

2004

Historical Landmarks of Brownsville Part 1

University of Texas at Brownsville

Texas Southmost College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, "Historical Landmarks of Brownsville Part 1" (2004). *History Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 82.
https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac/82

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

Historical Landmarks of Brownsville

- [1. Alonso Complex](#)
- [2. Bagdad-Matamoros, C.S.A.](#)
- [3. Barreda House](#)
- [4. Samuel Wallace Brooks House](#)
- [5. Browne Wagner House](#)
- [6. Brownsville Art League Fine Arts League and Historic Neale House](#)
- [7. Brownsville, C.S.A.](#)
- [8. Brownsville-Matamoros Bridge](#)
- [9. Brownsville-Matamoros Ferries and River Boardwalk](#)
- [10. Cameron County](#)
- [11. Cameron County Courthouse](#)
- [12. Cameron County Courthouse of 1883-1914](#)
- [13. Cameron County Jail](#)
- [14. Cameron County Jail - Old](#)
- [15. Camp Belknap](#)

[16-30](#) [31-45](#) [46-60](#) [61-65](#)

1. Alonso Complex

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Alonso Complex
<i>Address:</i>	510 E. St. Charles
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1998
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Spanish-born Manuel Alonso (1846-1922) constructed the one-story residence on this site in 1877 and added the two-story mercantile building by 1890. His "Los Dos Canones" mercantile was a popular gathering place for local residents. French and Spanish influences are evident in the cast iron porch elements (probably from New Orleans), French windows and corbelled brickwork. The complex was again used as a fine goods mercantile from 1925-1944. The Alonso family retained ownership of the complex until 1944. Recorded Texas Historic Landmark - 1998

[Top](#)

2. Bagdad-Matamoros, C.S.A.

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Bagdad-Matamoros, C.S.A.
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1964
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	Xeroscape Park, corner of E. Elizabeth Street and International Bridge, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Civil War "Sister Cities", across the river in neutral Mexico. Were linked to Texas by a ferry which landed here. Ferry hauled to Matamoros the Confederate cotton brought from East

Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas to Brownsville. In Matamoros, many speculators and agents vied for cotton to ship to Europe, via Havana. They offered in exchange vital goods: guns, ammunition, drugs, shoes, cloth. At Bagdad, on the Gulf, cotton was loaded from small boats onto ships riding the Gulf of Mexico. Goods crossing here were the South's lifeblood

[Top](#)

3. Barreda House

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Barreda House
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1994
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	642 E. Washington Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	This house was designed by architect Ben Clark and built in 1928-1929 for the firm of Barnes and Kenny for the family of Celestino Pardo Barreda (1858-1953). A 2-story buff brick Spanish Colonial Revival style house, it features twisted cast stone columns, iron balcony railings, a Mission parapet, and a sunroom with arched wood casement windows. Barreda, a native of Spain who came to Texas in 1872, owned a mercantile business and became an influential area commercial leader involved in banking and agriculture. The house has remained in the Barreda Family for more than 60 years.

[Top](#)

4. Brooks, Samuel Wallace, House



Samuel Wallace Brooks House

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Brooks, Samuel Wallace, House
<i>Address:</i>	623 E. St. Charles St.
<i>Architect:</i>	Brooks, Samuel W.; Et al.
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	OTHER
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>Located in an older, largely residential area, the Samuel Wallace Brooks House is perhaps the only surviving example in Brownsville of a wooden, I-plan house. Twice moved, the house has recently been sympathetically rehabilitated and adapted for office use. It retains setback, lot size and the northwest/southeast ridgeline orientation in a residential section that it has had historically. Its ornamental wood fretwork is especially noteworthy. The Brooks House is a one-and-a-half-story, wooden frame residence. The structure faces southwest and is clad in weatherboarding. The entrance front consists of three bays: a centered 1-light, 2-panel, front door with transom flanked by 15-light doors at each side. The second floor features a central, lateral gable emerging from the shingled roof.</p> <p>The gable has paired, 6-light, two-panel doors and alternate bands of (from bottom to top) fish-scale, diamond and square-butt shingles. A modified king-post roof brace is found at the top of the gable, and a narrow bargeboard with small, incised circles extends from the bottom of the king post along the lower sides of the gable. A small balcony with simple balustrade projects beyond the upper door. A veranda with sawn ornamental fretwork extends most of the length of the house front. Slightly projecting over the center steps, the veranda is accentuated by balustrade, entablature and supports sawn with quatrefoil, trefoil, circle and elongated figure-8 motifs. The shallow, tripped veranda roof is clad with standing-seam sheet metal.</p> <p>The northwest gable end of the Brooks House has no openings at ground floor level and two 1/1 pane windows at the second floor level. The gable detailing is similar to that of the entrance front. A square, corbelled-brick fireplace emerges from the peak of the roof. The southeast facade has a center 6/6 window at ground floor level. Above, the gable fenestration and detailing is virtually identical with that of the front gable. The rear (northeast) facade has only two openings: two symmetrically placed 15-light doors.</p> <p>The interior of the house has a central staircase hall with Italianate newel post and balustrade. A single room is located at each side, and the northwest room has a center fireplace. The second floor is a large, finished room, with a continuation of the staircase in the center.</p> <p>At its original Jefferson Street location, the Brooks house had a large, 1-story rear ell at the northeast corner of the house. An L-plan porch and what may have been a later addition extended along the remainder of the rear facade. Two small outbuildings and an L-plan, 1-story dwelling also appear to the rear of the house on a 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map. All except the main block were apparently demolished at the time the house was moved to Jackson Street in 1951.</p> <p>At that time, a small, non-historic frame addition was made to the northeast portion of the rear facade. Photos from that period also indicate the front veranda was supported by four wooden posts on brick piers. Second floor balconies had been removed, but ornamental</p>

shingles and king post braces in the gables remained. By 1980, the house was noticeably deteriorated, and Jackson Street had most much of its residential character.

In 1987, the structure was moved a second time to its present location. The structure had been condemned, and a quick search yielded a surprisingly compatible vacant lot. The original location was of course the site of a modern parochial school. In preparation for the move, the 1950's addition was demolished, and decayed and later materials removed. Once moved, missing elements such as the ornamental fretwork on the entrance front were carefully reconstructed from historic photos, and other elements approximated to retain the historic character of the building. The elements of the interior of the house such as the main staircase were restored as possible, and others adapted for modern office purposes. In the absence of historical documentation on its historic appearance, the rear of the house was left as simple as possible.

The Brooks House is on a flat, rectangular lot. The front of the site has a picket fence in the spirit of the historic fence, and the rear of the property is essentially undeveloped. Vegetation on the property is sparse, although mature palms and other trees line the street.

The Samuel Wallace Brooks House is a rare Rio Grande Valley example of an I house. After two moves and a period of decline, the building has recently been sympathetically rehabilitated in an appropriate setting. Its architect and first owner, S.W. Brooks (1829-1903), was an important figure in the history of late 19th century Brownsville. The building meets National Register Criterion C for its architectural significance.

In the later 19th century, Brownsville was one of the few South Texas communities with any standing as a city. The city's strategic location at the southern tip of the state near the mouth of the Rio Grande made it an important trading and shipping center for both Texas and, across the river, Mexico.

One of the more noteworthy Brownsville entrepreneurs of that period was Samuel Wallace Brooks (1829-1903). His career reflects the spirit that brought other ambitious men such as Charles Stillman and Capt. Richard King from the Northeastern United States to remote South Texas to seek their fortunes. As reported in *The Twin Cities of the Border* (1893), Mr. Brooks was a Pennsylvanian by birth, but lived in Ohio from the time he was 7 years old until he went to New Orleans and began business there in 1853, as an architect, builder and lumber dealer. He shipped materials for the roof of the Catholic Cathedral in this city, from his lumber yards in 1857, and continued business in New Orleans until 1863. He then came to this section and established himself in Matamoros [Mexico], in the same line of business he had conducted in New Orleans.

During a portion of his fifteen years residence in Matamoros, he had interests in both that city and Brownsville, but the latter place gradually demanded his greater attention; as a consequence, he removed to this side of the river in 1878, and has since that time was a permanent resident of this city. Brooks was very active in Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley in the later 19th Century as an architect, builder and engineer. He is credited with the design or construction of the Fort Brown Hospital (N.H.L. 1964) and jetties, the Episcopal Church of the Advent, the High School Building, the Browne-Wagner House (N.R. 1977), the Kowolski-Dennett House, the Frank Armstrong House, the Federal Building, and the Old Cameron County Courthouse, all in Brownsville, as well as county courthouses in Hidalgo (N R. 1980) and Starr Counties. He held the office of Brownsville City Engineer for eight terms, and held a Patent (No. 120,237 - 1871) for "Improvements in

Machines of Making Paving Blocks." The latter was for the manufacture of hexagonal pavers, made locally from the wood of ebony trees (Los Ebanos, as they are called locally).

In 1888, when Brooks -was likely at the peak of his power and influence in Brownsville, he and his second wife built their home at 1131 East Jefferson Street in Brownsville just southeast of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (N.R. 1980). Architecturally, it was likely considered a very forward-looking house in Brownsville. Because of the city's remoteness and its strong cultural and geographic ties with Mexico, the typical house of the 1880's there harkened back to Mexican or somewhat out-of-date, sometimes Greek Revival-influenced, American architectural traditions. The Brooks house, while not large in scale, was a modern house for the time and place, a one- and-a-half story residence in a modified I-plan form.

The main block was symmetrical especially noteworthy for its front veranda of ornate sawn fretwork and ornamental bargeboard elements in the end and front gables. The house followed popular American stylistic traditions of the 1880's, belying its location four blocks from the Mexican border. The house was apparently a source of pride locally and an illustration of it was published in *The Twin Cities of the Border* five years after its construction. Brooks died in 1903 at age 72. His widow, the former Mrs. Inez Vallejo Falgout of New Orleans, her son and daughter-in law, Charles (Carlos) and Librada Falgout, and ultimately her granddaughter, Alice Falgout Merkling, continued to occupy the family home.

In 1951, Immaculate Conception Church announced its desire to construct a school on the site of the Brooks House. As Mrs. Merkling's grandson Ernest Tijerina remarked, "You can't say no to the church," and the house was moved some five blocks to the northeast to 1313 East Jackson Street, a mixed, more recent residential/commercial neighborhood (Brownsville Herald, 16 July 1986). The rear ell and what appears on the 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map to be an irregular east corner addition was demolished at the old site. A small addition made to the eastern portion of the rear facade at the Jackson Street location and a new front porch were constructed.

By the 1970's, both the house and the neighborhood had fallen on somewhat evil times. In *Historic Brownsville* (1980), Betty Bay noted, "It is ironic and sentimentally sad that the house which Brownsville's most prominent architect of the late 1800's built for his own home should look as it now does - in such a desperate need of renovation" (p.149). The front veranda had been altered, unsightly additions made to the rear and the Brooks House was in a generally deteriorated condition.

In 1987, owner Niddia G. Arisman contracted to have the condemned house demolished and lot cleared (as it remains today). Members of the City of Brownsville Heritage Council, however, took a keen interest in the house and bought the demolition contract. A sympathetic buyer was found in the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Program, Inc., and the task of moving and rehabilitating the Brooks House began. An appropriate, vacant lot was acquired a half-mile or so to the west of the Jefferson Street site on St. Charles Street. The new location had never been developed with more than a storage shed, although it was surrounded by some of the most significant surviving late 19th and early 20th-Century residences in Brownsville. The new site approximates the long-lost original setting of the Brooks House. With the exception of the veranda and rear additions, most historic fabric from the original house survived. Photographic documentation of the front and sides of the structure was used to replicate the veranda and other missing elements.

The newel post, long since removed from the house, was returned and the staircase restored. As the historic rear ell had been demolished without documentation, it was decided to treat the rear of the building in a simple, non historic manner without extensions. The upstairs of the house was adapted for current needs, and the downstairs restored as possible to its original two-room/central hall plan. Every effort was made to preserve surviving historic fabric and accurately reconstruct missing elements. Accordingly, the historic integrity of the house has been restored, and the building probably the only surviving 19th Century structure of its style in the city is again a source of pride to the people of Brownsville.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON FILE IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[Top](#)

5. Browne-Wagner House

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Browne-Wagner House
<i>Address:</i>	245 E. St. Charles St.
<i>Architect:</i>	Brooks,S.W.
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	OTHER
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>In 1894 the residence at 245 East St. Charles Streets in Brownsville, Texas, was built for Josephine Glaevecke Browne. The architect, S.W. Brooks, designed this two-story brick structure in the best tradition of Gulf Coast dwellings, supplying all the materials for its construction. Many of these materials-(notably the cast iron fireplaces) were shipped to Brownsville from New Orleans.</p> <p>Situated on two city lots near the central business district, the house is oriented to utilize the general southeast Gulf breeze. It is built on a five foot masonry foundation faced with slate. The walls of the house are constructed as cavity walls with two layers (or wythes) of brick, totaling thirteen and one half inches thick. The mortar used is lime and sand forming joints which are struck flush. There is a large molded brick cornice crowning the perimeter of the house with a molded brick corbel table protruding at intervals . A brick string course is delineated just below the cornice. From most aspects, the low gabled roof is hidden by the large cornice. Originally wood shingled, the roof has recently been replaced with asphalt shingles.</p> <p>The window treatment on the house consists of three sizes of double-hung, wood-framed apertures. On the first floor in the front parlor there are four windows ten feet tall with six lights over nine lights. The lower sash raises above the window head into the wall cavity. This opening is six feet in height providing access to the porch. The bay window apertures on the first floor are six lights over six lights while in the remainder of the house the windows are four feet tall with four lights over four lights. All the second floor windows have arched headings.</p>

In a modified 'T' shape the Wagner House has a floor plan based on a central stairhall on both floors. From the veranda the main entrance, with a very classically detailed surrounds, opens directly into the hall. This veranda surrounds the front parlor on three sides. The wrought iron posts supporting the veranda replaced the original wooden posts (which had rotted), in the late 1950's. The front projecting wing of the house ends in a three part bay window. Inside, two hexagonal rooms are formed at this juncture, on the first floor is the original library and on the second is a bedroom. The second floor contains four bedrooms and a bathroom. Three of these bedrooms have fireplaces.

The house has four-inch plank flooring of long grained pine. In the front parlor, the fourteen foot ceiling of painted tongue and groove boards; the narrow picture mold approximately fourteen inches below the ceiling; and the cast iron fireplace with slate hearth are of note. With the exception of two upstairs bedrooms, all rooms in the house still have their original plaster, some are in need of repair except for the front parlor, the rooms have vertical tongue-and-groove wainscoting to a height of three feet. All the doors in the house are hand carved panel doors with glazed transoms above. The stairway to the second floor is solid walnut, partly painted.

In 1967 the rear porch was enclosed with a wood and glass facing to accommodate a family room. Originally, there was a cistern located on the porch into which the gutters emptied. When the porch was enclosed, the cistern was covered.

The property is bounded on the two street sides by a wrought iron fence raised on a brick masonry base. On the other two sides the property is defined by a brick wall, originally some ten feet tall, now substantially reduced from that height. The grounds were entirely bricked with delineated garden areas. Some of this brick was later used to construct a two-story garage located on the northeast corner of the property in 1922. Due to lack of maintenance, the remainder of the brick yard is covered by a layer of grass. To the rear of the house is located the original privy, now known as the wash house. This structure is brick with two arched openings, another entrance opened to the lot next door which was used as parking for horses and carriages.

Also on the property is a wooden playhouse, nine by ten by nine feet tall. Constructed in 1925, it has a front gallery with windows on either side of the door. Constructed in 1894 for Mrs. Josephine Glaevecke Browne, the residence at 245 East St. Charles Street is the most intact example of the larger brick residences characteristic of Brownsville in the late nineteenth century. The house is particularly noteworthy for its fine molded brick work--a quality peculiar to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the very tall, handsome proportions of its facades. An example of a vernacular handling of styles, the house features design elements from various sources. The architect, S. W. Brooks, employed classical detailing at door surrounds, while expressing the overall proportions and other detailing in a more Victorian Italianate manner.

Brooks' client on the house, Mrs. Browne, purchased lots 10-11-12, Block 43, in Brownsville, from the New York and Brownsville improvement company in April 1894 and contracted Brooks to construct a "dwelling house" on the property within a twelve month period. The \$1,300.00 payment for the house was made in Mexican coin. 14. Browne received an imposing and conservative residence which belies its late date.

Brooks was prominent in Brownsville during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Apparently well-connected in regional and local politics, he served several terms as city engineer and as superintendent of the Brownsville Post Office in the late 1880's and

early 1890's. His talents were broad, working not only as an architect, but as a contractor and engineer. Brooks first began his career in New Orleans as a builder and lumber dealer. In 1863, he moved to Matamoros, Mexico, and fifteen years later he permanently settled in Brownsville. As an architect Brooks designed and built the Fort Brown Post Hospital and the first Hidalgo and Starr County courthouses. As a contractor, Brooks supervised the construction of the first Cameron County Court-house. He designed or built numerous other public buildings and also served with the U.S. Engineer Corps.

The owners of the residence have all been prominent figures in the history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Josephine Browne was the daughter of German immigrant Adolphus Glaevecke who landed at Point Isabel in 1836.

Glaevecke, according to his written statement, moved to Brownsville in 1859. He served seventeen years as Cameron County Clerk from 1874. Josephine married Matthew L. Browne, a member of one of the wealthiest pioneer families in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Browne's parents were Irish immigrants who had accumulated vast tracts of valley land for ranching. Matthew served as Cameron County sheriff in the early 1890's and died in 1892. Two years later Mrs. Browne built the residence at 245 East St. Charles Street.

In 1903, Mrs. Browne sold the house to Thomas J. Hooks, a Brownsville City Commissioner, who founded the community of Donna, Texas. Hooks agreed to sell the property to Leigh Hallan, one of the first real estate developers in the Brownsville area. The purchase price for the house was \$5,500.00. Hallan paid \$1,000.00 in cash and drew up three promissory notes for the balance. The notes were sold by Hooks to Valley Rancher and founder of Raymondville, Willacy County, E. B. Raymond. Mr. Raymond died in 1914 having never lived in the house. However, his widow, Juana Rodriguez gained the property from the Hallan family by virtue of a judgment issued by the district court.

The house changed hands for the last time in 1920 when Mrs. Raymond sold to Mrs. Martha Landrum Wagner, wife of R. E. Wagner, a banker, who came to Brownsville in 1910 from Columbus, Texas. His wife, Martha Landrum, is a member of Pioneer Valley families. R. E. Wagner died in 1954 and Mrs. Wagner continues to reside in the house as she has for over fifty years, its longest resident.

Exterior:

Except for the front gable, there is a large cornice surrounding the whole house. This cornice is made of molded brick and has quite large corbels, also made of molded brick. The roof was originally wood shingled and has recently been replaced with asphalt shingles. Except from certain angles, the roof is rarely visible. The rear porch was enclosed in 1967 to accommodate a family room.

Interior:

The basic floorplan of the Wagner home is centered on the stair hall (on both floors) and, as mentioned before, is arranged so as to take full advantage of the prevailing breezes. The front entrance is located off the veranda and opens directly into the central hall. The front parlor is typical of all the rooms in the house in that it has long-grained pine floor of four-inch planks, a ceiling of painted tongue-in-groove boards fourteen feet high, a narrow picture mold approximately fourteen inches below the ceiling, and a metal fireplace with a slate hearth. Walls are plastered. Other rooms have a vertical tongue-in-groove wainscot up

to a height of three feet. Except for two bedrooms on the second floor, all rooms in the house still have their original plaster, some of which is in need of repair.

The veranda surrounds the front parlor on three sides. The back porch was an integral part of the plan in that it provided an "outdoor parlor". It has recently been enclosed by a wood and glass structure to make a family room. Originally there was a cistern located in this porch into which the gutters of the house emptied. When the porch was enclosed the cistern was covered.

The stairway to the second floor is of solid walnut, parts of which have been painted. The second floor contains four bedrooms and a bathroom. Both the first and second floors have rooms which have bay windows facing the side street, forming six-sided rooms. The lower room was originally the library while the upper room has always been a bedroom. Three of the four bedrooms upstairs have fireplaces. All the doors in the house are hand carved panel door with glass transoms above.

Site:

The yard was originally completely brick with garden areas arranged within the confines of the property which is bounded on two sides (the street sides) by a wrought iron fence upon a masonry base and on the remaining two sides by a brick wall. This brick wall was built to a height of ten feet, but has been partially reduced in height. Some of the brick from the front yard was used in the construction of a two-story garage which is located on the northeast corner of the property. The remainder of the brick yard now has a layer of grass grown over it, due to lack of maintenance. Just behind the house is what is now known as the wash house. Originally it contained the outdoor toilets, which have since been covered. The building itself is brick and has two brick arches opening toward the back of the house. Another entrance opened to the lot next door which, when owned by the owners of the home itself, was the parking area for the horses and carriages.

In addition to the three brick buildings already mentioned, there is a playhouse in the side yard which is a miniature replica of the typical Brownsville house form of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. It is wood with a front porch and long windows on either side of the front door. The Little house's dimensions are nine by ten by nine feet tall.

Matthew Browne served as sheriff of Cameron County in and around 1891. Mr. Browne died on May 7, 1894, as the result of an accident outside Corpus Christi, Texas, in the small community of Petronilo. Two years following the death of her husband Mrs. Browne purchased lots 10-11-12, Block 43, in Brownsville, from the New York and Brownsville Improvement Company, on April 5, 1894. Mrs. Browne entered into an agreement with the aforementioned S. W. Brooks to construct a "dwelling house" on the said lots within a twelve month period. The \$1,300.00 payment for the desired dwelling was made in Mexican coin.

Subsequent owners of the residence have all been prominent people in the history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Mr. Thomas J. Hooks, who purchased the property from its original owner in September of 1903, was at one time a Brownsville City Commissioner. Later, Hooks went on to found the community of Donna, Texas.

Mr. Leigh Hallan acquired the residence from Thomas Hooks for \$5,500.00 of which he paid \$1,000.00 in cash in then drew up and signed three promissory notes. Mr. Hallan, one of the

first real estate developers in the Brownsville area, was the son of the first minister and founder of Central Christian Church of Brownsville.

Mr. Hallan's promissory notes were sold by T. J. Hooks on January 1, 1912 to E. B. Raymond. Mr. Raymond, a valley rancher, died on October 19, 1914, leaving as his namesake the seat of Willacy County government, Raymondville. Raymond's widow Juana Rodriguez gained the property from the Hallan family by virtue of a judgment issued by the District Court.

In January 10, 1920 Mrs. Raymond sold the property to Mrs. Martha Landrum Wagner, wife of R. E. Wagner. Mrs. Wagner, present owner, is a descendant of two pioneer families. James L. Landrum, her father, was proprietor of Landrum's Plantation. Landrum's father brought the first Angora goats to the State of Texas. The inaugural suit of President William Howard Taft was made of wool from Landrum's flock. Mr. Wagner's mother was a Hicks family member whose father, Stephen Powers, came to Brownsville with General Zachary Taylor's army in 1846. A Columbus, Texas, native, Mrs. Wagner's husband came to Brownsville in 1910 where he served as an officer of the now defunct Merchants National Bank. Mr. Wagner died in 1954 and his wife Martha Landrum Wagner resides in the home today.

Constructed in 1894 for Mrs. Josephine Glaevecke Browne, the residence at 245 East St. Charles is the most intact example of the larger brick residences characteristic of Brownsville in the late nineteenth century. Designer builder of the home was prominent architect S. W. Brooks, who also built or designed many of Brownsville's numerous public buildings. Later, Brooks served as City Engineer for the City of Brownsville.

Mrs. Browne was the daughter of German immigrant Adolphus Glaevecke who left his native land in 1835 and landed at Point Isabel in January 1836. Glaevecke settled in a small ranching community on Old Kings Highway approximately fifteen miles outside of Brownsville. In 1859 Glaevecke, according to his own written statement, moved to Brownsville. Appointed to the office of County Clerk for Cameron County in 1874, Glaevecke served in that capacity for seventeen years. Glaevecke's wife and mother to Josephine was Concha Ramirez, who, before wedding Glaevecke was married to Casimiro Tijerina, descendant of Jose Salvador de la Garza. De la Garza was the original grantee of the Espiritu Santo Grant on which the City of Brownsville is now situated.

The young Josephine Glaevecke was betrothed to Matthew L. (Theo) Browne. Matthew Browne was a member of one of the wealthiest pioneer families in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Browne's father James G. Browne, an Irish immigrant, accumulated vast tracts of land throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley on which he grazed his extensive cattle stock. James Browne was married to Helene Kivlin, also a relocated Irish national. She came to Texas along with her widowed mother as a member of the historic McGloin colony which married in 1848. This colony along with other Irish settlements encompassed much of the Lands from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON FILE IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[Top](#)

6. Brownsville Art League Fine Arts Museum and Historic Neale House

<i>museum Name:</i>	Brownsville Art League Fine Arts Museum and Historic Neale House
<i>Mailing Address:</i>	230 Neale Drive
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Zip code:</i>	78520
<i>Area Code:</i>	956
<i>Phone:</i>	542-0941
<i>County:</i>	Cameron

[Top](#)

7. Brownsville, C.S.A.

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Brownsville, C.S.A.
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1963
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	Tourist Center, US Highway 77 & FM 802 (NW corner), Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	A major center of activity for Confederacy, chief depot for war material and supplies imported from Europe through neutral port of Bagdad, Mexico. Terminus of cotton road. Point of entry and departure for important personages of South in intercourse with outside world. Occupied by large Federal expeditionary force Nov. 6, 1863 after Confederates had destroyed Ft. Brown, cotton, commissary stores and supplies and had withdrawn. Became temporary seat of Union State Government with Texan A.J. Hamilton Military Governor. (BACK SIDE BROWNSVILLE, C.S.A.) When Confederate forces reoccupied Brownsville July 30, 1864 it resumed its importance as South's supply source and terminus of cotton road. Cotton export through Brownsville and other Rio Grande points means of survival of Confederacy west of the Mississippi. Imports from Europe and Mexico formed almost entire supply for military and civilian Gen. Magruder, Gen. Bee, Col. "Rip" Ford and other prominent Confederate officers headquarters here. Center of international intrigue throughout war.

[Top](#)

8. Brownsville-Matamoros Bridge

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Brownsville-Matamoros Bridge
<i>Address:</i>	1300 Mexico
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker</i>	1999

<i>Erected:</i>	
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	
<i>Marker Text:</i>	<p>The St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad arrived in Brownsville in 1904. The Rio Grande separated the U. S. railway from the Mexican National Railway line. Congressman John Nance Garner (1868-1967), later vice president of the United States, introduced a bill into Congress in 1908 providing for the construction of a bridge spanning the river and connecting the two railways. The Brownsville-Matamoros Bridge Company, owned equally by the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway and the Mexican National Railway, was incorporated in 1909 to handle bridge operations. In 1909 St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway magnate Benjamin F. Yoakum (1859-1929) met with representatives of the Mexican National Railway. An agreement was reached, and Yoakum hired the Foundation Company of New York to build the concrete foundations and the Wisconsin Bridge Company of Milwaukee to erect the steel spans. Work on the structure began in April 1909. The entire structure, a swing bridge of riveted construction, was completed in summer 1910. It was swung open in July of that year for inspection and was photographed by Robert Runyon. By that time, river traffic in the area had ceased, and the swing function was unnecessary. The approximate cost of the bridge, which totaled 227 feet in length, was \$225,000. The bridge was renovated for heavier automobile traffic in 1953 and 1992. Although the Brownsville-Matamoros Bridge Company erected an adjacent bridge in 1997 for automobile traffic, the original bridge continues to be used for rail and truck traffic. (1999)</p>

[Top](#)

9. Brownsville-Matamoros Ferries and River Boardwalk

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Brownsville-Matamoros Ferries and River Boardwalk
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	2000
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	in Hope Park, at 14th and Levee streets, Brownsville
<i>Marker Text:</i>	<p>Ferry service along this stretch of the Rio Grande evolved as population in the area increased. In 1836, General Jose Urrea used rowboats at the Paso Real ferry near the later site of Fort Brown en route to Goliad. General Vicente Filisola used the same service on his retreat from the Battle of San Jacinto. Charles Stillman, a Matamoros merchant and businessman, and his estate owned most of the ferry operations near this site from about 1846. The three main ferry ports were located at newly emerging Brownsville, Anacuitas (also called Paso Libre, then Shannondale and later Freeport) and Mansfield. Brownsville and Matamoros were integral to one another and the ferries, or chalans, were a lifeline between them. During the Civil War, the Confederates used ferries to transport cotton to Mexico while southern ports were blockaded by the Union Navy. During Union occupation</p>

of Brownsville in 1863, the banks of the Rio Grande were teeming with families waiting to cross the river into exile in Mexico. In the 1880s the ferry company built a plank walk from the railroad tracks to the Brownsville ferry dock because of complaints from passengers who had tired of walking through six inches or more of mud. The walk expanded as the ferry dock relocated several times, and soon the space was filled with a variety of shops catering to the bustling crowds of travelers. The Brownsville-Matamoros bridge was erected in 1910, but for a time only freight traffic on the river decreased. When the gateway bridge was built in 1928, the need for ferryboats vanished, and the boardwalk, by this time as much a part of local life as the river itself, vanished with them. (2000)

[Top](#)

10. Cameron County

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Cameron County
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1936
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	Brownsville Tourist Center, corner of FM 802 and U.S. Highway 77, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Created February 21, 1848; From Nueces County; Organized August 7, 1848; Named in honor of Ewen Cameron, 1811-1843; Captain in the Mier Expedition; Shot at Queretaro; County Seat, Santa Rita 1848-1849; Brownsville, since the earliest battles of the Mexican War, and the last battle of the Civil War were fought in this county

[Top](#)

11. Cameron County Courthouse



Cameron County Courthouse

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Cameron County Courthouse

<i>Address:</i>	1150 E. Madison St.
<i>Architect:</i>	Ayres, Atlee B.
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	CLASSICAL REVIVAL
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>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 vent) rating 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.</p> <p>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 paneled door and an i-roe gate across it.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 northwest of center. At the center of the roof is an octagonal lantern that has Balvanized louvers 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 louvers surround the walls of the skylight.</p> <p>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</p>

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.

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 paneling. 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 paneling; its ceiling is the exposed concrete structure. On the first floor the corridors have covered barrel vault ceilings. Plaster Sullivanesque decorated raibs between the coffers extension 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 laces 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 paneled 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.

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 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 loaned 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON FILE IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[Top](#)

12. Cameron County Courthouse of 1883-1914

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Cameron County Courthouse of 1883-1914
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1962
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	1131 E. Jefferson Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Completed in 1883, this was the first courthouse built by Cameron County officials, who previously rented or purchased office space. This three-story brick structure served as the county courthouse until 1914, when a new building was erected. Rio Grande Lodge No. 81,

A.F.&A.M., then occupied this structure. The original roof, with its gables and central tower, was removed during remodeling.

[Top](#)

13. Cameron County Jail

<i>Marker Title:</i>	1912 Cameron County Jail
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1994
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	E. Van Buren at 12th Street, Brownsville
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Originally built as a three-story structure in 1912, this building, Cameron County's second jailhouse, was enlarged with the addition of a 4th floor about 1929. The 1912 structure was designed by prominent architect Atlee B. Ayers and the 1929 addition by Ayers and his son and partner Robert Ayers. The building's classical revival style is a distinctive design for this type of resource. A one-story frame building was erected in the courtyard in the 1940s. The building served as Cameron County Jail and Sheriff's Office until 1978. Recorded Texas Historic Landmark - 1994

[Top](#)

14. Cameron County Jail, Old



Old Cameron County Jail

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Cameron County Jail, Old
<i>Address:</i>	1201 E. Van Buren
<i>Architect:</i>	Ayres, Atlee B.; et al.
<i>County:</i>	Cameron

<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	CLASSICAL REVIVAL
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>The Old Cameron County Jail in Brownsville is a four- story brick, terra cotta, concrete frame, and masonry building originally constructed in 1912-13 with additions in 1923, 1926, and 1930. Additions expanded the jail from 5,000 to 20,000 square feet to accommodate the county's increased inmate population. The Classical Revival building exhibits a modified T-shape.</p> <p>Today, the original three-story jail (1912-13) and its fourth story addition (1923) form the northwest corner of the building. A free-standing, two-story addition (1926) was incorporated into the main building in 1930, when a three- story central pavilion, and a four-story wing were also added at the south end of the jail. In the 1993 renovation, mechanical equipment, an elevator, and hallway connecting the three and four-story wings was added immediately behind the three-story central pavilion and over a portion of the two-story section.</p> <p>The 1912 building was surrounded by a 12' wall that was partially demolished in 1926 to make room for the two-story addition. Today, the wall encloses only the rear yard that is divided into two large areas by a brick wall with a steel door. Landscaping is limited to brick and grass in the jail yards, and grass and two palm trees in front of the building. The jail faces west on Van Buren Street at the southeast corner of 12th Street in a mixed commercial and residential neighborhood. It is one block from the current Cameron County Jail built in 1978. The building, in excellent condition, was recently renovated for lawyers offices, and retains all remaining aspects of the jail facility, including doors and cells.</p> <p>The Old Cameron County Jail was constructed in 1912-13 just east of a bend in the spur track of the Rio Grande Railroad. The spur ran east/west on 12th Street to Jackson, and then along 11th Street at Van Buren. The jail was only about four blocks north of the Fort Brown Military Reservation in a modest residential neighborhood. Historic photographs of the jail show small adjacent residences that are also illustrated on Sanborn's maps in 1914 and 1919. Photographs and Sanborn's maps also show a 12' tall brick wall surrounding the entire jail property forming a rectilinear compound with the building at its center. The wall was modified in 1926, and the footprints of its supporting pillars are still visible in the sidewalk in front (west) and north of the original building.</p> <p>The original 1912 three-story building had a modified T shape with central stair serving the T-extensions. This plan was retained when the fourth story was added in 1923, and a cast iron staircase rises the full height, featuring strap metal bar assemblies on levels one through three and round bar assemblies on level four.</p> <p>When jail expansion was planned in 1926, the brick rival enclosing the jail yard was removed at the southeast corner of the site. Brick from the wall was used to construct a free-standing, two-story concrete frame and masonry building on the remaining wall foundation. (fig. 5) The 1926 Sanborn's map, documenting this building fails to note that the original jail building is now four-stories. This rectilinear addition was retained in the 1930 expansion as a wing extending east from the antral three-story pavilion. It has a flat concrete roof with masonry parapet.</p> <p>In 1930, a three-story and four-story block were added south of 1912 building, and the entire building was unified with matching floor levels. As discussed, the earlier two- story</p>

addition was sited just behind the new antral three- story block.

Today, the building's floorplan remains essentially as it was after the 1930 expansion. The only exception is a service area added in 1993 to the rear of the building over a portion of the two-story addition. This houses elevator and mechanical equipment and also connects the three and four-story areas of the building on the upper two floors. This addition is not visible from the front of the building, and can only be seen from oblique angles at the sides of the building. It is finished in stucco to differentiate it from the historic building.

Although the entire building is now used as lawyers offices, the existing floorplan will be described in terms of the 1930 jail layout in order to convey the building's historical use.

As remodeled in 1930, the first floor from north to south consists of a cell block, jailer's office, main entrance, heal officer's office, sweat room, and jailer's living quarters. Behind the health officer's office are three cells and toilets. The old two-story wing contains women's cells.

The second floor contains a main cell block with a "sally-port" device for controlling the entry and egress of prisoners (which has been retained), as well as cell rooms for juveniles and felons. The third floor also has a main cell block and additional space for juveniles. On the interior of the 1912 portion, brick corbelling is visible at the juncture of the exterior walls and original roof slab. This provided additional structural bearing for the roof slab and has been retained. The fourth floor features a large cell block with control panels and small communication ports. This steel detention wall system has been retained, as have all interior detention doors, bar assemblies, and other detention devices throughout the building.

On the exterior, the first floor of the building is masonry laid in common bond with one course recessed and five courses projecting two-inches, giving it an appearance reminiscent of rusticated masonry. The original entrance, modified into a window in 1930, features a terra-cotta surround with an archruated head and embellished terra-cotta scroll keystone. The 1930 plans called for this entrance to be removed and a latching window to be installed, but the bottom of the door was simply bricked up, probably as a cost- saving measure. (see again fig. 2) Today, the building's main entrance is in the 1930 three-story central block, and features a coursed, recessed opening with the appearance of a flat arch with a shaped brick keystone.

Brick work at the transition of the first and second floors includes a corbelled band projecting eight inches surmounted by a sloped cement wash water table forming the lower sills of the second floor windows. Upper floor masonry is in common running bond. Windows are in alignment from one floor to the next and their relationship vertically is accentuated by recessed spandrels. Window sills and heads are articulated by rowlock coursing at the sills and soldier coursing at the heads projecting beyond the spandrel plane but recessed relative to the major wall surface. There is a single, central arched window with a plain terra cotta keystone on the second floor over the old main entry to the 1912 building. In 1930, it was planned that this window be replaced by two matching 1/1 sash windows. As with the old entrance, this change was not made.

Masonry forming the parapet on the 1930 addition features banding comprised of projecting stretcher and header courses with the appearance of crenelated molding located approximately at the juncture of the roof slab and exterior walls. Surmounting the parapet is elaborated masonry coursing including the repetition of the crenelated molding below,

but corbelled half a course in four equal corbels above which are two more corbelled stretcher courses. These support the final course of soldiers finished with a sloped cement wash parapet topping.

When the fourth floor was added to the 1912 building, the original metal cornice was lifted to new roofline. As a result, the intersection of the original three-story block and the added fourth story is articulated by a three and a half foot horizontal plaster band covering the original three-story cornice sockets and common brick backing. The metal cornice is supported by wood outriggers embedded in the masonry and is simple to the point of appearing stylistic. It is comprised of foot molds, architrave, dentils, interstitial soffits, cyma recta/reverse fascia, and a sloped top. The 1930 plans called for the metal cornice to be removed, and a brick cornice matching the new addition to be constructed. Again, cost prevailed, and the metal cornice remained.

The jail has a built up roof. On the interior of the original building, the fourth floor (originally the roof of the 1912 three-story building) slopes approximately 12- inches from the front to the back of the building.

The area behind (east of) the building is divided into two major jail yards and one small connecting yard. In the northern yard, a jail annex was constructed against the surrounding brick wall to the east. This was retained in the recent renovation and will be used to exhibit jail memorabilia. There is evidence of other enclosures, but these were removed at an earlier date. The two large yards are connected by a smaller enclosure accessed through a steel door. These jail yard details are not documented on Sanborn's insurance maps.

The jail's first floor is brown brick (Elgin Butler Brick and Tile Company shade #490), while the upper stories are of tan brick (shade #425). The fenestration is regularly spaced and rectangular, with the exception of the two arched window openings in the 1912 section. The 1930 plans indicate double-hung 1/1 wood sash windows, and these are seen faintly in the circa 1920 photographs. By the late 1980s, no windows remained in the building, though the window bars were intact. Single pane windows with applied muntins were installed during the recent remodeling.

Renovation of the Old Cameron County Jail as lawyer's offices was completed in early 1994. The building today is in excellent condition and both the building and site retain a high degree of integrity, including all salient interior features of the jail as it remained after it was vacated in 1978.

The Old Cameron County Jail, built in 1912-13 at 1201 East Van Buren Street in Brownsville, is the second facility constructed specifically to house prisoners for this county which was established in 1848. It succeeds the building constructed in 1882 that was used until this building was completed. A new Cameron County jail was built in 1978.

The jail was built in four stages 1912-13, 1923, 1926, and 1930 spanning a period during which Cameron County's population almost tripled from-27,158 (1910 Federal Census) to 77,540 (1930 federal Census). The original 1912 building was designed by Atlee B. Ayres, and the 1930 expansion by Ayres and his son Robert M. Ayres, with associated Brownsville architects and engineers, Procter and Dudley. It is one of five jail buildings attributed to Ayres and Ayres. The building exemplifies a "modern" approach to jail design in which free-standing facilities were equipped with cell work built and installed by outside firms specializing in correctional facilities.

The Cameron County jail is eligible under Criterion A (local level) in the area of Politics and Government as the building that housed county prisoners for 65 years during a period of tremendous community growth. It is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an evolutionary example of the work of Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres spanning over twenty years, as well as an extant example of a correctional facility reflecting early 20th century jail design. The building retains a high level of integrity with a period of significance from 1912 to 1945.

Cameron County, the southernmost county in Texas, was created from Nueces County on February 2, 1848, with Santa Rita as its temporary seat. Shortly, however, Brownsville was named the seat of county government. Records of the second county court session in Brownsville on January 15, 1849, stated that the Chief Justice be authorized to advertise inviting proposals with plans for the building of a jail of the following dimensions: 24 feet by 32." (Bay: 69) Early records also indicate that facilities were rented from both B.F. Hickman and I.B. Bigelow (the county's Chief Justice). Though specifications and plans for a jail were proposed by a J.G. Browne, these were "held over" on August 20, 1849. The county commissioners evidently changed their initial plans to purchase land and build a jail.

The town's first ordinances were passed on May 4, 1850, and the police force was organized on February 7, 1853, creating a more urgent need for a jail. (Bay: 71; Chatfield 1893:2). In December, 1852, the county signed a contract with Daniel Wolf to purchase the building already being rented for a jail. Wolf was to "thoroughly repair the building now upon the lot and...erect and place a substantial wooden framed building on the rear of the lot, the latter to be used for the courthouse. (Bay: 75) The buildings stood at the corner of Levee and Tenth Streets, and brick walls enclosed the jail. (Ibid.) In writing of an 1855 jail escape, author Henry Ferguson noted that "it was practically impossible to keep any prisoner who desired to escape in the fragile shack that served as a jail." (Ferguson 1976:106) In spite of this, the building served the county for some thirty years, though it was pronounced unfit and only partially floored in 1860. Men and women were housed together, and shackled to the floor at night to prevent escape. (Bay 81)

Finally, in 1882-83, a new jail building was constructed at 1144-54 East Madison Street. This was the first jail specifically designed and built for the county, and served as both the county and city jail until 1913. The city paid the county on a fee basis to house its prisoners there. (Bay: 67; Wooldridge & Vezzetti: 74) Just across the alley at 1131 East Jefferson, Cameron County also constructed a \$60,000 courthouse in 1882. Designed by J.N. Preston, it was described as brick, three-story, with a handsome, towering cupola. The second floor courtroom held 500. (Chatfield 1893 2)

In 1913, after the jail was replaced, the county sold the Madison Street property to Joaquin and Jose Fernandez who converted it to a store and living quarters. The old courthouse, which lost its roof and cupola in a 1933 hurricane, was sold to, the Masonic Temple of the Rio Grande, Lodge No. 81, A.F. & A.M. (Bay: 66)

The 1912 jail and courthouse buildings were both constructed in response to new state legislation. A law passed in 1881 allowed counties to sell bonds for courthouse construction. In addition, the 1876 state constitution and subsequent legislation required counties to provide detention facilities that were secure and humane (Robinson: 88).

Brownsville and Cameron County did not grow rapidly in the late 19th century. There was actually a population decline from 14,959 in 1880 to 14,424 in 1890. County assessments increased moderately from \$840,000 in 1889 to about \$1 million in 1893, when Brownsville's

population was estimated to be 7,000 and the county's 15,000. By 1900, Cameron County had 16,095 inhabitants. (Federal Census) Retarded growth, as one publication called it, was attributed to several causes including the unsettled condition of the border for an extended period, the distance and lack of rapid transit to the valley, and the presence of "foreigners." (Chatfield 1893:2) Though various companies were chartered to initiate rail service to the Rio Grande Valley, including the Rio Grande Railway and Turnpike Company and the Brownsville and Rio Grande Railway Company, the first train did not enter Brownsville until July 4, 1904. The advent of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway Company's Brownsville Railroad as it was called, helped to spark tremendous growth in the Valley. By 1910, Cameron County's population had grown to 27,158, a 69% increase since 1900.

By 1911, this large increase in population strained the county's facilities constructed thirty years earlier, and plans were made for a new county courthouse (NR 1980) and jail. (Robinson: 108-09; 2243 On October 11, 1911, Cameron County voters approved \$200,000 in courthouse and jail bonds to construct the new facilities. (Bay: 82) County Commissioners advertised for sites for the courthouse and jail, and separate parcels were selected and purchased. The jail site, at the corner of Van Buren and 12th Street, was bought from the New York and Brownsville Improvement Company for \$1,500. A separate site was selected for the courthouse at 1150 East Madison. The Commissioners Court took the position not to remove the prisoners from the present jail in order to construct a new jail on the old site, but that it would be less expensive to select a new jail site. (Commissioners Court Minutes K:552) The new jail site was located adjacent to the Rio Grande Railroad tracks fronting west on Van Buren Street at the corner of 12th Street. Small residences were located nearby. (see again fig. 3)

Both the architectural and construction contracts for the 1912 jail and courthouse were bid and awarded simultaneously. The two buildings were designed by Atlee B. Ayres, (1874-1969) prominent San Antonio architect. Ayres was among Texas' leading architects in the early and mid 20th century, and his career spanned some 70 years. Ayres was born in Ohio, and studied at the Metropolitan School of Art in New York City, a subsidiary of Columbia University, training in the methods of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He completed his architectural studies in 1894, and practiced in Mexico until 1900 when he formed the firm of Coughlin and Ayres in San Antonio. Following C.A. Coughlin's death in 1905, Ayres practiced alone until 1921 when his son Robert (1898-1977), joined him. Atlee Ayres, noted for his work, *Mexican Architecture Domestic, Civil and Ecclesiastical* (1926), was a charter member of the Texas Society of Architects. At the time of his death in 1969 at the age of 94, he was still practicing (University of Texas at Austin, Architectural Drawings Collection).

The combined careers of Ayres and Ayres (1901-1977) allowed the pair's architectural expression to evolve as construction technology and fashion changed. They designed several hundred homes, primarily in San Antonio, but also throughout South Texas, and in cities including Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, and Kansas City. Their residential commissions peaked during the 1920s and 1930s. While Ayres and Ayres work represents English Tudor, Italian Renaissance, and American Colonial Revival styles, the firm was perhaps best known for its popularization of the Spanish Colonial Revival, especially in San Antonio and South Texas. This style was rooted in Atlee Ayres deep knowledge and appreciation of Mexican architecture and its origins. It dominated much of the firm's work through the 1930s, and became its trademark, gaining the Ayres national recognition.

Atlee and Robert Ayres were responsible not only for impressive residences, but for many significant commercial, governmental and religious buildings, and their designs are found

locally in Brownsville, as well as regionally and nationally. In addition to Atlee Ayres design of the 1912 jail and courthouse, the senior Ayres designed the Brownsville High School (1916), the Jim Wells County Courthouse (Alice, 1911-12), the Kleberg County Courthouse (Kingsville, 1914), the Refugio County Courthouse (Refugio, 1917), and the Val Verde County Courthouse (Del Rio, 1915). Together, Ayres and his son completed the 1930 jail expansion, and with Phelps and Dewees, also of San Antonio, the Ayres designed the "new" Brownsville High School and Junior College Building (1927).

An inventory of Ayres and Ayres work in the University of Texas Architectural Drawings Collection includes notations of plans for the Bexar County Jail (San Antonio), the Hidalgo County Jail (Edinburg), the Kleberg County Jail (Kingsville), and, as associated architects, for the Victoria County Jail (Victoria). However, there are no plans, photographs or letters pertaining to these buildings in the Architectural Drawings Collection.

Ben V. Procter (b. 1882), who was associated with Ayres and Ayres in the design and construction of the 1930 jail expansion, established the firm of Procter and Dudley with Ltd. A. Dudley in Brownsville in 1922. He was first associated with his father, John V. Procter whose contracting and structural engineering business was based in the Hill Country. Ben Procter became a construction superintendent and came to Brownsville with the firm of Fitch Construction Company. By the late 1920s, Procter and Dudley, was known as one of the best firms of contractors the lower Rio Grande Valley.. (New Encyclopedia of Texas: 2921) On their letterhead, Procter and Dudley called themselves "engineers, contractors, architects, and for purposes of winning the 1930 jail commission, Procter was, noted as an architect.

It was still common in the early 20th century for jails to occupy the top floors of courthouses, and Willard Robinson, in his book, *The People's Architecture: Texas Courthouses, Jails and Municipal Buildings*, states new jail buildings as separate entities were not numerous during this era. When separate, Robinson describes the typical, late 19th Texas jail as a 2 or three-story cube containing sheriff's quarters, detention blocks, and occasionally, installations for other punishment. The jailer or sheriff lived on the ground floor, and the second and third floors were cell blocks. (Robinson: 88) A typical jail of the period might have been zoned to segregate prisoners by crime and sex, which was a departure from earlier detention practices in the United States (Ibid.). Jail buildings of the late 19th century were of masonry construction with freestanding steel and iron cells incorporating sanitary facilities (another innovation). Later jail innovations included electricity, water closets and lavatories. The exact floorplan of the 1912 Cameron County Jail is not known, but it was a three-story block building surrounded by a 12-foot high brick wall.

The 1912 jail and courthouse construction contract was initially awarded to Standard Construction Company of Dallas but when delays occurred, the: contract was assigned to Gross Construction Company which completed the projects for a total of \$187,715. (Bay: 86) On November 9, 1912, J.M. Schaefer of Gross Construction Company, stated that he expected to complete the jail within two weeks... When the building is completed, it will have cost about \$16,000." (The Brownsville Herald, November 9, 1912) Cell work for the 1912 Cameron County Jail was supplied by San Antonio's Southern Steel Company (later called Southern Prison Company) at a cost of \$3,674. (Commissioners Court Minutes K:517) According to construction superintendent Schaefer, it was Understood that cells will not be placed in the third story at the present time, as the second story will accommodate eight

cells, sufficient to care for the present needs of the county" (The Brownsville Herald, November 9, 1912).

It was cell work that delayed final completion and occupancy of the jail. The Brownsville Daily Sentinel quoted the December, 1912 grand jury's report as stating, We inspected the county jail and found conditions there very bad, but as good as we could responsibly expect owing to the crowded condition of the jail and their facilities for handling prisoners. We understand that the new jail will be occupied by January 1. (Daily Sentinel, December 16, 1912) The jail, however, was not occupied until sometime in 1913. On January 8, 1913, the Brownsville Herald noted that a new water and sewerage ditch was being dug from the present courthouse and jail eastward to the new jail site. the ditch was described as one of the deepest ever dug by water works employees 15 feet deep Several days later, the newspaper described the jail building as completed with the exception of the iron stairways which are being held up pending arrival of the steel cells." The cell manufacturer had requested that installation of the stairs be delayed to facilitate installation of the cells. (Brownsville Herald, January 18, 1913) By February 4, County Commissioners contracted with Southern Steel Company of San Antonio, the cell provider, to purchase cells for the third floor. Commissioners were forced to do this not because of the prisoner load, but rather the realization that after the stairs were installed, it would be impossible to install cells on the third floor." (Brownsville Herald, February 4, 1913) On February 4, 1913, County Commissioners also approved a contract with James McCoy to construct the jail wall at a cost of \$2,761 (Commissioners Court minutes L: 147).

As early as February, 1923, the Commissioners considered construction of a two-story addition to the jail. "It appears to the Court that there is an imperative public necessity for the erection of a new building at the County Jail... (Commissioners Court Minutes P:536). It would be necessary to tear down the southeast portion of the jail wall. "Bricks in the wall can be cleaned and used in the erection of said building." (Ibid.) The Commissioners specified that the project "is deemed a public work under Chapter M Title 104 of the State of Texas Revised Civil Statutes," making it eligible to use prison labor to tear down the wall, clean the brick, and build the new building. Convicts would labor ten hours a day. Bids for the addition and other jail improvements were advertised and opened, but were deferred to the County Clerk on June 11, 1923. It appears that a decision was made not to construct the addition at that time, perhaps because of cost.

Instead, in July, 1923, Cameron County Commissioners took bids to add a fourth floor to the jail. In July, bids by Homer L. Fitch and James McCoy were both rejected as too high, however, the \$8,758 bid of Dodd and Wedgartner was accepted in August, 1923 (Commissioners Court Minutes Q:18 19;28 & 71). There would be a \$1,158 deduction if the contractors did not "install cage," and another deduction of \$2250 if the old cornice could be taken down and reused. The county would furnish brick, sand and gravel that was already on the site. Though Commissioners Court records indicate that plans and specifications were attached, they were not included in the minutes books.

It was March, 1926, before there was further discussion of the two-story addition. At that time, the County Engineer reported completion of plans and specifications for the addition. (Commissioners Court Minutes R:490) The bid was awarded to W.A. Welton, one of seven bidders. (Ibid., R:531) Though materials were not discussed, it appears that the wall was dismantled as outlined in 15-23, and the brick reused in construction of this building. It is not known if convict labor was used.

In the next six years, the Cameron County Jail became increasingly crowded, and by 1929, construction of a new jail was being discussed. Brownsville architect Ben V. Procter wrote to Atlee Ayres on June 8, 1929, "Dear Friend, Cameron County are (sic) figuring on building another jail..." (University of Texas Architectural Drawings Collection, Ayres and Ayres Papers).

Over the next year, Procter and Ayres engaged in extensive political maneuvering to secure this major project. Ayres apparently started work on the plans shortly after receiving Procter's June 8, 1929 letter. The firm of W.E. Simpson Company of San Antonio was retained to provide structural engineering services. By June 25, 1929, Ayres received correspondence from Hull Youngblood of Southern Prison Company (formerly Southern Steel Company), with estimates for "the jail work for the annex to the Cameron County, Texas, jail." Estimates for various schemes, all involving the first and second floors, ranged from \$17,500 to \$30,000, and were "based upon standard jail work." The outside walls of both major cell blocks and window bars were of "tool proof material", and the partition walls of "open hearth steel." The minor jail work would be open hearth. The locking and operating devices were to be "fully selective, under control of guards and operable by the guard from the outside of the cell-block all comparable with the work of the Bexar County Jail "with which your are familiar."

Correspondence continued between Ayres and Procter and Ayres and Youngblood throughout June and July. By September, Procter reported "that the jail work is still hanging fire, it seems that the judge is afraid to bring it up...I think it would be a good idea for you to write judge and find out what he says about the job. By April 30, 1930, Oscar C. Dancy, the Cameron County Judge, wrote to Ayres, "Thanks for your letter of Saturday afternoon. Old Man Politics is getting into this Jail matter and the local architects are declaring war against you. And in order to get the matter done without friction, the contract in my opinion had best be in the name of Mr. Procter (sic). I trust that this will be entirely satisfactory with you as Mr. Procter is one of the best friends you have...We will want the proposal for the contract presented at the meeting of the court next Monday...We will want a four story building I am sure, and just about as planned by you, excepting we will want four stories. Procter wrote Ayres the same day that "they will build the south wing four stories and the connecting part three, and I give (sic) them an estimate of from \$45,000 to \$50,000 without the cages and cell."

Ayres exhibited a sense of humor in writing back to Judge Dancy on May 1, "...you say that 'Old Man Politics' is getting into this jail matter. It is just to bad we did not have this jail addition built so that we could have kept him there." He also noted that "It will be a very simple matter to increase the height of the building to four stories and it will certainly be much better to have it correspond in height with the old jail." After these politics were sorted out and the bid notification was issued, Ben Procter was specified as "Architect of Brownsville" and Atlee and Robert Ayres were associated architects.

Subsequent correspondence documents the care that was taken to have the new building correspond in proportion and alignment to the old building. Ayres discussed with Procter changes in the plans including placing 1/8 steel mesh on all windows in addition to the steel bars. This was "to keep prisoners from throwing things out of the windows." Again, correspondence indicates that the second and third floors in the new annex would only be roughed in for later completion. The decision was made to omit the galvanized cornice on top of the new fourth floor and to put a brick cornice instead. Robert Ayres proposed

removing the galvanized cornice from the older building, but the budget evidently did not allow for this work.

Finally, on April 29, 1930, documents were prepared by for signature by the County Judge and Auditor regarding the financing of the jail "substantially in accordance with plans and specifications submitted by Architect Ben Procter, except that instead of a three story jail, it is our recommendation that you make such annex or annexes four stories high, as the cost of an additional story will be very little in excess of what three story is and will perhaps save the County from going to the expense of tearing off the roof and building an extra story in the next five or six years." The building was to cost approximately \$50,000.

Approval of the project by County Commissioners followed a grand jury investigation of jail conditions, and an investigation by the Brownsville Herald. "This action looking toward a better jail was taken upon recommendation of the recent district grand jury. The jurors reported conditions as too crowded following their inspection of the jail" (Brownsville Herald, May 5, 1930). "Contributing toward the crowded condition is the large number of federal prisoners being caught and held on immigration charges. On May 1, 1930, the Herald had reported that 121 Federal prisoners had been discharged from the Cameron and Hidalgo County Jails to relieve congested conditions. "Those in the Cameron County jail were to be put across the river at Brownsville and the Hidalgo County prisoners. . at the city of Hidalgo. ..Their written pleas of guilty were ...rushed through in order to relieve congestion of the jails. Few of the prisoners have served the thirty day jail sentences recommended at preliminary hearings" (Brownsville Herald, May 11, 1930).

On June 13, 1930, Procter wrote to Atlee Ayres that the general construction contract in the amount of \$45,000 had been awarded to the firm of Meriwether and Sauers of Brownsville and Harlingen. Correspondence between the Ayres and Procter regarding details and finish out of the jail continued throughout the summer and into November, though there is never any mention of a construction schedule. The footprint of the completed building appears, however, on a September, 1930 Sanborn's map, and it assumed that the jail was at least nearing completion at that time (see again fig. 4).

The final correspondence in the Ayres Collection is dated March 12, 1932, and relates to purchase of cells, probably for the second and third floors as discussed in 1930. Atlee Ayres wrote to Judge Dancy that he had inspected "the old cells down at Southern Prison Company's place." These cells had been offered to Cameron County for \$4,980. Ayres told Dancy that he found that "while it is an antique type it is in fairly good condition. " He noted that the cells were rusty, but just needed to be "scrubbed with lye, then washed off and given a coat of gray lead and oil paint. " He also advised the Judge of his agreement that the present doors of these cells should be replaced "as the present doors are of course very old type." Ayres expressed his preference for entirely new cells, but felt that the old cells could be renovated. The correspondence ends before we learn the outcome. This discussion appears to be indicative of the evolution of the Cameron County Jail, which was expanded piecemeal, and always on a tight budget. With few changes, the Cameron County Jail occupied this building until a new facility was constructed in 1978.

The old Cameron County Jail is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Politics and Government as the building that housed local prisoners for a 65 year period of tremendous community growth. It is also significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent, intact example of evolutionary jail design, and as representing the continuity of the work of Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres. Though adapted as lawyers offices, the interior floor plan has been preserved, together with original jail cells and

security devices including doors and bars. The 1912 building with its 1923, 1926, and 1930 additions, combine with this contemporary treatment to preserve a well-articulated statement of an early 20th century detention facility.

[Top](#)

15. Camp Belknap

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Camp Belknap
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1996
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	From Brownsville, take Route 4 (Boca Chica Road), about 16 miles east.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	<p>In May 1846 when war was declared against Mexico, the U.S. Congress authorized the raising of 50,000 volunteer troops to supplement the regular U.S. Army. General Zachary Taylor was quickly inundated with volunteer soldiers arriving at Brazos Santiago, and was forced to place them in temporary encampments. Camp Belknap, located on this site, was established in the summer of 1846. The camp was located on a long narrow rise of land, measuring about 2 miles in length and one-half mile at its widest point. It was the first high ground encountered after leaving the Gulf Coast. Thought to be the largest encampment for volunteer soldiers, troop estimates total 7,000-8,000 men including several regiments from eight states. Soldiers suffered exposure to the elements, unsanitary living conditions, overcrowding, biting insects, thorny plants, and disease. Many died a premature death, often resulting in one two two funerals daily. No enemy attacks took place despite one false alarm. During August and September most of the volunteers were moved upriver either to camps nearer Matamoros, or further to Camargo. The camp was completely empty by December 1846.</p>

[Top](#)