

# HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY OF ARANSAS, REFUGIO, AND CALHOUN COUNTIES

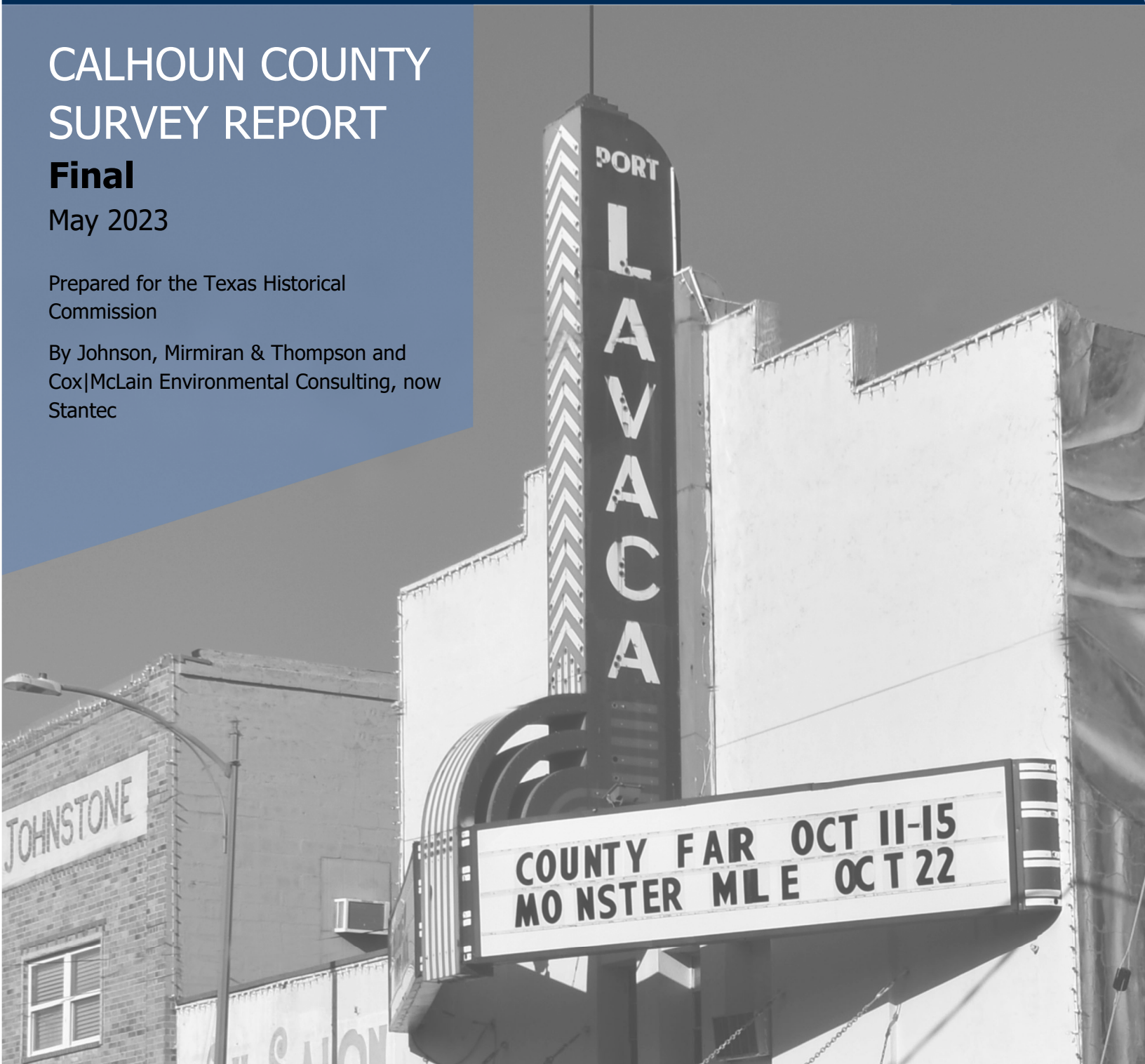
## CALHOUN COUNTY SURVEY REPORT

**Final**

May 2023

Prepared for the Texas Historical  
Commission

By Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson and  
Cox|McLain Environmental Consulting, now  
Stantec



COX McLAIN  
Environmental Consulting

now





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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



NRHP-listed La Salle Monument | Stantec

This document presents the findings of a 2021–2022 historic resources survey of Calhoun County, Texas. The Texas Historical Commission (THC), with funding from the National Park Service’s (NPS’s) Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund, retained Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson (JMT) and Cox|McLain Environmental Consulting, Inc., now Stantec (Stantec), in November 2020 to survey Aransas, Calhoun, and Refugio Counties. These counties were selected for study based on the lack of existing historic resource surveys, the likelihood of finding historic properties, and the threat of future hurricanes. The purpose of the project was to develop a historic context and identify historically significant properties and districts. This report presents the findings for Calhoun County. Stantec documented all buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts (broadly described as “resources”) within Calhoun County built in 1973 or earlier (defined as “historic-age”) and evaluated each for historic significance and integrity.

Fieldwork preparations involved the development of a fieldwork methodology, research design, public involvement plan, thematic historic context, geographic scope, and Geographic Information System (GIS)-based data collection platform. A public meeting was held on June 24, 2021, to introduce the project to interested parties and solicit information about historic resources. Stantec conducted fieldwork in Calhoun County between October 2021 and October



2022. In total, 2,973 historic-age resources were documented with a survey form and evaluated for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility based on their historic significance and integrity. At a second public meeting on October 12, 2022, preliminary results were presented to attendees and additional information about surveyed resources was solicited.

As a result of the survey, 40 individual properties and two districts are recommended eligible for the NRHP in Calhoun County (listed below; also see **Figure 1, Tables A-2 and A-3 in Appendix A, and the survey forms and maps in Appendices C and E, respectively**).

Individual Resources Recommended Eligible for the NRHP:

- Calhoun County Courthouse | 211 S. Ann St, Port Lavaca
- Calhoun High School | 201 Sandcrab Blvd, Port Lavaca
- Cox's Point Texas Centennial Marker | State Highway 35N, Point Comfort vicinity
- Grace Episcopal Church | 213 E. Austin St, Port Lavaca
- Gulf Intracoastal Waterway
- Jefferson Beaumont Texas Centennial Marker | 500 Martin Luther King Dr, Port Lavaca
- Lancaster Residence | 1700 S. Virginia St, Port Lavaca
- Moo-Moo Drive-In | 146 HWY 35, Port Lavaca
- Municipal Market Ice & Quick Freeze Plant and Turning Basin | Harbor St at Broadway St, Port Lavaca
- Naomi Chase Residence | 619 S. Virginia St, Port Lavaca
- Navidad Hotel | 429 E. Railroad St, Port Lavaca
- Old Town Indianola Cemetery | Zimmerman Rd, Magnolia Beach vicinity
- Port Lavaca Fire Station and City Hall | 216 E. Mahan St, Port Lavaca
- Port O'Connor Calaboose | S. 6th St, north of W. Main St, Port O'Connor
- Port O'Connor Coast Guard Station | 2307 Maple St, Port O'Connor
- Ranger Cemetery | Harbor St, west of Fulton St, Port Lavaca
- Rasmussen-Tanner-Hickl Residence | 303 Randle St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 147 S. Nueces St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 215 Bonorden St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 301 E. Wilson St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 303 E. Mahan St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 317 E. George St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 323 N. Colorado St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 323 S. Commerce St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 401 N. Commerce St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 403 S. Virginia St, Port Lavaca

- Residence | 502 S. Guadalupe St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 503 S. Colorado St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 616 W. Mahan St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 621 N. Trinity St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 704 S. Colorado St, Port Lavaca
- Residence | 710 Houston Ave, Seadrift
- Rex Theatre | 311 E. Main St, Port Lavaca
- Seadrift Calaboose | East end of E. Houston St, Seadrift
- Site of the Town of Indianola Texas Centennial Marker | S. Ocean Dr, Indianola vicinity
- Site of the Town of Linnville Texas Centennial Marker | FM 1090 N, east of McDonald Rd, Port Lavaca vicinity
- Sunlight Girls Club Clubhouse | 204 W. Alice Wilkins Ave, Port Lavaca
- Texas Marine Fishery Research Station | 3864 FM 3280, Palacios vicinity
- Victoria Barge Canal
- Viking Motel | 150 N HWY 35, Port Lavaca
- Wilkins School/Wilkins High School | 204 W. Alice Wilkins Ave, Port Lavaca

Districts Recommended Eligible for the NRHP:

- Downtown Port Lavaca
- Lynnhaven

Three NRHP-eligible properties and one NRHP-eligible district were resurveyed. No change is recommended to the eligibility status of two of the properties and the district. One property is now recommended not eligible for the NRHP because its integrity has been diminished by relocation since the original determination was made.

Properties Previously Determined Eligible for the NRHP and 2022 Recommendations

- Beach Hotel | 101 S. Commerce St, Port Lavaca
  - No change recommended to NRHP eligibility status
- Kamey Schoolhouse | 402 S. Ann St, Port Lavaca
  - Recommended not eligible due to relocation after original determination
- Point Comfort Historic District | Point Comfort
  - No change recommended to NRHP eligibility status
- San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad Depot | N. Virginia St and E. Railroad St, Port Lavaca
  - No change recommended to NRHP eligibility status

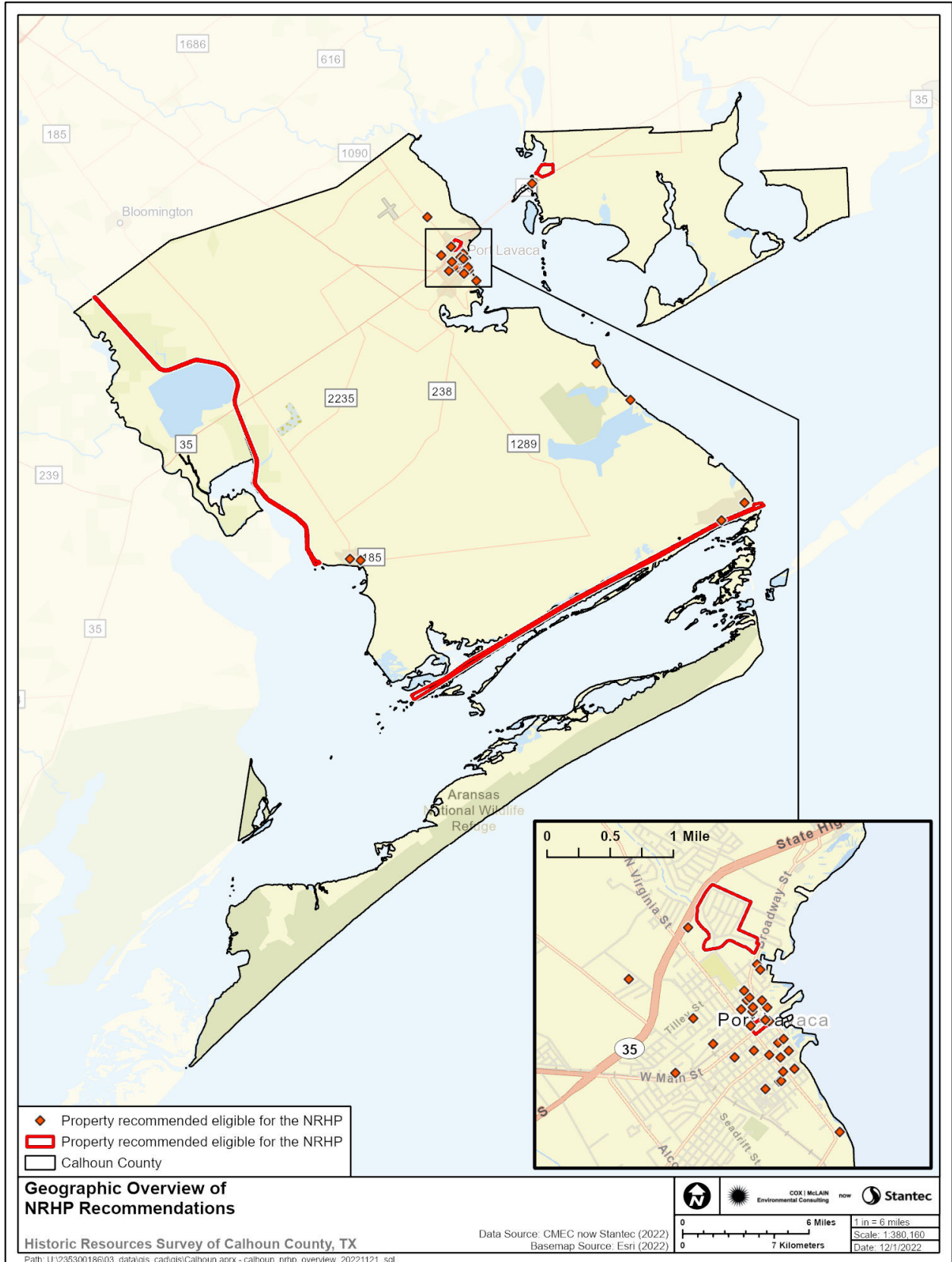


Figure 1. Geographic Overview of NRHP Recommendations.

Throughout the project, regular meetings were held with the project team and THC representatives, and all deliverables were reviewed by THC staff and revised based on their feedback.

This report begins with the project’s research design in **Section 2**. The public involvement plan and a summary of public engagement is provided in **Section 3**. **Section 4** presents the fieldwork methodology. **Section 5** is the historic context developed to evaluate the significance of documented resources. Survey results are provided in **Section 6**, and recommendations for future work are summarized in **Section 7**. **Appendix A** contains tables of historical markers in Calhoun County and properties/districts recommended eligible for the NRHP; **Appendix B** includes the survey forms for properties currently listed in the NRHP; **Appendix C** contains the survey forms for properties recommended eligible for the NRHP; **Appendix D** includes survey forms for properties recommended not eligible for the NRHP; **Appendix E** contains survey forms for districts recommended eligible for the NRHP; **Appendix F** comprises survey forms for the Post-WWII Neighborhoods identified during the survey; **Appendix G** contains survey forms for structures found during the survey; **Appendix H** contains survey forms for industrial properties identified during the survey; and **Appendix I** contains survey forms for properties recommended for further research. Digital files, including a GIS geodatabase of all surveyed properties and survey photographs, were provided with the final report.

## REPORT TERMINOLOGY

Terminology in this report is based on standards set by the NPS. More details can be found in “National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” (NPS 2002). This survey documents “resources,” which can be buildings, structures, objects, sites, or districts, as defined by the NPS.



## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN



Downtown Port Lavaca | Stantec

### PROJECT INFORMATION

#### HISTORIC-AGE SURVEY CUT-OFF DATE

The survey recorded historic-age resources, which are defined as any building, structure, object, site, or district that is 45 years of age or more at the time of the historic resources survey. According to this definition, resources constructed in 1973 or earlier were documented.

## PROJECT TEAM AND ROLES

Name	Company	Title	Role
Mary Alfson Tinsman	JMT	Contract Manager / Principal Investigator	Contract manager
Sara McLaughlin	JMT	Project Manager for overall contract / Senior Architectural Historian	Involved in each task
Emily Reed	Stantec	Principal Investigator for Stantec contract	Oversight of Stantec tasks
Sandy Shannon	Stantec	Project Manager for Stantec contract / Senior Architectural Historian	Involved in each task
Adrienne Vaughan Campbell	Stantec	Senior Historian	Context, fieldwork, QA/QC, recommendations
Amy E. Dase	Stantec	Senior Historian	Context, fieldwork, QA/QC, recommendations
Mitch Ford	Stantec	Architectural Historian	Fieldwork, public meeting, general support
Jenya Green	Stantec	Architectural Historian	Fieldwork, general support
Kimberly Hinder	Stantec	Senior Architectural Historian	QA/QC, survey deliverables, recommendations
Marcus Huerta	Stantec	Architectural Historian	Context, fieldwork, general support
Sara Laurence	Stantec	GIS Specialist	GIS, mapping
Izabella Nuckels	Stantec	Architectural Historian	Report QA/QC
Kelsey Riddle	Stantec	Architectural Historian	Fieldwork, general support
Emily Rinaldi-Williams	Stantec	Architectural Historian	Survey deliverables and recommendations

## PROJECT SETTING/STUDY AREA

### CURRENT LAND USE

Calhoun County is on the Texas Gulf Coast, which comprises the far western portion of the Gulf of Mexico and includes Matagorda Island. It is bordered by Aransas, Refugio, Victoria, Jackson, and Matagorda Counties. The county seat and largest town is Port Lavaca; other towns in the county include Kamey, Green Lake, Long Mott, Seadrift, Six Mile, Point Comfort, Olivia, Port Alto, Schicke Point, Alamo Beach, Magnolia Beach, Port O'Connor, and Indianola. As of 2020, Calhoun County had a population of 20,047 (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). The county's population centers are concentrated along its eastern perimeter, which hugs the coastline. Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor are the largest towns with populations of 11,557, 1,001, and 1,139 respectively (Texas Almanac 2020).

Land in Calhoun County includes a mix of wildlife managerial, agricultural, industrial, residential, and commercial uses. Several wildlife management areas (WMA) are in the county, including the Matagorda Island, Welder Flats, Guadalupe Delta, and Powderhorn WMAs. Part of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge is in Calhoun County (Texas Almanac 2020). Inland areas have a high concentration of rural agricultural parcels used primarily for grains, cotton, and ranching, particularly in the county's northern portion, and the heaviest concentration of aquaculture is in the easternmost extent (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017). Oil and natural gas pads are most common on inland rural agricultural parcels. The Dow Chemical Company, INEOS Nitriles, Formosa Plastics Corporation, and Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) Corporation have large facilities in Calhoun County, and several smaller petrochemical facilities are also present. Terminals at Port Lavaca and Point Comfort support maritime industries, as do the Matagorda Ship Channel, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), and Victoria Barge Canal. Residential development is generally concentrated in coastal towns, with some planned developments outside of population centers. Residential and commercial development scattered along the coastline includes houses, docks, marinas, and tourism-related buildings (Google Earth 2016).

## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Calhoun County is in the Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes ecoregion, characterized by barrier islands along the coast, salt grass marshes around bays and estuaries, tallgrass prairies, oak parklands and mottes along the coast, and woodlands in the river bottomlands (Texas Parks and Wildlife 2020). The altitude of the county ranges from sea level to 50 feet above, and approximately one-fourth of the county is under water. The land is generally flat with poor to moderately well-drained soil, consisting of surface loams with cracking clayey subsoils. Matagorda Island, which forms the barrier between the Gulf of Mexico and the mainland, primarily has deep shell sand (Kleiner 2021).

The county has a mild climate and averages 40 inches of annual rainfall. The 305-day growing season is especially favorable for almost one-third of the county that is considered prime farmland. The Guadalupe River, Chocolate Bay, and several creeks drain the land (Kleiner 2021). Bodies of water include Green Lake, Powderhorn Lake, and Cox Creek Reservoir. The series of bays that break the coastline includes Hynes, San Antonio, Espirito Santo, Lavaca, and Matagorda Bays (Texas Almanac 2020).

Local floras include tall grasses and live oaks, with cordgrasses and sedges along the coastline. Faunas include quail, deer, doves, cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, armadillos, skunks, opossums, raccoons, and coyotes (Kleiner 2021).



## **DESIGNATED HISTORIC PROPERTIES AND PREVIOUSLY EVALUATED RESOURCES**

The survey project team reviewed the following sources to identify designated historic properties and previously evaluated resources in Calhoun County.

- The THC Atlas map showing National Historic Landmarks (NHL), NRHP properties, Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHL), State Antiquities Landmarks (SAL), subject markers, Texas Centennial Markers, and previously surveyed resources
- Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) GIS data entitled "Historic Districts and Properties of Texas" and "NRHP-Listed and -Eligible Bridges of Texas"
- Texas Department of Agriculture Family Land Heritage (FLH) Program properties
- Texas Freedom Colonies Project Atlas (none mapped in the county)
- Known named highways from the THC's Historic Texas Highway program and Hardy Heck Moore's 2014 Statewide Historic Context for Historic Texas Highways (none identified)
- Websites for municipalities in Calhoun County to identify local landmark programs (none identified)
- NRHP Determination of Eligibility (DoE) properties and districts from THC records

### **PREVIOUSLY DESIGNATED HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

Two NRHP properties, two RTHLs, 69 THC subject markers, and four Texas Family Land Heritage Program properties were identified in Calhoun County. No NHL or above-ground SAL properties are in the county.

#### NRHP Properties

The NRHP properties in the survey area are the Matagorda Lighthouse and the La Salle Monument. The U.S. Coast Guard constructed the 1873 lighthouse, and it was listed in the NRHP in 1984 under Criteria A and C. The 1936 La Salle Monument was constructed for the Texas Centennial, and it was listed in the NRHP in 2018 under Criteria A and C and meets Criteria Consideration F. It is a 22-foot-tall commemorative monument marking the approximate site at Indianola where French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, landed in 1685.

#### RTHLs

Grace Episcopal Church in Port Lavaca was designated as an RTHL in 1965. The marker at this location commemorates the congregation's history from the 1800s to the mid-1900s. The 1896





Calhoun County Jail at 301 South Ann Street in Port Lavaca was designated as an RTHL in 1983 but was demolished in 2001.

### [THC Subject Markers and Centennial Markers](#)

The THC markers in Calhoun County were reviewed to identify general themes for future evaluation. The markers relate to various topics including early settlement and European immigration, cities and towns, churches, cemeteries, military, water, roads, railroads, community leaders, African Americans, fraternal organizations, notable buildings and structures, and events (**Appendix A, Table A-1**). Seven markers are 1936 Texas Centennial Markers, a type that the THC considers to be eligible for the NRHP. Thirty-one markers that appear to have associated extant historic-age resources were noted in **Appendix A, Table A-1**. Most of the associated resources are cemeteries; other property types include churches and schools, among others.

### [Texas Family Land Heritage Program Properties](#)

The Texas Department of Agriculture's Family Land Heritage Program (TFLHP) honors families who have owned and continuously operated a farm or ranch for 100 years or more. Though this recognition is just honorary, it can help identify properties that may have potential for NRHP eligibility. Calhoun County has four TFLHP properties that were established between 1852 and 1892 by English and German emigrants or persons of other European descent (Table 1).

Table 1. Texas Family Land Heritage Program Properties in Calhoun County

Name	Location	Year Settled	Year Designated	Notes
Brett Farm	5 miles west of Port Lavaca (potentially 194 Farm-to-Market Road 1679, Port Lavaca, TX 77979)	1852	1974	Established by Charles Brett Sr., an English emigrant, on 4 acres. Expanded to 519 acres.
Sonnemann Ranch	1.5 miles south of Long Mott Store on State Highway 185 North	1882	1984	Established by German emigrants Carl and Emelie Sonnemann on about 600 acres. Grew to more than 4,000 acres. Produced vegetables, corn, horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs.
Stanfill Residence (Homeplace)	1 mile southeast of Seadrift	1892	1999	Originally 59.7 acres, and later reduced to 58.7 acres. Produced fruits, vegetables, and cattle.
Wedig Ranch	10 miles southeast of Port Lavaca	1877	1982	Established on 4,428 acres by John Wedig, a Texas native of German descent. Later reduced to approximately 1,000 acres. Initially produced oranges, figs, and cattle, and later cattle and rice.

## PREVIOUSLY DESIGNATED HISTORIC DISTRICTS

No NRHP districts are in Calhoun County.

## PREVIOUSLY EVALUATED RESOURCES

Aside from designated properties (previously discussed), three resources and one district have been identified as eligible for the NRHP.<sup>1</sup> The San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad Depot and the Beach Hotel, both in Port Lavaca, were determined individually eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion A (TxDOT CSJ 0913-00-074). The 1961 State Highway 35 bridge over Lavaca Bay (National Bridge Inventory No. 130290017910061) was determined individually eligible under Criterion A in the area of Transportation and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering at the State level of significance. It illustrates important design and technology and represents an initiative to provide reliable, unimpeded vehicular transportation

<sup>1</sup> The JMT/Stantec Team reviewed data and reports provided by the THC and TxDOT’s “Historic Districts and Properties” map to compile a list of DoEs. The THC had no DoEs on file for Calhoun County as of December 2020.

while allowing ships unobstructed access to local ports. The community of Point Comfort was determined eligible for the NRHP as a district under Criterion A as a planned community development constructed for ALCOA (TxDOT CSJ 1090-04-018).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY**

### **PRELIMINARY RESEARCH**

The JMT/Stantec team conducted a preliminary desktop investigation of Calhoun County to develop a profile of current land use and the natural environment, previously designated historic properties and evaluated resources, and prevailing aspects of history, geography, and culture that shaped Calhoun County's built environment. The following resources were consulted:

- Texas Historic Sites Atlas and previous THC projects and programs (THC)
- Historic Districts and Properties of Texas, NRHP-Listed and -Eligible Bridges of Texas (TxDOT)
- The Family Land Heritage Program (Texas Department of Agriculture)
- Freedom Colonies Atlas (The Texas Freedom Colonies Project and Study)
- Articles from the Handbook of Texas Online
- Entries in the Texas Almanac
- Federal decennial population data; U.S. Census Bureau
- Texas Ecoregions; Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Images of America: Calhoun County (George Anne Cormier and the Calhoun County Museum)
- Agricultural census (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Additional sources were reviewed as part of the research effort. Historic contexts were developed following research, in conjunction with field investigations and development of the historic resources survey report. The types of resources utilized for developing the historic context included:

- Maps and aerial images that illustrate historical development:
  - Texas State Highway Department General Highway Maps
    - Calhoun County
    - Details of cities and towns in the county
- Texas General Land Office maps
- Sanborn Map Company fire insurance maps of Port Lavaca
- U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps of the county and major communities

- Aerial imagery
  - U.S. Department of Agriculture (from the Texas Natural Resources Information System [TNRIS])
  - U.S. Geological Survey
  - Nationwide Environmental Title Research Online
  - Texas General Land Office (GLO)
- Current NRHP nominations and DoEs
- Previous historical studies of the region, such as:
  - Hardy Heck Moore's *Statewide Historic Context for Historic Texas Highways*, prepared for THC and TxDOT in 2014
  - The TxDOT, Environmental Affairs Division, Cultural Resources Management Historical Studies Branch report series, including:
    - *A Field Guide to Industrial Properties in Texas*
    - *A Field Guide to Gas Stations in Texas*
    - *Agricultural Theme Study for Central Texas*
    - *Historical Agricultural Processing Facilities in Texas: An Annotated Guide to Selected Studies*
    - *Historic-Age Motels in Texas from the 1950s to the 1970s: An Annotated Guide to Selected Studies*
    - *South Texas Ranching*
  - Texas State Parks and Wildlife studies
  - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service studies
- Federal decennial census aggregate and manuscript schedules for population, agriculture, manufacturing, and industry from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture Historical Archive
- Special collections and archives at the following facilities:
  - Calhoun County Museum
  - Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, including vertical files and photographs
  - Texas State Library and Archives Commission
  - University of North Texas Libraries, including The Portal to Texas History
  - U.S. Coast Guard, including photographs and maps of lighthouses and stations
- Historical and regional journals, including:
  - *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*
  - *The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*
  - *The Journal of South Texas*
- Newspaper archives, including:
  - *The Port Lavaca Wave*
  - *Dolphin Talk, Port O'Connor/Seadrift*



- *Beeville Bee-Picayune*
- *The Victoria Advocate*
- *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*
- Local history collections available from public libraries  
Select secondary sources, such as books, articles, blog posts, and cultural resources management reports

## HISTORIC CONTEXT FORMAT

The historic context is organized thematically. Concise narratives of each major theme and subtheme were explored in the context. A Period(s) of Significance, applicable Area(s) of Significance, and related property types were identified for each theme and subtheme. Periods of Significance were carefully considered to include significant events and activities that occurred in the survey area.

## ANTICIPATED THEMES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Prior to survey, the project team developed research questions related to the anticipated themes and subthemes of Calhoun County's history. If research or public involvement revealed additional pertinent themes or subthemes, these topics were also developed and included in the historic context. The contexts were developed for the purposes of evaluating the significance of surveyed resources. As noted in the Fieldwork Methodology (**Section 4**), certain classes of resources were only to be documented under certain conditions, and the extent of documentation may be limited. Therefore, associated contexts were abbreviated accordingly.

## ARCHITECTURE

- What were early buildings like in Calhoun County, and what building traditions did they reflect?
- How did the evolution of architecture in Calhoun County mirror or deviate from national trends?
- What major eras of architecture, architectural styles and forms, and vernacular trends are common? What are the characteristics of those styles?
- How were local adaptations of common architectural styles executed?
- Who were the major builders and contractors?
- Were any architects particularly active?
- What are the architectural trends for agricultural buildings and structures? Do these resources reflect local or ethnic building traditions? How do agricultural resources reflect

the evolution of agriculture in the county and the types and quantities of agricultural products raised?

- How were buildings built or modified in response to the local climate?
- Have there been periods of exterior renovation/repair after major hurricanes?
- If widespread hurricane damage reduced historical building stock or resulted in major changes to buildings, what, if any, integrity considerations should be applied for eligibility under Criterion C?

## COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- What were the historical demographics for Calhoun County and its communities, and what of these trends influenced development?
- Where were early settlements and how did they evolve? This will include a brief overview of indigenous pre-history and European exploration.
- Where and what permanent settlements developed?
- How did land grant distribution evolve?
- How did railroads influence the location and success of settlements?
- How did maritime access influence the location and long-term success of settlements?
- What land-use patterns are common or atypical in Calhoun County's extant communities?
- What historical planning trends occurred in the development of these communities (e.g., planning models influenced by zoning, public health and housing, landscape design, urban renewal, severe weather, etc.)?
- Where and how has suburbanization developed?
- Were resort areas like Magnolia Beach and Alamo Beach master planned communities, or did they grow organically?
- How have the WMAs restricted growth and/or attracted development?
- What influence did the construction of the Port Lavaca seawall have on development?
- What influence have hurricanes had on community planning and development?

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Agriculture

- What types and quantities of agricultural products were raised and for what purpose?
- What quantities of land did agriculturists devote to various uses (e.g., improved, unimproved, woodlands, aquaculture, irrigation, orchards, gardens)?
- What labor sources did agriculturists rely on?
- What technological shifts occurred in agricultural practices and production?
- How did twentieth-century federal public programs change agricultural production?
- What types of and how did agribusiness evolve?

- Have hurricanes caused changes in the agricultural history of the county?

### Commerce

- Where did commercial centers develop and why those locations? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Indianola (no longer extant)
  - Port O'Connor
  - Port Lavaca
  - Seadrift
- What were the types of major commercial businesses? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Tourism/sport fishing
  - Commercial fishing
  - Shipping (seafood, etc.)
- What industries did commercial businesses serve?
- What were the major businesses and who were the leaders in commerce?
- What common businesses were associated with commercial centers?
- How did rail and water transportation networks influence types and locations of commercial centers?
- How did the automobile influence business types and locations?
- How did the introduction of the interstate system indirectly change the location of commercial centers?
- Did hurricane prevalence influence the county's commercial development?

### Maritime

- How is Calhoun County's maritime history related to exploration, early settlement, and immigration?
- How has infrastructure (i.e., ports and harbors) that supports maritime transport evolved? How have hurricanes affected these resources?
- How has the Matagorda Ship Channel evolved?
- How was the portion of the GIWW that intersects Calhoun County established and how has it evolved?
- How has the Victoria Barge Canal evolved?
- How has maritime merchant transport (i.e., primary and secondary shipping) evolved?

### Industry

- How and where did industrial sectors evolve in Calhoun County? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Oysters/shrimp/finfish
  - Shipbuilding
  - Manufacturing (including chemical processing and material production, such as smelting, aluminum, plastics, etc.)

- Petroleum and natural gas extraction, processing, and transport
- Agricultural processing, especially grain and cotton
- Electric, water, and telephone utilities
- Has the county's hurricane prevalence influenced industrial development?

## ETHNIC HISTORY

- What demographic trends, leaders, and important periods/events are tied to ethnic history? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - European heritage
  - Latino heritage
  - Black heritage
    - How did slavery evolve in Calhoun County's communities?
  - Vietnamese heritage
- How have these groups shaped the culture, economy, built environment, civic, and political life?
- What important commercial, social, cultural, religious, and educational institutions have associations with major ethnic groups?

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Educational Development

- How did primary and secondary education develop before and after the 1948 establishment of the Calhoun County Independent School District?
- What are the major public and private educational institutions?
- What schools (e.g., Rosenwald Schools) served Black and Hispanic students during the Jim Crow Era?
- When and how did school integration take place?

### Government

- When/how was the county formed?
- What were the historical government centers?
- When was the current county seat selected and how has it evolved?
- What are the major government administration buildings?
- When and how did major public/private infrastructure and service resources develop, such as post offices, libraries, fire stations, police stations, hospitals, eleemosynary institutions, U.S. Customs and Border Protection facilities?
- What twentieth-century federal public works projects were in Calhoun County?
- How do built resources reflect the government's response to major storms and hurricanes?

### Conservation

- Where did conservation areas develop and what was the catalyst for conservation in the county? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge and State Natural Area
  - Aransas National Wildlife Refuge
  - TPWD Wildlife Management Areas
  - Aviary rookeries and sanctuaries
- How has the development of conservation areas influenced the built environment within and near these areas?
- Are there relationships between conservation and the county's industrial history?
- Have conservation areas sustained major hurricane damage?

### Military Institutions and Activities

- What military institutions and activities are represented in the built environment? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Civil War
  - World War II
- What military facilities were in Calhoun County? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Matagorda Air Force Base
  - Matagorda Peninsula Army Airfield
  - U.S. Coast Guard facilities, including lighthouses
  - GIWW (U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers)
- How do military facilities in Calhoun County reflect the prevalence of hurricanes and how have hurricanes affected military institutions and activities?

### Recreation, Culture, and Leisure

- How did tourism opportunities on the coast influence the built environment?
- What theaters are extant?
- Did communities commemorate events/places/people with monuments and/or markers?
  - Were these markers part of larger commemorative campaigns (e.g., the 1936 Texas Centennial)?
  - Are these markers significant for design and/or association?
- What notable sculptures, statues, murals, or other works of art are visible from the public right-of-way?
- What resources associated with events like county fairs, livestock shows, annual festivals are extant?
- What dance halls are extant?
- What aspects of the built environment represent outdoor recreation, such as parks, marinas, and bird-viewing locations?
- Are there social, cultural, and religious organizations that have long-standing ties to the community or that have made important contributions to the history of the community?

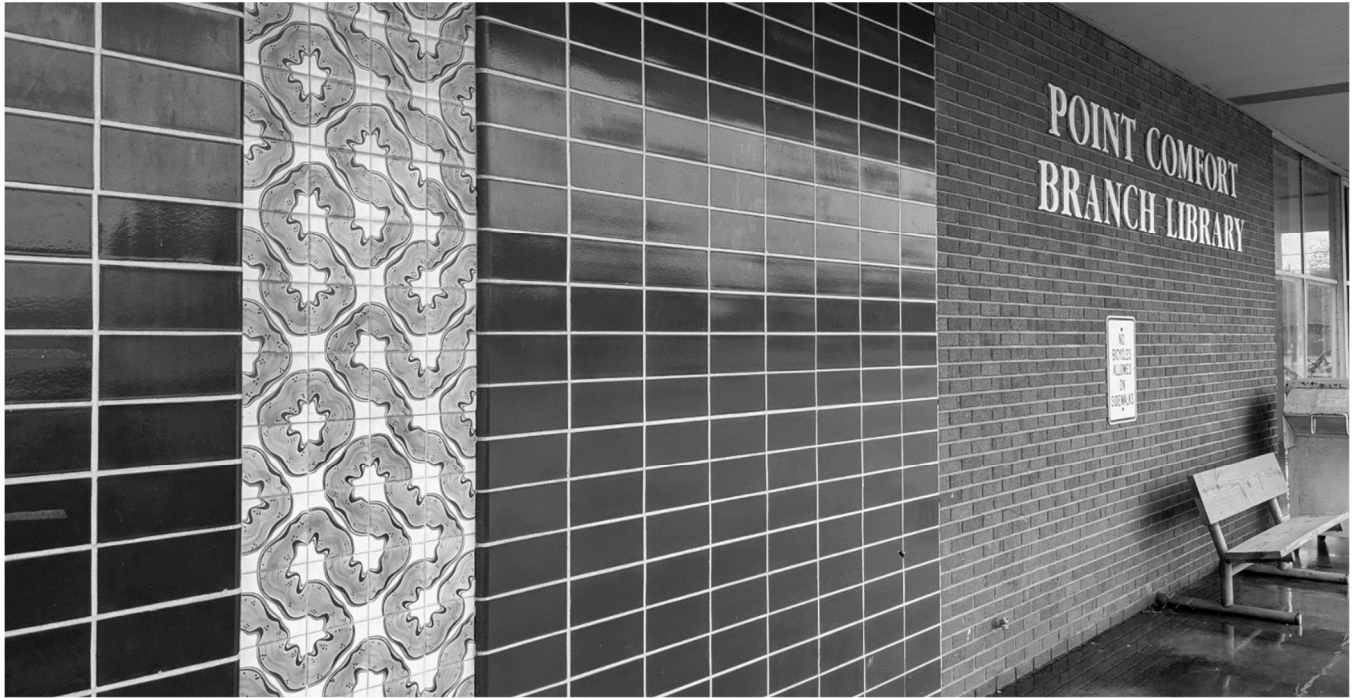


- How have hurricanes affected recreation, culture, and leisure opportunities?

### Transportation

- What were the significant modes of transportation? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Water—the Gulf of Mexico, GIWW, Matagorda Ship Channel, and Victoria Barge Canal
  - Railroads
  - Vehicular
  - Air
- What buildings, structures, and networks were constructed for transportation uses? This will include, but not be limited to:
  - Major highways (U.S. Highway 87 and State Highways 35 and 185)
  - Farm-to-Market roads
  - Bridges and causeways, including the Lavaca Bay Causeway (State Highway 35) and its predecessors
  - Matagorda Peninsula Airport (former Matagorda Peninsula Army Airfield), Calhoun County Airport, and other small airports or air strips
  - Harbors and shipping ports
  - Dredged channels, including GIWW, Matagorda Ship Channel, and Victoria Barge Canal
  - Port of entry for U.S. Customs and Border Protection
  - Railroad facilities, including depots
  - Lighthouses
  - Automobile-oriented commercial properties
- What historic-age major transportation resources, such as railroad depots or bridges, are extant?
- Have hurricanes influenced transportation development or changed transportation history in the county?

### 3. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN



Tilework and masonry at the Point Comfort Branch Library | Stantec

This section summarizes the public engagement efforts undertaken in conjunction with the historic resource survey of Calhoun County.

#### GOALS

The overarching goal of public involvement was to provide information about the project and solicit input from the public and key stakeholders. The JMT/Stantec team, on behalf of the THC, sought to achieve the following goals by providing opportunities for citizens, businesses, and organizations to participate in the survey process:

- Generate awareness of the project and communicate its purpose and goals.
- Establish public involvement opportunities.
- Provide county residents, property and business owners, elected officials, agencies, community groups, and other stakeholders with sufficient opportunity to contribute information for the project.
- Ensure that public engagements are held at convenient, accessible, and safe locations and scheduled during times that enable maximum involvement to the greatest extent possible.

- Identify and use innovative tools and strategies to share and present information and to empower public input in the project (e.g., website and social media).
- Proactively involve people and groups of people who are traditionally underrepresented in historic resource surveys by reaching out to targeted stakeholders. This included seeking out and considering the needs of people who are traditionally underrepresented: people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), low-income, or disabilities; minority households; and ethnic communities.

## TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

The following outreach tools and strategies were used to engage the public.

### WEBSITE

THC provided project information and updates via their website.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

The JMT/Stantec team worked with the THC to share information about the project on their social media platforms. Posted content related to general project information, public meeting announcements, fieldwork updates, and project website links.

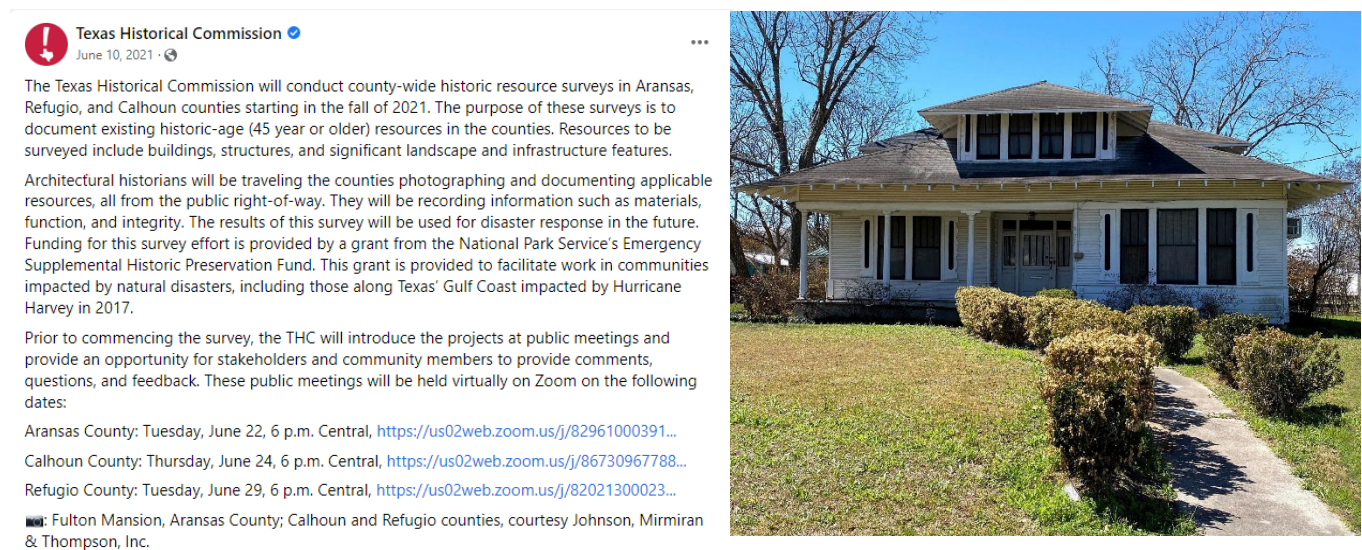


Figure 2. Example social media post from the project. Source: THC Facebook, June 10, 2021.

### FLYERS

Project flyers were posted or distributed at public locations including libraries, post offices, government centers, and other high-traffic places in advance of both public meetings. The flyers described the project, ways to get involved, and who to contact for more information.

During fieldwork, surveyors carried copies of the flyers to distribute to interested members of the public.

## NEWSPAPER

JMT/Stantec placed a public notice in the *Port Lavaca Wave* at least 14 days prior to the public meeting dates. A press release was drafted for the THC to distribute per their media policy.

## STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

JMT/Stantec identified 11 potential stakeholder organizations in Calhoun County (listed below). The THC reached out to each person or organization via email and/or letter to provide notice of the project and information about the survey. Recipients were also invited to attend the public meetings, share the information with the survey team, and provide feedback.

### Calhoun County Historical Commission

Robert Loflin (Chair)  
323 N. Colorado Street, Port Lavaca, TX 77979  
(361) 652-6180  
[info@calhouncountyhc.org](mailto:info@calhouncountyhc.org)

### Calhoun County Judge

Richard Meyer  
211 S. Ann Street, # 301, Port Lavaca, TX 77979  
(361) 553-4600  
[richard.meyer@calhouncotx.org](mailto:richard.meyer@calhouncotx.org)

### Calhoun County Library – Seadrift

Robbie Bess (Librarian)  
PO Box 576, 502 S 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Seadrift, TX 77983  
(361) 785-4241  
<https://cclibrary.org/contact/>

### Calhoun County Museum

George Anne Cormier (Director)  
301 S. Ann Street, Port Lavaca, TX 77979  
(361) 553-4689  
[director@calhouncountymuseum.org](mailto:director@calhouncountymuseum.org)

### Calhoun County Public Library

Pam Lambden (President)  
200 W. Mahan Street, Port Lavaca, TX 77979  
(361) 552-7323  
<https://cclibrary.org/contact/>

### Friends of Port O'Connor Library

506 W. Main Street #497, Port O'Connor, TX 77982  
<https://www.friendsofportoconnorlibrary.org/>

### Point Comfort Library Branch

Michael Williams (Librarian)  
PO Box 424, 1 Lamar Street, Point Comfort, TX 77978  
(361) 987-2954  
<https://cclibrary.org/contact/>

### Port Lavaca Chamber of Commerce

2300 Texas 35, Port Lavaca, TX 77979  
(361) 552-2959  
[info@portlavacachamber.org](mailto:info@portlavacachamber.org)





**Port O'Connor Branch of the Calhoun  
County Library**

Michelle Marlin (Librarian)  
PO Box 424, Port O'Connor, TX 77982  
(361) 983-4365  
<https://cclibrary.org/contact/>

**Port O'Connor Chamber of Commerce**

Darla Parker (President)  
PO Box 701, Port O'Connor, TX 77982  
(361) 983-2898  
[info@portoconnorchamber.com](mailto:info@portoconnorchamber.com)

**Seadrift Chamber of Commerce**

PO Box 3, Seadrift, TX 77983  
(361) 746-2840  
[info@seadriftchamber.com](mailto:info@seadriftchamber.com)

**Texas Independence Trail Region**

2305 S. Day Street #208, Brenham, TX 77833  
(979) 353-1800  
[info@texasindependencetrail.com](mailto:info@texasindependencetrail.com)

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

JMT/Stantec conducted two public meetings for Calhoun County: one on June 24, 2021, prior to commencing the survey and one on October 12, 2022 after survey completion.

The purpose of the first meeting was to introduce the project to interested community members and stakeholders. The survey team explained the purpose and goals of the survey and presented the research design, fieldwork methodology, historic context, and geographic scope. Stakeholders and community members were invited to provide feedback and comments on the presentation materials and to identify properties with potential historic significance. Eight people attended this June 24, 2021, meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting took place virtually utilizing the THC's Zoom account. The meeting consisted of an approximately 30-minute presentation by the JMT/Stantec team and covered the following topics:

- Introduction to the THC and to the project
- Introduction to the project team
- Purpose and goals of the project
- Overview of the work completed to date, including:
  - Research Design
  - Draft fieldwork methodology
  - Historic context
  - Geographic scope
- Explanation of the fieldwork approach
- Overall project schedule



- Assistance in identifying resources significant to the public; described how to provide input and feedback, including visual resources such as photographs or scanned images.
- Discussion/Q&A

The second public meeting was held on October 12, 2022, at the Calhoun County Library in Port Lavaca. Eight people attended. The purpose of this meeting was to present the preliminary survey results and NRHP recommendations. This meeting also provided a forum for community members and stakeholders to share feedback.



Figure 3. Stantec Principal Investigator Emily Reed presenting the preliminary survey results and NRHP recommendations at the October 12, 2022, public meeting. Source: Stantec.

## 4. FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY



Brutalist-style benches at Calhoun High School | Stantec

### PRE-SURVEY INVESTIGATION

The JMT/Stantec team conducted a preliminary analysis of the number and general character of historic-age resources in Calhoun County, informed by county appraisal district (CAD) data, historic aerial imagery, maps, and a windshield visit to canvas the county. The team's proposal for the project included documentation of up to 4,200 resources in Calhoun County. As detailed in sections below, based on the preliminary information gathered on the nature and quantity of historic-age resources in the county and the flexibility of the multi-category approach using Survey123, the team estimated we would be able to comprehensively document pre-1974 resources in Calhoun County. Therefore, rather than planning how to implement an initial, prioritized investigation under the terms of the contract and proposing a methodology for future work, the team used a desktop analysis and windshield visit to guide the field survey methodology.

### **DESKTOP ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTY AND AGOL DEVELOPMENT**

The team obtained Calhoun CAD data in February 2021 and analyzed it to characterize development. As detailed in Table 2 below, approximately 22,000 parcels are in Calhoun County.

Table 2. Preliminary CAD Analysis of Calhoun County Parcels

Total parcels	22,050
Total parcels with improvements with a minimum year-built date of 1973 or earlier	5,440
Total parcels built in 1973 or earlier that are part of a subdivision of 10 properties or more	2,836
<b>Total parcels meeting individual survey criteria</b>	<b>2,604</b>
<b>Number of post-war subdivisions with 10 properties or more</b>	<b>36</b>

The team explored methods for identifying “post-war residential neighborhoods,” which were defined in the Request for Qualifications as “neighborhoods developed after 1945 and containing ten (10) or more historic-age residential properties.” The team used CAD analysis to identify subdivisions that are historic-age (pre-1974) and have 10 or more parcels. Based on this criteria, entire townships (e.g., Seadrift) met this definition. The team removed the “post-war residential neighborhood” designation from several such areas that should be documented individually rather than with representative samples.

Next, the JMT/Stantec team prepared an ArcGIS Online (AGOL) map to use during the survey on tablet and desktop computers. Parcel outlines were color coded red for parcels where the earliest assessor construction date was pre-1945, yellow for parcels where the earliest assessor date was 1946 to 1973, and green for parcels where the earliest assessor date was post-1973.<sup>2</sup> The preliminarily defined post-World War II subdivisions were included in the AGOL map. The map also had topographic map layers, georeferenced high resolution aerial images of the urban communities, and the location of known historic properties and historical markers from the THC’s Historic Sites Atlas and AGOL map of DoEs and TxDOT’s Historic Resources Aggregator. The descriptions of the locations of the four Texas Department of Agriculture’s FLH properties in Calhoun County were reviewed along with CAD data on ownership to identify potential parcels that could comprise the FLH properties, and the parcels were marked accordingly. Additionally, the author of each historic context theme placed pins in AGOL for extant properties identified during contextual development that may have historic significance.

<sup>2</sup> We understand that though CAD construction dates are generally relatively reliable, they can sometimes be inaccurate or missing. Some property types, like public schools, religious institutions, and municipally owned properties are eligible for property-tax exemptions. Thus, year-built data for these types of parcels is often not listed. The absence of a construction date, or even classification as vacant land with no listed improvements does not necessarily mean that there are no buildings or structures on the property. CAD data is a valuable tool, but it is not without limitations. These limitations were discussed during surveyor training for the project.



## WINDSHIELD SURVEY

During the week of March 1, 2021, two senior historians from the JMT/Stantec team canvassed the county, with the goal of exploring answers to the following questions:

- How accurate is the CAD data?
- How many potentially eligible properties are present (order of magnitude) and where are they?
- How many mobile home neighborhoods are present, and where are they?
- How many resources will fall within “post-war subdivisions,” and where are they?
- Have any additional trends emerged that should be reflected in the development of the historic context statements?
- Are any potential historic districts present?
- How are irrigation resources expressed in the county?
- Given that location data for farms recognized by the FLH program is often vague, can we locate the four FLH properties in the county?
- Generally, how accessible/visible are properties from the public right-of-way?
- What factors should fieldworkers be aware of?

The two historians each drove portions of the county, resulting in near total coverage of primary public roadways. They used the AGOL map on iPads to drop pins at the locations of potentially eligible properties and districts and to make other geographically specific notes, such as access restrictions like locked gates. The historians each made notes about the nature of subdivisions that were preliminarily mapped as post-war neighborhoods to differentiate those whose composite properties should be documented individually.

The key take-aways from the windshield visit to Calhoun County are presented below.

- Few mobile home communities were observed; it was more common to see mobile homes intermixed with single-family houses.
- Pre-1960 CAD dates were particularly inaccurate. Many properties that were likely built prior to 1960 had a date of 1945 or 1960 listed. The CAD data lists only 161 pre-1944 properties, which is a low number.
- No apparent nineteenth-century resources were observed. Relatively few pre-World War II resources were observed, and almost none with all seven aspects of integrity.
- Few irrigation resources were evident—only drainages and 1950s-era levees.
- Current agricultural practices observed included cattle/goat grazing, horses, and row crops focused on cotton, grain, and sorghum. Most agricultural properties appeared to have little potential for NRHP eligibility due to their lack of historic-age building stock and integrity concerns.
- Limited potential for historic districts.

- Some of the neighborhoods preliminarily categorized as post-war subdivisions did not appear as expected (relatively homogenous subdivisions of Ranch and Minimal Traditional houses). Rather, some of the neighborhoods initially categorized as post-war included a wider range of chronological and stylistic developments.
- A few large Ranch-style homes on seaside and agricultural parcels were noted.
- Very few properties that appeared to have potential for individual eligibility under Criterion C were identified.
- The strongest high-priority Criterion C properties are Modernist resources (e.g. banks, courthouse, apartments).

## REVISED ANALYSIS OF CAD DATA, INFORMED BY THE WINDSHIELD SURVEY

Following the observations made in the field, the estimates of the properties to be surveyed were revised, as presented in Table 3 below. The windshield visit revealed several neighborhoods initially defined as post-war subdivisions that had considerable numbers of pre-war resources. Thus, the definition was revised to count only those neighborhoods that had one or fewer parcels with pre-1946 construction dates.

As a result of the windshield survey and research on specific properties as part of the historic context development, approximately 200 properties were mapped and tagged as having potential to be NRHP-eligible; they represent approximately 5 percent of historic-age parcels outside of post-war subdivisions. Given the character of the remaining historic-age properties observed, the percentage of building stock to be documented as not eligible was also estimated.

Table 3. CAD Analysis of Calhoun County Parcels

Total parcels	22,050
Total parcels with improvements with a minimum year-built date of 1973 or earlier	5,440
Total parcels built in 1973 or earlier that are part of a 10+ property subdivision with one or fewer parcels with pre-1946 development	1,928
Estimated number of pre-1974 resources without recorded CAD construction date and/or resources occurring on a parcel with more than one resource (5%)	272
Total parcels meeting individual survey criteria	3,784
Likely to be potentially eligible (5%)	189
Likely to be not eligible (95%)	3,595
Number of post-war subdivisions meeting representative documentation criteria	36



## **GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITIZATION**

The following order was identified for fieldwork:

1. Cities/Towns
  - a. Port Lavaca
  - b. Point Comfort
  - c. Seadrift
  - d. Port O'Connor
  - e. Olivia
  - f. Alamo Beach
  - g. Magnolia Beach
  - h. Long Mott
2. Coastal areas
3. Inland areas

The county's urban areas were prioritized for fieldwork first, due to their observed potential to have higher concentrations of potentially significant resources. Following the documentation in the urban areas, surveyors documented the properties mapped as potentially eligible and historic districts (if identified) that were not already documented as part of the urban fieldwork. Finally, surveyors moved from the coast inland to document the remaining historic-age resources in the county. This strategy prioritized the areas along the coast that are more vulnerable to natural disasters.

## **SURVEYOR TEAMS**

Following the pre-survey investigation, the JMT/Stantec team deployed survey teams comprising two surveyors (historians and/or architectural historians) per team. Each team was assigned survey locations based on the geographic prioritization strategy before heading out into the field. Each surveyor carried an iPad, GPS Navigation, a Wi-Fi hotspot, battery chargers, a point-and-shoot camera as backup in the event of technical failures, and copies the project flyers to distribute to interested members of the community.

Calhoun County was surveyed following the fieldwork methodology approved by the THC. Prior to deployment, all survey staff reviewed the documentation produced to date, including the draft historic contexts and the final fieldwork methodology to ensure the team was prepared to follow the procedures outlined in these documents. An internal meeting was held, attended by the JMT/Stantec team principal investigators and project managers, the primary authors of the historic context, the ArcGIS Survey123 data managers, and the staff assigned to fieldwork to ensure that the survey team understood the survey methodology and the historic themes and



anticipated property types associated with each theme. The pre-fieldwork preparation included survey team training on the use of the Collector and Survey123 applications and back-up procedures. Questions that arose during training were addressed by the project manager.

All fieldwork staff were informed of both general and site-specific safety measures. In addition to typical fieldwork hazards such as traffic, ticks, and weather, surveyors were made aware of the potential for alligators and snakes in roadside drainage ditches. Surveyors were equipped with rental trucks when conditions such as rough or sandy rural roads required them.

All resources were surveyed from the public right-of-way, and no right-of-entry permissions were sought. Teams of two historians worked in proximity to one another to ensure consistency in data collection and complete geographic coverage of the county.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Surveyors used the ArcGIS Collector and Survey123 applications to track progress and record resources in the field. Collector was pre-loaded with the data layers listed below.

- Calhoun County Assessor parcel lines and data
- Cemeteries, bridges, historical markers, historic properties, and NRHP-eligible resources and districts from the THC Atlas and TxDOT Historic Resources Aggregator
- TFLHP properties
- Post-World War II subdivision boundaries (revised following the windshield survey)
- Properties identified during contextual development and the windshield survey by senior members of the Stantec team as having potential for historic significance
- Historical topographic maps (countywide)
- Historical high-resolution aerial photographs of the following cities and towns:
  - Point Comfort: 1972
  - Port Lavaca: 1972
  - Port O'Connor: 1971
  - Seadrift: 1971 and 1972
- Current high resolution aerial photograph

Surveyors could toggle these layers on and off in Collector to guide fieldwork and assist with documentation and assessments. Each parcel was pre-loaded with the Calhoun County Assessor's data, including the address, parcel number, and earliest assessor construction date, which was always reviewed and confirmed or updated during fieldwork. The assessor data automatically populated into each documented resource's survey form.

Surveyors documented resources determined to have been constructed in or before 1973. The NRHP has a 50-year age threshold and 1973 was used as the cut-off year because of this project's 2023 completion date. Surveyors redocumented historic resources previously determined eligible for the NRHP by the THC to provide an updated record on integrity and current NRHP eligibility. The focus of this project was on above-ground resources that have potential architectural or historical significance; no archeological resources were documented.

Each historic-age property was documented on tablet computers using Survey123, which is a form-centric application that allows users to collect data and photographs tied to GIS points. All captured GIS data was compatible with the NPS Cultural Resource Spatial Data Transfer Standards (issued January 2014).

Surveyors used Collector to track their progress, changing each parcel from "not completed" to "surveyed," "modern/vacant," "not accessible," or "not visible" (Figure 4).<sup>3</sup> This data updated in real time, allowing teams of fieldworkers to work in the same geographic area simultaneously without duplicating efforts. Following the completion of fieldwork, GIS analysis was conducted to ensure that no unsurveyed parcels remained.

The Collector and Survey123 applications allowed real-time tracking of survey progress. Survey teams reported their progress to their firm's project manager daily. The JMT/Stantec team provided regular updates to the THC project manager regarding the number of properties surveyed, including details about their location and survey category. Regular communication ensured that the THC was abreast of the pace of the survey and the ability to document the expected number of historic-age properties in the county.

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<sup>3</sup> "Modern" properties were defined as those for which all resources visible from the right-of-way were constructed in 1974 or later.



Figure 4. Screenshot of the ArcGIS-based Collector application that surveyors used to track fieldwork progress.

For each visible resource, at least two photographs were taken to support an NRHP eligibility recommendation or to determine whether a higher level of survey was recommended. Additionally, surveyors took representative streetscape photographs of neighborhoods and historic districts.

## **HISTORIC RESOURCE CATEGORIES**

The information gathered on a historic-age resource depended on the property type and potential for NRHP eligibility. Each surveyed resource included the date of survey, surveyor name, photographs, and optional field notes. At least two photographs were required of each resource surveyed. As with the documentation, the photographs were taken only from the public right-of-way.

In some instances, CAD data did not have an address, tax parcel ID, or city for a parcel. When missing, address and city information were provided by the survey team for properties recommended eligible for the NRHP or contributing to a recommended NRHP district.

## **POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE AND CONTRIBUTING**

Resources falling under this category were individual resources considered potentially eligible for the NRHP and resources that contribute to a potential historic district. These resources may be eligible under Criteria A or B for their ties to regionally important events, themes, or figures. They may also be eligible under Criterion C for their architectural significance within a regional context or under Criterion D for their non-archeological information potential. All potentially eligible resources must retain sufficient integrity to convey their historic significance. The following data was collected to the extent possible for Potentially Eligible and Contributing resources:

County	Roof Materials	Significant Landscape Features
Address	Wall Materials	Associated Historical Context
City	Windows	Integrity
Tax Parcel ID	Door (Primary Entrance)	Recommendation
Construction Date	Plan	NRHP Criteria
Current Use	Chimneys	Designation
Historic Use	Primary Porch	External Notes
Surveyor	Number of Stories	Photos
Survey Date	Basement	Requires Additional Office Work
Stylistic Influence(s)	Additions/Modifications	
Roof Form	Ancillary Buildings	



## NOT ELIGIBLE

Resources recorded as Not Eligible were properties that lack architectural significance and/or integrity including those that may be in an irreversible state of deterioration. These properties would not contribute to a potential historic district. Not Eligible properties do not carry associations with significant historic themes in Calhoun County, have deteriorated, or have been altered to the point they no longer convey any such associations. The following data was collected for resources determined to be Not Eligible in the field:

County	Construction Date	Survey Date
Address	Current Use	External Notes (as applicable)
City	Historic Use	Photos
Tax Parcel ID	Surveyor	

## NOT VISIBLE

A number of properties were not be visible from the public right-of-way for a variety of reasons, including their distance from the public right-of-way, intervening buildings, or dense foliage. The following data points were collected for properties that were not visible:

County	Tax Parcel ID	External Notes (as applicable)
Address	Surveyor	
City	Survey Date	

## DISTRICTS AND OTHER GROUPINGS

Certain groupings of resources received a single entry in the Survey123 application with a description and overall photographs that provide an understanding of the character of the collection. Each contributing resource within a potentially eligible historic district was documented under the Potentially Eligible and Contributing category of resources (noncontributing resources were documented under the Not Eligible category). Post-war residential developments containing more than 10 post-war resources and mobile or manufactured home developments with 10 or more historic-age mobile and manufactured homes were documented with a single entry. Surveyors recorded the following information for potential or listed historic districts, post-war residential developments, and mobile or manufactured home developments:

County	Name	NRHP Criteria
City	Character	External Notes
Additional Location Information	Buildings Inventoried	Photos
Survey Date	Number of Resources	Requires Additional Office Work
Surveyor	Integrity	
Construction Date	Recommendation	

## INDUSTRIAL PROPERTIES

Surveyors anticipated finding historic-age industrial properties in Calhoun County, particularly ones associated with the petrochemical industry. Many of these industrial facilities are large, multi-building properties sitting far from the public right-of-way. Rather than recording each building and structure associated with the complex, surveyors maximized their efficiency in the field by surveying industrial complexes under a single record. The following information was collected for industrial properties:

County	Survey Date	Designation
City	Surveyor	External Notes
Additional Location Information	Recommendation	Photos
Tax Parcel ID	NRHP Criteria	Requires Additional Office Work

## SITE, OBJECT, OR STRUCTURE

Surveyors recorded historic-age sites, objects, and structures during the survey. Such resources included monuments, statues, cemeteries, and linear man-made waterways, among other resource types. The following information was collected for sites, objects, or structures:

County	Surveyor	NRHP Criteria
City	Resource Name	Designation
Additional Location Information	Property Type	External Notes
Tax Parcel ID	Integrity	Photos
Survey Date	Recommendation	Requires Additional Office Work



## RESOURCES OF SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

As directed by the THC, special considerations were taken with the following resource types:

- **Bridges**—Road and railroad bridges, overpasses, underpasses, and culverts were excluded from field investigation and documentation unless they were important features of a potential historic district as determined by the surveyors in the field.
- **Post-War Residential Neighborhoods**— Subdivisions with one or fewer parcels with pre-1946 development and containing ten (10) or more historic-age residential properties were documented and evaluated collectively by providing a general description of the neighborhood’s history, design, setting, building forms, architectural styles, a map of the neighborhood boundary, and photographs of a representative sample of the historic-age properties. Important non-residential properties within the neighborhood, such as schools, churches, parks, or commercial buildings, were photographed and recorded as part of the representative sample. CAD data was used to preliminarily identify these areas prior to pre-survey investigation.
- **Mobile and Manufactured Homes**—Individual mobile and manufactured homes were excluded from field investigation and documentation unless they were part of a development with ten or more historic-age mobile or manufactured homes, in which case they were documented collectively.
- **Irrigation and Drainage Districts**—Historic-age irrigation, drainage, and other water improvement districts were to be documented as a single system by providing a general description of the system’s history and function, a map of the system showing major features, and photographs of a representative sample of the historic-age features. No irrigation or drainage districts were identified in Calhoun County based on the pre-survey and survey fieldwork, TCEQ Water Districts Map Viewer, and research.
- **Linear Transportation Corridors**—Historic-age linear transportation corridors, including roads, highways, railroads, and former transportation rights-of-way, were to be excluded from field investigation and documentation unless they were important features of a potential historic district as determined by the surveyors in the field. No such resources were identified during fieldwork.
- **Linear Man-Made Waterways**— Historic-age linear man-made waterways such as the GIWW and the Victoria Barge Canal were documented as a single resource.
- **Ancillary Resources**—Historic-age ancillary buildings visible from the right-of-way were documented and photographed with the associated primary building. Historic-age structures such as stylized signs were documented along with the associated building. Ancillary buildings with no primary building were surveyed as individual resources.

## **POST-FIELD PROCESSING**

Following fieldwork, the Survey123 data was reviewed to ensure that all required fields were provided for each documented resource. Desktop research was conducted on post-World War II neighborhoods to compile neighborhood histories (**Appendix F**). Senior members of Stantec’s team reviewed individual properties and districts identified during fieldwork as having potential for historic significance and conducted desktop research as needed to inform NRHP evaluations. The team then held round table discussions to finalize the NRHP recommendations. The Survey123 data was finalized accordingly, and results and recommendations maps were prepared in GIS.





## 5. HISTORIC CONTEXT



Rural Calhoun County | Stantec

This narrative includes information based on pertinent historical themes and subthemes and specific chronological periods for the geographic area defined as Calhoun County, Texas and is not intended to be a comprehensive historical account of the county's history. The historic context describes local historical patterns of architecture; economic development based on agriculture, commerce, maritime, and industry; ethnic heritage; public and private institutional development for education, government, conservation, military institutions and activities, recreation, culture, leisure, and transportation. Each context theme or subtheme offers one or more periods and areas of significance appropriate to that topic and lists property types based on functions. The narratives focus on the extant buildings, structures, objects, and districts that represent these topics, and includes, to the degree necessary, relevant precursory details that galvanized the local built environment's evolution. With these component parts, this historic context provides a framework to evaluate historic-age resources for NRHP eligibility. Ultimately, this historic context will also help guide future planning priorities, goals, and strategies for significant historic properties in Calhoun County.

The previously prepared research design presented a series of questions applicable to each anticipated theme and subtheme to shape this historic context. However, the results of careful

research demonstrated that certain paths of inquiry were immaterial and their pursuit deemed unwarranted. These instances are briefly explained within each topic where appropriate. Similarly, the March 2021 windshield survey of Calhoun County supplied invaluable information that reshaped content to accommodate the findings. Surveyors were aware that severe weather events have caused substantial damage to local resources, and the survey revealed unexpected proof of losses. In effect, almost no nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century resources remain extant in Calhoun County; of the few that exist, most have been radically altered. Comments from reviewers provided additional insights and direction for this context.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Calhoun County's coastal position was the harbinger of both prosperity and adversity. The early history of Calhoun County is filled with intriguing people—the earliest Native American occupants, Old World explorers, the first permanent residents, and immigrants from neighboring Mexico and distant Europe. As the local demographic composition evolved, each generation helped shape the local built environment. Dramatic historical developments as far-ranging in time as a Civil War battlefield and a World War II Air Force base training installation, and as paradoxical in type as a state wildlife refuge adjacent to a petrochemical manufacturing plant are extant in the county. For the local built environment, though, perhaps the most significant events have been the result of devastating weather that has physically stripped the county of its precedent buildings, structures, and objects.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY**

Basic demographic data supplies insights about the groups that shaped Calhoun County's built environment (Table 4). Throughout the nineteenth century, the total population increased healthily each decennial until 1890, which was only four years after a colossal hurricane that killed some and drove others away. By this time only 983 people lived in Calhoun County, a 57 percent population drop. In the twentieth century, the county experienced generally steady population growth. From 1850 through 1980, the White native-born population had been the largest group, and extant twentieth-century resources will reflect their common building traditions. Like other groups, nineteenth-century resources are scarce.

The presence of Black and European influences in Calhoun County's built environment is largely imperceptible. The Black population in Calhoun County contributed substantially to the built environment during the nineteenth century, but hurricanes wiped out signs of their presence. In the antebellum era, the local enslaved population grew nominally relative to

plantation-based inland counties, several nearby plantations had some of the largest holdings of enslaved people in Texas. Once freed, most of the Black population worked in Indianola and Port Lavaca as domestics or laborers. They comprised about one-quarter of Calhoun County’s residents in 1870 and 1880, and 17 percent in 1890. Their late-nineteenth-century urban presence is not extant. The Black population decreased in the twentieth century and their proportion was consistently either similar to or smaller than that in other Texas counties. Similarly, the influence of Old World Europeans or their first-generation progeny is undistinguishable today. Just before the Civil War, the foreign-born population peaked at 28 percent, and declined in most subsequent decades, never reaching more than nine percent of the population in the first three decades of the twentieth century and averaging just more than two percent between 1930 and 1980. Thus, their influence on the local built environment waned similarly.

The built environment of the local Hispanic population—Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans—is slightly more visible in Calhoun County. Their nineteenth and early-twentieth-century population remained surprisingly small given the area’s longstanding ties to first Spanish and then Mexican economy, governments, and culture. By 1910, however, with Mexico in the throes of revolution, many sought refuge in neighboring Texas. The increase in Calhoun County was initially nominal, but between 1920 and 1930, the Hispanic population swelled a whopping 464 percent, with steady increases in post-war decennials. These numbers suggest the presence of building traditions consistent with Spanish- and Mexican-influenced forms, materials, and stylistic preferences.

Table 4. Aggregate Population Statistics for Calhoun County, 1850–1980.

Decennial	Total	Native-Born/Percent	Foreign-Born	Black/Percent	White/Percent	Hispanic/Percent
1850	1,110	--	--	243/22	867/78	9/<1
1860	2,642	1,490/56	738/28	414/16	2,228/84	--
1870	3,468	1,867/54	669/19	907/26	2,536/73	25/<1
1880	2,289	1,500/66	239/10	547/24	1,739/76	3/<1
1890	983	745/76	70/7	168/17	815/83	0/<1
1900	2,699	2,139/79	256/9	271/10	2,395/88	33/1
1910	3,635	2,760/76	314/8	491/14	3,074/85	70/1
1920	4,700	3,741/80	375/7	584/12	3,886/83	230/4
1930	5,385	3,418/63	112/2	557/10	3,530/66	1,298/24
1940	5,911	4,476/80	218/3	647/10	4,694/79	570/9
1950	9,222	6,094/66	260/2	712/7	6,354/68	2,156/23
1960	16,592	14,542/87	334/2	818/4	14,876/89	898/5 <sup>4</sup>
1970	17,831	10,762/60	321/1	785/4	11,083/61	5,963/33 <sup>5</sup>
1980	19,574	11,685/60	724/3	534/2	12,409/63	6,631/34

<sup>4</sup> This is for “foreign stock,” who are first-generation Americans with one or more foreign-born parents.

<sup>5</sup> This is for persons whose primary language and/or surname is Spanish.



(U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1922; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census 1913b; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1952; 1932b; 1942b; 1973; 1983; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1872a; 1901).

## WEATHER HISTORY

Major storms have battered Calhoun County, which has more shoreline than any other Texas county, throughout its history. Two enormous storms hit Indianola in the late-nineteenth century. This harbor contributed significantly to the arrival of immigrants, some who stayed and others who pursued western lands; the economic success of producers and shippers, who used the waterways; and the enjoyment of locals and tourists, who took advantage of sea and hunting excursions on inland freshwaters, saltwater bays, manmade channels, and the open Gulf of Mexico. The first recorded storm, in 1875, left only eight buildings standing and had a death toll of up to 300. The effort to rebuild was obliterated when an 1886 storm again hit Indianola (Figure 5) (Frantz 2021).



Figure 5. After the 1886 hurricane hit Indianola, it became a ghost town (Johnstone 2003a, 5:9).



In the first half of the twentieth century, at least five large hurricanes caused local damage. The 1916 storm struck at Baffin Bay, south of Corpus Christi, and thrashed homes and businesses in Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor. The 1919 hurricane hit Florida much harder, but Calhoun County suffered severe destruction and some loss of life when it hit the Texas coast (Figure 6). A 1934 storm hit Port Lavaca especially hard. A 1942 hurricane brought extensive local destruction, with 115 miles-per-hour winds recorded at Seadrift (Figure 7). The storm knocked the Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse off its pilings at Matagorda Bay. Just three years later, a hurricane made landfall at Port O'Connor and inundated Port Lavaca with a 15-foot storm tide.



Figure 6. The Clement home survived the 1919 hurricane but was surrounded by debris (Johnstone 2003a, 5:cover).





Figure 7. Seadrift's bayfront was severely damaged during the 1942 hurricane (Johnstone 2003a, 5:5).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the county continued to suffer devastating weather events. Much of the county was evacuated for Hurricane Ella in 1958, and its aftermath left flooding and coastal swells. The biggest wallop, at 175 miles per hour, was the

direct hit that Port O'Connor took from Hurricane Carla in 1961 (Figure 8). With 34 deaths, 465 injured, and \$300 million in damages, this was the largest hurricane to hit Texas to date. The relatively low death toll was credited to the largest peacetime evacuation in national history. Almost no buildings remained in the aftermath at Port O'Connor. In 1970, Hurricane Celia hit Corpus Christi, and its wide span caused extensive losses in Calhoun County. Port O'Connor took direct hits in 2002 with Tropical Storm Fay, which caused \$450,000 in damages, and again in 2003, with Hurricane Claudette. Hurricane Harvey, in 2017, hit just south at Rockport. This Category 4 storm produced extreme and unprecedented rains. In 2020, Tropical Storm Beta landed on the Matagorda Peninsula, with heavy wind, high surf, and large hail. Cumulatively, these storms have destroyed much of the built environment, irreversibly deleting it from the historical record.



Figure 8. Rows of seating from the Jamison Theater survived, but little else remained after Hurricane Carla hit Port O'Connor in 1961 (Johnstone 2003a, 5:73).



## **THEME: ARCHITECTURE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Hurricanes and major storms destroyed much of the earliest-built wood-frame-constructed buildings and structures in Calhoun County (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 668–71; Kleiner 2021; Maywald 2021; Port O’Connor Chamber of Commerce 2021). Those that survive have suffered extensive loss and destruction from severe weather events, incompatible and numerous modifications, or have received limited maintenance or experienced neglect. Given the lack of potential for NRHP eligibility under Criterion C, this context briefly reports major local architectural trends based on extant resources. Buildings in places like Indianola that have been completely leveled by hurricanes are not included in this context.

Both residential and non-residential architecture followed national trends, but buildings were generally more modest in Calhoun County than in more-urban Texas locales, even the nearest mid-size city of Victoria. Architect-designed buildings are rare, especially architect-designed residential buildings. Styles architects favored, such as the Richardsonian Romanesque and Beaux Arts -influenced styles are not apparent locally either because they were never built or because they were lost to storms. In the twentieth-century, buildings were sometimes constructed of brick or concrete-block units to withstand storms and others were lifted to prevent flooding.

This context is a tool to facilitate identification and evaluation of resources in Calhoun County and is not a comprehensive narrative of local architectural history. The styles and forms discussed are based on the Texas Historical Commission’s survey form list, *A Field Guide to American Houses* and *The Buildings of Main Street*, which historic preservation professionals recognize as industry standards (Longstreth 1987; McAlester 2015).

### **SUBTHEME: RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE**

#### [Nineteenth- to Early-Twentieth-Century Architecture](#)

Permanent dwellings of the pre- and early-railroad era in Calhoun County were constructed with local materials and reflected the building traditions of their inhabitants. The European building traditions of early settlers likely influenced local architecture; however, no such buildings are known to be extant. Once railroads arrived locally, buildings and construction techniques changed dramatically since inexpensive materials, especially dimensional lumber, could be obtained from distant sawmills (McAlester 2015, 135). In housing, seven distinctive folk-inspired forms emerged: gable-front, gable-front-and-wing, hall-and-parlor, I-house,

massed-plan, side-gable, and pyramidal. Collectively, these forms are referred to as National Folk houses (Figure 9). Railroad-influenced housing emerged in Calhoun County after 1861, when the first line arrived connecting Port Lavaca to Victoria (Kleiner 2021). National Folk houses were common until about 1930, but the trend persisted longer in rural places like Calhoun County. Even in the county's largest town, Port Lavaca, living conditions were primitive in the early-twentieth century with no municipal water or wastewater systems. People used outdoor privies and wood or metal cisterns to catch rainwater (Freier 1979, 68). Extant houses from this era have been modernized with additions and other modifications.



Figure 9. An example of a side-gable hall-and-parlor house in the rural Six Mile community is depicted in this undated image (Freier 1979, 193).

Houses constructed for middle- to upper-class residents from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries are often examples of Victorian-era architecture. Victorian-era houses have more complex forms than their National Folk predecessors and have mass-produced decorative detailing and components that industrialization made possible. Pattern books were widely disseminated throughout this period, introducing local builders to new styles and plans, including the Second Empire, Stick, Queen Anne, and Folk Victorian styles (McAlester 2015, 312). Of these, the Queen Anne and Folk Victorian styles are the most common styles extant in Calhoun County (Figure 10). In Texas, dwellings with Victorian-influenced designs were constructed as late as the 1910s.





Figure 10. An example of a c. 1910 Queen Anne-style house in Port Lavaca is depicted in this undated image. Although it was relocated, the building is extant at 323 South Commerce Street. Extant and intact houses from the early-twentieth century are rare in Calhoun County (Freier 1979, 193).

The Eclectic era of residential architecture occurred in two waves between 1880 and 1940. During this era, residences emulated the historical styles of domestic buildings in Europe, including traditionally Greek/Roman, English, French, and Mediterranean/Spanish designs (McAlester 2015, 406–7). This trend is not apparent in Calhoun County or examples were lost to severe weather events, although there are elements of these styles present on vernacular buildings throughout the county.

### [Early- to Mid-Twentieth-Century Architecture](#)

In the early-twentieth century, residential architecture shifted from the exuberance of Victorian- and Eclectic-era designs in favor of basic functional forms, flowing interior spaces, and organic expressions. The Craftsman-influenced style was the most popular residential design from about 1905 to the early-1940s (McAlester 2015, 568). The style was commonly applied to a long narrow or a boxy bungalow form. Bungalows were also adapted to other



styles or displayed no stylistic elements. The few examples extant in Calhoun County are modest in scale and detail.

The Minimal Traditional style became the favored small house design for working- and middle-class buyers beginning in the mid-1930s. Developed in response to changes in the housing market during the Great Depression, the federal government established the National Housing Act of 1934 to stimulate building industries and to provide government-financed home loans. The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) introduced guidelines for house designs that stipulated uniform construction standards for affordable homes intended to be accessible to as many Americans as possible (Ames and McClelland 2002, 60–62). In their 1936 publication on house designs, *Principles of Planning Small Houses*, the FHA promoted “providing a maximum accommodation within a minimum of means, and, consequently, cost” (Ames and McClelland 2002, 61). This translated to modest one-story house forms that lacked complexity and non-essential features like intricate roof forms, dormers, cornices, or variations in cladding (Figure 11). The affordable and efficient designs provided housing during the Great Depression and because they could be quickly constructed, they met a burst in demand from returning World War II veterans and their growing families. Box-like Minimal Traditional-style houses that reflect the FHA principles are common in Calhoun County. However, because of their simplicity and ubiquity, individual Minimal Traditional-style residences typically do not rise to the level of significance necessary for individual NRHP designation. Instead, neighborhoods of Minimal Traditional-style residences are more commonly eligible as historic districts.



Figure 11. In 1936, the FHA released a series of standards and guidelines for economical house designs that could be financed with FHA-backed loans. This, the simplest design, became known as the “FHA minimum house” (U.S. Federal Housing Administration 1937, 24).

The Ranch style, developed in Southern California in the mid-1930s, was one of the small house types the FHA favored in the 1940s. The agency’s approval made it easier to finance this house style than others thus contributing to its popularity (McAlester 2015, 602–3). Promoted as modern on the inside and traditional on the outside, the Ranch-style house offered a conservative approach to modernism that became the most common style built nationally in the 1950s and 1960s. These houses were often developed simultaneously in clusters as part of automobile-oriented planned neighborhoods, but they were also individually built on rural properties. Whereas earlier houses were compacted on pedestrian-friendly narrow lots, automobile reliance encouraged development of wider lots, where houses sprawled with more room between parcels. Ranch-style houses date from about 1935 to 1975. Ranch-style residences were not typically architect designed, and developers built entire neighborhoods that employed variations of a similar design. Some Ranch-style homes were built as infill in older neighborhoods, where the form was adapted to accommodate a narrow

lot. Ranch-style houses are so ubiquitous that they are infrequently individually eligible for the NRHP and are more likely to be eligible as historic districts.

Variations of the Ranch style are the early, smaller examples of the Minimal Ranch, Ranchette, or Transitional Ranch (McAlester 2015, 600–602). In addition to their small scale, these buildings lack a broad overhanging roof and other elaborations common to Ranch-style dwellings. Minimal Ranch houses are usually in or near the same neighborhoods as and very similar to Minimal Traditional-style residences, with the distinction often a matter of judgment (McAlester 2015, 602). Minimal Ranch houses may have a broader profile than the Minimal Traditional style and character-defining details like a large picture window, horizontal-sash double-hung windows, eaves, brick skirting, or an attached garage are common (McAlester 2015, 602). A Minimal Ranch-style house will rarely possess sufficient architectural distinction for individual NRHP eligibility. Minimal Ranch houses are most commonly eligible as part of a historic district comprised of Ranch, Minimal Traditional, or Minimal Ranch houses or a combination of these styles.

Other residential styles from the early- to mid-twentieth century, like Art Deco, Moderne, and Post-War Modern styles, favored among architects, are not apparent in Calhoun County.

### Post-1961 Architecture

In 1961, Hurricane Carla caused significant and widespread devastation in Calhoun County. Many buildings, particularly in Seadrift and Port O'Connor, which the storm annihilated, were constructed in its aftermath. Those that survived were extensively repaired or substantially renovated.

Many houses constructed immediately after Hurricane Carla do not exhibit a clear style or historical form. They are more likely to be of brick or concrete-masonry-unit construction than their wood-frame predecessors, and therefore more resistant to storms. Some houses from this era are elevated with pilings, piers, stilts, or concrete-masonry-unit blocks to resist flooding, but seemingly only in lower-lying parts of the county. Other houses from this era are examples of the Ranch style. A few Styled Ranch houses were observed. The Styled Ranch subtype is a Ranch house that exhibits character-defining historical or modern stylistic elements. In the 1960s and 1970s, architects and builders began to produce Styled Ranch houses that featured design facets of earlier architectural styles, including Spanish Colonial Revival, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Contemporary, Classical, Traditional, and other types (McAlester 2015, 695–704).

## SUBTHEME: NON-RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

Like residential architecture, commercial, civic, educational, financial, recreational, industrial, and agricultural building types in Calhoun County followed national design trends. Early buildings were vernacular and constructed with available local materials. With the arrival of the railroad, more-permanent buildings were constructed with dimensional lumber and prefabricated windows, doors, and decorative elements. Non-residential architecture evolved stylistically, moving from the elaborate Victorian-era designs and the historical references of Eclectic-era styles to the latest designs, like the Art Deco, Moderne, and Post-War Modern styles, during the early- to mid-twentieth century. By the mid-1950s, as automobile-culture became prevalent, standalone buildings with ample parking, drive-in facilities, and flashy signs that appealed to motorists replaced pedestrian-oriented commercial-block buildings of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Longstreth 1987, 127–31). The county's early railroad-oriented hotels were replaced by automobile-oriented hotels on major thoroughfares with modern designs (Figure 12). In the mid-twentieth century, owners of older buildings on downtown main streets attempted to attract customers by removing then-dated architectural elements and replacing original cladding, windows, and doors with more modern versions (Esperdy 2008). This trend, coupled with the need to repair buildings from storm damage, resulted in very altered commercial downtowns in Port Lavaca and Seadrift. After Hurricane Carla destroyed it in 1961, Port O'Connor's five-block downtown was rebuilt entirely (Rubert 2021c).

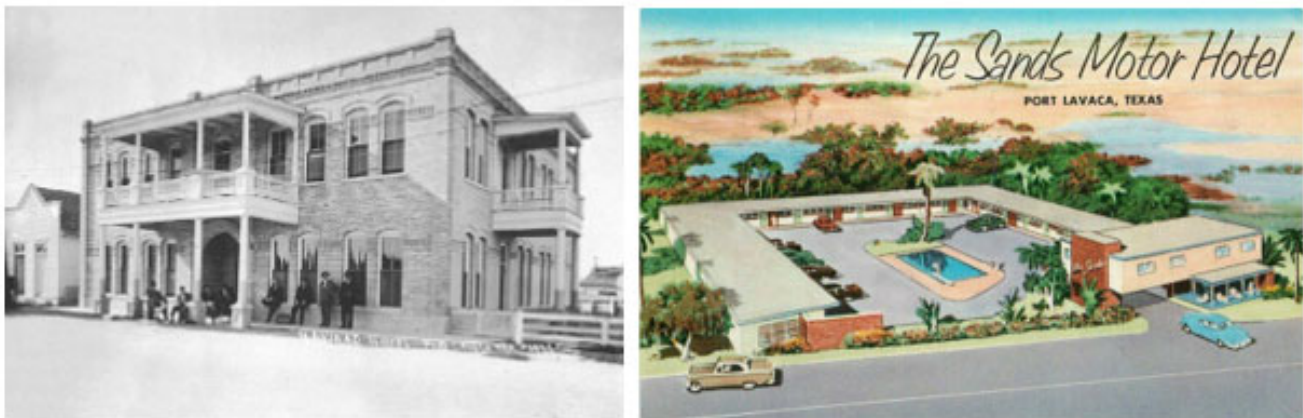


Figure 12. In Port Lavaca, the c. 1905 Navidad Hotel (left) was within walking distance of the railroad depot, and the c. 1955 automobile-oriented Sands Motor Hotel (right) was on West Main Street/U.S. Highway 87 (eBay 1950; Johnstone 2016, 122; *Victoria Advocate* 1957e, 7C).

Calhoun County's important institutions were housed in architecturally notable buildings. The 1896 county jail was a monumental fortress-like building, designed by Martin, Byrne, and Johnson of Victoria, that is no longer extant (Texas Historical Commission 1983a). No expense

was spared on the tourist pavilions, the center of the tourist economy. Lodgings like the Beach Hotel and Navidad Hotel in Port Lavaca, though modest in comparison to contemporaneous urban hotels, were grand for rural coastal Texas. Schools in Port O'Connor, Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Olivia were handsome and sturdy buildings (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 30–33). Some of the county's churches are architecturally distinct; the 1949 Grace Episcopal Church, for example, is a local example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style (Texas Historical Commission 1983b).

Banks of the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, such as the First National Bank of Port Lavaca, typically erected high-style buildings to convey institutional stability (Figure 13). The evolution of the First National Bank is characteristic of local non-residential architecture trends. The original wood-frame building on Main Street was replaced by a more-permanent masonry building by 1904. This building was abandoned in 1957 for a new Post-War Modern-style standalone bank near Main Street that could accommodate automobiles, now used as the Port Lavaca City Hall. The bank built a substantial Late Modern-style building on the outskirts of town in 1984. Although the 1904 building is extant, it was modernized in the mid-twentieth century and many character-defining features, like the tower, windows, doors, and parapet, were removed.



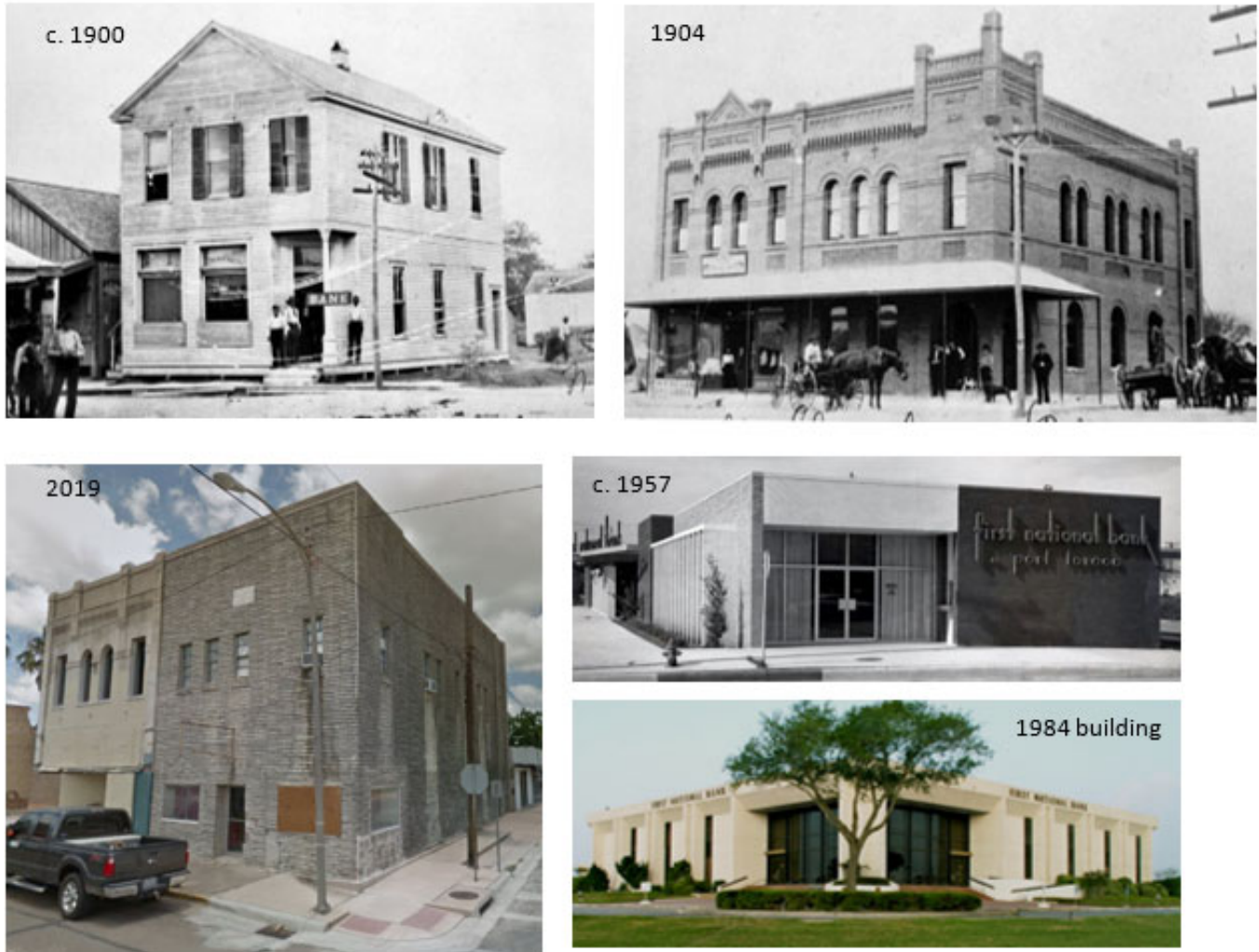


Figure 13. The First National Bank in Port Lavaca in about 1900 (top left), 1904 (top right), and 2019 (bottom left), after the 1904 building was modernized. Later locations of the bank were built in 1957 (middle right; now Port Lavaca City Hall), and 1984 (bottom right). (Anonymous 1900; 1904, First National Bank 2021; Google Earth 2019; Rhodes 2020a).

The survey revealed that most of Calhoun County's late-nineteenth-century to early-twentieth-century flagship buildings are not extant or have been heavily altered. Extant resources with architectural merit were mostly constructed after World War II in the Post-War Modern style, and included government buildings, churches, schools, and banks. A fine example of post-war design is the fifth and current 1959 county courthouse designed by Houston architecture firm Rustay and Martin and constructed by the D. W. Marshall Construction Corporation (Figure 14).

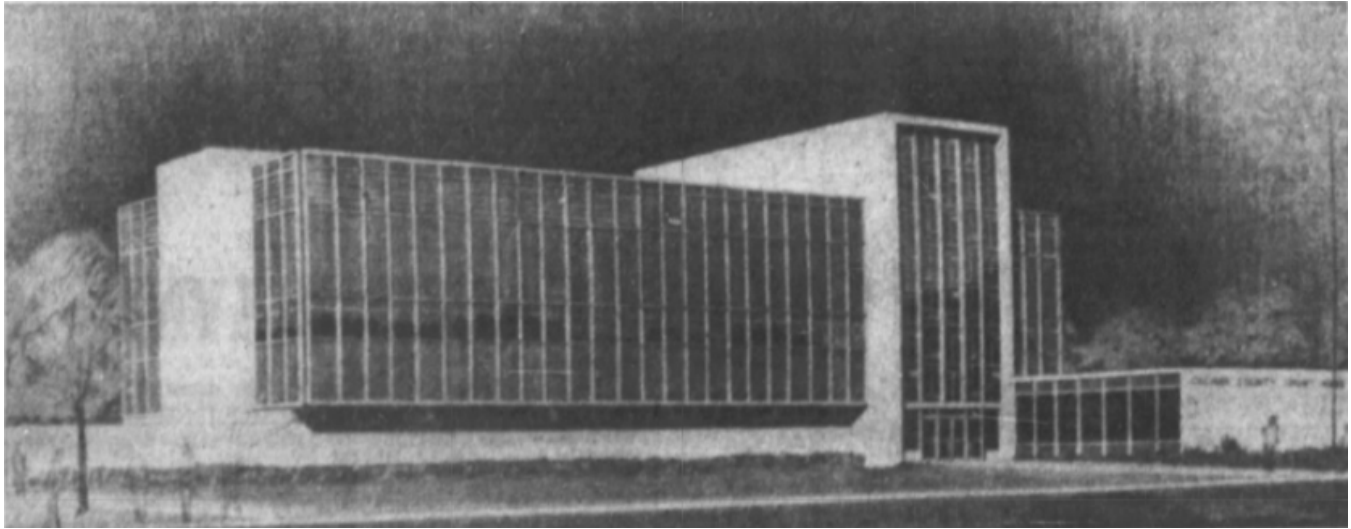


Figure 14. This architectural rendering of the 1959 Calhoun County Courthouse is by Houston architects Rustay and Martin, who also designed the 1962 Port Lavaca Library, which currently serves as the Calhoun County Museum (*Victoria Advocate* 1957a; *Victoria Advocate* 1962d).

Unlike high-style buildings, agricultural and industrial resources are usually devoid of architectural influences or only offer the barest of stylistic references. Agricultural resources evolved to reflect new technology and practices that required different building and structure types for storage needs and production. Although utilitarian, agricultural resources can convey historical customs through their design. A barn, shed, windmill/cistern, or agricultural processing complex have utilitarian components—typically of wood-frame construction with wood or corrugated metal exterior cladding and roof materials. Design influences occasionally present are limited to temporal practices, such as exposed rafter tails often apparent on buildings constructed in the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, most industrial resources are restricted to necessary structural components and exterior materials that protect interior equipment and processing mechanisms. Exceptions are those industrial facilities that have public space for sales, marketing, and business offices. For example, a large petrochemical plant office building constructed in the 1950s might exhibit contemporaneously popular architectural influences, such as the International Style with smooth flat surfaces and minimalist decoration limited to highly defined ribbons of windows.

## PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE

National architecture trends and major weather events guided the development of three discrete periods of significance for this context. This earliest period includes resources constructed before 1919 that withstood that year’s hurricane. These resources are rarely extant. Examples reflect vernacular and railroad-era architecture and occasionally represent the National Folk and Victorian-influences styles. From 1919 to 1945 residents rebuilt after the

hurricane with traditional designs, Revival-era styles, and some instances of early modernism. After 1945 trends changed decidedly, and from then until 1973 encompasses post-World War II-era architecture and modern design. It is punctuated by Hurricane Carla in 1961, which caused a loss in building stock and a subsequent surge in redevelopment activity; however, modernism was the continued preference for new buildings. Calhoun County's economic development in the 1960s and 1970s inspired construction of styled residences.

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture, Engineering

## RELATED PROPERTY TYPES

Most property types have potential to be eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture or Engineering.

## **THEME: COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The coastal advantages of Calhoun County’s early communities also forecast their fate in the crosshairs of weather events that thrashed the built environment. Some communities did not survive, and others had to reinvent themselves more than once to endure. The Spanish, and later Mexican, land grant system that provided for the earliest local settlement established rural landholders and their tenants, with no remnant indication of corresponding permanent community development. Subsequent European and Anglo-American settlers established inland trading posts and coastal ports. A series of events—Comanche reprisals, Civil War conflicts, and, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, destructive major hurricanes—extinguished these early improvements. Places like Cayloma/Coloma, Chocolate, Clark’s Station, Indianola, Kamey, Linnville, Port Cavallo, and Saluria, among others, were severely depleted if not permanently wiped out. This context thus describes the development of smaller communities and larger towns that persisted or were founded after the 1886 hurricane.

Calhoun County’s extant communities, small and large, followed typical Texan patterns of development and share certain characteristics. Native-born or immigrant families seeking land and opportunity from the 1850s through the 1890s settled crossroads communities like Green Lake, Long Mott, Six Mile, and Olivia. Cemeteries related to these communities reflect ethnic derivations. The inland communities of Green Lake and Long Mott benefited from later-built railroad lines that briefly stimulated additional population growth and commercial development in these locations. Hopeful investors planned four communities in Calhoun County, of which Seadrift and Port O’Connor developed into full-fledged towns. The two smaller villages, Magnolia and Alamo Beaches, became seaside resorts.

Port Lavaca, the largest, oldest-surviving town and the Calhoun County seat, dates to the early-1840s. The community developed around the port. Although it did not have rail service until 1887, after the demise of Indianola, Port Lavaca rose as the county’s economic center supported by its beef-shipping, seafood, shipbuilding, and dredging industries. The larger planned towns of Seadrift and Port O’Connor experienced measured success and developed more fully. The 1919 hurricane figured prominently in the devastation of these communities, all of which made efforts at rebuilding (Figure 15). The last community to form was Point Comfort, a suburban neighborhood ALCOA built for its employees beginning in 1949. Its core, Point Comfort Village, is the earliest-known local residential development that followed a formal plan with streets and infrastructure laid out first and sections built in phases, each with a single contractor.



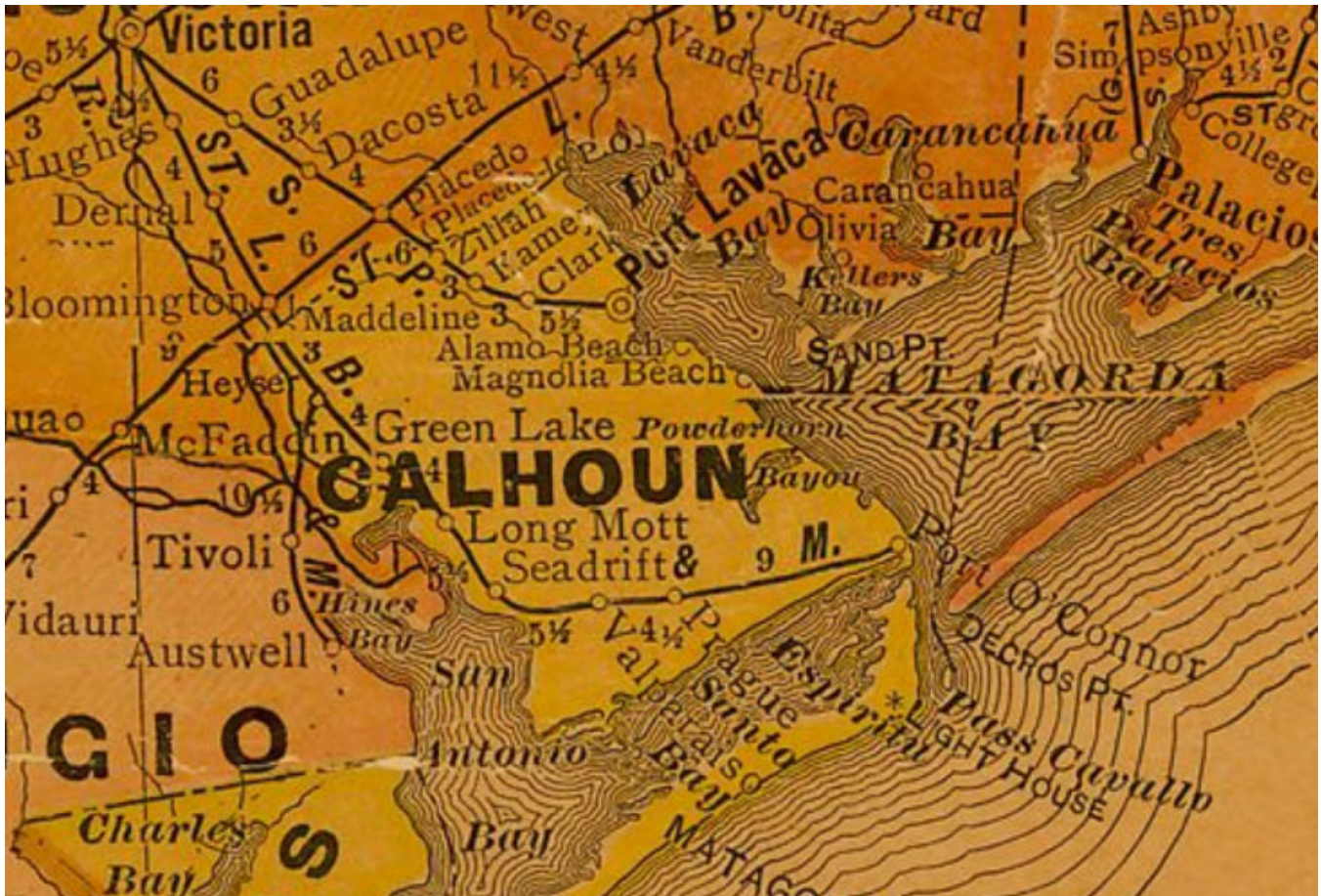


Figure 15. This 1920s map shows locations of Calhoun County's larger communities that survived the 1919 hurricane: Port Lavaca, Seadrift, Port O'Connor, Green Lake, Long Mott, Alamo Beach, Magnolia Beach, Kamey, Clark's Station, and Olivia (Texas Escapes 2021). The archival record is silent on Valparaiso and Prague, which evidently were stops along the 1887 Gulf, Western Texas, and Pacific Railroad.

Regardless of size, these communities have common attributes. They each had a viable core where people came together to trade goods or participate in institutional or social activities. During the earliest period, most communities revolved around a school, church, or both, often in the same building. If the population grew, a community could support additional services, and these more diverse property types also included retail stores, a cotton gin, additional congregations with related cemeteries, and a post office. An advantage for coastal communities was the ready commercial opportunities and economic security a harbor and accessible water-related transportation offered, and these places in Calhoun County expanded earlier and more rapidly. Those communities, both coastal and inland, on a late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century railroad route experienced similar financial certainty. The larger communities, of course, garnered many additional commercial businesses, like professional offices and a broader variety of retail stores, and other amenities, such as hospitals, theaters, and libraries. They also had larger residential areas, and more schools, churches, and clubs. Extant community planning and development resources in Calhoun County date to the



twentieth century. These resources are close to a community node that might be as small as a rural crossroads or as large as an urban downtown.

## **SUBTHEME: SMALL COMMUNITIES IN CALHOUN COUNTY**

Three small communities have Old World European roots, Six Mile, Olivia, and Long Mott. Czechoslovakian immigrants founded Six Mile in 1894. It was first known as Marekville and then briefly as Royal. The 1898 cemetery is the oldest extant improvement while other turn-of-the-century buildings, like a store/post office, do not survive. A 1900 school became the teacherage when a new building for classes was constructed. The Six Mile school consolidated with the Port Lavaca system in 1955, and the building was demolished in 1974 (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 12; Freier 1979, 106; Hardin 2021c). Itinerant preachers used the school for services until 1922, when a Presbyterian church was built (Guidry 1951). The church was destroyed and rebuilt twice, and the final 1962 building is extant (Figure 16) (Guidry 1951). Many houses remain in the community (Google Earth 2017).



Figure 16. Czechoslovakian immigrants initially launched the Six Mile Presbyterian congregation that now worships in this 1962 church. The church and the associated cemetery on the property each have an Official Texas Historical Marker (Six Mile Presbyterian Church 2021).

Swedish Lutheran immigrants founded the peninsular settlement Olivia, on the eastern side of Calhoun County at the north end of Keller Bay, by 1892. By the turn of the century, it had a small cotton gin, a general store, and a post office with mail delivered by boat. In 1904 the two-story town school building was constructed and by 1911 the building also provided worship space for the Lutheran congregation. The school was replaced at an unknown date and was renovated in 2017 to serve as the Olivia/Port Alto Community Center (Figure 17). In 1951, a Church of Christ congregation was established in Olivia (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 9–10; Guidry 1951; Hardin 2021b). The community has several extant dwellings (Google Earth 2017).



Figure 17. The former Olivia school was repurposed as the Olivia/Port Alto Community Center and these images show the building before (left) and after (right) renovations (Overton 2017; Olivia/Port Alto Community Center 2021).

Two small towns, Long Mott and Green Lake, were along the 1910 route of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad (StLBMR) on its way from Victoria headed south to Seadrift and east to Port O'Connor. Tucked slightly inland from San Antonio Bay and northeast of Mission Lake, German immigrants founded Long Mott in 1853. Twenty years later, there was a school and a church in the town. The railroad delivered mail to Long Mott by 1887. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the community flourished with local cotton production, which warranted a cotton gin that Walter Pilgrim operated (Figure 18). As was the case elsewhere along its route, when the railroad was built through the vicinity in 1910, an influx of new residents came to Long Mott. In 1914, residents had telephone service, plus a lumber yard and two general stores. In 1939, Long Mott had segregated schools for Black and White students, these schools were consolidated with the Port Lavaca system in 1955 (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 8; Guidry 1951; Handbook of Texas Online 2021a). Remnants of Long Mott at the intersection of State Highway 185 and John Tillery/Ralksen Roads include an agricultural processing center and a few dwellings (Google Earth 2017).



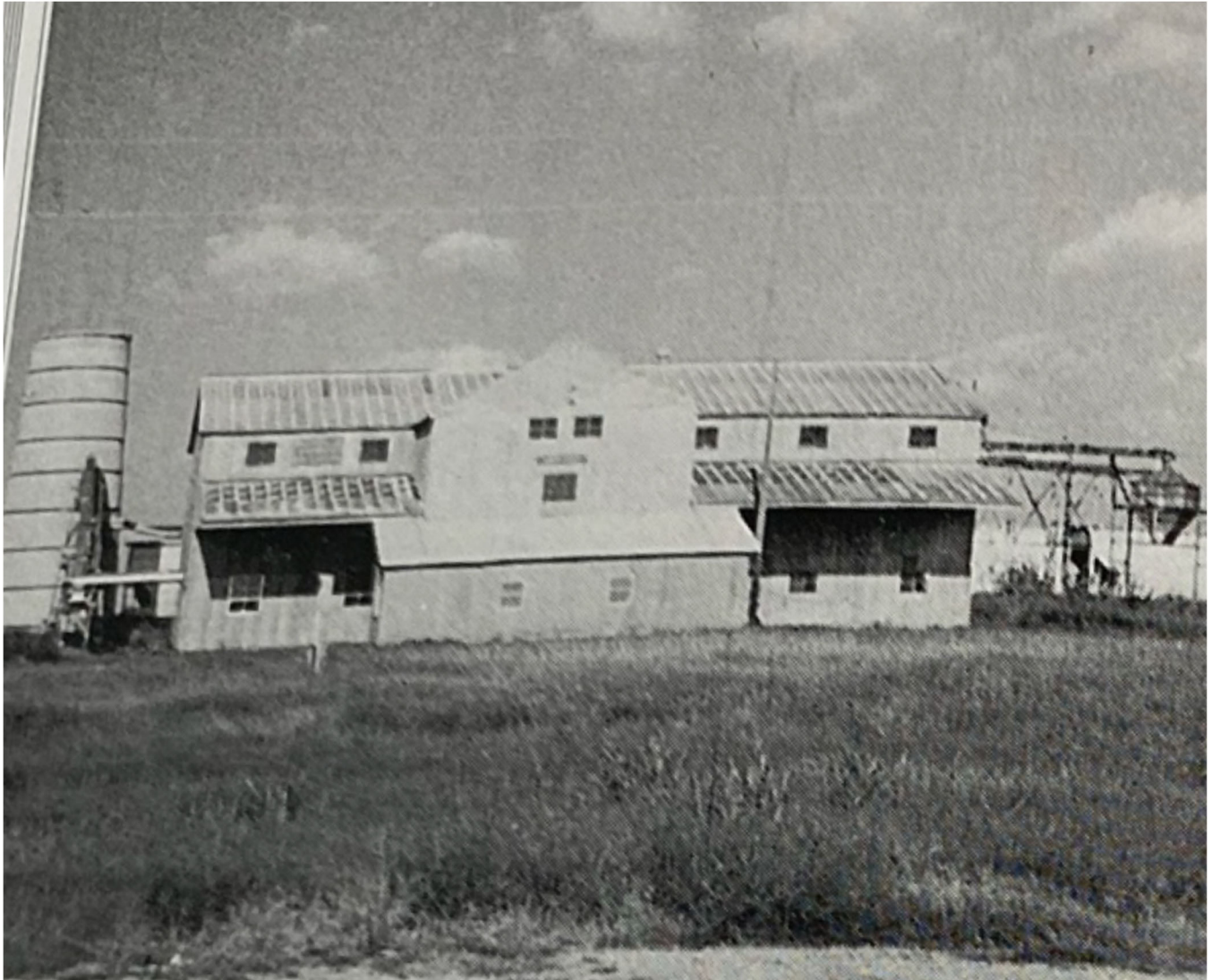


Figure 18. This undated image shows the Long Mott gin house (center) with a tall, circular burr burner (far left) and a cyclone seed bin (far right) before it was razed in the late 1980s (Johnstone 2003b, 4:52; Spiller 2014).

Settlers from Kentucky settled Green Lake in about 1850, which was mostly abandoned from after the Civil War until the twentieth century. When the railroad built through the vicinity in 1910, an influx of new residents came to Green Lake. In 1914, residents had telephone service, a cotton gin and warehouse, and a general store/post office operated by T. P. Traylor although the store closed in 1930. Traylor inherited the family ranch and built a school for local pupils where the Baptist congregation also worshiped (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 8; Guidry 1951; Rubert 2021a). No improvements related to Green Lake are extant (Google Earth 2017).

In about 1910, the Alamo Beach Investment Company promoted two towns south of Port Lavaca to northerners, both located on the west side of Lavaca Bay. The company marketed



the seaside villages Alamo Beach and Magnolia Beach for their coastal beauty, fertile lands, access to the intracoastal waterway, and hunting and fishing opportunities (Figure 19). For \$45 to \$75 an acre, investors could purchase property superior to the likes of the Italian Rivera, Newport, Atlantic City, St. Augustine, and San Bernardino, according to a sales brochure (Alamo Beach Investment Company 1910). The company's efforts at developing agricultural land flopped however, and both areas became small resort communities. Magnolia Beach had telephone service and a general store by 1914, and by the 1930s, several dwellings and a school were extant (Rubert 2021b). Alamo Beach had a post office from 1907 to 1915. In 1915, when residents built a seaside pavilion, the town also had telephone service, a dairy, and real estate and life insurance businesses (Hardin 2021a). Both communities have extant domestic resources with related infrastructure improvements (Google Earth 2017).



Figure 19. This advertisement for Alamo Beach touts the advantages of cheap land for citrus crops and seaside pleasantries (Johnstone 2016, 90).

Two other smaller communities in Calhoun County are Port Alto and Schicke Point. Port Alto, on the west shore of Carancahua Bay in the northeastern part of the county, was first known as Persimmon Point. In 1961, Hurricane Carla destroyed the coastal community. It is now mostly residential with a marina (Google Earth 2017; Handbook of Texas Online 2021d).

Schicke Point is a coastal residential village at the far eastern corner of the county at Carancahua Bay and Carancahua Pass (Handbook of Texas Online 2021g).

## **SUBTHEME: TOWNS IN CALHOUN COUNTY**

The oldest and largest of Calhoun County's towns is the seat of local government at Port Lavaca, on the west coast of Lavaca Bay. Founded in the early-1840s, the community was a bustling harbor throughout the nineteenth century, despite the impacts of the Civil War and regular damaging weather events. A relatively high percentage of the county's enslaved men and women were held in Lavaca and worked as draymen, laborers, or domestics in the community after emancipation (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1870).

Although Lavaca lagged its rival town, Indianola, to the south for decades, after the 1886 hurricane, the more-exposed Indianola was completely obliterated, and Port Lavaca rose to dominate local economic activity particularly after a direct railroad from Victoria opened the following year. The population swelled mildly in most subsequent decades with a series of industrial developments and transportation improvements which attracted workers and their families. In the aftermath of the 1919 storm, construction of a seawall in 1920 protected the community from future damage. By 1927, Port Lavaca had typical amenities like churches, schools, railroad depots, hotels, and numerous commercial entities (Sanborn Map Company 1927). A 1930s causeway across Lavaca Bay provided a direct route northward and led to population growth and increased school enrollment. Between 1940 and 1950, Port Lavaca's population increased 144 percent (Figure 20).

Substantial industrial developments encouraged another 107 percent rise in Port Lavaca's population to more than 10,000 residents between 1950 and 1970 (Maywald 2021). These developments included ALCOA, which sponsored construction of the Lynn Haven, later known as Lynnhaven, subdivision, and sold lots to its employees. Initial infrastructure construction for Lynnhaven was underway by June 1949 (*Victoria Advocate* 1949a; *Victoria Advocate* 1950e). In 1954, Port Lavaca annexed 250 acres on the town's north side, including the Bonorden and Western Heights subdivisions (*Victoria Advocate* 1954j). That year, the city council clarified that developers must provide installation of streets, sewers, and water improvements in proposed new subdivisions (*Victoria Advocate* 1954h). Meadowbrook Park, with 162 single-family dwellings was underway by 1956 (*Victoria Advocate* 1956a). In 1958, the city annexed almost 100 acres to develop single-family homes in the Brook Hollow and Hillside Terrace subdivisions (*Victoria Advocate* 1958c). Although hurricanes have wreaked havoc on Port Lavaca, many of its resources remain extant (Google Earth 2017).





Figure 20. The route of State Highway 238/Broadway Street is prominent in this 1950 aerial view of Port Lavaca (Johnstone 2005, 21).

Seadrift, on San Antonio Bay, initially developed as a harbor town with opportunities for commercial fishing and shipping (Figure 21). A post office was established in 1892, and during the following decade, the community garnered a physician, a music teacher, and a Baptist church. Inland transportation was limited to overland stage routes until 1910, when the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad (StLBMR) was built through the town. The following year, A. D. Powers and his American Town Site Company advertised “The Italy of America” with tracts for sale on model farms for truck crops; as-yet unbuilt canneries for production; easy freight access via railroad and the intracoastal waterway; and a town site with seaside amenities, like hotels, cottages, and pavilions. The company’s package deal came with a 1-acre town lot and a 5-acre rural plot, of which the company had 2,000 for sale, for \$300 each. Projected building costs for homes ranged from a small two-room house for \$150 to a large five-plus-room dwelling for \$1,000, with water-well boring priced at \$50 and fencing the rural tract for \$24 or less.

Daily train service made Seadrift a popular tourist destination. In the 1910s, the town had a myriad of businesses and institutions for residents and tourists alike, including a canning factory, ice factory, cotton gin, lumber yard, and blacksmithy; grocery, dry goods, feed, furniture, and hardware stores; two banks; a bakery; a barber; a school and three churches; plus, restaurants, four hotels, a health resort, and a livery. The 1919 hurricane obliterated much of the town and permanently ended railroad passenger service (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 12–13; Guidry 1951; Johnstone 2003b, 4:1; Powers n.d.; Rubert 2021d). Seadrift’s population declined until the mid-twentieth century when large industrial corporations established plants in the vicinity.

Although never fully realized, the 1963 Swan Point residential development, south of Seadrift, advertised residential lots for 900 proposed homes along 50-foot-wide canals that linked to San Antonio Bay with a marina, restaurant, club house, and pavilion (*Victoria Advocate* 1963d; *Victoria Advocate* 1964f). The community has many domestic and commercial resources, navigation district and municipals harbors, and retains a local school (Google Earth 2017).





Figure 21. This undated aerial view of Seadrift shows several homes built along the town's platted square blocks. A small cluster of downtown buildings is west (left) of the railroad's triangular wye (Johnstone 2003b, 4:2).

Similarly, Port O'Connor, on Matagorda and Espíritu Santo Bays, was initially a small late-nineteenth-century settlement, known as Alligator Head, that the American Townsite Company first promoted with only marginal success. In 1909, the Calhoun County Cattle Company launched its development as Port O'Connor and named the newly platted town for the former landowner Thomas M. O'Connor. The Irish-born Texas Republic fighter and livestock rancher had residences in Victoria and on his Refugio-based ranch. At the time of his 1887 death, O'Connor was the wealthiest man in Texas. His estate owned almost 70,000 acres in Calhoun County alone at the turn of the century. The extension of the StLBMR southeasterly from Seadrift to Port O'Connor in 1910 contributed to the Calhoun County Cattle Company's success in town development. The company offered 150 1- to 12-acre garden tracts for \$100 per acre, 20-acre parcels at \$40 per acre, residential lots in town for \$300 each, and wider bayside residential lots and Main Street business lots for \$600 each. Boosters touted commercial and institutional amenities for residents and tourists comparable to those in Seadrift. The 1919



hurricane obliterated much of the town and permanently ended railroad passenger service, but the community rebuilt (Calhoun County 1900; Calhoun County Cattle Company 1910; Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 13–14; O’Connor 2021; Rubert 2021c). In 1961, Hurricane Carla leveled most of Port O’Connor, and as a result, the local built environment post-dates the storm (Figure 22) (Google Earth 2017).



Figure 22. This 1961 aerial view shows the ravages Port O’Connor sustained in Hurricane Carla’s aftermath (Johnstone 2002c, 3:39).

Point Comfort is a suburban community across Lavaca Bay from Port Lavaca built between 1949 and the late-1950s. ALCOA funded the project for company housing known as Point Comfort Village, intentionally developing the neighborhood on the east side of the bay. The location, adjacent to the plant, kept workers close and precluded their need to commute via the causeway across the bay. This, in turn, prevented work stoppages and slow-downs when hurricanes damaged the causeway (*Victoria Advocate* 1951a). Streets, water lines, and storm and sanitary sewers were installed before the Lavaca Gulf Corporation built 48 one-story, one- and two-bedroom houses with detached or integrated garages (Figure 23) (*Victoria Advocate*

1949b, 7; *Victoria Advocate* 1950d, 1). Another 56 dwellings were completed in 1951, and a third building phase occurred in the late-1950s (Calhoun County Appraisal District 2021; *Victoria Advocate* 1950e, 16). In 1953, the community incorporated. The following year, ALCOA contracted for the construction of the seven-unit Point Comfort Center, a shopping strip, with tenants intended to be a supermarket, dry goods store, post office, physician's office, barber shop, and beauty shop. The building was clad with Roman tile brick and colored tile (*Victoria Advocate* 1954c, 1). The company also had a recreation hall built for the community around this time (*Victoria Advocate* 1951b). Point Comfort's other amenities included a city hall, fire station, public swimming pool, library, bank, and six churches (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 13; Handbook of Texas Online 2021c). Although Point Comfort has struggled with hurricane damage, many of its original historic-age resources remain. The residential section has more than doubled in size since the late-1950s (Google Earth 2017).



Figure 23. At 110 Lubbock Street, this 1952 dwelling is typical of modest one-story designs in Point Comfort Village (Keller Williams Realty 2021).



## PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Three discrete periods of significance apply to community planning and development in Calhoun County. The first period, 1887 to 1919, reflects permanent settlement and related improvements between two of the most damaging hurricanes to hit the area. This period also encompasses permanent and consistent railroad service to Port Lavaca and consequent development. The period between 1919 and 1942 corresponds with recovery and redevelopment patterns in rural crossroads communities and larger towns. From 1942 to 1973, pre- and post-war economic stability and expansion resulted in population growth and prompted suburban residential construction with shopping centers, schools, and churches, among other enhancements.

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture, Community Planning and Development, Engineering, Ethnic Heritage, Exploration/Settlement, Landscape Architecture

## RELATED PROPERTY TYPES

Most property types have potential to be eligible under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development. However, this context does not apply to agriculture, industry/processing/extraction, defense, and transportation property types.



## **THEME: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The diverse resources of Calhoun County's built environment reflect the breadth of its economic development history, which has depended on agriculture, commerce, maritime activities, and industry. Much of mid- and late-nineteenth century Texas was almost completely dependent on cash-crop agriculture, but a coastal position offered more opportunity for other profitable ventures in Calhoun County. Local agricultural production concentrated on livestock ranching, and while row crops gained steadily through the mid-twentieth century, it was cattle and their byproducts that remained constant through the years. Commercial development in Calhoun County followed typical patterns with towns, especially Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor, offering an array of conventional retail shops and services. Like other coastal communities, these towns drew tourists who traveled by train or automobile to experience outdoor seaside activities. Entrepreneurs built and operated lodging, restaurants, and outfitters that catered to these visitors. The coast also provided opportunity for domestic and international maritime trade. Shipping was the primary means of export and import for Calhoun County in the nineteenth century. Twentieth-century improvement to the harbors, channels and canals, and development of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, expanded local maritime commercial activity substantially to serve several corporate industrial users. Calhoun County's industry has expanded markedly since the nineteenth century, from processing beef and oysters for export to major wholesale seafood operations with support from shipbuilding and dredging enterprises. The petrochemical industry took advantage of the coastal position with ready access to water and railroad transportation near plentiful oil and natural gas reserves in the mid-twentieth century. The large industrial processing facilities that were built are notable complexes. Industrial developments in Calhoun County also include common types like agricultural processing centers and municipal utilities.

### **SUBTHEME: AGRICULTURE**

#### Introduction

The importance of agriculture, a leading economic force in Calhoun County for almost two centuries, is apparent in the rural built environment. Shaping their practices to local geographic, topographic, and climatic circumstances, agriculturists learned to produce successful yields. Relative to many other Texas counties, few ranches and even fewer farmsteads were established here, with a tendency toward comparatively large holdings. Relevant historical agents, especially exceptional transportation networks and a steady labor supply, linked the county's agricultural yields to numerous regional and national markets. Cash-crop production was limited until the twentieth century and even then, only nominal



amounts of corn and cotton were harvested. Calhoun County family farm operations regularly improved their farmsteads with vegetables, fruits, and small orchards for provisional use but did not produce enough volume of these truck crops to report in many aggregate agricultural decennial censuses. Beef cattle, sheep, and their byproducts were the dominant local products throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tropical storms and hurricanes caused regular difficulties, but no apparent changes to the county's agricultural practices were observed. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, only cattle ranching remained a constant, with new ventures into aquaculture just launching.

### [Early Agricultural Development, 1824–1846](#)

Since post-contact history under Spanish rule, local agricultural practices focused on raising livestock and limited feed crops that left minimal enduring impressions on the landscape. By 1835, the Mexican government had issued most large land grants along the perimeter of Lavaca, Matagorda, San Antonio, and Espiritu Santo Bays to native Tejanos (Kleiner 2021; Texas General Land Office 1919). Livestock ranching was a likely principal income source for these landowners, but their holdings were loosely ordered and only temporarily occupied on an annual basis (Faulk 1964, 261–63). When native Anglo-American migrants, typically born west of the Mississippi River, and foreign-born Western European immigrants settled the area in the 1830s and 1840s, they adopted Tejano ranching traditions, as these tried methods eased their adaptation to unfamiliar and often inhospitable conditions (Jackson 1986, 597–99, 616–17). The earliest locally registered brand is the privately held Welder Ranch's 1833 trademark (Anonymous 2021a). Landowners delegated management to cowhands who shepherded freely wandering semi-wild livestock on the open range where few built resources marked the landscape. The name choice of La Vaca, meaning the cow, for the 1842 port established on the eponymous bay in Calhoun County, made obvious the continued local commitment to cattle (Kleiner 2021).<sup>6</sup> Statehood in 1845, and the founding of Calhoun County the next year, stirred changes in local agricultural production.

### [Nineteenth-Century Agriculture, 1846–1900](#)

Relative to typical Texas counties with numerous small farms, nineteenth-century Calhoun County had few, but large, agricultural properties improved with essential domestic and agricultural resource types. In the antebellum years, only a small number of farmers had more than 10 improved acres (DeBow 1853). By 1850, just more than 1,000 improved acres for crop production represented three percent of total farmland in the county, nine percent in 1860, and only four percent as late as 1900 (DeBow 1853; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census

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<sup>6</sup> Over time the name morphed to Lavaca and to Port Lavaca by 1887.

Office 1864; 1902a). The number and average sizes of agricultural properties fluctuated mildly throughout the last half of the century. Nevertheless, property values rose regularly and appreciably, indicating that agriculturists were improving their land with domestic and agricultural buildings and structures (Table 5). A typical agricultural property would have at least one dwelling, possibly other small dwellings for workers, and related domestic auxiliary resources, like a hand-dug water well and a privy. A gated fence might protect domestic landscape features like a kitchen garden or an ornamental or swept yard. Local agriculturists benefited only modestly from technological advancements like the scythe, plow, reaper, thresher, and cotton gin until after 1887, when they could finally purchase affordable new tools delivered in railroad shipments. These acquisitions required protective equipment sheds.

Table 5. Aggregate Agricultural Decennial Census Statistics for Calhoun County, 1850–1900.

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900
Number of agricultural properties	--	--	43	82	66	226
Average acreage	--	--	54	1,812	2,247	1,152
Value of all agricultural properties	\$75,365	\$44,400	\$55,750	\$117,668	\$365,370	\$1,302,850
Equipment value	\$1,164	\$2,875	\$3,881	\$3,075	\$61,650	\$18,850
Bushels of corn	7,660	3,925	4,165	2,072	4,660	30,230
Bales of ginned cotton	109	5	--	--	31	1,185
Pounds of wool	--	2,600	17,490	30,456	8,251	15,420
Sheep	480	779	2,119	7,247	3,310	4,102
Dairy cows	2,077	265	402	731	748	679
Beef cattle	5,921	5,154	12,529	21,713	32,629	38,571
Swines	845	293	180	46	353	1,018
Draft livestock	690	257	957	1,507	1,376	1,976

(DeBow 1853; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1864; 1872b; 1883; 1885; 1895; 1902a; 1902b)

The main perquisite to withstanding the Gulf Coast’s recurrent hostile climatic conditions was ready access to an array of local, regional, and national markets via early and increasingly reliable transportation networks. Chief exports were beef hides and tallow initially and, later in the century, sheep byproducts as well. These products were shipped to markets on early overland routes through Victoria or Goliad; on schooners, sloops, steamers, and packets from Indianola and Lavaca to domestic and international ports; and on limited railroad routes. The U.S. Army Quartermaster depot, at Lavaca until 1854 and then at Indianola, shipped local beef and sheep byproducts, among other goods, overland by wagon train to San Antonio, where Fort Sam Houston, the state’s principal military post and distribution point for federal forts positioned along the western frontier, guaranteed a ready client with substantial and long-term needs (Dase et al. 2010, E7; Kleiner 2021). By the late-nineteenth century, mechanically refrigerated railroad freight cars opened markets to local livestock ranchers who could then ship perishable meat in addition to more-durable byproducts.

Nineteenth-century cash-crop production in Calhoun County was lackluster, but local agrarians continued to improve their farms and ranches. Its coastal position exposed the area to unpredictable tropical storms and hurricanes, but the long, hot, humid summers allowed for an 11-month-long growing season. Throughout the century, local agriculturists practiced subsistence farming with limited, if any, participation in the market economy. Corn, versatile and essential to survival, was the requisite crop that provided for both the farm family and its livestock. Many farmsteads and ranches likely had corncribs for surplus storage although none appear to survive. All parts of the plant were valued: the grain for food, the husks for filling mattresses, the stalks and leaves for roof thatch and erosion control. Grain, hay, and grass augmented the livestock diet. Farming families also grew beans, oats, sweet potatoes, melons, and other vegetables, on a few acres or less of a larger farmstead, for their nutritional value (Jones 2005, 33, 38). These foods may have been stored in cellars on more inland properties, although none were identified during survey. Until the mid-twentieth century, many families kept one or two dairy cows and a few swine plus chickens to sustain their diets with dairy, pork, and poultry. These animals required either feed or grazing land and small barns, sheds, or coops for protection from the elements and predators. Even as immediately reliable new tools and horse-pulled equipment inspired thousands of Texas farmers to grow the fickle cotton plant, local production remained extremely limited until the mid-twentieth century. In fact, local cash-crop production of all types was inconsequential until 1900, with few Calhoun County crops reported in aggregate decennial agricultural censuses. Thus, the county likely had few mills for grains or syrup and cotton gins would have been small hand-cranked machines of wood.

Shifts in livestock numbers demonstrate tangible postbellum recovery and related improvements in Calhoun County (see Table 5). Although both beef cattle and sheep were profitable with minimal care, ranching required not only an intense awareness of seasons and weather conditions, range conditions for grazing and water, and diseases that could quickly deplete herds, but also a keen handle on managing finances since a livestock herd represented a considerable capital investment. Herders moved livestock to the best grazing conditions, usually on the prairies in spring, summer, and fall, and in brushlands or river bottoms during the brief winter season (Freier 1979, 120–21). Although they were seldom housed in buildings, ranchers provided feed and water troughs for their herds. The number of beef cattle declined slightly between 1850 and 1860, but then rose continuously, peaking in 1900. These numbers rose steadily despite two severe financial panics that crippled many Texas ranchers, weather extremes in 1886–1887 and 1891, and the closing of the open range with barbed-wire fences in the last half of that decade. Locals who cordoned large landholdings included the Bludworth, McFaddin, O'Connor, Pierce, Stafford, Stoner, and Ward families (Freier 1979, 120). Privates ranches with registered brands included those of the Foester (1852), Bindewald



(1872), Hawes (1873), Cavallin (1880), Traylor (1887), and Stofer (1892) families (Figure 24) (Anonymous 2021a). The gradual installation of fences that defined perimeter boundaries prompted ranchers to divide their land holdings more selectively and, using interior fences, defined pasturelands and other land-use functions for rotating livestock and segregating herds as needed. They built corrals and pens to hold the animals, related chutes to direct them, and installed windmills with related cisterns, troughs, or tanks to water them. Because these animals were driven to markets in San Antonio and beyond, the presence of slaughterhouses and tanneries on ranches was probably uncommon, although possible on larger holdings. With meat-packing operations in nearby towns, these types of resources, along with stockyards, were more probable in urban settings.

Sheep numbers crested in 1880 before a sharp decline in 1890 and modest rebound by 1900; pounds of blade-shorn wool fluctuated accordingly. Wool might be briefly stored on ranches but was more probably transported to urban centers for storage and shipment. Because ranchers used working livestock—horses, mules, asses, and oxen—to manage their cattle and sheep herds in large pastures and on extensive rangelands, the county had more draft animals per capita than the state average. These valuable draft animals were kept in corrals or pens with associated protective wood-frame barns that had interior feed racks.



Figure 24. This undated image shows two cowboys in front of the Bindewald ranch house, where a woman is seated on the front porch. The wood-frame side-gable house has an integrated full-width porch with a shed roof. The house has horizontal clapboard siding and a pair of double hung windows on either side of the center front door. A barb-wire fence protects the domestic yard (Seadrift History Book Committee 2012, 108).

### Twentieth-Century Agriculture, 1900–1945

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the built environment of rural Calhoun County evolved with more and larger agricultural properties and the growing prevalence of tenancy farming. For the first time, the number and value of farms and ranches rose substantially in 1900 and crested in 1930 before ebbing with Depression-era losses by 1940 (Table 6). Several farmers organizations formed in this century, some as early as 1907, such as the Six Mile Farmers Union, others as late as 1930, like the Olivia Cotton Growers Cooperative Marketing Association (Guidry 1951; Hardin 2021b). Most agricultural properties consisted of defined domestic workspace with a main dwelling, water well, privy, and sundry small buildings and

structures to support domestic life. By 1940, average agricultural property had declined overall, but was still 100 acres more than the state average, even with only 50 percent of Calhoun County in improved agricultural use, mostly as pasturelands. Technological advances encouraged investment in equipment, especially increasingly affordable motorized trucks and tractors, and farmers built garages and sheds to protect these vehicles. Tenancy spiked by 1920, climaxed in 1930, and declined subtly by 1940 as landowners reclaimed their property to combat the depressive economy (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1942a). Tenant properties had similar domestic and agricultural resources comparably organized into workspaces. Tenant dwellings were typically newer but less adequate than those on owner-operated properties (Gray et al. 1925, 581). This was likely true for other buildings and structures on tenant properties.

Table 6. Aggregate Agricultural Census Statistics for Calhoun County, 1900–1940.

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Number of agricultural properties	226	293	533	574	353
Average acreage	1,152	328	307	234	487
Value of all agricultural properties	\$1,302,850	\$2,431,011	\$6,415,284	\$7,124,768	\$3,597,097
Equipment value	\$18,850	\$46,988	\$255,578	\$479,755	\$402,224
Percent owner/tenant	70/30	64/36	38/61	35/65	41/58
Bushels of corn	30,230	22,710	75,234	49,812	133,936
Bales of ginned cotton	1,185	1,159	2,702	5,974	10,530
Pounds of wool	15,420	10,448 <sup>7</sup>	6,751	13,221	4,754
Sheep	4,102	706	1,484	2,520	822
Swines	1,018	637	2,009	613	943
Dairy cows	679	1,294	2,615	1,808	1,440
Beef cattle	38,571	14,091	12,207	11,017	8,963
Draft livestock	1,976	1,647	3,101	2,660	1,254

(U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1921; 1932a; 1942a; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census 1913a; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1902a; 1902b)

Calhoun County’s livestock yields were fickle in the early decades of the twentieth century. In accord with state and national trends, livestock numbers and yields succumbed to Depression-era recession by 1940 (see Table 6). Local agriculturists continued to raise swine, dairy cows, poultry, and provisional crops to sustain their families. They also retained relatively large numbers of draft animals for livestock management purposes and these animals, plus dairy cows, were sheltered in barns or sheds. Strikingly, the number of beef bovines diminished annually, sinking below 9,000 head in 1940, a record low for the century (Figure 25). The scourge of Texas Fever, the common appellation for an epidemic of babesia that overtook the cattle industry in the late-nineteenth century, came under control after the turn of the century as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Animal Industry instituted a

<sup>7</sup> With no weight statistic provided for wool in 1910, this represents the 1,393 fleeces shorn at 7.5 pounds per unit.

campaign to stamp out the disease using in-ground dipping vats. Cattle were guided individually through a slender working chute to a narrow concrete channel, immersed progressively deeper in the vat until briefly but fully submerged in a cleansing solution, then directed through gradually shallower levels until exiting (Dase et al. 2010, E12).

The number of sheep and amount of shorn wool peaked in 1930, and these animals were plunge-dipped in similar in-ground structures designed for their smaller stature. By this time, some producers had replaced blades with shearing machines to shave fleece from the animals. Shearing was typically accomplished on a raised wood platform or concrete slab, often under cover of a roof that was temporary but might be a permanent wood-frame shearing shed. As was the case elsewhere in Texas, livestock raisers in Calhoun County suffered from deflation and bankruptcies after 1920 (Richardson and Hinton 2021).



Figure 25. Several men have gathered to rope cattle in a wood-fence corral at the Steinberg Ranch near Seadrift in this undated image (Johnstone 2016, 238).

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the county's two cash crops achieved new heights and an initial burst of truck-crop farming that fizzled. Corn production vacillated



decennially, setting a record high in 1940. These yields upped the need for storage cribs, bins, silos, or barns on farms and ranches and in similar structures or elevators at feed mills. Calhoun County's agriculturists finally turned to King Cotton, despite its unpredictability, and ginned bales almost doubled every decennial beginning in 1910, for a record high in 1940. Cotton farmers in the county included the Wooldridge family at Kenyon Island and Long Mott, the Blake family on Guadalupe Island, and the Williams family at Long Mott. The "island" farmers transported their cotton on river boats to the gin at Seadrift (Seadrift History Book Committee 2012, 110). Cotton growers usually transported their yields soon after harvest to a complex where the raw material was stored in a cotton house or warehouse, ginned through a large machine, and formed into 400-hundred-pound bales for sale and shipment. Still, many local farmers abstained from growing cotton on the thick, heavy soils, and some turned to truck crops (Freier 1979, 225). Some of this activity can be credited to private investors, including the Alamo Beach Investment Company, Calhoun County Cattle Company, and the American Townsite Company, who touted the warm climate by the sea with rich fertile soil and ready transportation access to wealthy markets. These entrepreneurs advertised tracts where truck crops grew easily on model farms, as-yet unbuilt canneries for production, and town sites with amenities like hotels, cottages, and seaside pavilions (Alamo Beach Investment Company 1910; Calhoun County Cattle Company 1910; Powers n.d.). The local spurt in fruit and vegetable crops was short-lived, however, without proper irrigation and landholders (Figure 26).



Figure 26. This lemon crop near Port Lavaca is positioned very close to the farm home in this undated image (Johnstone 2016, 232).

Fundamental changes to transportation and the composition of the population impacted agricultural production and practices in Calhoun County between about 1910 and 1940. First, improvements to and expansion of transportation networks benefited local agriculturists. These included channel dredging through Pass Cavallo, enhancements to vehicular roads and highways, and construction of the STLBMR, all of which provided easier access for exporting goods to more inland markets and importing modern equipment and building materials, like milled and dimensional lumber (Kleiner 2021).

In the 1930s, the federal government offered relief programs to tackle the devastating effects of severe economic conditions. The Agricultural Adjustment Act implemented a series of programs designed to control surpluses and maintain a minimum income level for struggling agriculturists. In the interest of removing glut from overabundant markets, farmers and ranchers reduced acreage, accepted quotas, abandoned cultivated crops, and slaughtered livestock. Farmers engaged in soil conservation practices, such as terracing, to prevent erosion on overused croplands; in current aerial images, however, remnants of these practices are not readily apparent in Calhoun County. Qualifying local farmers, both land holders and tenants,

diversified with crops like legumes and pastures of Bermuda grass; conserved soil and prevented erosion; and received payment for reduction of cotton acreage (*Victoria Advocate* 1937a, 7). Although some of these organizations existed before and during the Great Depression, in its aftermath, local branches of federal- and state-sponsored agencies or private organizations played a greater role in helping and monitoring agricultural activity. The U.S. Department of Agriculture had a small office in downtown Port Lavaca, for example (Sanborn Map Company 1940). The department sponsored both the agricultural extension service and the soil conservation district. Other local organizations included an agricultural association; women’s groups like home demonstration clubs; and youth groups like 4-H and Future Farmers of America.

Compensation measures taken during the extended national agricultural depression aided Calhoun County’s farm and ranch families, although housing conditions remained bleak for many as late as 1940. That year, of 740 rural homes<sup>8</sup>, 81 percent were tenant occupied. Almost all rural families lived in single-family dwellings (732 of the 740 rural houses), with 85 percent built before 1936, and only 112 homes built in the previous decade. About 98 percent of ruralites had either electric service (93) or some form of gas (633) to light their homes, and more than half (387) used gas for cooking fuel, but 19 percent still used wood-burning cookstoves (138). More than 96 percent of rural homes were also heated with wood-burning stoves and only three rural families had “modern” steam- or furnace-driven warm air systems. About 80 percent of families had no running water; of these, 45 percent had water within 50 feet of their dwelling, but another 36 percent had to walk further to reach a water supply. Although almost four percent of homes had indoor toilets, 92 percent still used an outdoor privy, and another four percent had neither an indoor nor outdoor commode. Almost 90 percent of rural homes had no bathtub. About 11 percent of families used mechanical refrigeration in their homes and another 33 percent had ice boxes, but the remaining 54 percent used cisterns and wells to keep perishable foods cool (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1943). In addition to dwellings, most rural properties still maintained the same types of domestic and agricultural buildings and structures—barns, outbuildings, and fences, at a minimum—as in previous decades, but this changed dramatically after World War II (Figure 27).

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<sup>8</sup> This discussion is limited rural farm homes, which includes those dwellings on land in agricultural use. Rural non-farm homes are excluded from this discussion.



Figure 27. Young children often cared for chickens on the family farm. This undated image shows a large barn (background) and plenty of protective wood fencing to keep the flock safe from predators on this property (Johnstone 2016, 235).

### Post-World War II Agriculture, 1945–1973

After World War II through the mid-1970s, agriculture remained a substantial part of the local economy with almost two-thirds of the county in agricultural use during this period. While the number of agricultural properties in Calhoun County declined to fewer than 300 in every decennial after 1949, average acreage fluctuated, but ultimately increased, a sign of consolidation and the move toward agribusiness (Table 7). By 1950, more than 200 farms were commercial establishments (Kleiner 2021). Concomitantly, tenancy gradually and substantially declined and the parallel rise in agricultural property values was dramatic, surging 279 percent between 1949 and 1959, and rising as the century progressed. An effort to plant rice locally resulted in at least 45 miles of canals, evident on topographic maps as levees, powered by 10 lift pumps that the Calhoun County Canal Company managed. This system initially irrigated 14,000 acres planted using airplanes to distribute seed. The Jenkins Brothers, who pioneered the crop locally, operated a rice dryer in Long Mott, and John Hancock and his brothers established a rice mill in Port Lavaca (Stiles 1947, 5B). The anticipated boom failed to be widespread however, with only 11 farms growing rice on 3,264 acres in 1959 and 17 farms



on 5,626 acres in 1964 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1964). A few farmers installed private irrigation systems, but as late as 1974, only 26 farms with an average of 359 acres used these structures to water crops (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1977).

Table 7. Aggregate Agricultural Census Statistics for Calhoun County, 1949–1974.

	1949	1959	1969	1974
Number of agricultural properties	331	259	297	253
Average acreage	731	610	702	833
Average value of agricultural property	\$24,054	\$90,924	\$136,905	\$237,519
Percent owner/tenant	62/37	67/33	71/29	72/28
Bushels of corn	31,759	30,052	16,006	2,408
Bales of ginned cotton	17,111	15,595	7,905	3,587
Pounds of wool	1,582	2,992	--	--
Sheep	608	653	161	1
Swines	607	340	222	77
Dairy cows	572	140	29	29
Beef cattle	15,176	14,518	20,375	20,743
Draft livestock	427	239	212	158

(U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1961; 1972; 1977)

Apart from beef cattle, Calhoun County’s agricultural yields plummeted after World War II in large part due to the 1950s drought (see Table 7). Fewer families raised provisional livestock or crops, and dairy cows shrank to nil. With increasingly inefficient drainage, poor irrigation, and soil compaction, the few local cash crops all but dissipated by the early-1970s. Corn production dropped almost 50 percent between 1959 and 1969, and cotton yields declined by 60 percent between 1959 and 1974. In the aftermath of the drought, sheep herding decreased precipitously by 1969 and ceased completely by 1974. By 1970, local agricultural production was focused on cattle, cotton, rice, and grain sorghums.

The built environment of agricultural properties in Calhoun County changed dramatically after World War II. In the domestic sphere, original main houses had often already evolved with additions that enlarged and modernized to accommodate a growing family. Agriculturists who prospered might abandon, demolish, or otherwise replace an older dwelling with a newly constructed home. Engine-powered vehicles and aircraft—trucks, tractors, small airplanes, and helicopters—diminished the need for draft animals and related buildings even as cattle ranchers grew their herds in the post-drought years to almost 21,000 head (see Table 7). Large wood- and metal-frame barns protected vehicles, aircraft, and equipment, such as combines, mower conditioners, pickup balers, windrowers, and harvesters. Operators added miles of fences, interior roads, with advantageously placed permanent corrals and pens, related loading chutes, gates with cattle guards, and more unusual additions like landing

strips. Post-drought, many added water sources using windmills and natural drainages and storing supplies in troughs, livestock tanks, or reservoirs. Ranchers required increasingly heavy capital investments for these improvements. Large-scale ranches more readily adapted to an industry that remained cyclical but embraced new technology. Breeding and industry promotion took a progressively greater role (Richardson and Hinton 2021).

Facilities that supported Calhoun County's agriculturists also evolved. After the 1950s, local livestock feed lots and auction houses attracted slaughterhouses, tanneries, and meat-packing plants based in larger cities that benefited from reduced transportation costs due to proximity. Soil conservation districts, drainage districts, and the county agricultural extension office, all of which supported farmers and ranchers with various programs, built facilities to sustain their staff and projects. Organizations like the soil conservation district and agricultural extension service became increasingly active, working with local farmers and ranchers to improve practices. The county fairgrounds underwent improvements with a new agriculture building in 1957 (*Victoria Advocate* 1957h, 14).

For the most part, extant agricultural resources in Calhoun County date to the twentieth century. Most farms and ranches have a cluster of resources at a hub or headquarters with their siting dependent on the location of water. Few resources date to the nineteenth century for several reasons including the many harsh weather events that caused severe damage; the relatively low number of contemporaneous agricultural properties; the very limited number and type of buildings and structures required for livestock ranching and their temporary lifespans; the tendency to replace older resources with modern buildings and structures; and, where land is subdivided, the addition of newer homes on smaller parcels. However, nineteenth-century locations include four Texas Family Land Heritage Registry properties, two of which have associated cemeteries that indicate family relationships and longevity of ownership. Extant pre-World War II rural houses have experienced additions or alterations, particularly the installation of indoor plumbing in kitchens and bathrooms and electrification. In the decade immediately after World War II, agricultural resources were typically of wood construction, but by the late 1950s, metal became increasingly preferable and prefabricated buildings and structures became ubiquitous.

### Periods of Significance

Representative and distinct elements of local agricultural history guided development of four discrete periods of significance for this context. The earliest period introduces livestock ranching and attendant subsistence farming from 1824 to 1846, when native-born Anglo American and foreign-born European immigrants settled in Calhoun County and continued Tejano ranching and farming traditions. The period between 1846 and 1900 parallels

antebellum and postbellum economic extremes and marked the development of varied transportation routes and nominal technological advancements. Between 1900 and 1945, production recounts modestly higher cash-crop yields despite agricultural and economic depression, but new lows for livestock herds. The final period, from 1945 to 1973, considers an overall decline of all agricultural yields except cattle ranching.

### Areas of Significance

Agriculture, Architecture, Conservation, Engineering, Ethnic Heritage

### Related Property Types

- Agricultural resources:
  - Complexes: with requisite domestic work space with related buildings and structures, agricultural work space with related buildings and structures, and various types of improved and unimproved lands, such as feed and cash croplands, terraces, pastures, orchards, fencelines, woodlands
  - Buildings, structures, and objects: headquarters buildings, livestock barns/sheds (for horses, dairy cows, swine, or sheep/goats), storage barns/sheds, corncribs, silos, permanent troughs, coops/cotes/roosts, corrals/pens/chutes, dipping vats, livestock tanks, reservoirs, fences/gates, entry gates/posts/pylons, cattle guards
  - Support resources: blacksmith shops, machine shops, granaries, dipping vats, irrigation systems, agricultural extension facilities, soil conservation district facilities, drainage district facilities, livestock feed lots/auction facilities, county fairgrounds
  - Processing facilities: gristmills, syrup mills, cotton gins, stockyards, slaughter houses, tanneries, shearing facilities, rice dryers, rice mills
- Domestic resources:
  - Single-family dwellings, multiple-family dwellings, multiple-worker dwellings
  - Secondary buildings or structures: sheds, garages, hand- or machine-dug wells, well/pump houses, cisterns/stands, privies, windmills, cellars
- Landscape resources: kitchen gardens, ornamental yards, swept yards, fences/gates
- Funerary resources: cemeteries
- Transportation resources: livestock trails, ranch/farm interior roads, landing strips

## SUBTHEME: COMMERCE

### Introduction

Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor are the focus of this context.<sup>9</sup> Despite the regular threat of severe weather events, the coastal locations of these three towns and their ready access to water-related transportation initially motivated the densest commercial development in Calhoun County. Its nineteenth-century prominence as the state's second busiest port, Indianola was never rebuilt after an 1886 hurricane destroyed the town. Since Indianola's only extant historic-age resources are cemeteries, the community is excluded from this context. Small towns with nineteenth-century roots—Green Lake, Long Mott, Six Mile, Olivia, and others—did not realize commercial development analogous to that of Calhoun County's three larger towns and are also excluded from this context. Throughout most of their respective histories, the three towns offered both conventional commercial businesses and those business types that catered to tourism.

### Commerce, 1887–1919

Before the railroad connected Port Lavaca to inland communities, the local population was in decline. By 1884, only 70 people resided there and businesses were limited to one general store and two dry goods/grocery stores (Maywald 2021). Many survivors of the 1886 hurricane who resided elsewhere, especially Indianola, moved to Port Lavaca in the wake of the devastating storm. In 1887, the Gulf, Western Texas, and Pacific Railroad linked Port Lavaca to Victoria, which prompted entrepreneurs to gradually establish both typical commercial businesses and those attuned to abundant opportunities highlighting the coastal setting's natural attributes. To support the growing local population and the new presence of the railroad, retail and wholesale businesses opened along East North Street, now known as East Main Street. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century downtown commerce included common enterprises: groceries, dry goods, mercantiles, drug stores, steam laundries, saloons, newspaper and printing companies, and various other retail operations (Figure 28, Figure 29). Near the railroad, harbor, or on the outskirts were wholesale businesses like lumber and coal yards, transfer companies and warehouse storage, bottling works and breweries, barrel-making and machine shops, carriage and wagon works, and milling and planning companies.

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<sup>9</sup> Additional topics suggested in the research design are not addressed since the sources examined indicate they had little or no bearing on commerce in Calhoun County and its municipalities. These topics included whether and how public parks and wildlife management areas have restricted growth or attracted sizeable development to communities, but neither was obviously apparent. Another proposed topic was whether historical planning trends—such as models for planning based on zoning, public health and housing, landscape design, and urban renewal—were evident, but those that are all post-date 1973.





Figure 28. This c. 1910 image, looking north on the packed-shell Guadalupe Street in Port Lavaca, shows parked animal-drawn drays, one- and two-story masonry commercial buildings, and telephone and electric poles and lines on both sides of the street. Buildings include O'Neil's Meat Market, the First National Bank, and the Bank Saloon (left) and the Cruce Building and saloon (right) (Johnstone 2002b, 2:13, 2016, 147).



Figure 29. Horse-drawn drays with burlap-wrapped cotton bales are parked outside the one-story wood-frame Bay Trading Company's Big Bargain House, at the northeast corner of Main and Colorado Streets, in September 1910. The building's full-width porch had a metal-clad shed canopy with a false parapet above (Johnstone 2002b, 2:8). T. A. McKamey, W. T. Moore, and Roy Miller owned the company which purchased most of the cotton local farmers raised and traded general merchandise. This was the eventual location of the Ed Melcher Company (Johnstone 2016; 31, 166).

The salt and fresh waters in Calhoun County enticed visiting sport fishers, coastal and inland fowl hunters, beachgoers, and excursioners. Away from home, travelers needed lodging, food, outfitting, and entertainments (Figure 30). Most towns of its size had a few hotels near the railroad and restaurants for visitors and residents, but burgeoning local tourism was cause for more than average numbers of these types of establishments at Port Lavaca. When the StLBMR extended the line from Victoria with daily service to Seadrift and Port O'Connor in 1910, these towns boomed with new enterprises. The American Townsite Company and the Calhoun County Cattle Company had already planned and implemented improvements for these destinations. The companies sought permanent residents, but also targeted temporary visitors, and built or encouraged hotels, restaurants, and tourist-related businesses at these locations. In 1910, at least 25 adults were either hotel employees or proprietors, 15 were



based in Port Lavaca, with the remainder residing in Seadrift or Port O'Connor. Another 16 adults, worked at restaurants (U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census 1910). Port Lavaca had the Beach/Lavaca and the Navidad Hotels; Seadrift had the Hotel Lafitte and the Bridges boarding house; and Port O'Connor had the Hotel LaSalle. Each of these towns had restaurants and outfitters that supplied transportation and equipment for hunting, fishing, and sailing excursions. Francis and Katherine "Kitty" Starbuck Montier, and later other family members, operated well-known Port Lavaca restaurant the Shell Fish Café, which opened in 1904 (Johnstone 2005, 25). Shoreside pavilions had bath houses and ballrooms. Some buildings were spared, but the tourist trade abruptly ceased in 1919 when a severe hurricane destroyed and damaged much property. By 1920, fewer than 10 employees worked at the only two hotels and two restaurants in operation at that time, all in Port Lavaca (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1920).



Figure 30. Ganado Sports operated one of the many launches and schooners that sailed hunting excursions on the Gulf of Mexico and inland bays. The Leonora plied local waters as early as the 1890s (Johnstone 2016, 175).

### Commerce, 1919–1973

Tourism-related and other commercial businesses gradually recovered after the perilous 1919 hurricane. In 1927, the two Port Lavaca hotels were operational and two-plus blocks of stores of unspecified types, with the exception of a single drug store, were extant on East North Street between Commerce and Virginia Streets. None, however, were noted as restaurants or were otherwise tourist-specific (Sanborn Map Company 1927). By 1930, a second hotel had opened in Seadrift, and Port Lavaca had at least five restaurant waiters or cooks (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1930). All three towns had revived by 1940 with hotels, restaurants, and other tourist activities. In Port Lavaca, businesses along East Main Street included at least six restaurants, plus a movie theater (Sanborn Map Company 1940). Accommodations typical of the pre-war period, such as tourist homes or motor camps, cottages, cabins, courts, or inns, do not appear to have been locally ubiquitous, but the 1936 Mother Hubbard Courts, with proprietors Jay and Adele Caruthers Hubbard, offered one such lodging option (Johnstone 2005, 43). Traditional local businesses included Clarence’s grocery, C. H. Stiernberg’s grocery, F. M. Ryon’s drug store, Madden’s drug store, the Main Street Theater, and a barbershop in Seadrift (Johnstone 2003b, 4:43, 53, 61). Port O’Connor had three general stores, a bank, and the Anchor Lumber Company, and local proprietors included John Kingan and D. D. Brian (Johnstone 2002c, 3:17–18; Rubert 2021c). The hurricanes of 1942 and 1945 imposed anew the cycle of rebuilding (Figure 31).





Figure 31. After the 1942 storm, masonry buildings (left) suffered window, door, and roof damage, and more-fragile wood-frame buildings (center) were destroyed. The precariously spindly metal water tower (far right) however, survived (Johnstone 2003b, 4:46).

Beginning in the 1920s, affordability and the resulting popularity of automobiles generated new prospects for commercial ventures. In 1927, vestiges of an earlier era included a blacksmith, the post office, a drugstore, and a bank. But by this time, Port Lavaca's three-block downtown also had one gasoline-filling station and four automobile repair shops (Sanborn Map Company 1927). By 1940, the downtown included one automobile dealership and two corner gasoline-filling stations with automobile repair shops on the periphery (Sanborn Map Company 1940). Business owners in Port Lavaca included Floyd Blake, Charles H. Boyd, Earl Butler, P. K. Dudgeon, Beverly Elliott, E. Harwood, John B. Mahon, Edmund Melcher, Gus C. Meles, L. G. Steve and Irene Kutris Skarvellis, Faye Sterling, Gilbert R. Thayer Sr. and Jr., brothers Emilio and Ernest Vela, George Wasserman, and Rudy and Marie Zacharias (Johnstone 2005, 32, 41–43, 48, 76, 77, 79). In the aftermath of the 1940s storms and World War II, Calhoun County's rebuilt towns became even more automobile centric.

From the 1950s through the early-1970s, the prevalence of automobile transportation shifted consumer interests. During this period, state highways and local roads underwent improvements that included reconstructing older routes and constructing new alignments,

paving smaller and feeder streets, and opening a new causeway over Lavaca Bay. For local commerce, this provided more locations with ample parking to build new or expand existing businesses that were removed from downtown Port Lavaca, which was almost fully built out (Figure 32). Financial institutions like the 1955 Coastal Bank Savings Association, the 1960s First National Bank, and the 1970 First State Bank and Trust Company all remained close to but on the outskirts of downtown initially; the two banks eventually built new locations along the re-routed State Highway 35 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 142–44).



Figure 32. By the time this image was taken, which is looking north in about 1950, Port Lavaca’s main streets were replete with one- and two-story masonry commercial buildings with portions of some blocks used for parking lots (Cormier 2013, 71).

Visitors to Calhoun County sought lodging and guidance on outdoor activities. In the post-war period, accommodations for the traveling public had expanded to include roadside motels built along major routes, such as the 1956 Sands Motel on State Highway 35 in Port Lavaca, the 1954 Holiday Motel on State Highway 35 on the outskirts of Port Lavaca, and the 1971 Bay Motel on State Highway 185 in Seadrift (Calhoun County Appraisal District 2021). Highway maps were such an indispensable source of essential information that corporations, like the Gulf Oil Company, devised guides for touring motorists, which they called “Fishgides,” mapping major roads with annotated details for fishers, like the locations of boats for rent, bait, specific fish types, and, not surprisingly, gasoline-filling stations. The reverse side indicated details



about deep-sea boat departures, area-specific tackle suggestions, and seasonal availability of various fishes (Gulf Oil Corporation 1960s). When the Viking Mall Shopping Center on the outskirts of Port Lavaca opened in 1962, it hosted several regionally prominent department stores (Figure 33) (*Victoria Advocate* 1962b).



Figure 33. In 1962, the Viking Mall Shopping Center, at the State Highway 35/North Virginia Street intersection on the outskirts of Port Lavaca, opened as the first million-dollar, all-weather community shopping center on the mid-Gulf Coast. The shopping center initially had 16 tenants, including a Cole's Department Store, a Lack's Furniture Store, a drug store, and an H.E. Butt Supermarket. The extensive parking lot was replete with freestanding overhead Googie-influenced lighting (*Victoria Advocate* 1962b).

Noting the competition from new roadside enterprises, downtown commercial businesses attempted to stay relevant with updated and replaced storefront materials during the post-war period. In some cases, new designs followed traditional fenestration patterns with newer materials like structural or flat glass, porcelain enamel, or screen slipcovers; in other cases, stone, brick, wood panels, or sheet metal enclosed original storefronts. In addition to the havoc hurricanes have wrought on downtown Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor, big-box and chain stores along automobile-oriented routes in and on their outskirts prompted decline, and many historic-age commercial buildings in these towns have empty storefronts.

Extant commercial resources in Calhoun County date to the twentieth century. Commercial central business districts are in downtown Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor, and post-World War II commercial corridors are in and on the outskirts of these three towns. A smattering of commercial resources is in or near some of Calhoun County's small communities. Commercial resources have been altered as the result of resolving hurricane damage and modernizing storefronts. Many downtown buildings are vacant. Research did not reveal a segregated Black commercial area or business district in any of Calhoun County's towns.

### Periods of Significance

Commerce in Calhoun County has two distinct periods of significance most applicable to its three largest towns, Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor. The first period, 1887 to 1919, pertains to late-nineteenth-century commercial development and related improvements between two of the most damaging hurricanes to hit the area. This period also encompasses permanent and consistent railroad service to all three towns and the consequent expansion of commercial businesses that residents and tourists patronized. The period between 1919 and 1973 corresponds with repeated recovery and redevelopment patterns starting with the first severe hurricane of the century. Throughout this era, local commercial businesses continued the cycle of repairing and rebuilding to varying degrees after storms hit. In the post-World War II decades, economic stability and expansion resulted in population growth and related commercial development, especially that associated with automobile culture.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Commerce, Community Planning and Development, Ethnic Heritage, Social History

### Related Property Types

- Domestic resources: hotels, motels, inns
- Commerce/trade resources:
  - Businesses: office buildings
  - Professional offices: engineering, law, professional services
  - Organizational offices: trade unions, labor unions, professional associations
  - Financial institutions:
    - Depository: banks, credit unions, mortgage loan companies
    - Contractual: insurance companies
    - Investment: investment banks, financial management companies



- Specialty stores: automobile showrooms, repair shops, gasoline-filling stations; blacksmithies; grocery stores, supermarkets, bakeries; clothing, hardware, furniture, other retail stores; boat rental, bait and tackle shops, outfitters, hunting/fishing/sailing guides and excursion services
- Department stores: marketplaces; trading posts; general, dry goods, mercantile, department stores
- Restaurants: restaurants, cafés, bars, roadhouses, taverns
- Warehouses: warehouses, commercial storage facilities
- Funerary resources: mortuaries, funeral homes, crematoriums
- Landscape resources: parking lots, street furniture/objects

## SUBTHEME: MARITIME HISTORY

### Introduction

Maritime shipping from coastal Texas evolved in conjunction with the state's economic development. Before the Civil War, Galveston and Velasco were the most important ports on the Gulf Coast. These ports were primarily engaged in trade with New Orleans. Most trade was of the common-carrier type, an evolution from merchant-traders more typical in the early-nineteenth century. Shallow water ports, including Brazos Santiago at Port Isabel, Indianola, Port Lavaca, Corpus Christi, Port Aransas, and Sabine Pass, mainly served intercoastal trade which generally cleared at Galveston (Handbook of Texas Online 2021a). After the Civil War, maritime shipping increased but shallow-water ports struggled to compete. Smaller ports declined partly due to the growth of railroad transportation in the 1870s and 1880s and partly due to the steadily increasing draft of ocean-shipping vessels, which required deeper harbors and waterways for navigation (Handbook of Texas Online 2021a).

### Maritime Exploration, Settlement, and Immigration, 1685–1892

Subgroups of the Karankawa tribe already populated the area when the Spanish began exploring coastal Texas in the 1500s. The first documented exploration of the present-day Calhoun County coast was by French explorer René Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, whose expedition party wrecked the ship *L'Amable* trying to cross the sandbar at Cavallo Pass in 1685. He came ashore somewhere near Powderhorn Lake and constructed a temporary fort on the eastern end of Matagorda Island (Kleiner 2021; Weddle 2021a). Neither the Spanish nor the French permanently settled in Calhoun County. Early colonization in the nearby cities Victoria, Goliad, and Refugio occurred during Mexican rule but was mostly limited to temporary settlements in present-day Calhoun County as the 1824 National Colonization Law and the 1825 state law of Coahuila and Texas did not allow colonization within 10 leagues of the Gulf

Coast (Barker 2021). This holdover from Spanish law required all imports to come through the Port of Veracruz. The Mexican government made an exception in 1825 for Galveston at the request of Stephen F. Austin and the Baron de Bastrop because of its ideal location for a seaport (Francaviglia 1998). The Mexican Government passed an 1830 law that opened coastal trade to foreigners. The first shipping port in Calhoun County was established by John J. Linn for the Martin de León empresario colony in 1831 (Bishop 2021; Kleiner 2021). Known as Linnville, the warehouse and wharf were near present-day Port Lavaca. When Linnville was destroyed in an 1840 Comanche raid, its settlers relocated to Lavaca (Kleiner 2021). After seven wharves were constructed at Port Lavaca in 1842, local entrepreneurs began exporting agricultural products, particularly cotton, from inland counties.

The development of ports along the Texas Gulf Coast occurred as ship design was going through rapid technological change. Sailing vessels became specialized with clippers for ocean travel and schooners for coastal voyages. Steamboats revolutionized coastal and river travel that converged at New Orleans, a major water-related transportation hub. The first steamboat came to Texas from New York in 1829, but regular service did not begin until 1837, when the Morgan Steamship Lines opened a route from New Orleans to Galveston and Velasco. The Morgan Steamship Lines expanded service to Port Lavaca in 1852 (Francaviglia 1998).

European immigration to Texas began in earnest in the mid-nineteenth century. A group of German immigrants led by Carl, Prince of Solms Braunfels, landed at Indian Point in 1844 and established the town of Indianola (Figure 34). The Morgan Steamship Lines relocated its service to Powder Horn near Indianola shortly thereafter and spurred the growth of Indianola as a port city (Francaviglia 1998; Handbook of Texas Online 2021b). By the mid-1850s, Indianola's port was second only to Galveston in commercial success (Borgens, Lawrence, and Gearhart II 2007). Increased maritime traffic and trade drew more European immigrants, via the port at Indianola, to east, south, and central Texas, travelling by wagon roads and later railroads (Francaviglia 1998).



Figure 34. The port at Indianola was an important immigration point by the mid-nineteenth century (Barkley and Odintz 2000).

### [Navigational Improvements, 1849–1912](#)

Despite the presence of navigational hazards along the coast and its barrier islands, no lighthouses were constructed until after the United States annexed Texas in 1845. In 1847 and 1850, Congress appropriated funds and authorized the erection of lighthouses, including those at Bolivar Point near Galveston and at Matagorda Island (U.S. Congress 1847a; 1850). The Matagorda Island Lighthouse, originally constructed in 1852 near Pass Cavallo between Matagorda Island and the Matagorda Peninsula, was the first in service on the Texas Coast (Freier 1979). Congress appropriated additional funds in 1853 for the placement of buoys at the entrance to Matagorda Bay, in 1854 for the Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse in Matagorda Bay, and in 1856 for a beacon light at the mouth of the bayou at Saluria (U.S. Congress 1853; 1854; 1856). The Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse, on the southern portion of Half Moon Reef, was constructed in 1858. The “screw pile” lighthouse was a wood structure constructed on iron pilings driven into the bottom of Matagorda Bay (Francaviglia 1998).

All the Calhoun County lighthouses and navigational aids constructed before the Civil War were damaged or destroyed by the Confederacy or by hurricanes in the decades that followed. Confederate troops destroyed the 1858 Swash Lighthouse inside Matagorda Bay and the beacon lighthouse at Saluria in 1861, and neither was reconstructed. The 1872 West Shoal Light and East Shoal Light of the Decros Point Light Station, that marked the outer boundaries of the channel, are no longer extant; they were destroyed in the 1875 hurricane and never reconstructed (Cipra 1983; Holland Jr. 1981).

Confederate sabotage and subsequent neglect and erosion around the foundation damaged the Matagorda Island Lighthouse, which was dismantled in 1867. It was reconstructed in 1873 in a new location, then operated by light keepers until the mid-twentieth century, when electric lines were built to the island. The U.S. Coast Guard maintained the lighthouse from this period until 1995 when it was decommissioned. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns the lighthouse now, and that agency, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the Texas General Land Office operate the structure by joint agreement (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Oko 2013; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2011).

The Confederacy controlled the Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse during the Civil War and kept it dark. The U.S. Government repaired the structure and placed it back into service in 1868. Severely damaged by a 1942 hurricane, it was condemned by the U.S. Coast Guard and removed from service. The lighthouse was temporarily relocated in the Point Comfort dredging yard and then donated to the Calhoun County Historical Commission. In 1979, the H. E. Butt Foundation moved the structure to its permanent location on a tract adjacent to the Port Lavaca Chamber of Commerce where it was repaired and painted (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).

### [Harbor Improvements, 1865–1900](#)

In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, schooners, sloops, steamers, and packets sailed from Port Lavaca and Indianola to domestic and international ports in the Gulf of Mexico, and to Philadelphia and New York, among other Atlantic Seaboard harbors (*Lavaca Journal* 1848, *The Indianola Bulletin* 1853). The import and export of freight on water routes saw major growth during this period and the connection between railroads and ports was an important contributing factor to the increase in maritime activities and growth of communities. Maritime traffic increased and navigation aids prevented loss of life or cargo. In 1847, Congress established a port of entry at Saluria on the northeastern end of Matagorda Island, with Matagorda, Aransas, Copano, and Corpus Christi as points of delivery (U.S. Congress 1847b). The custom house was moved to La Salle, six miles south of Indianola, in 1850 (Handbook of Texas Online 2021f). The U.S. Army established a depot in Indianola during the Mexican-



American War (1846–1848), which remained there for the next three decades, providing imported military supplies to interior forts, including a shipment of camels from the Middle East by U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis in 1859 (Francaviglia 1998; McComb 1999). In 1871, the Mallory Line, a Morgan Steamship Lines competitor, established a direct route between New York and Indianola (Francaviglia 1998). The Morgan Steamship Lines headquartered at Indianola until 1878, offering regular voyages to New York (Kleiner 2021). Commercial fishing activity also began to increase in the late-nineteenth century, particularly oyster fishing (Figure 35) (Francaviglia 1998).



Figure 35. This 1907 image depicts oyster sheds and commercial fishing vessels at the Port Lavaca harbor (Johnstone 2016).

Several factors combined to impede the development of Calhoun County’s ports during the late-nineteenth century. Rivalry among local ports regarding the Morgan Steamship Lines terminus hindered cooperation to improve shared resources, such as railroad connections or channel improvements. The Confederate destruction of harbors at Indianola, Port Lavaca, and Saluria during the Civil War further impeded development. The time it took to recover during Reconstruction gave the port in Galveston, which was not destroyed and had an intact connected railroad, a major advantage in becoming the main Texas port. An 1875 hurricane destroyed Saluria and caused considerable damage at Indianola and Port Lavaca. Another

hurricane in 1886 destroyed Indianola (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981). Finally, efforts to deepen the channel at Pass Cavallo between 1879 and 1885 failed (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Gadus and Freeman 2005). As a result, Port Lavaca was a secondary harbor, receiving cargo first shipped to larger ports on ocean vessels and then re-loaded onto smaller coastal ships.

### [Channelization and Harbor Improvements, c. 1850–1960](#)

Congress began to fund coastal waterway channelization in Texas at about the same time the federal government began to build the first lighthouses. One of the first improvements was a canal constructed in the 1850s that changed the outlet of Caney Creek to Matagorda Bay from the Gulf of Mexico (Alperin 1983). In 1873, Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act, authorizing a study on an inland waterway of the Texas Coast and appropriating funds for improvements to rivers and harbors in several locations, including the entrance to Matagorda Bay and the channel to Indianola (Alperin 1983; U.S. Congress 1873). Congress appropriated funds again in 1876, 1878, and 1881 for improvements to the Pass Cavallo inlet into Matagorda Bay (U.S. Congress 1876; 1878; 1881). Due to the projected costs of the inland waterway project, the federal government did not pursue these improvements during the nineteenth century. No funds were ever appropriated again for a project of this scale; however, less costly channelization projects near Galveston were completed between the 1890s and the early-twentieth century (Alperin 1983).

Development of channels and canals continued in the early- to mid-twentieth century along the Texas Gulf Coast, including in Calhoun County. In 1905, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) began to study inland waterways along the Louisiana and Texas coasts. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Inland Waterways Commission to conduct a comprehensive report of the nation's water resources, including waterways as transportation routes. In response to the appointment and report of this commission and the lobbying of the Interstate Inland Water League, the Rivers and Harbors Act that Congress passed in 1907 authorized funds to construct canals and waterways along the Gulf Coast, including channels from Corpus Christi to Aransas Pass, Aransas Pass to Pass Cavallo, and from the Brazos River to West Galveston Bay. These segments were constructed by 1909 (Alperin 1983; Gadus and Freeman 2005). The 1910 Rivers and Harbors Act appropriated additional funds for inland waterways that included a channel between the Brazos River and Matagorda Bay. In 1909, 1921, and 1929, the Texas legislature established navigation districts responsible for construction of canals and other waterways (Mercier 2021).

### [Port Improvements, 1911–1958](#)

Around 1890, considerable political and commercial activity was directed toward establishing deep-water ports in Texas (Handbook of Texas Online 2021a). Since the destruction of



Indianola, Calhoun County ports were less prominent than others on the Texas coast, yet shipping was still important to the local economy. After the founding of Port O'Connor in 1911, local investors lobbied the USACE to deepen the channel at Pass Cavallo, extend it through the natural channel alongside Matagorda Island, and build a turning basin. However, the USACE determined that the county's ports were not developed enough to warrant the expense and that the proximity of more-developed ports, including Galveston and Port Aransas, made the likelihood low that Port O'Connor could be competitive. Thus, even though the burgeoning local oil industry spurred development and expansion at other ports, the economic drivers in Calhoun County and the large land mass between Pass Cavallo and Rockport remained mostly based on agricultural production (Gadus and Freeman 2005).

Calhoun County's ports continued to be important for the transportation of agricultural products through the mid-twentieth century. A 1920 seawall constructed in Port Lavaca mitigated damage from subsequent storms, and the Port Lavaca harbor and channels were dredged in 1936 (Maywald 2021). The Morgan Steamship Lines, sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883, continued to travel to Port Lavaca through the mid-twentieth century (Figure 36) (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).

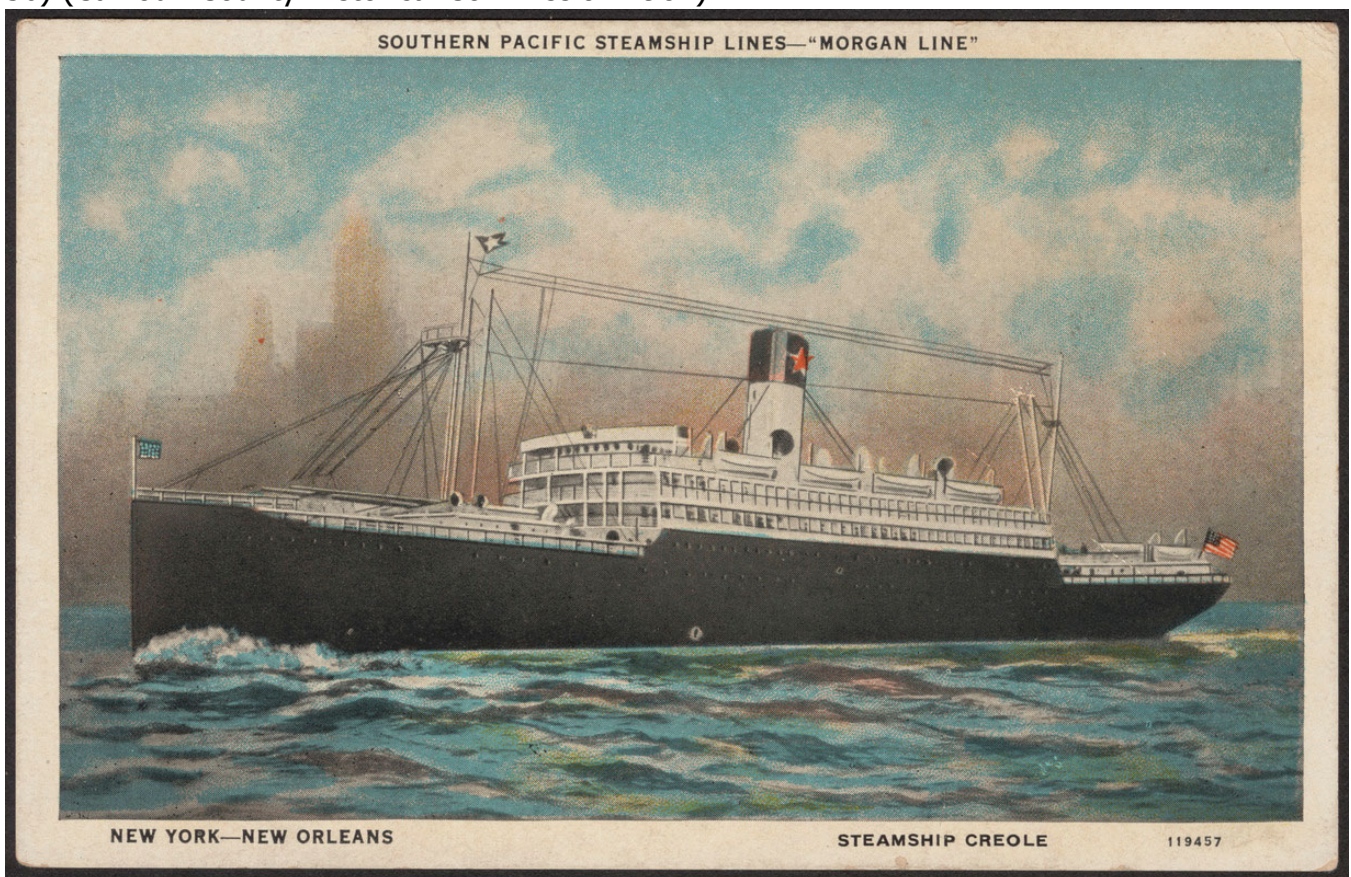


Figure 36. This postcard illustrates the Morgan Steamship Lines' Steamship Creole, which provided regular passage between New York and New Orleans (Teich & Company 1896).

### [The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, 1934–1975](#)

The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), which took several decades to gain support and build, became an important shipping route along the Gulf Coast and through Calhoun County (Figure 37). Local promotion for this continuous system of navigable waterways began in 1905, when Victoria business owners, at the next county seat to the northwest, formed the Interstate Inland Waterway League, the present-day the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association. The group advertised in newspapers and held conventions in Louisiana and Texas to garner interest. The organization was a major proponent of the intracoastal waterway, promoting its development at the national, state, and local levels (Alperin 1983). At the national level, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Inland Waterways Commission in 1907. Congress included authorization of a comprehensive study on a national system of connected intracoastal waterways in their Rivers and Harbors Act of 1909 based on information the commission provided and the Interstate Inland Waterway League’s lobbying efforts (Alperin 1983).





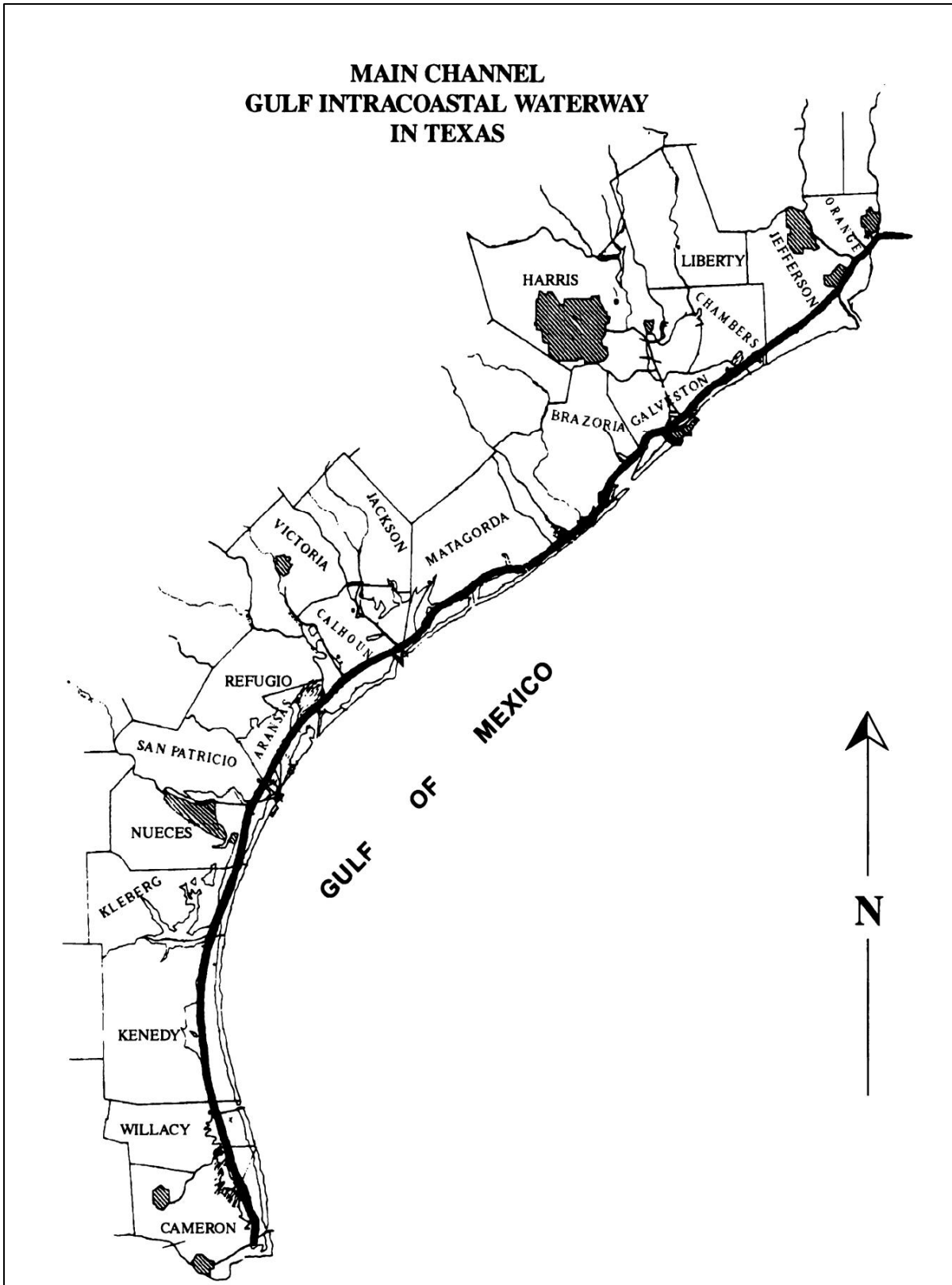


Figure 37. The GIWW route through Texas extends from Orange County to Cameron County (Texas Department of Transportation 1994).

The flourishing petroleum industry was another major factor that catalyzed the intracoastal waterway in early-twentieth-century Texas. In the 1920s, steel was in high demand as an import for use at Texas extraction and processing locations and petroleum products were in high demand as exports. Transporting these materials by water was cheaper than by rail. This spurred construction of improved or new deep-water ports along the coast and the intracoastal waterways. These ports, some of which were originally used or planned for the transport of agricultural products and other goods, became shipping points for petroleum products, iron, and steel (Alperin 1983). After another USACE study on a route from the Mississippi River to Corpus Christi in 1923, Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1925, which included authorization of \$9 million for a continuous intracoastal waterway between New Orleans and Galveston. In 1927, Congress authorized its extension along the Texas coast to Corpus Christi. The GIWW segment between Louisiana and Galveston was completed in 1934, the route to Port O'Connor in 1939, and the segment to Corpus Christi in 1942 (Alperin 1983; Rubert 2021c).

The GIWW played an important role in national defense during World War II. With German submarines patrolling the Gulf Coast, inland waterways were a safe means of transporting commodities for military and civilian use. War-related industries, like shipbuilding and petrochemical production, located their facilities along the GIWW and its tributaries (Alperin 1983). In 1942, Congress authorized an enlarged channel extending to near Brownsville to better serve national defense with the Second Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act. The work was completed to Corpus Christi in 1945 and the final channel through the Laguna Madre in 1949 (Alperin 1983).

The GIWW continued to develop into the second half of the twentieth century. Traffic along the waterway increased from 28 million tons in 1949 to 130 million tons by 1972. Tributary channels were constructed to access industrial areas, production facilities, and commercial centers, and by the late-1970s, petroleum, its products, and chemicals made up more than 76 percent of the tonnage on the GIWW (Alperin 1983). In 1975, the Texas Coastal Waterway Act authorized the state to serve as the local sponsor of the GIWW, and responsibility for the waterway was added to the duties of the State Highway and Public Transportation Commission, the present-day Texas Department of Transportation (Alperin 1983).

As the longest segment of the GIWW, the Texas extent has had a major positive impact on the state's economy, bringing in billions of dollars annually. The waterway is still used as a major transportation route for petroleum products and other commodities, and it continues to be dredged, modified, and enlarged. All the commerce at the City of Victoria's port goes through the GIWW (Alperin 1983). In addition to its industrial uses, the GIWW is a recreational destination for sports fishing and pleasure craft (Alperin 1983).

### [The Victoria Barge Canal and the Matagorda Ship Channel, 1954–1966](#)

Post-World War II development of the petrochemical industry in the vicinity of the Calhoun County ports spurred mid-twentieth-century growth. Congress authorized the 35-mile-long Victoria Barge Canal in 1945 and it was constructed between 1954 and 1958 from the San Antonio Bay through Calhoun County to a turning basin south of Victoria. Modifications include expansion of the turning basin and widening and deepening the canal. Its current dimensions of 12 feet deep by 125 feet wide dates to the 1990s (Figure 38). The canal connects the Port of Victoria to the GIWW and, as a result, the rest of the Gulf Coast (Port of Victoria 2021; Roell 2021b). The USACE maintains the canal and the Victoria County Navigation District manages the property. More than 6 million tons of grain, gravel, oil and other products are transported through the canal annually (Miles 2011).



Figure 38. This current view of the 35-mile-long Victoria Barge Canal shows its present-day 125-foot width (Port of Victoria 2021).

In 1958, Congress authorized a deep-draft project for Matagorda Bay, the Matagorda Ship Channel. The selection of Point Comfort for an aluminum plant by ALCOA was the impetus for construction of the channel (Maywald 2021). The Calhoun County Commissioners Court



established the Navigation District Board in 1953, appointing commissioners and authorizing a tax to fund channel construction. ALCOA provided the other half of the cost. The USACE constructed the channel from the Gulf of Mexico, through the Matagorda Peninsula and Matagorda Bay, to Point Comfort. It was constructed with a four-mile-long outer bar and jetty channel, a 22-mile-long inner channel, which incorporated and enlarged the already extant Pass Cavallo-Port Lavaca Channel, a turning basin at Point Comfort, and jetties flanking the entrance channel that minimized wave action and shoaling (Alperin 1977). Dredging began in 1961 and was completed in 1966. The Matagorda Ship Channel bypassed the naturally formed Pass Cavallo. Without dredging and other efforts to improve or channelize Pass Cavallo, it has sanded in and is now known as Sunday Beach.

### Calhoun County Ports, 1963–1973

After World War II, major changes took place in the American shipping industry that impacted Calhoun County's ports. Container shipping began in the 1950s, allowing standard-size containers to be transferred from ships to trucks or railroad freight cars. This spurred the development of bigger cargo ships, larger ports to transport and process the containers, and deeper ports. The size of tanker ships increased with the growing demand for oil in the U.S. and globally. The overfishing of waters closer to the coast resulted in a change to the fishing industry, as bigger ships were necessary for offshore deep-water catches (Stein 2017).

In the second half of the twentieth century, in addition to the GIWW and the Victoria Barge Canal, local major water transportation facilities included the ports at Port Lavaca and Point Comfort. The Port of Port Lavaca-Point Comfort was designated a U.S. Customs port of entry in 1963. In 1973, there were three port facilities in Calhoun County including two terminals at the deep Port of Port Lavaca-Point Comfort, and a shallow-draft-vessel terminal on the Victoria Barge Canal near Long Mott. Major facilities at Port Lavaca and Point Comfort included the ALCOA steamship dock that exclusively served the smelting plant, hauling ore and chemicals used for the manufacture of aluminum, and the Calhoun County Navigation District dock, which served other businesses (Texas Highway Department 1973). Exports from the Calhoun County Navigation District dock included agricultural products like livestock and grains, aluminum ingots, and carbide. Imports included liquid fertilizer and lumber (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981). The only commercial dock along the GIWW, the Scurlock Oil Company barge dock in Port O'Connor, was mainly used for transporting crude oil (Texas Highway Department 1973). Finally, the Union Carbide Barge Terminal on the Victoria Barge Canal was used for transporting chemical products (Texas Highway Department 1973).

Extant maritime history resources in Calhoun County are limited to twentieth-century resources. Due to the susceptibility of the coastal county to frequent hurricanes, earlier-built resources do not survive. Nineteenth-century navigation resources are limited to the



Matagorda Island and Halfmoon Reef Lighthouses. Port and harbor resources that date to the first half of the twentieth century include wharves, docks, and the Port Lavaca seawall, and those that date to the second half of the twentieth century include docks and wharves in Port Lavaca, Point Comfort, Port O'Connor, and on the Victoria Barge Canal. GIWW canals and channels, the Victoria Barge Canal, and the Matagorda Ship Channel, as well as the turning basins, jetties, and related development of harbors and ports are historic-age; however, these resources, still in use, have undergone non-historic-age modifications.

### Period of Significance

The period of significance for maritime history in Calhoun County is 1842, the date the port at Port Lavaca was developed, to 1966, when the Matagorda Ship Channel was completed.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Commerce, Engineering, Maritime History, Politics/Government, Transportation

### Related Property Types

- Commercial resources: warehouses, wharves, docks
- Government resources: ports of entry, customs houses, border patrol resources, public works, canals, channels, seawalls
- Defense resources: Coast Guard facilities, lighthouses, piers, docks, life-saving stations
- Transportation resources: boats, ships, lighthouses, navigational aids, wharves, docks, warehouses, channels, canals

## **SUBTHEME: INDUSTRY**

### Introduction

The imprint of industrial development on Calhoun County's landscape has changed markedly since the mid-nineteenth century. The first forms of industry processed raw materials for mostly local use, apart from beef and oysters, for which the coastal ports at Indianola and Port Lavaca provided ample opportunity for export to more-distant markets. In the twentieth century, industrial improvements included agricultural processing centers, municipal utilities, and wholesale seafood, with shipbuilding and dredging activity to support the latter industry. The mid-1930s discovery of oil and gas fields and their position near improved waterways attracted large industrial corporations to Calhoun County. Because tropical storms and hurricanes have ravaged the county, few nineteenth-century industrial resources are extant and many from the twentieth century, both on the coast and inland, are no longer present.

### Early Industrial Development, 1846–1900

In Calhoun County several nineteenth-century industrial developments were both typical and unique. In 1860, the county had 14 manufacturing establishments. Most of these provided food, clothing, and equipment to residents. Six establishments employed three men who made bread, footwear, and clothing; another 10 men worked at three metal smiths, two saddleries, and one wainwright shop. The few employers with larger work forces likely exported their products. This included 12 men who produced \$15,000 of preserved turtle soup for a single purveyor, and nine men who produced \$5,553 of oysters for four businesses (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1865). During the Civil War, E. C. Singer operated a torpedo factory on the bluff overlooking Port Lavaca Bay and a blacksmith shop in town, both in support of the Confederacy. An arsenal with an associated foundry and a small arms manufactory served the Confederacy from La Vaca. At Indianola, the Confederacy overtook warehouses and wharves (Winsor 1978, 42, 44). By 1870, three beef-packing plants that employed 44 workers were in Port Lavaca (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1872b). After major hurricanes shattered the port at Indianola in 1875 and annihilated it in 1886, subsequent coastal development in that location ceased permanently.

### Agricultural Processing, 1900–1945

From the first decades of the twentieth century, agricultural processing complexes served cotton and grain farmers. At least three private land companies advertised small truck farms, but, when these failed, many local farmers turned to cotton (Alamo Beach Investment Company 1910; Calhoun County Cattle Company 1910; Powers n.d.). Cotton gin complexes with a gin house, trash burners and hoppers, and storage were founded in towns and rural crossroads communities. The earliest-known gin complexes at Port Lavaca were the Farmer's Ginning Company (1902–1924), Planter's Gin (1913–1944), Citizen's Light & Water Company Gin (1924–1930), Blue Gin (1930–c. 1948), and Farmer's Gin (Figure 39) (1944–1951). Rural complexes included the 1913 Long Mott Gin, the 1934 Moreman Gin, and the 1929 gin at Clark's Station. W. H. Hillman established this last complex and operated one of the Port Lavaca gin complexes. In 1934, W. H. Frels purchased Hillman's gins and he sold them to Joe F. Brett in 1945. Brett closed the gin but continued to operate a grain processing complex at Clark's Station (Spiller 2014). Local grain processing facilities, all near railroad sidings, included corn silos and storage facilities, a rice dryer at Long Mott, and a rice mill at Port Lavaca (Stiles 1947, 5B). The few agricultural complexes which are extant have experienced alterations and new construction to preserve functionality.



Figure 39. This image shows the current condition of the Farmers Gin building that operated between 1944 and 1951 at the intersection of State Highway 87 and Gin Road (Spiller 2014).

### Utilities, 1900–1973

The early-twentieth century brought municipal utilities—electricity, telephone, and water—to Calhoun County. Local telephone service was the first successful utility in the county and, beginning in 1910, lines hung from cedar poles extending from Port Lavaca to Seadrift to Port O'Connor. By 1923, 28 miles of lines hung from cedar and creosoted pine poles along the southwest side of the railroad between Port Lavaca and Victoria linking the communities telephonically. Soon after, Seadrift and Victoria were connected. In 1941, a wood-frame building was constructed in Port Lavaca, it housed the telephone exchange that served 272 telephones the following year. In the mid-1950s, a central office building replaced the older building to serve 2,222 customers by 1956. Additions to the office building occurred in 1957, 1967, and 1984. By the late-1950s, telephone service reached 135 rural families near the smaller communities of Six Mile, Alamo Beach, and Magnolia Beach. The 1969 exchange in Port O'Connor had additions in 1979 and 1982. The Seadrift office dates to 1980, with small communications huts built at Alamo Beach, Chocolate Bayou, Magnolia Beach, Green Lake, Airport, and State Highway 87 during the 1980s (Spiller 2008).

Municipal electricity and water came online slightly later than telephones. In 1914, Willett Wilson Sr. built an electricity generating plant with two engines that served 216 Port Lavaca customers. In 1926, Texas Central Power Company, a subsidiary of Citizen's Light and Water Company, purchased the plant. In 1929, a transmission line from Victoria extended to Port Lavaca, and in 1941, electric power reached 545 local customers. In 1944, the power plant was dismantled. By 1950, a new facility had 1,408 customers (Figure 40). This growth took place under Grace Rogers, who had been a fish-house bookkeeper and then a cashier for the utility company from 1928 until 1936, when she was named plant manager. She served in that capacity until 1955. Her successor, Lawrence Froelich, managed the plant until 1978 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 137). Port Lavaca's water works had at least two locations by 1927, with one plant on the northwest side of town and the other, the City Power and Light Company plant, in town near the high school (Sanborn Map Company 1927). The limited information about the evolution of municipal wastewater in Calhoun County, suggests that the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA), established in 1935, was instrumental in local water protection, reclamation, and treatment by the 1950s. In the 1960s, the GBRA acquired the Calhoun County canal system and built a diversion dam and saltwater barrier. In the 1970s, the GBRA operated the regional wastewater reclamation system and several small wastewater treatment plants and built a plant at Port Lavaca. In the 1980s, a water supply pump station and pipeline was built in Calhoun County for industries along the Victoria Barge Canal (Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority 2019, 1–2). Major weather events throughout the century wreaked havoc to these above-ground resources and they required regular replacement.





Figure 40. Electricity generated by the Texas Central Power Company provided the bright lights of Main Street in 1955 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 136).

### Seafood Industry 1887–1945

Extracting seafood from the Gulf of Mexico and local bays began before the Civil War and remained a dominant Calhoun County industry through the 1970s. Only oysters were harvested at first. One of the earliest-known wholesale marketers was German-born Charles Rubert who operated a vessel worth \$300 from Matagorda Island and Indianola until 1886, when post-storm, he relocated to Port Lavaca and was able to take advantage of the newly established railroad (Calhoun County 1895; Freier 1979, 130). In 1905, the Fish and Oyster Company of Port Lavaca employed 50 sloops and 350 men to harvest \$150,000 worth of oysters from bays and shallow waters and shipped to markets in the western United States and Mexico (Freier 1979, 130). In 1908, 9,000 tons of unshucked oysters in 80,000 barrels, valued at almost \$173,000, and 840,000 pounds of fish, valued at almost \$59,000, shipped from Calhoun County (Freier 1979, 225). A barrel manufacturer in Port Lavaca supplied containers for packing unshucked oysters with crushed ice and barrel hoops for securing burlap covers before loading onto refrigerated rail cars (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 174–81). By the 1910s, renowned oysters from Tiger Island and Half Moon Reef were transported by railroad from Port Lavaca, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor (Freier 1979, 130). At least 60 oyster boats operated out of the county by 1919, supplying several small

oyster and fish houses, plus the larger Curry and Warrach operations with wholesale products (Figure 41) (Freier 1979, 225).



Figure 41. Warrach's oyster house complex had a two-story "house" (left) and a one-story shell-shucking shed (right) in this undated image (Johnstone 2016, 62).

Modest technological advances and support industries transformed the seafood industry between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s. In the 1920s, fishermen replaced their nets and seines with dragnets, modified hand-pulled-rope tow lines with steel-cable hoists for trawling, and added fuel-powered engines to propel their sailing vessels, some of which were up to 30 feet long. In 1927, the Stephens and Leggett Cannery at Smith Harbor in Port Lavaca had warehouses and a pier (Sanborn Map Company 1927). By 1930, the Port Lavaca fleet included 700 employees and 40 boats that shipped 2.5 million pounds of seafood (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 174–81). By 1934, Port O'Connor had an ice plant to support transportation of seafood products. Of the many oyster, shrimp, and fish houses in Calhoun County, several were long lasting, including those of Charles E. Fisher, Flavius V. Gentry, and the Smith Brothers. Gentry had docks between Commerce and Guadalupe Streets in Port Lavaca (Freier 1979, 130). The original wood-frame oyster and shrimp "houses" or sheds, built over water at the end of long piers, were easy targets for storms and none remain extant. In addition to extracting fresh seafood, some of these houses added shell-crushing

plants to their ventures, while others expanded into local quarry and sold game fish like tarpon and grouper, plus ducks, geese, and sandhill cranes (Johnstone 2016).

Timing of the 1936–1937 Works Project Administration-sponsored construction of a municipal harbor and market in Port Lavaca was providential (Figure 42). The local shrimp fleet launched in earnest two years earlier as the crustacean became more common in American diets (Freier 1979, 130). With its own ice and quick-freeze plant at the foot of Clement Street, present-day Harbor Street, the city-operated market rented its three partitioned fish warehouses where shrimp were deheaded, washed, chilled, packaged into five-pound bundles, and quickly frozen on site before shipment. With electric cranes for hoisting catches, high docks, and an integrated power plant, the new market boosted productivity.



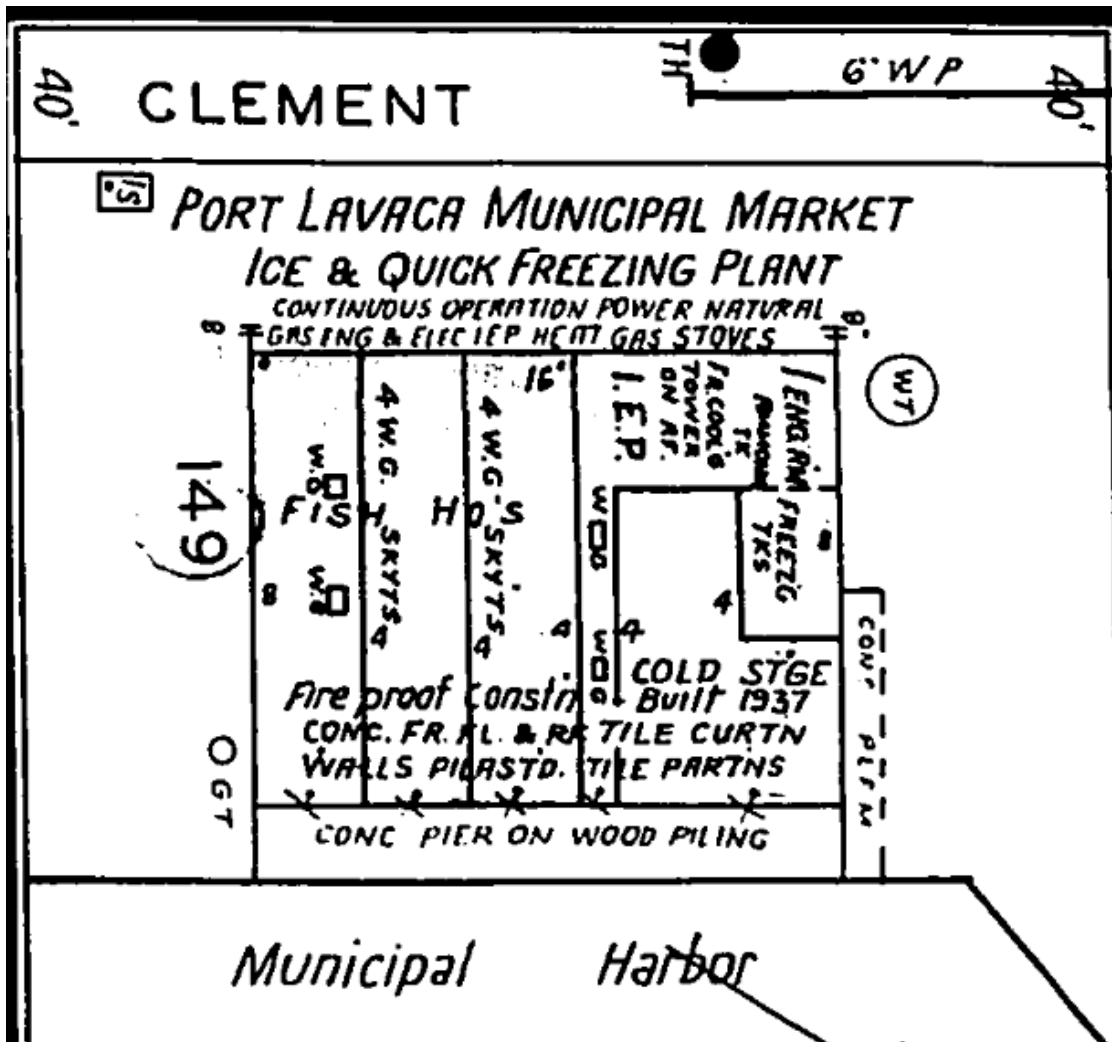


Figure 42. The municipal market configuration in 1940 (top) and its north façade facing Clement Street, present-day Harbor Street, in 2021 with later additions evident (bottom) (Google Earth 2017; Sanborn Map Company 1927).



### Seafood Industry 1945–1973

The food industry, including seafood, changed dramatically at mid-century, and after World War II, the shrimp industry boomed. Local wholesale dealers sold to large companies or their subsidiaries, such as the Kroger Grocery and Bakery Corporation's Colter Corporation, General Foods Corporation's General Seafood Company, and the Western Shell Fish Company. In 1949, both the Colter Corporation and the Western Shell Fish Company pulled out of Port Lavaca; the General Seafood Company had limited local operations that focused on vehicular truck transport rather than extraction or processing, and trucks replaced railroad transportation of processed seafood. Trawlers, now 65 feet and longer, and able to go to greater depths further from shore, also pulled out of Port Lavaca since they were too large to easily navigate the unpredictable Pass Cavallo. The Port Lavaca-owned Clegg Shrimp Company at the municipal market, Key Fish Market, and Lavaca Shrimp Company stayed afloat in smaller bay boats that could navigate the pass but suffered lower takes (Figure 43). When H. Morgan Daniel Seafood, a major provider to the Campbell Soup Company, purchased the municipal market in 1965, the building was remodeled with expanded freezer and storage spaces. A pioneer in the industry, the Mississippi-born Daniel, who later served as president of the Texas Shrimp Association and a director of the National Fisheries Institute, resided in Port Lavaca for several years. The purchase was timed to take advantage of newly built Matagorda Bay jetties and the deep channel port at Point Comfort. The H. Morgan Daniel Seafood Company shared the municipal market with two local companies, but pulled out of Port Lavaca in the 1970s, by which time the smaller businesses had built their own processing and cold storage facilities in town. By the 1980s, the municipal market was a processing plant for cat food and shrimp (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 174–81). The 1930s core of the building remains extant with several alterations and additions.



Figure 43. Although door, window, and some cladding materials have been replaced, the fenestration pattern on the Clegg Shrimp Company's southwest façade at the Municipal Harbor has changed little from its original configuration based on this undated image (Johnstone 2005, 96).

### [Shipbuilding, 1900–1973](#)

Two important industries emerged which supported the local seafood economy, shipbuilding and dredging. Little is known of nineteenth-century shipbuilding and repair activity in Calhoun County, except that ship caulkers, carpenters, and wrights were in employment, according to manuscript federal population censuses, for every decennial between 1850 and 1900, but no related resources from this era are extant. Although Port Lavaca registered 34 vessels under five tons and another 72 vessels greater than five tons and up to 23 tons in 1908, just two years later, the county had only one shipbuilder in residence, and in 1920, only four were present (Freier 1979, 225). When the shrimp industry took off and demand for repairs and renovations increased, at Port Lavaca, the Smith Brothers seafood company added boat building to their business and the Chervenka family boat builders worked on shrimp boats (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 174–81). H. C. Hartzog opened a shipyard in 1938 that serviced Army ferries and large dredges up to 126 feet long until 1965 (Figure 44) (McHaney, Spurlin, and Roberts 1996, 94). In 1955, Johnson Roselle Clegg added a trawler company to his shrimp fleet. On Fulton Street, across from the municipal harbor, the extant facility had an office, supply room, repair shop, and manufacturing building. Obsolete by the 1950s, bay boats were no longer built or repaired. Instead, steel-constructed shrimp boats were up to 75 feet long with 225 horsepower engines, high-powered short-wave radios,

depth records, and automatic pilots. By 1967, many large trawlers had on-board freezers. In 1972 and later, Clegg added an automatic ice manufacturing plant, expanded fuel and oil operations, and enlarged metal and wood shops at his Fulton Street location (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 174–81).

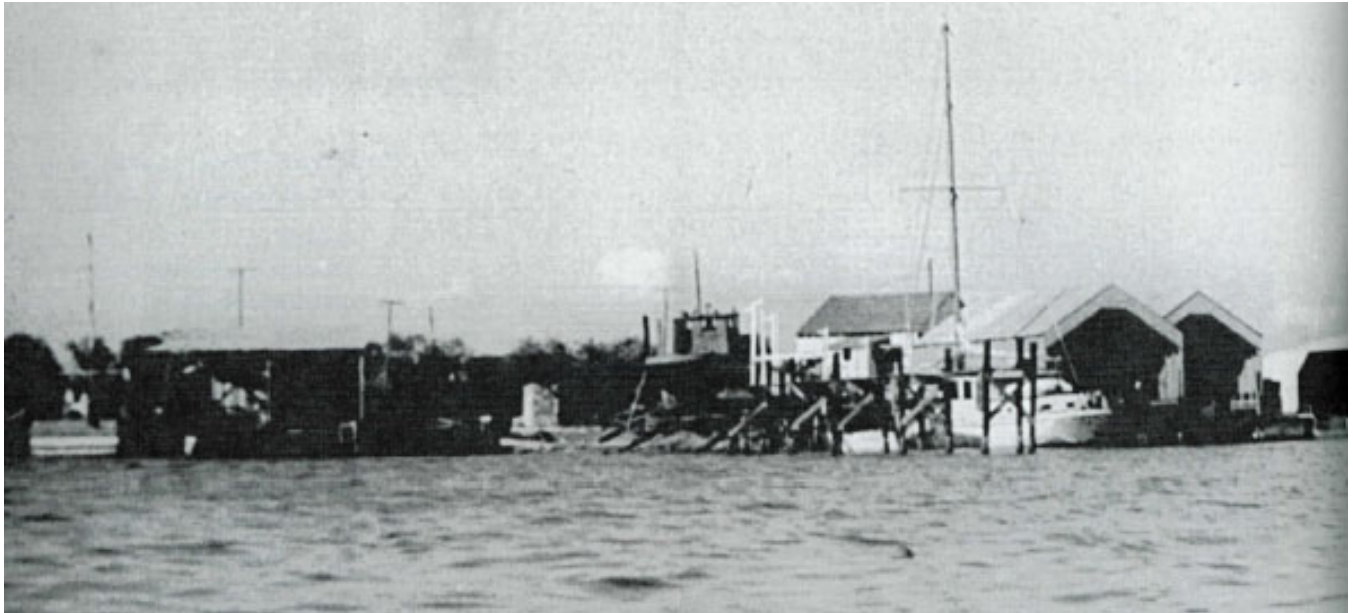


Figure 44. Hartzog's Shipyard, in this undated image, operated in Port Lavaca from 1938 until 1965 (McHaney, Spurlin, and Roberts 1996, 94).

### [Dredging, 1900–1973](#)

The work of dredging reshaped Calhoun County's land and water features to aid navigability and recover marine life and mineral deposits with commercial value. The Smith-Ullrich Dredging Company was at work by 1912 (Figure 45) (Johnstone 2002a, 1:25). In 1941, King and Jewel Fisher opened a small machine shop with an office and two work boats. They expanded their marine business in 1954 when they began dredging the harbor at Port Lavaca to connect it with the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Lavaca Bay (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 155–56). This and other dredging projects were made possible by the Matagorda Ship Channel and the Calhoun County Navigation District Dock, which has a sheet-pile-supported wharf with a concrete deck, two railroad sidings, 2 miles of water frontage for industrial wharf development, and barge docks for several businesses, including Bauer Dredging and Fisher Dredging. In 1966, planners anticipated 400,000 gross tons of imports and almost 1.8 million tons of exports annually (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 150).



Figure 45. The Smith-Ullrich Dredging Company's first dredge barge in 1912 (Johnstone 2016, 208).

### Petrochemical Industry, 1934–1973

Calhoun County's extractive industries included shell for fill and construction early on, but its petrochemical industry did not emerge until, with temporary derricks and drill rigs, natural gas was discovered locally in 1934 and crude oil in 1935 (Figure 46) (Kleiner 2021). By 1956, 22 small oil fields were scattered throughout the county's lands and waters at: Chile, Coloma Creek, East Long Mott, East Sheriff, Green Lake, Heyser, Jay Welder, Kellers, Long Mott, Magnolia Beach, Matagorda Bay, Melbourn, Mesquite Bay, Olivia, Point Comfort, Port Lavaca, Powder Horn, San Antonio, Sheriff, Southeast Long Mott, Steamboat Pass, and Zollar (Texas Highway Department Planning Survey Division 1961). These fields typically had pump units with related separators, metering stations, and storage tanks linked to pipelines. Larger operations had pump houses or stations, power or boiler houses, and refinery facilities or natural gas casinghead, cycling, or injection plants (Dase 2003, 12–25). By 1982, the county exported more than 850,000 barrels of crude oil, 2.4 million feet of casinghead gas, almost 44 billion cubic feet of gas-well gas, and more than 310,000 barrels of condensates (Kleiner 2021).





Figure 46. Visitors and oil field roughnecks pose in this undated image of a temporary wood derrick built for oil exploration near Port O'Connor (Johnstone 2016, 7).

These many mineral fields supported a variety of large processing facilities after World War II. One of the earliest and largest of these was the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). In Point Comfort, the company built the industry's first post-World War II smelter in the country and its first Texas facility on 3,000 acres between 1948 and 1950 with an associated dock to handle 57,000 tons of bulk alumina ore cargoes annually imported, mostly from overseas, for processing. The first plant had three potlines, each with a dedicated power house, a paste department, and a gas-reducing station. Immediate expansion added two potlines with power houses in 1951. As the decade progressed, the company added an ingot casting plant, more potlines and power houses, pot repair facilities, a gas separation plant, and both alumina and chemical operations. In the 1960s, the plant grew with digesters and production units for aluminum fluoride, cryolite, caustic chlorine, floor-spar, bulk loading, brine evaporation, plus new docks. The ingot casting plant was expanded, and facilities were built for carbon paste, gypsum, natural gas, and gasoline units. In the 1970s, ALCOA built a casting department and alumina and chemicals plant that refined bauxite into alumina. Fluoride recovery and expanded mud lake systems attempted to redress environmental issues. The smelter permanently closed in 1982. As of 1990, 1.8 million tons were shipped annually via rail and

barge from Point Comfort for smelting elsewhere (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 101; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 151).

The Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), operated by the Dow Chemical Company since 2001, was the second largest company to take advantage of minerals in Calhoun County. From 1952 to 1954, prominent construction firm Brown & Root built the plant near Green Lake under the direction of plant manager Charles M. Blair (Figure 47) (McHaney, Spurlin, and Roberts 1996, 96). The first processes installed handled #1 olefins and oxide and low-density polyethylene with supporting steam and utilities plants. In 1956, an oxide derivatives unit was added, and Robert P. Barry took over as plant manager until 1967. In the 1960s, production capacity doubled with the introduction of #2 olefins, high-density polyethylene, and oxide complexes, an alcohol unit, and the world's largest styrene plant. The following decade, UCC built a new high- and low-density polyethylene units and an advance cracking reactor. UCC's model production facilities substantially reduced energy use. By 1980, UCC employed 1,400 workers on its 2,500-acre campus (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 98; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 157–58).

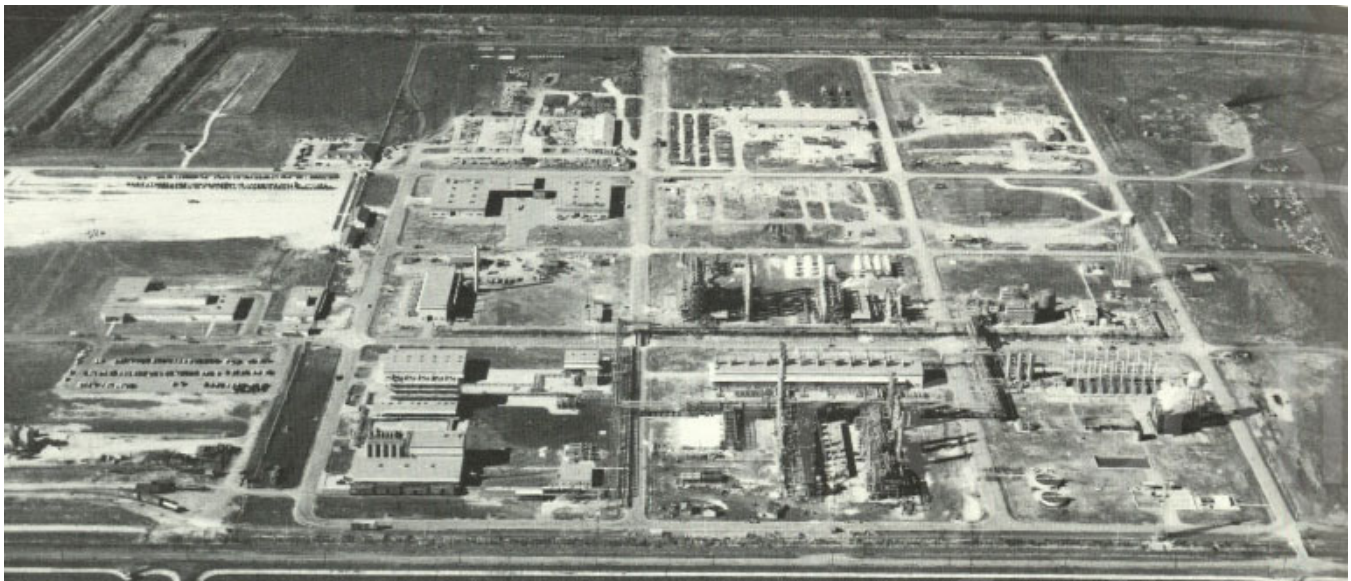


Figure 47. The Union Carbide Corporation plant in 1954 already had a sprawling campus (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 98).

Several other petrochemical companies landed in Calhoun County, which by 1958 had 11 manufacturers and 77 mineral-related enterprises. In the 1960s and 1970s, vinyl acetate manufacturer National Starch Corporation, pitch oil manufacturer Witco, and Vistron Corporation, later subsumed by British Petroleum Chemicals, had local plants, and smaller businesses produced oil field products and metal cleaners (Kleiner 2021). Besides UCC and the National Starch Corporation, several companies used the 1968 Victoria Barge Canal to ship

chemical products. Later arrivals include the Formosa Plastics Corporation, the Carbon/Graphite Group, and ALCOA subsidiaries the Neumin Production Company and the Lavaca Pipeline Company (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 152–54). The heaviest concentration of waterfront industrial plants is centered at the Port of Port Lavaca–Point Comfort. As of 1980, port facilities consisted of piers, wharves, and docks; oil handling and bunkering; warehouses and open storage; hoisting equipment; marine repair plants, drydocking facilities, and floating equipment; and railroad sidelines (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Water Resources Support Center 1980, III).

Extant industrial resources in Calhoun County date to the twentieth century. Agricultural complexes are along main roads and have modern resources and equipment on the premises with older buildings and structures largely no longer in use or functioning as storage rather than as processing facilities. Because municipal utilities have been regularly upended by severe weather events, they are in altered conditions. Similarly, coastal exposure wiped out early seafood and shipbuilding resources, but later examples persist. Because of their later construction dates, many buildings and structures associated with dredging, oil and natural gas, and petrochemical manufacturing survive.

## PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Representative and distinct elements of local industrial history guided development of three discrete periods of significance for this context. The earliest period, 1846 to 1900, accommodates rare extant nineteenth-century industrial resources. Between 1887 and 1945, industrial resources centered on agricultural processing and the wholesale seafood industry, and the latter industry had a post-World War II development phase from 1945 to 1973. Municipal utility improvements occurred between 1900 and 1973. Later periods of significance are for shipbuilding and dredging from 1900 to 1973, and oil and natural gas extraction, which gave rise to the petrochemical industry, from 1934 to 1973.

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture, Engineering, Industry, Maritime History

## RELATED PROPERTY TYPES

- Industry/processing/extraction resources:



- Manufacturing facilities: mills, shipyards, factories, refineries, natural gas plants (casinghead, cycling, and injection), power/boiler houses, office buildings, warehouses, parking lots
- Processing facilities: food processing/packing, grain elevators, cotton gins/houses/compresses, cotton seed oil mills, trash burners and hoppers, storage resources, office buildings, warehouses, parking lots
- Extractive facilities: derricks, drill rigs, pump houses, pump stations, pump units, power/boiler houses, separators, metering stations, office buildings, warehouses, parking lots
- Waterworks: filtration plants, sewage treatment plants, reservoirs, water towers, dams, pump houses, ice plants, warehouses
- Energy facilities: generating plants, substations, transmission lines, windmills, turbines, office buildings, warehouses
- Communications facilities: exchange offices, pole lines
- Storage: bulk terminal plants, tanks, tank farms, grain storage bins, cotton houses, seed storage houses/bins, warehouses
- Transportation resources: pipelines (fountain heads and gathering, trunk, and natural gas lines), railroad sidings, wharves



## **THEME: ETHNIC HERITAGE**

Calhoun County has been home to communities from diverse homelands, including Native Americans, people of Spanish and Mexican descent, Anglo-Americans, African Americans, and European settlers. Archeological artifacts, including a Clovis point found in the area and shell middens along an arm of San Antonio Bay, suggest the presence of Paleo-Americans from prehistoric times (Kleiner 2021). The Karankawas, a group of coastal peoples sharing the same culture and language, occupied lands between Galveston and Corpus Christi Bays until the mid-nineteenth century. Within Calhoun County, Native American cultural artifacts have been discovered at Lavaca Bay and Six Mile Creek, and Tonkawa shelter sites have been found at littoral locations along Cox's Creek, Keller's Creek, the Guadalupe River, Green Lake, Chocolate Bayou, and Linn's Bayou (Kleiner 2021; Lipscomb and Seiter 2021). Most of these groups were forced from the area or succumbed to disease after Europeans settled the area in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Old World explorers made first known contact in the early-sixteenth century. Spanish explorers, including Alonso Álvarez de Pineda, who drafted a map that included Espíritu Santo Bay and claimed what is now present-day Texas for the Spanish Crown, visited the region in the first quarter of the sixteenth century but did not establish any permanent local settlements (Kleiner 2021). In 1685, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, who had explored the mouth of the Mississippi River three years earlier, landed a party of 180 French colonists in Matagorda Bay. La Salle, who mistakenly believed he was in the vicinity of the river's mouth, had returned to the area with plans to colonize the waterway from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes (Tucker 2010). The settlement, on Garcitas Creek in present-day Victoria County, known as Fort St. Louis, failed in 1689 due to the hostile environment and attacks by Karankawas (Texas Beyond History 2009). Alonso De León rediscovered Fort St. Louis, burned the remaining improvements, and buried the fort's cannons for future use (Kleiner 2021). The Matagorda Bay landing site, the eventual location of Indianola, was commemorated as part of the 1936 Texas Centennial with a statue of La Salle (Figure 48).



Figure 48. This image of the 1936 La Salle above Matagorda Bay marks the approximate location where he came ashore in Calhoun County (Utley 1958).

The 1820 population of what would become Texas had an estimated 4,000 immigrants, mostly from Spain or Mexico, and approximately 15,000 Native Americans (University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio 1985). The Spanish Crown, wary of French incursions from Louisiana and native-born English-speaking White settlers from the eastern and southern United States, had long focused on missions that sought to evangelize frontier Native American populations into secular, self-supporting communities. As loyal subjects, the government hoped these reformed people would help defend its North American empire (Ringebach 2014, 30). After the Mexican War of Independence concluded in 1821, the newly established Mexican government initiated a program that utilized professional colonizers, known as *empresarios*, to bring families to Texas. In 1825 Martín de León settled 41 Mexican families in the area, and in 1831 John J. Linn established the first White settlement in Calhoun County at Linnville. An 1840 Comanche raid burned Linnville to the ground and the settlers relocated three miles away, establishing the community that would later become Port Lavaca (Kleiner 2021).

The Spanish missions by design were meant to conclude with their secularization, whereupon their buildings, agricultural complexes, and public resources were turned over to the inhabitants. In some cases, due to varying circumstances, mission locations were moved before permanent facilities were constructed. What infrastructure could not be readily moved to a new location was left behind, and sometimes subsequent settlers reused or recycled these

materials. Later, the built environment of Mexican society reflected its three-tiered stratification. The landed gentry at the top occupied dwellings that were generally constructed of stone and their spaciousness varied depending on the family's means. Middle class rancheros occupied single-pen adobe dwellings. Laborers, the lowest class, resided in pole-built *jacales* with mud walls and thatched roofs (Dase et al. 2010, 24).

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Europeans came to Texas in large numbers. Many fled their Old World countries because of political, religious, or economic difficulties. Publications produced as early as the 1830s and through the 1850s lured foreign-born immigrants to Texas in search of a better life (Dase et al. 2010, 21). Carl, Prince of Solms Braunfels, led a group of German immigrants who, on their way to western Texas, landed at Indian Point in 1844. A member of the party, Johann Schwartz, built the first house in the area in 1845 and another German immigrant group established the community of Seadrift in the 1840s (Kleiner 2021; Malsch 2021b). Four groups of Polish settlers, the first in North America, emigrated to Calhoun County from the Prussian province of Opole between 1854 and 1856. The first group of 65 families reached Indianola in December 1854, and like the Germans, used the port as their passage point to Karnes County (Freier 1979, 72). Subsequent European groups included Swedes, who established a 13,565-acre Lutheran colony in 1892 that formed the town of Olivia. Irish, Scots, and Bohemians also traveled through or settled in Calhoun County (Hardin 2021b; Kleiner 2021).

Foreign-born immigrants shaped the built environment through cultural and practical traditions brought over from their homelands. Building techniques as well as preferences for spatial arrangement of the built environment and landscape carried over from the foreign-born settlers and was passed to younger generations. To the extent distinctly ethnic architectural building forms have been attenuated over time, factors such as pressure to assimilate into mainstream American society, intermarriage with other ethnic groups, technical construction innovations, and improvements to transportation and communication networks have all shaped the built environment such that it is less likely to reveal distinctive outward signs of foreign heritage (Dase et al. 2010, 22).

In 1850, Calhoun County had a total population of 1,110 persons of whom 867 were White, nine were Mexican-born<sup>10</sup>, and 243 were enslaved persons. By 1860, the population had increased to 2,642, of which 2,228 were White and 414 were enslaved Black people. Of this population, 1,490 were native born and 738 were foreign born. In 1870 the county's population had reached 3,468, of which 2,536 were White and 907 were Black. Of this

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<sup>10</sup> Although these people were reported as free Black people in the aggregate census, all of them were born in Mexico (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1850a).

population, 1,867 were native born and 669 were foreign born (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1872a).

Like the American South, the early agricultural economy of Calhoun County depended on a supply of competent cheap labor that, in the antebellum era, included enslaved people. The number of enslaved persons residing in Calhoun County slowly increased from 26 in 1846, to 333 in 1860, and declined to 175 in 1864 (Campbell 1991, 264; DeBow 1853). In 1850, five enslavers who resided in the county's rural parts, held almost 70 enslaved persons, or almost 30 percent of the local population, and the remainder were in or near Indianola or Lavaca (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1850b). In the postbellum era, local Black women worked in domestic positions and none were employed in agriculture; several Black men who worked in agriculture were livestock handlers (Kleiner 2021; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1870; 1880). The local Black population declined before the end of the century, however, and few were involved in agriculture after the postbellum era.

Slavery had evolved in southeastern Texas much as it did in the larger American South but varied in Calhoun County with a larger urban population of enslaved people. Most of Texas' Anglo-American inhabitants were native-born southerners and brought traditions from their home states when they settled in the eastern timberlands and southern central plains. They ultimately turned to the production of cotton as a cash crop and continued the practice of enslaved labor. By 1846, Texas had more than 30,000 enslaved people who produced a considerable amount of cotton (Campbell 2021). With Calhoun County's flat, grassy coastal prairies more suited to rangeland ranching, this was the dominant local agricultural activity, with few plantations—two known locations were at Green Lake and Cox's Point—in operation. A cowboy culture emerged among enslaved livestock ranch workers. But most enslaved persons in Calhoun County worked in urban settings in domestic occupations or as laborers at the port or elsewhere in Indianola or Port Lavaca (Freier 1979, 125; Kleiner 2021).

Although specification of a person's race was not required on brand registrations, records indicate several free Black persons and former enslaved people registered livestock brands and marks in Calhoun County in both the antebellum and postbellum periods. From 1843 to 1854 the "JD" brand was used by Ann Harred, described in deed records as "a free woman of color," on Matagorda Island. Other registrations attributed to Black persons include Alfred Washington's "T" brand in 1868, John Lytle's "L2" brand in 1868, William Barefield's "turkey track" brand in 1869, Washington White's "WA" brand in 1869, and James Kitchen's "trailing heart" brand in 1874. Recorded narratives indicate both before and after emancipation Black persons worked cattle as cowboys and drove livestock to markets as close as the local ports and as distant as Kansas (Freier 1979, 125, 185).



Numerous freedmen communities were established in the American South in the 1870s and 1880s, and many survived into the twentieth century when “Jim Crow” laws continued forced segregation. Freedom Colonies, small enclaves that typically included homes clustered around one or more community resources like a church, school, lodge-hall, or general store. Given the difficulties in establishing financial security in the decades following emancipation, these communities were typically on less desirable lands, far from main roads and resources, or near railroad tracks (Dase et al. 2010, 32). Following emancipation, the Freedmen’s Benevolent Association formed in Port Lavaca, counting among its trustees former enslaved persons James Randall and John Lytle. In 1898 the trustees conveyed the association’s property to the Second Baptist Church, which later became Mount Sinai Baptist Church (Freier 1979, 185; Texas Historical Commission 1980). No known freedmen communities are in Calhoun County (Texas Freedom Colonies Project 2021). Lacking cash and land, many freed families lived in log houses that were easy and inexpensive to build, upgrading in later years as their finances allowed. Most freedmen were trained in agriculture and turned to sharecropping or leasing land to farm (Dase et al. 2010, 32). In the twentieth century, segregated public schools for Black children operated in Kamey, Long Mott, and Olivia (Texas Board of Education 1937). In 1960 Naomi Chase organized the Sunlight Girls Club for the benefit of the Black community to address issues related to racial integration, promote ideals of womanhood, and provide scholarships for further education. The 1965 Sunlight Mothers League supported the club’s activities. The club met initially in Chase’s garage and later in the Wilkins School cafeteria (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 106).

Second, decennial population censuses show that very few Mexican nationals or their descendants resided in Calhoun County until after 1910, when waves of adept agricultural laborers came to Texas. The small initial burst that almost doubled the local Mexican-born population paralleled the decade-long Mexican Revolution that began in 1910. More ample growth in the Mexican-born and -descended population occurred in ensuing decades. By 1930, 24 percent of the county was of Mexican descent and some were landowners, but most were tenant farmers or farm laborers (Kleiner 2021).

In 1930 approximately one-quarter of Calhoun County’s population was described as “Mexican.” This group includes Mexican nationals (those with Spanish and indigenous cultural roots), their descendants, and those that identify as Mexican American. Their relatively large numbers and their retention of cultural traditions have had a notable impact on southeastern Texas (Dase et al. 2010, 25; Kleiner 2021). A study of Mexican American neighborhoods, also known as *barrios*, in the American Southwest identified a particular housescape made up of a single-family dwelling and its immediate landscape. Character-defining features include an

almost continuous extent of front-property enclosure, the use of brilliant color, and the occasional religious shrine in the front yard (Arreola 1988, 299). Calhoun County's Mexican American community also formed support organizations including the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) local council 671 in 1975. LULAC is the oldest and largest continually active Latino political association in the United States and was the first national Mexican American civil rights organization (Orozco 2021). Other Hispanic organizations in the county includes the *Sociedades Guadalupanas* and the local Mexican-American Political Action Committee, founded in 1988.

Invited by a crab-processing plant owner, about 150 Vietnamese refugees arrived in Calhoun County in 1976. Some of the immigrants, making \$40 a day picking meat from crab shells, purchased their own fishing boats. The Vietnamese entry in the fishing industry disrupted the close-knit local market, which had an unwritten code of conduct to deter the new fishers. On August 3, 1979, a confrontation between Sau Van and Billy Joe Aplin resulted in first a murder charge and then acquittal of the Vietnamese man. The incident sparked the Ku Klux Klan to target local Vietnamese fishers (Cahalan 2019).

The local built environment with ethnic associations requires attention to their minority circumstances. The complexities of racial and ethnic discrimination, which shaped where these groups live, work, and recreate limited in multiple ways the substance of their built environments. Although some archival records report on these groups, others overlook them. No in-depth study of the local ways they adapted to express their cultural identities, or their ability to do so, has been accomplished. Thus, identifying and evaluating components of Calhoun County's ethnic built environment considered the limitations minority communities experienced.

## PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

To accommodate the extended period in which various ethnic groups resided in Calhoun County, the period of significance extends from 1830 to 1973.

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Agriculture, Architecture, Art, Commerce, Community Planning and Development, Education, Engineering, Ethnic Heritage, Exploration/Settlement, Health/Medicine, Industry, Maritime History, Politics/Government, Social History



## RELATED PROPERTY TYPES

Most property types have potential to be eligible under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage. However, this context is unlikely to apply to defense and transportation property types. Consideration should be given to atypical property types associated with ethnic groups that did not have means or necessity to own, lease, or maintain dedicated buildings. These might include municipal parks and other outdoor spaces associated with specific groups and their activities.



## **THEME: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The built environment associated with Calhoun County’s public and private institutional development includes resources typical to a coastal county. The local schools and government buildings—the county courthouse, town halls, and community center—are represented, as are several culture and leisure types, like movie theaters, clubs, and religious organizations. Development associated with the county’s coastal location attracted diverse improvements, such as a former military base now part of a national wildlife refuge and other tourist-oriented and community amenities like public beaches, piers, marinas, and boat launches. Institutional resources like lighthouses and navigational aids reflect how water travel was an early and consistent mode of transportation. Transportation developments include privately sponsored railroads and public roadways.

### **SUBTHEME: EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### Introduction

Calhoun County schools have been rebuilt repeatedly due both to repeated major storm damage and the need to enlarge facilities as the student population grew. Preliminary research revealed 11 elementary and secondary schools operating in Calhoun County, seven of which were built in the early- to mid-twentieth century (Table 8). The Alice O. Wilkins School in Port Lavaca has been converted to a satellite campus for Victoria College, the county’s only higher education institution. Three additional former schools are extant but are neither in use as primary nor secondary schools. The former Olivia School is no longer in educational use. Low enrollment in 2011 and budget cuts compelled the Point Comfort Elementary School to close, and the building is now vacant (Cuaron 2011). This context begins with an overview of early education in Calhoun County and then outlines its twentieth-century educational history and resources.



Table 8. Historic-age schools in Calhoun County.

Current Name	Former Name	Location	Current Grades	Public/Private	Era	Notes
Port O'Connor Elementary	Same	508 West Monroe Street, Port O'Connor	PreK-5	Public	Early-twentieth century and post-World War II (WW II)	1936 Public Works Administration (PWA) two-story brick building surrounded by post-WW II and later buildings and additions
Calhoun High School	Same	201 Sandcrab Boulevard, Port Lavaca	9-12	Public	Post-WW II	1968 Brutalist building
Harrison/ Jefferson/ Madison Complex	Unknown	605 North Commerce Street, Port Lavaca	PreK-5	Public	Post-WW II	Most post-war resources replaced between 1995 and 2004; one Post-War Modern building extant on Colorado Street
Hope High School	Unknown	900 North Virginia Street, Port Lavaca	9-12	Public	Post-WW II	Built between 1953 and 1976; recently an alternative high school; was likely previously elementary or middle school
Olivia Community Center	Olivia School	Northeast corner of County Road 304 and State Highway 172, Olivia	N/A	Public	Post-WW II or earlier	Olivia's third school, reportedly built in 1950 and closed by 1957 <sup>11</sup> ; later used as a community center; currently undergoing renovations with plans to reopen as a community center
Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic School	Same	301 South San Antonio Street, Port Lavaca	PreK-8	Private	Post-WW II	1960 Post-War Modern building; the school closed before reopening in 1996
N/A — vacant	Point Comfort Elementary School	87 Wood Street, Point Comfort	N/A	Public	Post-WW II	Late-1960s campus with 1990 wing; closed 2011.
Seadrift School	Same	1801 West Broadway Avenue, Seadrift	PreK-8	Public	Post-WW II	Everything but the post-WW II gymnasium replaced between 1995 and 2004
Travis Middle School	Calhoun High School	705 North Nueces Street, Port Lavaca	6-8	Public	Post-WW II	Former 1955 high school; some original volumes remain; primary façade modified.
Victoria College Wilkins Industrial Training Center	Alice O. Wilkins High School, Wilkins School	Southeast corner of West Alice Wilkins and Ann Streets, Port Lavaca	College	Public	Post-WW II	Former Black school; last graduating class was 1955; school closed in 1965

This table was compiled using a series of aerial images, topographic maps, newspaper and internet sources (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Google Earth 2019).

<sup>11</sup> This building appears to date to the early-twentieth century, but various sources indicate it was constructed in 1949 or 1950 (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 29; Overton 2016b). A school is in this location in 1952, according to a topographic map (U.S. Geological Survey 1952). A 1937 Texas Board of Education map of schools shows a school in the Olivia vicinity, but its exact location is unclear (Texas Board of Education 1937).

### Pre-1900 Educational Development

Before statehood in 1845, neither the Spanish nor Mexican governments established systems of public education and, although the Republic of Texas granted land endowments to support the development of local schools, many counties were indifferent to education and failed to even survey their land allotments (Berger and Wilborn 2021). Upon statehood, Texas established free schools with an 1854 law that formed the framework for local school systems (Berger and Wilborn 2021). Calhoun County's first school opened in a Port Lavaca Presbyterian church building in 1849 (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 28). By 1854, the county had four school districts: District #1 for Port Lavaca; District #2 for Green Lake, Long Mott and East Santos Bay; District #3 for Indianola; and District #4 for Matagorda Island (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 28).

After the Civil War, the Constitution of 1866 encouraged the education of freedmen's children. However, schools for Black pupils were controversial, and students and teachers experienced both discrimination and intimidation. The 1869 constitution eliminated the separation of Black and White taxation for schools and reaffirmed provisions for the broader funding of public education. In 1871 the state established the board of education to oversee public schooling (Berger and Wilborn 2021).

With a population of more than 5,000 in the late-nineteenth century, Indianola had multiple public and private schools, but all were lost to the 1875 and 1886 hurricanes (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 28; Malsch 2021b). Other schools constructed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century included a building for all grades on Main Street in Port Lavaca, a one-room schoolhouse for Black students in Port Lavaca, and schools in Long Mott, Powder Horn, and Saluria (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 28; Texas Historical Commission 2002). None of these early schools are extant.

### Educational Development, 1900–1945

Calhoun County had seven public schools in 1910, including a four-story brick building for all grades built in Port Lavaca that replaced an 1897 school (A. H. Belo & Co. 1910; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 69). Many rural schools built in the early-twentieth century were one- or two-room schoolhouses with one or two teachers instructing multiple grade levels (Berger and Wilborn 2021). Examples in Calhoun County were the 1902 Six Mile School, 1911 Kamey School, c. 1912 Sweetwater School, and 1920 Plainview School (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 73–75, 77). The one-room Chocolate School was converted to a single-family dwelling that was extant in 1990 (Kleiner 2021; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 73). The communities of Olivia and Seadrift supported

larger, two-story four-room schools constructed in 1910 and 1912, respectively (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 29; Cormier 2013, 111). The Olivia school was built for the children of Swedish farmers and later, a small building was added for Mexican American students (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 29; Cormier 2013, 76, 112). In 1923, the one-room Black school in Port Lavaca was replaced by a two-room Rosenwald School built in 1923 at Ann Street and Mulberry Street, now Alice O. Wilkins, Streets (Fisk University 2021; Texas Historical Commission 2002). The school was renamed Alice O. Wilkins High School after the school's long-time principal.

The Better Schools Amendment of 1920 allowed an increase in local taxation for education. The law was designed to ease the state's burden of financing schools, but many counties were slow to increase funding. Financial inequality among districts led to inadequate funds and subpar facilities in some locales. These challenges resulted in poor quality schools for students in rural, sparsely populated counties, as well as in areas with large Black and Mexican American populations. Kamey School, for example, had no water until 1935 and no electricity until 1939 when the New Deal-era Rural Electrification Administration program provided service (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 28).

New Deal programs also supported school construction in Calhoun County. The Public Works Administration (PWA) granted funding for a new school in Port Lavaca in 1934 and a two-story brick school in Port O'Connor in 1936 (Figure 49) (*Victoria Advocate* 1934; *Victoria Advocate* 1936). The Port O'Connor School, at 508 West Monroe Street, is the earliest extant school in the county. Victoria-based architect Kai J. Leffland designed both PWA schools in Calhoun County (*Victoria Advocate* 1935b; *Victoria Advocate* 1935a).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leffland was a fourth-generation architect. His father, Danish-born Jules Carl Leffland, immigrated in 1886 and operated a thriving South Texas practice. After his 1924 death, his son took over, but the younger architect's work is not well documented (Victoria Regional History Center 2021).



Figure 49. This 1962 image shows the 1936 PWA-sponsored Port O'Connor School after Hurricane Carla. The storm badly damaged the school, but it was repaired and is still in use. It may be the earliest extant school in the county (Johnstone 2002c, 3:51).

By 1937, Calhoun County had 11 school districts in Alamo Beach, Kamey, Long Mott, Magnolia Beach, Olivia, Port O'Connor, Port Lavaca, Roemer, Seadrift, Six Mile, and Sweet Water servicing more than 1,300 White students. Approximately 140 Black students attended separate schools in Kamey, Long Mott, Olivia, Port Lavaca, and Seadrift (Texas Board of Education 1937, 1,300–1,301).

### Educational Development, 1945–1973

Calhoun County experienced a period of great population growth after World War II that resulted in an influx of new students. Enrollment rose from 954 in 1947 to 3,503 in 1956, necessitating the enlargement of existing schools and construction of new facilities (*Victoria Advocate* 1957b). In 1948, the local districts consolidated under the Calhoun County Independent School District (CCISD); some small rural buildings closed and students were bused to schools in other communities (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 69; *Victoria Advocate* 1957d). Most extant schools are the result of CCISD's post-World War II building campaign that reflected modern architecture styles and popular plans. The International, Post-War Modern, and Brutalist styles were dominant with classrooms that opened directly to the exterior.

Post-War Modern school buildings were constructed in Point Comfort, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor. All of Port Lavaca's campuses were updated in the post-war years with new



buildings or additions, including two brick buildings on the Alice O. Wilkins High School campus that appear to date to the post-war years. A new Port Lavaca High School was built in 1955 in the International style, only to be replaced 13 years later, in 1968, with the current Calhoun High School, a \$3 million Brutalist-style building constructed with pre-cast, pre-stressed building methods (Figure 50) (Baass Concrete Co., Inc. 1967; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 69).<sup>13</sup> Situated on 50 acres and accommodating more than 1,000 students, the school had 41 classrooms, six laboratories, a study hall, library, cafeteria, 1,200-seat gymnasium, 2,000-seat auditorium, and office space (*Victoria Advocate* 1968b). Three interior patios, eight lighted tennis courts, a paved parking lot, and landscaping completed the campus. Smyth & Smyth of Corpus Christi were the architects who designed the Brutalist school (*Victoria Advocate* 1965g).<sup>14</sup>

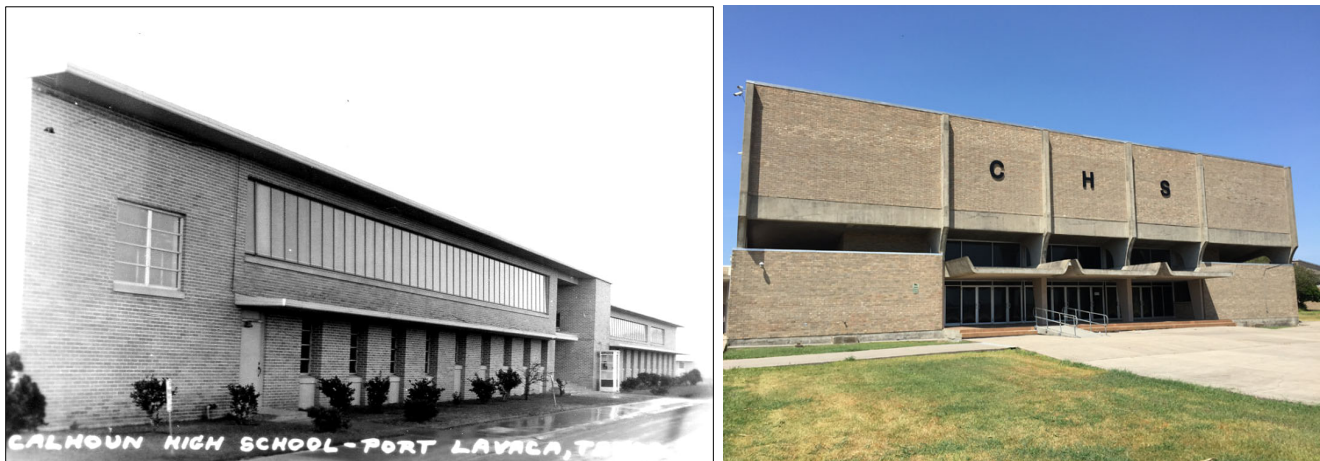


Figure 50. The 1955 International-style Calhoun High School (left) was later known as Travis Middle School (Anonymous 1955). Smyth & Smyth designed the 1968 Brutalist-style Calhoun High School (right) (Anonymous 2021b).

Until 1950, schools were segregated under the “separate but equal” doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* compelled schools to end segregation. Although many discriminatory practices continued, Texas school districts began to implement integration (Berger and Wilborn 2021). In the 1970 case of *Cisneros v. CCISD*, the desegregation decision was extended to Mexican American students, for whom integration had not been universal (Berger and Wilborn 2021). In the same year, a federal judge ordered the integration of all Texas schools in *United States v. Texas*. Although some school districts

<sup>13</sup> The 1934 high school became Madison Elementary School and the 1955 high school became Travis Middle School (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 69).

<sup>14</sup> Brothers Joe G. Smyth and Needham Smyth established their firm in 1947 (Ferrell/Brown & Associates, Inc. 2021). They were active leaders in the Texas Society of Architects and the Corpus Christi Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The firm is in operation today as Ferrell/Brown & Associates (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1952a; *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1952b; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1958). Smyth & Smyth contributed to the design of the Nueces County Courthouse, a striking New Formalist-style concrete building, but their work is otherwise not well documented.

adopted immediate, across-the-board integration in the 1955–1956 academic year, other districts began with partial integration in 1955, including CCISD, which first unified its junior and senior high schools (*Victoria Advocate* 1955b; *Victoria Advocate* 1963e). The final graduating class of Alice O. Wilkins High School was 1955. Each year, Black students were integrated at Calhoun High School until Wilkins closed in 1965 (Popplewell 2004).

By the 1980s, CCISD had eight elementary schools, three middle schools, and Calhoun High School. Many local churches operated schools as well (Kleiner 2021). In recent years, CCISD has embarked on a major building campaign demolishing and replacing most historic-age resources on the campuses of the Seadrift School, the Harrison/Jefferson/Madison Complex, and Travis Middle School (former Calhoun High School) in Port Lavaca.

## PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Three distinct periods of significance apply to this context based on the history of education in Calhoun County. The early era (pre-1900) accounts for historic resources from the county’s early settlement era through the end of the nineteenth century. The next period of significance (1900–1945) encompasses resources constructed from 1900, when communities were growing and establishing new schools or replacing outgrown ones, through the Great Depression and World War II. The post-World War II era (1945–1973) includes resources built to accommodate the county’s post-war growth and school integration, and it extends to 1973.

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture, Community Planning and Development, Education, Ethnic Heritage

## RELATED PROPERTY TYPES

- Domestic resources: teacherages
- Education resources: elementary schools, junior and senior high schools, libraries, research facilities, sports facilities, district offices
- Landscape resources: parking lots, plazas, gardens, street furniture/objects

## SUBTHEME: GOVERNMENT

Before its formal political organization, Old World European explorers and Spanish and Mexican migrants arrived and settled in present-day Calhoun County. In 1689 Alonso De León discovered the settlement’s ruins of René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle’s failed colony

near Powderhorn Lake, and in 1722 the Spanish constructed Nuestra Señora de Loreto de la Bahía Presidio on its site (Chipman 2021; Weddle 2021b). Following initial settlement, the Spanish government established the empresario system to bring settlers to the region, and the practice remained similar under Mexican rule in Texas (1821–1836). In 1824 the Mexican government passed a national colonization law which granted states the authority to regulate the distribution of unappropriated lands for colonization (Barker 2021). In 1831, John J. Linn established the first permanent local settlement in Linnville. Following a Comanche raid in 1840 the settlement relocated to a bluff three miles away, the new site later became Port Lavaca (Kleiner 2021).

The Republic of Texas carved Calhoun County from parts of Jackson and Victoria Counties on April 4, 1846, and fully organized the county on September 22, 1846. The county seat was established in Lavaca, known as Port Lavaca by 1887. By this time the town had a post office and a courthouse (Maywald 2021; Cameron and Lerich 2021). The county boundaries changed subtly between 1856 and 1871 as other counties were formed and altered. Modified for the last time in 1947, the boundary extended that year to incorporate the continental shelf of the Gulf of Mexico (Kleiner 2021; J. H. Long 2008).

Following its rapid development as a well-connected port during the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), Calhoun County’s seat was relocated to Indianola in 1852. The town’s port offered inland connectivity via the Indianola Railroad and overland trade routes including the Chihuahua Trail and the shortest route to San Diego on the Pacific coast. During the Civil War the county seat relocated to Port Lavaca from April 1864 to September 1865 (Malsch 2021b; Maywald 2021). Public buildings in Indianola included an 1857 county courthouse and an 1883 hospital. In 1875, a devastating hurricane damaged the town, but much was rebuilt. The even more powerful 1886 hurricane battered Indianola’s transportation links and an ensuing fire destroyed what had been rebuilt effectively eliminating the town from the map. The county seat was reestablished in Port Lavaca in 1886, and by 1887 Indianola had been permanently abandoned (Kleiner 2021; Malsch 2021b).

At Port Lavaca, several public buildings were constructed. A two-story Greek Revival county courthouse was built in 1887. A post office was constructed on Austin Street at Commerce Street in 1892, and a jail was erected in 1896. A second courthouse was constructed on Live Oak and South Ann Streets in 1910. Both courthouse buildings were demolished and in 1959, a Post-War Modern style courthouse and jail complex designed by Houston architecture firm Rustay and Martin and constructed by D. W. Marshall Construction Corporation was built as a replacement (see Figure 14) (Lane Jr. 2021; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990; Cameron and Lerich 2021). After several relocations, a federal post office was

constructed in 1968 at 300 West Austin Street. This building was replaced by a postal store in October 1999 (Poplewell 1999; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990).

The Calhoun County public library system formed as a project of the Port Lavaca Women’s Study Club around 1940. The library was initially in a federally built community hall known as “The Cove.” In 1957 the Calhoun County Library Association formed to advocate for a larger facility. In 1961 the Calhoun County Commissioners Court agreed to convert the former jail building into a library. Branches of the library system were established in Seadrift in 1967, Point Comfort in 1978, and Port O’Connor in 1989. The most recent Calhoun County Main Library opened in 1990 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 146).

The first hospital in Calhoun County opened in 1947 and consisted of a clinic that doctors Stanley W. Lester and Truman Melcher operated. In 1949 the Calhoun County Commissioners Court established a board of directors to oversee construction of a county hospital. The new building, a 20-bed facility that architect Wyatt C. Hedrick designed, opened on April 10, 1950, with four physicians and 14 employees. A nursing school opened in 1952, and the hospital was expanded in 1960, renamed for local rancher Champ Traylor in 1962, and expanded again 1963 (Figure 51). An addition to the hospital was completed in June 1993 and a renovation was completed in February 1995 (Memorial Medical Center 2021).





Figure 51. The Champ Traylor Memorial Hospital had grown to accommodate more than 75 beds and had 99 full-time and 26 part-time employees by 1980 (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 22–23).

Both the federal and municipal governments have engaged in local public works projects. The federal government undertook several large projects related to port facilities. These include a channel from Pass Cavallo to Port Lavaca; the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway; the Port of Port Lavaca-Point Comfort; the Matagorda Ship Channel, with a side channel to Port Lavaca; and the Victoria Barge Canal (Maywald 2021). Other government-sponsored projects have encompassed public-use facilities, like the municipally owned quick-freeze plant opened during the Great Depression, stimulating the frozen vegetable and seafood industries; and public safety infrastructure, like the seawall constructed between 1920 and 1921 in Port Lavaca to protect the town from high water and erosion (Figure 52) (Maywald 2021). The seawall was expanded in the early-1960s (*Victoria Advocate* 1960). The 1960s-era seawall in Seadrift was heavily damaged by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.



Figure 52. The seawall, built in the aftermath of the 1919 hurricane, protected Port Lavaca from future devastation (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 200).

Municipal government improvements in Calhoun County have mostly consisted of repurposing existing buildings. The City of Port Lavaca purchased the former USACE district office in 1958 to house city hall. This building was replaced in 1984, when the city purchased a building from the First National Bank. Port Lavaca's fire department occupied a building on the corner of Mahan and Guadalupe Streets, later used as a police station. The Bauer Community Center, made possible with a gift from W. H. and Louise Bauer, was completed in 1988 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 27, 112).

The Seadrift City Hall, a former skating rink built in 1963, was purchased from a Victoria bank in 1988 and rehabilitated into a municipal facility with offices, community center, kitchen, and storage space (Figure 53) (Calhoun County Appraisal District 2021; *Victoria Advocate* 1988, 19). In 1991 Point Comfort converted the former Cal-Com Federal Credit Union building into its city hall (*Victoria Advocate* 1991, 7).



Figure 53. This former skating rink built in 1963 serves as the Seadrift City Hall (City of Seadrift 2021).

### Periods of Significance

Calhoun County governmental history has had two developmental eras. The first encompasses late-nineteenth-century development built in and around Port Lavaca, the county seat, and other small towns; however, none of these resources are known to be extant. The second period, beginning in 1950 and extending through 1973, encompasses post-storm replacement improvements in Port Lavaca, Seadrift, Port O'Connor, and Point Comfort that accommodated the needs of the local population and enabled expanded public services.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Community Planning and Development, Engineering, Politics/Government, Social History

### Related Property Types

- Government resources:
  - City and town halls
  - Correctional facilities: police stations, jails, prisons, law enforcement substations
  - Fire stations and houses
  - Offices: municipal buildings and annexes, federal agencies
  - Customs houses
  - Post offices
  - Public works: electric generating plants, sewer systems
  - Courthouses: county courthouse
  - Hospitals
  - County agencies: agricultural extension, hospitals, libraries, community centers, charitable institutions
- Landscape resources: parking lots, parks, plazas, gardens, street furniture/objects

## **SUBTHEME: CONSERVATION**

### Introduction

In the late-1940s, a local branch of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) launched measures in Calhoun County initially focused on revising agricultural practices to prevent soil depletion and erosion and to guide water management. With assistance from the SCS, which conducted salient studies of soils, grasses, and other ecologies to both protect resources and bolster productivity, private farms and ranches initiated conservation plans in subsequent decades. The Foester and Denman families practiced various early conservation practices, like deferred grazing and pasture rotation for range management, and brush control measures to combat invading florae and encourage native salt grass growth.

Except for a small chunk of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge that intersects its political boundary, Calhoun County had no state or federal support for protection of natural resources until the late-twentieth century. The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge encompasses the slice of Calhoun County—with five small lakes and a sliver of the Galveston Intracoastal Waterway—that hangs from neighboring Aransas County’s western portion. Because this portion of the refuge is consolidated with and managed as part of the Aransas Unit on the Blackjack Peninsula, the history of the refuge is excluded from this context.

Several late-twentieth-century conservation locations in Calhoun County are mostly natural settings with some manmade viewing areas and do not have historic-age resources. Some of these areas are along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, including the Port Lavaca Bird Sanctuary, Six Mile Park, Magnolia Beach, Magic Ridge, Powderhorn Lake, Boggy Nature Park, and Swan Point. Elsewhere in the county are the Indianola Bird Walk, Lighthouse Beach and Bird Sanctuary, Welder Flats Coastal Preserve, and approximately 13 rookeries.

Four conservation locations designated in the late-twentieth century each had precedent occupations with associated resources: the Matagorda Island and Myrtle Foester Whitmire units of the refuge, and the Guadalupe Delta and Powderhorn WMAs. Extant historic-age resources in these units and areas do not relate to conservation and may be associated with other relevant contexts, particularly Agriculture, Military, or Recreation, Culture, and Leisure.

### Matagorda Island: National Wildlife Refuge, State Natural Area, and State Park

Long before its conservation, Matagorda Island was home to very few families who settled there in the 1890s. They operated cattle ranches and built wood-frame homes plus windmills, cisterns, barns, corrals, and fences on the island’s vast 30,000 acres of sandy uplands (McAlister and McAlister 1993, 74). After regular battles with severe weather events, these





families still raised livestock on but no longer occupied the island by the 1930s. In the early-1940s, the federal government condemned the northern portion of the island to acquire the land from the Hawes, Hill, and Little families (Hawes n.d.).

Two families owned the southern portion of Matagorda Island between about 1933 and the 1980s. Between 1933 and 1941, on behalf of his American Liberty Oil Company, prominent Texas oil man Clint Murchison Sr. purchased portions of the southern 10 miles, approximately 11,500 acres. In 1934, he built a house on the property (Figure 54) (McAlister and McAlister 1993, 76). In 1942, the Department of Defense acquired the island's 28 northern miles and leased the American Liberty Oil Company's northern miles for a World War II bombing and gunnery training range that was utilized through the 1950s (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex 2010, 13). In 1946, Murchison and partner Toddie Lee Wynne Jr. separated their assets, and the Matagorda Island property went to Wynne. Another prominent oil investor and real estate man, Wynne was part of the family noted for developing Six Flags Over Texas in the early-1960s. On Matagorda Island, Wynne maintained a cattle ranch, adding a bunkhouse for ranch hands, windmills, fences, corrals, outbuildings, an electric water well, a hangar for his DC-3, packed shell roads, and an air strip. He expanded the house into a sprawling one-story lodge with a club house and guest accommodations. Full-length verandas on the east and west façades provided vistas of Mesquite Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. A white wood fence surrounded the landscaped grounds (McAlister and McAlister 1993, 76). Wynne also had a series of dikes built to prevent tidal overwash. These, however, were ruled a violation of state water rights and he was forced to install culverts and levees to allow normal tidal fluctuation into the flats (McAlister and McAlister 1993, 79–80). It was with Wynne's fiscal support and from his Matagorda Island property that Space Services of America launched the first privately owned rocket 30 miles into space in 1982. In the 1980s, when the state and federal governments agreed to establish a national wildlife refuge on the island, the Wynne family conveyed the property (McAlister and McAlister 1993, 80).



Figure 54. Clint Murchison Sr. had this 1934 house, no longer extant, built on Matagorda Island. Beginning in the late-1940s, Toddie Lee Wynne expanded the building into a large lodge (Peppard 2014).

Today, the 38-mile-long, 56,683-acre Matagorda Island is both a unit of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and a state park that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) jointly manage. The USFWS began management of the northern portion in 1971, with military property and personnel on the ground as late as 1978. Ownership transferred fully to the USFWS in 1982. State involvement also began in the 1970s, with some property transferred to the Texas General Land Office. The 7,325-acre state park is at the northeast end of the island. It was established in 1979, and the remainder of the island is devoted to natural resources conservation. By 1986, the entirety of the island was under federal and state control. Between hurricane damage and demolition, few historic-age resources remain extant on the island.

#### [Myrtle Foester Whitmire Unit, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge](#)

The USFWS acquired the 3,440-acre Myrtle Foester Whitmire Unit, near Powderhorn Lake, in 1993 (Figure 55). The Foester family's Calhoun County roots date back to 1847, when Louis John Foester emigrated from Germany (U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office 1880).

By 1895, his estate held more than 6,800 acres (Calhoun County 1895). A great-grandson, Curtis Marsh Foester Sr. (1905–1953) married Myrtle Buehring (1908–2000) in 1930. They operated a cattle business and farm on their widespread lands for about 30 years (Find A Grave 2021). In the mid-1960s, the Foesters practiced soil and water conservation on the property with the help of the Calhoun-Victoria Soil Conservation District (*Victoria Advocate* 1962c). In her later years, Myrtle Buehring Foester Whitmire conveyed the land to the federal government. The unit has 18,000 feet of a 1950s canal developed for rice farming. New construction includes 2.65 miles of canals to aid flood control. Major corporations with a local presence that helped fund the structures are ConocoPhillips, Formosa Plastics, ALCOA, and Tetra-Tech (Votteler 2009). Review of aerial imagery suggests few historic-age resources are extant in the Whitmire Unit.



Figure 55. A corral on the former Foester Ranch (Republic Ranches 2021).

### [Wildlife Management Areas](#)

The USFWS and TPWD identified the Guadalupe Delta as a wetlands area and wildlife habitat that needed preservation and protection in the late-1970s. The WMA has four units that total



more than 7,400 acres: Mission Lake, Hynes Bay, Guadalupe River, and San Antonio. This WMA is noted for substantial archeological evidence of Karankawan inhabitants (Texas Beyond History 2021). Review of aerial imagery suggests few historic-age resources are extant in the Guadalupe Delta WMA.

In 2018, TPWD acquired the 15,000-acre Powderhorn WMA, part of a ranch that once spanned 42,000 acres. In 1936, Leroy G. Denman Sr. purchased the property and stocked it with 3,000 Santa Gertrudis cattle (Figure 56). Later, Leroy G. Denman Jr. added exotic species. Both men worked as attorneys for the King Ranch (Oko 2015). British Petroleum supplied substantial support for the acquisition through its contributions to the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund established after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department 2018). Review of aerial imagery suggests few historic-age resources are extant in the Powderhorn Ranch WMA.



Figure 56. The Denman family ranch house and outbuilding (Foster 2014).

### [Periods of Significance](#)

The first period of significance for this context begins in 1945, when local soil conservation districts implemented programs to give private owners guidance on incorporating conservation



plans and practices into land use and ends in 1973. The second period of significance for this context is extremely short since public conservation locations were not designated until the late-twentieth century. As a result, the limited era starts in 1971, when the government oversight of a wildlife refuge began, and extends to 1973.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Conservation, Entertainment/Recreation, Landscape Architecture

### Related Property Types

- Domestic resources: single-family dwellings
- Government resources: government offices
- Social resources: civic facilities
- Education resources: research facilities
- Recreation and culture resources: outdoor recreation facilities, such as parks, campgrounds, picnic areas, and hiking trails
- Landscape resources: parking lots, parks, unoccupied lands, natural features, street furniture/objects, conservation areas

## **SUBTHEME: MILITARY INSTITUTIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

### Introduction

The earliest military activity in present-day Calhoun County was the 1836 presence of the nascent Texas Navy in Matagorda Bay during the Texas Revolution. Both Confederate and Union forces occupied the area during the Civil War. World War I military activity in Calhoun County was limited to use of the intracoastal channels and canals. During World War II, Calhoun County was the location of training ranges for Army aircraft and ground-to-air gunnery and bombing ranges. An associated airfield developed on Matagorda Island was later recommissioned as an Air Force base that was used continuously through the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The base closed permanently in 1975.

### Civil War Fortifications, 1861–1865

The first military presence of any duration in Calhoun County dates to the Civil War. In 1862, the Confederacy used enslaved labor to build Fort Esperanza on Matagorda Island and other fortifications in the area. To prevent U.S. Army use, Confederate forces destroyed more infrastructure than they built, damaging coastal lighthouses, the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf

Railroad, and ports and wharves. The U.S. Army took command of Fort Esperanza in December 1863 in the Battle of Matagorda Bay and occupied the fort through June 1864. The Army's garrison camps and earthworks on Matagorda Island, Matagorda Peninsula, and forts and trenches in Indianola, made the region the most heavily fortified in Texas (Winsor 1978). The first torpedo mine, developed in Port Lavaca in 1863, was patented and developed for the Confederacy (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).

### [U.S. Coast Guard Installations, 1880–1995](#)

Congress created the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915, merging the Revenue Cutter Service and the U.S. Life-Saving Service into one agency. In 1939, lighthouses and navigation aids came under Coast Guard jurisdiction. During World War II and under U.S. Navy command, the Coast Guard protected coastal waters and beaches, increasing patrols after German submarines landed agents on shores in New York and Florida in June 1942 (Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild 2000). Merchant Marine licensing and vessel safety were added to the mission in 1946. From 1967 to 2003, the U.S. Coast Guard was part of the U.S. Department of Transportation; it is now part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard 2021).

The U.S. Life-Saving Service built the earliest Coast Guard facility in Calhoun County. The Saluria Life-Saving Station was constructed on the northeastern point of Matagorda Island in 1880. The Coast Guard abandoned the station in 1929 due to sand accretion at the inlet, and built Station Saluria in 1932 (Figure 57) with congressional appropriations (*Henderson Daily News* 1932; *Palacios Beacon* 1930a; 1930b). Hurricane Carla severely damaged Station Saluria in 1961, and the new station constructed in Port O'Connor could withstand hurricane-force winds (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; U.S. Coast Guard 2021). Station Port O'Connor, constructed in 1964, is active today, with 48 active and seven reserve members manning the facility (U.S. Coast Guard Heartland 2020).



Figure 57. This 1932 image of the U.S. Coast Guard Station at Saluria shows the lifted building with its central lookout cupola (U.S. Coast Guard Heartland 2020).

Two lighthouses came under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Coast Guard in 1939: the Matagorda and Halfmoon Reef Lighthouses. The Matagorda Lighthouse was constructed in 1873 (U.S. Coast Guard 2021). Continuously operated by lighthouse keepers during World War II, 11 guardsmen were stationed on the island to protect Station Saluria and the lighthouse (*The Paris News* 1966). Light keepers operated the structure until the mid-twentieth century, when electric lines were built to the island (*The Paris News* 1966). The U.S. Coast Guard maintained the lighthouse from this period until 1995 when it was decommissioned; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now owns the structure (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Oko 2013; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2011). The Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse was constructed in 1858. Severely damaged by a 1942 hurricane, the Coast Guard condemned it and removed from service. Eventually donated to the Calhoun County Historical Commission, in 1979, the lighthouse was moved to a tract adjacent to the Port Lavaca Chamber of Commerce and repaired (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).

### World War II Military Installations

The major World War II installation in Calhoun County was a bombing and gunnery range on Matagorda Island. The land for the military reservations on Matagorda Island in Calhoun County and Matagorda Peninsula in Matagorda County were acquired by the U.S. Government in 1940 by condemnation of private property on the northeastern portion of the island and a lease with the owners for the southern portion. The War Department designated the U.S. Army Matagorda Bombing and Machine Gun Range in 1941 (U.S. War Department 1943). The 50,825-acre Matagorda Island range was for air-to-air and air-to-ground gunnery training (Freeman 2014). On May 20, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9168, which established the "Matagorda Bay Defensive Sea Area," a national defense area, and restricted traffic to vessels that had permission from the Secretary of War (Roosevelt 1942). USACE constructed the Matagorda Army Airfield in 1943 to support the bombing range. The bombing range and airfield were deactivated at the end of World War II but reactivated in 1949 as an Air Force base.

Originally constructed with three asphalt runways, the airfield was modified with six paved runways and multiple taxiways, a ramp, and several support buildings by 1952 (Figure 58) (Freeman 2014). During its history, the base was under the command of multiple larger bases, including Texas installations at Foster Field, Randolph Air Force Base, Carswell Air Force Base, and Bergstrom Air Force Base, and Louisiana installations at Chennault Air Force Base and Barksdale Air Force Base. Most activity ended before 1960, and in 1971, the U.S. Air Force transferred more than 19,000 acres of the land to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The base was formally deactivated in 1975. However, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the Tethered Aerostat Radar System, an aerostat balloon-based radar system that federal agencies use to monitor and prevent drug trafficking, was based at the former defense facility (Freeman 2014; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department 2007). Today, Matagorda Island is both a unit of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and a Texas Wildlife Management Area.





Figure 58. This 1990 aerial photograph of Matagorda Island shows the extant runways and taxiways of the former military base on Matagorda Island (Freeman 2014).

Other World War II Army activities in Calhoun County included temporary training facilities associated with Camp Hulen in nearby Matagorda County. Camp Hulen began in 1926 as a summer training camp for the 36<sup>th</sup> Division of the U.S. Army Texas National Guard (Jenkins 2021). In 1941, a special Senate committee national defense study identified the camp as a good location for National Guard anti-aircraft training (U.S. Congress 1941). Camp Hulen established a temporary camp at Indianola that operated as an anti-aircraft target range with batteries of guns manned by the 211<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (Figure 59) (Anonymous 1941). Conditions were primitive, and damage from a 1945 tropical storm led to building permanent improvements to replace temporary tents. Another temporary camp at Miller's Point at Magnolia Beach had a mess hall, infirmary, barracks, and base store, constructed in 1943

(Calhoun County Historical Commission 2011). There was also a projectile area near Olivia and a rifle range and anti-aircraft range in Wells Point (Jenkins 2021). Other World War II-related buildings and structures included observation towers, some erected by the military and some by private organizations and used by volunteer citizens to observe and report on airplane activity (Calhoun County Historical Commission 2011). The Lavaca Bay Causeway, damaged by a 1942 hurricane, was rebuilt in 1943 with limited wartime resources to keep Camp Hulen and the Indianola camp connected (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990).



Figure 59. This 1944 image shows the Army firing range on Indianola Beach with battery defenses (Anonymous 1941)

### [Gulf Intracoastal Waterway](#)

The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), a continuous system of navigable inland waterways constructed along part of the Texas Coast between 1927 and 1942, played a significant national defense role during World War II. With German submarines lurking on the Gulf Coast and wreaking immense havoc with just a small number of submarines, the inland waterways were a safe means to transport commodities for military and civilian use. War-related industries, like shipbuilding and petrochemical production companies, located their facilities along the GIWW and its tributaries (Alperin 1983). In 1942, Congress authorized an enlarged

channel extending southward near Brownsville to better serve national defense with the Second Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act. The work to Corpus Christi was completed in 1945 and the final channel through to the Laguna Madre was finished in 1949 (Alperin 1983).

Extant resources associated with the military history of Calhoun County include the Matagorda Island and Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse, the Port O'Connor Coast Guard Station, remnants of the runways and some buildings at the Matagorda Island Air Force Base, and the canals and channels of the GIWW. No non-archeological resources are known to remain from Civil War, except the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at the Fort Esperanza, a historic archeological site (Kleiner 2021). The lighthouse keeper's house and other buildings associated with the Matagorda Island Lighthouse are no longer extant. Few, if any, historic-age resources associated with the World War II training camps at Indianola and Magnolia Beaches are extant. These temporary camps were cleared away shortly after the end of the war. The GIWW is extant and still in use, although changes over time have included dredging, widening, and other modifications.

### Period of Significance

The period of significance for military history in Calhoun County is from 1861, the start of the Civil War, through 1975, when Matagorda Air Force Base closed.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Engineering, Military, Social History, and Transportation

### Related Property Types

- Defense resources:
  - Military facilities: military camps, training facilities
  - Coast Guard facilities: lighthouses, Coast Guard stations, piers, docks, life-saving stations
  - Air facilities: air bases, runways, airplane hangars, associated buildings and structures
- Transportation resources: lighthouses, runways, navigational aids, canals



## SUBTHEME: RECREATION, CULTURE, AND LEISURE

### Introduction

Recreation, culture, and leisure has been an important part of Calhoun County’s history and a major component of the local economy since the late-nineteenth century. Clubs and organizations and natural, art, sports, and entertainment resources have provided residents and visitors with outlets and opportunities. Like much of the built environment in Calhoun County, hurricanes and major storms have destroyed or caused significant damage that required repairs to many recreational and cultural resources. Because of the county’s small population, the several municipalities have only ever had one or two examples of certain property types. When evaluating these resources for NRHP eligibility, diminished integrity is expected, and rarity should be considered. This section begins with an overview of tourism, followed by a synthesis of recreation, culture, and leisure organized by property types: outdoor recreation; cultural institutions, monuments, and markers; and meeting halls, clubs and organizations, and religious institutions.

### Tourism

Tourism flourished in the late-nineteenth century because of improved working conditions for a growing middle class, including a five-day work week and paid time off. An extensively expanded national railroad network made travel increasingly accessible (Aron 1999, 45–47). Coasts and waterways, mountains, and other scenic and natural areas became popular tourist destinations (Aron 1999, 46). With steady daily rail service by the late-1880s and a larger local railroad network by the 1910s, Calhoun County’s 500 miles of coastline and freshwaters were attractions for Texans traveling on excursion trains from Victoria, Cuero, San Antonio, Houston, and elsewhere to spend a weekend or up to several months along the waterfront (*Victoria Advocate* 1969a, 7B; Maywald 2021).

Of the many early tourist improvements, hotels are the lone survivors. Hotels and tourist cottages were constructed within walking distance of passenger train depots and the bayfront, including the 1904 Beach Hotel and the c. 1905 Navidad Hotel in Port Lavaca, the 1909 Lafitte Hotel in Seadrift, and the 1911 LaSalle Hotel in Port O’Connor (Figure 60, Figure 61) (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981, 12–16; Cormier 2013, 33, 80; Dunnam 2021; Freier 1979, 194). Dancing, swimming, sailing, fishing, and hunting were popular activities in the early-twentieth century. Tourists dined in fish and oyster houses on the bay (Cormier 2013, 81). Pavilions erected over the water in Port Lavaca, Port O’Connor, Seadrift, and Alamo Beach had changing rooms and public spaces for dances, parties, and community functions (Figure 62) (Cormier 2013, 34, 36–37, 42). The LaSalle Hotel, the “finest wintering place on the coast,” rented well-appointed hotel rooms and cottages for longer stays. The hotel offered guests



activities like tennis, croquet, and boat rentals. Game-hunting patrons had access to a 70,000-acre game preserve (*The Houston Post* 1910, 3; *Victoria Daily Advocate* 1911, 3). Tourism stalled during World War I and the 1919 hurricane destroyed the pavilions and the LaSalle Hotel (Cormier 2013, 82–83; Port O’Connor Chamber of Commerce 2021). Known extant resources from this era are the Beach Hotel and the Navidad Hotel, although neither is currently used for lodging.<sup>15</sup> The Lafitte Hotel was moved to Victoria County where it is a hotel and event center (Hathcock 2007, B3).

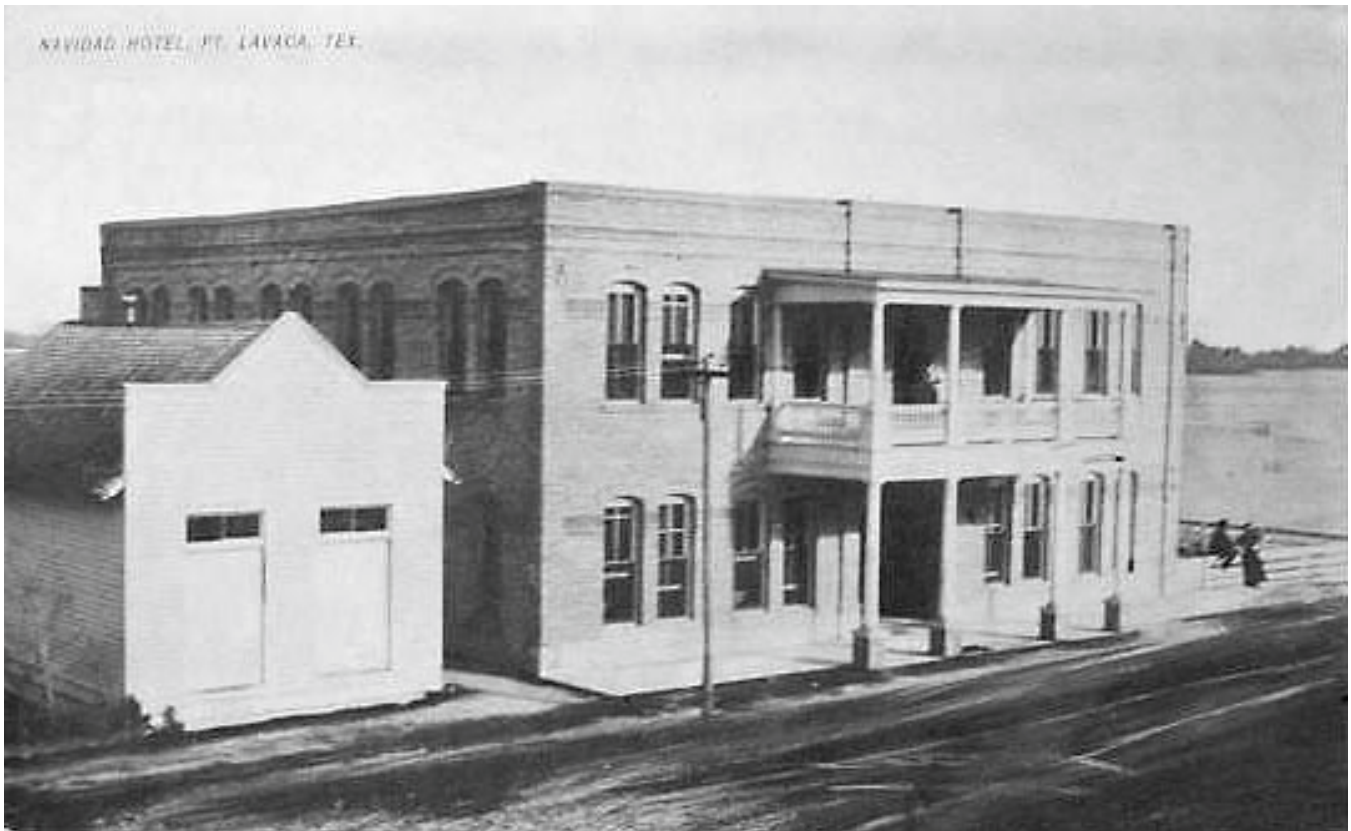


Figure 60. The c. 1905 Navidad Hotel, shown in this undated image, in Port Lavaca was one of several bayfront hotels constructed for tourists visiting Calhoun County (Port Lavaca Main Street 2021b).

<sup>15</sup> In Port Lavaca, the Beach Hotel is at the corner of Main and Commerce Streets and the Navidad Hotel is at 429 East Railroad Street.

**THE LaSALLE  
HOTEL**

**PORT O'CONNOR, TEXAS.**

—◆—

One of the Finest and Best Appointed  
Hotels Along the Gulf Coast.

—◆—

Absolutely Fire Proof.

—◆—

Magnificent Suites of Rooms, with and  
without Baths.

—◆—

Cuisine Positively Unequaled in the  
State of Texas.

—◆—

Comfortable Cottages Adjacent.

—◆—

Pavilion, with Dance Hall, Auditorium  
and Bathrooms to Accommodate 300  
Bathers, in Connection.

—◆—

Fine Orchestra for both-Lobby and  
Pavilion.

—◆—

Mr. Kestel, Expert Tarpon Fisherman  
with Fleet of Boats, at Disposal of  
Guests at All Times.

—◆—

Tennis, Croquet and All Other Pleas-  
ures of a First-Class Resort.

—◆—

Considering Accommodations, Rates  
are the Most Reasonable of Any  
Hotel on the Coast

—◆—

For Particulars Address

**The Hotel LaSalle**  
Port O'Connor, Texas

Figure 61. This advertisement for the LaSalle Hotel touted the resort's amenities in 1911 (*Victoria Daily Advocate* 1911, 3).

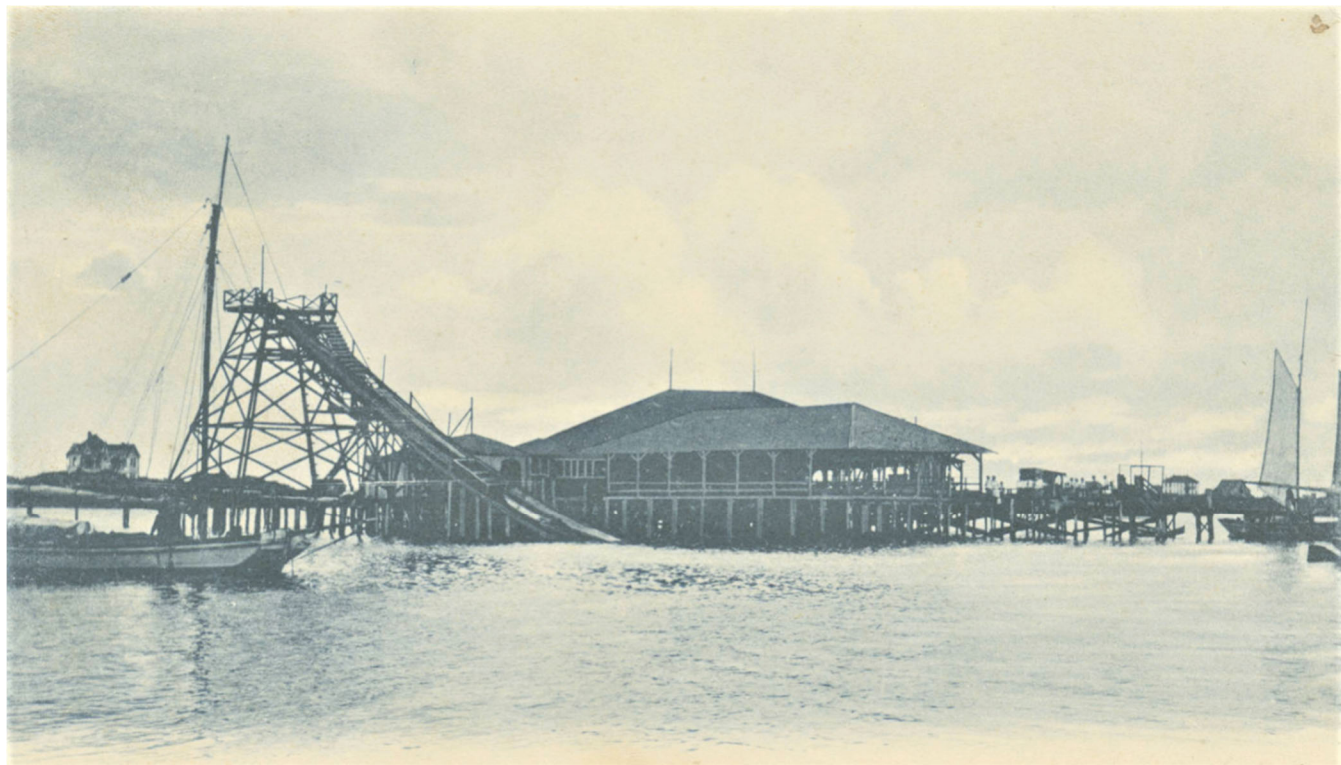


Figure 62. The 1896 Shoot-the-Chute Pavilion in Port Lavaca had a bathhouse and slide, the latter very evident in this 1906 image. A 1912 hurricane destroyed the popular tourist attraction (Langsdorf & Company 1906).

Despite the loss of passenger train service in 1935 and destructive hurricanes in the 1940s and in 1961, Calhoun County's tourism industry revived in the mid-twentieth century. Seawalls were constructed to preserve the coastline by preventing erosion and storm surge damage. Swimming at beaches, recreational fishing and boating in freshwater and saltwater, and hunting were popular activities. Piers, marinas, hunting and fishing centers, and restaurants catered to tourists. The county became a birdwatching destination. Automobile-oriented motels and hotels built along state highways and other major thoroughfares replaced the railroad-oriented hotels of an earlier era. Vacation houses and second homes or rentals were built along and near the coast.

## Outdoor Recreation

### **Beaches**

Calhoun County's natural resources, some enhanced with buildings, structures, and landscape improvements, have historically provided recreational opportunities for tourists and residents. Beaches include Magnolia Beach, the only shell beach along the Texas Gulf Coast, and Lighthouse, Indianola, Alamo, Port Alto, and King Fisher Beaches. Common amenities are picnic tables, shelters, barbeque grills, boardwalks, restroom and shower facilities, concession stands, and playgrounds (Calhoun County Parks Board 2021).



## Piers, Marinas, and Boat Launches

Public and private piers, marinas, and boat launches are common in Calhoun County. These waterfront resources are susceptible to storm damage and have been replaced over time. The well-known pier over Lavaca Bay linking Port Lavaca and Port O'Connor is a repurposed automobile bridge that Hurricane Carla damaged in 1961. When the bridge's remnants were transferred to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department conservatorship, it became the 3,200-foot-long Port Lavaca State Fishing Pier, believed to be the longest in Texas at the time (*Victoria Advocate* 1964a, 1). In 1964, the pier had four night-fishing lights, steps to the reef for wade fishing, cleaning stations, and a concession stand (Figure 63) (C. Long 2021; *Victoria Advocate* 1965a, 15A; *Victoria Advocate* 1965d, 12; *Victoria Advocate* 1969a, 7D). In 1969, boat launches and/or fishing piers were present in Port Lavaca, Port O'Connor, Seadrift, Indianola, Magnolia Beach, Alamo Beach, Olivia, Six Mile, and other locations (*Victoria Advocate* 1969a, 7D).



Figure 63. The Port Lavaca State Fishing Pier in 1964 when it was dedicated (*Victoria Advocate* 1964d).

## Parks

Calhoun County has state, county, and city parks, most of which are waterfront, and one roadside park. Indianola State Historic Park, the first of its kind in the county, was established in 1958 on 300 acres at the site of Indianola on Lavaca Bay. It had facilities for fishing, boating, camping, picnicking, and swimming. Monuments and markers commemorating the historic site were erected at this location. In 1970, ownership transferred to Calhoun County, and it became known as Indianola Beach Park (Kleiner 2021). The 7,325-acre Matagorda Island State Park is at the northeast end of the island, established in 1979, and its remainder is devoted to natural resources conservation. An 1873 lighthouse and remnants of a former military base are on park lands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2012).



Port Lavaca has historically had three neighborhood parks: City Park (also called Tilley Street Park), George Adams Park, and City Hall Park (Golden Crescent Council of Governments 1980). The county also had three district parks: Bayfront Park, which opened in 1958 with a relocated ALCOA building that was repurposed for storage and a concession stand; a 1959 sports complex park near the county fairgrounds; and Fishing Pier Park, created in 1964 at the base of a recently built fishing pier and enhanced in 1973 with a swimming pool (Golden Crescent Council of Governments 1980; *Victoria Advocate* 1958f, 12; *Victoria Advocate* 1958h, 16; *Victoria Advocate* 1959c, 10A; *Victoria Advocate* 1973, 10B). Other municipal parks include Point Comfort City Park, where a public swimming pool was added in 1957; parks in the small communities of Six Mile and Olivia that have existed since at least 1960; Port O'Connor Park, established in 1964 at the base of the fishing pier; and Bill Sanders Memorial Park on Swan Point, also from the 1960s (*Victoria Advocate* 1963f, 16; *Victoria Advocate* 1964a, 13; *Victoria Advocate* 1964c, 13A).

At least one state-owned roadside park was created in Calhoun County. In 1958, William Lee and Katherine Sells Traylor, described as "pioneers of the Gulf Coast area," donated land for a roadside park along State Highway 35 northeast of Point Comfort. The Port Lavaca Garden Club helped establish the Will Traylor Park, with a dedicatory marker that the Texas Highway Department installed (*Victoria Advocate* 1958e, 12).

## Sports Facilities

Public sports facilities like baseball fields, tennis courts, volleyball courts, basketball courts, and swimming pools were common municipal amenities. As the largest city in Calhoun County and its seat of government, Port Lavaca has been the location of the larger sports facilities. The city had a baseball field with a large wood grandstand in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Cormier 2013, 93). In 1954, Sandcrab Stadium was constructed. The \$80,000 youth football field had seating for 3,944, a press box, and an electric scoreboard (*Victoria Advocate* 1954g, 8). Permanent rodeo facilities were constructed in 1957 at the county fairgrounds. Bowling was available beginning in 1956 at the Port Lavaca Bowling Center, later known as Sea Lanes, on Main Street (Rhodes 2020b; *Victoria Advocate* 1956b, 24).<sup>16</sup> A skating rink opened in 1961 in a building now used as Seadrift City Hall (City of Seadrift 2021). Port Lavaca had a short-lived miniature golf course in the late-1960s (*Victoria Advocate* 1969b, 5B). The only golf course in the county is at the Hatchbend Country Club. Established in 1958, the private club has a nine-hole course, club house, swimming pool, and

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<sup>16</sup> The Port Lavaca Bowling Center is closed; the building may still be extant at 1935 West Main Street. Beau's Billiards, Bowling & Arcade at 100 Village Road in Port Lavaca appears to be a more-recent establishment.

tennis courts (*Victoria Advocate* 1958a, 16; *Victoria Advocate* 1958h, 12; *Victoria Advocate* 1958j, 10).

## Fairs and Festivals

The county fair is the longest-standing recreational event in Calhoun County's history. Agriculturists organized the first county fairs in the early-nineteenth century to promote contemporaneously modern farming practices (Kniffen 1949, 267). They became large-scale, multiple-day events on permanent grounds with agricultural and technological demonstrations and exhibits, livestock judging, contests, food, live entertainment, and carnival rides. The Calhoun County Fair was first held as early as 1922 (*Victoria Advocate* 1922, 2). In 1957, the county purchased permanent fairgrounds outside the Port Lavaca city limits at 186 Henry Barber Way and a rodeo arena, barns, and agricultural building were constructed (*Victoria Advocate* 1957h, 14; *Victoria Advocate* 1958b, 14; West 1957, 1). The grounds and some of the facilities, which local organizations use for events, meetings, youth rodeos, and other activities, remain extant (Calhoun County Youth Rodeo 2021; *Victoria Advocate* 1959b, 8; *Victoria Advocate* 1959e, 8).

Other events in Calhoun County not as old or long-lasting as the county fair highlight other local traditions. An annual fishing festival that started in 1958 attracted hundreds of competitors from across the state (*Victoria Advocate* 1958d, 12; *Victoria Advocate* 1958g, 1). Other events include an annual Juneteenth Celebration, first held in the late-1970s in Port Lavaca's George Adams Park; Seadrift's Shrimpfest, which began in 1978; and the Taste of Heritage Festival, which started in 1986 to celebrate local ethnic groups and related cuisines (*Victoria Advocate* 1979, 14E; *Victoria Advocate* 1980, 1D; *Victoria Advocate* 1986a, 14B).

## Cultural Institutions, Monuments, and Markers

### Movie Theaters

Port Lavaca's several movie theaters each represent different eras of cinema history. The Rex Theatre, now the Main Street Theatre at 315 East Main Street, is an early, purpose-built movie theater incorporated into Port Lavaca's commercial corridor (Figure 64). Contractor Patrick E. Barnett of Victoria completed construction in December 1939 at a cost of \$16,500 (*Victoria Advocate* 1938, 1). The building could seat 500 people on the main floor and in the balcony and had a stage, air conditioning, and motion picture equipment (Sanborn Map Company 1940, 1; *Victoria Advocate* 1945, 1, 7).<sup>17</sup> A 1945 fire severely damaged the building, with only

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<sup>17</sup> The 1939 Rex Theatre was the second local building known by this name; the original location of the first theater remains unknown. Because Long-Griffith Theatre chain leased the 1939 building, it was also called as the Port Lavaca Long's Theatre. It has also been known as the Port Lavaca Theatre.

four walls and the steel girders left; the front of the building was less impaired and the building was rebuilt (*Victoria Advocate* 1945, 1, 7). The theatre reopened and was in use during the 1950s and 1960s before closing for an extended period (*Victoria Advocate* 1959d, 10; *Victoria Advocate* 1968a, 2A). In 1994, the building was renovated and reopened as a live theater venue (Port Lavaca Main Street 2021a).



Figure 64. This undated image shows the 1939 Main Street Theatre in Port Lavaca (McIntyre 2021).

Port Lavaca took part in the post-World War II drive-in movie theater trend. The 1950 Port Drive-In opened on West Austin Street near Alcoa Drive and expanded in 1954 to add a second screen and capacity for 1,000 parked cars (*Victoria Advocate* 1950b, 2; *Victoria Advocate* 1954d, 3A). It closed in 1975 and was later demolished (Machann 2021a). Competition from Twin Dolphins Theatre, which opened in 1973 at 152 State Highway 35, likely contributed to its demise (Machann 2021b). Like other movie theaters of the era, Twin Dolphins is a standalone building in an outlying area that accommodates ample parking.

Seadrift and Port O'Connor also had movie theaters, which are extant, heavily modified, and no longer functioning in their original capacity. The downtown Seadrift Theatre at 415 Main Street had a tall false parapet (Figure 65) (Johnstone 2003b, 4:61; *Victoria Advocate* 1954a, 9). Hurricane Carla destroyed Port O'Connor's Jamison Theater in 1961. A 1962 replacement



was built at the southwest corner of Main and Third Streets (Rhyne 2020; *Victoria Advocate* 1962a, 2).



Figure 65. This c. 1955 image depicts the downtown Seadrift Theatre, with a drug store next door. The building is extant, but the marquee has been removed, among other alterations (Johnstone 2003b, 4:61).

## Dance Halls

Dance halls catered to tourists and residents, beginning with the bayfront pavilions of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. At least three historic-age dance halls are extant and in use in Port Lavaca, including the 1972 Veterans of Foreign Wars Post Ballroom at 16 Konrad Road; the 1964 Continental Ballroom at 4242 State Highway 35; and the Knights of Columbus Hall, now Drifters Hall, at 5287 Farm-to-Market Road 3084 (Ficklen 2021; *Victoria Advocate* 1972, 3B; Sachs 1964, 21). The Music Box in Six Mile and The Lone Star on Farm-to-Market (FM) Road 2615 in Port Lavaca were popular venues no longer in operation, although the latter may be extant (Six Mile "Music Box" & Lone Star Dance Hall Alums 2021; Snider 2018).

## Museums

The Calhoun County Museum was established in Port Lavaca in 1964. The museum was originally housed in part of the 1896 jail. In 1991, after the jail was demolished, the museum eventually moved to its current location at 301 South Ann Street in the city's former library



(Poppewell 1991, 10A). The organization acquires, documents, preserves, studies, and exhibits the artifacts on local history, natural history, and maritime history (Calhoun County Museum 2021).

## Monuments and Markers

Significant monuments and markers in Calhoun County include the La Salle Monument and seven 1936 Texas Centennial markers. The La Salle Monument is a 22-foot-tall commemorative sculpture marking the approximate site at Indianola where French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, landed in 1685. It is listed in the NRHP under Criteria A and C and meets Criteria Consideration F (B. T. Wilson 2017). The county's 1936 Centennial Markers, all NRHP eligible, honor La Salle; early political leader Jefferson Beaumont; pioneer settler Sylvanus Hatch; the sites of Indianola, Cox's Point, and Linnville; and Calhoun County (Texas Historical Commission 2021; B. T. Wilson and Smith 2018).

## [Meeting Halls, Clubs and Organizations, and Religious Institutions](#)

### Meeting Halls

Calhoun County residents used bayfront pavilions as meeting halls in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries before they were lost to storms. Later meeting halls were both publicly and privately owned. In 1951, ALCOA built a recreation and assembly hall for its employees at the entrance of its Point Comfort Village housing development (Figure 66) (*Victoria Advocate* 1951b, 13). The Olivia Community Center at 50 County Road 304 was established by 1960 in a former school building (Overton 2016b).<sup>18</sup> Although unused for many years, the building is being renovated for a community center. Other examples of meeting halls were associated with social or service organizations and used for both organizational and community events (Overton 2016a; 2016b). In 1927, downtown Port Lavaca had two lodges associated with second floor meeting space on Main Street between Guadalupe and Colorado Streets.<sup>19</sup> Later organizational halls tended to be purpose-built, standalone buildings with ample parking. The Bauer Community Center in Port Lavaca and the Port O'Connor Community Center were both built in recent years.

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<sup>18</sup> The school was in use from at least 1949 to 1959, although the building may be older (Overton 2016b).

<sup>19</sup> The Masonic Hall was on the second floor of 306 North Street (now 233 East Main Street). The other lodge was on the second floor of 311 North Street (now 220 East Main Street) (Johnstone 2016, 153).

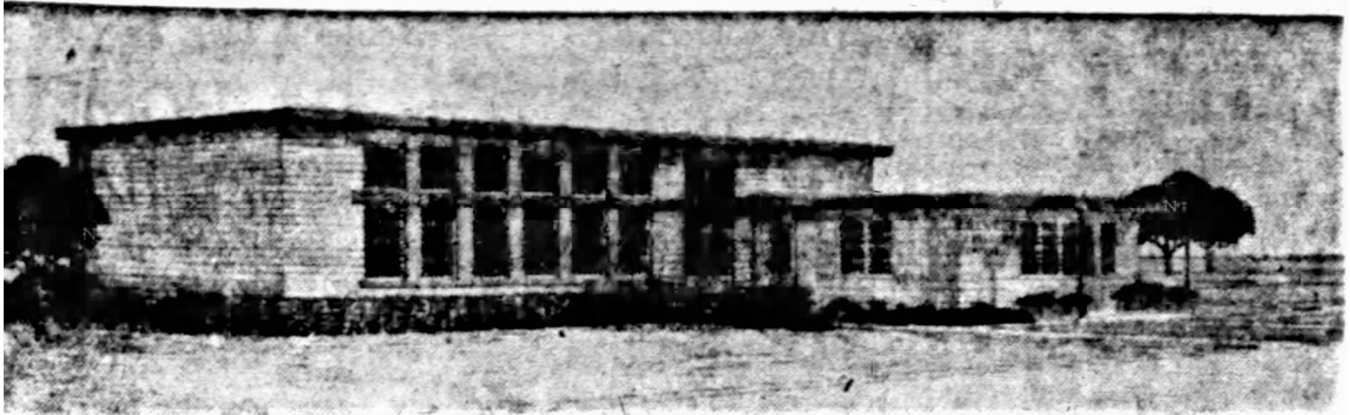


Figure 66. This 1951 architect's sketch of the Point Comfort Recreation Hall, a recreation and assembly building built for Aluminum Company of America employees, was near the company's worker housing (*Victoria Advocate* 1951b, 13).

## Clubs and Organizations

Residents of Calhoun County established local chapters of many state and national social and service organizations, including Masons, Woodmen of the World, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Knights of Columbus, American Legion, Rotary Club, Lions Club, and others. The Lavaca Lodge #36, established in 1847, is likely the oldest such local organization still in existence, and the group meets at 3484 FM Road 1090 in Port Lavaca (Diggs 2021, 97; Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 97). Two organizations active in civic affairs and community improvements in the post-World War II years were the Calhoun County Jaycees, later known as the Port Lavaca Jaycees, and the Mid-Coastal Sportsmen's Club. The Calhoun County Jaycees chapter was a junior chamber of commerce organization established in 1954 (*Victoria Advocate* 1954f, 6). Among other activities, the group created and sponsored the annual fishing festival, funded improvements like a seawall and city park in Port Lavaca, and lobbied for local and state legislation that would benefit the community (*Victoria Advocate* 1954i, 1; *Victoria Advocate* 1963f, 14). The Mid-Coastal Sportsmen's Club was established in 1961 to focus on legislative campaigning and other work that would benefit the outdoorsman, such as the construction of beacon lights in bays, boat ramps, fishing piers, and parks (*Victoria Advocate* 1961, 10; *Victoria Advocate* 1965c).

Women's organizations included social and service clubs. The Port Lavaca Women's Study Club was organized in 1927 and became affiliated with the National Federation of Women's Clubs in 1945 (*Victoria Advocate* 1957c, 8; L. D. Wilson 2021). Home demonstration clubs were active as early as the 1930s, including those at Green Lake, Long Mott, and other countywide groups (*Victoria Advocate* 1939, 2; *Victoria Advocate* 1957i, 12). These clubs were part of a U.S. Department of Agriculture program designed to teach rural women about home economics and agriculture and to help improve their families' living conditions (L. D. Wilson 2021). The Port Lavaca Garden Club, established in 1950, helped beautify the community by planting

trees and creating and maintaining flower beds (*Victoria Advocate* 1950c, 3). Port Lavaca had a Junior League chapter that organized in 1964 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 95; *Victoria Advocate* 1964b, 7).

The Sunlight Girls Club was an influential organization for Black girls in Port Lavaca. The club benefited more than 300 girls during its 40 years of existence. Educator Naomi Bellfield Chase founded the group in 1960 to help female students transition from segregation to integration (Calhoun County Historical Commission 2013, 1). Chase sought to instill “principles of finer womanhood” through life skills, music, art, and social etiquette education (Calhoun County Historical Commission 2013, 4). Membership and attendance requirements were strict, and club graduates received college scholarships with funds from the Mothers League, organized in 1965 to support the club. The Sunlight Girls Club is commemorated with a Texas Historical Commission historical marker at the clubhouse site, the former Wilkins School cafeteria, which is extant on West Alice Wilkins Street between Ann and South Benavides Streets (Figure 67).

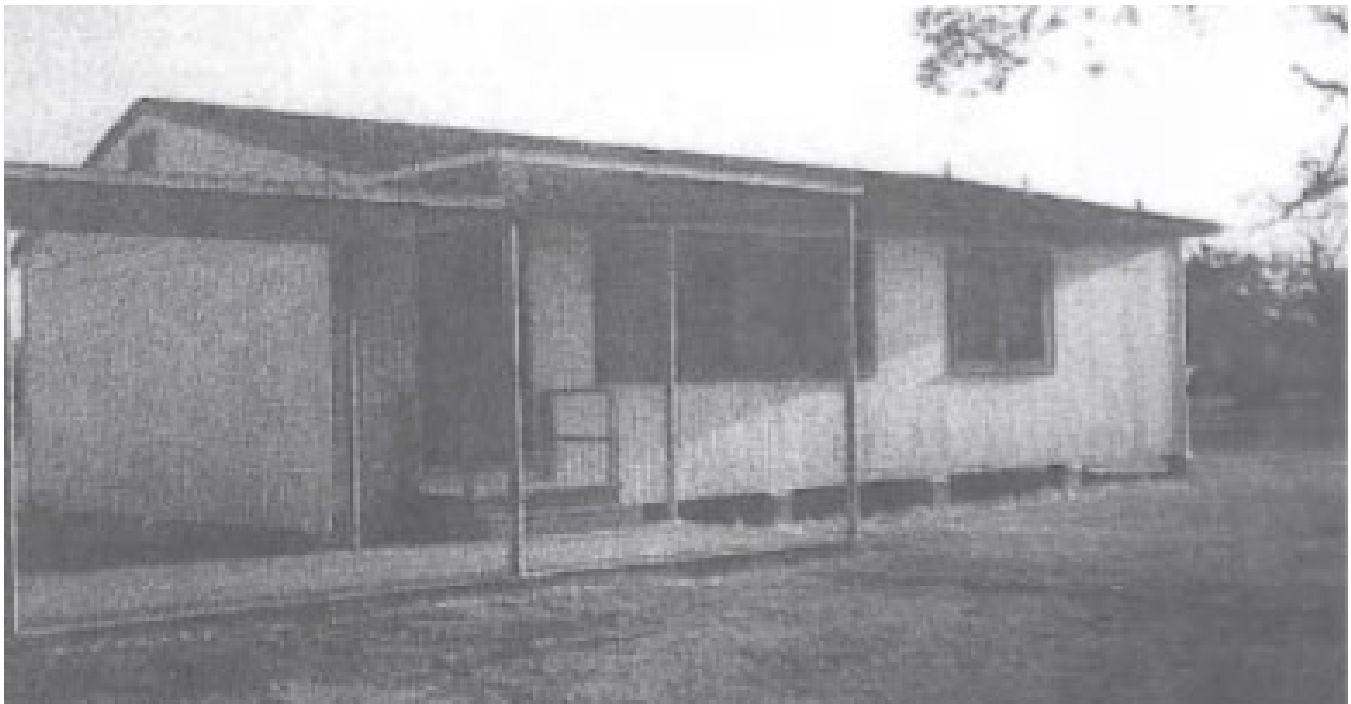


Figure 67. The Sunlight Girls clubhouse on West Alice Wilkins Street in Port Lavaca is depicted in this undated image (*Victoria Advocate* 2015, A6).

Other youth organizations in Calhoun County include 4-H clubs in Port Lavaca, Port O’Connor, Olivia, Seadrift, Long Mott, and Six Mile, and Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops (*Victoria Advocate* 1937b, 3; *Victoria Advocate* 1957f, 7; *Victoria Advocate* 1957g, 14).

Two civic organizations that support Mexican American interests in Calhoun County are a local council of the League of United Latin American Citizens, founded in 1975, and the Mexican American Political Action Committee, founded in 1988 (Port Lavaca Commemorative Book Committee 1990, 96–97). A Black men’s civic organization called the Progressive Service League formed in the 1970s, and later became the Calhoun Citizens in Action, a group for all genders and ethnicities that sponsors Black history events and supports those in need (Overton 2016a).

Religious Organizations

More than 20 religious congregations are active in Calhoun County (Foyer Media 2021). The earliest were organized in the mid- to late- nineteenth century, including historically Black and White congregations. Their churches have weathered storms that destroyed and damaged buildings, which led to building requiring gathering locations and relocating new construction to higher ground. Between storm damage and increased numbers of congregants, some church buildings have been replaced multiple times. Today, most congregations meet in post-World War II buildings. In Port Lavaca, several have Official Texas Historical Markers (Table 9).

Table 9. Congregations in Port Lavaca with a Texas Historical Commission Historical Marker\*

Name	Established	Current Location	Current Location Year Built	Notes
Mount Sinai Baptist Church	1870	400 West Center Street	1965 ( <i>Victoria Advocate</i> 1965b, 14)	One of the oldest Black congregations in the county; formerly Second Baptist Church
Saint Joseph Baptist Church	1872	811 South Virginia Street	1984	Formerly Free Will Baptist Church
First Baptist Church of Port Lavaca	1854	902 Calhoun Street	1954 ( <i>Victoria Advocate</i> 2009, 3)	Formerly Lavaca Baptist Church
First Presbyterian Church	1848	1111 North Virginia Street	1956	
First United Methodist Church	1841	814 North San Antonio Street	1958, 1975	
Grace Episcopal Church	Pre-1850s	213 East Austin Street	1949, post-1951	
Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church	1857	415 West Austin Street	1953	

\*Data from the Texas Historic Sites Atlas unless otherwise noted.



### Periods of Significance

Calhoun County recreation, culture, and leisure resources had three major developmental eras. The earliest period of significance extends from the late-nineteenth century to 1919, the heyday of railroad-oriented tourism, which concluded when a major hurricane ripped through the county. The second period extends from 1919 to 1945, reflecting early automobile-oriented tourism. The third period spans from 1945 to 1973. After World War II, citizens lobbied for expanded recreational and cultural opportunities, especially those related to natural resources, and tourism promotion. Local leaders and public agencies responded favorably with related improvements (*Victoria Advocate* 1954e, 4; *Victoria Advocate* 1959a, 10; *Victoria Advocate* 1964a, 13).

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Art, Commerce, Entertainment/Recreation, Ethnic Heritage, Landscape Architecture, Performing Arts, Religion, Social History

### Related Property Types

- Domestic resources: tourist/seasonal cabins, cottages, residences, hotels, motels, resorts, fishing camps, hunting camps
- Recreation and culture resources:
  - Theaters/auditoriums: cinemas, movie theaters, playhouses, auditoriums, halls
  - Museums: museums, exhibition halls
  - Music facilities: dancehalls, bandstands, opera houses
  - Sports facilities: gymnasiums, swimming pools, tennis courts, playing fields, stadiums, bowling alleys
  - Outdoor recreation: piers, marinas, parks, campgrounds, picnic areas, hiking/walking trails
  - Fairs: county fairgrounds
  - Monuments/markers: commemorative markers, commemorative monuments
  - Works of art: sculptures, statues, murals
  - Social resources: meeting halls, clubhouses, civic organization facilities
- Religious resources: religious facilities, religious-related halls
- Landscape resources: parks, plazas, gardens, forests, unoccupied lands, natural features, street furniture/objects, conservation areas

## **SUBTHEME: TRANSPORTATION**

### Introduction

The essential modes of transportation in Calhoun County during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were ports, railroads, roadways, and airfields. Few transportation resources in Calhoun County are eligible for the NRHP since so many resources were annihilated or irreversibly damaged from many devastating weather events. Extant transportation infrastructure and resources, including the ports, channels, lighthouses, railroads and railroad beds, roadways, and airfields illustrate these modes of transportation for Calhoun County residents and businesses.

### Maritime Transportation

As a coastal county along the Gulf of Mexico, water travel was the most accessible type of transportation during the period of early settlement. Bordered on the east by San Antonio Bay, Blacks Bayou, Mission and Green Lakes, and the Guadalupe River; intersected by Lavaca Bay and Carancahua Bay; and bordered on the south by the Gulf of Mexico with Matagorda and Espiritu Santo Bays between the mainland and Matagorda Island and Matagorda Peninsula, it was natural for ports to develop in the early-nineteenth century at Linnville, Port Lavaca, Saluria, and Indianola. Pass Cavallo, the narrow route between Matagorda Island and the Matagorda Peninsula linked Lavaca Bay with the open gulf.

The first port in Calhoun County was at Linnville in 1831 where there was a wharf with a warehouse. The settlement, including the port, was destroyed in an 1840 Comanche raid, and the inhabitants resettled in Lavaca, later known as Port Lavaca. After seven wharves were constructed at Lavaca in 1842, that port began to export agricultural products, particularly cotton, from inland counties. Charles Morgan, who already had a steamship route between New York and New Orleans, expanded service of the Morgan Steamship Lines to the Texas ports of Galveston and Velasco in 1837 and to Lavaca in 1852 (Francaviglia 1998).

In 1844, German immigrants established the town of Indianola, and developed a port there in 1855. Morgan Steamship Lines relocated its service to Powder Horn near Indianola shortly thereafter and spurred the growth of this port (Francaviglia 1998; Handbook of Texas Online 2021e). The line headquartered from Indianola until 1878, offering regular voyages to New York (Kleiner 2021). Increased maritime traffic and trade encouraged additional German immigration through the port in the 1840s and 1850s, followed later in the century by Italian, Czechoslovakian, Polish and Wendish immigrants. These newcomers settled in east, south, and central Texas, travelling overland on wagon roads and later on railroads (Francaviglia 1998). A mid-nineteenth-century U.S. Army depot in Indianola provided imported military supplies to



interior forts (Francaviglia 1998). In 1871, a direct connection between New York and Indianola was established on the Mallory Line, a competitor of the Morgan Steamship Lines (Francaviglia 1998). Schooners, sloops, steamers, and packets sailed from Lavaca and Indianola to domestic and international ports in the Gulf of Mexico, and to Philadelphia and New York, among other Atlantic Seaboard harbors (*The Indianola Bulletin* 1853; *Lavaca Journal* 1848b).

Despite the presence of navigational hazards along the coast and its barrier islands, no lighthouses were constructed until after the United States annexed Texas in 1845. The earliest was a lightship placed at the entrance of Galveston Bay in 1849 (Francaviglia 1998). The Matagorda Island Lighthouse, originally constructed in 1852 near Pass Cavallo between Matagorda Island and the Matagorda Peninsula, was the first in service on the Texas Coast (Freier 1979). The precise location of this tower was likely near Lighthouse Cove. Other lighthouses were built along the coast subsequently. Some, like that at Matagorda Island, had the traditional tall cylindrical shape, while others were “screw pile” lighthouses, a wood lighthouse structure on iron pilings (Francaviglia 1998). Pass Cavallo remained an important lighthouse location for navigating to Port Lavaca and Indianola, especially for the Morgan Steamship Lines. As a result, in 1873, the existing lighthouse was constructed two miles from the original tower location. This lighthouse, similar in design to the Bolivar Point lighthouse in Galveston Bay, was painted black (Figure 68). Like its predecessor, this structure was also constructed from cast-iron plates, possibly using repurposed plates from the 1852 lighthouse. Light keepers operated the lighthouse until sometime between 1956 and 1966, and the U.S. Coast Guard maintained the lighthouse from this period until 1995 when it was decommissioned. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns the structure and manages by joint agreement with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas General Land Office (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Oko 2013; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2011). The lighthouse remains extant; however, the keeper’s residence and associated resources are not. Additional information on lighthouses in Calhoun County can be found in the Military Institutions and Activities section of this report.



Figure 68. The Matagorda Island Lighthouse and Station depicted in 1950 (U.S. Coast Guard 1950).

The 1858 Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse was constructed on the southern portion of Halfmoon Reef. This “screw pile” wood structure was built on iron pilings driven into the bottom of Matagorda Bay (Figure 69) (Francaviglia 1998). The Confederacy controlled the lighthouse during the Civil War, keeping it dark. The federal government repaired it and placed the structure back in service in 1868. Severely damaged by a 1942 hurricane, the U.S. Coast Guard condemned the lighthouse and temporarily relocated it to the Point Comfort dredging yard. The structure was donated to the Calhoun County Historical Commission. In 1979, the H. E. Butt Foundation moved the structure to a tract adjacent to the Port Lavaca Chamber of Commerce, where it is extant. Eagle Scouts repaired and painted the remnant structure (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).





Figure 69. This undated image depicts the Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse (Anonymous 1910).

Other lighthouses, no longer extant, include the 1858 Swash Lighthouse inside Matagorda Bay and one at Bayou Saluria on Pass Cavallo, both destroyed by Confederate troops in 1861 and never reconstructed. The 1872 West Shoal Light and East Shoal Light of the Decros Point Light Station that marked the outer boundaries of the channel were destroyed in an 1875 hurricane and never reconstructed (Cipra 1983; Holland Jr. 1981).

The earliest channelization of coastal waterways in Texas coincided with the construction of the first lighthouses in the 1850s. A canal that changed the outlet of Caney Creek to Matagorda Bay from the Gulf of Mexico was an early effort (Alperin 1983). In 1873, Congress passed the River and Harbors Act that authorized study of introducing an inland waterway along the Texas Coast. The prohibitive cost prevented the federal government from pursuing the project and no funds were appropriated, although channelization projects near Galveston occurred between the 1890s and the early-twentieth century (Alperin 1983).

Several factors impeded the development of local ports in the nineteenth century. Rivalry among the Calhoun County ports over the terminus for the Morgan Steamship Lines hindered cooperation to improve shared resources, such as railroad lines to the ports or channel improvements. Then, during the Civil War, Confederate forces destroyed harbor improvements at Indianola, Port Lavaca, and Saluria. The time it took to recover during Reconstruction gave Galveston, which was not destroyed and had an intact railroad to the port, a major advantage in establishing itself as the major harbor on the Texas coast. Hurricanes in 1875 and 1886 caused considerable damage and the 1886 hurricane destroyed Indianola, which was never rebuilt (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981). Finally, efforts to deepen the channel at Pass Cavallo between 1879 and 1885 failed (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Gadus and Freeman 2005).

Substantial channel and canal improvements were built along the Texas Gulf Coast through the mid-twentieth century. In 1905, the USACE launched another study of inland waterways along the Louisiana and Texas coasts. The same year, business owners in Victoria formed the Interstate Inland Waterway League, now the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association, to promote construction of a continuous system of navigable waterways. The group advertised in newspapers and held conventions in both states. The organization was a major proponent of the intracoastal waterway, promoting its development at the national, state, and local levels (Alperin 1983).

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Inland Waterways Commission to conduct a comprehensive study of national water resources, including waterways as transportation routes. In response to the appointment and report of this commission and the lobbying of the Interstate Inland Water League, Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act in 1907, which authorized funds for construction of canals and waterways along the Gulf Coast, including channels between Corpus Christi and Aransas Pass, Aransas Pass and Pass Cavallo, and the Brazos River to West Galveston Bay. These segments were constructed by 1909 (Alperin 1983; Gadus and Freeman 2005). Congress passed a new Rivers and Harbors Act in 1909, which authorized a comprehensive study on a national system of connected intracoastal waterways. The 1910 Rivers and Harbors Act, which appropriated additional funds for inland waterways, included a channel between the Brazos River and Matagorda Bay. Yet a comprehensive intracoastal waterway project along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts remained unfulfilled (Alperin 1983).

Although less prominent than other ports on the Texas coast, shipping continued to be an important economic force in Calhoun County during the twentieth century. After the founding of Port O'Connor in 1911, local investors lobbied the USACE to deepen the channel at Pass

Cavallo, extend it through the natural channel alongside Matagorda Island, and build a turning basin. The USACE determined that the local ports were not improved enough to warrant the expense and that the proximity of more-developed ports, including those at Galveston, Port Aransas, and Corpus Christi, made the likelihood low that Port O'Connor could be competitive. Therefore, while the burgeoning oil industry spurred development and economic growth at other ports, Calhoun County and the area between Pass Cavallo and Rockport remained mostly agricultural (Gadus and Freeman 2005).

Still, local ports were important transportation centers for agricultural products, oil, and petrochemical industries in the mid-twentieth century. After 1914 and 1919 storms caused damage in Port Lavaca, a sea wall was constructed in 1920, mitigating the effects of subsequent weather events. The Port Lavaca harbor and channels were dredged in 1936 (Maywald 2021). The Morgan Steamship Lines, sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883, continued to travel to Port Lavaca through the mid-twentieth century (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981). Post-World War II petrochemical industry development in the vicinity of the Calhoun County ports allowed for their continued relevance (Texas Highway Department 1973). The 35-mile-long Victoria Barge Canal, authorized by Congress in 1945, was constructed between 1954 and 1958 from San Antonio Bay through Calhoun County to a turning basin south of Victoria. The canal—12 feet deep and 125 feet wide—connects Victoria to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) and ports along the entire Gulf Coast (Port of Victoria 2021; Roell 2021b). In 1973, the major local water transportation facilities included the Port of Port Lavaca–Point Comfort, the GIWW, and the Victoria Barge Canal (Texas Highway Department 1973).

In addition to the influences of President Theodore Roosevelt and the Interstate Inland Waterway League, other catalysts spurred development of the intracoastal waterway in Texas. World War I was one factor, as water transportation routes proved valuable for moving goods and supplies during the war. The 1901 discovery of oil at Spindletop decades earlier and subsequent growth of the state's petroleum industry put steel in high demand at extraction and processing locations and stimulated export of crude and its products. Transporting these materials by water was cheaper than by rail. The rapidly developing petroleum industry led to construction of improved or new deep-water ports along the Texas coast and the intracoastal waterways. These ports, some of which were originally used or planned for the transport of agricultural products and other goods, became shipping points for petroleum products, iron, and steel (Alperin 1983). As a result, the federal government finally began construction of an intracoastal waterway the entire length of the Gulf Coast shoreline.

After a 1923 USACE study on a continuous inland waterway from the Mississippi River to Corpus Christi, Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1925, which included authorization of \$9 million for an intracoastal waterway from New Orleans to Galveston. In 1927, Congress authorized its extension along the Texas coast to Corpus Christi. It took several years to construct the waterway due to the project's grand scope and railroad company opposition to the competition. The segment between Louisiana and Galveston was completed in 1934, reach Port O'Connor in 1939, and was completed to Corpus Christi in 1942 (Alperin 1983; Rubert 2021c).

The GIWW played a prominent role in national defense during World War II. With German submarines patrolling the Gulf Coast, the inland waterways were a safe means to transport commodities for military and civilian use. War-related industries, like shipbuilding and the petrochemical production companies, located their facilities along the GIWW and its tributaries (Alperin 1983). In 1942, Congress authorized an enlarged channel extending almost to Brownsville to better serve national defense under the Second Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act. The final channel through the Laguna Madre was completed in 1949 (Alperin 1983).

Although completion of the intracoastal waterway from Mexico to Florida was finally realized, the GIWW continued to develop. Traffic along the waterway grew from 28 million tons in 1949 to 130 million tons by 1972. Tributary channels were constructed to access industrial areas, production facilities, and commercial centers, and by the late-1970s, petroleum, its products, and chemicals made up more than 76 percent of the tonnage on the GIWW (Alperin 1983). In Calhoun County, ALCOA selected Point Comfort for an aluminum plant, which became the impetus for building the Matagorda Ship Channel, with side channels to Port Lavaca and a hurricane refuge harbor (Maywald 2021).

The county commissioners court established the Navigation District Board in 1953, appointing commissioners and authorizing the levy of a tax. The tax funded right-of-way purchase for a channel through the Matagorda Peninsula; construction of the channel, turning basins, and spoilage areas; half the cost of the channel construction; and indemnified the USACE, which constructed the channel. ALCOA provided the other half of the channel construction costs. Dredging began in 1961 and was completed in 1966. Exports from the Calhoun County Navigation District Dock included agricultural products like livestock and grains, aluminum ingots, and carbide. Imports included liquid fertilizer and lumber (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).



In 1963, the combined Port of Port Lavaca–Point Comfort was designated a U.S. Customs sea port of entry. In 1973, local port facilities included the two deep seaport terminals at the Port of Port Lavaca–Point Comfort, and a terminal on the Victoria Barge Canal near Long Mott for shallow draft vessels only. Major docks at the terminals at Port Lavaca–Point Comfort included an ALCOA Steamship Company Dock that exclusively served the smelting plant, hauling ore and chemicals for the manufacture of aluminum, and the Calhoun County Navigation District Dock, from which mainly fertilizer and machine parts were shipped (Texas Highway Department 1973). The only commercial dock along the GIWW in 1973 was the Scurlock Oil Company barge dock at Port O’Connor that was mainly used for transporting crude oil (Texas Highway Department 1973). Finally, the Union Carbide Barge Terminal on the Victoria Barge Canal was used to transport chemical products (Texas Highway Department 1973). In 1975, the Texas Coastal Waterway Act authorized the state as the local sponsor of the GIWW, and responsibility for the waterway was added to the duties of the State Highway and Public Transportation Commission, now the Texas Department of Transportation.

As the longest segment of the GIWW, the Texas extent has had a major impact on the state’s economy, bringing in billions of dollars annually. The waterway is still used as a major transportation route for petroleum products and other commodities, and it continues to be dredged, modified, and enlarged. All the commerce at the City of Victoria’s port goes through the GIWW (Alperin 1983). Recreational use of the GIWW includes boating and sport fishing (Alperin 1983).

### Railroad Transportation

Four railroads served Calhoun County in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The earliest, the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad, was chartered in 1850 and was the second chartered in Texas. Construction began in 1856 and the line between the City of Victoria in Victoria County, and Port Lavaca was completed in 1861 (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981; Goodmaster et al. 2018). Following construction, Confederate forces destroyed railroad tracks and sunk ships and felled trees to render the Guadalupe River impassable during the Civil War to prevent future attacks. The railroad was rebuilt during Reconstruction. After major hurricanes in 1875 and 1886, railroads supplanted riverine transportation (Goodmaster et al. 2018).

The Indianola Railroad Company, chartered in 1858, proposed a line between the port at Indianola and the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad at Clark’s Station. Investment and construction did not begin until after the Civil War, when the charter was renewed in 1866. Thirteen miles of track were laid in 1869 and a depot, and car and locomotive shops were constructed (Malsch 2021a). In 1871, the two companies consolidated into the Gulf, Western



Texas, and Pacific Railroad. Owners Henry S. McComb and Charles Morgan, of the steamship line, intended to connect his company's dock at Indianola with passengers and freight traveling to and from the capital in Austin and the transportation hub in San Antonio. In 1873, track was constructed inland to Cuero (Malsch 2021a). Multiple factors prevented completion of the railroad to San Antonio, including the competition from other railroads; financial panic of 1873; the death of Morgan in 1878, and damage from the 1875 hurricane. The hurricane inflicted damage to Indianola, home to the Morgan Steamship Lines docks, and to the railroad between Clark's Station and Port Lavaca. Yet, Gulf, Western Texas, and Pacific Railroad was Calhoun County's only railroad, with the only route to Indianola, in the late-1870s (Texas General Land Office 1882).

The Southern Pacific Railroad acquired Morgan's properties, including the railroad, in 1883, but the 1886 hurricane obliterated Indianola. The leg from Clark's Station to Indianola was abandoned and the track rebuilt to Port Lavaca in 1887 (Malsch 2021a). By this time, mechanically refrigerated freight train cars opened markets to livestock ranchers who hoped to sell perishable meat in addition to more-durable byproducts. In 1905, the Southern Pacific merged the line into the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railroad (Roell 2021a). In 1927, the line was leased to the Texas and New Orleans Railroad Company, merged into the company in 1934, and merged into the Southern Pacific in 1961 (Werner 2021a).

As the twentieth century progressed, the railroad became more freight-oriented. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railroad was the only railroad in the county, terminating in Port Lavaca, with no other stops or stations identified along the route in Calhoun County (Texas General Land Office 1919). The railroad was a convenient mode of transportation for tourists from inland communities who would ride the train nicknamed "Old Salty" from Cuero and Victoria to Port Lavaca to enjoy the coast. With automobiles increasingly more common, the train became less convenient and less popular. Passenger service was discontinued in 1935 (Maywald 2021).

Oil fields developed in Calhoun County from the 1930s through the mid-twentieth century, putting additional demand on railroads. By the early-1970s, the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio line of the Southern Pacific Railroad, terminating in Port Lavaca, mainly transported agricultural products and well-drilling muds (Texas Highway Department 1973).

The St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad (StLBMR), chartered in 1903 to extend from Sinton to Brownsville, was constructed through Victoria County in 1906. The charter was amended to include branch lines, including one to Port O'Connor. The Calhoun County Cattle Company donated \$150,000 toward the cost of construction of the line. In 1910, the Port

O'Connor, Rio Grande and Northern branch was constructed through Long Mott and Seadrift, terminating at Port O'Connor, where there was a roundhouse (Figure 70). Its route roughly parallels current State Highway 185, with a split from the main line to the Seadrift wharf and later, one to a Gulf Oil Company distribution facility. The line provided passenger service and freight service, mainly for agricultural products and the seafood industry, to depots in all three towns. By 1919, the line traversed the west side of Calhoun County with stops in Heyser, where a southwestern branch linked to Refugio County, and on to Green Lake, Long Mott, Seadrift, and Port O'Connor (Texas General Land Office 1919).

After the 1919 hurricane, passenger service on the StLBMR was discontinued. The StLBMR became a subsidiary of the Missouri Pacific Railroad in 1925 but continued to operate separately until it fully merged into the parent company in 1954. The section between Seadrift and Port O'Connor was discontinued in 1933, with tracks ending at the Lela Pens, a barn-like building for loading cattle onto the trains. The section between Long Mott and Seadrift was discontinued in 1969. By 1973, the Missouri Pacific line terminated at Long Mott and mainly transported grain and chemical products for the Union Carbide Corporation, the National Starch Corporation, and Grain, Incorporated (Texas Highway Department 1973). In 1997, the Missouri Pacific Railroad merged into the Union Pacific Railroad (Spiller 2016; Werner 2021b). The track between Port O'Connor and Long Mott is no longer extant, and Port O'Connor has no surviving railroad resources associated with this line. The section of railroad between Bloomington and Long Mott is extant and operated by the Union Pacific Railroad, with service to the Dow Chemical Plant at Long Mott. In Seadrift, the depot has been relocated and restored, and the Lela Pens building is extant approximately two miles east of Seadrift on the north side of State Highway 185 (Spiller 2016).

The Point Comfort and Northern Railroad Company was chartered in 1948 and constructed in 1949. The 13-mile-long track connects the ALCOA plant in Point Comfort to the StLBMR in Jackson County near Lolita. In 1973, this line primarily served the plant to haul pig aluminum castings (Texas Highway Department 1973). By 1990, freight cars hauled minerals, chemicals, and metal products (Young 2021).





Figure 70. This 1919 map of Calhoun County shows lines of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexican and the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railroads (Texas General Land Office 1919).



## Vehicular Transportation

Because of its location on the coast and ease of access by ships and sailing vessels, roads in Calhoun County were initially not well developed. The Indianola Road, a wagon trail connecting the port in Indianola to the transportation hub of Victoria, was the major route through the county and connected to early overland wagon paths via Victoria or Goliad, including the Atascocita Road, which extended between Fort Brown and Montgomery County, La Bahia Road to San Augustine, and roads to Ciudad Mier, Mexico, and San Antonio. The Butterfield Stage was used for passenger and mail service coming in through the Indianola port to San Antonio, Houston, and Mexico via Victoria (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981). Before the Civil War, a branch of what became part of the postbellum Chisholm Trail reached from Indianola toward San Antonio and beyond, and cattle drivers guided herds of livestock along this trail. Ferries at various crossings, including one that spanned the Guadalupe River in Calhoun County in 1848, shortened overland routes before the eventual construction of bridges (*Lavaca Journal* 1848a, 2). The U.S. Army Quartermaster depot, at Lavaca until 1854 and then at Indianola, shipped local beef and sheep byproducts, among other goods, overland by wagon train to San Antonio, where Fort Sam Houston, the state's principal military post and distribution point for federal forts positioned along the western frontier, guaranteed a ready client with substantial and long-term needs (Dase et al. 2010, E7; Kleiner 2021).

Vehicular routes in Calhoun County received more attention beginning in the early-twentieth century, when automobiles became more common. Early road improvements included paving roads in the Six Mile community with a base of shell. Road maintenance required oxen teams and graders (Calhoun County Historical Commission 1981).

When a state highway system was first adopted in 1917, no state highways were proposed in the county. The closest proposed highway extended from Edinburg in Hidalgo County roughly northeast to Houston and then to the Louisiana border, passing through the City of Victoria in Victoria County, which borders Calhoun County on the northwest (Miller 1917). By 1919, a route designated Highway 29 crisscrossed Calhoun County, from its northern border with Victoria County, southeast to Port Lavaca, then southwest to Seadrift, and southeast again to Port O'Connor (Texas Highway Department 1919). Between 1922 and 1926, Highway 29 was truncated, terminating in Port Lavaca, but the entire roadway to Port O'Connor was reincorporated into Highway 29 by 1928 (Texas State Highway Commission 1926; 1928). The route of Highway 29 north of Port Lavaca became a designated secondary federal highway.

The local segment of a new roadway, designated Highway 57 and nicknamed the “Hug-the-Coast Highway,” was under construction in 1928 between Rockport in Aransas County and Port Lavaca (*Victoria Advocate* 1928). The planned highway would intersect Highway 29 in Port Lavaca, cross Lavaca Bay, and continue to Palacios in Matagorda County (Figure 71). (Texas State Highway Commission 1928). The bridge spanning Lavaca Bay was 9,000 feet long constructed of creosote timber with moveable spans which could open for ships traversing the channel (*Palacios Beacon* 1929). Construction began in 1930 and was completed the following year (*Victoria Advocate* 1930).



Figure 71. The Cuervo Good Roads Delegation drives down Main Street in Port Lavaca to certify road conditions in this undated image (Johnstone 2016, 157).

In 1933, Highway 29 from the Victoria County line to Port Lavaca and Highway 57 from Port Lavaca to the Jackson County line were the only paved roads in Calhoun County. Highway 57 from the Refugio County line to Highway 29 and Highway 29 from Port Lavaca to Seadrift and Port O'Connor had surfaced roads. By 1933, a new surfaced road was incorporated into the highway system between Green Lake and Seadrift, and Highway 111 from the Jackson County line south to Olivia was under construction (Stene 1933). Highway 29 was redesignated U.S.

Highway 87 in 1935, with the route terminating in Port Lavaca (Texas Department of Transportation 2021b). In 1939, the former route of Highway 57, was redesignated State Highway (SH) 35, which was Calhoun County's only paved road in 1940 (Texas Department of Transportation 2021a). State Highway 185, parallel to the StLBMR, was a metal-surface road, as were local roads from Port Lavaca north to the community of Six Mile and south to Magnolia, Magnolia Beach, and Indianola, as well as the eastern portion of State Highway 238. U.S. Highway 87, paralleling the route of the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, part of the Southern Pacific Railroad, the western segment of State Highway 238, and State Highway 172 terminating in Olivia, were surfaced with bitumen. The rest of the roads were dirt, many unimproved (Texas Highway Department Planning Survey Division 1940). A plethora of statewide infrastructure improvements projects after World War II and the development of several oil fields in Calhoun County, resulted in dramatic improvements to road networks by the early-1960s. The 28 miles of SH 35 were reconstructed or built on new alignment. U.S. Highway 87 from SH 35 to the Victoria County line was reconstructed. New towns around the post-war ports at Point Comfort and Port Alto were extant in 1960, with an improved road system to access these on the east side of Lavaca Bay (Texas Highway Department Planning Survey Division 1961).

In 1958, the Texas Highway Department built the Will Traylor Park roadside park along SH 35, northeast of Point Comfort on land the Traylor family donated (*Victoria Advocate* 1958e, 19). In 1961, Hurricane Carla badly damaged the 1930s causeway over Lavaca Bay (Figure 72). The causeway was partially demolished, with portions on both sides of the bay repurposed as fishing piers. A new continuous plate girder bridge, the Lavaca Bay Causeway, was under construction before the storm hit. With the damage repaired and construction completed, the new bridge opened in 1962 (Maywald 2021). The causeway (National Bridge Inventory Number 130290017910061) was 2.2 miles long, the longest bridge in the state at the time. It was also the first prefabricated bridge in Texas, which allowed for fast construction at low cost. Texas Highway Department engineer Robert L. Reed designed, and Houston construction company Elmer C. Gardner, Inc., built the structure. The designers received the E. I. Hewes Award for innovative use of sonar to locate fill materials for the bridge's 194 approach spans (Mead & Hunt, Inc. 2009). The bridge was determined eligible for the NRHP at the state level of significance under Criterion A, in the area of Transportation as part of the Texas State Highway Department's major coastal transportation initiative, and under Criterion C, in the area of Engineering for its design significance as an award-winning bridge and for its exceptional length (Texas Department of Transportation 2016).



Figure 72. This 1944 image shows the State Highway 35 causeway, reopened after hurricane damage repair (Anonymous 1944).

In 1968, the Federal Highway Act authorized a national functional highway classification study in cooperation with the state highway department. In Calhoun County the classification system included principal arterials U.S. Highway 87, from Port Lavaca through Kamey and northwest to Victoria County, and SH 35, passing through Green Lake, Port Lavaca, and Point Comfort. FM Road 404, connecting the western part of the county with Victoria, was a minor arterial and collectors included SH 172, south from the Jackson County line and terminating in Olivia; SH 185, connecting Green Lake, Long Mott, Sea Drift, and Port O'Connor; SH 238, connecting Port Lavaca and Sea Drift; SH 316, connecting Port Lavaca to Magnolia Beach; and other FM roads and spurs (Texas Highway Department 1973).

### [Air Transportation](#)

Other than the World War II use of Matagorda Island Army Airfield, air travel has been a limited mode of transportation source in Calhoun County. In the 1940s, the Army had the only airfield in the county, constructed on Matagorda Island in 1943 to support training at the Matagorda Island Bombing and Gunnery Range. The airfield was transferred to the U.S. Air Force in 1949 and was active until 1975. Now incorporated into the Matagorda Island Wildlife



Management Area, this airfield never served civilian or commercial clients (Freeman 2014). In the 1960s, public and private airfields in Calhoun County included Fisher Airfield in Port O'Connor, Reikert Airfield in Port Lavaca, Tanner Airfield south of Port Lavaca on Chocolate Bay, and the Indianola Airfield (Texas Highway Department Planning Survey Division 1961). The Calhoun County Airport, northwest of Port Lavaca, was the only public airport. It had two asphalt runways and was primarily a commercial airport, but also served a crop-dusting business. The private Tanner Airport, south of Port Lavaca had two grass runways. Four small airports in the county included the Green Lake Ranch Airfield, American Liberty Oil Company Airstrip, Kimbrel Field, and the Tanner Seaplane Base. A 1972 private airfield was on FM Road 1289 north of SH 185; another airport was in Port O'Connor, formerly the Fisher Airfield; and an airfield named Bargo was on the coast between Port O'Connor and Indianola (Texas Highway Department Planning Survey Division 1972).

### Periods of Significance

The period of significance for maritime transportation extends from 1852, the date the port at Lavaca was developed, to 1966, when the Matagorda Ship Channel was completed. The period of significance for railroad transportation is 1856, when construction began on the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad, until 1949, when the Point Comfort & Northern Railroad was completed. The period of significance for automotive transportation is from 1917 with the establishment of the state highway system to 1961, with the construction of the present Lavaca Bay Causeway. The period of significance for air transportation is 1943 to 1975, associated with the military use of Matagorda Army Airfield and Air Force Base, the Calhoun County airport, and smaller private airfields.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture, Agriculture, Commerce, Engineering, Maritime History, Transportation

### Related Property Types

- Transportation resources:
  - Water-related resources: wharves and docks, warehouses, channels and canals, moveable roadway and railroad bridges over navigable waterways, resources associated with the port of entry for U.S. Customs and Border Patrol
  - Railroad-related resources: depots, railyards, industrial properties, agricultural storage buildings and structures adjacent to railroad tracks (grain bins, cotton gins, warehouses, for example), bridges, warehouses

- Vehicular-related resources: gas stations, hotels and motels, major bridges and causeways, roadside parks
- Air-related resources: airplane hangars, runways, airports
- Defense resources: air facilities, Coast Guard facilities

## 6. SURVEY RESULTS



Navidad Hotel in Port Lavaca | Stantec

### RESULTS SUMMARY

In total, 2,917 historic-age buildings; 27 sites, objects, and structures; 20 neighborhoods/communities constructed after World War II; six mobile home communities; and three industrial complexes were documented during this survey.<sup>20</sup> An additional 14,404 parcels were identified as undeveloped or non-historic-age, defined as parcels where all resources visible from the right-of-way were constructed in 1974 or later. Additionally, 1,773 parcels were not accessible and/or not visible to surveyors.

Of the documented resources, 2,896 are recommended not eligible for listing in the NRHP, two are NR-listed and retain integrity to maintain their listing, and 43 are recommended individually eligible for the NRHP (Table 10). Three districts are recommended eligible for the NRHP. Twenty-nine resources would be contributing to the recommended Downtown Port Lavaca historic district. The other two recommended districts, Lynnhaven and Point Comfort,

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<sup>20</sup> Following the survey methodology, neighborhoods/communities constructed after World War II and mobile home communities were documented collectively as one resource.

are post-World War II neighborhoods that were not inventoried following the survey methodology.

Most of the surveyed resources were single-family residences. Other commonly documented historical functions include commercial, agricultural, industrial, recreational, religious, governmental, educational, funerary, hospitality, and transportation-related uses (Table 11).

The construction date of surveyed historic-age resources ranged from 1840 to 1973. As shown in Chart 1, most were built between 1940 and 1973, with the 1950s and 1960s representing the largest share of documented resources. Few resources constructed prior to 1940 were identified in the survey area.

Table 10. Number of Historic-Age Resources Documented by Survey Category

<b>Survey Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Not Eligible</b>	
Buildings	2,854
Structures, Objects, Sites	16
Industrial Properties	3
Post-World War II Neighborhoods*	23
<b>Potentially Eligible (More Research Needed)</b>	
Buildings	2
Structures, Objects, Sites	1
Post-World War II Neighborhood	1
<b>Recommended Individually Eligible</b>	
Buildings	35
Structures, Objects, Sites	8
<b>Recommended Eligible District**</b>	
Contributing Buildings***	29
<b>NRHP Listed</b>	
Structures, Objects, Sites	2

\*Includes 17 post-World War II neighborhoods and 6 mobile home neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with multiple additions were counted as one neighborhood.

\*\*Includes two post-World War II neighborhoods and downtown Port Lavaca

\*\*\*Three buildings recommended as contributing to a historic district were also recommended individually eligible and are therefore included in this table twice.

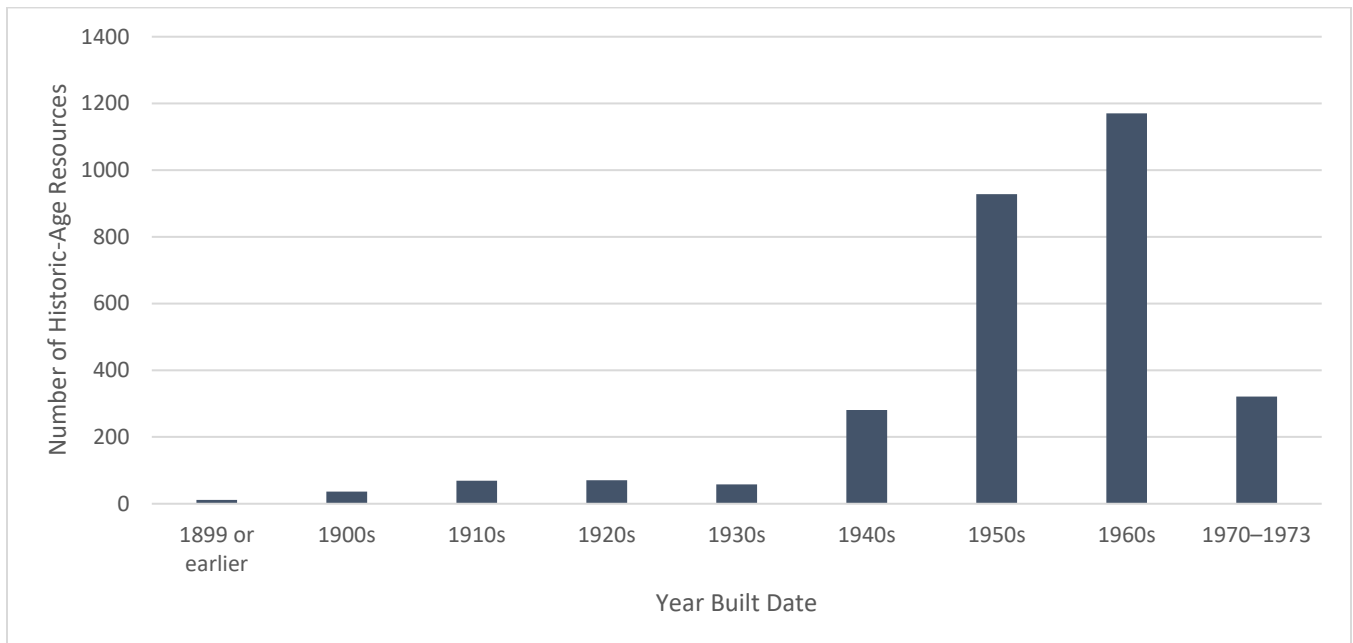


Table 11. Primary Historical Function of Individual Resources\*

Primary Historical Function	Number
Domestic	2452
Commerce/Trade	247
Agriculture	58
Industry/Processing	36
Recreation/Culture	31
Religious	27
Government	21
Other	21
Educational	15
Funerary	12
Hospitality	10
Transportation	9
Defense	4
Healthcare	2
Social	2

*\*Excludes post-World War II and mobile home neighborhoods documented collectively*

Chart 1. Year Built Date of Surveyed Resources



## POST-WORLD WAR II NEIGHBORHOODS

Twenty post-World War II neighborhoods/communities were documented as collections of resources and evaluated for historic significance as districts. Sixteen neighborhoods/communities are in Port Lavaca, and one each are in Seadrift, Port O'Connor, and El Campo Beach. Additionally, the entire town of Point Comfort was documented as a collection of resources. Neighborhood summaries and evaluations are provided in **Appendix F**.



## **RESOURCES CURRENTLY LISTED IN THE NRHP**

**La Salle Monument | State Highway 316 at N. Ocean Dr, Indianola  
THC Atlas Number 2100002757**



**Matagorda Lighthouse | Matagorda Island**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074807**





## NRHP RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents NRHP recommendations. Properties recommended individually eligible are provided first, followed by recommended historic districts.

### INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

In total, 40 individual properties are recommended eligible for the NRHP as a result of this survey. This does not include the three properties previously determined eligible for the NRHP that were reassessed: the Beach Hotel, the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad Depot, and the Kamey Schoolhouse. The properties recommended individually eligible for the NRHP were constructed between 1840 and 1969 and are associated with events or trends (NRHP Criterion A), persons (NRHP Criterion B), or design (NRHP Criterion C) important to local or state history. Most are buildings, but objects, sites, and structures are also recommended eligible. They are in Port Lavaca, Port O'Connor, Seadrift, the former site of Indianola, and rural areas of Calhoun County (Figure 1).

The three resources previously determined eligible were reassessed for eligibility. The Beach Hotel and the train depot retain sufficient integrity to convey their significance and no change is recommended to their eligibility status. The Kamey Schoolhouse is now recommended not eligible because it was relocated after its eligibility determination; it was moved from a rural to urban location and does not meet NRHP Criterion Consideration B for moved buildings due to the incompatible change in setting (NPS 2002). Additionally, the Point Comfort Historic District which was previously determined eligible was reassessed and determined to remain eligible for listing in the NRHP, and no change is recommended to its eligibility status.

Each individual property recommended eligible for the NRHP is summarized below. A complete tabulation is provided in **Table A-2 (Appendix A)**. Survey forms and individual maps showing the recommended NRHP boundary, and any contributing and noncontributing resources are provided in **Appendix C**.

Note: Seven Texas Centennial Markers, which are eligible for the NRHP under the "Monuments and Buildings of the Texas Centennial" Multiple Property Documentation Form, are in Calhoun County (Wilson and Smith 2018). One is the NRHP-listed La Salle Monument, which is not included herein, and four are granite markers documented as part of this survey and included in the list of NRHP recommendations. The Calhoun County marker (Atlas #5507016053, which may also be related to Atlas #5057000625) was not observed in the location indicated in the THC Atlas and the Sylvanus Hatch marker (Atlas #5057005172) was not accessible from the

right-of-way, therefore these resources were undocumented as part of this project and excluded from the recommendations and figures.



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## Rural Calhoun County

### Cox's Point Texas Centennial Marker | State Highway 35N, Point Comfort THC Atlas Number 3300074810



Cox's Point Texas Centennial Marker, currently designated a Texas Centennial Marker, is located on the north side of SH 35N, just east of the Lavaca Bay Causeway. The marker commemorates the location at which a town was founded in 1836 by Captain Jack Shackelford's "Red Rovers" of Alabama. The "Monuments and Buildings of the Texas Centennial" Multiple Property Documentation Form identifies Texas Centennial markers as individually eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Social History at the state level of significance and indicates that they meet Criteria Consideration F as the product of the statewide efforts to commemorate historic persons and events in the 1930s (Wilson and Smith 2018). The period of significance is 1936. The recommended boundary for this resource is the marker footprint.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

## **Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW)** **THC Atlas Number 3300074808**



The Calhoun County segment of the GIWW is recommended eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation, Military, and Maritime History, at the national level of significance. This waterway was an important shipping route along the Gulf Coast and was the result of a federal effort to build a protected coastal transportation route. This segment was constructed between 1939 and 1945 (the GIWW was constructed between Galveston and Port O'Connor in 1939 and from Port O'Connor to Corpus Christi in 1945) (Alperin 1983; Rubert 2021). The presence of the inland waterway was particularly important for defense during World War II, but it continued to develop after the war, and traffic increased into the late-1970s, especially with the post-war growth of the petroleum and chemical industries in Texas. The period of significance for this segment is 1939 to 1973, ending 50 years prior to the date of this survey.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Old Town Indianola Cemetery | Zimmerman Rd, Indianola**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074798**



This Historic Texas Cemetery, currently designated a Historic Texas Cemetery, is significant as one of the only remaining resources associated with Indianola, a community permanently annihilated after two devastating late-nineteenth-century hurricanes. It is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its numerous burials associated with the lost town of Indianola and meets Criteria Consideration D as a cemetery that derives its primary significance from age and association with historic events. The period of significance begins with the first burial in 1850 and ends in 1886, with burials associated with the final brutal storm.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Site of the Town of Indianola Texas Centennial Marker | S. Ocean Dr, Indianola  
THC Atlas Number 3300074809**



The site of the Town of Indianola Texas Centennial Marker, currently designated a Texas Centennial Marker, is located on the south side of Ocean Drive, east of Channel Drive. The marker denotes the location of the, originally named Karlshaven, port town which was completely destroyed in the 1886 hurricane. The “Monuments and Buildings of the Texas Centennial” Multiple Property Documentation Form identifies Texas Centennial markers as individually eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Social History at the state level of significance and indicates that they meet Criteria Consideration F as the product of the statewide efforts to commemorate historic persons and events in the 1930s (Wilson and Smith 2018). The period of significance is 1936. The recommended boundary for this resource is the marker footprint.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Site of the Town of Linnville Texas Centennial Marker | FM 1090 N, East of McDonald Rd, Port Lavaca  
THC Atlas Number 3300074797**



The Site of the Town of Linnville Texas Centennial Marker, currently designated a Texas Centennial Marker, is located on the side of FM 1090 N without a paved turnoff or other design or landscape elements. The marker commemorates the site at which an early settlement (1831), named for John Joseph Linn, was destroyed by a Comanche raid in 1840. The “Monuments and Buildings of the Texas Centennial” Multiple Property Documentation Form (2018) identifies Texas Centennial markers as individually eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Social History at the state level of significance and indicates that they meet Criteria Consideration F as the product of the statewide efforts to commemorate historic persons and events in the 1930s. The period of significance is 1936. The recommended boundary for this resource is the marker footprint.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Texas Marine Fishery Research Station | 3864 FM 3280, Palacios**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074756**



When the Texas Marine Fishery Research Station opened in 1969, it was reportedly the largest salt-water research installation in the U.S. with 21 salt-water ponds, an office building, and a laboratory (*Victoria Advocate* 1969; *Victoria Advocate* 1970). Operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, scientists researched topics such as the best way to farm shrimp and oysters in man-made ponds. It is still in operation today.

The Texas Marine Fishery Research Station is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its advances in marine agriculture. The period of significance begins in 1969 when the center opened and ends in 1973, the 50-year cut-off.

Overall, the resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



## Victoria Barge Canal

THC Atlas Number 3300074805



The 35-mile-long Victoria Barge Canal, constructed between 1954 and 1958, is recommended eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A in the areas of Maritime History, Industry, and Transportation at the local level of significance. The canal connects the shallow-draft Port of Victoria in neighboring Victoria County to the GIWW (Port of Victoria 2021; Roell 2021). Its construction was a significant economic boon to both counties as it allowed the inland city of Victoria to have a shallow-draft port and provided incentive for the development of industry along the canal in Calhoun County. The period of significance begins with 1954, the start date of construction, and ends in 1973, 50 years prior to this survey. The Victoria Barge Canal continues to be a significant economic resource to Calhoun and Victoria Counties. The recommended boundary includes the channel itself, but not adjacent docks or other resources associated with private industrial facilities.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

## Port Lavaca

### Calhoun County Courthouse | 211 S. Ann St, Port Lavaca THC Atlas Number 3300074753



Architects Rustay and Martin designed the fifth and current county courthouse in the Post-War Modern style in 1959 with porcelain-enameled-aluminum curtain wall panels, flat and unadorned planes, bands of windows, and a simple block tower at the entrance with decorative geometrically arranged windows (*Victoria Advocate* 1957). The building continues to serve as the center of county management.

The courthouse is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government as the center of county governance since 1959. The period of significance is 1959 to 1973, the 50-year cut-off. The building is also recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its Post-War Modern-style architecture. Despite 2005 design and material modifications, it retains sufficient integrity and character-defining features of the style to convey its architectural significance. The period of significance for architecture is 1959.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association.

**Calhoun High School | 201 Sandcrab Blvd, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074749**



Smyth & Smyth architects of Corpus Christ designed the 1968 Calhoun High School in the Brutalist style using pre-cast, pre-stressed concrete building methods (Baass Concrete Co., Inc. 1967; *Victoria Advocate* 1965a). The \$3M complex was situated on 50 acres and accommodated more than 1,000 students (*Victoria Advocate* 1968). Additional buildings were added to the school property beginning in 1980, but campuses of the era were designed for later expansions, so these changes do not reduce the property's integrity.

The school is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Education. It exemplifies national educational and school planning and design trends of the late post-World War II years through its unified campus design, scale, and fortified architecture. The period of significance for education begins with the 1968 construction date and ends in 1973, the 50-year cut-off. The school is also recommended eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an exemplary local example of the Brutalist style. The period of significance for architecture is 1968.



The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



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**Grace Episcopal Church | 213 E. Austin St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074736**



The 1949 Grace Episcopal Church, an RTHL listed building, was designed by San Antonio architect, Henry Steinbomer, who gracefully combined the Spanish Colonial Revival and Post-War Modern styles in this church complex (Moorhead et al. 2022). In 1966, the stained-glass windows, parish hall, narthex, and connection between the hall and church were added, but these are historic-age changes sympathetic to the original architecture (Texas Historical Commission 1983b). The 1996 library wing is set back and differentiated from the historic-age volumes.

Grace Episcopal Church is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a unique local example of a Modernistic Spanish Colonial Revival-style building and meets Criteria Consideration A as a religious property that derives its primary significance from its architectural importance. The period of significance is 1949 to 1966, the dates of construction.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Jefferson Beaumont Texas Centennial Marker | 500 Martin Luther King Dr, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074791**



The Jefferson Beaumont Texas Centennial Marker, currently listed as a Texas Centennial Marker, is located in the Port Lavaca Cemetery among graves. The marker serves as a gravestone for Kentucky native, Jefferson Beaumont who served as Chief Justice of Calhoun County and for whom Jefferson County is named. The “Monuments and Buildings of the Texas Centennial” Multiple Property Documentation Form identifies Texas Centennial markers as individually eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Social History at the state level of significance and indicates that they meet Criteria Consideration F as the product of the statewide efforts to commemorate historic persons and events in the 1930s (Wilson and Smith 2018). The period of significance is 1936. The recommended boundary for this resource is the marker footprint.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Lancaster Residence | 1700 S. Virginia St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074746**



Built for Dr. York Lancaster and his family, this well-preserved 1963 mid-century home, with its flat roof, ribbon windows, broad expanses of textured brick walls, and connection to the outside, exhibits characteristics of the International and Contemporary styles (McCoppin and Leggett 2022; *Victoria Advocate* 1963d). It is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is 1963, the year in which the house was completed.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Moo-Moo Drive-In | 146 HWY 35, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074751**



This 1967 Moo-Moo Drive-In was part of a local chain established by Milton Neitsch that sold a full line of Moo-Moo dairy products via a drive-up window, as well as hamburgers, hot dogs, and other prepared food served under covered parking (*Victoria Advocate* 1964e; *Victoria Advocate* 1967).

The building is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce and Criterion C in the area of architecture as an illustration of a significant commercial building type related to the automobile. The building's design is shaped by the need to accommodate automobiles and the stylistic and economic trends of the era.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



## **Municipal Market Ice & Quick Freeze Plant | Broadway and Harbor Streets, Port Lavaca**

**THC Atlas Number 3300074731**



The Works Progress Administration (WPA) sponsored the construction of this 1937 building and its deep-water turning basin (*Corpus Christi Caller* 1936; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1935). The local shrimp industry became an important part of the local economy in the 1930s. The turning basin was used to unload fishing boats, and the building, the Port Lavaca Municipal Market Ice & Quick Freeze Plant, was used to prepare and quick-freeze seafood, a process that helped maintain the taste. The facility was also used to process, freeze, and package local crops (Brown 1948). It was reportedly one of only two facilities of its kind on the Gulf Coast when built (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1935).

The building and turning basin are recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government as a WPA-sponsored and municipally operated project designed to foster the local economy. The period of significance for politics/government begins in 1937 when the property was constructed and ends in 1949, the year in which the city began leasing the property to a private company (*Victoria Advocate* 1965b). The property is also recommended eligible under Criterion A in the area of Agriculture at the local level for its contributions to local fishing and crop preparation and distribution. The period of significance for agriculture begins in 1949. Further research is needed regarding how long the facility was in operation to identify an agricultural significance end date.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The resource no longer retains its integrity of association as it is no longer in use, specifically it is not used for its historic purpose.

**Naomi Chase Residence | 619 S. Virginia St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074735**



The Naomi Chase (1917–1986) house is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black, Education, and Social History and Criterion B for its association with Ms. Chase. Chase was a highly regarded local educator of 46 years (1937–1983) and a civic leader. In 1963, she received the first Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce outstanding citizen award in recognition of her work with Black students at Wilkins School and later Wilkins High School, and as the founder of the Sunlight Girls Club, which she organized in 1960 to help Black girls transition from segregated to integrated schools and to promote leadership, civic engagement, and scholarship (*Victoria Advocate* 1986b). She went on to receive numerous local, state, and national awards until her death in 1986, at which point a flag was flown in her honor over the U.S. Capitol (Popplewell 2000; *Victoria Advocate* 1986b; *Victoria Advocate* 1963b; *Victoria Advocate* 1986c;). For its first six years from 1960 to 1966, the Sunlight Girls Club met at Chase's house at 619 S. Virginia Street (Texas Historical Commission 2013). Chase is distinct from other local leaders for her important contributions to the education and advancement of Black children in Aransas County. Her home is the best representation of her productive life, as it reflects the period in which she achieved significance as a civic leader. The period of significance for the property begins in 1963, the year in which the present house was constructed. Chase continued to teach, lead the club, and contribute to civic affairs into the 1980s; therefore, the period of significance end date is 1973, the 50-year cut-off.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Navidad Hotel | 429 E. Railroad, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074752**



The c. 1905 Navidad Hotel was one of several early-twentieth-century bayfront hotels constructed for tourists visiting Calhoun County. It is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Entertainment/Recreation. Commercially, the building illustrates the evolution of hotels to provide a leisure experience in a picturesque setting as the tourism economy flourished at the turn of the century. The building is one of the last remaining vestiges of Calhoun County's early tourism-based economy. Its siting at the end of a rail line illustrates how leisure travelers used the transportation options of the era to visit close-in vacation locations that provided lodging. The period of significance extends from the c. 1905 year-built date and concludes with the 1919 hurricane that destroyed Port Lavaca's waterfront pavilions and other tourism-related resources and dampened the county's tourism industry.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, and feeling. It has impaired integrity of materials due to loss of the original projecting double-height porch and the enclosure of an opening on the front façade. The resource is no longer in use and currently stands vacant and therefore does not retain its integrity of association.

**Port Lavaca Fire Station and City Hall | 216 E. Mahan St, Port Lavaca  
THC Atlas Number 3300074727**



The 1949 Port Lavaca Fire Station and City Hall building is a Post-War Modern-style building by architects Leffland and Ault of Victoria (*Victoria Advocate* 1948a; *Victoria Advocate* 1949). The building is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government as the earliest known intact purpose-built municipal building in Calhoun County. The period of significance begins with the 1949 construction and ends in 1956, when a new city hall was built, and this building began to serve other municipal purposes.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The resource is no longer in use and currently stands vacant and therefore does not retain its integrity of association.



**Ranger Cemetery | North side of Harbor St, East of Broadway St, Port Lavaca  
THC Atlas Number 3300074793**



This cemetery, currently designated a Historic Texas Cemetery, is significant for its 1840s graves, and burials of federal soldiers who died during a Civil War epidemic (Texas Historical Commission 1975). Its bayside position is constantly threatened by weather events, and the cemetery represents a rare surviving early funerary property in Port Lavaca, despite compromises to the setting. The Ranger Cemetery is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its several old burials and its association with historic events and meets Criteria Consideration D as a cemetery that derives its primary significance from age and association with historic events. The period of significance begins with the first burial in 1840 and ends with the last interment in 1941.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Rasmussen-Tanner-Hickl Residence | 303 Randle St, Port Lavaca  
THC Atlas Number 3300074726**



This Queen Anne-style house is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Built in 1906, the period of significance is limited to the year in which it was constructed. Despite some alterations, this high-style Queen Anne house retains its massing and many of its original decorative features including the canted bays, steeply pitched hip and gable roofs, circular and double-hung sash windows, doors, porches, and wood siding.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Residence | 147 S. Nueces St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074742**



This gabled-wing cottage is a good example of the Folk Victorian style with Queen Anne elements applied to a vernacular form in Calhoun County. Notable features include 2/2 wood double-hung sash windows, an intersecting gable roof, an original 1-light wood door set below a 1-light transom, and a front porch supported by turned columns with jigsaw trim in the corners. It retains a high level of integrity and is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is the year that the house was built, c. 1920.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Residence | 215 Bonorden St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074744**



This Folk Victorian farmhouse is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. This modest vernacular house form with applied Victorian-era decoration retains its original massing, steeply pitched hip roof with hipped dormers, 2/2 double-hung sash windows, and wrap-around porch with turned posts. Alterations include a rear addition, replacement skirting, and changes to the porch. The period of significance is limited to the year in which it was constructed, c. 1920.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Residence | 301 E. Wilson St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074725**



This c. 1910 residence is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. This bungalow is a strong local example of the transition from Folk Victorian to the Prairie style popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Folk Victorian style is evident in the application of Queen Anne elements such as bay windows, varied wall textures, and overall massing to a traditional house form. The wide overhanging eaves, hipped roof with flared ends, hipped roof dormer, horizontal emphasis with a wide frieze, and integral front porch with a curved shape between the porch supports are indicative of the Prairie style. The period of significance is the year that the house was built, c. 1920. Despite some changes such as the partial enclosure of the porch during the historic period and some window and siding replacement, the building retains its overall design and represents the evolution of residential architecture in Port Lavaca.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Residence | 303 E. Mahan St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074724**



This Greek Revival-style I-House is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The house retains its distinctive original two-story, single-pile plan with Greek Revival influenced design elements on the symmetrical facade, two-story front portico with square columns, and entrance with transom. Alterations include rear additions, a replacement door, and some replacement porch supports and windows. The period of significance is limited to the year of construction, c. 1890.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Despite alterations and additions, the building is able to convey its significance and the overall integrity is not diminished.

**Residence | 317 E. George St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074730**



This c. 1900 Queen Anne-style residence is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Despite apparent storm damage, the loss of the supports and foundation of the wrap-around porch, and boarding over of some elevations, this Queen Anne retains most of its original wood siding, double-hung sash and diamond-patterned windows, one-light doors, and canted bays, as well as its original massing. The period of significance is limited to the year of construction, c. 1900.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. Due to the loss of significant portions of the original siding and replacement with an incompatible material, the resource does not retain integrity of materials.



**Residence | 323 N. Colorado St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074728**



This c. 1900 house is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Varying wall materials, original double-hung sash and Queen Anne cottage windows, original door and transom, a hip roof with flared ends, and widely overhanging eaves with a boxed cornice and a decorative frieze define this Queen Anne house with Italianate influences. The period of significance is limited to the year that the house was constructed, c. 1915.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Residence | 323 S. Commerce St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074732**



This c. 1900 Queen Anne-style house is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is limited to the year in which it was constructed, c. 1900. Despite the application of vinyl siding and Aramco shutters over most of the windows, this Queen Anne house retains the original two-story massing with canted bays, steeply pitched roof, wrap-around porch with classical columns, and decorative detailing including canted bays and an attic window with diamond-shaped lights.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Residence | 401 N. Commerce St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074729**



An unusual example of the Dutch Colonial Revival style for the area, this house is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Retaining good integrity of design, the building exhibits the steeply pitched, cross-gambrel roof, double-hung sash windows, and classical porch columns characteristic of the style. The period of significance is the year that the house was built, c. 1915.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Residence | 403 S. Virginia St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074741**



This c. 1910 Folk Victorian-style former house is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Now used for commercial purposes, this simple gabled-wing cottage retains its original 2/2 double-hung wood sash windows, historic massing, and steeply pitched gable roof. Despite a historic-age addition, replacement doors, the installation of an ADA ramp, and some porch alterations, it retains good integrity and exhibits the characteristic elements of the Folk Victorian design. The period of significance is limited to the year it was built, c. 1910.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Although the resource is now used for commercial purposes, its original historic use is clear in its form, it therefore retains its integrity of association.

**Residence | 502 S. Guadalupe St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074738**



This Folk Victorian house is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Built c. 1900, the period of significance is limited to the year of construction. It retains its clipped gable roof, original 2/2 double-hung wood sash windows, one-light Queen Anne door with a transom, and front porch, as well as a bay window, wave pattern vergeboard trim, and patterned shingles in the dormers and gable ends.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Residence | 503 S. Colorado St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074740**



This c. 1900 pyramidal cottage located at 503 S. Colorado Street in Port Lavaca is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. It displays elements of Colonial Revival and Italianate styling in its steeply pitched hipped roof with boxed eaves accented by brackets, double-hung sash windows, fanlight above the primary entrance, and full-width front porch supported by classical columns. An addition to the rear, the installation of a ramp, and installation of some replacement windows have not adversely impacted the integrity of this house. The period of significance is limited to the year of construction, c. 1900.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Despite some replacement materials and reversible additions, the structure retains its overall integrity of design, materials, and workmanship.

**Residence | 616 W. Mahan St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074723**



This c. 1900 house is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Retaining its original 2/2 double-hung wood sash windows, steeply pitched gable roof with paired through-cornice dormers, inset porch with jigsaw trim, and 1-light, 5-panel entrance with 2-light sidelights and a paired-lite transom, this house remains a good example of Folk Victorian design in Port Lavaca. The period of significance is limited to the year that the house was built, c. 1915.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Residence | 621 N. Trinity St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074743**



Built c. 1910, this bungalow exhibits both Craftsman and Colonial Revival style elements and is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The building is indicative of the period in which it was constructed with a mix of elements from the two most popular styles. The hipped dormers, exposed rafter ends, and 4/1 double-hung sash Craftsman patterned windows and doors indicate the Craftsman design while the columned porch supports, entry with sidelights and transom, and tri-partite windows display the Colonial Revival influence. The period of significance is limited to the year of construction, c. 1910.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Residence | 704 S. Colorado St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074737**



This c. 1900 Queen Anne style one-story house is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The canted front bay, mix of wood siding and shingles, original 2/2 double-hung sash windows, and original one-light door with transom are notable features of this Queen Anne gabled-wing cottage. The period of significance is limited to the year of construction, c. 1900.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Rex Theatre | 311 E. Main St, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074734**



The 1939 Rex Theatre was an early purpose-built movie theater in Port Lavaca's commercial corridor (*Victoria Advocate* 1938). Designed to seat 500, it had a stage, air conditioning, and motion picture equipment (Sanborn Map Company 1940, 1; *Victoria Advocate* 1945). A 1945 fire extensively damaged the building, though the front facade was less impaired (*Victoria Advocate* 1945). The theatre was repaired and reopened and was in use through at least 1970. It is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation as the primary and most intact early-twentieth-century theater venue in Calhoun County. The period of significance is 1939 to 1945, the year of the fire. Further research may reveal a second, later period of significance.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Although the theater is now used for live productions as opposed to films, it retains its association as an entertainment venue.

**Sunlight Girls Club Clubhouse | 204 W. Alice Wilkins Ave, Port Lavaca  
THC Atlas Number 3300074739**



In 1960, long-time Wilkins High School educator Naomi Chase organized the Sunlight Girls Club for the benefit of Black girls to address issues related to racial integration (Texas Historical Commission 2013). The club promoted leadership, values, and community service and provided activities and events for members. It also encouraged members to obtain higher education and provided educational scholarships. Starting in 1966, the club began to meet in this building, the former Wilkins High School cafeteria. The club continued to exist for at least 40 years after it was founded.

The Sunlight Girls Club clubhouse is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Black Ethnic Heritage, Education, and Social History as an important community organization that helped Black girls transition from segregated to integrated classrooms, develop leadership, and achieve higher education. The period of significance is 1966, the year in which the group began meeting in the former Wilkins cafeteria, to 1973, the 50-year cut-off date.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The resource is no longer in use and currently stands vacant and therefore does not retain its integrity of association.



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**Viking Motel | 150 N. HWY 35, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074750**



The Viking Motel comprises four Storybook-style motel buildings arranged around a central parking lot and a shield-shaped pool. The main motel building incorporates a rounded restaurant and a drive-thru registration area. Architect John T. Webb also designed Viking Mall and Port Lavaca Clinic (*Victoria Advocate* 1963c).

The motel is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Commerce at the local level of significance. It embodies the characteristics of a themed, automobile-oriented post-World War II motel and reflects the continued importance of tourism in the local economy. The period of significance begins with the 1967 construction date and ends in 1973, the 50-year cut-off.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



**Wilkins School/Wilkins High School | 204 W. Alice Wilkins Ave, Port Lavaca**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074759**



Wilkins School was built in 1950, replacing a frame Rosenwald School (Phillips 1975). It was named after long-time and esteemed local Black educator Alice O. Wilkins. In 1953, it was organized as a high school, becoming the first secondary school for Black students in Calhoun County, and plans were made to build a gym/auditorium building, which opened in 1954 (*Victoria Advocate* 1954b; *Victoria Advocate* 1955a). These much-needed improvements may have been an effort by the Calhoun County Independent School District to equalize schools for Black and White children to evade racial integration, though further research is needed on this topic. In 1955, the school district adopted a desegregation plan, but it was not until 1964, after the Civil Rights Act, that it was forced to integrate (Phillips 1966a; *Victoria Advocate* 1955b). Initially, the school district planned to rename Wilkins High School and integrate the school. Black members of the community objected to the name change, and White parents protested sending their children to a former school for Black children (Phillips 1975; Phillips 1966b). In 1966, responding to community outcry, the school district closed the school, converted it to storage, and placed students in temporary buildings at Jackson Elementary School instead (Phillips 1966c; *Victoria Advocate* 1966).

Wilkins School/Wilkins High School is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Black Ethnic Heritage, Education, and Social History. As the first high school for Black children in the county, a potential equalization site, and a representation of the local desegregation/integration process, the school is associated with trends that contributed substantively to history. The period of significance is 1950, the year in which the school building opened, to 1966, when it was closed.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The resource is no longer in use and currently stands vacant and therefore does not retain its integrity of association.



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## Port O'Connor

### Port O'Connor Calaboose | S. 6th St, north of Main St, Port O'Connor THC Atlas Number 3300074758



The Port O'Connor calaboose is a rare surviving example of a tiny and primitive jail designed to house prisoners for a short time. Easily and affordably constructed, they provided a law enforcement solution in small, rural communities where a full-size jail was unnecessary. It is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government. The period of significance start date is 1909, the estimated date of construction (Moore 2018). Further research is needed about the length of time during which the jail was operational to establish a period of significance end date.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The resource is no longer in use and therefore does not retain its integrity of association.



**Port O'Connor Coast Guard Station | 2307 Maple St, Port O'Connor**  
**THC Atlas Number 3300074747**



The Port O'Connor Coast Guard Station was constructed in 1965 following severe damage to the 1932 Saluria Station on Matagorda Island by Hurricane Carla in 1961 (*Victoria Advocate* 1965c). It is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the areas of Military and Maritime History at the local level of significance. Although the history of the U.S. Coast Guard in Calhoun County dates to the creation of the agency in 1915, the period of significance for this building begins in 1965 with its construction and extends to 1973, 50 years prior to the date of this evaluation. During this period, the Coast Guard has operated its missions related to vessel safety, port security, marine licensing, law enforcement, and national defense in Port O'Connor.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



## Seadrift

### Residence | 710 W. Houston Ave, Seadrift THC Atlas Number 3300074757



Located at 710 Houston Avenue in Seadrift, this Craftsman bungalow retains good integrity and is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is the year that the house was built, c. 1915. The design is evident in the varied wall textures, wide overhanging eaves, double-hung sash windows, and wrap-around porch with wood posts with an arched opening between the supports set on a battered solid porch balustrade. Some windows are hidden by Aramco shutters, and a room was added to the northeast corner of the building at the rear.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Seadrift Calaboose | 201 +/- Houston Ave, Seadrift  
THC Atlas Number 3300074755**



The Seadrift calaboose is a rare surviving example of a tiny and primitive jail designed to house prisoners for a short time. Easily and affordably constructed, they provided a law enforcement solution in small, rural communities where a full-size jail was unnecessary. It is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government. The period of significance start date is c. 1914, the estimated date of construction (Moore 2018). Further research is needed about the length of time during which the jail was operational to establish a period of significance end date.

The resource retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The resource is no longer in use and therefore does not retain its integrity of association.

## DISTRICTS

Downtown Port Lavaca and the Lynnhaven neighborhood are recommended eligible for the NRHP as historic districts. Point Comfort was previously determined eligible for the NRHP as a historic district. No change is recommended to its status. A summary of these districts is provided below. See also **Table A-3** in **Appendix A** and the district maps and summary overviews in **Appendix E**. Survey forms for individual historic-age resources recommended as contributing to the Downtown Port Lavaca historic district are also provided in **Appendix E**. Because resources in post-World War II neighborhoods were not documented individually, separate survey forms are not provided for Lynnhaven and Point Comfort.

### Downtown Port Lavaca

Downtown Port Lavaca comprises approximately three blocks of one- and two-part commercial buildings constructed during the early- to mid-twentieth century and a nineteenth-century passenger train depot. Founded in the early-1840s, the bustling harbor of Port Lavaca rose to prominence in the aftermath of two events: the 1886 destruction of nearby Indianola by hurricane, and 1887 arrival of the Gulf, Western Texas, and Pacific Railroad from Victoria. The harbor played a pivotal role in the growth of the community and its designation as the county seat. Both the harbor and the railroad provided financial security to the fledgling town.

Industrial development and transportation improvements brought new businesses and residents through the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The town developed into the county's economic center with its shipping facilities for seafood and agricultural products, and the shipbuilding and dredging industries which emerged in support of the shipping industry. Buildings along Main Street represented common uses including groceries, dry goods, mercantiles, drug stores, laundries, printing companies, and banks. The downtown area provided the core where people gathered to trade goods, conduct business, and socialize. Areas adjacent to the railroad and the harbor housed warehouses and industrial uses such as transfer companies, machine shops, and milling and planning companies. By the 1920s, Port Lavaca was a bustling town that continued to grow into the 1930s with the construction of the causeway across Lavaca Bay. The post-World War II era brought industries such as the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) attracting new residents to support the commercial base of the city.

Several of the early-twentieth-century storefronts and the depot remain to convey the importance of commerce to the growth of Port Lavaca. The Beach Hotel, which catered to tourists, represents the important contribution of tourism with associated food, outfitting, and entertainment establishments to the early local economy. By 1940, the construction of the Rex

Theatre and at least six restaurants along Main Street emphasized the growth of the entertainment and food service industries. Melcher Hardware at the corner of Main and Colorado Streets is a legacy business that has served the community since 1917. The district's later buildings are indicative of the change in design trends to modernism in the post-World War II era. The remaining downtown buildings show the evolution of Port Lavaca and the critical businesses that sustained the community.

Particularly destructive hurricanes in 1919, 1934, 1945, and 1961 caused extensive damage in Port Lavaca through wind and water. Cumulatively, these storms damaged or destroyed much of the original wood frame commercial buildings in Port Lavaca. Many of these buildings have been replaced during the period of significance with sturdier brick and concrete block buildings to help withstand storms. Continued storm damage and modernization efforts have impacted the architectural integrity of the building stock; however, downtown Port Lavaca retains its integrity of association, location, setting, and feeling. The area continues to convey the feeling and setting of a historic downtown commercial corridor. It is still associated with the commercial development of the community and is in its original location. Overall, it retains sufficient integrity for eligibility under Criterion A.

Downtown Port Lavaca is recommended eligible for the NRHP at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce for its importance as the commercial center of Port Lavaca and Calhoun County. Based upon the extant building stock, the recommended period of significance is 1887 to 1960.



Table 12. Resources in the Recommended Downtown Port Lavaca Historic District.

<b>THC Atlas No.</b>	<b>Resource Type</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Recommended Status</b>
3300075636	Building	123 N Colorado St	Noncontributing
3300074773	Building	134 N Colorado St	Contributing
3300074733	Building	101 S Commerce St	Contributing
3300077700	Building	106 S Guadalupe St	Noncontributing
3300074761	Building	114 S Guadalupe St	Contributing
3300074774	Building	115 S Guadalupe St	Contributing
3300074780	Building	113 E Main St	Contributing
3300075663	Building	116 E Main St	Noncontributing
3300074760	Building	119 E Main St	Contributing
3300074762	Building	123 E Main St	Contributing
3300074785	Building	126 E Main St	Contributing
3300074763	Building	129 E Main St	Contributing
3300074784	Building	132 E Main St	Contributing
3300075656	Building	133 E Main St	Noncontributing
3300074783	Building	134 E Main St	Contributing
3300074779	Building	137 E Main St	Contributing
3300074782	Building	138 E Main St	Contributing
3300074778	Building	202 E Main St	Contributing
3300074772	Building	203 E Main St	Contributing
3300074777	Building	210 E Main St	Contributing
3300074771	Building	211 E Main St	Contributing
3300074770	Building	215 E Main St	Contributing
3300074776	Building	216 E Main St	Contributing
3300074769	Building	219 E Main St	Contributing
3300074775	Building	220 E Main St	Contributing
3300077701	Building	224 E Main St	Noncontributing
3300074768	Building	233 E Main St	Contributing
3300075662	Building	234 E Main St	Noncontributing
3300074767	Building	237 E Main St	Contributing
3300074766	Building	301 E Main St	Contributing
3300074765	Building	309 E Main St	Contributing
3300074734	Building	311 E Main St	Contributing
3300074764	Building	313 E Main St	Contributing
3300074781	Building	108 N Virginia St	Contributing
3300074745	Building	N Virginia St at E Railroad St	Contributing

### Representative Photographs of the Recommended Downtown Port Lavaca Historic District



200 Block of Main Street, northwest side



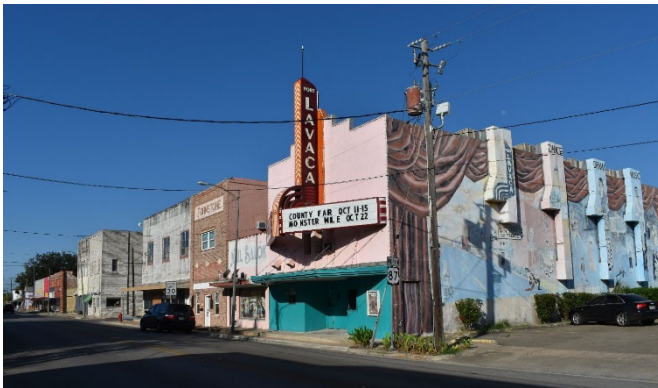
100 Block of Main Street, northwest side.



100 Block of Main Street, southeast side.



200 Block of Main Street, northwest side.



100 Block of Main Street, northwest side.



100 Block of Guadalupe Street, southwest side.

### [Lynnhaven, Port Lavaca](#)

Located in northwest Port Lavaca, Lynnhaven was platted in 1949 by the Calhoun Development Company, a subsidiary of ALCOA, as a residential subdivision for its company managers (Texas Court of Civil Appeals 1970). The company had selected Point Comfort on the east side of Lavaca Bay as the site of its first Texas facility and post-World War II smelter in 1948 (*Victoria Advocate* 1948b). With housing in short supply, ALCOA formed the Calhoun Development Company to provide necessary residences for its workers in the area (*Victoria Advocate* 1950b). Along with Point Comfort Village across Lavaca Bay, Lynnhaven was one of the first residential neighborhoods developed by ALCOA.

Lynnhaven is recommended eligible for the NRHP at a local level of significance under Criterion A for its important association with the history of ALCOA and the company's impact on community planning and development in the Port Lavaca area. The period of significance is 1949, when the neighborhood was platted, to c. 1970, when development ended.





## Representative Photographs of the Recommended Lynnhaven Historic District in Port Lavaca



Representative overview of Lynnhaven.



Representative overview of Lynnhaven.



1964 Church at 1101 Calhoun Street.



1954 Church at 902 Calhoun Street.



## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK



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Recommendations for future work are listed below.

1. **Conduct further study of select resources.** Resources recommended for study outside the parameters of this survey are listed below.
  - **Lynnhaven neighborhood, Port Lavaca:** Identify contributing and noncontributing resources and based on this inventory, revise the recommended NRHP boundary.
  - **Point Comfort:** Identify contributing and noncontributing resources and based on this inventory, revise the recommended NRHP boundary.
  - **Deshazor Park-Ezzell neighborhood, Port Lavaca:** Investigate the potential association with the Defense Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act of 1951. Research conducted for this study revealed little information about this potential association, but intensive study may uncover more detail and potential historic significance.
  - **Properties not visible from the right-of-way:** Coordinate with the County Historical Commission and other knowledgeable parties to identify

properties not visible from the right-of-way that may have historic potential. Pursue right-of-entry and document properties with potential historic significance. Potential properties to investigate should include, but not be limited to the following:

- **Mary O'Connor Braham property** (Maple Street outside Port O'Connor; parcels A0019-00340-0003-00, A0019-00330-0008-00, A0019-00330-0001-00, and A0019-00340-0002-00). This is an agricultural property potentially associated with prominent early settlers of the area.
  - **Matagorda Island**
  - **Family Land Heritage Program properties**
2. **Maximize accessibility of survey documentation.** The documentation collected during this survey should be made available to Calhoun County and its municipalities, with encouragement to publish the data in an interactive GIS map. Alternatively or additionally, the THC could host the data in an online map format available to the public.
  3. **Support NRHP designation of eligible properties and districts.** Very few resources in Calhoun County are designated historic properties. The JMT/Stantec team recommends that the THC conduct outreach with owners of properties recommended eligible for the NRHP and other interested parties to encourage new NRHP applications. Increasing the number of NRHP-listed properties and historic districts in the survey area can help drive heritage tourism and bolster community pride. Additionally, nonprofit properties would be eligible for state historic preservation tax credits, and income-producing properties would be eligible for both state and federal tax credits if they are listed in the NRHP individually or as contributing to a district.
  4. **Support funding for historic property restoration and repair.** Many properties recommended eligible for the NRHP have visible storm damage or need basic exterior repairs, like window or roof stabilization. Owners of historic properties in disaster-prone places need help accessing funding to ensure the long-term survival of these important resources.
  5. **Support disaster preparedness plans that include historic properties.** Calhoun County has a rich history, but many important resources have been lost to storms and hurricanes. To prevent future loss, the county's disaster preparedness plans should be reviewed to ensure that historic properties are considered and that strategies are in place for how to protect and rehabilitate historic properties in the event of a major storm or hurricane.

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