

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only  
received **JUL 23 1980**  
date entered **SEP 27 1980**

**1. Name**

historic Cameron County Courthouse

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 1150 East Madison Street \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Brownsville \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district 15th

state Texas code 048 county Cameron code 061

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Cameron County Judge - R.A. (Ray) Ramon

street & number 1150 East Madison Street - P.O. Box 431

city, town Brownsville \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Texas

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cameron County Courthouse, Records Office

street & number 1150 East Madison Street

city, town Brownsville \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Texas

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date July 1977 \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county  local

depository for survey records Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office

city, town Brownsville \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Texas



## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Cameron County Courthouse is a rectangular building that extends approximately 170 feet along its north and south facades and 100 feet along its east and west facades. It has three stories and an elevated basement. The building is constructed of reinforced concrete and steel framing. The wall finish is brown bricks of running bond and terra cotta trim. A terra cotta watertable extends around the perimeter. The first floor consists of brick banded courses. The banding is made of six courses and a recessed one. There are six rows of this bonding. At the second floor a terra cotta band extends around the perimeter. The second and third floors have recessed brick panels inset between brick pilasters. The pilasters have terra cotta corinthian capitals which support a terra cotta architrave and cornice with dentils. A brick frieze above the first cornice has cast-iron ventilating grilles and terra cotta brackets which extend to a second terra cotta cornice. Above each of the four entrances are two full tapered half circle columns and a quarter column on each side. Each column is capped with a terra cotta corinthian capital. A terra cotta shield on top of the cornice above each entrance bears the inscription "1912". The inscription "Cameron County Courthouse" is located on the frieze. A granite cornerstone occupies each exterior corner of the building.

At the center of the four facades is a projecting colonnaded porch. The front portion of each porch has three terra cotta framed openings, a large one flanked by smaller ones. The sides of the porch have a window-like terra cotta framed opening. Each porch has seven granite steps, a terra cotta rail and a pedestal on both sides of the steps. The porches have plaster ceilings and a plaster cornice with a terra cotta band below the cornice. A concrete bulkhead is located to the right of the porch on the north facade. The bulkhead contains a concrete ramp and steps which lead to the basement. The doorways to each entrance have a deep recessed stone surround and an arched, beveled glass transom. Large, heavy, wooden framed doors have a full length beveled glass panel, wooden surrounds, brass thresholds, brass hardware, and a large brass kickplate. The doorway to the basement through the bulkhead has a double leaf, wooden panelled door and an iron gate across it.

Double wooden windows with one-over-one single hung sashes and a transom above occupy all three floors of the building. The windows have terra cotta surrounds, terra cotta lintels, and terra cotta sills as well as wooden sills. Some of the windows have been removed and the openings have been plastered over. Brick spandrel panels separate the windows of the second and third floors. The windows in the basement have one light and are hinged at the top. They are also covered with iron bars.

The building has a flat roof which consists of a concrete deck and built up asphalt covering. The roof has a brick parapet and a wood shed roof hatch. A brick chimney extends up from the basement through the roof just northwest of center. At the center of the roof is an octagonal lantern that has galvanized louvres around its brick walls. The lantern has a built up roof on its sloping panels. Above the lantern is an octagonal skylight with sloping wire-glass panels. Metal louvres surround the walls of the skylight.

On the first floor of the building corridors lead from each of the entrances to an octagonal rotunda. The quadrants formed by the corridors contain offices. The floor plans of the second and third floors are similar to the first, except that a circular central passageway runs around the rotunda on the second and third floors.



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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SEP 27 1980

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

Stairways are located on both sides of the west corridor to connect all three floors, but only the southwest one leads to the basement. The steel, close string, dog-legged stairways have marble treads and risers leading to each floor. A decorative wrought iron railing extends from a large wrought iron newel at the basement all the way to the third floor with a newel at each landing and floor, except for the third floor where the iron railing turns and ends at a half newel at the wall. The newels have a pendant extending below the ceiling at each landing and floor. A wooden handrail is mounted on top of the iron railing. This same railing extends around the rotunda on the second and third floors. A metal spiral stairway with a pipe handrail extends from the second floor to the roof.

The major passageways through the building have white and black mosaic tile flooring, bordered and patterned, with a marble base. Some office spaces have vinyl asbestos tile floor covering and many have carpeting. The basement floor is concrete.

The walls and ceilings of the three main floors are of plaster, although some of the offices have modern wood panelling. Marble wainscoting extends along the walls of the first and second floors and in the stairwells. The walls of the basement are of brick and wood panelling; its ceiling is the exposed concrete structure. On the first floor the corridors have coffered barrel vault ceilings. Plaster Sullivanesque decorated ribs between the coffers extend down the walls to pilasters capped with plaster corinthian capitals. Pilasters also occupy the intersections of the angles of the octagonal rotunda. The arched openings leading into the rotunda have Sullivanesque plaster decorations on the faces and soffits of the arches. On the third floor the plaster arch over each face of the octagon has Sullivanesque decoration and an ornate shield at the keystone.

The dome over the rotunda is art glass with decorated plaster ribs. A large light fixture hangs from the center of the dome. It has a center frosted glass shade and twelve branches which also have frosted glass shades. In the center of the coffers in the first floor corridors are large glass sphere lighting fixtures. Most of the offices have modern lighting fixtures. The building is served with a modern heating and air conditioning system.

Most of the doors in the building are wood panelled with a glass panel at the top and a patterned frosted glass transom. The wooden architrave has wood panel like trim and plinth blocks. Some doors, however, are modern aluminum store front with aluminum thresholds. The doorways leading to the offices on the first floor are located in the center of the coffered panels in the ceiling.



## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1912

Builder/Architect Atlee B. Ayres

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Cameron County Courthouse, built in 1912, is a fine example of a 20th century Classical Revival public building. Designed by Atlee B. Ayres, one of Texas' most eminent architects, the building is notable for its academic architectural detailing and striking interior. Much of the lavish terra cotta ornament is reminiscent of that used by Louis Sullivan.

The Cameron County Courthouse built in 1912 is the county's second courthouse. The large brick and terra cotta building constructed in the late classical revival style is noted for its academic architectural detailing and striking interior. It has a three-story rotunda with art-glass dome plastic-relief ornament and lavish interior ornamentation reminiscent of that used by Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School.

The building's main distinction, however, is that it was designed by Atlee B. Ayres, one of Texas' most eminent architects. Atlee designed many major buildings in San Antonio and elsewhere in the state during his long and distinguished career. In addition, he was also instrumental in securing professional recognition for architects in Texas.

Atlee Bernard Ayres was born on July 12, 1873 in Hillsboro, Ohio. His family moved to Texas about 1879, settling in San Antonio in 1888. In 1890 Ayres went to New York to study architecture at the Metropolitan School of Architecture which was connected with Columbia University. He also studied at the Art Students League and took painting from Frank Vincent Dumont. After graduating in 1894 he returned to San Antonio and began working for several San Antonio architects. He practiced architecture in Guadalajara, Mexico for about two years, only to return to San Antonio in 1900 to open his own practice. Joined by his son, Robert, in 1924, the firm became Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres. Together they received widespread recognition for their work in American Architect, the Architectural Record, and Pacific Architect; the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals lists several entries dealing with their work. Ayres was a writer himself. In 1926 he published a book on colonial architecture in Mexico entitled Mexican Architecture.

In 1937 Ayres and two other architects were instrumental in securing passage of state legislation for the licensing of architects. Ayres himself received Texas License No. 3. Ayres was also a charter member of the Texas Society of Architects. Ayres was the recipient of many honors including being appointed State Architect by Governor James Ferguson. In 1931 when Ayres was fifty-eight years old, he was made a fellow of the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C. In 1938 Secretary of State Cordell Hull delegated him to represent the United States at the 16th International Congress of Planning and Housing in Mexico City. At the time of this ninety-third birthday in 1966, the American Institute of Architects believed that he was probably the oldest practicing architect in the United States. Atlee B. Ayres died on November 6, 1969 in San Antonio. Today his firm continues its many years of successful practice under the direction of his son, Robert M. Ayres.



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Historic American Buildings Survey-- director, John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; John White (ass't. prof.) Texas Tech Project Supervisor; Betty Bird, project historian; student assistant architects, Scot Deneroff, Susan Dornbusch, Matthew Lowry, Eduardo Luaces and Alan Willig

# 10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreage of nominated property 1 acre  
 Quadrangle name East Brownsville

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	4	6	5	0	7	3	0	2	8	6	5	7	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing	

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is bounded on the north by Madison Street, on the south by Monroe Street, on the east by 11th Street, and on the west by 12th Street.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

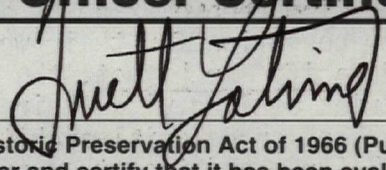
# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Andy Alvarez - County Planner Katherine L. Smith  
Cameron County Planning Department  
 organization Private consultant date May 27, 1980  
 street & number 1150 East Madison Street 512 541-9592  
2612 W. 48th St. telephone 512 451-2684  
 city or town Brownsville Austin state Texas

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local



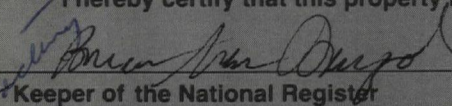
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer date May 27, 1980

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
 Keeper of the National Register date 9/27/80

Attest: Beth Grovorn date 9/23/80  
 Chief of Registration



Property Cameron County Courthouse

State N. Carolina Working Number 7.23.80.1918

80004084

**TECHNICAL**

**CONTROL**

Photos 5  
Maps 1

*Good example of an early 20th C. Classical Revival public building; noted for its tone with detailing and striking interior. Co's 2nd courthouse.*

**HISTORIAN**

*accpt  
Grosvont  
9/23/80*

**ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN**

**ARCHEOLOGIST**

**OTHER**

**HAER**

Inventory \_\_\_\_\_  
Review \_\_\_\_\_

**REVIEW UNIT CHIEF**

*accpt  
Grosvont  
9/23/80*

**BRANCH CHIEF**

**KEEPER**

National Register Write-up \_\_\_\_\_  
Federal Register Entry 2.3.81

Send-back \_\_\_\_\_  
Re-submit \_\_\_\_\_

Entered SEP 27 1980







*View from Southwest*

Cameron County Courthouse  
1150 East Madison Street  
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo courtesy of Cameron County Commissioners  
Court. Photographer unknown. Date: 1979.  
Negative property of Cameron County Com. Crt.

Southwest oblique, camera facing northeast.

Photo 1 of 5.

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*View from North*

Cameron County Courthouse  
1150 East Madison Street  
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo courtesy of Cameron County Commissioners  
Court. Photographer unknown. Date: 1979.  
Negative property of Cameron County Com. Crt.

North facade, camera facing south.

Photo 2 of 5.

JUL 23 1980

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View from Northwest

Cameron County Courthouse  
1150 East Madison Street  
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo courtesy of Cameron County Commissioners  
Court. Photographer unknown. Date: 1979.  
Negative property of Cameron County Com. Crt.

Northwest oblique, camera facing southeast.

Photo 3 of 5.

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Rotunda Dome  
(stained glass)  
from third floor

Cameron County Courthouse  
1150 East Madison Street  
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo courtesy of Cameron County Commissioners  
Court. Photographer unknown. Date: 1979.  
Negative property of Cameron County Com. Crt.

Detail of rotunda dome.

Photo 4 of 5.

JUL 23 1980

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Detailed architecture  
at junctions of arched  
corridors

Cameron County Courthouse  
1150 East Madison Street  
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo courtesy of Cameron County Commissioners  
Court. Photographer unknown. Date: 1979.  
Negative property of Cameron County Com. Crt.

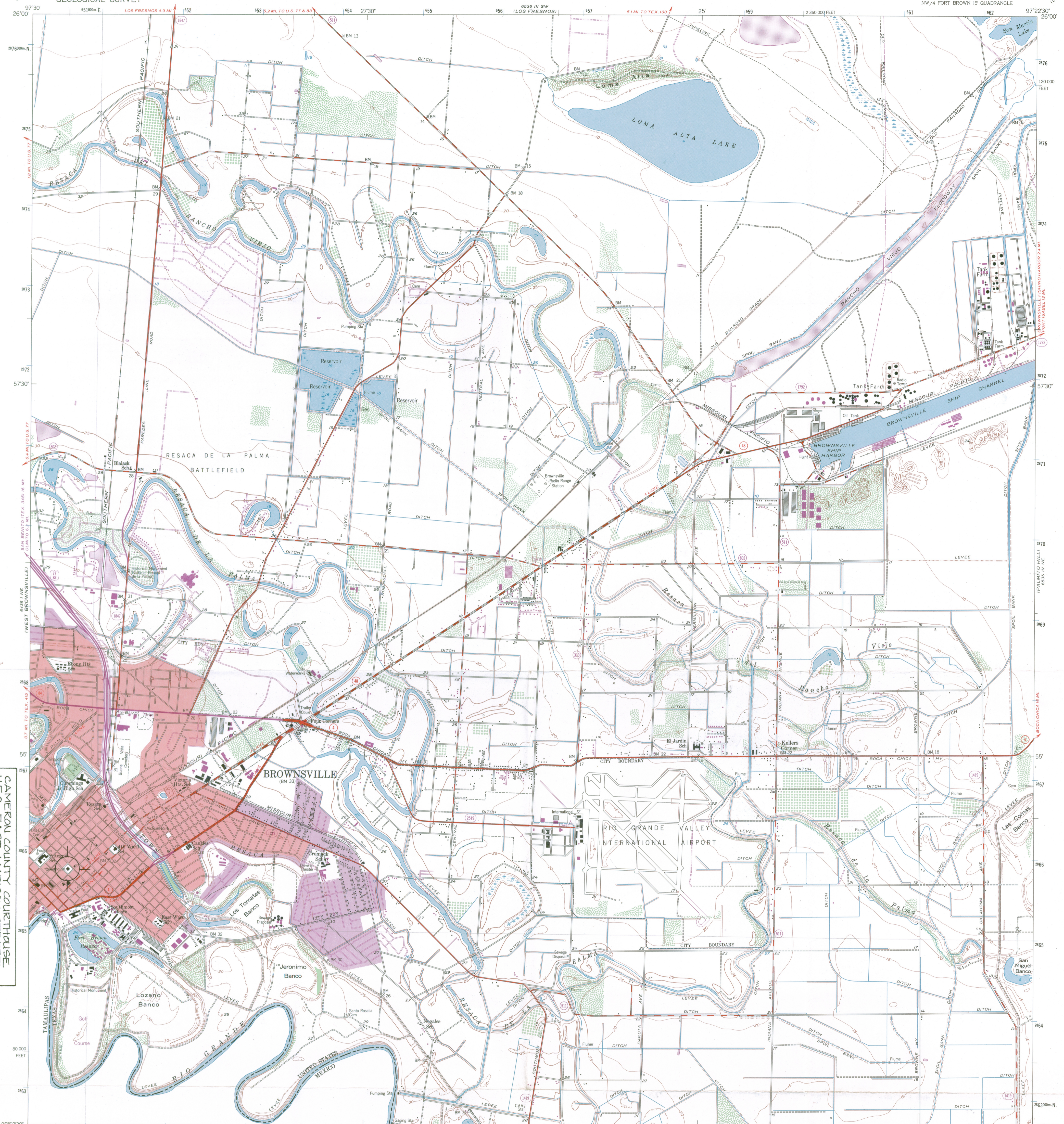
Interior arch detail.

Photo 5 of 5.

JUL 23 1980

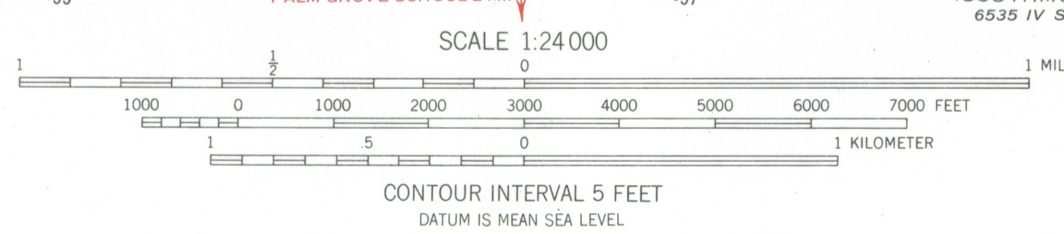
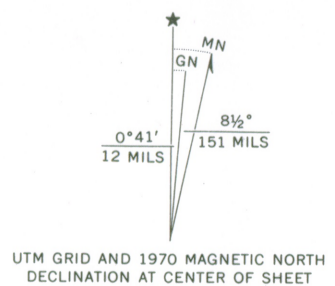
SEP 27 1980





CAMERON COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
1150 EAST MADISON STREET  
BROWNSVILLE, CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE: 14JG5073002865720

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE  
Culture and drainage in part compiled by U.S. Coast and  
Geodetic Survey from aerial photographs taken 1950  
Topography from 1930 map by USGS, revised by  
planetable surveys 1955  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, south zone  
1,000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 14, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates areas in which only  
landmark buildings are shown  
Revisions shown in purple compiled by from aerial photographs  
taken 1970. This information not field checked  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Light-duty  
Medium-duty  
Unimproved dirt  
Route  
State Route

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JUL 23 1980  
NATIONAL  
REGISTER**

EAST BROWNSVILLE, TEX.  
NW/4 FORT BROWN 15 QUADRANGLE  
N2552.5-W9722.5/7.5  
1955  
PHOTOREVISED 1970  
AMS 6535 IV NW-SERIES V882

2597-433

SEP 27 1980



ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE TEXAS  
Date Entered SEP 27 1980

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Georgian Revival Buildings of Southern Methodist University Thematic Resources	Dallas Dallas County
Cameron County Courthouse	Brownsville Cameron County
Allen, Paul, House	Houston Harris County
Gilfillan House	Austin Travis County
Aynesworth-Wright House	Austin vicinity Travis County
Green Pastures	Austin Travis County
Manhattan Heights Historic District	El Paso El Paso County

Also Notified

Honorable Lloyd Bentsen  
Honorable John G. Tower  
Honorable James M. Collins  
Honorable E. (Kika) de la Garza  
Honorable Mickey Leland  
Honorable J. J. (Jake) Pickle  
Honorable Richard C. White

State Historic Preservation Officer  
Mr. Truett Latimer  
Executive Director  
Texas State Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

NR Byers 10-15-80

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.