

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Seward Plantation
Other name/site number:
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 10005 FM 390 E
City or town: Independence State: Texas County: Washington
Not for publication: [ ] Vicinity: [ ]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[n] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National
Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the
property [x] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[ ] national [ ] statewide [x] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [x] A [ ] B [x] C [x] D

Signature of certifying official / Title: Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 11/29/12
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[ ] entered in the National Register
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain:

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Seward Plantation, Independence, Washington County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
6	3	buildings
1	0	sites
2	1	structures
2	0	objects
11	4	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** DOMESTIC / single dwelling = residence; DOMESTIC / secondary structures = smokehouse, dependencies; DOMESTIC / multiple dwelling = duplex; AGRICULTURE / SUBSISTENCE / agricultural outbuilding = barn; AGRICULTURE / SUBSISTENCE / animal facility = barn, chicken coop; AGRICULTURE / SUBSISTENCE / storage = corn crib, hay mow; TRANSPORTATION / road-related; RECREATION AND CULTURE / marker = commemorative monument

**Current Functions:** DOMESTIC / single dwelling = house; AGRICULTURE / SUBSISTENCE / agricultural outbuilding = barn; RECREATION AND CULTURE / marker = commemorative monument; VACANT

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** MID-19th CENTURY: Greek Revival  
 OTHER

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Wood, Stone

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-7 through 7-16)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** N/A

**Areas of Significance:** Agriculture, Architecture, Archeology

**Period of Significance:** 1855 - 1936

**Significant Dates:** 1855, 1865

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked):

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): Euro-American, African-American, Black Freedmen

**Architect/Builder:** unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 8-17 through 8-25)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 9-26 through 9-28)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: HABS TX-33-B-8 and HABS TX-3498-(A through E)
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office (Texas Historical Commission, Austin)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University (Baylor University, Waco, TX)
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property:** approximately 60 acres

**Coordinates** (either UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates)

UTM References

NAD 1927  NAD 1983

Zone: 14

A. Easting: 755733	Northing: 3357497
B. Easting: 756425	Northing: 3357510
C. Easting: 756558	Northing: 3357102
D. Easting: 755770	Northing: 3357173

**Verbal Boundary Description:** See continuation sheet 10-29

**Boundary Justification:** See continuation sheet 10-29

**11. Form Prepared By** with assistance from Carlyn Hammons, THC Historian

Name/title:	Paul Fisher, Processing Archivist		
Organization:	Texas Collection, Baylor University		
Street & number:	One Bear Place #97142		
City or Town:	Waco	State: Texas	Zip Code: 76798-7142
Email:	paul_fisher@baylor.edu		
Telephone:	254.710.1268		
Date:	September 2012		

**Additional Documentation**

**Maps** (see continuation sheet Map-30 through Map-32)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets Figure-33 through Figure-40)

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## Photographs

All photographs share the following information and are printed on HP Premium Plus photo paper with HP Viverra inks.

Name of Property: Seward Plantation  
City or Vicinity: Independence  
County, State: Washington County, TX  
Photographer: Anne Payne  
Date Photographed: November 28, 2011  
Number of Photos: 20

Photo 1: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0001

South elevation of the main house (Resource 1, contributing). Also visible in the photo are the centennial marker (Resource 14, contributing), far right, and the swale of the La Bahia Road (Resource 13, contributing), foreground. Camera facing north.

Photo 2: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0002

Northwest oblique of the main house and the smokehouse (Resource 1a, contributing). Camera facing southeast.

Photo 3: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0003

South elevation of the main house. Camera facing north.

Photo 4: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0004

East elevation of the main house. Camera facing west.

Photo 5: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0005

Interior of the front entry hall, first floor, in the main house. Camera facing south.

Photo 6: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0006

Interior of the central hall, second floor, in the main house. Camera facing south.

Photo 7: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0007

Interior of the dining room, first floor, of the main house. Camera facing roughly southeast.

Photo 8: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0008

North elevation of the slave quarters (Resource 2, contributing). Camera facing south.

Photo 9: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0009

Southwest oblique of the slave quarters. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 10: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0010

Northwestern oblique of blacksmith shed and house (Resource 3, contributing). Camera facing southeast.

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Photo 11: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0011

East elevation of the blacksmith shed and house. A portion of the main house's northern (rear) elevation is visible on the far left. Camera facing west.

Photo 12: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0012

South elevation of the barn (Resource 4, contributing). Camera facing north.

Photo 13: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0013

Interior of the barn. Camera facing roughly northwest.

Photo 14: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0014

Southwest oblique of the hay mow (Resource 5, contributing). Camera facing northeast.

Photo 15: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0015

East elevation of the corn crib (Resource 6, contributing). Camera facing west.

Photo 16: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0016

Northwest oblique of the outhouse (Resource 7, contributing). Camera facing southwest.

Photo 17: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0017

Southeast oblique of the well house (Resource 9, noncontributing). Camera facing northwest.

Photo 18: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0018

East elevation of the tenant house (Resource 10, noncontributing). Camera facing roughly northwest.

Photo 19: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0019

Northeast oblique of the 1911 barn (Resource 12, noncontributing). Camera facing southwest.

Photo 20: TX\_Washington County\_Seward Plantation\_0020

Swale of La Bahia Road runs from top to bottom of photo. Also visible is the 1911 barn (near top center), the centennial marker (center), and the south elevation of the main house (left). Camera facing east.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

Seward Plantation fronts Farm-to-Market Road (FM) 390 in Washington County, Texas, approximately one mile east of the town of Independence. FM 390 roughly follows the historic route of the well-traveled La Bahía Road (later known as the Old Washington Road), which cut through the Seward Plantation, directly in the front of the main house, until the 1950s. The nominated historic district consists of ten contributing properties, including the main house, slave quarters, various barns and outbuildings, remnants of the historic road, and a commemorative marker. The nominated boundaries encompass approximately 60 acres. The Seward family has been the sole owner of the nominated property since its construction. Established c. 1855, Seward Plantation has been well-preserved and today is one of the most intact examples of antebellum plantation architecture in the region. The vernacular Greek Revival big house, one-room slave quarters, and various log-pen barns are surrounded by gently rolling pastureland and remain today to tell the story of an early Texas farmstead.

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Seward Plantation is located in Washington County, Texas, approximately one mile east of the center of Independence. The buildings are clustered together in close proximity to the rear main house, creating a functional and practical agricultural complex that served the family for more than 150 years. Most of the land adjoining the nominated district is now pasture, used for gathering hay and grazing cattle, but was also once used to grow cotton and other subsistence crops for the Seward family. The centerpiece of the complex is the large Greek Revival house, which still looks out over the fields from beneath massive oak trees, much as it did in the 1850s.

The main house faces south, roughly paralleling FM 390, which lies approximately 100 yards to the south. FM 390 follows the approximate path of La Bahia Road, one of the three oldest roads in Texas. Before realignment efforts in the 1950s, the road ran in much closer proximity to the main house—within 50 yards of the front porch. The swale of this old road is clearly visible in the grassy lawn that stretches from the highway to the house. A packed dirt driveway leads from the highway and runs east of the house to the backyard complex of outbuildings and carport at the rear. It branches off to the east to give access to the tenant house. The line of Live Oaks along the driveway may have all been planted at the same time and are estimated to be between 100 and 120 years old. However, the two oaks on either side of the gate entering the backyard, are estimated to be 130 to 140 years old. Old growth oak groves stand at the southwest corner of the yard and in the yard west of the house as well. The fields immediately adjacent to the house, stretching to the creek to the west and to the north, are still used as they were historically—for growing hay and grazing cattle. The fields north of the creek, while still under Seward family ownership, exhibit a near complete regeneration of forest cover; however, the trees are likely not the historic species.<sup>1</sup>

As nominated, the Seward Plantation comprises approximately 60 acres. All of the historic resources, however, are clustered together on a smaller parcel fronting FM 390 (see maps on pages 30-32 for reference). Each contributing and noncontributing resource is described below. The number given with a resource is the number it holds on the sketch map, page 32, and is also the number it is referred to on the table, page 16.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the vegetation on Seward Plantation and other properties located throughout the Independence area, see Thomas Crumpton, III, "The Oaks of Independence: A Landscape History of the Original Site of Baylor University and the Potential Surrounding Historic District." M.A. thesis, Baylor University, 2011.

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1. Seward Plantation House (contributing). c. 1855

**Exterior Description:** The main house is the centerpiece of the Seward Plantation, a good example of a Southern plantation “big house” in the Greek Revival style as interpreted on the newly settled Texas frontier. Between 1853 and 1855,<sup>2</sup> slaves built the house of native red cedar on a foundation of native shale. Family tradition holds that the house began as one-story and was moved shortly after its construction; while a precise date has not been determined, the move occurred prior to 1860. The 1934 Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) research indicates that the house was moved in 1856, which is plausible, but unverified. According to family recollections, the house—without the second story, as it had not yet been added—was placed on cottonwood logs and rolled downhill nearly three-quarters of a mile to its current location. Once there, additions to the house began almost immediately, including the second story and multiple one-story rear additions. It is likely the additions were made piecemeal, as the family needed more space and could afford more room. The second story addition was made prior to the Civil War, but the other one-story additions were made after the war, notably a dining room and attached kitchen. Since the dining room was re-paneled in 1887, it had probably already been there for some time. An open air passage eventually connected the kitchen to the stone smokehouse, once a separate building several dozen yards distant. Other rooms added onto the back of the house included a storage room and well room. Both were probably built in the early 1900s.<sup>3</sup> By the time that the HABS recorders documented the house in 1934, the house had achieved its current configuration. No further additions (or demolitions) to the main house have taken place since then.

A long, six-bay double gallery extends across the front of the house (south elevation) to provide shade from the hot sun. The first floor gallery is supported by nine 12”x12” solid cedar columns, while the second floor gallery is supported by 6”x 6” solid cedar columns. The galleries are nearly eleven feet deep, are lined by simple wood railings, and are incorporated under the main roof of the house. The side gabled roof is shingled. Unique for the area, the roof is not flush with the walls and ceiling; there is a one-foot gap between the roof plate and the ceiling and walls to allow for continuous ventilation throughout the attic and to discourage condensation and dry rot under the roof. The west chimney, made of native rough-cut shale, stands on the exterior gable end wall; the east chimney is internal, placed in the ridge. The house sits on a native shale foundation. Exterior siding is ½” x 7” red cedar. Rafters and ceiling joists are also red cedar.

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<sup>2</sup> Sources differ on when the house was first started, making it likely that it took several years for such a project to be completed; additions to the house probably add further confusion. The 1997 Historic American Buildings Survey project recorded by a Texas A&M University Architecture class claims the date 1853-1855; see David Woodcock *et al*, “Seward Plantation,” Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey Tex 3498, 1997, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.tx0933> (accessed 20 October 2010). Betty Plummer contends that the date of construction was 1855; see Betty Plummer, *Historic Homes of Washington County* (San Marcos, Texas: Rio Fresco Books, 1971): 114-117. Edward Schiwetz also states the date as 1855. Edward Muegge Schiwetz, “Independence: The Athens of Early Texas,” *Humble Way* 7, 3 (September-October, 1951): 17. Gordon Echols, too, supports the 1855 building date; see Gordon Echols, *Early Texas Architecture* (Texas Christian Press, 2000): 96. Also see the New Deal-era HABS documentation of Seward Plantation by James Campbell, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey Tex 239-INDEP, Data Pages, 1934, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.tx0276> (accessed 20 October 2010); and descendant Frederick Whittlesey Seward, Jr., *Obadiah Seward of Long Island, New York and His Descendants* (Goshen, New York: Frederick Whittlesey Seward, Jr., 1948): 178.

<sup>3</sup> Plummer, 114; also Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey Tex 239-INDEP, Supplemental Material, 1934-1936, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.tx0276> (accessed 20 October 2010).

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The six bays of the south elevation are not precisely uniform in width, varying from just over ten and a half feet wide to almost fourteen feet wide. Fenestration of the bays is identical on the first and second floors. Beginning with the westernmost bay, it consists of the following. The first and second bays each hold a single, double-hung, six-over-six wood window. Five wood steps, framed by the same simple railing of the galleries, lead up to the third bay which holds the wood paneled double entry doors. The doors are topped by a ten-lite, fixed glass transom and flanked by four-lite, fixed glass sidelights (repeated on the second floor). The fourth and fifth bays are identical to the first and second, holding a single, double-hung, six-over-six wood window each. While the roof line and gallery of the sixth bay are flush with the others, the living space is recessed, and so the gallery wraps partially around to the east elevation. The recessed bay contains a wood panel, single entry door. (The room that lies beyond the door on the first floor did not internally connect to the interior of the house until recent times. The room was used for boarders, and did not allow for access to the rest of the house.)

The east elevation of the house contains four bays under the main gable. The northernmost is the only one not fronted by the gallery and is clad in wood drop siding. Each story of the bay holds a single, double-hung, six-over-six wood window framed by louvered wood shutters. Working southward, the next bay contains no fenestration. The third bay contains a single, wood paneled door on the first floor and a single, double-hung, six-over-six wood window framed by louvered wood shutters on the second floor. The fourth bay simply consists of the open gallery space framed by the solid cedar columns. The gable wall is clad in wood drop siding. The east elevation of the rear additions are a mix of materials and roof shapes. The east wall of the well room is composed primarily of a patchwork of fixed, multi-lite windows of various sizes and vertical wood siding. Entry is provided by panel-and-glazed wood double doors. Horizontal drop siding clads the east wall of the storage room. A single panel-and-glazed wood door provides entry.

The west elevation is a similar mix of materials and forms. Because of the change in grade (it slopes downward from east to west), basement space exists beneath a portion of the western half of the house's main block. Into the native shale foundation are set four wooden doors—a single door to the south of the chimney and a single door and a pair of double doors to the north of the chimney—that provide access to this basement space. Fenestration of the first floor consists of two double-hung, six-over-six wood windows to the north side of the chimney and one double-hung, one-over-one wood window south of the chimney. The 1934 HABS drawings indicate that this window is "new." Second floor fenestration is identical to that on the first, except that it lacks the southmost window. Drop siding extends from the first floor all the way up the gable wall.

From the main block of the house, one-story rear additions stretch northward. A screened-in porch runs along a portion of the west elevation and once provided additional work space for the adjacent kitchen. The porch projects outward approximately 9 feet. Because of the change in grade, this porch sits elevated on large, unhewn cedar posts to keep it flush with the first floor level of the house. A set of exterior stairs provides access to the elevated porch, which is sheltered by the same metal roof that covers the kitchen addition. The west elevation also incorporates the formerly-detached stone smoke house (described below as Resource # 1a).

**Interior Description:** The interior of the house is organized around a central hall, the east side of which holds the stairs to the second floor. Two rooms lie to the west of the hall; three rooms to the east. The dining room, added sometime in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, lies directly north of the entry hall. From the dining room, the well room and storage room are to the east and the kitchen lies directly to the west. To the north of the kitchen, a passageway leads to the formerly detached smoke house.

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All of the interior trim is red cedar with exception of the stairs. The stair treads, newels, balusters, and rails are made of walnut. The risers and moldings, however, are cedar. Floors, walls, and ceilings throughout the house are composed of center matched pine or cedar in various widths. Of note is the dining room finish, which includes cedar paneling that extends from floor to ceiling, and is hand-rubbed to a lustrous finish.

**Significance and Integrity:** The main house of the Seward Plantation retains a remarkable degree of integrity. Though it evolved over the years with multiple additions, these additions were sympathetic to the original design of the home and reflect the evolution of the plantation's agricultural activities. In addition, as new technologies such as running water, flush toilets, and electricity were brought to Washington County, the house was modified slightly to accommodate these necessities. Overall, however, the house is in good condition and retains more than sufficient integrity to convey its historical significance. Integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association are maintained to a high degree.

1a: Smoke House (Contributing), c. 1855

**Description:** Originally a free-standing structure located about fifty feet behind the house, the stone smoke house measures approximately 17'x19'. The native shale walls are just over one foot thick. The metal roof (originally wood shingled) is front gabled. Its south elevation is now incorporated into the ell addition and connects to the kitchen via passageway. The west and east elevations are composed entirely of stone; small, narrow, horizontally rectangular openings are placed high on each of the elevations. The north elevation is also composed of stone. The 1934 HABS drawing show that this north wall also had a small opening like the ones on the other elevations. Since then, however, two six-over-six, double-hung wood windows have been installed on the main level. A half-door opens into a small basement space (accommodated because of change in grade).

**Significance and Integrity:** The smoke house is in good overall condition. It is in its original location, though because it has been incorporated into the main house, leaving it free standing no longer, its integrity of setting is somewhat compromised. However, it maintains its original form, composition, and materials—even with the addition of windows to one elevation. Integrity, therefore, is good and because a smoke house was historically one of the most important buildings on any farmstead, it contributes to the significance of the property.

2. Slave Quarters (contributing), c. 1855

**Description:** Located approximately 150 feet directly north of the main house, this dwelling is actually a duplex. The quarters are single-room units and share a common wall. They are currently unified under a modern, corrugated metal, side gable roof. The metal roof covers a much older wood, split shingle roof. Both units sit on a field stone foundation.

The unit on the west is a single-pen log building measuring approximately 17'x17'. It is composed of V-notched cedar planks with wide plaster chinking. A board and batten door with a square four-lite window provides entry on the south elevation. A massive stone chimney stands on west elevation against the gable end. A small square window is roughed in to the north elevation. The interior features a board floor (laid horizontally to the entrance) on cedar joists. A stone hearth dominates the west wall. This unit's four wall log construction is evidence that it was built first.

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The east unit is approximately the same size. The south elevation is composed of vertical board and batten walls and entry is provided by a wood, four panel door. The east elevation is also board and batten construction and bears a double-hung, four-over-four wood window. A massive stone chimney stands against the north elevation. The north wall is composed of stone instead of wood. On the interior, the wood plank floor lays perpendicular to the entry, on cedar joists. A large stone hearth dominates the north wall. The east unit's west wall is the west unit's east wall constructed of cedar logs. This dates construction of the east unit to after that of the west, though it is unclear when this occurred. A 1950 photograph illustrates that it dates to at least that time.

**Significance and Integrity:** Cultural geographer Terry Jordan's authoritative study of log buildings in Texas found that double-pen dwellings in which one pen pre-dates the other were actually quite common in Texas. Further, he found that while the initial pen was often constructed of logs, the second pen most often was not.<sup>4</sup> However, the fact that these are discrete units without internal passage suggests that this was not an instance of enlarging the structure to accommodate a growing family, but rather adding space for an additional family. The 1860 Census lists three slave dwellings on the Seward Plantation. It is possible that this duplex represents two of them.

Family tradition holds that a slave named "Uncle Finn" lived in these quarters. Uncle Finn is credited with the fine stonework that is found throughout the Seward Plantation, including all the chimneys. He performed this craft throughout the Independence area.

At the time of the 1999 HABS documentation, both chimneys were collapsed and most of the roof had collapsed as well. The current property owners have rebuilt the chimneys and roof within the past decade and made repairs to the chinking on the west unit. Historic photographs also note the presence of a small porch roof extending over the entrance of the east unit that no longer remains. The doors and windows are not original, but likely date to the late nineteenth century and within the period of significance. Original method of construction is still clearly visible in these dwellings, however, and they are in good overall condition. Sufficient integrity exists to convey significance.

### 3. House and Blacksmith Shed (contributing), c. 1855 with post-1915 shed addition

**Description:** Located approximately 100 feet northeast of the main house, this house is a one-room, front gabled, frame cabin, measuring approximately 17'x13'. The house faces south; a modern porch, consisting of a corrugated metal roof supported by rough cedar posts, extends across the entire southern elevation. The house is clad in cedar boards—board-and-batten on the north, south, and east elevations, horizontal cedar siding on the west elevation. It is topped by a corrugated metal roof. The only entry is provided on the south elevation through a wood panel, top-glazed door that is not original to the house. To the left of the entry door is a modern, double-hung, aluminum window. Two additional aluminum windows hang on the east elevation. A massive stone chimney stands along the north gable end wall. At some point in the building's history, the roof line was extended on the west eave side and the space beneath it was enclosed and incorporated into the interior. Inside the house are a wood floor and a concrete hearth, which likely replaced an earlier hearth made of the same stone as the chimney. Walls are painted gypsum board.

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<sup>4</sup> Terry G. Jordan, *Texas Log Buildings: A Folk Architecture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

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Sometime after 1915 (date based on historic photographs as well as HABS documentation) a single-bay blacksmith shed was added on to the rear (north) of the house. There are no doors which permit passage between them. The shed has a corrugated metal gable roof, and it is open on the west side. Its north elevation is composed of painted wood siding and bears three small, square windows. The east elevation is random width 1" boards on two-by-four framing. A board door with a small window provides entry on the east elevation.

**Significance and Integrity:** The Seward descendants today still call this house "Aunt Caroline's house." Aunt Caroline was a slave woman owned by the Seward family, who stayed at the plantation even after emancipation. At one time, the house also was called "Lot's house," after a servant who worked for the Seward family into the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> It's possible that this could constitute the third slave house indicated by the 1860 Census. The house is in good condition. Though it contains many non-original materials, the form and method of construction retain a good degree of integrity. The shed is in poorer condition, but retains enough of its integrity to convey its significance, especially as it relates to the continued agricultural use of the property.

4. Barn<sup>6</sup> (contributing), c. 1855

**Description:** The barn is a single-pen log building constructed of saddle notched cedar logs nine to thirteen inches in diameter. It sits on a foundation composed variously of logs and loose field stones. The little chinking that exists consists of sawn boards and field stone. A corrugated metal roof has been installed directly on top of a split shingle roof. A drop roof extends off the east elevation to create a lean-to. A single board door with wrought iron strap hinges opens to the south. Above it is a square opening that leads directly to the interior loft. The gable walls (north and south) are 1" sawn boards. The rear wall (north) is sheathed in corrugated metal. Inside, the one-room barn is subdivided into three very small pens by sawn boards. Overhead, the loft floor consists of small diameter oak and cedar saplings laid across large diameter logs. The loft is supported by nine cedar posts. Split logs served as feed troughs.

**Significance and Integrity:** No longer in active use, the barn is in poor but stable condition. It dates from the earliest days of the plantation. With the exception of the corrugated metal, it retains its original materials. Method of construction is evident and typical of the construction techniques used on early Texas farmsteads.

5. Hay Mow (contributing), c. 1855

**Description:** Sitting directly behind the barn is the hay mow, once used for storing livestock feed. The hay mow is a double-pen, dog-trot style building constructed of cedar logs and sheltered by a corrugated metal gable roof with new framing. Walls are saddle-notched logs, six to nine inches in diameter, with no chinking. Steel corner angles were added to each outside corner of the building during stabilization work in 1998. A shed roof (rebuilt in 1998) extends along the entire south elevation. The south elevation contains three openings—a large opening to the central passage, and smaller, square openings to each of the end pens. The central passage has a short retaining wall of field stone on each end to keep the raised earth floor in place. While fully open on the south end, the north end of the passage terminates in a wall composed of vertical boards. In the western pen, the log floor runs north to south, while the log floor of the east pen runs east to west. The gable walls (west and east elevations) consist of vertical 1" boards, nearly twelve feet wide, and feature large square openings.

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<sup>5</sup> Woodcock *et al*; Seward, 214; Gracey Booker Toland, *Austin Knew His Athens* (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1958), 13.

<sup>6</sup> HABS documentation refers to this as a horse barn. This exact use is otherwise unverified.

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**Significance and Integrity:** After the 1998 stabilization efforts, the hay mow is in very good condition. Though the roof and shed framing are mostly of new construction, the remainder of the main building is composed of original materials. Method of construction is evident and typical of the construction techniques used on early Texas farmsteads. The hay mow dates from the earliest days of the plantation.

6. Corn Crib (contributing), c. 1855

**Description:** The corn crib is a single-pen log building with three shed additions on the north, south, and west elevations. Pen walls are constructed of saddle-notched cedar logs 4-9" in diameter and chinked with lime mortar. Board and batten doors with iron strap hinges are centered on the east and west elevations. Gable end walls (east and west) are vertical 1" boards of varying widths. The east gable wall once had a large square opening above the door; it is now filled with sawn boards. A shed roof extends off the west gable end wall. Supported by cedar posts, it is open on all three sides. Another shed runs along the entire southern elevation and is open on all three sides. The floor is concrete and the roof is corrugated metal supported by rough log posts. The shed along the north elevation is mostly enclosed on all three sides. Cladding is a various patchwork of materials including chicken wire, corrugated metal, sheet metal, and sawn boards. This enclosed shed once served as the hen house. The corn crib and the south shed have concrete floors. The other two sheds have dirt floors.

**Significance and Integrity:** The corn crib was an integral component of the early Texas farmstead as it stored the staple food for human (and often animal) consumption. The sheds were likely added piecemeal as the needs of the farm evolved, which is very typical for this type of resource. Though no longer used for food storage, the crib retains enough of its original materials and form to convey its purpose and its significance.

7. Outhouse (contributing), c. 1900

**Description:** Built of sawn, unpainted wood boards, the structure has one hole inside, and a small sliding glass window high on a wall. The side gabled roof is corrugated metal. The floor is stone. It is located approximately 50 feet west of the main house.

**Significance:** The Seward family maintains that the outhouse is original to the site and was still in use until the 1950s, when a sewer system was installed for the house. Such facilities were an obvious necessity on any homestead and its presence here helps to illustrate an almost complete collection of essential farmstead buildings. In fair condition, and indicative of the type of construction and design, it is considered contributing. Its exact date of construction is difficult to determine and shows evidence of repairs.

8. Mounting Block (contributing), mid-nineteenth century

**Description:** The mounting block is a low object made of several large gristmill stones stacked in decreasing size going up to form a high stepstool-like round platform. It stands approximately two feet high. It is located just outside of the picket fence on the west side of the house, just south of where the original carriage house (razed) was located. A 1936 HABS photograph proves that the mounting block has been in this location at least since that time.

**Significance and Integrity:** Built almost like a stepstool, the mounting block was made so ladies in their long skirts could safely and modestly climb into a carriage or buggy. The round top piece was made from a gristmill

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stone, though it is not known where the stone was taken from. Local legend says this mounting block was also used as a slave auction block, but that information could not be corroborated. Because it dates from the period of significance, and because it retains integrity, it is counted as a contributing resource.

9. Well House (non-contributing), date unknown

**Description:** The current well house has been reconstructed. The well itself, six feet in diameter, goes down through twelve feet of stone and tapers out at the bottom. The shaft is constructed of field stone, which rises approximately two feet above grade and appears to have been recently rebuilt. The opening is currently covered with boards. The shelter sits on four rough cedar posts. The gabled roof is shingled with modern composite shingles, and the gable end walls are painted boards. It also boasts a rectangular cupola which houses the pulley system for lowering and raising buckets of water.

**Significance and Integrity:** The Seward family maintains that there has always been a well house on the site of the current well house as long as the family has owned the property. The current well house dates from the last 50 years and it is unknown if the well itself has been reconstructed or modified in any way. For these reasons it is considered noncontributing.

10. Tenant House (non-contributing), c. 1950s

**Description:** The tenant house is a modest, front gabled building clad in wood clapboard siding and sheltered by a modern metal roof. A small side gabled addition projects to the north. The main elevation faces east. A wood porch extends along the primary façade; three square wood posts support a dropped metal roof. The east elevation consists of a single entry door and two aluminum frame windows. Each of the remaining elevations bears two aluminum frame windows as well. The house is located approximately one hundred and thirty five yards to the northeast of the main house, east of the driveway and is removed from the historic agricultural service complex. It currently serves as rental housing.

**Significance:** A photograph from 1957 demonstrates that this house has been altered significantly since that time. Alterations include the addition of the side gabled ell, reconfiguring the porch design, and replacing original vertical board siding with the horizontal clapboard siding. This house was moved from an unspecified location to this locale in 1957. It is considered noncontributing for that reason.

11. Carport (non-contributing), c. 1950s

**Description:** Made of prefabricated metal pieces with a large metal roof, the carport sits adjacent to the ell additions of the main house. The metal frame sits on large, painted cedar posts. The top third of the carport opening is enclosed by wood lattice panels. A short, dry-stacked rock wall borders the eastern edge.

**Significance:** The carport was built on the property in the 1950s. Because it falls outside of the period of significance, it is counted as noncontributing.

12. Barn (non-contributing), 1911

**Description:** Located near the tenant house away from the historic complex, this barn was added to the site in 1911. Large and rectangular, the barn is clad in deteriorated four-by-eight sheets of painted plywood. Most of the paint has peeled away. The side gable roof is corrugated metal. The only openings consist of one double-door entry on each of the south and north elevations. Doors are metal and swing outward. The floor is dirt.

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**Significance:** According to the current property owner, this barn was built to replace some five barns that were destroyed in a 1900 hurricane. The location of these five barns is unknown. There is little architectural or construction merit to this barn, nor is there any information to help determine what, if any, changes have been made since 1911. A photograph from the 1950s provides evidence that at least one side was clad in unpainted vertical board siding rather than the plywood siding that it has now. A hole in the roof now leaves the interior exposed to the elements. Though relatively stable, it is in poor overall condition. It is considered noncontributing.

13. La Bahía Road Remnants (contributing), mid-17<sup>th</sup> century

**Description:** The sloping swale of the La Bahía Road can still be seen cutting across the front of the Seward property. Several large trees grow on either side of the roadway, with sparse native grasses and other low, quick-growing plants scattered along the path. On aerial photographs of the site, the route is even more noticeable. The route of the road remained fairly constant until the 1950s when FM 390 was constructed to the south. Members of the Seward family helped maintain the road. Over time, the road became known as the Washington Road or the Old Washington Road, as it led directly to Washington-on-the-Brazos, an important political and commercial center in early Texas.

**Significance and Integrity:** As one of three major roads through Texas at the time Americans began coming to Texas, the La Bahía Road was one of the oldest pathways in Central Texas. By the time of the Civil War, it was still heavily in use. Because it was an integral component of transporting the plantation's crops to market, it is considered a contributing resource.

14. Texas Centennial Historical Marker (contributing), 1936

**Description:** This gray granite slab is approximately 4' tall, 2.5' wide and 10" thick. Finished smooth on the front surface, all other sides are rough cut. A bronze lone star encircled by a bronze wreath sits at top. The inscription identifies this site as the home of John Hoblett Seward and Laura Roberts Seward, along with their birth and death dates. It also reads, "Built in 1855 of hand-sawed cedar" and credits erection of the marker to the State of Texas in 1936. It stands just outside the fenced yard of the main house, between the house and the La Bahia Road remnants.

**Significance and Integrity:** This is one of hundreds of similar markers erected during the state's 1936 centennial celebration. To commemorate Texas' 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence from Mexico, the state sponsored a wide program of commemorative programs and activities. Erection of markers at historic sites was one of these programs. Collectively, the sites chosen to be recognized with markers tell an important story about how the citizens of Texas viewed their past and placed value on the experiences. The marker is in excellent condition and, based on 1936 photographs, remains in its original location.

Uncounted Site Resources

There are a number of other features present on the property that are not of substantial size or scale to be considered in the official resource count. Collectively, however, they do serve as evidence of the property's historic function and/or significance. These include filled-in wells; crumbling foundations of unknown buildings or structures; ceramic well liners; a cotton seed dryer; large iron pots once used for processing

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animals; remnants of rock walls; portions of stake and rider rail fences; and numerous other pieces of agricultural equipment.

**Table 1: Contributing and Noncontributing Resources**  
 See sketch map on page 31 for locations of each resource.

Number	Date built	Resource	Type	Contributing	Condition
1	c. 1855	House	Building	Contributing	Good
1a	c. 1855	Smokehouse	Building	Contributing	Good
2	c. 1855	Duplex Slave Quarters	Building	Contributing	Good
3	c. 1855 with post-1915 shed addition	Blacksmith Shed and House	Building	Contributing	Fair
4	c. 1855	Barn	Building	Contributing	Poor but stable
5	c. 1855	Hay mow	Structure	Contributing	Good
6	c. 1855	Corn crib	Structure	Contributing	Fair
7	c. 1900	Outhouse	Building	Contributing	Good
8	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Mounting block	Object	Contributing	Good
9	unknown	Well house	Structure	Non-contributing	Good
10	Pre-1957 (moved to site in 1957)	Tenant House	Building	Non-contributing	Good
11	1950s	Carport	Building	Non-contributing	Good
12	1911	Barn	Building	Non-contributing	Poor
13	n/a	La Bahía Road Remnants	Site	Contributing	Good
14	1936	Texas Centennial marker	Object	Contributing	Excellent

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## Statement of Significance

Built by the John H. Seward family in 1855 as a cotton plantation, the Seward Plantation has outstanding historical value. While there are a good number of antebellum resources extant in Washington County, the Seward Plantation's collection of original slave quarters and log service buildings is rare, particularly because of their good overall condition. They are good examples of the methods of construction utilized on early Texas farmsteads. After the Civil War, the Seward family utilized the property for various agricultural activities, including cattle ranching, and utilized lien-based labor systems to keep up crop production. It is still used by Seward descendants for agricultural pursuits today. Seward Plantation is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its association with agriculture, Criterion C for Architecture, and—because of the potential to yield additional information about the domestic and agricultural activities of its earliest inhabitants—it is nominated under criterion D for archeology. The period of significance begins in 1855, the estimated date of initial operation, and extends to 1936.

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## Town of Independence, Washington County, Texas

The Seward Plantation lies one mile east of the rural town of Independence in Washington County, Texas, and twelve miles northeast of Brenham, the current county seat. During the Spanish era, the area that would become Washington County was sparsely populated. Its location along La Bahia Road,<sup>7</sup> however, meant that explorers and traders were familiar with the territory and eventually recognized its potential for settlement and agricultural exploit.

European settlers began moving into the region in 1821, under the Mexican *empresario* system. The first three hundred families arrived under the contract that established Stephen F. Austin's first colony, which stretched from what is now Washington County eastward to the Gulf of Mexico. For the most part, these families were Americans of British descent and hailed from the Trans-Appalachian South, primarily from Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Missouri. These new residents became citizens of the Mexican state of Coahuila and Texas, which was divided into three departments. What would become Washington County lay within the department of San Felipe de Austin, and as the population rose, settlers petitioned for status as Washington Municipality. The request was granted in 1835, but in one short year, under the newly independent Republic of Texas, the area was organized as Washington County.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> La Bahia Road is one of the oldest roads in Texas. Originally an east-west Indian trail in southwestern Louisiana and southeastern Texas, French and Spanish explorers utilized it as early as the late 1650s. Its importance grew as it became a primary corridor for the movement of people and goods from the well-established Spanish (and later Mexican) port settlements on the Texas coast to the interior missions and presidios of east Texas. Over time, this section that stretched in front of the Seward property became known as the Washington Road, as it led directly from Independence to Washington-on-the-Brazos, an important political and commercial center in early Texas.

<sup>8</sup> James L. Hailey and John Leffler, "Washington County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.  
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/hcw4.html>. Accessed 28 March 2012.

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The town of Independence originated as Coles' Settlement on land patented to John P. Coles in 1824 as part of *empresario* Stephen F. Austin's first colony. It was renamed shortly after the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836 (which was declared at Washington-on-the-Brazos, just 15 miles east of Independence). The town was selected as the site for Baylor University in 1845, and the town reached its peak during the 1850s when it was recognized as a cultural, economic, and religious center, as well as the wealthiest city in Texas. Because its economy was based primarily on a slave-based agricultural model, the community suffered through the Civil War and Reconstruction. It continued to decline after city and university officials refused to let the Santa Fe railroad come to the town. Much of the agricultural trade was diverted during the 1880s to towns that were closer to railroad access. Without train access, students and teachers found it increasingly difficult to get to and from Independence as well. Part of Baylor University left in 1861, and the final Baylor department moved out of Independence in 1886. Independence, Texas, began its transition to quiet rural settlement.<sup>9</sup>

Natural disasters also added to Independence's woes. An 1873 fire destroyed several businesses, to be followed by a tornado in 1882 and a hurricane in 1900. Because of the destruction all of these events inflicted on local buildings, there was a brief building boom in Independence during the 1940s, where the stone and other resources from the abandoned Baylor buildings were used for new buildings or repairs across Independence. Despite the new buildings and repaired old ones, more business and people did not come to Independence. In 1958, the post office closed. By 1966, the population was 200, and the population was down to only 140 people by 2000.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Civil War, the lack of a railroad, and Baylor's relocation in 1886 altered the Independence economy, the surrounding farmland remained productive. However, the area has never again achieved the agricultural success of its early history.<sup>11</sup> Livestock ranching has replaced cotton as the most prevalent activity in the county.

## Agriculture in Washington County

### *Pre-Civil War*

Located within the Blackland Prairie of southeast central Texas, Washington County enjoys both climate and soils highly conducive to rich agricultural outputs. With the Brazos River and several smaller streams running through the area, and timber readily available, early Euro-American settlers in the area quickly grasped the agricultural possibilities and planted cotton, corn, and other crops. In the early 1820s, Austin's colonists set about clearing land for cultivated fields, and had established the area's first cotton gin by 1825.<sup>12</sup> As the number

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<sup>9</sup> Independence Preservation Trust, "Old Baylor Park and Baylor Female College," <http://www.independencetx.com/BaylorPark.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Augustin and Pitts, "Independence, Texas."

<sup>11</sup> Independence Preservation Trust, "Welcome to Independence, Texas," <http://www.independencetx.com/> (accessed 28 March 2012).

<sup>12</sup> James L. Hailey and John Leffler, "Washington County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/hcw4.html> (accessed 28 March 2012).

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of immigrants increased during the Republic of Texas era, so too did the number of agricultural enterprises and the county rapidly developed a thriving agricultural economy.

By 1850 the area had a robust agricultural economy based on the production of cotton, corn, and cattle and supported a number of large plantations among numerous smaller farms, many of which utilized slave labor. In that year, farmland covered 263,917 acres of the county, with potatoes, corn, tobacco, cotton, wheat, and oats under cultivation. In fact, Washington County was the third-leading county in the state in cotton production in 1850. Any surplus crops and the cash crop cotton could be loaded onto boats at the town of Washington, and shipped to the Texas coast for sale and transport out of Texas for sale.<sup>13</sup>

The population of Washington County more than tripled from 1850 to 1860. By 1860 there were 15,215 people living in Washington County; the 7,941 slaves made up more than half of the population. Just four years later, slaves numbered 8,663. The percentage of slave population in Washington County was much higher than the statewide average. In 1850, slaves constituted 27% of the general population of Texas, but the percentage was 47% in Washington County. In 1860, slave population was 33% statewide, but more than 52% in Washington County. That same year, the state average of slaves per holder was 8.34, but it was 12.66 in Washington County. Sixty percent of Washington County slaveholders had less than 10 slaves, but 20% of them had more than 20.<sup>14</sup>

The county's increased population was coupled with a marked increase in agricultural output. The 1860 census returns show farmland had expanded to encompass 365,000 acres, including more than 76,000 acres of improved land. Cotton bale production increased an astonishing 500% in just ten years, making Washington County the second largest cotton producing county in Texas. Cattle within the county had multiplied as well, with over double the number than they had ten years before.<sup>15</sup>

Washington County's cultivation rates also exceeded the state average. The average improved acre per farm in 1860 in Texas was just over 70 acres, but it was 133 acres in Washington County. County farmers also produced nearly twice as much cotton per acre as the state average. Forty-one percent of farms in the county had more than one hundred acres in production, while 19% had that number in the rest of the state.

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<sup>13</sup> Crumpton III, "The Oaks of Independence"; Hailey and Leffler, "Washington County."

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census returns compiled in Sean Michael Kelley, *Plantation Frontiers: Race, Ethnicity, and Family Along the Brazos River of Texas, 1821-1886*. PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2000: 109.

<sup>15</sup> Gracey Toland, *Austin Knew His Athens* (San Antonio: Naylor Co, 1958), 4-5; "Independence, Texas: Brochures;" vertical file, Texas Collection, Baylor University; Independence Preservation Trust, "A Visit with History," <http://www.independencetx.com/history.htm> (accessed 6 April 2010); Independence Preservation Trust, "Baylor University on Windmill Hill," <http://www.independencetx.com/BaylorUnivWindhamHill.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012); Samuel Hesler, *A History of Independence Baptist Church, 1836-1969, and Related Organizations* (Dallas: Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1970), 107; Guy Nelson, "Baylor University at Independence," M.A. thesis (Baylor University, 1961), 4, 7; Thomas H. Kreneck, "Houston, Samuel," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HH/fho73.html> (accessed 28 March 2012); James L. Hailey and John Leffler, "Washington County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/hcw4.html> (accessed 28 March 2012).

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*Post-Civil War*

The Civil War quickly reduced the flourishing agriculture of Washington County. The larger agricultural operations lost their workforces, and huge cash crop operations became less feasible. The economy was stimulated, however, by the thousands of immigrants, many of them from Germany, who moved into Washington County during the late 1860s and the 1870s. In 1870 there were 1,901 farms, and almost 123,000 acres of county land was classified as "improved." Sharecropping and tenant farming offered partial solutions, and by 1880 about two-thirds of Washington County farmers labored on rented land. Crop production recovered enough to produce 52,215 bales of ginned cotton in 1900.<sup>16</sup>

The first two decades of the twentieth century were hard for Texas farmers due to boll weevil infestations and droughts. Cotton production in Washington County began to decline, dropping more than twenty percent by 1920. At that time, 98,000 acres were devoted to cotton, and the number of farms had increased to 4,158, but production had dropped to only 11,014 bales. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, thousands of acres of cotton land were taken out of production, and farmers began to diversify their operations, increasingly focusing on livestock and dairy cows and planting crops like grain, hay and grasses to support them.<sup>17</sup>

Mirroring what was happening across the state, the farms of Washington County began to mechanize and consolidate in the 1940s and 1950s. This led to a significant drop in population and number of farms. The latter dropped by more than thirty percent from 1940 to 1950, leaving just 2,929 farms. The acreage of each, however, increased as the focus shifted to livestock and the supporting crops.<sup>18</sup>

In 1982 about eighty-seven percent of Washington County land was in farms and ranches; ninety percent of the agricultural receipts were from livestock and livestock products.<sup>19</sup> Ranching remains the primary agricultural activity in Washington County today.

### **The John H. Seward Family**

John Hoblett Seward arrived in Washington County in 1833 at the age of eight, along with his parents, Samuel and Mary Anne Elizabeth, and brother George. The Swards established a farm and completed their home in 1834, eventually adding three additional children to their family. This home,<sup>20</sup> which still stands in its original location a little more than a mile north from the nominated property, was sited near the original La Bahia Road—one of just three major roads through Texas at the time—and so the family probably knew more than

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<sup>16</sup> Hailey and Leffler, "Washington County."

<sup>17</sup> Hailey and Leffler, "Washington County."

<sup>18</sup> Hailey and Leffler, "Washington County."

<sup>19</sup> Hailey and Leffler, "Washington County."

<sup>20</sup> The Samuel Seward house was recorded by the Historic American Building Survey program in 1936. Notes from the effort indicate that construction began in 1827, which would predate the Swards' arrival in Texas. The home is located on what is now known as Seward Plantation Road. It has been altered substantially.

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most of what was going on from travelers going up and down the road.<sup>21</sup> In addition to his farm operation, Samuel also owned interest in a mercantile store in Independence and speculated in land. By 1850, Samuel had acquired thirteen slaves, of which seven were eighteen or younger. He owned property in Washington County, Milam County, and Falls County, with a combined value between six and seven thousand dollars.<sup>22</sup>

Surviving evidence indicates that Samuel's agricultural activities were going well around this time, and he began involving his sons John and George more and more in the family business enterprises. The 1850 U.S. Census enumerated John living in his parents' home. But, John makes his first appearance as a land owner in the Washington County tax rolls just one year later.<sup>23</sup> In addition to 2,200 acres in Washington County, he is listed as owning two lots within the town of Independence, several thousand acres in Falls County, 26 horses, 75 head of cattle, and 14 slaves. Less than 15% of Washington County landholders owned more than 1,000 acres in 1850, making John one of the largest landholders in the county.<sup>24</sup> The average number of slaves per slaveholder in Washington County was just over twelve, meaning Seward's holdings were just about average for the area.

In approximately 1853, John Seward began construction on his own house only a short distance from his childhood home. He completed his new one-story dwelling around 1855, just in time to bring his new bride, Laura Jane Roberts of Houston, to their new home after their wedding on June 28. Family tradition holds that this home was originally located nearly three-quarters of a mile to the east of its present location, but was soon moved to a "more healthful" location.

County tax records show that John's real estate holdings held steady from 1851 to 1856. He increased his slave holdings by just two (for a total of sixteen). His cattle herd steadily grew, however, from 50 head in 1851 to 200 in 1856. John wrote to an unknown acquaintance in the 1850s that three of his slaves picked 1,236 pounds of cotton and three hired slaves picked 1,163 pounds, making 2,399 pounds picked in one eleven-hour day. John figures that each person picked almost 400 pounds and further notes that the highest amount picked was 450 pounds and that a fourteen-year-old picked the next highest amount of 427 pounds.<sup>25</sup>

The 1857 tax records document that John's land, slave, and cattle holdings decreased by half from the previous year. They remain at these levels for the next several years. His father's holdings increase by roughly the same numbers during this same time period, however, suggesting that the assets were transferred in some manner.

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<sup>21</sup> "Seward, Samuel," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/SS/fse13.html> (accessed 28 March 2012); Ohio Genealogy Express, "Roster of Ohio Soldiers in the War of 1812, Columbus, Ohio: The Adjutant General of Ohio, 1916," <http://www.ohiogenealogyexpress.com/military/1812-f.html>, (accessed 2 April 2012); Find a Grave. "Samuel Seward." <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=32134068>. Accessed 1 April 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Dana Morris, "A Map of Independence, Washington County, Texas," October 1970.

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note that Samuel Seward disappears from the tax rolls in this same year. When he reappears, in 1857, John's taxable assets represent approximately half of what they had been in the previous years.

<sup>24</sup> Analysis of Washington County tax rolls in Kelley, *Plantation Frontiers*, 409.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Crumpton III, "The Oaks of Independence: A Landscape History of the Original Site of Baylor University and the Potential Surrounding Historic District" (M.A. thesis, Baylor University, 2011): 187; Toland, *Austin*, 11-12; "Seward, Samuel," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Quoted in Frederick Whittlesley Seward, Jr., *Obadiah Seward of Long Island, New York and His Descendants* (Goshen: Frederick Whittlesley Seward Jr., 1948): 140-143.

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Combined, the two men continued to increase their cattle herd, amassing 500 head by 1862, and at some point began selling beef in the family's Independence mercantile store. As noted in John Seward's 1861 account book from the family's store in Independence, the Sewards were selling meat to local residents. Each meat cut, price, and date of sale is carefully recorded in this book, organized by buyer. Other transactions are also noted, including payment to the Sewards for items such as lumber, sugar, and salt.<sup>26</sup> Other evidence suggests that the Sewards acted as cotton brokers, buying cotton from area growers and then arranging for its transport and sale.<sup>27</sup>

In 1860, just before the start of the Civil War, the U.S. Census recorded John Seward's household. He and his wife Laura lived with their two young sons<sup>28</sup> (Oscar and Clay) and two adult white males (non-relatives). The census also recorded twelve slaves (four of whom were under the age of 5) living in three slave dwellings. John, now 35 years old, held real estate valued at \$20,000 and personal assets worth \$20,000. Even as the Civil War raged, John and his brother bought 13 additional slaves (including a blacksmith and carpenter) in December of 1864, for \$6,300.<sup>29</sup>

Prosperity was not to last. Like many landowners in the South, the Sewards signed contracts with former slaves to continue working the fields after the Civil War. One such surviving labor contract details a sharecropping agreement between John H. Seward and five newly freed people. Signed in 1867, it provides for Frank Seward, Elick Black, Ann Lewis, Henry Homes, and Tom Seward to work for John H. Seward for a year.<sup>30</sup> The contract calls for the four men and one woman to work 25 acres of corn and cotton, with John Seward receiving 2/3 of the crops they would raise. In exchange, the team of five people would receive 25 acres of land to live on, all the farming implements that would be needed for the job, and 3.5 pounds of bacon and a peck of cornmeal per person per week. These terms reflected the needs of landowners at the time. They needed a labor force quickly and were not giving up much more than they had before under the antebellum slave system. Seward negotiated another contract in 1869 with former slaves, including Anderson Elliot and his children, Roxana, Caroline, Benjamin, Anderson, Sam, and Absalom, as well as Monroe Moore, Dorlas Greer, Tilda Thompson, and Ruth Elliot. This contract was wage-for-labor contract versus a sharecropping agreement. Seward was to provide each worker with 3.5 to 5 pounds of meat and a peck of cornmeal per week, plus a monthly wage of \$3 to \$12.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Hoblett Seward, [Account Book], 1861-1862.

<sup>27</sup> In 1865, Confederate forces seized 67 bales of cotton that John had shipped to the port city of Brownsville. He filed an affidavit that the cotton was "purchased by my said firm [J.H. Seward & Bro.] from various parties being our immediate neighbors in the county of Washington. [Statement by John Seward, Copy #1], Legal Document, August 1, 1865; digital image, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph31057/> : accessed July 25, 2012), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas.

<sup>28</sup> The couple eventually had eight children, of whom four lived past 26 years of age.

<sup>29</sup> [Bill of Sale for Slaves], Text, n.d.; digital images, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph31037/> ( accessed July 25, 2012), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas.

<sup>30</sup> [Labor contract between Frank Seward and John H. Seward], Star of the Republic Museum, Digitized by Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph31033/m1/1/?q=john%20seward> (accessed 2012 October 11).

<sup>31</sup> [Labor contract between Anderson Elliot, Roxana Elliot, Caroline Elliot, Benjamin Elliot, Anderson Elliot, Sam Elliot, Absalom Elliot, Monroe Moore, Dorlas Greer, Tilda Thompson, Ruth Elliot, and John H. Seward], Star of the Republic Museum,

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John also brought in some additional income by selling properties he held in Washington and other counties and by selling off his cattle holdings.<sup>32</sup> The 1870 Census lists his real estate assets valued at \$1,750 and personal assets worth \$1,880.

John Seward died in 1892. His property was not split up among the children and Laura until 1899, with the house and 132 acres of land staying with Laura. She continued to run the plantation until her death in 1920. Her son Oscar Alpheus Seward, who worked as the county clerk for Washington County, purchased his siblings' interests in the plantation in 1913 and assisted his mother with its management during her final years.<sup>33</sup> Oscar Alpheus Seward was a graduate of Baylor University when it was located in Independence. He began his public service as county clerk in 1889, and over the years served as a state legislator (1919-1921), justice of the peace, chief of the volunteer fire department, and president of a telephone company. Upon his death in 1936, the same year a Texas Centennial marker was erected in front of the house, his son Oscar Alpheus Seward, Jr., took over operation and management of the family property, with assistance from Clay Seward (Oscar Sr.'s brother). Oscar, Jr., served honorably in both World Wars, rising to the level of lieutenant colonel. He also took an interest in the house, and he completed the first recorded restoration of the main house in 1955.<sup>34</sup> Upon Oscar Alpheus Seward, Jr.'s death in 1959, the property passed to Oscar Alpheus Seward (III) and his half-sister Patricia Seward. Though the property was abandoned for a period of time, it remains in the hands of Seward family descendants today.

### **Period of Significance**

The period of significance for the Seward Plantation begins in 1855, which is when John and Laura Seward established the plantation, and ends in 1936 with the death of their son Oscar Alpheus Seward, Sr. Continuous agricultural use is documented through tax records and census records through this time. From 1936 to the present, the house intermittently remained vacant for short periods of time and the exact nature of the agricultural activity during those periods of vacancy is not known. Additional research could reveal such details and justify a longer or additional period of significance.

### **Significance of the Seward Plantation: Criterion A for Agriculture (local level)**

The Seward Plantation is significant under National Register criterion A in the area of agriculture as an example of the early agricultural enterprises that led to the successful settlement of Washington County. The plantation era in Texas was brief since Texas was still the frontier at the beginning of the Civil War. Slave-labor, cotton-

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digitized by Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph31036/m1/1/?q=seward> (accessed 2012 October 11).

<sup>32</sup> [Deed of Trust transferring livestock to M. Kennard], Legal Document, May 25, 1869; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph31035/> : accessed July 25, 2012), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas.

<sup>33</sup> [Deed of Property to the Heirs of John H. Seward], Star of the Republic Museum, Digitized by Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph31042/?q=seward>, (accessed 28 March 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Library of Congress, David Woodcock, et. al., "Seward Plantation;" Frederick Whittlesey Seward, Jr., *Obadiah Seward*, 205-211, 223-224.

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based agriculture had only 30 years—at most—to develop. Large landholdings were common, but large cultivated acreage was not. The Seward Plantation is a good example of this. While John owned more than two thousand acres, only a very small portion of it was under cultivation. A typical Texas slaveholding plantation had a population of 10-20 slaves. John Seward's slaveholdings fall in to the typical range. After the Civil War, the Seward Plantation transitioned to sharecropping, like many former plantations around the South. Some contracts arranged by the Seward family were pure sharecropping agreements, but others provided for only labor, in exchange for housing and other needed amenities. As the agricultural trends in Washington County evolved to focus more on ranching in the twentieth century, so too did the Seward family. This agricultural shift is also illustrated in the current landscape. There has been an increase in general woody vegetation since the late nineteenth century as fields for row crops were converted for livestock production. Hay growing and baling continues to be an important activity for the Seward family today and they maintain about 50 acres adjacent to the house complex for this purpose.

**Significance of the Seward Plantation: Criterion C for Architecture (local level)**

The Seward Plantation is significant under National Register criterion C in the area of architecture as a good example of vernacular Greek Revival architecture and for its collection of pre-Civil War dwellings and outbuildings that were integral to the agricultural operations for a number of years. The Seward Plantation represents the largest concentration of original outbuildings clustered around the original house in the county. The nominated property exemplifies the pattern of features common to this particular class of resources.

The Greek Revival style was brought to antebellum Texas by U.S. settlers, primarily those settlers from the South. The two-story columnar porch with classical orders (which became a principal feature of Greek Revival) made its way to Texas by 1840. Details ranged from simple square columns to the more elaborate Ionic order and proportional emphasis was on horizontality. The vernacular examples, such as the Seward Plantation home, lack classical orders and moldings but exhibit the proportion, form and detail of the style. Large frame homes such as this one were unusual on all but the largest of plantations. The vast majority of antebellum Texas farmers—including small and mid-size plantation owners like the Seward family—lived in a “big house” that was a hewn-log or timber-framed, one- or one-and-a-half story house with a wide central hall or center passage and a full-length front porch. The scale of John Seward's home likely reflects his tenure in Texas, his business relationship with his father, and the success of the mercantile and brokerage businesses.

In most other respects, however, the physical attributes of the Seward Plantation conform to the “typical” Texas plantation.<sup>35</sup> It consists of a service complex located within close proximity to the main house, single-room slave dwellings located within that same complex, and various outbuildings constructed of saddle-notched logs and tacked-on shed additions.

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<sup>35</sup> For a good discussion of a “typical” antebellum plantation in Texas, see Sue Winton Moss, “A Plantation Model for Texas,” in *The Anson Jones Plantation: Archeological and Historical Investigations in Washington County, Texas* (College Station: Center for Environmental Archeology, 1995). Her study of Texas plantations discovered a “striking homogeneity of the built environment” among the medium-sized and smaller agricultural operations.

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**Significance of the Seward Plantation: Criterion D for Archeology (local level)**

The Seward Plantation is also significant for the information potential that it holds and is, therefore, nominated under National Register criterion D in the area of Archeology. Although no formal archeological study has been conducted, the potential for subsurface remains is likely. In fact, the property owners regularly find objects such as beads, buttons, coins, ceramic sherds, nails, and other items. A good number of original outbuildings still stand, but ground indentations, partial foundations, oral tradition, and historic photographs all point to the existence of other resources that no longer stand, in addition to features such as filled-in wells and trash pits. Buried portions of these resources, along with subsurface remains in proximity to the extant resources could potentially provide information about domestic (both free and enslaved) and agricultural activities on the property throughout its history. It may be possible to learn more about early travelers of the La Bahia Road, as well. A high potential area might include the locations at which the road crossed the creek (twice) within the nominated boundaries.

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### **Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is roughly bounded by dry creek bed branches of Town Branch/Independence Creek on the west and north, Seward Plantation Road on the east, and FM 390 E on the south.

The starting point for the boundary description is the north side of FM 390 East in Washington County, where it crosses the Town Branch of Independence Creek. This corresponds with the southwest corner of the property legally described as: A0097 Saul., Thomas S., Tract 65. The Washington County Appraisal District online records identify this property as R18423.

From the southwest corner of this property, follow the property line (the creek bed) north until the creek branches to the east. Follow the creek bed east until it ends, then directly east to Seward Plantation Road. Follow the property line south to FM 390 E, then along the north side of that road west, back to the starting point.

As drawn, the property encompasses approximately the southern half of A0097 Saul., Thomas S., Tract 65, as well as the portion of A0097 Saul., Thomas S., Tract 64 that lies north of FM 390 E. The Washington County Appraisal District records online identify Tract 64 as R18422.

### **Boundary Justification**

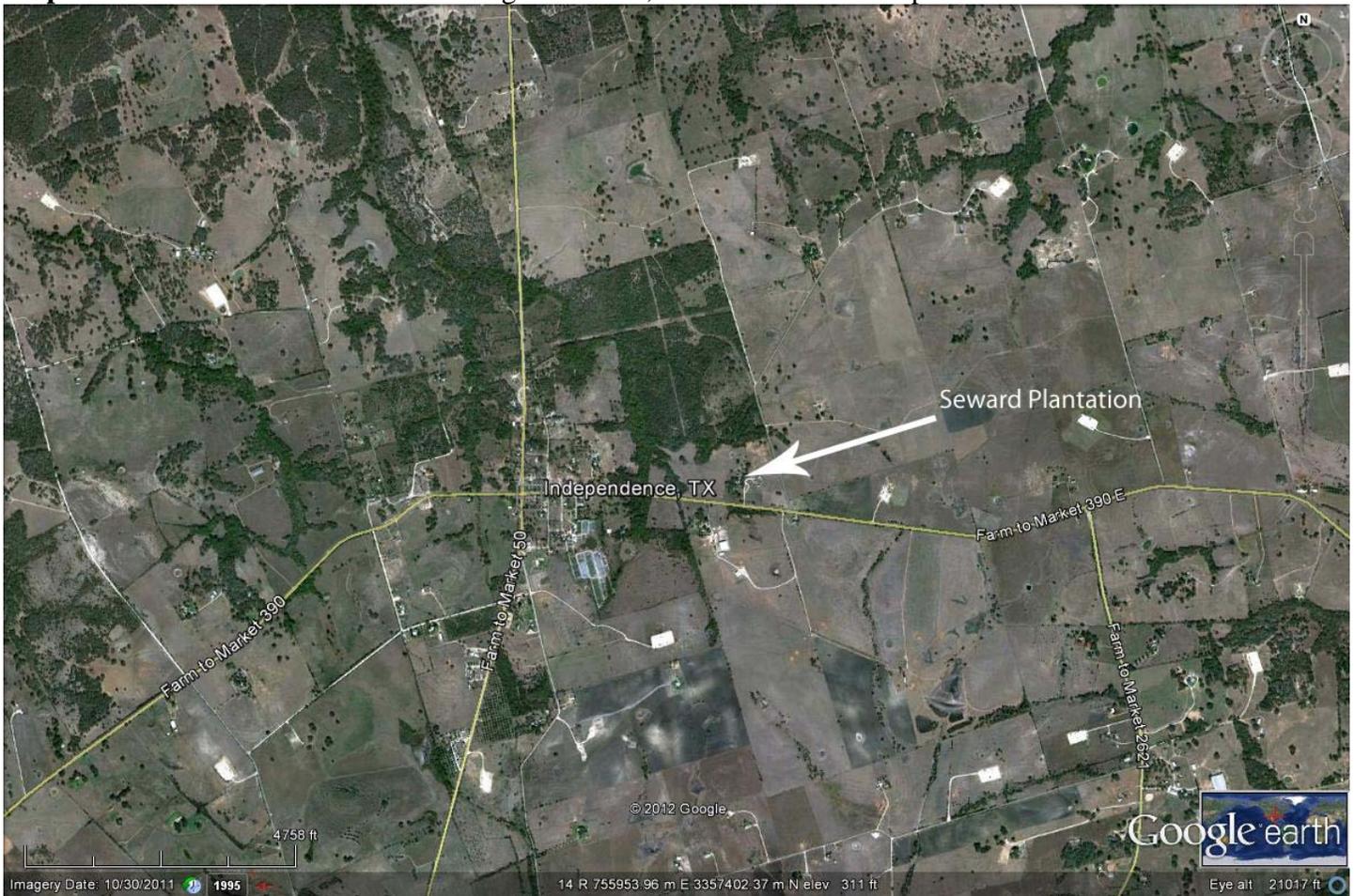
The boundaries of the approximately 60 acre parcel were chosen for their historical integrity and their high concentration of historic resources. While the Swards did (and still do) own additional acreage adjacent to these boundaries, there is little of historical value in these fields, nor are they currently used for their original purpose. The fields that are included are used in much the same manner as they have been since at least the early 1900s and perhaps earlier—for growing hay and for grazing cattle.

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**Map 1:** Washington County (shaded) is located in east central Texas.



**Map 2:** Seward Plantation is located along FM 390 E, one mile east of Independence.



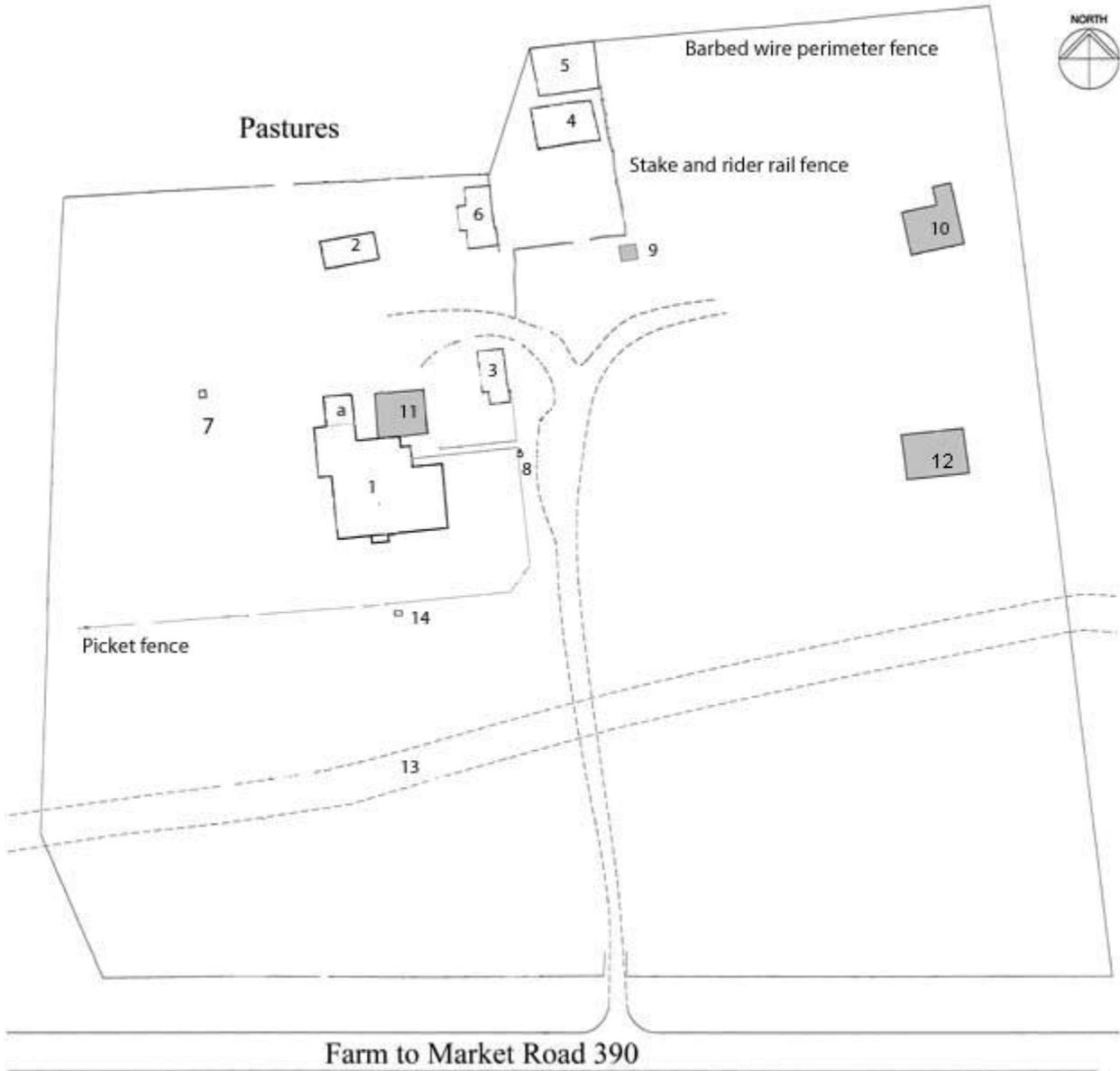
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**Map 3:** Polygon depicts approximate boundaries of the nominated property. Both the west and north boundaries actually follow the natural contours of two branches of Town Branch/Independence Creek. See USGS map submitted with the nomination for additional reference. UTM coordinates for points A, B, C, and D are listed on page 4.



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**Map 5:** Sketch map depicts contributing and noncontributing (shaded) resources.



- |                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. House                    | 7. Outhouse           |
| a. Smoke house              | 8. Mounting block     |
| 2. Slave quarters           | 9. Well house         |
| 3. House w/ blacksmith shed | 10. Tenant house      |
| 4. Barn                     | 11. Carport           |
| 5. Hay mow                  | 12. Barn              |
| 6. Corn crib                | 13. La Bahia Road     |
|                             | 14. Centennial marker |

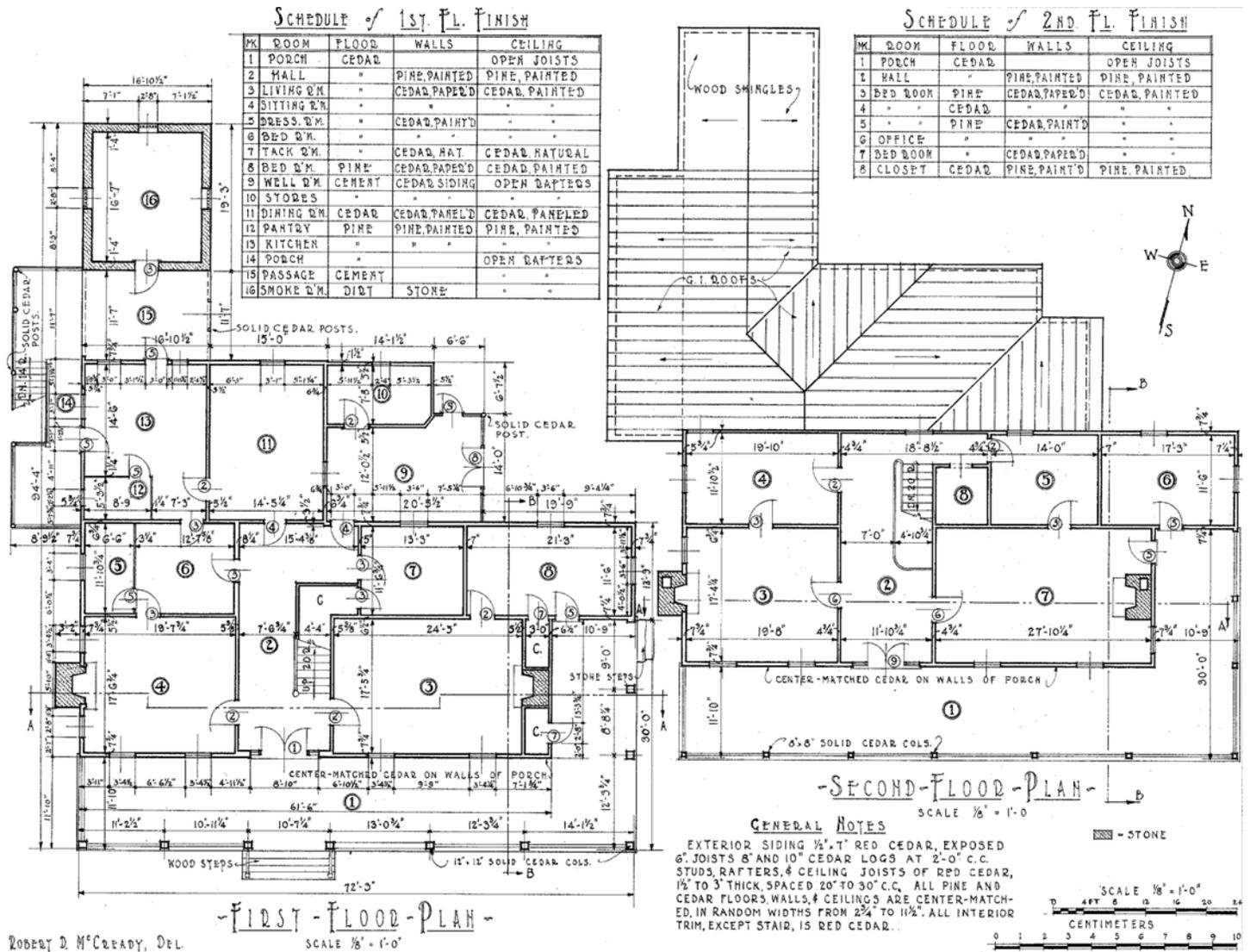
Seward Plantation, Independence, Washington County, Texas

**Figure 1:** Google Earth aerial view of the residential and service core of Seward Plantation.



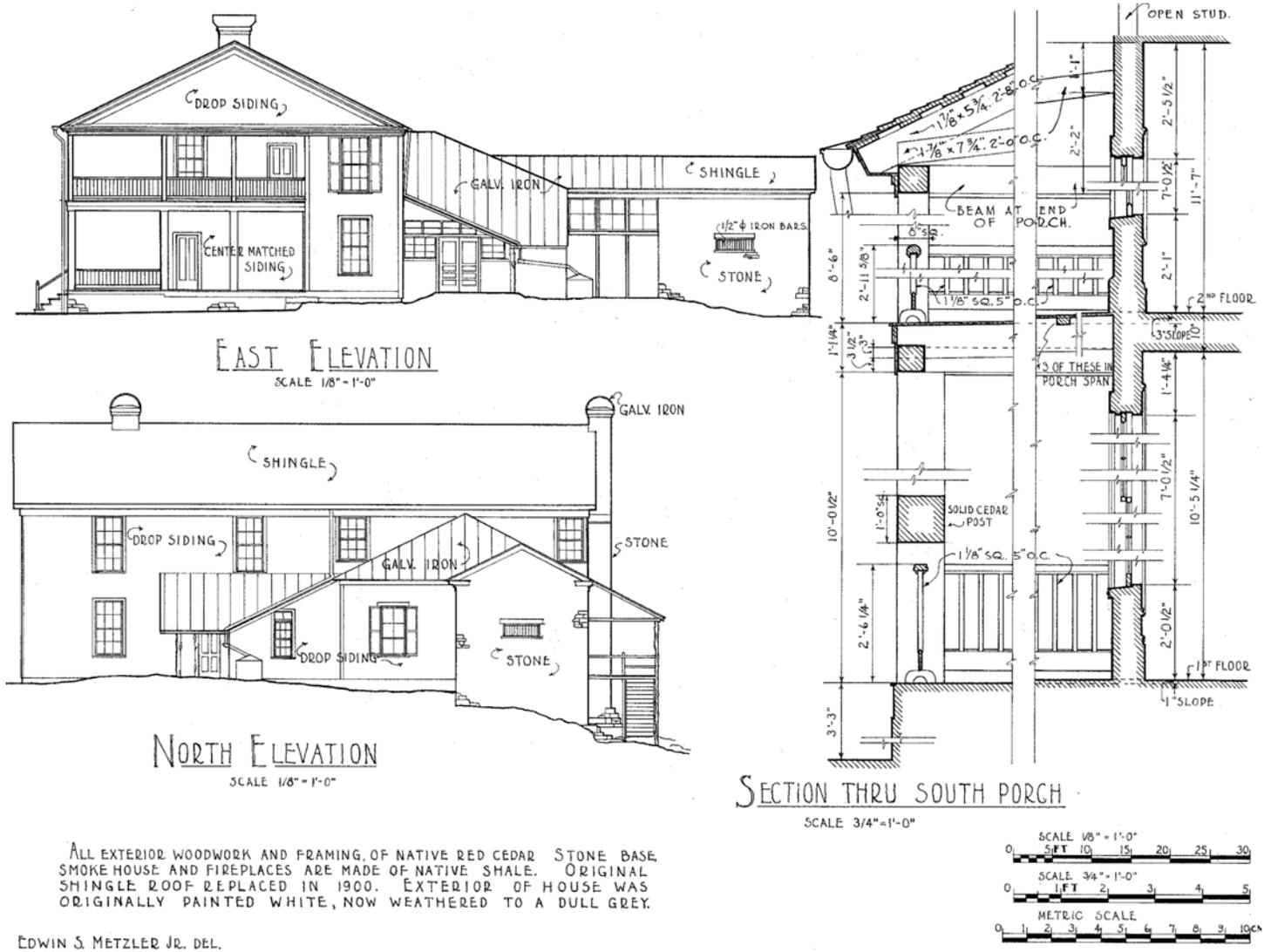
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**Figure 2:** First and second floor house plans prepared by the Historic American Building Survey program in 1934. Survey number HABS TX-33-B-8.



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Figure 3: Elevation and section drawings prepared by HABS in 1934. Survey number HABS TX-33-B-8.



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Figure 4: Elevation and section drawings prepared by HABS in 1934. Survey number HABS TX-33-B-8.



EDWIN S METZLER JR. DEL.

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**Figure 5:** Seward Plantation, Main House, south (main) and east (side) elevations, c. 1916. From the Ward Family collection.



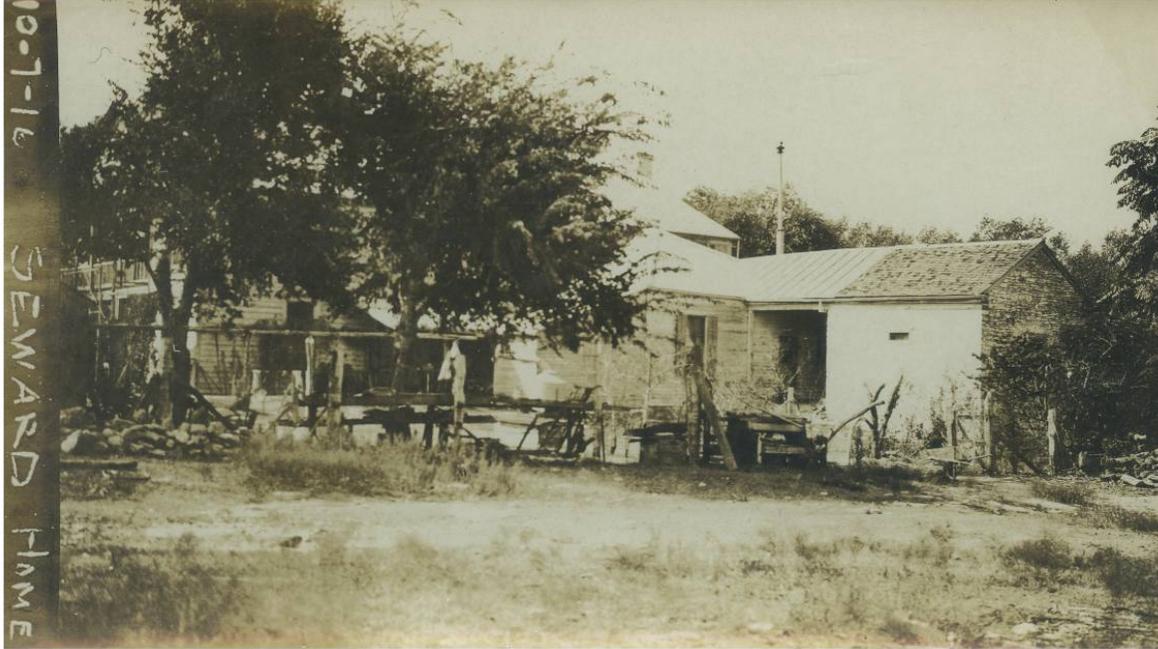
**Figure 6:** West elevation, Main House, 1934. Historic American Buildings Survey, James I. Campbell, Photographer, March 10, 1934 VIEW FROM NORTHWEST. HABS TEX,239-INDEP,1-4.



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**Figure 7:** View of the yard and rear of the main house, c. 1916. From the Ward Family collection.



**Figure 8:** View of the rear yard of the main house, 1936. Historic American Buildings Survey, Harry L. Starnes, Photographer, April 23, 1936. REAR ELEVATION. HABS TEX,239-INDEP,1-7.



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**Figure 9:** East elevation, main house, 1934. Historic American Buildings Survey, James I. Campbell, Photographer, March 10, 1934. VIEW FROM NORTHEAST. HABS TEX,239-INDEP,1-2.



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**Figure 10:** North (rear) elevation of the slave quarters, 1950. From the Ward Family collection.



**Figure 11:** View of the service complex from the east, looking west, c. 1915.

