

2004

Historical Landmarks of Brownsville Part 2

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 2" (2004). *History Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 81.
https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac/81

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

- [16. Cavazos House](#)
- [17. Celaya, Augustine, House](#)
- [18. Celaya, Creager, House](#)
- [19. Church of the Advent](#)
- [20. Cisneros House](#)
- [21. Convent of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament](#)
- [22. Cueto Building \(La Nueva Libertad\)](#)
- [23. Davis, Jefferson - President C.S.A.](#)
- [24. Esparza Cemetery](#)
- [25. Federal Court Site](#)
- [26. Fernandez, Miguel, Hide Yard](#)
- [27. First Presbyterian Church of Brownsville](#)
- [28. Fort Brown](#)
- [29. Fort Brown Calvary Barracks](#)
- [30. Fort Brown Commissary/Guardhouse](#)

[1-15](#) [31-45](#) [46-60](#) [60-65](#)

16. Cavazos House

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Cavazos House
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1984
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	608 E. Adams Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Fannie Seward Cavazos (1844-1928) moved from Ohio during the Civil War to Bagdad, Mexico. She came to Brownsville in 1870 with her husband, Wenceslao Cavazos. After his death in 1882 Fannie began a successful Mexican-style lace drawnwork business. She helped establish the Mexican Presbyterian Church in Brownsville. This home, built in 1905 for Fannie Cavazos by her daughters, is a good example of a Late Victorian cottage and features decorative woodwork.

[Top](#)

17. Celaya, Augustine, House

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Celaya, Augustine, House
<i>Address:</i>	504 E. Saint Francis St.
<i>Architect:</i>	Rendon,A.
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	GOTHIC
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>The Celaya House is an eleven-room, two-story, masonry residence built in 1904 for Augustine Celaya, a prominent lawyer in the area. The adobe bricks used in construction were handmade by local labor; all walls are 13 inches thick and outer surfaces are covered in natural cement. This construction provides insulation in both winter and summer. The design of the various wings and arched windows was developed by the owner to take advantage of the slightest tropical breeze.</p> <p>The denticulated cornice emphasizes the shape of the building below the parapet and above the graceful arches over the windows and doorways. The moveable vented shutters of the Celaya House are typical of homes of the period and the climatic location. Additionally, an interesting complement of brick outbuildings is found behind the house.</p> <p>The house is supported by brick and concrete piers concealed by the outside walls which extend to ground level. Access to the crawl-space beneath the house is provided by openings around the perimeter. These were covered by wooden lattice grates. The irregularly shaped structure has walls extending upward to form a parapet which shields any view of the roof from below. The pitch of the roof corresponds to the direction in which each wing of the house is facing. The original wooden shingle roof is now covered by composition roofing.</p> <p>The front elevation, which faces northeast, featured a large and curved entry porch with protective balustrade. The upstairs porch, removed in the 1960s, corresponded in shape with the downstairs, excluding the front steps. The principal supports, upstairs and down, were substantial rounded posts which resembled the turned legs of late Victorian furniture and repeated the shape of the balusters. Unlike the delicate cornice work which decorated many of the houses of that era, the brackets at either side of the top of each post were heavy but gracefully curved, with only three cutouts in the design. They were in keeping with the sturdy feeling of the house. Three floor-length windows open onto the front porch downstairs and three floor-length windows gave access to the upstairs porch from the central hall.</p> <p>The curve of the lower porch was squared off when the flooring was replaced in the early 1970s. There are three chimneys. One serves the fireplaces in the library downstairs and bedroom above it. The second chimney serves the fireplaces in the dining room below and the bedroom above it. The third chimney connects with the flue which vented the cast-iron, wood-burning cookstove in the first kitchen.</p> <p>A 10 x 16 inch coping runs across the front of the house by the concrete sidewalk and extends halfway towards the back on the side street. When the house was built the coping held an ornamental, black iron fence and gate. This was removed in the early 1920s, and only the coping remains.</p> <p>At the back of the house, two airy screened porches run the length of the living room and the bedroom above it. The original balustrades were removed circa 1926, and solid wood was</p>

used in their place when the porches were screened. An unscrewed continuation of the upstairs porch, with the original balustrades, continues back along the bedroom in the west wing. It is here that the back staircase descends to the latticed porch outside the kitchen. A door leads to the outside at the foot of this staircase.

The windows throughout the house are of the double-hung type with two-over-two lights. The floor-length windows are 11 feet in height, whereas all others are 7 feet 7 inches in height. The windows are shuttered but not screened. All ceilings in the house are 12 feet 4 inches high and are of tongue-and-groove construction. The doors are 7 feet 9 inches tall (with the exception of bathroom and closet doors) with four panels each, and are of solid wood with a dark finish. The original hardware is still intact. A 44-inch-wide pocket door with four panes opens from the entrance hall to the parlor. A similar pocket door leads from the library into the parlor. Transoms are featured over every doorway. Hardwood for the floors, doors, stairways, mantels, and wainscoting came from New Orleans. The carpentry and carving were done by local artisans.

All walls are papered, except those of the kitchens. Wooden laths along the brick walls form a base to which light cotton fabric is tacked. The wallpaper is pasted to this cloth. The brick walls of the kitchens were given periodic coats of heavy whitewash, but in recent years Bondex has been used.

All principal rooms have 9-inch baseboards with decorative beveled molding at the top, except for the wainscoted areas. The kitchens' baseboards are 5 inches deep.

When the house was wired for electricity, single-rod, cast-metal chandeliers were installed. These terminate in either curved or straight arms holding the frosted glass shades. The parlor has two sets of chandeliers with three lights each. The chandeliers in the library and dining room have four lights each. The fixture in the breakfast room has one light. The master bedroom has two sets of chandeliers with two lights each. The other bedrooms have two-light chandeliers.

The lights in the upstairs hall are centered over the stairwell. Each of three rods, 4.5 feet long, hangs by two metal rings from the ceiling medallion. Each holds a single, frosted, bell-shaped shade. A large frosted globe hangs by two rings from the center of the medallion. This fixture lights both the upstairs hall and entrance hall below. As was typical of that era, the house had few closets. When Mrs. Celaya protested to the builder about lack of closet space upstairs, he replied that no more was needed as she had plenty of wardrobes.

The solid front door of wood features a fixed-glass pane 28 inches x 25 inches in the upper half, with a narrow ledge beneath supported by a decorative wooden molding. Narrow 28-inch x 7-inch fixed-glass panes ornament the upper half of wooden panels which flank the front door. A clear glass fanlight over the doorway allows added light into the entrance hall. On each side of the front door a full-length window opens onto the front porch.

The entrance hall is 9 feet x 22 feet and has dark polished wainscoting 3 feet 8 inches high. An interesting feature of this is the pattern of alternating smooth and corrugated boards with a narrow rail at the top. The newel at the foot of the stairs is topped by a large wooden sphere.

The rare, free-standing, curved staircase has been the object of much admiration and comment. It is of dark polished hardwood with a raised "X" design adorning the sides of the stringer. Its hand-carved ornamental spindles are arranged in an intricate design. The underside of the staircase is of the same wood design as that used in the wainscoting, while

the ceiling and molding match the dark wood of the rest of the room. The round open stairwell with dark polished balusters is centered over the entrance hall.

A door from the entrance hall leads to the library in the east wing. The room is octagonal in shape and measures 14 feet 4 inches x 15 feet 8 inches. Three windows face the front street. The library is highlighted by an ornate fireplace and overmantel with the original, oval, 16-inch x 27-inch beveled-glass mirror in perfect condition. Applied wooden scrollwork adorns the corners. Glazed tiles (1.5 inches x 5 inches) in a cloud-like design of white, green, brown, and tan are used around the fireplace opening and hearth. A single 3-foot 8-inch-wide pocket door of four panels leads to the 11-foot 78-inch x 30-foot parlor.

To the left of the entrance hall another pocket door leads into the parlor. This is the south wing of the house. There are two windows facing the front street and three facing south, while a full-length window and a door open onto the airy porch at the back. Originally this porch had balustrades that matched those of the front porch, but in late 1927 they were removed and the porch was screened in.

The door at the foot of the staircase leads to the dining room in the north wing. Its shape and dimensions are the same as those of the library, with three windows facing the side street and a full-length window opening onto the front porch. This room is highlighted by a fireplace and overmantel whose framework is similar to that of the library. It has an oblong 16-inch x 27-inch beveled mirror with .75-inch carved frame. Glazed tiles (1.5 inches x 5 inches) in shades of ochre, sienna, and umber surround the fireplace opening and pave the hearth. This room has a china pantry with a decorative, diagonally patterned, wooden panel above the door. This matches the dark wainscoting in the entry hall. Matching panels are also found over the closet door in the north bedroom and over the pantry door in the breakfast room.

A door leads from the dining room to the 11-foot 3-inch x 11-foot 8-inch breakfast room. A door at the back of the entrance hall and under the curve of the staircase also leads into the breakfast room.

This room has a door and a window opening onto the screened porch and another window opening on the west wall facing a latticed porch. The wainscoting and chair-rail in this room match those of the hall, but are only 32 inches high. A china pantry gives added storage.

From the breakfast room a door leads into the first kitchen, 11 feet 8 inches x 9 feet 4 inches, in the west wing. A door opens onto the south, latticed porch and another to a porch on the north side. Part of this kitchen was used to construct a downstairs bathroom in 1975. This required no major structural change.

The north porch features a large enclosed pantry and an enclosed commode which was added in the early 1940s. Most of the original lattice has been replaced by hardware cloth. This porch has a separate roof of galvanized metal.

Adjoining the first kitchen is another room identical in size. It had been planned originally to use this room for hunting and sporting equipment, but it was turned into a second kitchen with a kerosene range and a sink for dish washing. Several years later the iron cookstove in the first kitchen was removed and the vent in the wall was sealed. Single windows face the north and south porches and a door on the west side opens to the backyard.

The upstairs contains four bedrooms and bath. Three of the bedrooms are built around the central hall with its round stairwell. The central hall and connecting short hall both have wainscoting identical to that of the entrance hall.

The bedroom in the east wing is of the same dimensions as the library below, with three windows on the east wall and a window facing south. This room is highlighted by a fireplace with a wooden mantel. The mantel is supported by two fluted columns and has applied wooden ornamentation. White 1.5-inch x 5-inch glazed tiles frame the opening, and variegated white and green tiles are used for the hearth. A door leads into the adjoining master bedroom.

The master bedroom, 11 feet 7.5 inches x 30, is the same size as the parlor below it. Two windows face the front of the house and three windows face south. The back wall has a floor-length window and a door opening onto the upstairs screened porch.

The north bedroom has three windows facing the side street and is the same size and shape as the dining room below. The room is highlighted by a fireplace and mantel that match the fireplace and mantel in the bedroom already described. Here all of the tiles are variegated white and green.

The short 3-foot 6-inch x 7-foot 4-inch hall has a door that leads to the screened porch and a door to the right that opens into the bathroom, 6 feet 5 inches x 11 feet 8 inches. Simple tongue-and-groove 3-foot 8-inch wainscoting with quarter round is used here. The original clawfooted tub is still in use but the commode with overhead wall tank and pull chain was replaced in the 1930s.

A door from the bathroom leads to the 11-foot 7 inch x 19-foot inch back bedroom. Here a door and floor-length window open onto the upstairs back porch. There is a window facing west, and two windows are on the north wall. It is interesting to note that the museum-quality bedroom suite once belonged to Augustine's parents. It is massive in scale and elaborately executed. The half tester of the bed soars to within a foot of the 12-foot-4- inch ceiling.

The brick outbuildings at the back of the house include a 6-foot x 10-foot outhouse with a partition in the center. One side was for the servants' use and the other for family members. A two-story building with a galvanized metal roof contains a one-car garage and a laundry room on the ground level, and a storeroom and servants quarters on the second level. In the floor of the garage there was originally a pit for servicing the cars. It had a wooden cover which was closed when not being used. In the early 1960s the pit was filled in and the floor was cemented over. The laundry room has a brick floor and a brick fireplace with raised hearth. The fire-place was used for heating water and the flatirons that were used for doing the family laundry. Access to the second floor was gained by way of an outside staircase removed circa 1980. Constructed at the same time as the main house, the outbuildings contribute to its overall character.

In back of the lower screened porch there was also a large gazebo. Its coneshaped shingled roof covered the underground cistern at one time. A downspout from the roof of the house brought rain water through large galvanized pipes to keep the cistern filled. A screen across the opening filtered out any debris, and a hinged lid closed over it when not in use. This gazebo was torn down sometime in the late 1930s.

A large, galvanized, tank-type cistern stood outside the door of the second kitchen and provided additional water for household use. This cistern was in use for over twenty years and was removed sometime in the late 20s or early 30s. The brick foundation still remains to show its location.

Built at the turn of the century (1904) for a prominent lawyer and businessman, the Celaya House is an unusual rendition of Victorian-period architecture in Texas. Its many wings and thick walls make it ideally suited to the tropical climate of Brownsville. Augustine Celaya, the owner, helped to develop commerce along the border and served as President and General Manager of the Rio Grande Railroad. He was completely bilingual, and was licensed to practice law on both the United States and Mexican sides of the Rio Grande. His residence was built in an area known as the Celaya Addition, and the house plan was designed by the owner himself.

Augustine Celaya was born to Simon and Adelaide Danache Celaya on July 21, 1860, in Brownsville, Texas. His mother was born in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, of French ancestry. Simon Celaya emigrated from Spain to the United States as a young man. He took a year's finishing course at St. Joseph's College, Bardstown, Kentucky, and came to Brownsville in 1850. He was employed as confidential clerk by Jose San Roman and Company which was then carrying on immense business in dry goods, produce, etc. During his long residency in Brownsville, he acquired large land holdings and was the trusted agent of a number of foreign capitalists in negotiating for land or placing loans in this section. He served as Spanish vice-consul in Brownsville for more than twenty years, and was credited with introducing numerous Spanish immigrants to the area.

Augustine attended local schools and later received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, on July 20, 1883. He received his law degree from the University of Virginia on July 3, 1884. Returning to Brownsville, in November of 1884, he obtained licenses to practice in the Federal, District, and Circuit courts. In April, 1885, he was enrolled in San Antonio as an attorney and counselor to practice in the District and Inferior state courts. The honorary degree of Master of Arts was conferred on him by the faculty of Spring Hill College on the 11th day of April, 1885. He returned to Brownsville on August 6, 1886, and began his law practice there.

On July 10, 1889, Augustine Celaya married Laura Scanlan who had moved to Brownsville from her birthplace in Victoria, Texas. She was the daughter of Anne Elizabeth Duffy and William Scanlan, who was sheriff of Cameron County for many years. Laura attended local elementary schools and received her high school education at Nazareth Academy, Nazareth, Kentucky.

Simon, Augustine's father, had been the principal organizer and incorporation of the Rio Grande Railroad, which was the first railroad in south Texas. It started operations in 1872, and he served as president and general manager of the company, a position he held for twenty years. In 1896 Augustine succeeded Simon as resident and general manager. He held these positions until the railroad was sold to the Frisco System. Augustine acquired large land holdings in Mexico, but these were lost during various Mexican revolutions. He also had numerous real estate holdings in Brownsville and its environs. Mr. Celaya rose to prominence as an attorney and later as Prosecuting Attorney for Cameron County. In 1912 he served as city recorder. He was also treasurer of Cameron County for six years. Later he served as judge of the City Corporate Court.

The house that Laura and Augustine Celaya built was completed in 1904, and was one of the city's showplaces. With its airy porches and large rooms it lent itself well to the hospitality for which the family was noted. Architecturally, the house can be considered as the climactic development of Brownsville's local masonry tradition, which combined both American and Mexican stylistic elements to produce some outstanding designs. Local brickworkers constructed large, dual-purpose structures serving as both home and place of business, such

as the Andres Cueto store "La Nueva Libertad", previously listed on the National Register. These craftsmen were also capable of producing more individualistic works such as the Celaya House.

The house is actually L-shaped in plan, and is distinguished by its highly original main elevation which joins three polygonal bays to form the entrance porch. The exterior detailing is typical of the local masonry style, with segmentally arched door and window openings and a dentiled cornice. The unusual massing of the house led to the equally unusual and significant interior plan. The dramatic main staircase. With its fine Eastlake railing, serves as the centerpiece around which other rooms are placed. The Celaya House is one of the few such structures in Brownsville to survive in the hands of the original builders, retaining much of its original architectural character as well as numerous pieces of original family furniture.

In 1928, Augustine took ill very suddenly with a high fever. Although tests of all sorts were run and a doctor from San Antonio was Brown in to consult with local physicians, the cause of his illness was never determined. He died within a week at the age of sixty-eight in the massive bed in which he was born.

Laura, his widow, lived to be ninety-one years old and lived in the house until her death in June 1958. Laura and Augustine Celaya had six children: Laura (1890- 1894), Adelaide (1891-1933), Augustine, Jr. (1894-1980), Mary (1897-1898), Joe Scanlan (1899, still living in Seguin, Texas) , and Clarence (1901-1981).

Laura and her husband, Elmore Starr Grider, lived in the house after their marriage. Elmore was auditor and purchasing agent for the City of Brownsville for many years. He also was the owner of the Rio Grande Fish and Oyster Company. During World War I he served on the Zone Price Committee pertaining to seafood. The couple's three daughters--Laura Celaya (Laurita), Lucie Starr, and Sarah Ward--were born in this home and lived there until their marriages. Laurita followed in the footsteps of her mother and was married at home. Lucie Starr and her husband lived in the house for a time after World War II. Their son Richard was born during this Augustine, Jr., continued living at home after his marriage with Maria del Carmen Pardo. Eighteen months later they established their own home. He served in the Texas State Legislature for eighteen years. Joe Scanlan married and moved to Mexico where he worked for the Mack Truck Company for many years until his retirement. Clarence remained a bachelor. He served in the China-Burma Theatre during World War II. Laura's husband, Elmore Grider, died in 1958. Laura and her brother Clarence continued living in the homestead. Clarence died in 1981 at the age of eighty. Laura was the last to occupy the house. She died in May, 1984, at the age of ninety-three. Family members continue to maintain the house.

Celaya Family Records and Correspondence, Brownsville.

Chatfield, Lieut. W. H., U. S. Army (comp.), *The Twin Cities of the Border and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*. E. P. Brandao, New Orleans, 1893 (reprinted by the Harbert Davenport Memorial fund, the Brownsville Historical Association, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Historical Society, 1959).

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON FILE IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER.

[Top](#)

18. Celaya--Creager House



Celaya-Creager House

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Celaya--Creager House
<i>Address:</i>	441 E. Washington St.
<i>Architect:</i>	Tracy,M.E.
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	CLASSICAL REVIVAL
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>Located on an ample, corner lot in an older residential neighborhood in Brownsville, the Celaya-Creager House is one of the most substantial surviving turn-of-the-century residences in the city and, arguably, the region. Recently rehabilitated on the exterior, the Celaya House is constructed of yellow brick laid in a common bond pattern; the structure, however, is dominated by a large, three-sided Classical Revival porch. The property consists of the main house and one contributing outbuilding.</p> <p>The Celaya-Creager House is a large, two-story, masonry residence with a single story, detached garage. The entrance (southwest) facade is dominated by a bowed, two-story, giant order portico with full entablature and classical balustrade. It is supported by four giant order Roman Ionic columns. A wraparound veranda with rounded corners covers three sides of the structure; it also features miniature Roman Ionic columns and balustrades at both ground and second floor levels. The house has a hipped roof broken by dormer windows on the southwest and southeast sides and chimneys, and terminates with a flat balustraded widow's walk; the dormers have lost the "Alamotif" parapets appearing in historic photos, but the present pediments are in keeping with the style. The entrance bay of the main block has central doors with oval sidelights and transoms on both floors. These are flanked by large bay windows, with single pane lower sashes and decorative, elongated diamond pane windows above. This window configuration is used throughout most of the rest of the house. The undulating quality of the entrance facade is unusual in a house of this sort. The remaining facades continue the same architectural detailing, although with less regard to symmetry. The northwest facade has four bays with corresponding windows above, while the southeast facade, somewhat longer, has another two-story bay window roughly at the</p>

center of that elevation. The rear (northeast) elevation has four windows at each level (that portion of the house is thought by some to have been a very early addition).

The entrance hall divides two similar, flanking rooms entered through large arches. A large, central L-shaped hall contains the three-run staircase and provides access to most of the remaining ground floor rooms. The principal reception and dining rooms are connected by large, flat-arch openings, so that the spaces appear to flow together. Architectural detailing is relatively simple: stairway and the sole downstairs mantle in the west room demonstrate modest classical influence, and the six-panel doors and architraves have no special ornamentation. The dining room/hall doors are pocket doors. The five second-floor bedrooms (three with bay windows) are all connected to the central hallway. Again, only the west room has a fireplace. Few early electrical or plumbing fixtures survive.

An early, one-story masonry garage with clipped gables was constructed between 1914 and 1919, and is located at the eastern corner of the property. Sanborn maps indicate sheds that have come and gone along the northeast and northwest boundaries, and also an open, octagonal, gazebo like structure north of the rear ell; the latter building was in place by 1914 and remained in 1930. Large palm trees are the most distinctive vegetation on the site, although mature pecan trees flanking the Washington Street entrance are also of note.

The Celaya-Creager House, one of Brownsville's grandest turn-of-the-century residences, is also one of the most historically significant homes in the city from that era. Built for Jose and Serafina Fernandez Celaya, it became home in the 1920s of Rentfro Banton Creager, one of the most politically-active South Texans of his day, and his wife Alice. The house is one of three classically inspired mansions remaining in the city; all were designed by the same architect, M. E. Tracy, and one, the Celaya House's fraternal twin, next door, was built for Mrs. Celaya's parents, Jose and Juanita Fernandez.

The first decade of the 20th century was a prosperous one for Texas' southmost city, Brownsville. Located at the mouth of the Rio Grande, Brownsville grew in population between the 1900 and 1910 censuses by more than 50 percent to 10,517 inhabitants. The city was a great trading center with Mexico and as the largest city in South Texas it was also a commercial and cultural center.

Among the most prosperous citizens of Brownsville at that time were the Celaya and Fernandez families. Simon Celaya, a Spaniard by birth, had come to Brownsville in 1850, and achieved considerable success as a capitalist and railroad president. Jose Fernandez, also born in Spain, was a very successful wholesale merchant and married Juanita Champion, a member of another pioneer family. The marriage of their children Jose Celaya and Serafina Fernandez thus allied two of the city's most prominent families.

Jose Celaya held a number of important business and political positions in the community. He was secretary and treasurer of the Rio Grande Railroad (later called the Port Isabel & Rio Grande Valley Railway) from a date after 1893 until it was sold some years later. Celaya was also a director of the Texas Bank and Trust Company of Brownsville and a member of the Cameron County Commissioners Court.

The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 had done much to spawn a national interest in Beaux Arts Classicism, and that dovetailed with a burgeoning interest in American colonial architecture. A post-Victorian cross of the two styles became very popular in the first decade or so of the 20th century and was referred to as "Classic Colonial" or "Colonial Renaissance" in some contemporary literature. In Texas it became a favorite building style of the wealthy, and it can be found in such mansions as the Wharton-Scott House (National

Register, 1975) in Fort Worth or the McFaddin-Ward House (National Register, 1971) in Beaumont. These buildings tended to be large, overscaled and opulent; they usually featured giant order porticos (sometimes with wraparound porches) and generally employed classical or colonial detailing in a decidedly unacademic way.

In 1911, two substantial homes in this mode were begun on adjoining lots for Jose and Juanita Fernandez and their daughter and son-in-law Serafina and Jose Celaya. The architect of the two houses was one M. E. Tracy, about whom, according to architectural historian Stephen Fox, little is known. Tracy was the architect of Brownsville's two other large Edwardian-era Colonial Revival residences, built for Owen Combe and J. J. Young; the Combe House has been demolished. While the character of 19th century Brownsville was an architectural hybrid of American and Mexican traditions, it is of note that the Hispanic Fernandez/Celaya family would choose the arche-typically American Colonial/Classical Revival style. Celaya was a County Commissioner during construction of the Beaux Arts-style Cameron County Courthouse (National Register 1980) which was built: in 1912, and he may have favored classicism. Or the family may simply have followed in the footsteps of scores of other prosperous Texans who built similarly-styled mansions. The style, however, never achieved great popularity locally, and the Celaya and Fernandez Houses, the latter now altered, are perhaps the most striking surviving domestic examples.

The Celaya's enjoyed their new home only a decade or so, for in 1924 it was sold to Rentfro Banton Creager (1877-1950), one of the most celebrated South Texans of his day. A native of Waco, Creager moved to Brownsville at age seven. He graduated from Southwestern University (National Register 1975) in Georgetown, Texas, and received his law degree from the University of Texas at Austin in 1900. In 1904 he married Elizabeth Alice Terrell (d. 1958), daughter of John L. Terrell of Terrell, Texas. Alice Creager would later become involved in numerous civic and philanthropic activities, and managed the family farm and citrus orchards.

R. B. Creager achieved considerable prominence as an attorney and banker, as collector of customs for the Brazos de Santiago District (under Presidents Roosevelt and Taft) and especially through his interest in Republican politics. At a time when Texas was overwhelmingly Democratic in its politics, Creager was Republican nominee for governor in 1916 and chairman of the Texas Republican State Committee in 1921. He made the sole speech seconding the nomination of Warren G. Harding in 1920, and was visited in Brownsville by Harding before his inauguration. Senator James T. Heflin of Alabama later attempted to associate Creager with scandals in the Harding administration in a highly publicized controversy. But Creager argued, apparently successfully, that Helen's motives were a direct result of the Texan's campaign to have a condemnation of the Ku Klux Klan introduced at the 1924 Republican National Convention. He later helped secure the nominations of Herbert Hoover in 1928 and Alfred Landon in 1936, and worked diligently for Robert A. Taft in 1940.

Creager was offered the post of U.S. Ambassador to Mexico by Presidents Harding and Coolidge, but according to a biographical sketch in *The New Encyclopedia of Texas*, he "declined, believing he could best serve the interests of his country, and international relations, by continuing his activity in the border capital of Brownsville, and in his party counsels" (Davis, 1:330). His honors, business and civic board memberships and community and Episcopal Church activities were numerous.

Alice and Rentfro Creager acquired the Celaya House in the 1920s, the decade arguably of their greatest prominence. *The New Encyclopedia of Texas* noted at that time that the

Creagers "have one of the most imposing residences in Brownsville and have entertained many of the county's best know celebrities." (Ibid) The Creagers resided in the Celaya House until shortly before Creager's death in 1950, and it is believed to have the strongest associations of any residence with R. B. Creager.

Since the Creager ownership, the structure has undergone a variety of uses, not all sympathetic. The exterior of the Celaya Creager House, however, has recently been restored and the interior will be adapted for commercial purposes. Accordingly, this important early 20th century landmark should again be a source of pride and enjoyment to the people of Brownsville.

[Top](#)

19. Church of the Advent

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Church of the Advent
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1988
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	104 W. Elizabeth Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	One of the earliest Episcopal churches organized in Texas, this congregation was founded in 1851. The Rev. William Passmore served as first Rector, and by 1854 a church building was completed in the downtown area. Destroyed by a hurricane in 1867, it was rebuilt by 1877. The current building was designed by Scottish architect Thomas McLaren and built in 1926-1927. The Mission style structure features a domed tower, barrel tile roof, and curvilinear parapet.

[Top](#)

20. Cisneros House

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Cisneros House
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1991
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	451 E. Adams Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Local architect Jose Colunga (1882-1946) built this house for businessman Jose A. Cisneros, Sr. (1887-1963). A hallmark example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style when completed in

1926, the structure's current Eclectic appearance dates to 1933, when a Classical Revival porch was added. Original Spanish Colonial Revival elements, such as tiled pent awnings, remain. Owned by Mr. Cisneros until 1945, the house was purchased by the family again in 1979.

[Top](#)

21. Convent of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Convent of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1972
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	700 E. St. Charles Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	This block was once surrounded by a ten-foot wall enclosing a beautiful structure housing America's first colony of Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament, a cloistered teaching order. The convent had a history of vicissitudes and heroism. Arriving in the frontier village of Brownsville in 1853 from their mother house in Lyons, France, the nuns moved into an unfurnished former warehouse to begin their school while their first convent was being built. For their bilingual (Spanish-English) pupils, they were compelled to translate from French and print textbooks on a small hand press. Indian raids, yellow fever epidemics, storms, and the Civil War (1861-65) did not deter the Sisters, who taught without interruption until 1867, when the original convent was destroyed by a hurricane. On petition of patrons, the Sisters agreed to reopen their school. On this site was built, at cost of \$20,000 in Specie, a New Orleans French-style convent of distinctive architecture. The Sisters occupied it on Dec. 25, 1868. For many generations it served as a boarding and day school for girls, until in 1967 the Sisters moved to Villa Maria, a modern educational center.

[Top](#)

22. Cueto Building (La Nueva Libertad)

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Cueto Building (La Nueva Libertad)
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1985
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	13 & E. Madison Streets, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	

A fine example of late Nineteenth Century South Texas commercial architecture, this building was constructed in 1893 to house the expanding grocery and mercantile, retail and wholesale business of Don Andres Cueto (1862-1927), a native of Spain. "La Nueva Libertad," as the business was known, included a retail store, storerooms, a carriage house, and domed brick bakery ovens. Prominent features of the building include its corbelled brick cornice and parapet.

[Top](#)

23. Davis, Jefferson - President C.S.A.

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Jefferson Davis - President C.S.A.
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1926
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	Corner of E. Adams and 7th Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Commemorating the services to the United States of America of Jefferson Davis - President C.S.A. Graduated West Point 1828; Served on Indian Frontier 1828-1835; United States Congress 1845-1846; U.S.A. Col. Commanding Miss. Troops, Landed Point Isabel, Texas, 1846. Hero of Bueno Vista and Monterey; Declined Post Brigadier General U.S.A. Secretary of War 1853-1857; U.S. Senator (Miss.) 1849, '51, '57, '61 (Resigned); Soldier - Statesman - Martyr; Erected by United Daughters of the Confederacy 1926

[Top](#)

24. Esparza Cemetery

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Esparza Cemetery
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1999
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	US 281, 8.5 mi. W of Brownsville
<i>Marker Text:</i>	This graveyard was named for Carlos Villarreal Esparza (1828-1885), whose family's occupation of the surrounding ranch land began in the early 19th century. According to family records, the original Esparza Cemetery was established south of this site in the mid-1800s. In 1888, Carlos' widow Francisca Garcia Esparza moved his grave and those of other family members because of flooding and other problems at the old cemetery. It is believed that Carlos' parents, Pedro and Felicidad Villarreal Esparza, are interred here. The cemetery

is the resting place of family members who served in World Wars I and II, local civic and political leaders, officers in law enforcement and the Texas Rangers. A record of the area's Mexican American pioneers, it continues to serve the community. (1999)

[Top](#)

25. Federal Court Site

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Federal Court Site
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1965
<i>Designations:</i>	na
<i>Marker Location:</i>	1201 E. Elizabeth Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Built 1850 by Wm. C. Douglas, who arrived with Gen. Zachary Taylor during Mexican War. In 1852 by order of U.S. Congress, first Federal Court in Brownsville was held in back room here by Judge John Watrous.

[Top](#)

26. Fernandez, Miguel, Hide Yard

Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Fernandez, Miguel, Hide Yard
<i>Address:</i>	1101--1121 E. Adams St.
<i>Architect:</i>	Unknown

<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	OTHER
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard is a one-story brick commercial building with an L-plan and a flat roof. The building occupies two lots at the northeast corner of East Adams and East 11th streets near the original Market Square in downtown Brownsville. Constructed in two stages, this vernacular building has classical characteristics typical of late 19th century Rio Grande Valley commercial architecture.</p> <p>The area surrounding the Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard exhibits topographical features characteristic of South Texas settlement. Brownsville, on the north bank of the Rio Grande, lies on a flat coastal plain. The central business district follows a rectilinear plan. The building is advantageously placed with the East Adams Street facade facing the heavily trafficked Market Square, a traditional center of retail trade, now serving as the site of City Hall. The 1904 St. Louis, Brownsville & Mexico (now Union Pacific) railroad tracks are seven blocks to the south of the Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard.</p> <p>The building has an interior brick pier and arch wall system with iron tie bars that support; the wood roof joists and reinforces the exterior load-bearing brick walls. The exterior 4-course walls are more than one foot thick and rise to form a parapet that encloses the roof. The exterior walls were once painted with signs advertising the businesses housed within; most of these signs have been removed.</p> <p>The East 11th Street facade, facing northwest, was built about 1890. Simple but distinctive brick pilaster; at the corners define the continuous 100-foot bay. Ten evenly spaced double wood doors with transoms punctuate the northwest facade. Originally these entrances had not only double wood doors that opened into the building, but also exterior shutters that opened out and provided additional protection from the elements. Over each door is a brick segmental arch. A continuous projecting brick entablature caps the pilasters and features a molded-brick cyma recta cornice that rests on a brick dentil course. Above the cornice line is a five-course parapet with molded-brick coping. The parapet conceals a slightly sloped roof (see floor plan illustration).</p> <p>The East Adams Street facade, facing southwest, was built about 1900. This facade is almost identical to the 11th Street facade in form and detail, but a centered brick Pilaster, at the juncture of the later addition, bisects this facade into two 50-foot long bays. Next to the center pilaster is a metal sign that once advertised in neon one of the commercial businesses within the building. Eight identical doorways, four at each bay, are similar to those on the northwest facade. The entablature and cornice continue on this wing as does the parapet that conceals a flat roof. The southeast wall abuts another structure.</p> <p>The rear, alley facade is unadorned. The back of the East 11th Street wing contains a flat arch single-door entrance with a 7-light transom. Behind the parapet above, beginning at each end, the roof gradually slopes downward and terminates at the mid-point of the wall. This slope allows rain water to escape at an opening at the midpoint of the wall through a large cylindrical pipe. Attached at the reentrant angle of the building is a small frame structure with a shed roof.</p> <p>Roof joists are visible at the back of the East Adams Street wing. A brick wall extending from the south side of this wing encloses the southeast side of the original hide yard. At one time</p>

this wall also enclosed the northeast (back) of the hide yard. The original yard area is now used for parking. Behind this is an alley.

Three interior brick walls, all running parallel to the East Adams Street facade, have segmental brick arches and range from six inches to one foot thick. One interior wall is set back approximately 33 feet from the East Adams Street facade. The wall is 100 feet in length, spanning the earlier and later wings, with eight evenly spaced arches. A second interior brick wall is set back approximately 33 feet from the first interior wall and has four evenly spaced arches. A third interior brick wall is set back approximately 33 feet from the second interior wall; its four arches are visible but have been enclosed with brick. The wood ceiling has cross braces between the roof joists. The simple interior remains largely intact. The interior was subdivided in the 1960s and leased to various businesses.

Concrete sidewalks connect the building front with the streets. Various rear outbuildings constructed over the years no longer exist. The original open hide yard contains a few trees.

The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard was rehabilitated in 1987-88 with funds from a Community Development Block Grant. The exterior has been cleaned to stabilize its appearance. One altered doorway was removed and restored to match the other original doorways.

The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard was built in two stages between 1890 and 1900 in downtown Brownsville, at the southernmost tip of Texas in the lower Rio Grande Valley. The building is eligible under Criterion A for its association with commercial activities important to the region. Also eligible under Criterion C as a local example of late 19th century Rio Grande Valley commercial architecture, the vernacular building exhibits classically derived characteristics.

The Valley is a distinctive region where the Rio Grande flows between two countries but does not separate them, nor does it separate their history. Miguel Fernandez began his hide yard in 1890 when he and his brother Jose dissolved their partnership in an import-export business after immigrating to Brownsville from Spain. The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard, adjacent to downtown Brownsville's Market Square, was one of the first hide yards established in Brownsville. At least three other hide yards existed in Brownsville. Henry M. Field operated a hide yard between 10th and 11th streets on East Monroe Street. Michael Schodts Lumber, Bone and Hide Yard was next to Field's, also between 10th and 11th streets on Jackson, covering an entire city block. Later, the Cafferelli brothers began a hide yard on East Levee Street.

Hide yards such as these began to proliferate in the late 19th century when drought adversely affected the cattle market and, combined with calamitous prices, began dictating ranch strategy. As Tom Lea describes in *The King Ranch*, "...lack of rainfall brought crisis to many western ranching areas, forcing huge numbers of gaunted cattle into a market which had already collapsed." The severest drought period the Rio Grande Valley suffered culminated in 1891-92 forcing huge numbers of cattle, worth no more than about \$5 a head into the depressed economy. These low market prices for live cattle made it necessary for ranchers to slaughter their cattle; render the tallow; bleach the bones, horns, and hooves; and dry and bale the hides. In some cases the ranchers would salvage hides from dead animals on the range. A businessman like Fernandez, with a bone and hide yard, would store these byproducts until he had sufficient quantities for shipment to processors in Eastern markets.

Hide yard owners like Fernandez would also stock general merchandise for local rancheros, according to local tradition. Goods delivered to hide yards in the valley probably came from sources as far away as New York and New Orleans. Transactions at hide yards usually

involved little cash; ranchers would generally trade or barter their hides and bones for supplies such as rope, hardware, wire, and tools. Hide yard bookkeeping systems frequently consisted of a notebook, called a cartilla, in which the hide yard owner tallied customer credits like hides or bones against debits like dry goods, hardware, or other purchases.

According to local tradition, transactions here that did involve cash were often related to Fernandez's activities as a private banker. He possibly secured some of the ranch and land properties he acquired with profits from these transactions or perhaps from defaults on loans.

An extant example of late 19th century commercial architecture in the lower Rio Grande Valley, the architecture of the Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard is rich with Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American cultural heritage. Very early Spanish colonial and Mexican provincial commercial buildings along the Rio Grande probably evolved from late 18th century structures, generally unadorned cubes constructed of adobe or jacal. This trend appears to have been set by the 1850s when the commercial buildings in early settlement areas (San Ygnacio, NR 1973; Old Guerrero, Mexico) reflected the use of course-stone load-bearing walls, hand-hewn wood lintels and double doors, and shallow parapets concealing flat roofs drained by canales or gabled thatched roofs. With affluence came the addition of decorative details such as quoins, cornices, and, occasionally, wood door moulds that often were based on pattern books widely distributed in the late 19th century. The preferred location for these buildings was a prime, corner lot on the central plaza. The preferred form was either an L-plan that could enclose a private area or a rectangular plan. Both plans would be fenestrated with symmetrically placed double doors opening to the street.

By the late 19th century, construction techniques evolved to use double-wythe brick loadbearing walls, machine-sawn wood doors and window surrounds, while continuing to employ earlier construction techniques like tall parapets concealing flat or tripped roofs. While the preference for corner locations and rectangular or L-plans continued, construction with brick instead of wood or adobe allowed designers to build two-story structures and to add cornices and pilasters embellished with corbelled brick. In Roma, northwest of Brownsville, bricks were used for entire walls and classical entablatures with moldings and dentils surmounted the openings. Examples of brick architecture in Roma are the Manuel Guerra House and Store (NR 1972) and commercial buildings in the Roma (Roma-Los Saenz) National Register Historic District (NR 1972).

Heinrich Portschiller (1840-1915) constructed many of the buildings in the Roma Historic District and is attributed with the introducing classical details in molded brick, probably from pattern books. Local builders emulated his renowned craftsmanship and innovative style all along the Rio Grande. He served in the Prussian and Mexican armies, immigrating to Mexico in 1883 and then to Roma, Texas. His influence on the Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard is evident in conjunction with the prevalent Spanish Revival styles that appeared in late 19th century Mexico and other structures Portschiller built in the lower Rio Grande Valley. His buildings and other similar structures all have double-wythe brick loadbearing walls, machine-sawn wood doors and window surrounds, a tall parapet concealing a flat or tripped roof, simple details, plain capitals, dent] moldings, and a corner location.

The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard displays these typical, late 19th century, Rio Grande Valley architectural characteristics. Constructed in two stages almost identical in form and detail, the L-shaped building sits on a prominent corner. Exhibiting a classically derived projecting brick entablature and symmetrically placed fenestration, the building employs double-wythe brick load bearing walls and tall parapets concealing a flat, sloped roof.

After his father's death in 1904, Miguel Fernandez Jr. inherited and continued operating the family business. Miguel Fernandez Jr. became not only a merchant, but also a banker, cotton gin operator, landowner, and developer. He served as Vice President of the Merchants National Bank, and as a city alderman during his early career.

Profit derived from the hide yard declined during Miguel Fernandez Jr.'s ownership, partially due to the competitors' practice of extending credit to area ranchera, according to Antonio Gomez, grandson of Miguel Fernandez Jr. As he related, the Cafferelli brothers extended credit to ranchera on a regular basis. Gomez also suggested that when grandfather and father's generations died, the new, younger ranchers did not feel the same obligation to trade with the more established hide yards.

A stipulation in Miguel Fernandez Jr.'s will provided that the hide yard could not be sold until after his youngest child died. Thus, the building remained in the Fernandez family's ownership until 1984 when it was auctioned to the present owners.

The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard is one of the few remaining intact sites and the only remaining hide yard site in Brownsville's original townsite. Also one of few remaining buildings that composed Market Square, the historic core of downtown Brownsville, the hide yard was the only one-story building that ever existed on the square. Other similar extant buildings include L. Madrilena (NR 1988), the most highly detailed local example of lower Rio Grande Valley commercial architecture, and El Globo Nuevo at 1502 East Madison Street.

Currently, the Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard is divided into several other retail businesses. Recent stabilization and exterior cleaning removed paint applied over the last few decades.

The Miguel Fernandez Hide Yard is an important: vernacular example of late 19th century Rio Grande Valley commercial architecture that feature classically derived characteristics. The hide yard is representative of Miguel Fernandez and his trade.

[Top](#)

27. First Presbyterian Church of Brownsville

<i>Marker Title:</i>	First Presbyterian Church of Brownsville
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1993
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	435 Palm Boulevard, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	This church, organized by The Rev. Hiram Chamberlain and 19 charter members in 1850, is Brownsville's oldest Presbyterian congregation. Services were held on a river boat and in several sanctuaries before this structure was built by the San Antonio construction company in 1927. A well-preserved example of a 20th Century Gothic Revival sanctuary, it features cast stone detailing, Gothic arches and windows, and irregularly arranged tower and bays. The congregation continues to serve the area.

28. Fort Brown



Fort Brown

<i>Resource Name:</i>	Fort Brown
<i>Address:</i>	S edge of Brownsville off International Blvd.
<i>Architect:</i>	Unknown
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	NO STYLE LISTED
<i>Narrative:</i>	<p>The government reservation of the original post was build on a tract of land containing 358 acres, situated on the Rio Grande immediately adjacent to Brownsville. The reservation consisted of low, flat prairie land covered with chaparral, mostly mesquite and huisache.</p> <p>Inside the reservation was the lagoon or resaca--an old channel of the Rio Grande River--which enclosed a small island of 25.5 acres. After the timber was removed in 1846 to prevent its use as a cover for Mexican troops, a national cemetery was located there.</p> <p>The post of Fort Brown had accommodations for one battery of artillery, one company of cavalry and four companies of infantry. Quarters for the infantry were located on the northern boundary of the reservation, separated from the City of Brownsville by a wall. Artillery quarters were situated about midway between the northern and southern borders.</p> <p>Infantry officers' quarters, consisting of seven houses, were located along the northern border of the lagoon, opposite and 175 yards distant from the barracks. The commanding officer's house was a 1 1/2 story frame building raised on brick piers. The lieutenant's quarters were similarly constructed. A brick walk ran along the front of the officers' quarters and up to each house.</p> <p>The cavalry barracks were built of brick in the same plan as the infantry officers' quarters. The artillery officers' quarters were on the extreme southern end of the reservation, about one half mile away from the infantry quarters and hospital. The infantry barracks were four two story framed buildings, elevated on brick piers with porches on each end. The cavalry</p>

barracks were also elevated on piers but were built of brick and surrounded by a veranda, as were the artillery barracks. A guard house was located near the principal gate constructed of hewn logs. The post hospital was a handsome brick building completed in 1869 in accordance with plans from the Surgeon General's office. A covered veranda surrounded the entire building.

Although the post had been continuously occupied as a military reservation from 1846 to 1944, no attempt was made to preserve Taylor's original fortification. In 1944 at the time of the army's departure, only ruins of the old breastworks remained as grass covered mounds. These still exist today, preserving the outline of the bastions. They are located directly on the river in the northern corner of the old drill field, now adjacent to a golf course. Within the limits of the breastworks is an upended cannon placed by General James Parker's Commission in 1920-21 which supposedly marks the spot Major Brown died. There is also a marker containing a table indicating the location and dimensions of the original fort:

Earthworks of 800 yards perimeter, 6 bastions, walls 9 1/2 feet high, parapet 15 feet wide, ditch 8 1/2 feet deep, 15 to 20 feet wide. Amateur excavation by freshman at Texas Southmost College was begun in February, 1975.

A number of brick and frame buildings dating from 1869 were in existence at the time of the sale. These included officers' quarters, the post hospital, the headquarters building and the chapel. The headquarters building was used for the Brownsville Police and the chapter for the local historical society. Subsequent dispersal of property by the city and its further division caused serious inroads into the integrity of Fort Brown. The headquarters building was destroyed for the city's General Services, and the chapel was moved from in front of the hospital to make room for parking and a college library. The chapel now serves to house maintenance equipment and is lodged against a levee encircled by a chain link fence. Several of the officers' quarters were removed for construction of a new Chamber of Commerce building but those closest to the hospital remain. The island in the Fort Brown Resaca, which once contained a national cemetery, now is developed as the Fort Brown Hotel complex.

Only the old hospital building and a few other brick structures to the east remain of the building developed just after the Civil War. Remodeling has greatly altered the appearance of most of these and modern construction has destroyed the historical setting of the old Fort Brown. Most regrettable is the fact that much of this construction is of recent origin, within the last six years.

The hospital building, the least altered on the exterior, and the most impressive architecturally, is almost obliterated by the less than good and incompatible example of modern architecture, the college library. International Boulevard has been cut through to a new bridge across the Rio Grande, where the fort wall ran along the northern boundary and the parade ground is filled with parking lots and municipal buildings.

Fort Brown was established March 28, 1846, by General Zachary Taylor and was called Fort Taylor on May 17, 1846. It was renamed Fort Brown in honor of Major Jacob Brown of the 7th Infantry who was killed in its defense on May 9, 1846. It was here in the lower Rio Grande Valley and in the immediate vicinity of Fort Brown that American armies first demonstrated that the United States was taking its place among the world powers.

Although the most important activity at Fort Brown was in connection with the Mexican-American War throughout each succeeding war it has been active either in the direct campaign or in the training of troops. During the Civil War there was much Union and Confederate activity in and about Fort Brown and the troops stationed at that post are

believed to have fought the last battle of that war. During the Spanish-American War, Fort Brown also experienced activity, but is famous during that period primarily for the work of General Gorgas, then Lieutenant Gorgas, who first began his experiments on Yellow Fever at the old hospital there. Fort Brown was also the center of command during the bandit trouble of 1914 and succeeding years when thousands of troops were concentrated in the area. Throughout its history, Fort Brown contributed significantly to the defense of the nation, aiding greatly in the westward expansion of the United States.

HISTORY

The first United States military post in Texas, Fort Brown was established in April 1846, shortly after the army of General Zachary Taylor arrived to occupy territory claimed by the United States and Mexico. Taylor constructed earth fortifications directly on the bank of the river early in May, then moved the bulk of his force to Point Isabel, leaving a garrison of fifty men under Major Jacob Brown to defend the fort. Learning that a large body of troops had left the fort, and believing that Taylor was about to withdraw entirely, Generals Arista and Ampudia crossed the Rio Grande, determined to drive Taylor from the territory. Leaving a large force and seven cannon to lay siege to the fort, the rest of the army proceeded north to Loma Alta in pursuit of the main American army. Hearing the Mexican guns bombarding the fort, Taylor marched back to its relief. En route, he encountered the Mexicans, defeating them at the battles of Palo Alto (May 8) and Resaca de la Palma (May 9). Fort Taylor, as it was first named, had held out, but during the siege, Major Brown had been killed. On May 17, the name of the fort was changed to Fort Brown. The post was heavily garrisoned for the remainder of the war, and in 1848 became a permanent post. The town of Brownsville grew up adjacent to it. During the 1850s it protected the area from hostile Indians and kept a check on border disputes. Colonel Robert E. Lee was stationed there for a short time during this period.

In 1861, the Federal troops evacuated Fort Brown and were replaced by Texas State troops. With the southern Atlantic coast blockaded, Brownsville became a major Confederate port, with cotton for Europe passing south into Mexico and war material for the Confederacy passing north into Texas. To eliminate this trade, a Union army landed at the mouth of the Rio Grande in November, 1863, occupying Fort Brown and Brownsville. Eight months later, however, the Federal forces were driven out by a strong Confederate army which held the fort until the end of the war. Nearby, troops from Fort Brown engaged in the last battle of the Civil War, Palmetto Hill, over a month after Appomattox.

The post was reoccupied by United States troops and expanded into a sizable installation, guarding the border and playing a minor role in the Indian wars. In 1882, Lt. William Gorgas, later Surgeon General of the Army, began his experiments with Yellow Fever. Later the post was a focal point in the efforts to control border disturbances during the troubles of 1914-16, and remained a regular army Post until 1944, when it was abandoned. At that time the property was sold to the City of Brownsville which used the old buildings for city offices. The area now houses various functions including the city general services administration, a civic center and Texas Southmost College, which occupies the remaining old fort buildings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON FILE IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[Top](#)

29. Fort Brown Cavalry Barracks

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Fort Brown Cavalry Barracks
<i>Address:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	Brownsville
<i>County:</i>	Cameron
<i>Year Marker Erected:</i>	1987
<i>Designations:</i>	Recorded Texas Historic Landmark
<i>Marker Location:</i>	Fort Brown - Campus of TX Southmost College, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	This building, associated with the rebuilding of Fort Brown after the Civil War, housed cavalry units until World War I, when it served as a quartermaster warehouse and commissary. Closed after World War II, the building was leased by private industry until purchased by Texas Southmost College. The one-story brick structure features an elongated T-plan, with a central entry through an arched opening, and reconstructed shed-roof porches

[Top](#)

30. Fort Brown Commissary/Guardhouse

<i>Marker Title:</i>	Fort Brown Commissary/Guardhouse
<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>	Fort Brown - Grounds of TX Southwest College, Gorgias Street, Brownsville.
<i>Marker Text:</i>	Constructed in 1905 to serve as a food storage facility, this building was abandoned one year later when Fort Brown was closed. Upon reactivation of the post during Mexican border disturbances, the building served as a guardhouse and jail. Among those quartered here were political refugees following the Battle of Matamoros on June 4, 1913. The structure features a loading dock and a shed roof with gabled dormer over the entrance.

[Top](#)