

LANDMARK INN

state historic site

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VISITORS GUIDE

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TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Welcome to Landmark Inn State Historic Site in the heart of Castroville. This historic complex, located along El Camino Real, the primary route of travel from San Antonio to Mexico, provided hospitality for travelers in the sparsely settled territory of southwest Texas. Built in the 1840s and expanded throughout the 19th

century, the Landmark Inn also served as a commercial center for the community of Castroville. Today, overnight guests continue to relish Texas hospitality, eating breakfast in the 1860s Vance House, settling into a rocking chair on the covered porch, or relaxing in the grassy courtyard.

HISTORIC BED AND BREAKFAST

The natural rock crossing of the Medina River near the Landmark Inn has long been a way station for people traveling through Texas. The area's water, shade, and wildlife have made it a prominent crossroads for many travelers, including early Native Americans and later European settlers. Henri Castro chose this advantageous location, the meeting of the Medina River and the old San Antonio-El Paso Road, for the primary settlement of his Alsatian immigrant community. Fifty settlers and their families established Castroville on September 3, 1844. Most of the buildings were constructed from the plentiful local limestone and timber.

Cesar Monod, a Swiss merchant, bought property just south of the river crossing from Henri Castro and built a one-story structure and detached kitchen around 1849. The main building served both as his personal residence and a store for travelers along the San Antonio-El Paso Road. Monod purchased additional land and a small two-story building from Michel Simon in 1850. In 1853, John and Rowena Vance moved to Castroville from San Antonio and purchased the Monod property. It became known as the Vance Hotel when they added a second floor to the main building and began renting the new rooms to travelers. Vance also operated a post office out of the store and served as Castroville's postmaster for many years. In 1861, Vance expanded the hotel complex by building a family residence near the hotel.

George Louis Haass and Laurent Quintle built a grist mill for processing the corn and other grain grown by local farmers in 1854 on land purchased from the Vance family. Water diverted from the Medina River powered the mill, although it could also be operated by a steam engine. Joseph Courand bought the mill in 1876 and the Vance Hotel property in 1899. He continued to operate a large store and hotel on the site and expanded the milling complex to include a steam-powered cotton gin, giving his business the ability to process the three locally grown crops—corn, wheat, and cotton. Also, beginning in 1879, he processed local lumber in the mill.

Jordan T. Lawler bought the entire property in 1925. He converted the mill to generate electricity around 1927, providing the first electric lights in Castroville. This plant operated until 1935 when the business was sold to the San Antonio Public Service Company. Lawler, along with his sister Ruth, restored the main hotel building in the 1940s, renaming it Landmark Inn. During World War II, they rented rooms to servicemen's families. Ruth Lawler was a teacher in Castroville schools for more than 30 years and following her retirement in 1960, served the community as a school board member, city council member, and municipal judge. She was determined to preserve the Landmark Inn for future generations and gave the property to the State of Texas in 1974, retaining only the right to live in the residence constructed by the Vance family until her death (1990).



The Bath House was originally built as a residence in 1847.

Walking Guide

1 LANDMARK INN

The main building was constructed in two stages. The original owner, Cesar Monod, built the first floor as his home and store around 1849. Monod was later elected as the mayor of Castroville in 1852. John Vance added the second story rooms to offer travelers overnight lodging when he bought the property in 1853. He also added a one-story wing onto the east side of the building. The Vances continued to operate a store in the original building and added a post office. The Vance's property was also where the first local newspaper, the *Castroville Era*, was printed in 1876. Joseph Courand, who owned the property after the Vances, continued to operate The Big Store in the building until he sold it to Jordan T. Lawler in 1925.



2 MONOD KITCHEN Cesar Monod built this detached kitchen when he constructed the main building in 1849. Many homes of this time period had a separate kitchen building where meals were cooked. Cooking was done on the European-style raised hearth using three-legged Dutch ovens and hanging cookware. Keeping the kitchen separated from the main house was intended to prevent fires from spreading to the residence. It also kept the main building cooler during warm weather.

3 BATH HOUSE This two-story structure was built as a residence by Michel Simon in 1847, making it the oldest building on the site. While the property was operated as the Vance Hotel, it served as a bath house and laundry facility.

4 VANCE HOUSE John Vance built this one-and-a-half story residence for his family in 1861. Later owners, including Joseph Courand, used the walk-out basement as workrooms and storage for mill and cotton gin products. Ruth Lawler moved into the home around 1927 and lived there until her death in 1990.

5 COTTON GIN FOUNDATION Owner John Courand processed corn, wheat, and lumber at the steam- and water-powered mill, then expanded this mercantile complex to include a cotton gin sometime before 1900. This cotton gin was a steam-powered machine that separated the white cotton fiber from its seed pod, rendering it into a form that could be compressed into large bales. At this time, cotton was one of the primary crops grown in Medina County, although the local cotton economy was eventually devastated by infestations of boll weevils.



The mill's original equipment was replaced with a turbine to generate electricity in 1927.

6 HAASS-QUINTLE MILL The gristmill was built by George Louis Haass and Laurent Quintle. They bought the property for the mill from John Vance, but purchased the right to dam the Medina River and divert water to the mill directly from impresario Henri Castro. The mill could be powered by water from the river or by a steam engine. At its peak, the Haass-Quintle Gristmill processed 100,000 bushels of corn a year. Much of the ground cornmeal was sold to Army forts west of Castroville, including Forts McKavett and Lancaster. Joseph Courand purchased the mill property in 1876. Courand's mill prospered for several decades and was expanded around 1879 to include lumber milling. In 1927, Jordan T. Lawler acquired the mill and converted it to a hydroelectric power plant that provided Castroville's first electricity. He sold the plant to the San Antonio Public Services Company in 1935.

