

Main and Military Plazas Historic District

<i>Reference Number:</i>	79002914
<i>Resource Name:</i>	Main and Military Plazas Historic District
<i>Other Name:</i>	See Also:70000741;75001956;75001949;77001426;75001956
<i>Address:</i>	Roughly bounded by San Antonio River, E. Nueva, Laredo, and Houston Sts.
<i>Restricted:</i>	
<i>City:</i>	San Antonio
<i>State:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Bexar
<i>Ownership:</i>	PRIVATE
<i>Resource Type:</i>	DISTRICT
<i>Number of Contributing Buildings:</i>	60
<i>Number of Contributing Sites:</i>	1
<i>Number of Contributing Structures:</i>	2
<i>Number of Contributing Objects:</i>	3
<i>Number of Non-contributing Buildings:</i>	3
<i>Number of Non-contributing Sites:</i>	0
<i>Number of Non-contributing Structures:</i>	0
<i>Number of Non-contributing Objects:</i>	0
<i>Federal Agency:</i>	
<i>Park Name:</i>	
<i>Related Multiple Property Listing:</i>	

<i>Nominated Name:</i>	STATE GOVERNMENT
<i>Certification:</i>	LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER
<i>Certification Date:</i>	1979-06-11 00:00:00.000
<i>Significance Level:</i>	STATE
<i>Significant Person:</i>	
<i>Circa:</i>	C
<i>Significant Dates:</i>	1915
<i>Cultural Affiliation:</i>	Spanish Settlement
<i>Architect:</i>	Multiple
<i>Other Description:</i>	
<i>Applicable Criteria:</i>	EVENT; ARCHITECTURE/ENGINEERING; INFORMATION POTENTIAL
<i>Criteria Considerations:</i>	RELIGIOUS PROPERTY
<i>Areas of Significance:</i>	COMMERCE; HISTORIC - NON-ABORIGINAL; MILITARY; EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT; POLITICS/GOVERNMENT; ARCHITECTURE; RELIGION
<i>Architectural Style:</i>	EARLY COMMERCIAL; LATE VICTORIAN; COLONIAL
<i>Current Function:</i>	RECREATION AND CULTURE
<i>Subfunction:</i>	MUSEUM
<i>Historic Function:</i>	DOMESTIC; RELIGION; COMMERCE/TRADE
<i>Historic Subfunction:</i>	
<i>Foundation Material:</i>	STUCCO
<i>Wall Material:</i>	NONE LISTED
<i>Roof Material:</i>	STONE
<i>Other Materials:</i>	NONE LISTED
<i>Other Certifications:</i>	
<i>Other</i>	NATIONAL REGISTER; NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Documentation:

Period of Significance: 1900-1924; 1875-1899; 1700-1749; 1850-1874; 1800-1824; 1750-1799; 1825-

1849

UTM Zone:

UTM Easting:

UTM Northing:

Acreage: 870

Narrative: The Main and Military Plaza district is an area in downtown San Antonio comprised of thirteen whole blocks, the two plazas, and portions of two additional blocks, including 36 contributing structures, 24 compatible structures and an open green space (Main Plaza). Contributing structures include the primarily 19th and early 20th-century two- and three-story masonry structures, punctuated by the 18th century Spanish Governor's Palace (1), with the architectural focal points consisting of the 19th century City Hall (3), County Courthouse (6), and Cathedral (4). In cases where an altered structure, still in scale, is an essential element in a facade row (such as the Commercial Row at 134 Houston including the Soledad Block) with alterations consisting of removable facade elements, the altered building is included in the block as a whole contributing member. Three recent 20th-century structures (a restaurant on Commerce St., the 28-story story Frost Bank, and the new City Rail annex) that are inconsistent with the scale and architectural styles of the district are considered as intrusions. It is hoped that a district listing on the National Register will halt any additions to the numerous parking lots in the district. Individual 19th and early 20th-century structures with removable facade additions are listed as compatible to the district, in that they are in scale with the contributing structures and could feasibly be restored.

A portion of the 18th-century Pajelache Acequia (San Pedro Ditch) runs under Main Avenue and veers off under block 100, appropriated by the County to investigate and interpret the site of the Acequia before building county offices and a parking garage on the site. The Acequia had been covered by 1849.

A wide variety of architectural styles are represented in the district covering a time span of over 200 years. This variety illustrates through the built environment San Antonio's evolution from Spanish Presidio in the 18th century to 19th-century cow town, to solid commercial city center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, giving the area an organic, eclectic flavor not found in many downtown areas of this size.

Representative of the Presidio period of the two plazas is the Spanish Governor's Palace (1740), a one-story Spanish Colonial town house. Originally used as the comandancia, headquarters, and residence of the captain of the presidio of San Antonio de Bexar (the ranking representative of the Spanish king in the absence of the governor), the building has continued in

use for residential (19th century) and commercial (20th century) purposes for 238 years. The Palace is now a city museum.

The Melchoir de la Garza house (ca. 1800), a small one story caliche block cottage, is the one remaining example of the type of homes that once ringed the two plazas during the Presidio period, through the Republic, Statehood, and the Confederacy. These houses were replaced during the post Civil War boom in the late 19th century by the primarily two story masonry commercial structures, such as the Vogel Belt Complex (ca. 1880), as the emphasis in the area shifted from total community functions to primarily business and local government functions. This change was intensified by the arrival of the railroad in 1877, further encouraging development of the cattle industry. The importance of this area as a center or hub of activity is further exemplified by the construction of the elaborate three-story Italian Renaissance Revival City Hall (1888-91), and Bexar County Courthouse (1892-96). The little parish church becoming an important Gothic Revival style cathedral (San Fernando Cathedral) with the appointment of a Catholic bishop to San Antonio after the Civil War is another indication of the importance of the area.

The next real boom period occurred from about 1915 to 1929, primarily because of the expansion of the military sector during World War I. San Antonio was also popular as a health resort at this time, with a large tourist trade from all over the country taking advantage of the pleasant climate and natural warm springs, with the cattle industry still an important factor in the economy. The Main Plaza Building (Old Frost Bank) (1922) is an excellent example of the spirit of this time period. This twelve-story Commercial style structure was San Antonio's tallest building in 1922. The bank was an outgrowth of Col. Tom Frost's wool business (built on the same location in 1867), which is symbolized in detailing on the building. Other examples of this period in the district would be the Rand Building (ca. 1920), an eight story commercial structure showing Chicago Style influence, and the Kallison Block (ca. 1920), a two-story brick commercial row with Spanish Revival and Mission influences.

The district has continued in its importance as a commercial and governmental core area with the alteration and re-use of some of the older buildings, and the destruction of some of these buildings for parking space or construction of the newer and larger commercial structures of today. The architectural importance of the area, therefore, lies not in continuity or cohesive qualities of scale, materials or design, but rather in their diversity. Examples of the many changes in these qualities through time still remain as they are woven into the animated fabric of this vigorous city center.

Contributing Structures: (Numbers in parentheses refer to district map.)

1. Spanish Governor's Palace. 1740. 105 Military Plaza. (N.R., N.H.L., 1971)
2. Vogel Belt Complex. ca. 1880. 111-121 Military Plaza. (N R., 1975)
3. City Hall. 1888-81. Center of Military Plaza. This Italian Renaissance Revival structure was built in the center of Military Plaza. Otto Kramer, prominent architect of New York, Chicago and St. Louis, originally designed it as a three-story structure topped with an octagonal clock tower 135 feet high. The tower and corner turrets were removed in 1927, when a fourth floor was added. (29)
4. San Fernando Cathedral. 1738-1749 and 1868. 114 Main Plaza. (N.R., 1975)
5. Main Plaza Building (Old Frost Bank). 1922. 103 S. Main. Constructed on the site of the original (1867) Frost & Bros. location, this is a twelve-story Commercial style structure with neoclassical elements. Contractor for the bank and office building was J.P. Haynes. Coin motifs are repeated throughout, as well as ram's head and hoof motifs symbolic of Col. Tom Frost's wool business from which the banking concern developed. (30)
6. Bexer County Courthouse. 1892-96. Main Plaza. (N.R., 1977)
7. Kallison Block. ca. 1920. 101-125 S. Flores. This two story brick commercial row is illustrative of the mission influence with its classical Spanish detailing at the second level window moldings, tile roof, and elaborately detailed, angled entrance. First level has been altered.
8. Kotula Building (Embassy Bar). ca. 1870. This two-story, three-bay, stuccoed stone commercial building with crown molding at the cornice has deep apertures with double doors at the second level indicating removal of a detail, possibly a gallery.
9. Heusinger Building (Visual Display Products). ca. 1880. 408 Dolorosa. This two-story, three-bay brick commercial structure has segmental arched 4-over-4 sash windows, with quarry faced sill course and coping at the parapet.
10. Faucett Building. ca. 1900. 414-418 Dolorosa. This two story brick store front building has three bays with varying fenestration in each bay. The second level openings have triple and quadruple rowlock arches and expressed extrados. The elaborate cornice includes corbeled brackets, reticulated brick panels and stone coping with modernistic stone sculpture at the parapet.
11. Arena Building. ca. 1920. This two-story brick commercial row shows mission influence at the parapet. There are decorative brick arches over the center and end bay windows and transoms over all the first floor windows.

Stone coping follows the parapet lines, with belt courses above and below the second level openings.

12. Melchoir de la Garza House. ca. 1800. 100 S. Laredo St. This is a stuccoed caliche block cottage with a three-bay facade and shed addition at the rear. The gabled roof shows wood shingles under the newer asbestos shingles. The house, though a type that was once common, is unique to the district.

13. Continental Hotel. ca. 1900. 332 W. Commerce St. This three-story brick masonry commercial building has Italianate Victorian detailing with brick corbeling at the cornice. It is divided into bays of two and three windows, with quarry faced stone lintels over second level windows and round arches with extrados over the third floor windows. The street level has been altered.

14. Central Candy Co. Building (Artes Graficas). 19th century. 113-119 Cameron. This two-story commercial structure is constructed of limestone on the ground floor with round-arched openings and of brick on the second story with segmental arches and three bays articulated by brick pilasters. The facade at both levels is plastered and scored to simulate cut stone, with brick corbeling at the cornice and a brick coping along the parapet line.

15. Old Bexar County Jail (Bexar County Election Center and Archives). 1878. 120 Cameron. Originally designed by Alfred Giles as a two-story stone structure with battlemented parapet, the old jail was altered in the 1930s. It is now a five-story brick veneered structure with an arched brick west portico and Romanesque influence at the attic level. The original limestone security walls still remain.

16. Moke Building (Plaza Bridal Studio). ca. 1880. This three-story brick commercial building has been altered at ground level. Four single pane, double hung sash windows span the second level facade with stone or terra cotta panels set into the wall above each. The third level is bracketed by stone pilasters with composite capitals. Round arched openings at this level spring from stone impost blocks. A stone string course runs between each level, with a stone coping at the parapet.

17. Elmendorf Building (Plaza Furniture). ca. 1910. 223 W. Commerce. This three-story brick commercial building has been altered at ground level. Two- and three-part doublehung sash windows with transoms are separated by stone or terra cotta drop ornaments at the top of the third level and stone or terra cotta blocks at the base of the second level, with stone lintels and window sills. There is a dentilled string course above ground level and a stone cornice with brick parapet wall above.

18. S.H. Kress & Co. ca. 1920. 211 W. Commerce St. Pilasters separate

coupled, single-pane, double-hung sash windows at the second level of this two-story brick commercial structure, with decorative brick panels above each pair of windows. Stone panels are set into the cornice line above the pilasters.

19. Commercial Row. Late 19th and early 20th centuries. 134 144 W. Houston. These four late 19th and early 20th century three-story masonry commercial structures contribute to the architectural eclecticism of the district with their variety of compatible architectural details, such as the wide arches of the 20th century Book Building at 134 Houston to the narrower arched 19th century Soledad Block structures which are thought to have been designed by Alfred Giles.

20. Wolfson Building. ca. 1880. 103 W. Commerce. This two story Victorian stone commercial structure with elaborately bracketed eaves and segmentally arched windows at the second story has been altered at street level. It was designed by Alfred Giles for Wolfson's Department Store.

21. Rand Building (Wolff Marx Store Building). ca. 1920. This eight-story brick and tile veneer commercial building shows Chicago Style influences in the fenestration and three part commercial motif, with neoclassical details at the base and cornice.

22. Morris Adelman Building. Early 20th Century. 101 W. Commerce. This two-story brick commercial structure with contrasting brick pilasters and cornice has been altered at ground level. It constitutes the only tie with the district in this block which is almost entirely covered by the multi story Frost Bank Building.

23. Chee Kunh Tong Chinese Free Masons, ca. 1920. 117 W. Nueva. This two-story brick structure with an A-B-A threebay facade has decorative brick arches over end bay windows, string courses, and a corbeled brick cornice. Spanish influence is evident in the elaborate stone over-door treatment at the end bays and canales (roof drains) piercing the parapet.

24. Ramsey and Ford Buildings. Late 19th century and early 20th century. 114 E. Main Plaza. This pair of two-story brick commercial buildings have been altered, but still maintain the scale of the district. Some of their earlier detailing at the cornice and molded window hoods at the second level remain. This was the site of the old Casas Reales in the 15th century. 25. Legal Professional Building (Old City Jail and Police Building). ca. 1915. 200 Main Plaza. This is a three-story red brick structure with raised basement and white stone or plaster detailing at arched openings, string course and parapet balustrade. Detailing indicates Renaissance Revival influences. 26. Morris Hotel. Early 20th century. Dwyer Ave. at

Dolorosa. This four-story brick hotel has been altered at street level. The upper three stories retain their rich architectural detailing, with a string course above second level, segmental arches above fourth floor windows of white limestone and a dentilled cornice of limestone.

The Main Plaza and Military Plaza District has been the traditional hub of downtown San Antonio since the 18th century. Military Plaza was first established in 1722 as a parade ground and market square for the Spanish soldiers garrisoned there. While this plaza is associated with early Spanish colonialism, retaining to this day the 1749 Spanish Governor's Palace, it evolved over the years from a community gathering place and market place into the seat of government for the city when the Italian Renaissance Revival style City Hall was built in 1888-91. Main Plaza was the site of the first authorized Texas city when it was established as the market square for the Canary Island fundadores of San Antonio March 9, 1731. These early settlers built small, primitive jacal, palisado, or caliche block residences around the square, with their village church (now San Fernando Cathedral, N.R., 1975) and the Casas Reales (now 114 E. Main Plaza), their seat of government, as their focal points. A local government structure still shares the architectural focus of Main Plaza with the Cathedral, in the form of the 1882 Romanesque Revival style County Courthouse. Through the 18th and 19th centuries the two plazas have been the scene of everyday business and social events, as well as many skirmishes and battles, with the architecture changing to late 19th and early 20th century commercial and governmental structures as these functions became more important to the area. Many of these structures and facade rows remain today, with commerce, banking, government and the historic ambiance of the area combining to make the plazas popular with natives and tourists alike.

The Main and Military Plaza area has been the scene of numerous historical events, as evidenced by the 34 commemorative markers and monuments recorded there (see Appendix 1). Eight of the structures immediately on the plazas are already on the National Register: the Spanish Governor's Palace, built 1749 (N.R. & N.H.L., 1971); the four Vogel Belt structures, built in the 1880s (N.R., 1975); San Fernando Cathedral, built as first parish church ca. 1738, rebuilt in 1868-1873 (N.R., 1975); and the Bexar County Courthouse, built in 1882 (N.R. 1977).

Military Plaza

Military Plaza (Plaza de las Armas) was established in 1722 by the Spanish

Garrison which earlier had established its presidio on the site of San Pedro Park by San Pedro Springs. In 1749, the same year the Spanish Governor's Palace was built on the square, the Spaniards made peace with the Apache by burying a live horse with a tomahawk, a lance, and six arrows on the Plaza.

Moses Austin came here in 1820 seeking permission from the Spanish governor to settle Anglo-American colonists in Texas. In this area the bloodiest battle in the siege of Bexar (The Storming of Bexar) in Texas' War of Independence from Mexico was fought in 1835. Davy Crockett came here in 1836 prior to the Battle of the Alamo seeking help "in our common cause." For more than fifty years following removal of the presidio from Military Plaza, it was headquarters for cattlemen, cowboys, saloons, gambling casinos and dance halls. Barbed wire was first introduced to ranchers here, and the "Chili Queens," vendors of individual servings of chili from large open pots, presided over their stalls in the open market. The "Chili Queens" were a regular institution on the Plaza until 1900 when they ceased operations. They were reinstated briefly in the 1930s until the health department closed them down permanently.

Construction of the Italian Renaissance Revival style City Hall in the center of the Plaza in 1888-91, designed by prominent New York, Chicago and St. Louis architect Otto Kramer, signaled a change for Military Plaza from an open market to the center of municipal government, reinforced by the substantial masonry commercial structures now ringing the square, such as the Victorian Vogel Belt Complex, the 1870s limestone vernacular Kotula Building, the brick two story Heusinger Building (ca. 1880), the three-story brick Moke Building (ca. 1870s), the brick Victorian Elmendorf Building (ca. 1870s) and the mid-19th century Kalteyer Complex, including brick and stone Victorian and vernacular commercial buildings and a two-story stone residence.

Main Plaza

Although the first permanent Spanish residents founded Mission San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo) and the presidio of San Antonio de Bexar in 1718, the title "first settlers" was bestowed by the Spanish crown on the sixteen Canary Island families who founded Villa de San Fernando on Main Plaza, March 9, 1731. This primarily residential plaza was ringed by the settlers' primitive homes, protected by their Spanish Baroque parish church, Nuestra Senora de Candelaria y Guadalupe, 1739-1749, and the Casas Reales, their "city hall." Main Plaza is also called "Plaza de las Islas" for these Canary Island settlers.

The Islanders, all volunteers, were brought to settle the area on the recommendation of the First Marquis de San Miguel de Aguayo, appointed Governor of Coahuila and Texas in 1719. His assertion was that one Spanish family would more effectively secure the area than 100 soldiers. Native

Canary Islanders were chosen on the basis of their proven work records as small farmers and due to the ease of transporting them to the area.

People from all the settlements and missions gathered here for fiestas, marriages, funerals and marketing. Santa Ana made his quarters here during San Antonio's occupation by his army. Like Military Plaza, Main Plaza gradually evolved into more of a commercial center, with the advent of permanent masonry commercial structures around the square, such as the Wolfson Building (1880s), and the Ramsey and Ford Building (ca. 1876), site of the old Casas Reales. The Wolfson Building was designed by prominent San Antonio architect Alfred Giles. Giles was prolific in designing public and commercial buildings and homes in south central Texas and northern Mexico during the last quarter of the 19th century, such as the Gillespie County Courthouse (N.R.), the Sullivan Stable and Carriage House in San Antonio (N.R.) and the Bandera County Jail (N.R. nomination in process).

By 1868, the small parish church (by now called San Fernando) was no longer large enough to accommodate the parishioners, and a new church designed by Francis Giraud was built around the walls of the original building. In 1874 the church became a cathedral, as the center of the new Diocese of San Antonio.

The Chee Kunh Tong Chinese Free Masons Building was constructed near Main Plaza to serve the Chinese population which greatly increased in San Antonio after Pershing's expedition into Mexico searching for Pancho Villa just prior to W.W. I. The Chinese railroad workers in Mexico were sympathetic to the Americans and more than 500 had to flee to safety as a result. Most remained in San Antonio's Chinese community after special citizenship was granted by Congress.

Like Military Plaza, Main Plaza also became a governmental center with the addition of the Romanesque Revival Bexar County Courthouse (1892) designed by James Riely Gordon, evolving also into a banking center after construction of the Old National Bank of Commerce (ca. 1919) and Old Frost Bank, then San Antonio's tallest structure (twelve stories, 1920) . James Riely Gordon, known as the "Courthouse Architect," specialized in the use of the Romanesque Revival style and Greek Cross plan as applied in the Bexar County Courthouse, with the central stair well used to provide ventilation in the hot Texas climate. Other examples of Gordon's work still in existence include the Victoria County Courthouse (N.R.), Wise County Courthouse (N.R.) and Erath County Courthouse (N.R.).

The life of the city continues to center around the plazas. Business and banking, the Cathedral, County

Courthouse and City Hall all continue to bring people into

the old plazas where Texas' first city was founded.

APPENDIX I

Main-Military Plazas and the immediate area have thirty four (34) markers and monuments commemorating historic events recorded by the State of Texas.

Included among these are the Statue of Moses Austin on City Hall Grounds, Military Plaza, which was a special Texas Centennial marker.

De Zavala and Texas Historical Commission markers commemorate the following:

J. A. de la Garza House and Garden -- Soledad Street at Veramendi, site of bank and mint where Spanish money was coined.

Residence of Governor Ramon Musquiz -- Southeast corner of Soledad and Commerce Streets, where women and children survivors of the Alamo were taken after the battle March 6, 1836.

Zero Milestone of Spanish Kings' Highway -- "Old Spanish Trail", ca. 1920s highway.

Spanish Governor's Palace -- In addition to Texas State Medallion and plaque, site also has National Historic Landmarks plaque and De Zavala plaque.

San Fernando Cathedral -- National Register property, two markers noting burial site for Alamo victims; first parish church and center of old City of San Antonio marker; Battle markers for Texas Victory in December, 1835, and Santa Anna flag of "no quarter" in 1836; Texas State Medallion. In addition the Knights of Columbus have erected markers commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone, dedicated May 11, 1938.

Confederate States of America Arsenal and Hospital - Houston at Soledad, southeast side 134 Soledad, marking site of arsenal and hospital for Confederate troops in Texas.

Milam Headquarters -- West side of Soledad at Veramendi, headquarters for Ben Milam on his entry into San Antonio, December 5, 1835.

Veramendi House -- Home of Governor Veramendi where James Bowie won hand of Ursula Veramendi and where Ben Milam fell victim to a Mexican sniper on December 7, 1835.

Civil War Centennial Marker -- Main Plaza Building, commemorating the

surrender of Union Troops in 1861 under command of General D. E. Twiggs to Texas.

French Building -- Main Plaza at Dwyer marking site of Old San Antonio City Hall, 1859, and Bexar County Courthouse.

Perote Prisoner's Capture -- Southeast corner of Soledad and W Commerce Streets, site of capture of San Antonians later taken to Perote Prison in Mexico.

Woll Invasion -- West Commerce at Main Plaza - Commemorating invasion and battle with Mexican Army in 1842 when Texans lost to invaders.

First Protestant Church Service -- 100 Soledad -- Site of Old County Clerk's Office where First Protestant Church Service was held by John McCullough, Presbyterian, and John Wesley DeVilbiss, Methodist, April, 1844.

Casas Reales -- 114 Main Plaza -- Site chosen July 2, 1731, as Royal Houses of Spanish Governors and seat of Spanish Government in Texas (last walls were destroyed earlier this year by demolition of buildings on east side of Main Plaza).

Barbed wire -- Military Plaza, City Hall Grounds -- In site of first demonstration of practical use of barbed wire in United States by John "Bet-a-Million" Gates in 1870s.

Ruiz Home -- Site of home of Jose Francisco Ruiz, one of two native signers of Texas Declaration of Independence, Dolorosa Street, south side of Military Plaza. (Home was moved to Witte Museum Grounds and reconstructed there in the 1940s.)

Plaza de Armas -- Military Plaza, City Hall -- Marker commemorating arrival of Spanish Military Garrison.

San Antonio Met Mutual Aid Assn. -- Main Plaza -- Commemorating aid program and store for families of Confederate Army.

St. Anthony de Padua -- Statue to St. Anthony on Courthouse grounds erected by the Order of Alhambra.

Canary Island Settlers -- Commemorating settlers from Canary Islands who founded Villa de San Fernando in March, 1731, Courthouse lawn.

Bexar County Government -- Courthouse, commemorating Bexar County's unique position as oldest administrative government in Texas.

Jefferson Davis Memorial Highway -- Marker at Courthouse in honor of President of the Confederacy.

American Legion Memorial -- Courthouse, dedicated during Texas Centennial to the American Legion.

Erasmus Sequin -- Courthouse, commemorating famous early settler and civic leader.

San Jacinto Bell -- Courthouse, Bicentennial marker, with bell from U.S.S. San Jacinto.

Franklin Roosevelt Statue -- City Hall Grounds, erected in honor of late president, "The Good Neighbor", by Comite Mexicano de Accion Civica y Cultural.

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