

United States Department of the Interior
National Park 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 NPS use only

received **SEP 27 1982**

date entered

1. Name

historic Sterling, Ross S., House

and/or common Texas White House

2. Location

street & number 515 Bayridge Road. N/A not for publication

city, town Morgan's Point N/A vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state Texas code 048 county Harris code 201

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Maison Blanche Corporation,
Count de Malleray de Barre, President,

street & number 10 E. 68th St.

city, town New York, N/A vicinity of state New York 10021

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Harris County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Houston state Texas

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1979 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Texas Historical Commission

city, town Austin state Texas

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☐ good
☒ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Seafarers traveling on the Houston Ship Channel near Morgan's Point on Galveston Bay may be startled to see a view of the White House. Former Texas Governor and First Lady Ross and Maude Sterling commissioned prominent Houston architect Alfred C. Finn to build their palatial home and model it after the President's Georgian mansion in Washington, D.C. Finn's creation, like the White House, has two main facades, one facing the bay and one facing Bayridge Road. It is said to be approximately two-fifths the actual size of its model but exaggerates somewhat the proportions of its major elements.

Built of grey, sand-rubbed Texas limestone and mounted on raised basement, the imposing 34 room, two-story residence spreads over a six acre lot. Three banks of eight over eight windows on the top story are aligned with the same number of French doors on the first floor. Both the windows and doors are recessed; the windows are set in simple frames with straight, limestone sills. Consoles support the simplified cornices above the doors.

The elevation that faces the bay and resembles the White House is actually the rear (south-east facade) of the building. Its central design element, the most troublesome aspect of the facade, is the overwhelming portico that divides the structure's tripartite plan. Supported by a colonnade of ten slightly elongated Ionic columns and projecting over nearly half of the facade's total surface area, the portico features a full entablature. The White House's columns, spaced to stand between the openings on the facade's recessed wall, accentuate the structure's verticality. Finn increased the number of columns on the Sterling mansion by four and erected them without reference to the wall, giving their placement a random appearance. This unbalanced portico, along with the reduction in the scale of the flanking granite blocks and the additions set to the northeast of the building, give the facade its somewhat awkward appearance. Five materials were selected for the exterior: granite, marble, Gloucester stone, concrete and plaster support its walls.

A limestone balcony constructed of turned stone balusters spaced between plinths circles the red quarry tile roof and completely conceals the sundeck. The Bayridge Road (north-west) entrance is planned in three parts also, with its two-story central block being the structure's focal point. A 24 pane, triple sash window is placed in the middle of the second story between two sets of side lights that contain six lights each. Limestone pilasters separate each set of glazed openings. An elaborate stone garland with a shell motif is affixed above the center window. This complex of window lights and the first floor French doors set on either side of the central block are framed by a delicately webbed iron balcony. A gigantic fan-shaped iron grill is suspended above the ground floor entrance and radiates over the stone steps. Beyond its structural massing, there are very few similarities between this facade and that of the White House.

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The interior of the Sterling residence repeats much of the ample Georgian Revival design of the exterior. The massive front hallway, for instance, has deep plaster cornices, and a double staircase leading to the second floor. The library features Georgian panelling but a Jacobethan Revival fireplace. The main floor, following the piano nobile concept, contains these and other rooms designed primarily for entertaining, including the living, drawing and dining rooms, the kitchen and breakfast room. The second floor provides nine bedrooms, a sleeping porch and nine hand-painted tile bathrooms, while the basement housed recreational and service support facilities, including a club room, bowling alley, billiard room, trophy room, wine cellar and gardening room.

There are no known outbuildings associated with the Sterling House and, other than the seawall, the principle man-made landscape features are a swimming pool southwest of the house, nearby circular and cascading fountains, and the u-shaped driveway at its front entrance.

The Sterling House is the major feature of a bayside community of early twentieth century dwellings, many of some substance. The proximity to the abrasive Gulf Coast climate and proximity to several large petrochemical complexes has subjected the exterior of the structure to unusual wear, yet it remains intact. The Sterling House is unusually well-built.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1924-27

Builder/Architect Alfred Finn

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Texas White House, a 21,000 sq. ft. likeness of the President's home in Washington, D.C. was built from 1924-1927 with a panoramic view of Galveston Bay and near the oilfields where its original owner, former Texas governor, petroleum tycoon and philanthropist, Ross S. Sterling (1875-1949) amassed, lost and regained his enormous fortune. Legend has it that Sterling approached prestigious Houston architect Alfred C. Finn, pulled out a twenty dollar bill and, pointing to the south portico of the White House, said, "Build this for me." Although the copy was basically unsuccessful, the monumentality and audacity portrayed are a fitting expression of Ross Sterling's career, and the house is one of the major landmarks of the Texas Gulf Coast.

Born in nearby Anahuac, Texas, Ross Shaw Sterling initially made his living raising livestock. With his brother Frank, he worked as an oil operator and together they purchased an option on two wells in Humble and Goose Creek, Texas in 1910. Ross Sterling incorporated the Humble Oil and Refinery Company (now Exxon) in Baytown with a capital investment of \$4 million and served as first president and later as Chairman of the Board until his resignation in 1925. Under Sterling's leadership Humble's assets increased to \$100 million. From 1925 to 1930, Sterling turned his attention to real estate and to the development of Houston's central business district. He also purchased and merged the city's competing dailies, the Post and the Dispatch; and he chaired the executive committees of the Houston National Bank, the Houston-Harris County Navigation Board, and the Texas Highway Department.

Concurrently, Sterling and his wife, nee Maude Gage, built their bayside mansion with the assistance of the interurban railroad that routed its track within 100 yards of the Sterling property. Building materials - and later legislators and friends of the Sterlings - were transported to the Sterling house on the line. Six acres were selected from the 200 acre estate, and work on the two-story, 34 room mansion commenced.

The White House itself has been compared favorably with Dublin, Ireland's Leinster House. Sterling's mansion is similar to this prototype, but it bears a closer resemblance to the Chateau de Rastignac in Perigord, France, the building whose oval portico inspired Latrobe's addition to the White House in 1824. Texas' version lacks both the balance of its individual components and the splendid detailed features that make the Chateau and the capital city structure so impressive. Proportions of the Sterling house are at times awkward; pilasters are absent between the windows and doorways; and flat window heads were substituted for the alternating round and pedimented heads on the first floor. Finn's White House has all of the boldness of the grand French royal houses but it lacks the unity of architectural principles that were embodied in 18th century Palladian design. Nonetheless, it in some ways epitomizes the social and cultural ambitions of entrepreneurial Texans of the pre-Depression era.

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Alfred C. Finn (1883-1964), architect of the Sterling home and a native of Bellville, Texas, received his training in the offices of the Fort Worth architects Sanguinet and Staats. In 1912, Finn was sent to work in the Houston branch of Sanguinet and Staats. The next year he commenced independent practice. ✓ Finn became a major Houston architect, producing large commercial and institutional buildings, especially under the sponsorship of entrepreneur Jesse H. Jones. Prior to the construction of the Morgan's Point mansion Finn designed a curious massive porch with Art Nouveau detailing for the Sterlings' home at 4515 Yoakum Boulevard in the Montrose section of Houston, and also built Houston homes for Sterling's brothers Albert in Chelsea Place (now demolished) and Frank in Broadacres (altered; currently the official residence of the President of the University of Houston). Ross Sterling himself went on to build several substantial structures in downtown Houston (including the Houston Post-Dispatch and Sterling Buildings), but chose as his designer his son-in-law, prominent Ft. Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick.

Maude and Ross Sterling's initial expectations of a life of luxury in their new home were somewhat frustrated. By 1929 the effects of the stock market crash had begun to impact Houston. Cotton prices fell and oil production was rationed. Powerless to slow the spiraling economy, Sterling watched his millions turn to worthless paper. Against the advice of his friends and his broker, he placed and won his bid for Texas' gubernatorial seat in 1930 and held that position for two years until he was defeated by Miriam A. Ferguson, the country's second female governor and the first woman to be elected to that position. Ross Sterling's term as Governor of Texas was relatively uneventful.

For some time after his defeat, Sterling disappeared into obscurity only to reappear with even greater zeal. He organized the Sterling Oil and Refinery Company and guided its development as Chief Executive until 1946. That same year, he became chairman of the Board of Hermann Hospital. He died in Fort Worth on March 25, 1949 and was buried in Houston.

The Sterlings donated their palatial bayside home to the Houston Optimist Club in 1946 with the provision that the Optimists purchase an additional 200 acres of Sterling property for \$250,000. After making a few modifications, the new owners opened the house as a Boy's Home and ten new residents moved to Galveston Bay. The Paul Barkleys purchased the estate in 1961 when the Optimists, struggling to maintain the property, offered the title to their roster of supporters. The Barkleys restored the Sterling House to single family use and, like Maude and Ross Sterling, entertained there extensively. It was sold, however, when their attempts to convert the property to a yachting club were challenged by neighbors. It is now owned by the Maison Blanche Corporation, Count de Malleray de Barre, President.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Jackie Swindle, "The First Texas White House; Up for Sale", Texas Historian, Nov., 1974.
Texas State Historical Association, Austin.
Southwest Center for Urban Research, Houston Architectural Survey, IV (Houston: S.C.U.R., 1980)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 5.67 acres

Quadrangle name Morgan's Point

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	5
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3	0	6	9	3	0
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3	2	8	3	5	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

A 5.6710 acre tract or parcel of land being situated in or a part of the Johnson Hunter League, Harris County, Texas, the same being Lots 1 through 19 of Grand View Addition to Morgans Point, as recorded in the Official Public Records of Real Property

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

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirsten Mullen, (edited by Peter Flagg Maxson)

organization Texas Historical Commission date October 24, 1980; August 1, 1982

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

city or town Austin, Texas state 78711

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 17 Sept. 1982

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the
National Register

date 10/29/82

for
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Original plans for Sterling Mansion, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston,
Texas on file.

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date entered

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of Harris County in Volume 93, Page 278 and a 1.2076 acre tract as recorded in the Official Public Records of Real Property of Harris County in Volume 4320, Page 255. Said 5.6710 acre tract being more particularly described by metes and bounds as follows:

BEGINNING at the northeast corner of a brick corner post for the northeast corner of Lot 19 of said Grand View Addition.

THENCE, South $55^{\circ} 46' 00''$ West, with a brick-wrought iron fence, passing the northwest corner of Lot 1 of said Grand View Addition at a distance of 475.00 feet, and continuing in all, a distance of 507.46 feet to the northwest corner of a brick corner post for corner of the herein described 5.6710-acre tract.

THENCE, South $32^{\circ} 27' 07''$ East a distance of 432.48 feet to a one-inch brass axle found for corner on the beach of Galveston Bay at approximate high tide line;

THENCE, North $54^{\circ} 36' 54''$ East, with the approximate high tide line of Galveston Bay, a distance of 122.02 feet to an old one-inch iron rod found for the southwest corner of Lot 1 of said Grand View Addition, said rod being buried approximately 3 1/2 feet;

THENCE, North $50^{\circ} 46' 00''$ East, with the approximate high tide line of Galveston Bay, a distance of 478.66 feet to a point for the southeast corner of Lot 19 of said Grand View Addition, from which the remains of a deteriorated-disturbed old one-inch iron rod bears South $50^{\circ} 46' 00''$ West, a distance of 0.32 feet;

THENCE, North $32^{\circ} 27' 07''$ West, with the East line of said Lot 19, a distance of 388.29 feet to the PLACE OF BEGINNING and CONTAINING 5.6710 acres of land, being situated in and a part of the Johnson Hunter League, Harris County, Texas.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

EVALUATION / RETURN SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Sterling, Ross S., House
Harris County
TEXAS

Working No. 9/27/82-2765

Fed. Reg. Date: 2.1.83

Date Due: 10/29/82 - 11/11/82

Action: ☒ ACCEPT 10/29/82

Entered in the ☐ RETURN

National Register ☐ REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

☐ resubmission
☐ nomination by person or local government
☐ owner objection
☐ appeal

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments: _____

Recom./Criteria _____

Reviewer _____

Discipline _____

Date _____

see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: ☐ technical corrections cited below
☐ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ alterations/integrity
☐ dates
☐ boundary selection

8. Significance

Period _____ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates _____ Builder/Architect _____

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) _____

- _____ summary paragraph
- _____ completeness
- _____ clarity
- _____ applicable criteria
- _____ justification of areas checked
- _____ relating significance to the resource
- _____ context
- _____ relationship of integrity to significance
- _____ justification of exception
- _____ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Address of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

USGS References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

_____ national _____ state _____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

Title _____ date _____

13. Other

- _____ Maps
- _____ Photographs
- _____ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: 202 272-3504

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet



Sterling House
515 Bayridge Road
Morgan's Point, Harris County, Texas

Photo by David Moore, November 1979
Negative on file at Texas Historical Commission

Southeast facade - camera facing northwest

Photo 1 of 4



Sterling House
515 Bayridge Road
Morgan's Point, Harris County, Texas

Photo by David Moore, November 1979
Negative on file at Texas Historical Commission

Northwest facade taken at north oblique

Photo 2 of 4



Sterling Mansion
515 Bayridge Road
Morgan's Point, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Dave Moore, November, 1979.
Negative on file at Texas Historical Commission.

Northeast facade, camera facing southwest.

Photo 3 of 4.

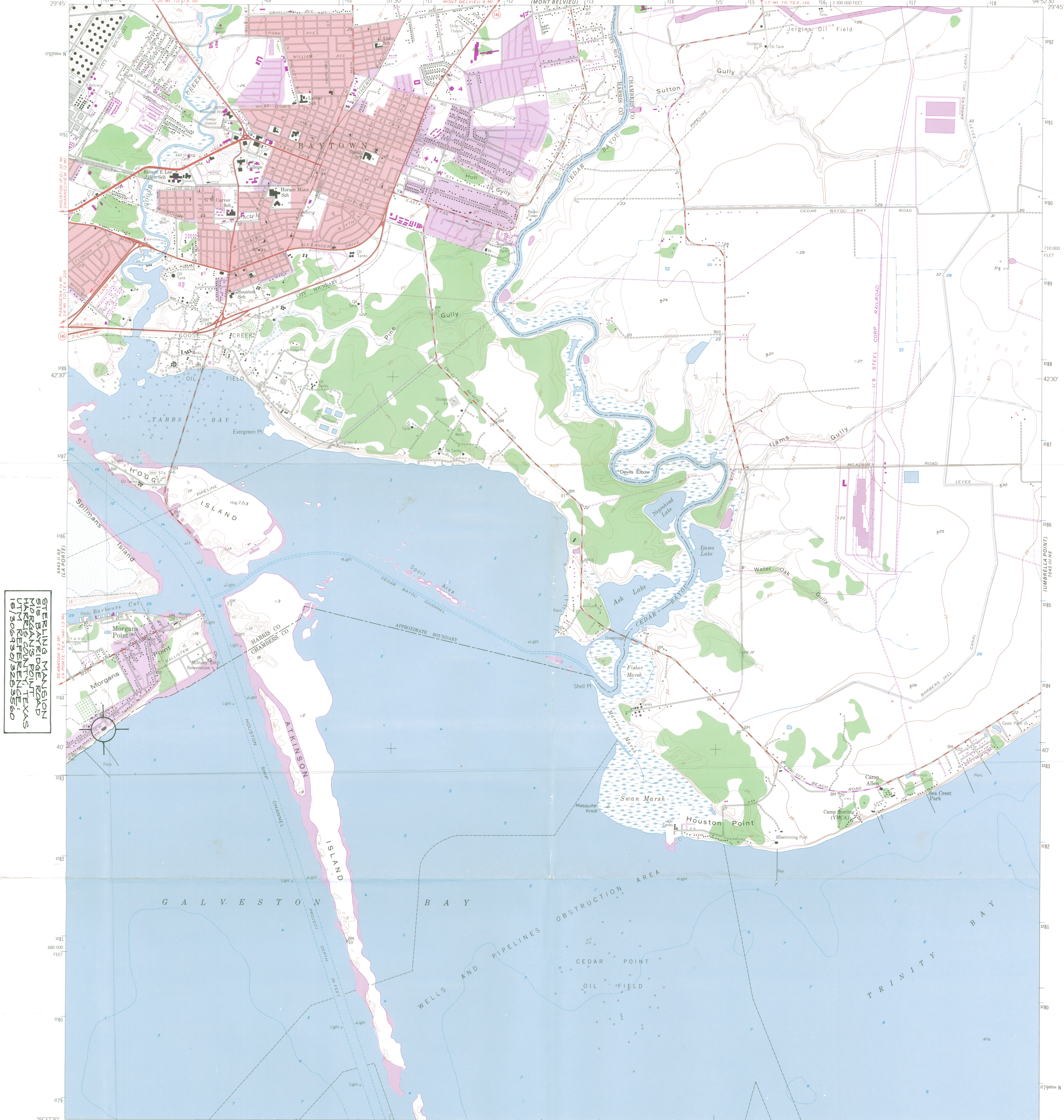


Sterling Mansion
515 Bayridge Road
Morgan's Point, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Dave Moore, November, 1979.
Negative on file at Texas Historical Commission.

Northwest facade taken at west oblique, camera
facing east.

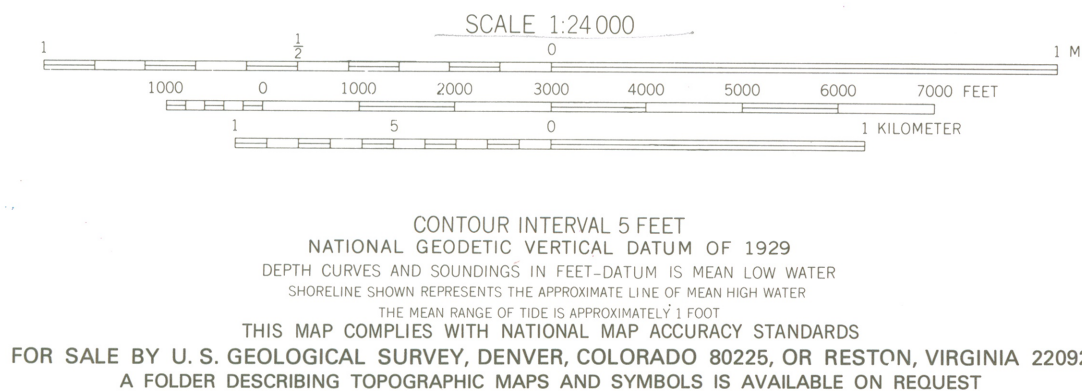
Photo 4 of 4.



STERLING MANSION
515 BARTRIDGE ROAD
MORGANS POINT
UTM REFERENCE
15/306930/3203560

Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, USCE, and TVA
Hydrography compiled from USC&GS charts 588 and 1282
Culture and drainage in part compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1954-1955. Topography from 1943 map of U. S. Corps of
Engineers, revised by USGS planetable surveys 1956
Morgans Point 7.5 minute quadrangle originally mapped by USGS 1916
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,
south central zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 15, shown in blue
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
Water stages in this area vary with meteorological conditions
Approximate limits of occasional inundation shown by dashed blue lines
where mean high water is undetermined for lack of visual evidence

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1969. This information not field checked
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Heavy-duty _____ Light-duty _____
Medium-duty _____ Unimproved dirt _____
○ State Route

MORGANS POINT TEX.
(FORMERLY MORGAN POINT)
N2937.5-W9452.5/7.5
1956
PHOTOREVISED 1969
AMS 7043 III NW-SERIES V882