial block, the building has undergone alterations including the infill of storefronts with vinyl siding and installation of stucco. Four recessed panels mark the primary (south) elevation between the infilled storefront and the shed roof. Historically, the building at 758 Sixth Street was known as the Earl Hankamer Building and housed Hankamer Clothing for Men

⁷ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 20-21.

⁸ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 22.

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as well as Hubbard's Clothing for Men, Mrs. Mooney's Dress and Apparel Shop, and a beauty shop.⁹

730 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 5

The Carpenter Building (730 Sixth Street) is the sole two-part commercial building in the district, and it is by far the most ornate, embodying the Italianate Style through its heavy cornice with corbelled brackets (Photos 1, 17). Situated at the northwest corner of the intersection of Sixth and Merchant streets, the Carpenter Building is the visual anchor for the downtown area. The building's primary (south, facing Sixth Street) and east (facing Merchant Street) elevations are nearly identical, with entrances and aluminum storefronts on the first floor and nine-over-four wood windows with shutters at the second floor. A cast concrete band with decorative brackets lines the tops of the windows. A fabric awning wraps around both elevations, and each elevation bears two panels with the lettering "THE CARPENTER BUILDING" and "SOUR LAKE, TEXAS." The primary elevation is distinct, however, as it features a decorative panel with a centered star centered between the second-floor windows. Additionally, a stepped parapet with recessed brick panels and stone coping lines the top of the primary elevation; the parapet contains a centered circular plaque that reads "Established 1903."

Constructed in 1903, as the circular plaque indicates, the building at 730 Sixth Street was the first brick building in Sour Lake and is the oldest extant building in the district.¹⁰ Purpose-built for the First National Bank, it was the only surviving building following the 1904 fire that devastated downtown. In 1909, the bank changed hands to Sour Lake State Bank. J.M. Carpenter operated the Carpenter Corporation from the second floor, lending the building its name. The first floor housed Sour Lake State Bank, and the second floor housed the Carpenter Corporation and rented out individual offices to various businesses and organizations including telephone offices, the school tax collector's office, a dentist's office, and Woodmen of the World.¹¹

125 Merchant Street (Contributing) Resource 6

The building at 125 Merchant Street is situated at the northeast corner of the intersection of Sixth and Merchant Streets (Photo 22). It, along with 135 Merchant Street to its north, comprises part of a long contiguous one-part brick commercial block building with five storefronts that occupies the east side of the 100 block of Merchant Street (Photos 10, 11).

⁹ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 13.

¹⁰ "Property ID: 39432," Hardin County Appraisal District Map, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://esearch.hardin-cad.org/>.

¹¹ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 14a-b.

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The building is characterized by wood storefront systems with multilite transoms and a wood awning with a corrugated metal roof and metal tie rods anchoring it to the building with metal tie rods. It consists of three bays, and the northmost bay and southmost bay are nearly identical, flanking a central bay that has a raised flat parapet. There is a brick cornice lining the roof across all three bays, including on the higher central bay, and recessed panels fill the space between the transoms and the roof.

The building at 125 Merchant Street contains the two southernmost storefronts of the building. The transoms on 125 Merchant Street are infilled with brick, and there are four recessed panels above the row of infilled transoms. The storefronts contain recessed entries with glazed doors flanked by skylights. The south storefront entrance is at the corner of the building, and the canopy wraps around the corner to the south elevation which faces Sixth Street. 125 Merchant Street abuts the noncontributing building at 180 Sixth Street to the east. Part of this elevation contains a stucco wall with a mural depicting the 1883 Sour Lake Springs Hotel. Historically, the building at 125 Merchant Street housed Cohen's Dry Goods, Dornac Grocery, and Howell's Dry Goods; the east part of the building that sports the stucco and mural housed V.B. Daniel's Insurance and the judge's office.¹²

*690 Sixth Street (Noncontributing) **Resource 7***

The building at 690 Sixth Street is a one-part commercial block building with a flat roof and metal coping at the roofline (Photo 14). It is located on the north side of Sixth Street with its primary elevation facing south. The building is part of a commercial block containing the buildings at 680 and 690 Sixth Street as well as the south elevation of 125 Merchant Street. Although originally constructed in 1935, the building received multiple alterations in the mid-2000s, including non-historic stucco, stone, and brick veneer siding, as well as a non-historic sloped corrugated metal canopy supported by square wood posts. The canopy extends east across the primary (south) elevation of the neighboring building at 680 Sixth Street. 135 Merchant Street abuts the subject building at its west elevation. The circa 1950 Occupancy Map shows that over time, the building housed Gulf States, Harrison's Liquor Store, Sour Lake Insurance Agency, and Naomie Day's' Beauty Shop.¹³

*680 Sixth Street (Noncontributing) **Resource 8***

The building at 680 Sixth Street is located on the north side of Sixth Street with its primary elevation facing south (Photo 14). The building is located at the east end of a commercial block containing the buildings at 680 and 690 Sixth Street as well as the south elevation of 125 Merchant Street. It was originally constructed around 1960 as a one-part commercial

¹² Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 23a-b.

¹³ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 24.

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block building. In the mid-2000s, the building received alterations which included the addition of a second story with a flat overhanging roof as well as brick veneer siding at the first story and wood siding at the second floor. A non-historic sloped corrugated metal canopy supported by square wood posts that extends west across the primary (south) elevation of the neighboring building at 690 Sixth Street. The east elevation of the building features a mural depicting the Texas flag and faces into a parking lot; this space used to contain an abutting one-part commercial building which has since been demolished. Historically, the building housed a series of barbershops: P.A. King's, Harrison's, and Payne's.¹⁴

650 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 9

The building at 650 Sixth Street is a one-story rectangular workshop with corrugated steel siding and a front gable roof (Photo 3). The workshop has a partially enclosed front porch and a garage opening used for loading on its side (east) elevation; there is a detached auxiliary building to the west of the building. Radley Electric constructed the building in 1950 to serve utilitarian purposes for its growing industry. It is set back from Sixth Street (Photo 8) because it was constructed behind a commercial building that is no longer extant.¹⁵ The building has housed a restaurant, "Howie's Hangout," since 2020.¹⁶

695 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 10

The building at 695 Sixth Street was constructed in 1920 (Photo 21). It is a one-part brick commercial block building characterized by a wood and aluminum storefront system and a stepped parapet with a central semicircular protrusion; this is not the original parapet shape. Full-height ashlar masonry pilasters mark the edges of the elevation. The storefront spans the primary (north) elevation of the building and contains two display windows flanking the primary entrance, which consists of a partially glazed wood door with sidelights and a transom. Tile veneer bulkheads line the bottom of each display window. A row of transoms tops the storefront configuration and contains a similar three-transom-with-double-mullions configuration to the buildings at 689 and 685 Sixth Street, to its east. A flat wood canopy with a corrugated metal roof situated between the display windows and transoms spans the elevation. Suspended metal tie rods anchored to a brick band above the transoms support the canopy which, along with the transoms, wraps around the corner of the building to its west elevation. There is a recessed cast stone panel above the

¹⁴ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 25.

¹⁵ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," Map, circa 1950, 26-28.

¹⁶ HHM & Associates, Inc. for Bailey Elmore, *Historical Resources Survey of Downtown Sour Lake, TX*, Austin, TX: HHM & Associates, Inc., 2023.

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transoms. The building is at the west end of a contiguous commercial block located on the south side of Sixth Street; this block consists of 675, 685, 689, and 695 Sixth Street (Photo 12). It occupies the southeast corner of the Sixth and Merchant Street intersection. The building's west elevation faces Merchant Street and contains two display windows filled with glass blocks over a stone veneer bulkhead. A second recessed stone panel is situated between the transoms and a simpler stepped parapet at the top of the elevation. Full height ashlar masonry piers mark the edges of this elevation, though the corner pier has been covered with non-historic stone. The circa 1950 Occupancy Map shows that over time this building housed Gulf States Utility, Louise Dorman's Dress Shop, and the Citizen's National Bank after it relocated from 689 Sixth Street, which abuts the subject building immediately to the east.¹⁷

The rear portion of this building is addressed as 165 Merchant Street and accessed by a separate entrance via the west side façade. Today this portion of the building is differentiated from the front of the building by a non-historic stepped parapet with a centered pediment (Photo 16). A sloped corrugated metal awning covers the 165 Merchant Street entrance, with a centered partially glazed wood door. Two wood windows flank the entrance on either side. Multiple alterations detract from the integrity of this portion of the building, including an altered parapet, replaced canopy, and stone veneering of piers flanking the elevation. Most egregiously, the elevation was covered with stucco in 2005. The visible side (south) elevation retains its historic wood entrance configuration, plat canopy, and brick walls, evidencing what the primary elevation looked like before these irreversible changes. Despite these changes, the building overall retains integrity to contribute to the district's significance (justification is further explained on page 14). The circa 1950s Occupancy Map shows that this portion of the building housed doctor's offices: Dr. Hart's and earlier, Dr. Lancaster's office.¹⁸

685-689 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 11

Constructed in 1920 for the Citizens National Bank, the building at 685-689 Sixth Street is a one-part commercial block building with brick siding. The western section of the building has a flat parapet (Photo 20), while the eastern section has a stepped parapet (Photo 20). Although these different parapets present an appearance of separate buildings today, fire insurance maps from 1966 suggest that this was one integrated building historically (Map 3). The primary (north) elevation consists of three bays, each with its own storefront system and entrance. A brick pilaster separates the two western bays, while stucco pilasters separate the third eastern bay. The easternmost bay contains a partially glazed multi lite wood door set to the left (east) side of an aluminum storefront system. This

¹⁷ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 44.

¹⁸ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 43.

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storefront contains four display windows over tile-veneered panels; multi-lite wood transoms top this bay. The middle bay is narrower than the first bay. It consists of a wood storefront system over a wood bulkhead with a recessed central entrance containing paired, partially glazed wood doors topped by a transom. A separate row of three transoms with centered double mullions tops the storefront system. These transoms are echoed by the transoms on the easternmost bay (685 Sixth Street). The portion of the building addressed as 685 Sixth Street features a non-original aluminum storefront system with two display windows over tile-veneered panels flanking the entrance on either side. Three wood transoms, each bisected by a double mullion, top this bay's storefront system. Along the middle and westernmost bay, a sloped corrugated metal awning supported by wood trusses spans the full elevation over the transoms. Above the canopy, there is a recessed cast stone panel with "19 CITIZENS NATIONAL BANK BUILDING 20" in raised lettering. Along the easternmost bay, a flat wood canopy with a corrugated metal roof spans the elevation between the storefront and the transoms; this canopy extends east across 675 Sixth Street, which abuts the subject building. Suspended metal tie rods anchored to a brick band above the transoms support the canopy. There is a recessed cast stone panel bearing painted ghost signage that reads "CONFECTIONARY."

The circa 1950 Occupancy Map shows that at one point, the building contained three separate spaces corresponding with the three exterior storefront bays. After its original tenure as the home of Citizen's National Bank, the building housed a number of businesses in each suite. Over time, the middle part of the building contained Will & Juen German Jewelry, Sharfstein's Clothing, Blum's Fashion Shop, Archie Wilkin's Hardware, Rex Supply Hardware, and Radley Enterprises. The west part of the building primarily housed drug stores-- Giesecke's Sour Lake Drug, George Dixon Sour Lake Drug, and Randy Richard Sour Lake Drug—as well as Wylie Ellis Watch Repair – Jewelry.¹⁹ Meanwhile, over time the easternmost portion of the building housed Sieder's Confectionary, Radley Enterprises, and Schwab's Clothing, with Sieder's Confectionary being the most recent as evidenced by the existing ghost signage.²⁰

675 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 12

The building at 675 Sixth Street was constructed in 1920 (Photo 18). It is a one-part brick commercial block building characterized by a wood storefront system, diamond-shaped brick detailing, and a pedimented parapet. Although the 1966 fire insurance map shows the building subdivided into two separate commercial spaces, the parapet and diamond detailing tie the storefronts together as one unified building. The wood storefront spans the primary (north) elevation of the building and is divided into two symmetrical bays reflecting

¹⁹ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 46a-b.

²⁰ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants," 47.

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each other; each contains two display windows topped by multilite transoms with a fully glazed single door at the center end of each bay. The entrances are flanked by glass block sidelights. A flat wood canopy with a corrugated metal roof situated between the display windows and transoms spans the elevation and extends west across 685 Sixth Street, the neighboring building, which shares a party wall. Suspended metal tie rods anchored to a brick band above the transoms support the canopy. Historically, there was a cornice beneath the parapet; this was removed in 1970 but is still evident on the elevation. The building is at the east end of a contiguous commercial block located on the south side of Sixth Street; this block consists of 675, 685, 689, and 695 Sixth Street (Photo 12). 685 Sixth Street abuts the building to the west. The circa 1950 Occupancy Map shows that over time this building housed E.E. Ryan Grocery and Market and the Sour Lake Insurance Agency.²¹

665 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 13

The Post Office, located at 665 Sixth Street, is a circa 1966 Modern one-story oblong box characterized by floor-to-ceiling windows and a flat metal canopy (Photo 15). It has brick siding and a flat roof, and the primary entrance consists of paired, fully glazed aluminum doors set within an aluminum storefront; transoms top the storefront and entrance. Brick pavers line the primary (north) elevation, and a cement ramp accesses the entrance. Two murals depicting “Shoestring Row”—the so-called “Shoestring” of the Sour Lake oilfield—and a horse-drawn wagon, respectively, decorate the west elevation (Photo 9).

615 Sixth Street (Contributing) Resource 14

The **First M.E. Church South** (615 Sixth Street) was constructed in 1921 and sits at the east end of the district on the south side of Sixth Street (Photo 2).²² It is a three-story buff brick Mission Revival building characterized by curved parapets and a large stained glass arched window on the primary elevation. The building has a central front gable mass flanked by two circulation towers. A raised double staircase accesses the primary entrance which is inset into a porch with square brick piers. The entrance contains paired, fully glazed wood doors with transoms and flanking sidelights. The First M.E. Church South retains its historic windows including the large semicircular stained-glass window on the central mass, the smaller rectangular stained-glass windows on the circulation towers, and tripled one-over-one wood windows on the side elevations (Photo 24). Brick pilasters punctuate the side (west and east) elevations of the building. A large open field occupies the space to the west of the church.

Overall District Integrity

²¹ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, “Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants,” 48.

²² Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, “Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants,” 54.

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Considered holistically, the Downtown Sour Lake historic district retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It retains integrity of location because the downtown remains in the same location that was selected for the new Sour Lake town site in 1903. Additionally, the extant buildings in the district have not been moved from their original locations. The district retains its overall integrity of design through its expression of the American Commercial movement, Italianate architecture, Mission Revival architecture, and mid-century modern influences – the same architectural styles that marked the district throughout its period of significance. The district retains integrity of setting through the retention of the original street grid and the intersection with State Highway 105, the overall pattern of setbacks and rhythm of storefronts, and the surrounding topography and vegetation. The intact street grid and widely spaced, low-scale, low-density streetscape pattern also remain consistent through the period of significance. The Texas Fire Insurance Department Maps from 1966 (Figure 3) shows empty lots have been interspersed with buildings throughout the district and demonstrate its decline. Given Sour Lake’s longstanding low-density character, these demolitions do not significantly change the overall streetscape pattern, and as a result, the district is able to retain its overall integrity of setting. Finally, the district retains its overall integrity of feeling and association; it evokes the feeling of a small town and retains its association as Sour Lake’s central business district.

Contributing versus Noncontributing Resources

The contributing resources within the Downtown Sour Lake Historic District retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Original building materials retained on contributing buildings include brick, cast stone, cinderblock (on 104 Merchant Street), and corrugated steel (on the Radley Electric Building at 650 Sixth Street). The contributing buildings within the Downtown Sour Lake Historic District also express their integrity of design and workmanship through detail expressed in brickwork and storefront construction on the buildings. Over time, some contributing resources have experienced alterations (as detailed in the inventory table below). Buildings within the district still are considered contributing if alterations are compatible and/or if alterations do not detract from the overall building form and streetscape pattern. For example, common alterations on contributing buildings include door replacements, window replacements, and canopy replacements that are generally appropriate for twentieth-century commercial buildings and compatible with the overall character of the district. Very few historic photos of the buildings in the district are available, making precise restoration of buildings challenging, but repairs and maintenance on contributing buildings generally have tried to respect the look and feel of small-town Texas commercial architecture, are reasonably reversible, and do not destroy or conceal the majority of the building’s historic fabric and features. The

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Citizen's Bank Building at 695 6th Street, for example, includes a compatible new canopy and windows – but also a speculatively reconstructed parapet and stone veneer over its corner piers (Photo 21). Nonetheless, the bank is considered contributing because the bulk of the historic features and fabric on the front façade remain visible, the original form and massing remain reasonably intact, and overall, the building continues the streetscape pattern that characterizes the district.

On the other hand, alterations to noncontributing buildings are irreversible and/or change the overall form and massing of the building, disrupting historic streetscape patterns. There are four noncontributing buildings in the district—111 Merchant Street, 680 Sixth Street, 690 Sixth Street, and 758 Sixth Street—all of which are of historic age but altered (see inventory). At 111 Merchant Street, the window enclosure changes the pattern of commercial storefronts that typifies the district. At 758 Sixth Street, for example, the alteration of the roof shape disrupts the flat-roofed pattern of the commercial district (Photo 13). Substantial alterations in the 2000s were especially detrimental to the integrity of the buildings at 680 and 690 Sixth Street and 165 Merchant Street (Photos 14 and 16), where historic façade materials were totally covered with new veneers and fenestration patterns were changed to no longer reflect typical storefronts found on twentieth-century commercial buildings. The noncontributing building at 680 Sixth Street also includes a second-story addition with a hipped roof, again disrupting the flat-roofed streetscape pattern found among the other commercial buildings in the district. However, the noncontributing resources are not widespread enough to significantly detract from the overall integrity of the district.

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Inventory

Image	Address	Year	Original Use	Stylistic	Alterations	Contributing
	Resource #	Built	Type - Form	Influence(s)	Additions	Status
	104 MERCHANT ST	1948	Commercial	No stylistic influences visible	All windows replaced, Doors replaced	Contributing
	1		Store - One-part commercial block		Side/rear addition (pre-1966)	
	111 MERCHANT ST	1965	Commercial	No stylistic influences visible	Front windows enclosed with glass block, Front storefront enclosed, New window and door openings punched on side facades, All doors replaced, Canopies replaced, Brick painted	Noncontributing
	2		Restaurant - One-part commercial block			
	135 MERCHANT ST	c. 1916	Commercial	Commercial	Doors replaced, Transoms replaced compatibly	Contributing
	3		Store - One-part commercial block		Rear addition	
	758 6TH ST	c. 1930	Commercial	No stylistic influences visible	Roof shape altered, Storefront boarded, Doors replaced, Transoms enclosed	Noncontributing
	4		Store - One-part commercial block			
	730 6TH ST	1903	Commercial	Italianate	Some windows replaced, Canopy removed, Doors replaced	Contributing
	5		Bank - Two-part commercial block		Awning added	
	125 MERCHANT ST	c. 1916	Commercial	Commercial	Windows replaced during historic period, Transoms boarded	Contributing
	6		Store - One-part commercial block			

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Image	Address Resource #	Year Built	Original Use Type - Form	Stylistic Influence(s))	Alterations Additions	Contributing Status
	690 6TH ST 7	1935	Commercial Office - One-part commercial block	No stylistic influences visible	All windows replaced, Fenestration pattern altered, Doors replaced, Canopy replaced, Partially stuccoed ca. 1970	Noncontributing
	680 6TH ST 8	c. 1960	Commercial Store - One-part commercial block	No stylistic influences visible	All windows replaced, One window enclosed, Canopy altered/replaced, Doors replaced Additional story added	Noncontributing
	650 6TH ST 9	1950	Warehouse Metal workshop	No stylistic influences visible	Doors replaced, Original porch enclosed Rear/side porches, Detached auxiliary building	Contributing
	695 6TH ST 10	1921	Commercial Bank - One-part commercial block	Commercial	Parapet altered, Transoms & canopy compatibly replaced ca. 2005, Some windows enclosed with glass block, West side facade stuccoed, Piers veneered with stone	Contributing
	685-689 6TH ST 11	1920	Commercial Store - One-part commercial block	Commercial	Storefront partially replaced, Transoms replaced compatibly ca. 2005, Canopy replaced; Tile veneer under some windows; Parapet possibly altered on westernmost bay Rear addition	Contributing
	675 6TH ST 12	1920	Commercial Store - One-part commercial block	Commercial	Transoms & canopy replaced compatibly ca. 2005, cornice lost ca. 1970, sidelights enclosed with glass block, tile veneer under windows Rear porch	Contributing

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Image	Address	Year	Original Use	Stylistic Influence(s)	Alterations	Contributing Status
	Resource #	Built	Type - Form		Additions	
	665 6TH ST	c. 1966	Governmental	Mid-century Modern, Mid-century Modern	Mural on west side façade	Contributing
	13		Post Office - Oblong Box			
	615 6TH ST	1921	Religious	Mission Revival	Storm windows over stained glass	Contributing
	14		Church - Vault			

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

Commerce (local level of significance)

Period of Significance

1903-1966

Significant Dates

1903

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Originally known as Sour Lake Springs, the town took its name from the sulfurous springs that fed into the nearby lake. In the early 20th century, Sour Lake experienced growth driven by the regional oil boom and gained a rail connection to the larger city of Beaumont. Improved transportation and oil-related investment helped transform the town's center into a modest hub of local commercial activity. Although oil production declined during the 1930s and 1940s, it saw a resurgence after World War II. However, the construction of highways in the 1960s contributed to the decentralization of the commercial district, and several buildings within the nominated area were demolished, leaving empty lots that remain today. The district is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Commerce at the local level of significance for the period 1903–1966, which spans from the construction of the earliest extant building to the erection of the U.S. Post Office—an event that also marks the beginning of the district's overall decline.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Background

Sour Lake is located in southeast Hardin County in East Texas, about 50 miles west of the Texas-Louisiana border. It is 18 miles southwest of Kountze, the Hardin County seat, and considered part of the Beaumont-Port Arthur Metropolitan Area.²³ Sour Lake is the oldest extant town in Hardin County.²⁴

White settlers first came to the area around present-day Sour Lake in 1835, though Native American tribes including the Caddo had lived in the Southeast Texas area long before.²⁵ Native South Carolinian Stephen Jackson came to the Sour Lake area in 1835 when the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas granted him a league of land covering 4,428 acres.²⁶ At this time, Jackson's land was a part of the independent Republic of Texas.

From the beginning of southeast Texas settlement, the "Piney Woods" in the area supplied much needed lumber that grew into a significant industry. Hardin County was no exception to this trend.²⁷ After the discovery of rich oil reserves in the area in the 1890s, the local

²³ Diana J. Kleiner, "Sour Lake, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed July 3, 2023.

²⁴ Kleiner, "Sour Lake, TX."

²⁵ "Hardin County," *Center for Region Heritage Research*, Stephen F. Austin State University, accessed October 3, 2023.

²⁶ Kleiner, "Sour Lake, TX."

²⁷ "What is the Big Thicket?" Big Thicket: National Preserve Texas, NPS History eLibrary, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/bith/learn/the-big-thicket>

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lumber supply helped facilitate the construction of the oil rigs, railroad tracks, and towns needed for the booming oil extraction industry. Efforts to preserve the forest began in the 1920s, concurrent with the decline of the oil industry, and ultimately the Big Thicket was designated as the United States' first National Preserve in 1974.²⁸

Early History of Sour Lake

Originally called Sour Lake Springs, the town derived its name from the eponymous sulfurous springs that fed into the nearby lake.²⁹ Present-day Sour Lake, which encompasses the proposed downtown historic district, is located to the south of the original Sour Lake Springs and, historically, the 1870s Sour Lake Hotel. The springs were rich in minerals and attracted visitors who wanted to reap the health benefits they offered. The lumber industry also continued to contribute to the local economy.³⁰ Sour Lake's claim to fame would soon shift with the discovery of oil gushers just 400 feet from the Sour Lake Hotel and 200 feet from the lake itself. While the resort and the oil industry coexisted for a while, the famous Sour Lake Springs Hotel burned down in March 1909. The destruction of the hotel was symbolic of the end of Sour Lake's tenure as a resort town in favor of a town revolving around the oil industry.

*Early Efforts to Find Oil*³¹

Prior to 1867, no efforts were made to drill for oil in Sour Lake, despite the myriad signs pointing to its presence. Starting in 1867, prospectors began drilling on leased land with quite limited success. Finally, in 1896, West Virginian prospectors W.A. and John Savage drilled Sour Lake's first well.³² For the next five years, additional minor discoveries were made in the oil fields around Sour Lake. In 1898, the Gulf Coast Refining Company found these discoveries promising enough to construct the first oil refinery in Texas in Sour Lake.³³ However, these small wells did not produce much oil and quickly were plugged up by sand sinking into the wells, and the refinery in Sour Lake closed around 1900.³⁴

²⁸ "Creation of Big Thicket National Preserve," Big Thicket: National Preserve Texas, NPS History eLibrary, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/bith/learn/historyculture/creation-of-big-thicket-national-preserve>

²⁹ Patricia L. Duncan, "Hardin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 10, 2023.

³⁰ "What is the Big Thicket?"

³¹ Largely adapted from W.T. Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses: A Tale of Texas' [sic] Second Oil Boom Town*, Nederland, Texas: 1900.

³² Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses,'* 2.

³³ Emery L. Kennedy, "An Economic History of the Development of the Oil Industry in Southeast Texas," (master's thesis, 1952) 18, [1002603849-Kennedy.pdf \(unt.edu\)](#).

³⁴ Kennedy, "An Economic History of the Development of the Oil Industry in Southeast Texas," 18.

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Sour Lake Fields and the Rise of the Oil Industry

On January 10, 1901, the discovery of the Lucas Gusher in nearby Spindletop Hill “brought Texas and the nation into the ‘Fuel Age.’”³⁵ It put neighboring Beaumont on the map as Texas’s first boom town. So great was the wealth derived from the oil discovered on Spindletop Hill that it led to the creation of multiple commercial enterprises, including the J. M. Guffey Petroleum Company in 1901 (later the Gulf Oil Corporation) and the Texas Fuel Company (later abbreviated to Texaco) in 1902.³⁶ The many gushers discovered at Spindletop drew in so-called “Boomers” from across Texas and states beyond looking for work in the burgeoning oil business.³⁷ When the Spindletop field started drying up, companies and independent prospectors alike turned their attention to Sour Lake field. For example, the J.M. Guffey Petroleum Company and the Great Western Oil & Gas Company both began drilling deeper wells in Sour Lake in 1901.³⁸

The Great Western Oil & Gas Company’s investments in the Sour Lake oilfield realized that potential on March 7, 1902, when the Atlantic and Pacific No. 1 well became Sour Lake’s first “true gusher.”³⁹ Boomers set their sights on the Sour Lake oil field. Investors poured into the area, including the Texas Oil Company. The Texas Oil Company oil field at Sour Lake remains the nation’s oldest continuously operated oil field.⁴⁰ It seemed an unlimited pool of oil laid under the Sour Lake oil field, and it had thus far avoided common problems seen at Spindletop, including sand filling in wells or saltwater pumping from wells due to over drilling.⁴¹ The “Shoe String,” a tract of land within the oil field that measured “only 69 feet wide and three-fifths of a mile long,” was an especially lucrative area.⁴² The success of the Sour Lake oilfields drew laborers and merchants hoping to strike it rich and get their

³⁵ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 4.

³⁶ James A. Clark and Mark Odintz, “Gulf Oil Corporation,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 02, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/gulf-oil-corporation>; Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 10.

³⁷ Charlie Jeffries, “Reminiscences of Sour Lake,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1946): 25–35. From the Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht101117/m1/41/?q=%22sour%20lake%22>.

³⁸ Emery L. Kennedy, “An Economic History of the Development of the Oil Industry in Southeast Texas,” Master’s Thesis, North Texas State College, 1954, from the University of North Texas, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc662986/m2/1/high_res_d/1002603849-Kennedy.pdf; “Great Western Oil & Gas Company,” American Oil & Gas Historical Society, accessed 10/02/2023, <https://aoghs.org/old-oil-stocks/great-western-oil-gas-company/>.

³⁹ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 7.

⁴⁰ Robert Wooster, “Sour Lake Oilfield,” TSHA, *Handbook of Texas Online*, Published 1952, Updated July 1, 1995. Accessed July 5, 2023. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/sour-lake-oilfield>

⁴¹ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 49.

⁴² Jeffries, “Reminiscences of Sour Lake.”

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own helping of “Sour Lake molasses.”⁴³⁴⁴ It is uncertain how many people relocated to Sour Lake during this time, though at its peak in 1903, the population of Sour Lake was somewhere between 4,000 and 10,000, likely resting at about 7,000 people.⁴⁵

The Role of Transportation in the Oil Boom

In the early boom days, Sour Lake did not have an operational oil refinery or railroad connection of its own. Consequentially, Sour Lake oilers depended on nearby Beaumont to refine their oil and ship it to market, as Beaumont had already developed the necessary refining facilities and rail infrastructure due to its head start. By 1901, the Rand & McNally map of Texas showed multiple railroad lines converging in Beaumont. This map shows that, by 1901, the Southern Pacific railroad line included a stop named “Sour Lake” in the present-day location of Nome, around nine miles south of the Sour Lake spring and oilfield. The distance from the railroad made it challenging to send Sour Lake oil to refineries in Beaumont or Port Arthur. Sour Lake’s Houston correspondent remarked:

The want of a railroad is sincerely felt here, and the tardiness of the Southern Pacific in starting the proposed branch is a source of disappointment to those who have so liberally donated extensive station grounds and right-of-way to this road.⁴⁶

As a result, oil speculators began constructing pipelines to convey oil directly to refineries in Beaumont without the need for rail transportation. In 1902, Guffey constructed a pipeline to his refinery in Beaumont and other drillers followed, so that “at the close of 1903 [pipelines] included one eight-inch and four six-inch pipelines to Beaumont, a six-inch line to Saratoga and a four-inch line to Raywood, and several shorter lines to loading [docks]” (likely located at the nearby rail depots discussed below).⁴⁷ By 1905, additional pipelines were constructed to link Sour Lake to new refineries in Port Arthur and Port Neches.⁴⁸

Around the same time, in August 1902, the Southern Pacific Railroad company announced they would build a spur connecting the Sour Lake oilfield to the main Southern Pacific railroad line. The railroad spur finally reached Sour Lake Oil field at the end of June 1903. A new map of Texas published by Southern Pacific in 1903 clearly illustrated this new rail spur extending all the way to Sour Lake). This new map renamed the site of the old Sour

⁴³ Block, “Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses.’”

⁴⁴ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 21.

⁴⁵ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 43.

⁴⁶ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 27.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, 45.

⁴⁸ “Sour Lake produces Texaco.”

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Lake train stop as “Nome,” reflecting the renaming of the post office at that site to Nome in 1903.⁴⁹

The Southern Pacific spur improved transportation, but it was still somewhat inefficient. On July 26th, 1904, the Beaumont, Sour Lake, and Western Railroad Company laid a new track—dubbed the “Electric Road”—which created a more efficient, direct connection between Sour Lake and Beaumont. This new rail connection decreased the travel time from Sour Lake to Beaumont to 45 minutes, as opposed to the four or five hours it took by buggy or by using the old Southern Pacific Line which stopped in Nome.⁵⁰ Sour Lakers quickly realized that:

...their city, with its new system of railroads, storage tanks, pump stations, and pipelines, would quickly become the transportation and supply hub, not only for their own oil field, but also for the neighboring boomtowns of Saratoga and Batson...⁵¹

Development of rail would spur commercial growth and development of Sour Lake’s downtown.

Population Growth and Commerce

Prior to the oil boom, Sour Lake was a health resort town with a permanent population of around 150 people, though “the number of visitors there might reach as many as 300 persons or triple the number of permanent residents.”⁵² When the oil boom arrived in Sour Lake in 1902, the population boomed in response. At its peak in 1903, the population skyrocketed to 10,000 people. A news article from July 15, 1903, described the town as an “Eve-less Eden” with men outnumbering the women nine to one.⁵³ Still, there were some families of men, women, and children in town. In November of the same year, the town had one church and two schools – one white and one Black. In contrast, Sour Lake boasted 56 saloons that became quite crowded on payday.⁵⁴

Sour Lake needed to grow its footprint to accommodate the population growth. In 1902, Sour Lake had a small, two-block business district, though its location is unclear. In early 1903, there were two Sour Lake townsites laid out, but “plans afoot to abandon both of

⁴⁹ Robert Wooster, “Nome, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 02, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/nome-tx>.

⁵⁰ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 87.

⁵¹ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 63.

⁵² Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 1.

⁵³ “Real Boom Coming,” *Galveston Daily News*, July 15, 1903.

⁵⁴ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 53.

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them and build a new townsite substantially outside of the oil territory, where land could be bought and sold cheaply.”⁵⁵ It is unclear which of the three townsites developed into the present-day proposed Sour Lake Downtown Historic District, but the site selected was located near water and far from the oilfields in hopes of reducing the risk of fire. The new townsite was also “a short distance to the east of grounds chosen for the new Southern Pacific Depot” and rail line.⁵ Downtown Sour Lake grew into a “sizeable community” (though unincorporated) by July 1903, with many businesses both oil-related and typical to a small town’s needs.⁵⁶ The majority of news articles about Sour Lake at this time revolved around the state of the oil business, as this subject was most relevant for readers both from the area and elsewhere.

History of Sour Lake During the Period of Significance

Making Way for a Lasting Oil Industry

By the end of 1903, a number of factors signaled the end of the Sour Lake oilfield’s peak of productivity – including declining oil production, a devastating fire, and competition from the nearby, newly discovered Batson Prairie oilfield.⁵⁷ Although the Sour Lake oilfields continued to be profitable for decades, they never again would reach the productivity seen in 1903. With such a high number of wells operating at the same time, the “Shoe String” area of the Sour Lake oilfield showed signs of depletion as early as 1903.⁵⁸ Oil rigging was often profitable but extremely dangerous. The latent sulfur acted as chloroform and could knock workers out. It could also cause blindness if it made contact with workers’ eyes. Fires frequently plagued the oil fields, and the latent sulfur at nearby Sour Lake and the springs made this particular oil field especially dangerous. A major fire in August 1903 destroyed a number of oil derricks and blocked a number of wells so that they no longer flowed – further contributing to declining oil production.⁵⁹ Another fire in January 1904 also destroyed the town of Sour Lake and redirected labor away from the oil rigs and toward rebuilding.⁶⁰ Around the same time, in November 1903, a gusher was discovered roughly thirteen miles away at Batson Prairie, drawing many boomers away from Sour Lake, with “hundreds of drillers, mule teams, and rotary rigs having deserted the town for Batson Prairie.”⁶¹ The town’s population never again would rise to the peak seen in 1902 and 1903. Nonetheless, Sour Lake’s prosperity and growth continued. Additionally, many oilers remained at Sour Lake fields—the oil had not dried out but rather was flowing at a lower

⁵⁵ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 26.

⁵⁶ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 43.

⁵⁷ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 69.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, 45.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, 46.

⁶⁰ Kennedy, 46.

⁶¹ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake ‘Molasses,’* 69.

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and steadier pace and employment was stable. Over time, the cumulative historical output of the Sour Lake oilfields would prove double that of Batson.⁶² Block concluded: The Sour Lake...that would emerge from the Boomtown would certainly be less exciting, but perhaps the economy would be healthier because it would be less upon greed and get rich quick mentality and more upon long-range planning to make the most of Sour Lake's assets and advantages.⁶³

Fire and Post-Fire Downtown Development

After a fire ravaged the downtown on January 24, 1904, destroying property and taking many lives, the town quickly rebuilt. Although there were a lot of businesses in Sour Lake in 1903, very few of them were documented. We know approximately "fifty business houses" were destroyed in the fire due to subsequent insurance claims made by former business owners.⁶⁴ Luckily, "First National Bank had just completed a new two-story brick building (Carpenter Building, 730 Sixth Street, Photo 1) and it and a few other firms had already moved most of their stock and equipment to it."⁶⁵ As a result of the great losses, Sour Lakers began to express a desire for a more permanent community. This manifested in rapid reconstruction efforts, with the replacement of wood-frame buildings facilitated by the thriving lumber industry in Hardin County. The desire for permanency also led to the erection of more brick buildings, with the First National Bank (now the Carpenter Building, 730 Sixth Street, Photo 1) as an anchor.⁶⁶ The desire for permanency also stimulated a movement to incorporate the town in 1904, although the initial effort was unsuccessful. Ambrose Merchant, a prominent Sour Lake businessman in the oil industry and namesake of Merchant Street, was elected as Mayor. The 1914 Texas Almanac and Guidebook reported, "Sour Lake, the chief city of [Hardin] county, is unincorporated, but has an estimated population of 2,800."⁶⁷

In 1916, an article in the *Oil City Visitor* newspaper declared "Sour Lake No More 'Oil Burg' of Sin and Shacks: It is a City of Homes, Schools and Churches, Good Roads, Legitimate Business and Enterprise" – especially noting that "One hundred and twenty-five thousand

⁶² Wooster, "Sour Lake Oilfield;" Julia Cauble Smith, "Batson-Old Oilfield," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 02, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/batson-old-oilfield>.

⁶³ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses'*, 70.

⁶⁴ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses'*, 73.

⁶⁵ Block, *Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses'*, 74.

⁶⁶ "Sour Lake Texas Telephone Directory," *Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.; American Telephone & Telegraph Co.*, February 1931.

⁶⁷ Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1914, book, January 1914; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth117157/>; accessed September 29, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas State Historical Association, 284; Sour Lake would go on to incorporate in 1947.

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dollars has just been spent on good roads and streets,” and that new schools were recently constructed (no longer extant, outside of the district boundaries).⁶⁸ Sour Lake also established a Baptist Church (nonextant) and the 1921 Methodist Church (First M.E. Church South, 615 Sixth Street, Photo 2) further demonstrating economic stability through foundational institutions.⁶⁹ Newspaper articles indicate that the fundraising campaign to construct the new Methodist Church was a grassroots affair.⁷⁰ This investment in government, houses of worship, and infrastructure occurred alongside and in concert with downtown’s commercial core.

In 1931, Sour Lake was home to fifty businesses; due to the slowing of oil production, in 1947, the number of businesses was 31.⁷¹ Sour Lake had suffered in the previous decade due to the international effects of the Great Depression. Failing businesses led to increased vacancy in the downtown area.⁷² The circa 1950 Occupancy Map shows that downtown Sour Lake was dense and active, characterized by businesses that were necessary to support the economy of a small town, as well as some recreational businesses including a theater, ice cream parlor, and confectionary. Farming and the lumber industries kept Hardin County afloat, but the economy did not start recovering until after World War II. The automobile age and inception of highways—like State Highway 105—in the area bolstered the economy by providing transit options for local industry.⁷³ The thriving shipbuilding and rubber industries in Beaumont and Port Arthur were a boon to the local economy, and highways enabled some job seekers to commute for these opportunities.⁷⁴ By 1947, the year Sour Lake voted to incorporate—permanently this time--the businesses in downtown Sour Lake represented the diverse mix needed for a sustainable small town, as reflected on the circa 1950 Occupancy Map (Figure 2).⁷⁵

Mid-Century Changes

In the early 1950s, Sour Lake remained one of the top oil-producing areas in Texas, with Hardin County producing over 25,000 barrels per day.⁷⁶ Its main industry was and

⁶⁸ Joe E. Murray, “declared “Sour Lake No More ‘Oil Burg’ of Sin and Shacks,” *Oil City Visitor*, Oct. 14, 1916, p. 4, from newsbank.com.

⁶⁹ Ann C. Smith and Mildred Jett, “Sour Lake Business Places and Known Occupants,” Map, circa 1950.

⁷⁰ Various articles, *Oil City Visitor*, 1920-1921, from newsbank.com.

⁷¹ Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide 1954-1955.

⁷² “Sour Lake, Texas,” Telephone Directory, *Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. & American Telephone and Telegraph Co.*, February 1931.

⁷³ Patricia L. Duncan, “Hardin County,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 10, 2023.

⁷⁴ Paul E. Isaac, “Beaumont, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 10, 2023.

⁷⁵ Kleiner, “Sour Lake.”

⁷⁶ Texas Almanac, 1954-1955, book, 1953; Dallas, Texas.

(<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth117168/>: accessed September 29, 2023), University of

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continues to be oil. The lumber industry continued to be a steady source of employment for Hardin County, and the Federal government became a larger source of employment following the Great Depression.⁷⁷ The construction of a new United States Post Office (665 Sixth Street, Photo 15) in 1966 and the designation of the Big Thicket as a National Preserve in 1974 demonstrate the increase of federal involvement and employment in the area.⁷⁸ An additional side effect of the establishment of the Big Thicket National Preserve was an increase in tourism to the area, further bolstering the economy.⁷⁹ Sour Lake's population stayed relatively stable in the mid-twentieth century. However, like many small Texas towns, Sour Lake's commercial development sprawled outwards, leading to the decline of downtown.

Prior to the arrival of the highway, commercial buildings were oriented towards Merchant Street, the primary north-south artery downtown, or towards Sixth Street, the primary west-east artery. These buildings faced main thoroughfares because they were the source of most traffic and therefore, more customers.⁸⁰ When the Texas Highway Department selected the route for Highway 105 through Sour Lake, they chose Yount Street, one block north of the main commercial thoroughfare along Sixth Street. As a result, the commercial buildings on the north side of Sixth Street now backed up to the highway. In some ways, this location facilitated continued use of the buildings on the north side of Sixth Street, because their rear loading docks now faced the highway and could facilitate easy loading and unloading of goods delivered by truck. However, after the construction of State Highway 105 new commercial construction faced north towards the highway rather than towards the city center to attract motorists driving along Highway 105. For example, the 1948 QP Grocery Store constructed at 104 Merchant Street included entrances oriented both toward Merchant Street and toward Highway 105, negotiating the transition between downtown commercial development and highway-oriented commerce.⁸¹ The building located just outside the district boundaries at 785 HWY 105, constructed in 1950, also faces the highway rather than into the rest of the town.⁸² Small oil wells also sprang up

North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas State Historical Association, 28.

⁷⁷ Patricia L. Duncan, "Hardin County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 10, 2023.

⁷⁸ Francis Edward Abernathy, "Big Thicket," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 7, 2023.

⁷⁹ Hardy Heck Moore, Inc and Blanton & Associates, Inc. for Texas Historical Commission, *The Development of Highways in Texas: A Historic Context of the Bankhead Highway and Other Historic Named Highways*, Austin, TX, June 28, 2013, 367.

⁸¹ "Work Begun on New Store Building for Q-P Store," *Oil City Visitor*, June 4, 1948, p 1, from newsbank.com.

⁸² Though it is of historic age and fits within the narrative of commercial development in Sour Lake, this building is outside of the district boundary. This is because of its distance from the rest of the resources in the district due to historic demolition of the commercial buildings that once spanned that distance.

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along the highway, as illustrated by the 1955 USGS topographic map (Figure 6) as well as aerial photos from 1952 and 1957.⁸³

While city directories from the 1950s through 1970s do not show a decrease in the number of businesses, the 1966 Texas Fire Insurance Department map shows less density downtown. This suggests that businesses relocated outside of downtown Sour Lake to the outlying areas along the highway.⁸⁴ Aerial photos show new commercial development at the intersection of Highway 326 and Highway 105 beginning in 1957 and increasing in intensity by 1976.⁸⁵ Between 1982 and 1995, highway-oriented commercial development increased along Highway 105 closer to Sour Lake's historic downtown. During the same time period, downtown Sour Lake experienced vacancy that resulted in demolition of some historic buildings. To respond to this trend, some buildings received facelifts to appear more modern and continue to attract shoppers to downtown. For example, in 1957 both Allen's Department Store at 125 Merchant Street and Swain's Hardware & Furniture at 135 Merchant Street received a "buff brick front" in an effort to make "the whole block very attractive."⁸⁶ Other new occupants and investors also moved into the area—notably including the Radle Electric Company, which moved into the building at 165 Merchant Street in 1969.⁸⁷ Despite these efforts, historic maps and newspaper articles indicate that a number of historic buildings burned down or were razed between about 1950 and 1966.⁸⁸

Significance of Commercial Development

The construction of brick buildings, including the Carpenter Building (730 Sixth Street, Photo 1) and the Merchant Street commercial block (125 and 135 Merchant Street, Photo 11), reflected the growth of Sour Lake's economy as a result of the oil industry. A 1916 *Oil City Visitor* article reported:

Ambrose Merchant and John Herring, two of our oldest residents [sic] and largest property owners, have shown their faith in the town by letting the contract for five brick buildings to be erected on their property; corner Post-office and Merchant Streets...[They have]

⁸³ The referenced aerials are not included in the nomination. [Aerial photos], 1952 and 1957, Historic Aerials, accessed 10/12/2023, <https://www.historicaerials.com>.

⁸⁴ "Sour Lake, Texas," Telephone Directory, Southwestern Bell, September 1970; "Map of Sour Lake," 1966.

⁸⁵ "730 Sixth Street, Sour Lake, TX: 1976," <https://www.historicaerials.com/>, accessed November 6, 2023.

⁸⁶ "Swain's Hardware & Furniture Building Receiving Brick Front Too," *Oil City Visitor*, Apr. 26, 1957, p. 1, from newsbank.com.

⁸⁷ "Radley Electric in New Location," *Oil City Visitor*, Nov. 7, 1969, p. 1, from newsbank.com.

⁸⁸ "Map of Sour Lake," *Texas Fire Insurance Department Engineering Division*, Austin, TX: 1966.

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Endeavored to create confidence in the growth and permanency of the town.⁸⁹

Having learned from past fires, especially the devastating January 1904 fire, Sour Lake officials constructed a new fire station and installed an elevated water tank adjacent to it; they also installed fire hydrants at major intersections.⁹⁰ While the historic fire station and elevated tank are not extant, a 2008 replica of the fire station stands at its previous location (just outside the district boundaries), and the fire hydrants remain extant.⁹¹ The use of brick in new construction provided an additional element of fire safety. Finally, the construction of the First M.E. Church South (615 Sixth Street, Photo 2) and the First Baptist Church (not extant) were further signs of a desire for permanency among Sour Lakers as they showed a desire to tend to spiritual needs in addition to economic.

Downtown Commerce's Relationship to the Oil Industry

Although the oil industry declined in the twentieth century, it maintained sufficient activity to support a small commercial district downtown, and efforts to diversify the economy also helped downtown businesses survive through downturns in the oil industry. For example, although local oil production in the 1920s had declined from the peak of the 1910s, the overall Texas oil industry was still robust, and the 1921 telephone directory shows new businesses related to the auto industry as well as many businesses typical of small towns in Texas: grocery stores, clothing stores, barbershops, cleaners, restaurants, etc.⁹² Additionally, the Texas Company and Gulf States both had a continued presence in Sour Lake.⁹³ Banking and insurance were two other local industries that gained traction in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹⁴ The Carpenter Building (730 Sixth Street, Photo 1) contained a bank on the first floor and various offices on the second floor leased to the Carpenter Corporation, insurance brokers, and other private practices.⁹⁵

The Radley Family's enterprises exemplify how Sour Lakers survived by straddling the line between embracing new types of businesses and staying involved in the oil industry. The Radley's primary business had always been oil, but the circa 1950 Occupancy Map shows their foray into electricity with Radley Electric, whose historic workshop building remains

⁸⁹ "Contracts Signed Up: Five More Brick Buildings Are to be Erected At Once," *Oil City Visitor*, July 15, 1916, Vol. 9, No. 2.

⁹⁰ "Map of Sour Lake," 1966.

⁹¹ "Sour Lake," *Google Street View*, October 2023, accessed November 8, 2023.

⁹² "Sour Lake, Texas," Telephone Directory, *Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.*, Summer 1921.

⁹³ Smith and Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places..."

⁹⁴ Smith and Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places..."

⁹⁵ Smith and Jett, "Sour Lake Business Places..."

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extant and in use as a restaurant (650 Sixth Street, Photo 3).⁹⁶ The family also expanded into the real estate business, with its portfolio of businesses encompassed in Radley Enterprises.⁹⁷

The decline of the oil industry and the arrival of the highway left significant scars downtown. By 1966, after decades of vacancy, downtown Sour Lake lost 20 of the businesses displayed on the Occupancy Map to demolition. These included the Crescent Theatre, variety stores, clothing stores, grocery stores, cafes, and hotels. The demolition and consequential vacant lots in the proposed district evidence the effect of Highway 105 and the automobile age on downtown Sour Lake.

Although these demolitions resulted in the loss of historic resources, the vacant lots that remain today illustrate the trend of downtown demolition in small downtowns in Texas and across the nation during the midcentury highway-development era, as illustrated by the 1966 Texas Fire Insurance Department map and 1976 aerial photos (Figure 3). On the south side of Sixth Street, the decline of downtown led to demolition of a string of buildings that historically included a café, shoe shop, and hotel (all listed on the circa 1950 occupancy map and visible in 1952 aerial photos but demolished in 1957 aerial photos). Around 1966, the construction of a new post office at 665 Sixth Street (Photo 9) partially filled this vacant stretch, representing an attempt at reinvestment in the declining downtown. Another example of the effect of automobiles on business in Sour Lake is the appearance, on the 1966 Texas Fire Insurance Department map, of a gas station located on Highway 105 at its intersection with Ann Street (just outside the district boundaries) in the former location of the Christian Church. The gas station has since been demolished.

Continuing Commercial Resilience

Despite decades of decline and vacancy, the Sour Lake community retained pride in its historic downtown. Beginning around 2000, the Radley family began a concerted effort to rehabilitate downtown buildings and find commercial tenants that would bring vitality back to downtown Sour Lake. Although these efforts to revitalize downtown Sour Lake fall after the end of the period significance, they place the proposed district in a larger context of preservation efforts at this time, influenced by the national Main Street program (beginning in Texas in 1980) and the Texas Courthouse Preservation Program (established in 1999). Within the district boundaries, the installation of brick sidewalks and streetlamps illustrates this trend, as do the alterations to 680 and 690 Sixth Street and 165 Merchant Street (both noncontributing, Photos 14 and 16). Other new developments from the early 2000s that aimed to enhance the “historic” image of downtown and encourage more

⁹⁶ Smith and Jett, “Sour Lake Business Places...”

⁹⁷ Duncan, “Hardin County.”

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commercial traffic lie immediately outside of the historic district boundaries – such as the new fire station constructed on the site of the original 1904 fire station at 160 S. Merchant Street, the replica oil derrick on the fire station property, and replica depot at 630 Sixth Street.⁹⁸ While these revitalization efforts are not historic age and are not yet considered significant under National Register Criterion A, they are important to understand as part of the narrative of an oil boom town’s commercial resilience and determination to survive into the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The Sour Lake Commercial Historic District illustrates the town’s evolution from a sulfur springs resort to a modest commercial hub shaped by the early 20th-century oil boom. Fueled by improved transportation and regional investment, the district’s primarily commercial buildings developed between 1903 and 1966. Although later highway construction led to decentralization and the loss of some buildings, the remaining core retains integrity and reflects the community’s economic history. Despite limited documentation, preservation efforts have respected the district’s historic character, and it stands as the most intact representation of Sour Lake’s commercial development during its period of significance.

⁹⁸ “Sour Lake,” *Google Street View*, October 2023, accessed November 8, 2023.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

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10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property: approx. 5.37 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. 30.140576° -94.413953°
2. 30.140451° -94.412318°
3. 30.139781° -94.411464°
4. 30.139383° -94.411449°
5. 30.139384° -94.412439°
6. 30.139275° -94.412882°
7. 30.139267° -94.413412°
8. 30.139854° -94.413945°

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of Sour Lake Downtown Historic District are drawn on the attached scale map (Section 10, page 42).

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed district encompasses a cohesive concentration of historic resources associated with Sour Lake's commercial development in the center of downtown. The district boundary consists of resources along Sixth Street, Sour Lake's main west-east artery, between South Merchant Street and South Ann Street, that retain the highest integrity and historic associations.

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Section 10: Scale Map of Boundary



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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: _ Charlotte Adams, Architectural Historian and Emily Payne, Architectural Historian
organization: _ HHM & Associates, Inc.
street & number: _ P.O. Box 9648
city or town: Austin state: TX zip code: 78766
e-mail: _epayne@hhminc.com
telephone: _512.478.8014
date: _March 12, 2026

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets MAP-44 through MAP-45)

Additional items (see continuation sheets FIGURE-46 through FIGURE-53)

Photographs (see continuation sheets PHOTO-54 through PHOTO-75)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

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Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

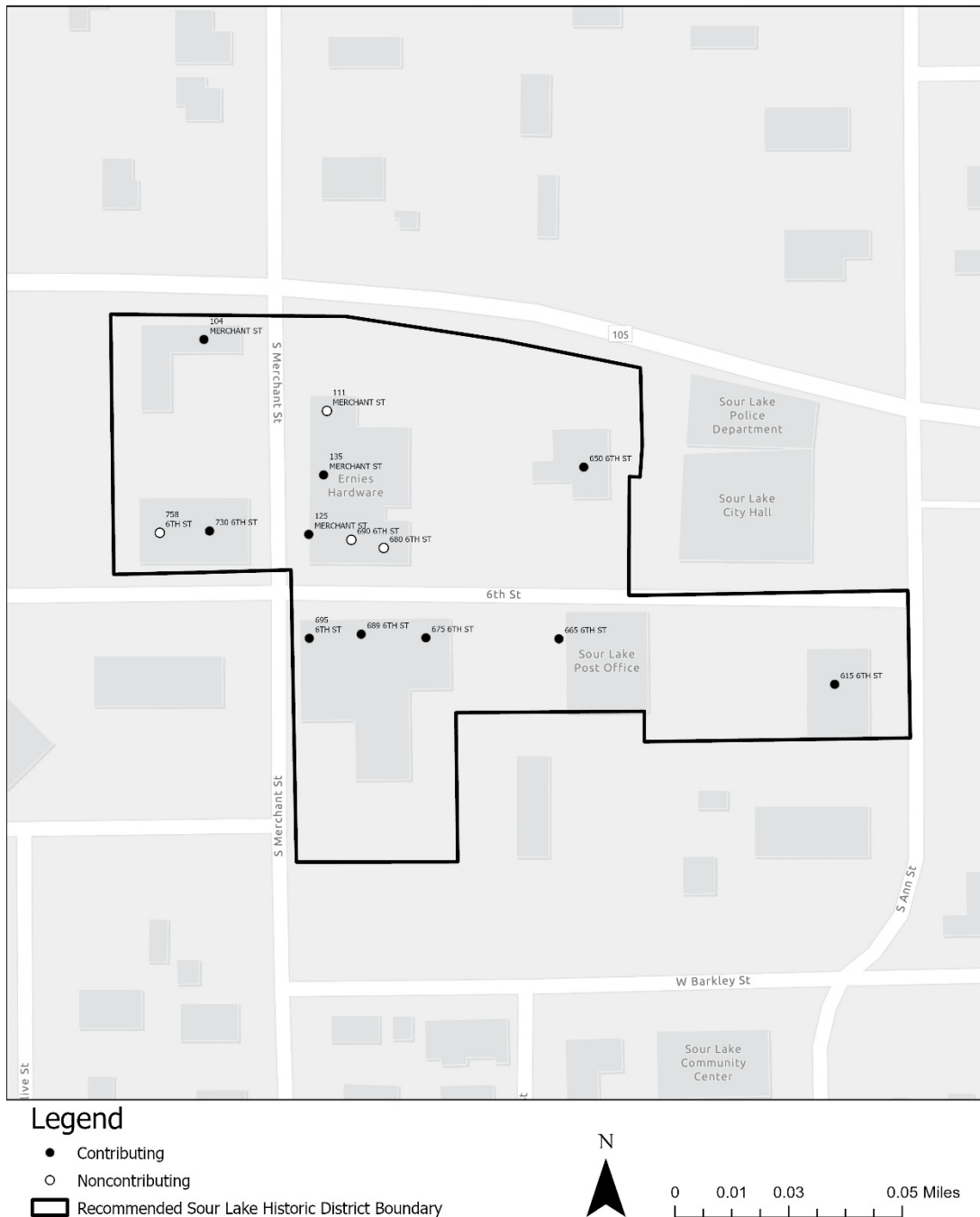
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Maps

Map 1. Map showing the Sour Lake Downtown Historic District with contributing and noncontributing resources. Map by HHM, 2026. For an accurate boundary, please see Section 10, pg. 41-42.

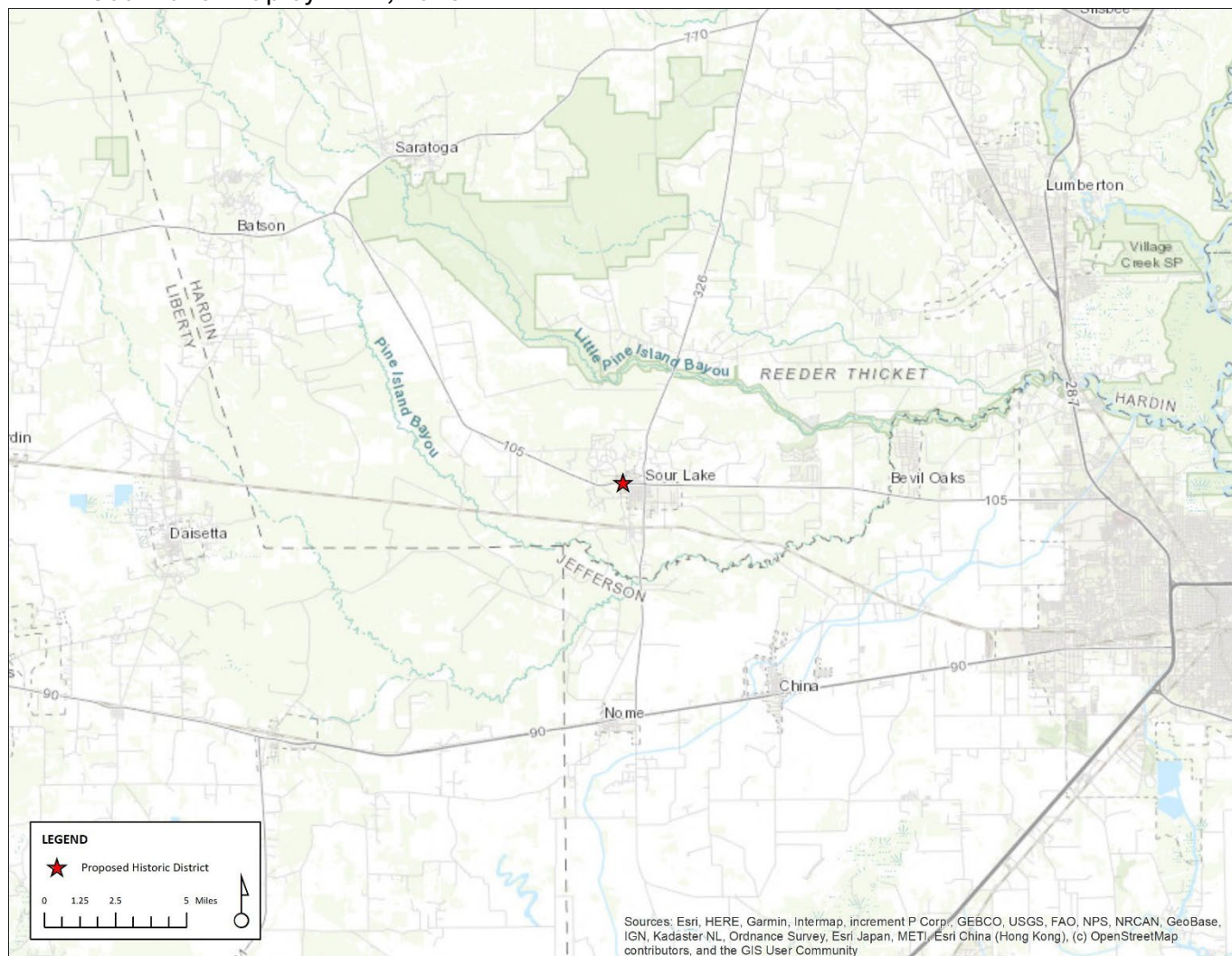
Map of Sour Lake Contributing and Noncontributing Resources



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Map 2. Map showing the location of the Sour Lake Downtown Historic District boundary within Sour Lake. Map by HHM, 2023.



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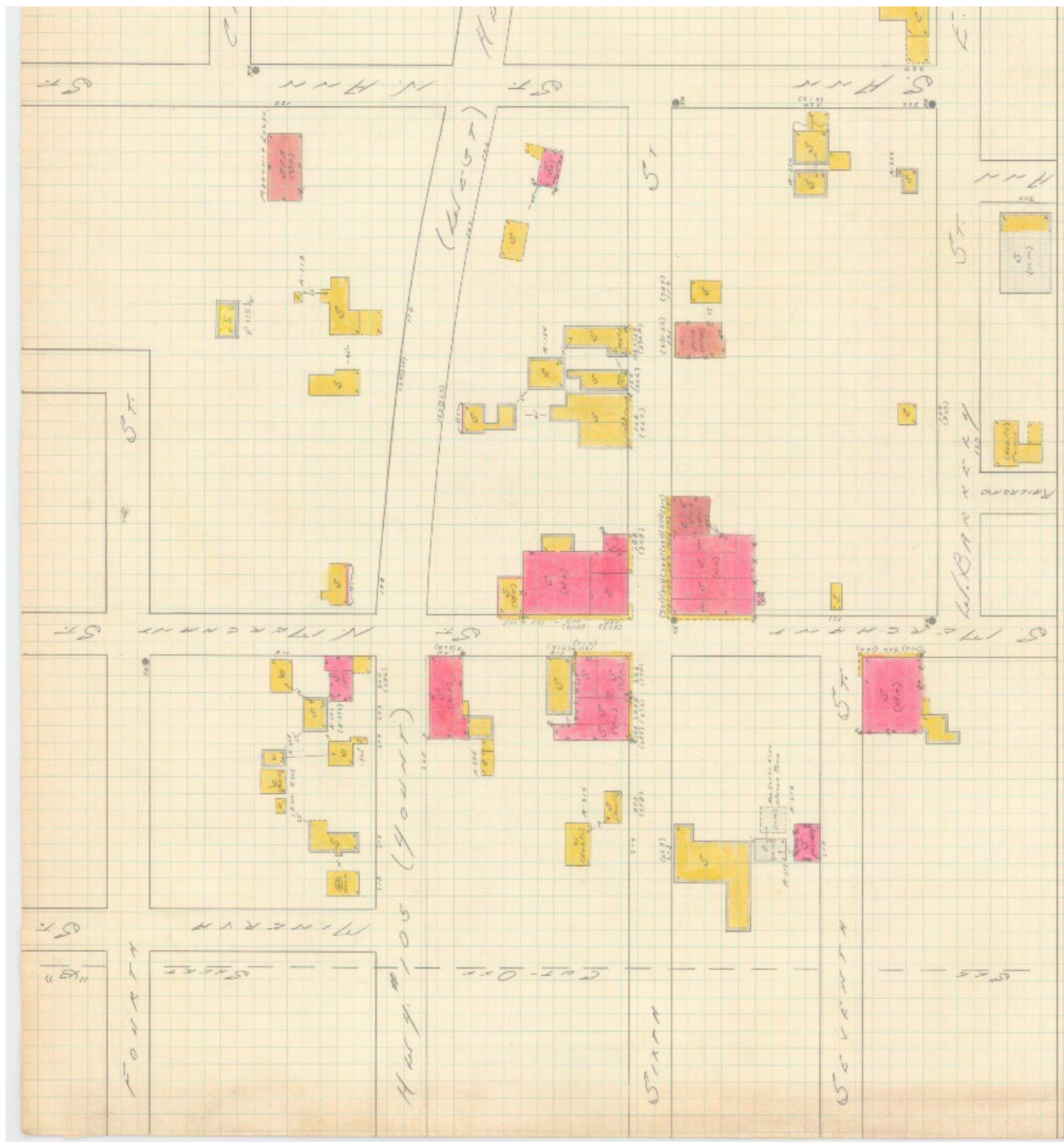
Figures

Figure 1. 1903 photo of Fannin Street showing wood frame construction prior to 1904 fire.
Source: Block, W.T. Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses:' A Tale of Texas' [sic] Second Oil Boom Town.



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Library and Archives Commission.

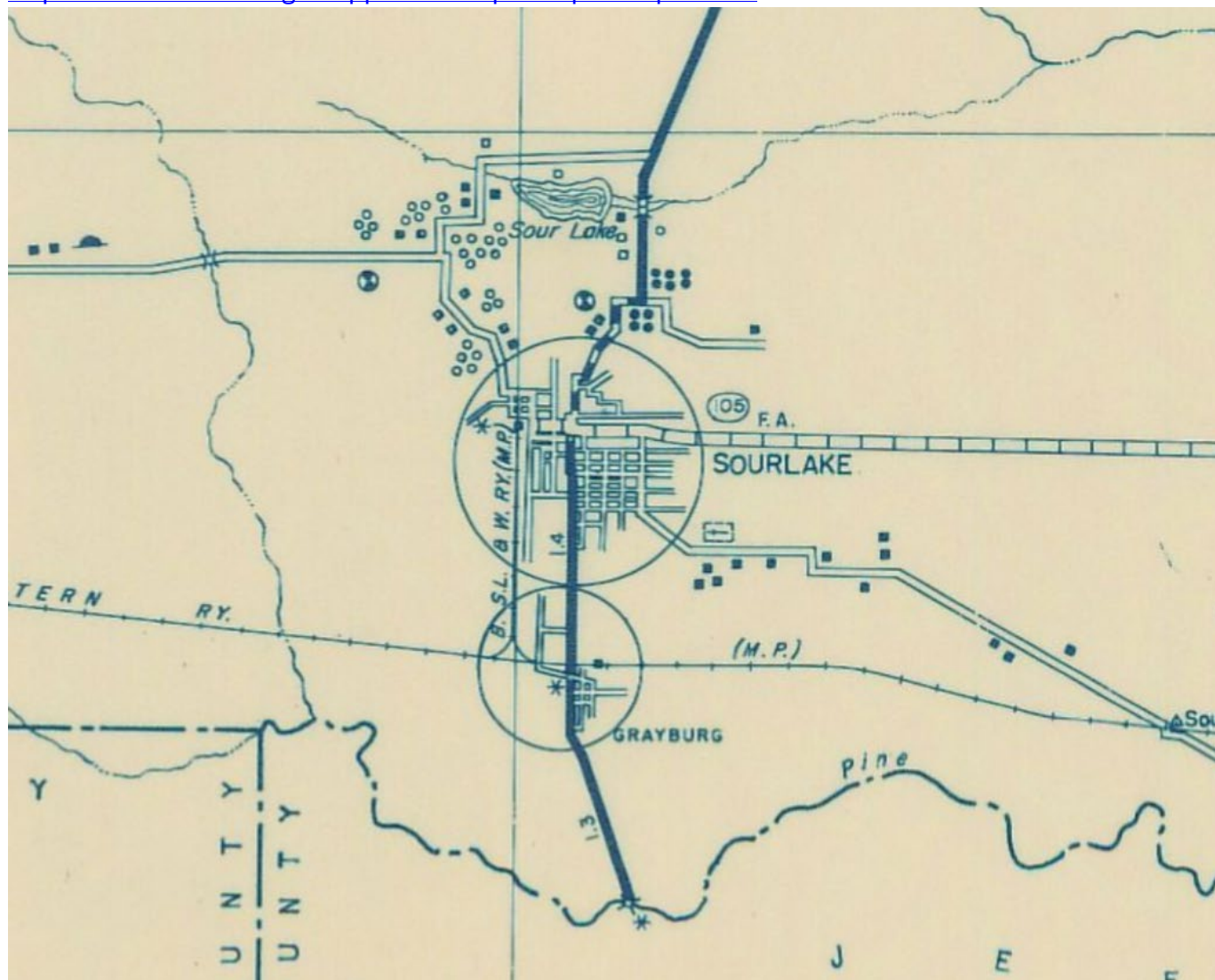


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Figure 4. Detail of a 1940 Map showing the Southern Pacific Railroad line's route through downtown Sour Lake. Source: Texas State Library and Archives.

<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/apps/arc/maps/maplookup/04883>.



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Figure 5. Photograph of Merchant Street looking south; 125 and 136 Merchant Street (demolished); Carpenter Building is visible at top left. Source: Image from 1916 Oil City Visitor Article "Contracts Signed Up: Five More Brick Buildings Are to be Erected At Once."

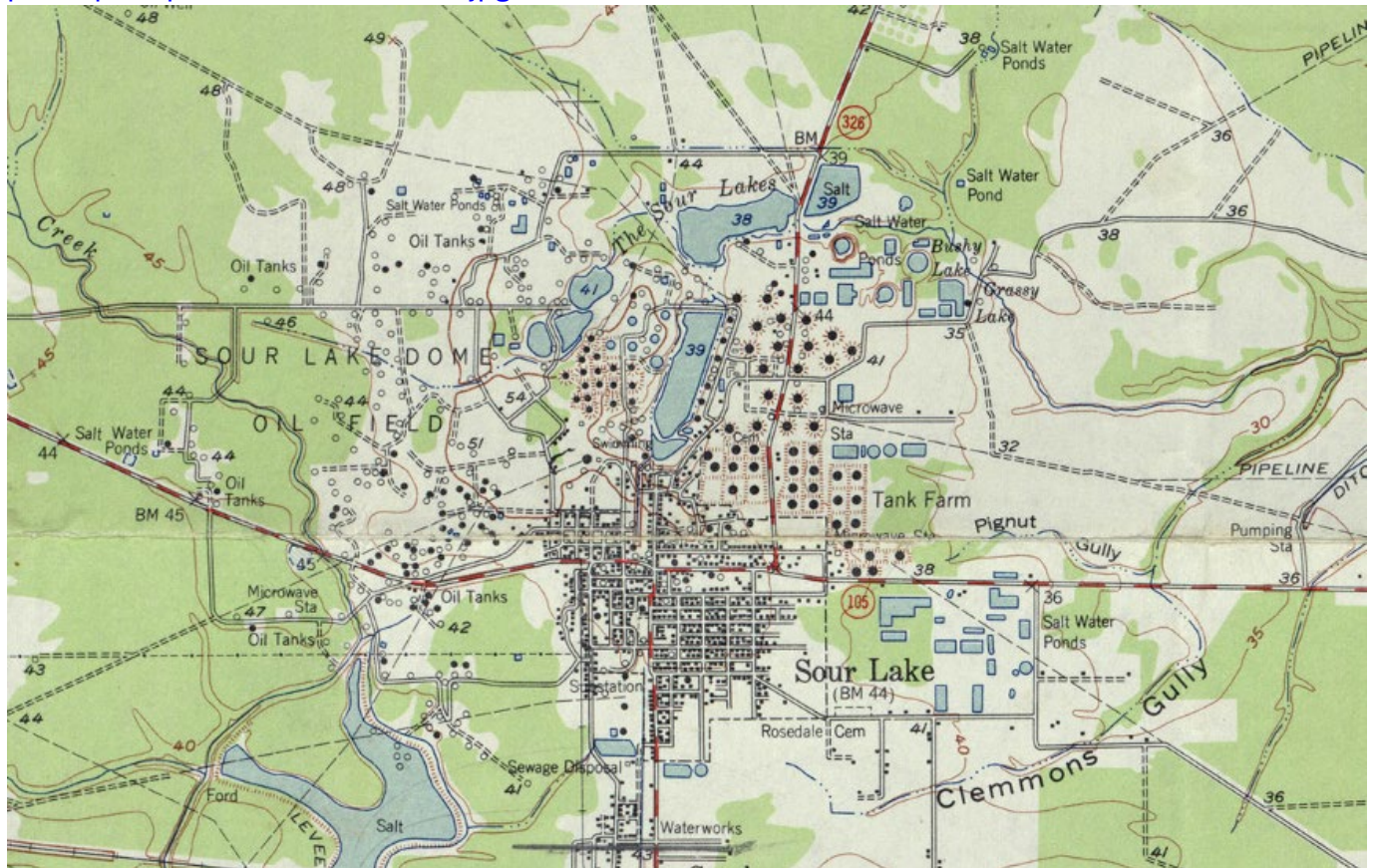


Merchant Street. looking south.

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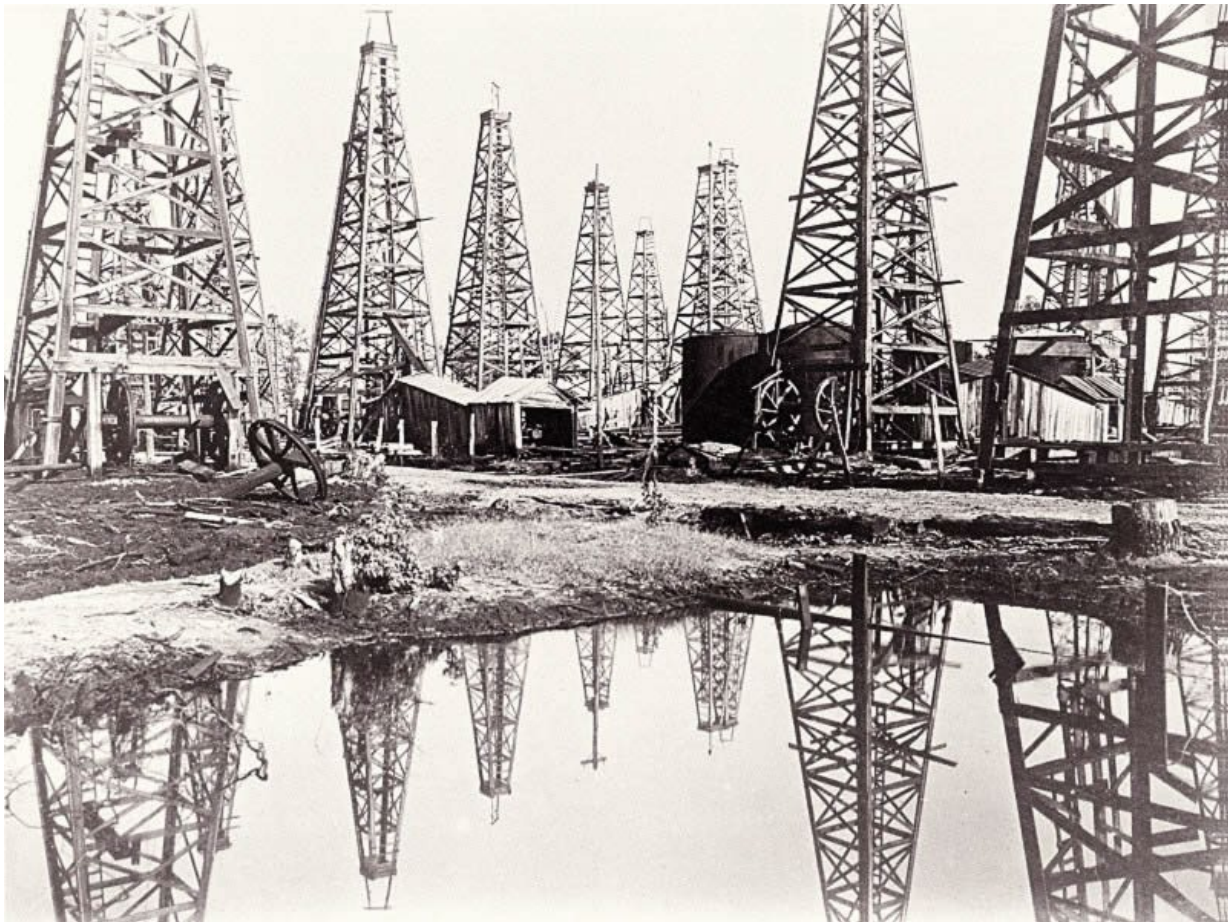
Figure 6. Detail of the topographical map of the Sour Lake area, showing the town in relation to the springs and other natural resources. Source: USGS Topographic Map, 1955, from the University of Texas Libraries, https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/topo/texas/txu-pclmaps-topo-tx-sour_lake-1955.jpg.



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Figure 7. C. 1903 photograph showing the oil derricks at Sour Lake field. Source: Block, W.T. Mud, Gushers, and Sour Lake 'Molasses:' A Tale of Texas' [sic] Second Oil Boom Town.



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Figure 8. Detail of a map published by Southern Pacific in 1903, illustrating a new rail spur that extended all the way to Sour Lake. Source: Southern Pacific Company. Correct map of Texas., map, 1903; Chicago, Illinois.

(<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth190557/m1/1/?q=southern%20pacific>), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting University of Texas at Arlington Library.



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Photo Log

Name of Property: Sour Lake Downtown Historic District
Location: Sour Lake, Hardin County, Texas
Photographer: Emily Payne
Date Photographed: April 27, 2023.

All photographs reflect the current appearance of the nominated properties as of March 2026.

Photo 1

730 Sixth Street. Carpenter Building (constructed 1903). Shows Sixth Street looking west and Merchant Street looking north. Noncontributing 758 Sixth Street shown at left. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 2

Contextual view of Merchant Street from Highway 105. Camera facing south.

Photo 3

Contextual view of Sixth Street from 700 block. Camera facing east. Photo 4. 100 Block of Merchant Street (constructed 1916). Left to right: 135 Merchant Street and 125 Merchant Street. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 5. South side of 600 Block of Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing southwest.

Photo 6

Northwest Merchant Street, showing 104 Merchant Street, a contributing resource.

Photo 7

650 Sixth Street. Workshop Building (constructed 1950) showing setback from Sixth Street. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 8

U.S. Post Office (constructed 1966) showing mural. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 9

615 Sixth Street (ID: 139896). First M.E. Church South (constructed 1921). Camera facing south.

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Photo 10

758 Sixth Street (constructed 1930). Camera facing north.

Photo 11

Left to right: 690 Sixth Street (constructed 1935) and 680 Sixth Street (constructed 1960). Noncontributing due to extensive alterations. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 12

Rear portion of 695 Sixth Street, facing Merchant Street, showing 165 Merchant Street. Camera facing east.

Photo 13

Restaurant at 111 Merchant Street, constructed around 1965. Camera facing east.

Photo 14

135 Merchant Street (constructed 1916). Camera facing east.

Photo 15

730 Sixth Street. Carpenter Building (constructed 1903). Camera facing west.

Photo 16

695 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing south.

Photo 17

Middle and westernmost bays of 685-689 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing south.

Photo 18

Easternmost bay of 685-689 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing south.

Photo 19.

Detail of the storefronts at the middle and westernmost bays of 685-689 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing southeast.

Photo 20

675 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing southwest.

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Photographs

Name of Property: Sour Lake Downtown Historic District
Location: Sour Lake, Hardin County, Texas
Photographer: Emily Payne
Date Photographed April 27, 2023.

All photographs reflect the current appearance of the nominated properties as of July 2025.

Note that photo ordering below follows the order of parenthetical references within the narratives in Section 7 and Section 8. For geographically arranged thumbnail photos, refer to the inventory table at the end of Section 7.

Photo 1. 730 Sixth Street. Carpenter Building (constructed 1903). Shows Sixth Street looking west and Merchant Street looking north. Noncontributing 758 Sixth Street shown at left. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 2. Contextual view of Merchant Street from Highway 105. Camera facing south.



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Photo 3. Contextual view of Sixth Street from 700 block. Camera facing east.



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Photo 4. 100 Block of Merchant Street (constructed 1916). Left to right: 135 Merchant Street and 125 Merchant Street. Camera facing southeast.



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Photo 5. South side of 600 Block of Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 6. Northwest Merchant Street, showing 104 Merchant Street, a contributing resource.



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Photo 7. 650 Sixth Street. Workshop Building (constructed 1950). Camera facing northeast.



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Photo 8. U.S. Post Office (constructed 1966) showing mural. Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 9. 615 Sixth Street (ID: 139896). First M.E. Church South (constructed 1921). Camera facing south.



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Photo 10. 758 Sixth Street (constructed 1930). Camera facing north.



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Photo 11. Left to right: 690 Sixth Street (constructed 1935) and 680 Sixth Street (constructed 1960). Noncontributing due to extensive alterations. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 12. 165 Merchant Street – also showing the rear portion of 695 Sixth Street at the right. Camera facing east.



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Photo 13. Restaurant at 111 Merchant Street, constructed around 1965. Camera facing east.



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Photo 14. 135 Merchant Street (constructed 1916). Camera facing east.



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Photo 15. 730 Sixth Street. Carpenter Building (constructed 1903). Camera facing west.



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Photo 16. 695 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing south.



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Photo 17. Middle and westernmost bays of 685-689 Sixth Street (constructed 1920).
Camera facing south.



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Photo 18. Easternmost bay of 685-689 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing south.



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Photo 19. Detail of the storefronts at the middle and westernmost bays of 685-689 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing southeast.



Sour Lake Downtown Historic District
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Photo 20. 675 Sixth Street (constructed 1920). Camera facing southwest.



~end~