

**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 Immaculate Conception Church

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street & number 1218 E. Jefferson Street _____ not for publication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	____ museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	____ unoccupied	____ commercial	____ park
____ structure	____ both	____ work in progress	____ educational	____ private residence
____ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	____ entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
____ object	____ in process	____ yes: restricted	____ government	____ scientific
	____ being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	____ industrial	____ transportation
		____ no	____ military	____ 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

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

city, town 1. Austin, Texas
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 terrazo, 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

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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

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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			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<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.

favorable that may be at

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property 0.97

Quadrangle name Brownsville

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 14 650660 2865530
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C
Northing

D
Northing

E
Northing

F
Northing

G
Northing

H
Northing

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 X 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

for Bruce Lee Dyer
Keeper of the National Register

date 3/26/80

Attest: Bob Groves

date 3/26/80

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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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, Co Centennial of I.C.Ch., both available from Oblate Fathers, 7711 Madonna Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78216.

Texas Catalogue: HABS, compiled 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
Grovena**3/26/80*

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER

Inventory

Review

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

*accept**Grovena**3/26/80*

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up

Send-back

Entered

MAR 26 1980

Federal Register Entry

Re-submit



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



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

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.

Northeast oblique, showing rectory and out-
buildings.

Photo 3 of 6

MAR 26 1980 JAN 29 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.

East elevation, showing rectory.

Photo 4 of 6.

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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.

Interior, looking toward altar.

Photo 5 of 6

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

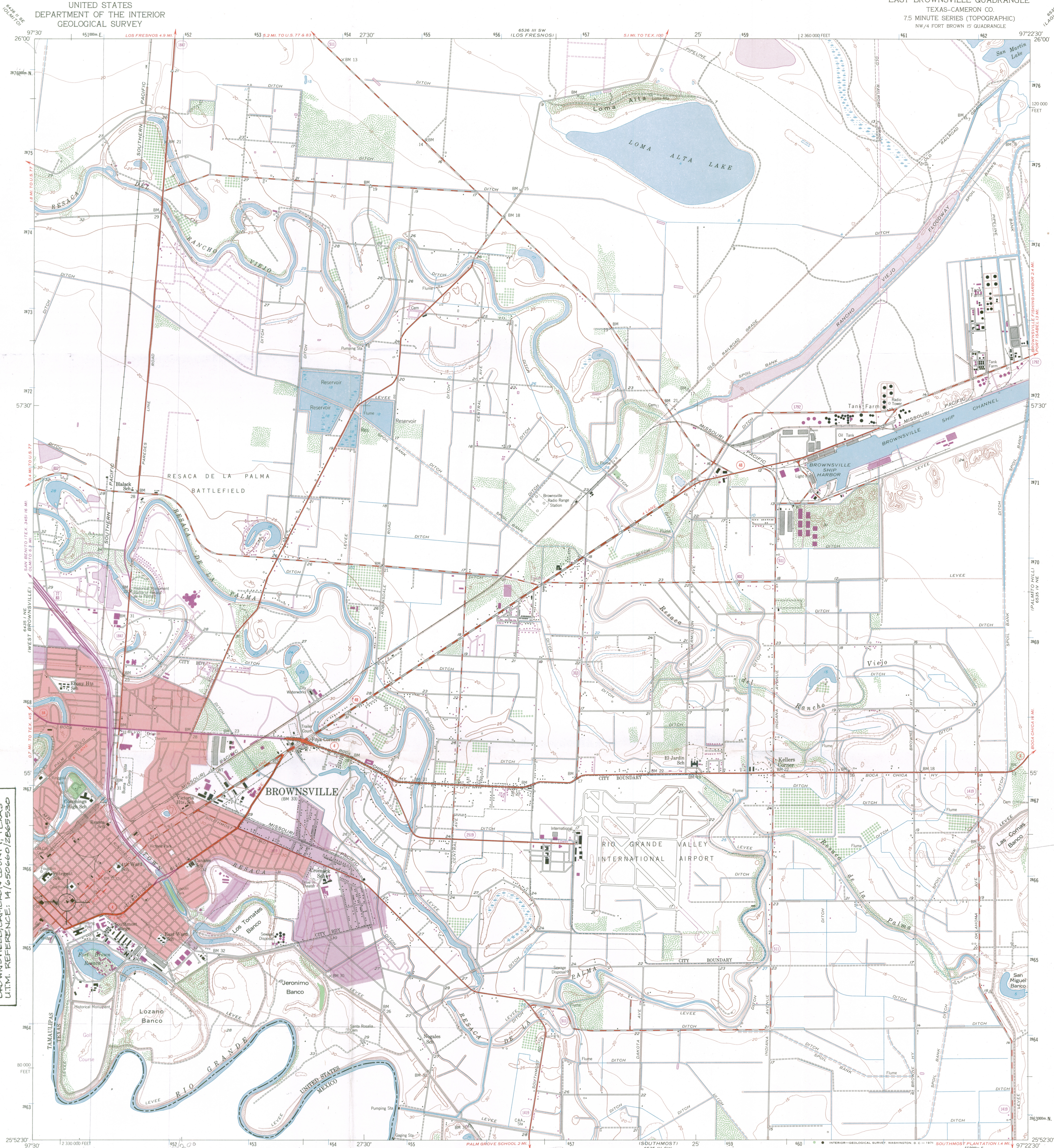
Photo by Margaret Pate, 94 N. Coria,
Brownsville, 1979. Negative property of
Ms. Pate.

Southwest oblique

Photo 6 of 6

JAN 29 1980

MAR 26 1980



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH
1216 E. JEFFERSON ST.
BROWNSVILLE, CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS
UTM. REFERENCE: 14J650660/2865530

Maped, 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

JUN 16 1971

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

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
U.S. Route	State Route

EAST BROWNSVILLE, TEX.
NW/4 FORT BROWN IS QUADRANGLE
N2552.5—W9722.5/7.5

1955
PHOTOREVISED 1970
AMS 6535 IV NW—SERIES V882

2597-433

MAR 26 1980

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE TEXAS

Date Entered MAR 26 1980

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
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.