

**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 JAN 29 1980

date entered MAR 26 1980

1. Name

historic Immaculate Conception Church

and/or common Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

2. Location

street & number 1218 E. Jefferson Street

not for publication

city, town Brownsville vicinity of congressional district 15

state Texas code 048 county Cameron code 061

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Catholic Church, Diocese of Brownsville

street & number 1900 E. Elizabeth Street

city, town Brownsville vicinity of state Texas 78520

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cameron County Courthouse

street & number 1150 E. Madison Street

city, town Brownsville

state Texas

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

1. Texas Historical Marker
title 2. HABS

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1. 1974 2. 1974

federal state county local

1. Texas Historical Commission
depository for survey records 2. Library of Congress

1. Austin, Texas
city, town 2. Washington, D.C.

state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" 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 Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception exemplifies Gothic Revival architecture in the ecclesiastical form. Built between 1856 and 1859, the church is located in the old part of Brownsville's downtown district, near the Rio Grande River.

The Cathedral is Latin cross in plan, with the principle public entrance on the north side. The single story structure has buttressed brick walls which rise to a height of forty feet. The foundation, continuous bearing with footings under piers, is also brick. The gabled roof is pitched approximately twelve in twelve, and is covered in asbestos shingles; the original tiles no longer exist. The roof reaches to seventy feet at its peak. Brick parapets are laid in a continuous wheel pattern with open work.

The main facade is marked by a square brick entrance tower, eighty-eight feet in height. Below this tower, there is a Gothic arched, heavily moulded, recessed entry, with a pair of nine panelled wooden doors. The reveals are moulded brick and wood, and the tympanum is also wood. Above this entry is a large, stained glass, Gothic window flanked by two stained glass lancet windows.

There are thirty-eight stained glass windows in the church. With the exception of the large pointed arch window at the entrance, they are all simple lancet windows, placed symmetrically, with brick trim.

Inside, along the nave, there are eight clustered piers which help support the roof. The rib vaulted ceiling is panelled with canvas, painted blue, and lined with gold leaf. The interior walls are plastered and painted white. The floor is green terrazzo, except at the altar, where it is covered with red carpet.

The original altar was wooden, ornately carved and trimmed in gold leaf. In 1960, in accordance with Church liturgical reforms, it was replaced with a simple flat marble table. The original pulpit was designed by the church's architect, and was replaced with a simple podium, also in 1960. The hand-pulled bells in the belfry are original; they were taken from a steamship in the late 1800's. Seven of the nine original crystal and bronze chandeliers remain. They were imported from Paris when the church was built. The wooden pews are original; the seating capacity is over four hundred.

In 1958 the Altar of the Sacred Heart was installed. During the same period the Madonna Chapel was dedicated; it was a gift of the Stillman family in memory of Charles Stillman, an early pioneer and

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founder of Brownsville. The imported marble altar is surrounded by four stained glass windows. Centered over the gold-leaved retable is a painting of the Madonna and Child. The chapel is set off from the nave of the church by a high grille surmounted by the coat of arms of Mariano S. Garriga, Bishop of Corpus Christi at the time.

There is a rectory located directly behind the Cathedral, built in 1861. It is constructed of the same bricks as the church. Two wings were added to this building at an unknown date. A vestry was added in 1890. Originally, the rectory was three stories high, but in 1933 a hurricane blew the roof off. Consequently, the third floor ceiling was lowered and this floor was used as an attic. Currently, the priests reside on the refurbished second floor, and the first floor contains offices. A spacious arched gallery opens from the rectory to an inside patio. In 1935 the second floor of the gallery was enclosed with brick and glass windows were installed.

The walks within the grounds were originally brick, and now are brick and concrete. There is a memorial to the Oblate Missionaries in the northeast corner of the churchyard, and a vault of the Simon Celaya family in the northwest corner. The grounds are enclosed by an iron fence with stucco covered pilasters.

In 1963 restoration of the exterior of the Cathedral was carried out. In 1965 the interior was restored to compare favorably with the original beauty. This included total replacement of the canvas ceiling, and painting and decoration of ceiling, walls and columns. A new roof was put on the building. This was the first complete restoration done on the church.

In 1970 the church was damaged by fire, and another restoration was begun. At this time the exterior of the church was sandblasted, and painted, and what appears to be cement stucco was applied to the exterior along the base. This stucco waterproofing was a response to moisture in the walls. Its application aggravated the problem, causing the moisture or rising damp to climb to the height of the stucco and to exit through the interior plaster. Recently the damaged plaster was replaced with cement plaster, a treatment that further seals the walls and ultimately causes the moisture to rise higher.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1856-1859

Builder/Architect Father Pierre Y. Keralum

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Gothic Revival structure of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception is an outstanding example of mid-nineteenth century architecture, few of which remain in the Rio Grande Valley. It was designed by Father Pierre Y. Keralum, who studied architecture in France before entering the seminary. Texas boasts many Gothic Revival churches. Few, however, are as highly evolved as Immaculate Conception. The Brownsville church is also an early use of the style; it was not used widely in Texas until the 1880's. Built between 1856 and 1859, the cathedral dates back to only ten years after the incorporation of Brownsville, and stands as a milestone to the development of the Catholic Church in Texas. It was the first permanent settlement of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the United States.

In 1849, at the request of Bishop J.M. Odin of Galveston, whose diocese included the entire state of Texas, four priests of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate came to Brownsville from Canada. For several months they lived in an unused barn and said Mass in an abandoned store building. In March of 1850, a lot was purchased and plans for a chapel were made. This small chapel was completed in June of that year.

By 1856 they had outgrown the original building; plans and specifications were made for a larger, permanent chapel. Construction began on July 6, 1856. On June 12, 1859, the church was completed. Bishop Odin blessed it and dedicated it to the Immaculate Conception.

In 1861 the rectory of the church was erected. Besides serving as a residence for the local priests, it also served as a refuge for priests fleeing the turmoil of several Mexican revolutions. The second floor of the rectory was the site of the first Oblate seminary in the United States.

In 1874 the church was named a Cathedral when Bishop Dominic Manucy became the first Vicar Apostolic in Brownsville. The title was revoked eight months later when the Bishop moved his residence to Corpus Christi. In 1912 Corpus Christi became a diocese, and Brownsville did not regain its rank until 1965 when the Diocese of Brownsville was established.

The Cathedral was affiliated with St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in 1924. It continues to serve as an active focus for the community.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.97

Quadrangle name East Brownsville

UTM NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	14	6 5 0	6 6 0	2 8 6 5	5 3 0
Zone	Easting	Northing			
C					
E					
G					

B	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at the northeast corner of 12th and Jefferson Streets, extending southward to the southeast corner of 13th and Jefferson, then 120' along Jefferson to an alley, 350' north to 12th Street, then 120' east to the northeast corner of 12th and Jefferson.

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janie Gribble

organization Texas Historical Commission date January 7, 1980

street & number P.O. Box 12276 telephone 512-475-3094

city or town 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 January 25, 1980

For HCRS use only

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

date

3/26/80

for *Janie Gribble*
Keeper of the National Register

date

3/26/80

Attest: *Bob Grosvenor*
Chief of Registration

date

3/26/80

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Brownsville Herald, Article of Sept. 21, 1975, page 1-C.

Loth, Calder and Julius Trousdale Sadler, Jr., The Only Proper Style. Little, Brown and Company, N.Y. 1975.

Personal letter from Jon Volz, architect, to Calvin Walker, A.I.A 1979.

Photo-Data Book Report-HABS, TEX-3139

Souvenir booklets, Installation of Bishop Aldop Marx, ^{ce} Centennial of I.C.Ch., both available from Oblate Fathers, 7711 Madonna Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78216.

Texas Catalogue: HABS, complied by Paul Goeldner, Trinity University Press, 1974.

Property

Immaculate Conception Church

State

TX - Cameron

Working Number

1-29-80 281

8000 4085

TECHNICAL

Photos 6

Maps 1

CONTROL

Early and outstanding ex. of Gothic Revival architecture in TX. First permanent settlement of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the U.S.; and their 1st Seminary represents steps in the development of the Catholic Ch. in TX.

HISTORIAN

accept
Grovesna
3/26/80

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER

Inventory _____

Review _____

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

accept
Grovesna
3/26/80

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up

2-3-81

Send-back

Federal Register Entry

Re-submit

Entered

MAR 26 1980



Immaculate Conception Church
1218 E. Jefferson Street
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo by Chip Kaufman, Texas Historical
Commission, 1972. Negative on file at THC.

Northwest oblique

Photo 1 of 6

JAN 29 1980

MAR 26 1980



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Immaculate Conception Church
1218 E. Jefferson Street
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo by Chip Kaufman, Texas Historical
Commission, 1972. Negative on file at THC.

Southwest oblique

Photo 2 of 6

JAN 29 1980

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Immaculate Conception Church
1218 E. Jefferson Street
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo by Chip Kaufman, Texas Historical
Commission, 1972. Negative on file at THC.

Northeast oblique, showing rectory and out-
buildings.
Photo 3 of 6

MAR 26 1980 JAN 29 1980



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Immaculate Conception Church
1218 E. Jefferson Street
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo by Chip Kaufman, Texas Historical
Commission, 1972. Negative on file at THC.

East elevation, showing rectory.

Photo 4 of 6.

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Immaculate Conception Church
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Photo by Chip Kaufman, Texas Historical
Commission, 1972. Negative on file at THC.

Interior, looking toward alter.

Photo 5 of 6

JAN 29 1980

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Immaculate Conception Church
1218 E. Jefferson Street
Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas

Photo by Margaret Pate, 94 N. Coria,
Brownsville, 1979. Negative property of
Ms. Pate.

Southwest oblique

JAN 29 1980

Photo 6 of 6

MAR 26 1980

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE
TEXAS

Date Entered MAR 26 1980

Name

Location

Immaculate Conception Church

Brownsville
Cameron County

Dallas Scottish Rite Temple

Dallas
Dallas County

Sims House

Orange
Orange County

Also Notified

Honorable Lloyd Bentsen

Honorable John G. Tower
Honorable E. (Kika) de la Garza
Honorable Jim Mattox
Honorable Charles Wilson

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

NR

Byers/bjr 3/31/80

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