

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

840

National Register of Historic Places
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: R.J. Hill Building
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: NA

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 401 Commerce Street
CITY OR TOWN: Palacios VICINITY: N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Matagorda CODE: 321 ZIP CODE: 77465

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this (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 (meets) (does not meet) the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant (nationally) (statewide) (locally). (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark Wolfe

8/19/09

Signature of certifying official

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

E. H. Beall

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

10-14-09

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5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING	
	1	0	BUILDINGS
	0	0	SITES
	0	0	STRUCTURES
	0	0	OBJECTS
	<hr/>		
	1	0	TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: None

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: COMMERCE/Department Store = Mercantile

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: RECREATION & CULTURE/Museum = Historical Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late Victorian: Romanesque

MATERIALS:

FOUNDATION	Concrete
WALLS	Concrete, Brick
ROOF	Asphalt
OTHER	Brick

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-7).

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Commerce; Architecture**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1910--1946**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1910**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** J.G. Bontrager, general contractor.**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-8 through 8-14).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-15).**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- 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 #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing
	14	772064	3177941

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: North 80 feet of lot 18, block 52, City of Palacios, Texas**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:** The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Terri Myers, Historian, Kristen Brown, Architectural Historian,
Karen Thompson, Associate Historian**ORGANIZATION:** Preservation Central, Inc.**DATE:** February, 2008**STREET & NUMBER:** 823 Harris Avenue**TELEPHONE:** (512) 478-0898**CITY OR TOWN:** Austin**STATE:** Texas**ZIP CODE:** 78705

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS**MAPS** (see continuation sheet MAPS-16 through MAPS-19).**PHOTO LOG** (see continuation sheets PHOTOS-20).**HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheets FIGURES-21).**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheets FIGURES-22 through FIGURES-24).

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Palacios Area Historical Association**STREET & NUMBER:** 401 Commerce Street**TELEPHONE:** (361) 972-1148**CITY OR TOWN:** Palacios **STATE:** Texas**ZIP CODE:** 77465

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R.J. Hill Building
Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

The R.J. Hill building is a concrete block 2-part commercial building located in downtown Palacios, Texas on a flat lot at the corner of Commerce Street and 4th Street, approximately a block and a half north of Tres Palacios Bay. It is a 2-story building with a 40-foot by 80-foot rectangular footprint, its narrower façades facing north and south and its longer façades facing east and west. Its primary, or north, façade faces Commerce Street, and its secondary façade fronts 4th Street to the east. Built in 1910, the Hill Building is a stout masonry structure with Richardsonian Romanesque stylistic elements such as round arches and decorative brickwork. The building is constructed of 16-inch by 8-inch cast concrete blocks, made on site, textured to resemble stone, and set with thin mortar joints. The blocks are identical to one another but are randomly inverted to avoid a monotonous appearance. Historically, the lower level had an open floor plan for the retail space and the upper level was a residence. Currently, both floors have open floor plans, as the interior has been gutted for renovation and transformation into museum space for the Palacios Area Historical Association.

GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Matagorda County is located on the Gulf of Mexico in southeast Texas, approximately 50 miles southwest of Houston. The county is 1,612 square miles in size and is comprised of flat coastal prairie. A narrow barrier island known as Matagorda Peninsula is located a short distance off the coastline of the county. The peninsula creates Matagorda Bay, which is divided into two distinct portions by the Colorado River channel: East Matagorda Bay, and Matagorda Bay proper, which is larger and extends north into an inland bay called Tres Palacios Bay. Tres Palacios Bay is located at the southwestern corner of the county, on the mouth of the Tres Palacios River. The town of Palacios occupies a point on a bend in Tres Palacios Bay. Central Palacios is a grid-like network of streets approximately one square mile in size, at the point. South Bay Boulevard runs along the coastline at the southern edge of town, and East Bay Boulevard runs along the coast on the eastern edge of town. The R.J. Hill Building is on the southwest corner of the intersection of Commerce and 4th streets, approximately two blocks from South Bay Boulevard and the coastline. Commerce Street was the southernmost edge of the early 20th century commercial district and remains so today.

DESCRIPTION OF RESOURCE

The main façade of the building is roughly symmetrical but lacks clearly defined bays, with four ground-floor openings, five second floor openings, and three parapet-level divisions. The first floor is comprised of four large arched openings that contain storefront windows and the building entrance. The arches are placed slightly off-center, so that the westernmost arch fits within the façade and the slightly shorter easternmost arch, which contains the entrance, projects approximately a foot outside the edge of the façade. This creates the illusion that the five upper floor windows are off-center, when in fact they are centrally placed.

The four openings of the ground floor each feature decorative round arches comprised of several rows of red brick headers and a cast concrete keystone. A semicircular window with four wedge-shaped panes is located within each of the arches. The arches rest on cast concrete engaged columns atop concrete block pedestals.

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The columns have smooth shafts with entasis, bulbous bases and hypotrachelia, and blocky square-profile capitals. Between the columns are the storefront windows and entry. The easternmost arch is slightly shorter than the other three, and is paired with a matching arch that faces east toward 4th Street. Together, these corner arches each project slightly beyond the northeast corner of the building, meeting at a single freestanding column with a modified Ionic capital. Beneath this corner archway is the main building entrance, inset and placed at an angle. Its broad sidelights and transoms are set at a slight angle to the double entry doors, creating a concave appearance. Historically, a second entrance, also inset into the building, was located two arches to the west. Both the two storefronts and the two entrances originally had leaded glass transoms comprised of small beveled squares of glass. Today, the second entrance has been filled in to resemble the other two non-entrance openings, so that the façade has the corner entry only and three storefront windows. The beveled glass transoms have been recently restored to their historic appearance.

The upper portion of the north façade contains the second story windows and a parapet. There are five windows at the second story, grouped in an AABAA pattern—four 1/1 wood sash double hung windows, and one larger window in the center that is twice as wide as the other four and comprised of two 1/1 double-hung windows placed side by side. Above each window is a round-arched hoodmold of red brick headers, and above each window, in the arch, is a semicircular window. At the sill level of the windows is a corbelled stringcourse consisting of three rows of bricks. It continues around the entire perimeter of the building. The parapet level is demarcated by another stringcourse that circumscribes the building. At parapet level, three panel-like divisions are created by four sets of paired vertical strips of brick, each bracketing a smooth engaged cylinder of concrete. In the center panel is a cast concrete sign which reads “R.J.HILL.1910.” Above this, running the width of the building, is a shelf-like corbelled band, nine rows of brick high, with stretchers and evenly spaced headers creating a pattern of regular vertical lines. This too runs the entire perimeter of the building.

The east façade of the building, which faces 4th Street, has similar vertical organization and decorative details, but the fenestration differs. The ground floor has an asymmetrical arrangement. On the north end is the single open archway that frames the inset main entrance. Like the arches on the front façade, it is brick with a cast concrete keystone and is supported by cast concrete columns. On the southern end of the east façade is a secondary storefront window with concrete sill flanked by two pairs of double entry doors. The southernmost entry door likely provided access to the second-floor residence. Above each of the doors and the storefront window is a round brick arch, each connected to the next. The identical arches, each comprised of brick headers, spring from strips of corbelled cast concrete and contain semicircular windows. The trio of arches is smaller than the larger arches of the main elevation and entry; to be exact, the top of these arches matches the height of the springing point of the entry arch. Between the north and south entrances are five small semicircular windows, each framed by a brick round arch and a concrete sill. They are placed high on the wall. Historically, a flat awning stretched across both the north and east façades. It was placed between the storefront windows and capping arches on the main façade, so that the semicircular windows in the arches provided light to the indoors. On the east façade, the shorter height of the southern storefront meant that both the doors and upper semicircular windows were below the awning. The five smaller semicircular windows high on the wall were placed just above the level of the awning, to admit additional light to the interior. Today, the building does not have an awning. The second floor and parapet level of the east façade are similar to those of the shorter main façade. Six second floor windows, identical to the smaller size

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windows of the main façade, are spaced evenly across the façade. The parapet is divided into three equal panel-like portions with the same decorative vertical strips of brick that are found on the main façade.

The west façade contains no windows or doors on the first floor. The second floor parapet level decoration is identical to that of the east façade, but the second-floor fenestration differs slightly—it contains only five evenly spaced windows instead of six. At the north end of the west façade is a large rectangular painted mural, faded with age. It reads “DRY-GOODS” in hand-painted block letters. Below this several rows of masonry blocks were at one time painted over and/or washed clean, as no further text appears and a large span of blocks appears obscured. Adjacent to the west side façade is a narrow strip of empty land between the Hill Building and its next-door building. The lack of windows on the first floor of the west façade, however, suggests that the Hill Building’s builder planned for the possible future construction of a one-story building attached to its west wall.

The south, or rear, façade looks onto the wide side lawn of the Luther Hotel and Tres Palacios Bay beyond. On the first floor are five small windows in two rows, with three windows in the lower row located very low to the ground, and two windows in the upper row. They are grouped in an ABA pattern, in that the center window of the lower row does not have an upper window above it. The upper row of windows is located on what could have been a mezzanine or staircase landing level. All five windows have heavy, flat concrete lintels and smaller concrete sills. Each window contains two double hung windows immediately adjacent to one other. The second floor is identical to the second floor of the main façade, with four smaller and one larger arched window opening in an AABAA pattern. The parapet level brickwork is identical to that of the main façade, as well.

The interior of both floors currently have open plans and are in the process of being converted into gallery, office, and storage space for the City by the Sea Museum of the Palacios Area Historical Association. A staircase connecting the two floors is located toward the rear of the building.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1910, the R.J. Hill Building is one of the oldest commercial buildings in the town of Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas. The two-story Richardsonian Romanesque building, constructed of cast concrete blocks, retains most of its original historic fabric and design features including the round-arched entries and window openings indicative of the style. The R.J. Hill Building reflects the economic growth of Palacios in the early 20th century, a time when the town was being promoted as a seaside resort. The building has been a mainstay of Palacios' small downtown district, serving variously as a general store, a doctor's office, a beer parlor and other commercial uses throughout its history. It is currently undergoing exterior restoration and interior renovation for use as a local museum. Commanding a corner lot, the imposing building replaced a wood frame general store building built by Hill at the turn of the 20th century. Within a few years the business outgrew its confines, prompting Hill to build a larger, more permanent commercial building. It anchors one end of downtown Palacios. The R.J. Hill Building vividly demonstrates the town's expanding economic growth in the early 20th century and therefore is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Commerce. A local landmark, the R.J. Hill Building is perhaps Palacios' most ambitious and architecturally significant commercial building. The use of cast concrete blocks that were manufactured on site is an unusual and striking feature of the building. Because it is such a noteworthy and intact building, it is also nominated under Criterion C as a good local example of Romanesque stylistic influences in a commercial building.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Matagorda County, Texas

Matagorda County is located in southeast Texas, along the Gulf of Mexico. Covering 1,612 square miles of total land and water area, the county is bisected by the once flood-prone Colorado River, with many creeks and tributaries also flowing south toward Matagorda Bay or the Gulf of Mexico. The county's name comes from the Spanish words "mata" (brush, sprig, blade) and "gorda" (fat, thick); in Matagorda the meaning can be assumed to mean "dense canebrake" (Kleiner). This refers to the canebrake that was once found along Caney Creek and the shores of Matagorda Bay. The majority of the county is flat and delta-like, with fertile coastal prairies, coastal marshes, and riparian forests. Within the county are large bays which collectively have a surface area of approximately 500 square miles. They are sheltered from the Gulf by the long, thin Matagorda Peninsula, which functions as a barrier island. The Colorado River channel, essentially an isthmus, divides the bays into East Matagorda Bay to the east and the larger Matagorda Bay to the west. After crossing the bay, the river channel cuts across the peninsula at approximately its midway point. Tres Palacios Bay is a small irregular-shaped bay extending north from Matagorda Bay, at the mouth of Tres Palacios Creek.

Matagorda County has a long and colorful history. Projectile points found along the Texas coast date human habitation to at least the Paleo-Indian period (10,000 to 6,000 B.C.). Little is known about these prehistoric peoples. The tribes residing at the coast in more recent history were the hunter-gatherer Karankawas. Accounts written by early explorers such as Cabeza de Vaca in 1528 describe some of the tribes' practices, as well as their appearance and weaponry. Despite these early accounts, our knowledge of the Karankawas is limited, as they left no villages, no written language, only a scattered few bows and arrows, and only a few hundred words of spoken language (Kuehne 1973, 5). They were a fierce, nomadic people who traveled in

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search of food and navigated waterways in dugout canoes. Their practice of ceremonial cannibalism made them particularly fearsome to early settlers in the area. They periodically raided nascent settlements, resulting in deaths on both sides (Lipscomb). Attempts to missionize the Karankawa failed.

For 300 years before the first permanent settlement was established, explorers and cartographers had a presence in Matagorda Bay and the area around present-day Matagorda. The first record of an Anglo-European man in Texas dates to the Feast Day of Corpus Christi in 1519. It was then that Alonzo Alvarez de Piñeda, agent to the Governor of Spanish Jamaica, mapped the Texas coastline. Some time after 1528, Cabeza de Vaca and companions likely passed through what would become Matagorda County during expeditions into the Texas interior (Kleiner). In 1558, Guido de Lavazares went ashore at Matagorda Bay and claimed possession for the Spanish king. This was the first known formal European possession claim in Texas (Weddle, "Guido de Lavazares"). Frenchman Robert de la Salle sailed into Matagorda Bay in 1685, setting up temporary camps on Matagorda Island and on the mainland near the future site of Indianola before proceeding up the Lavaca River and establishing Fort St. Louis (Weddle, "The LaSalle Expedition"). In the 1680s, Spanish expeditions seeking to destroy La Salle's fort sailed into the area. In 1690, Manuel José de Cárdenas y Magaña produced a map of the Matagorda Bay area.

The first permanent settlements in Texas by non-native peoples were the missions, founded by the Spanish in an attempt to establish centers of Christianity and educate the indigenous people. The missions, established with varying degrees of success between 1682 and 1793, were located inland. As early as 1805, Spain had interest in establishing a port at the mouth of the Colorado River, at present-day Matagorda. It was in 1822, however, that the first permanent settlement was established there, by Anglo-Americans in Stephen F. Austin's colony.

Stephen F. Austin was 27 when his father Moses Austin made plans to travel to San Antonio to secure a grant of land and permission to settle it. Stephen agreed to join his father in the venture, but while waiting to meet him in Louisiana, learned of his father's death. Stephen continued to San Antonio anyway, arrived in August 1821, and obtained permission from Governor Antonio María Martínez to proceed with the colonization effort (Barker). The arrangement was such that Austin could explore the coast and select a colony site between the San Antonio and Brazos Rivers, then offer large plots of land to each settler. The amount of land a settler would receive was based on size of family and number of slaves, with a base amount of 640 acres given to the settler as head of family. From his colonists, Austin would collect 12.5 cents per acre for his efforts (Barker). Stephen Austin advertised his colony immediately, and by December 1821 had colonists arriving on the Texas coast. After Mexican independence, the region's new provisional government made changes to Austin's colonization agreement. In January 1823 Agustín de Iturbide's rump congress instead developed the *empresario* system. In this system, heads of families are given a league and a labor of land, or 4,605 acres, and the *empresario*, or land agent, receives 67,000 acres of land for every 200 families he settles, but collects nothing from the colonists themselves (Barker).

Settlers continued to arrive. In 1822 the *Only Son*, a schooner from New Orleans full of Stephen F. Austin's colonists, arrived at the mouth the Colorado River in Matagorda Bay. It was followed shortly by another ship of settlers, and still more in 1828 when Austin was awarded another colonization contract. Land grants were distributed inland, upstream along the various rivers in the area. Caney Creek was a popular early settlement location because of the rich alluvial soil along it. Many settlers suffered setbacks in the form of disease, poor

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crops, and raiding Karankawas, and many died. The settlers persevered, however, and slowly began to tame the wilderness. Elias R. Wightman, a surveyor, and several other men petitioned Stephen Austin for permission to build a town at the mouth of the Colorado, for the purpose of better protecting settlers in the area. In 1827 Austin consented, setting aside a league of land at the site and securing permission from the Mexican government to proceed. By 1829 the town of Matagorda was formally organized, and was incorporated in 1830. By 1835 it was the third largest town in the province of Texas, with 1,400 inhabitants, and was one of the region's most important ports (Ingram 1986, 35).

In 1834, while the region remained under control of the Mexican government, the municipality of Matagorda was established. It spanned a large area, with its western border up the Lavaca River as far as present-day Colorado County. Before and during the Texas Revolution, Matagorda-area residents participated in councils and conventions, such as the Convention of 1833. They also contributed troops to revolutionary activities, including sending aid to Colonel James Fannin. After the war, the new Republic of Texas organized 23 Texas counties; Matagorda County was one of these original counties, with the city of Matagorda as its seat. The county was created by the Republic of Texas on March 17, 1836. In July 1837, county officers were selected. The new county showed strong growth early on—its location on the coast meant that it saw agriculture, shipping, and immigration, all things important to the early growth of Texas.

The city of Matagorda became the second largest seaport in Texas and served as a point of entry for immigrants from 1840 until 1865. It was during this time that Matagorda County saw a large increase in transportation and industry development. Both livestock and cotton were important components of the local economy by 1850. In addition, there were twelve hundred slaves in the county at this time and a total population of 2,124. The growing agricultural economy encouraged the further importation of black slaves and by 1860 there were more than 2,100 slaves in a county with an overall population of 3,454. Cotton and livestock continued to contribute to the growth of the Matagorda County economy (Kleiner).

The 1860s also brought the larger issues facing the nation to the forefront of Matagorda County life. In 1861, the county's voters supported secession from the Union by a vote of 136 to 8 and Confederate camps and posts were established around the county. The Civil War did not physically come to Matagorda, but the area did not remain untouched by the realities of war. Several white supremacist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the White Man's Union Association formed to protect white interests by suppressing the black population of the area (Kleiner).

Though Union troops never entered Matagorda County during the war, the Union blockade of the Texas coast restricted foreign trade, greatly hampering the Matagorda economy that relied on the foreign cotton trade. Because of a serious decline in cotton production due to decreasing land values and the emancipation of slaves following the Civil War, Matagorda County's cotton production did not rebound until the 1870s, and the overall economy and population growth grew slowly until the end of the 19th century (Kleiner).

It was in the last years of the 19th century that Matagorda County saw an influx of people from other states and an expanding economy. Settlers moved into the county as rice started to replace cotton and livestock. The Matagorda County Rice and Irrigation Company, founded in 1899, helped further rice as an important crop. Rice made up 34 percent of the county's improved acreage. Railroad construction in the county also

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increased during the late 19th and early twentieth century which encouraged development and growth of existing areas as well as contributed to the creation of new towns like Palacios (Kleiner).

The population of Matagorda County continued to grow throughout the 20th century as the area's economy diversified to include petroleum and other industries. Agriculture remained important well into the 1970s as the county was a leading producer of both cattle and rice. The growth and development of Matagorda County now falls under the purview of the Houston-Galveston Area Council which now provides regional planning to the area (Kleiner). By 2000 Matagorda County had a population of just over 37,000, with half residing in Bay City. However, Palacios is home to approximately one-fifth of the county's residents with over 5,000 residents (www.city-data.com).

Palacios, City by the Sea

The town of Palacios is located in the southwest part of Matagorda County and derives its name from Tres Palacios Bay, on which it is located. The bay was named for Jose Feliz Trespalacios, who served as Spanish governor from 1822–1823. The land north and west of the bay was known as the “bull pasture,” most likely because the owner, Abel “Shanghai” Pierce, was a cowboy who eventually began importing cattle from India (Pierce 1986, 404). It was purchased in 1901 by W.C. Moore of Houston, Texas, for speculative development. Moore headed a group of land promoters who formed the Texas Rice Development Company (TRDC). The company subdivided the former bull pasture into 160-acre sized tracts (Claybourne 1986, 367). In 1902, a one square mile tract on the bay at Hamilton Point was sold to the Palacios City Townsite Company, a subsidiary of the TRDC, for future development as town lots (Griffin, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/hfp1.html>).

The town became known simply as Palacios to avoid confusion as there was already an existing post office called Tres Palacios nearby. The townsite company offered incentives, doubtless land in the form of town lots, to the Southern Pacific Railroad to extend its line to Palacios which spurred the town's growth and development. The first train arrived in Palacios on June 29, 1903. The townsite company attracted settlers by boasting of the town's temperate coastal climate and marketed it as a place to start a new life (Claybourne 1986, 369). Almost immediately, seafood and related businesses opened in Palacios, taking advantage of the town's prime location on Tres Palacios Bay (Claybourne 1986, 367), and these businesses continued to be important to the Palacios economy through the 1990s (Griffin). In addition, the town leaders marketed Palacios as an ideal place for a variety of fruit orchards and farming. Cotton and rice became important products by 1910 (Claybourne 1986, 369).

Hallmarks of town building emerged in the first years after the townsite was platted; in addition to residential construction, civic and commercial building commenced. The first church, a Methodist church, was organized in 1903 and the first newspaper started in 1906; it is now called the *Palacios Beacon*. Palacios residents voted to incorporate in 1909 (Claybourne 1986, 369). By 1915, about 2,000 residents lived in Palacios, according to the townsite company (Griffin).

R. J. Hill Building, 1910

During its initial growth period, Palacios gave rise to a number of significant edifices including the R.J. Hill General Store Building. Robert J. Hill moved to Palacios with his wife, Kate Elizabeth (Breggan) Hill, in 1904, just two years after the town was founded. He was likely attracted by the boosters and hoped to

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capitalize on the town's growth potential by getting in on the ground floor. On January 8, 1906, Hill and his wife purchased a lot from the Palacios City Townsite Company for \$250. The lot occupied the north 80 feet of lot 18, block 52 in the Town of Palacios in the area slated for commercial development. There Hill built a one-story frame mercantile store. Hill and his wife both worked at the store; the 1910 census lists Hill as a retail worker at a mercantile store and his wife is listed as a saleswoman (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910). He also served on the City Council, was a member of the Presbyterian Church, and was active in civic life (Claybourne 1986, 243).

Business increased such that by 1910, Hill built a new two-story brick and concrete block building on the lot where his frame store had been (Historic Matagorda County, Vol. II, 243). He hired J.G. Bontrager as the general contractor. Bontrager hung a sign on the building boasting that the "intire building (*sic*) [was] constructed of Ideal Blocks" (photo, Matagorda County Historical Museum, vertical files), a rock-faced hollow concrete block sold as a less expensive substitute for stone (Simpson). The use of such blocks, which were manufactured on site, was a new innovation in construction in the early 20th century.

"Ideal blocks" were among the many kinds of concrete blocks that emerged as building materials in the early 20th century. Concrete — a mixture of cement, sand, water, and stone aggregates — had been used for centuries, but technological advances in making Portland cement in the late 19th century combined with a patent for cast iron machines for making blocks on site in 1900 opened the door to concrete block construction. Use of the new building blocks spread across the country between about 1905 and 1940. In 1906, one observer wrote that "Concrete blocks were practically unknown in 1900, but it is probably safe to say that at the present moment more than a thousand companies and individuals are engaged in their manufacture in the United States." In Omaha, Nebraska, stonecutter Nils Peterson was so impressed with the product that he quit chiseling stone to "make them in a mold." He invested his savings in a block making machine and started the Ideal Cement Stone Company (Simpson).

Dozens of companies and hundreds of builders used the new machines. They cost as little as \$60 and, according to its manufacturers, required little expertise. A 1917 Sears and Roebuck house-by-mail catalogue claimed that it was so easy to make the blocks "you can make them during your spare time, or on rainy days." Nevertheless, most buildings built with such block were constructed by professional contractors. Although the product was more expensive than wood, it was much cheaper than stone and billed as fireproof and able to "last practically forever." Rock-faced blocks were most popular because they looked like quarried stone and thus appeared more expensive (Simpson).

Several other buildings erected in Palacios at that time, including the City of Palacios maintenance building and the First Presbyterian Church, also employed Ideal blocks. The Hills were members of the Presbyterian Church and may have influenced the congregation's choice of building materials.

When completed, Hill's two-story concrete block building looked solid and stately, with its Romanesque arches lending a sophisticated air to its façades. A mercantile store occupied the first floor while the upper floor was outfitted as living quarters for the owners. Hill called his business "the old reliable store" and advertised in both Palacios and the nearby town of Collegeport across the bay. A 1911 advertisement in the *Collegeport Chronicles* reveals some information about the goods sold; it reminds its readers to get "ready for cold winter by purchasing clothes for winter, tailor suits, everything for men and boys from feet to head.

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R.J. Hill Building
Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas

Free Delivery. Phone 19. Commerce and Pavilion” (Fourth Street). Hill employed other advertising methods such as gift needles and calendars, “Compliments of R.J. Hill, Palacios, Texas.”

Despite its sense of permanence, Hill’s business lasted only five years; it closed by July 1915 when Tatum & Sons Dry Goods store occupied the space. Like Hill, Tatum primarily sold “dry goods and groceries,” as well as “wear goods.” The store also had a shoe department. In addition to the store, other activities took place in the building. For instance, the February 10, 1911 issue of the Palacios Beacon shows a photograph of Marie Nielsen, with a caption regarding her performance at the “Hill Building Opera House.” In 1915, a “picture theater” opened in the second story of the Hill Building; it was called the Lyric Theater.

D.P. Moore Dry Goods was also located in the Hill Building in the late 1910s and through most of the 1920s. It was one of a small chain of D.P. Moore stores located in Matagorda County; others were in Matagorda, Bay City, and Gulf. Dolph Phineas Moore moved to Matagorda in 1892 to open his first store after serving as post master in Elliott, TX for seven years. Eventually Moore owned 640 acres of land from the Colorado River to Avenue G in what is now Bay City. Developers purchased three hundred and twenty of those acres to create Bay City and an election was held to move the county seat from Matagorda to Bay City (Blaylock 1986, 367). In addition to owning his chain of dry good stores, Moore served as Matagorda County treasurer at the end of the eighteenth century and then helped create the Matagorda County Rice and Irrigation Company of which he was director in 1900 (Blaylock 1986, 368).

After D.P. Moore vacated the store in the 1920s, the building saw a variety of uses including a doctor’s office, a canning kitchen during the Great Depression, a beer “joint” in the 1940s, a plumbing business in the 1950s, a Montgomery Wards, and a gift shop. Palacios residents still remember Dr. Joseph Wagner who operated his medical practice on the first floor and lived with his family on the second floor in the 1920s. Dr. Wagner was an Illinois native who graduated from Rush Medical School and started a practice in Newman, IL. In 1902, he and his family moved to Louisiana to take up rice farming and in 1906 he moved to Palacios for the same reason. He soon discovered the town needed a doctor so he took the Texas Medical Exam in 1907. Dr. Wagner visited patients in a horse and buggy until he purchased a car in 1909. During his 54-year tenure in Palacios, he delivered approximately 4,000 babies and served as Palacios’ city health officer for 39 of those years (Claybourne 1986, 547). Dr. Wagner also served on the board of trustees for the Palacios school system. He died at the Bay View Hospital in Palacios in 1957. In 1960, when the new hospital was under construction, the town agreed to name it Wagner General Hospital (Claybourne 1986, 548).

Although the Hills no longer operated their store, they continued to own the building, serving as landlords for the subsequent businesses. Before his death in 1930, Hill borrowed money against his property from H.J. Schley. In 1934, in the depths of the Great Depression, the land was put up for auction and Schley received clear title to the property (Matagorda County Deed Records). The property was deeded to Schley. Several years later the parcel was given to Clara Schley, G.G. Lawson, and Esma Lawson under the Partition of Deed Estate of H.J. Schley and Clara Schley. In 1946 the American Legion purchased the property from them. The American Legion owned the building until the mid-1950s and the building saw a number of new owners throughout the following decades (Matagorda County Deed Records, various dates).

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R.J. Hill Building
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The building was also used for a variety of community purposes including a Depression-era canning kitchen, and an American Legion Hall. In the wake of the devastating Hurricane Carla in 1961, the American Red Cross established their headquarters in the building to serve Palacios area residents (Ingram 2001).

In 1990, the Palacios Area Historical Society purchased the building from Leonard Lamar, his wife Joan, and Dale and Cathy Porter, to restore the historic building to its 1910 appearance and establish a museum. In the 1990s they secured the foundation and re-pointed areas of deteriorating masonry. The Society also replaced the roof, tie rods, installed new windows in the second floor as well as a few on the first floor. The original multi-light leaded glass transoms were restored and re-installed in their original locations. The building will be used as museum space after full restoration is completed (Palacios Area Historical Society 2006).

Conclusion

Built in 1910, the R. J. Hill building is one of the earliest and largest commercial buildings built in Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas. Located in the heart of Palacios' downtown, it stands as a monument to the early economic growth of the town marketed as a seaside getaway at the turn of the 20th century. The building, built in the Richardsonian Romanesque style using "Ideal block" construction, is architecturally significant for the town and the period as well. The building's fabric is largely intact and it remains a testament to the commercial development of Palacios. Because of this, it is nominated to the National Register under both Criterion A for Commerce and under Criterion C for its architectural significance as a outstanding example of a Romanesque-style commercial building, both at the local level of significance. Its period of significance is from its construction year through 1946, when its primarily commercial function shifted with the American Legion's ownership.

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R.J. Hill Building
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MAPS

See following sheets:

Map 1: Location of Matagorda County---page 16.

Map 2: Matagorda County Map showing location of Palacios---page 17.

Map 3: Palacios map showing location of R.J. Hill building---page 18.

Map 4: 1944 Sanborn Map---page 19.

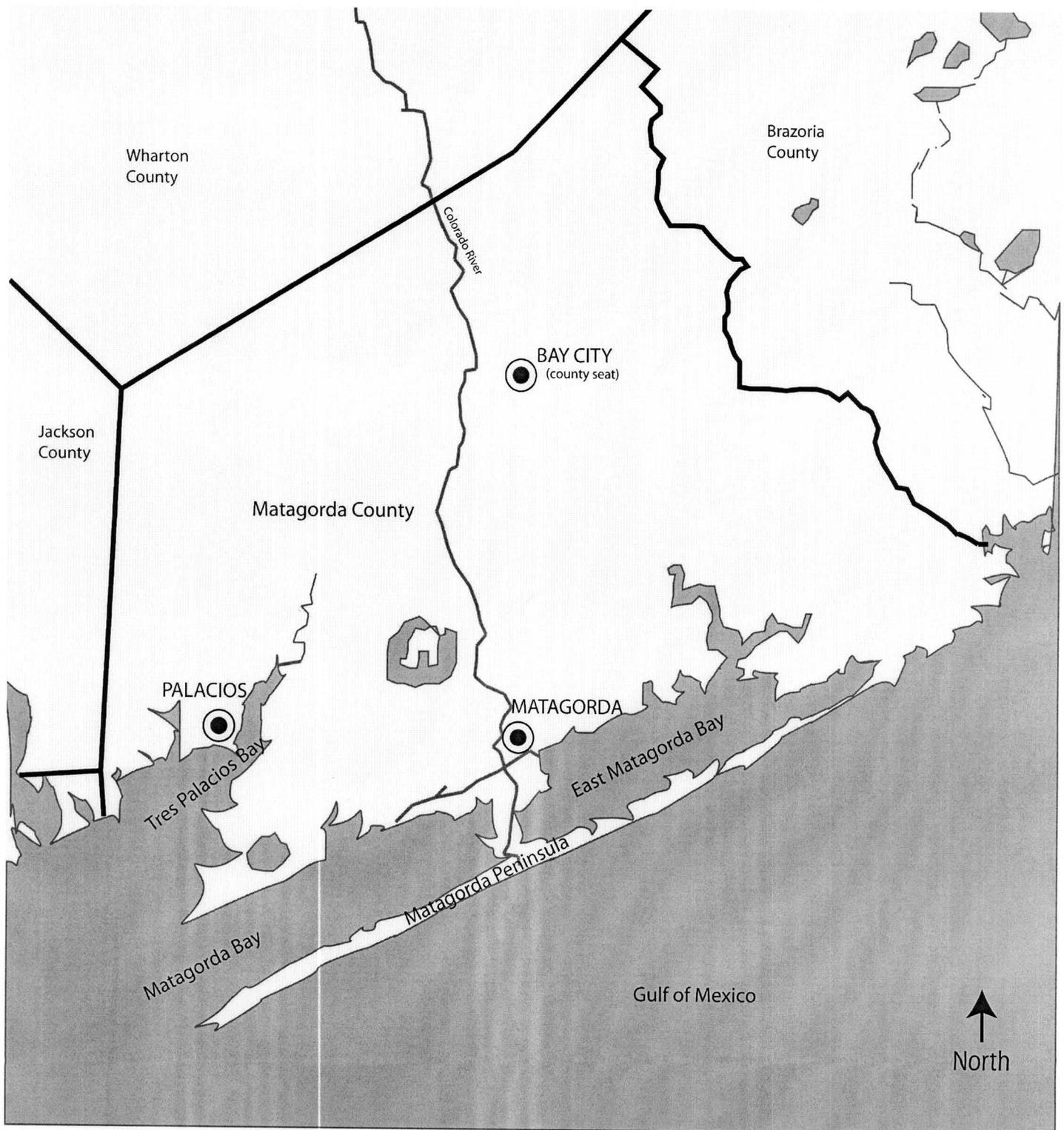


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R.J. Hill Building
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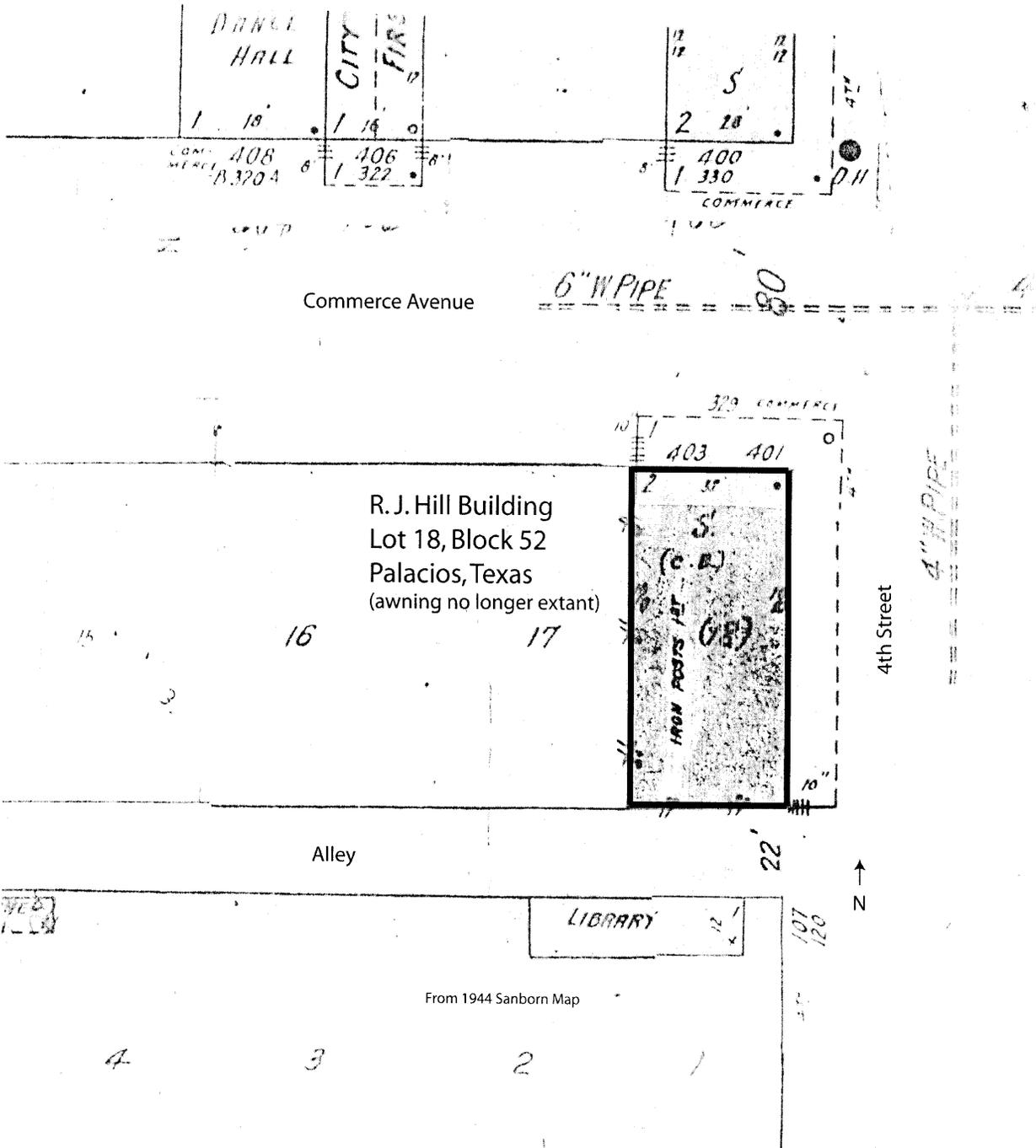


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R.J. Hill Building
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From 1944 Sanborn Map

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Section PHOTOS Page 20

R.J. Hill Building
Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas

PHOTO LOG

Photo 1

North and east facades
Camera facing S/SW
Photographer: Terri Myers
Negative on file: Preservation Central
R.J. Hill/2007 Roll 1 Frame 26

Photo 2

North and west facades
Camera facing S/SE
Photographer: Terri Myers
Negative on file: Preservation Central
R.J. Hill/2007 Roll 1 Frame 27

Photo 3

Hill Building, front entrance detail
Camera facing SW
Photographer: Terri Myers
Negative on file: Preservation Central
R.J. Hill/2007 Roll 1 Frame 31

Photo 4

West facade
Camera facing W
Photographer: Terri Myers
Negative on file: Preservation Central
R.J. Hill/2007 Roll 1 Frame 28

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R.J. Hill Building
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HISTORIC PHOTOS



R.J. Hill Building, ca. 1975



A view of Commerce Street, the R.J. Hill Building is on the left, ca. 1915.

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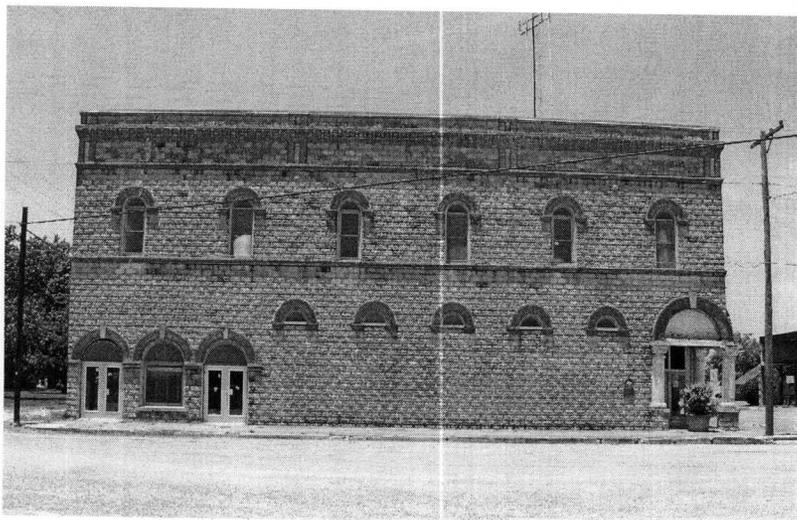
Section FIGURES Page 22

R.J. Hill Building
Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Front (north) elevation



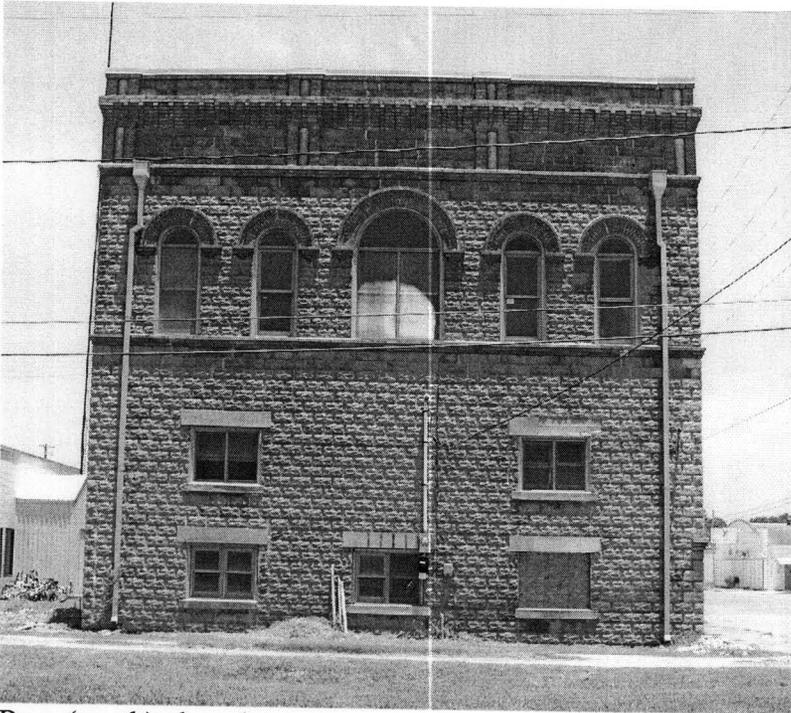
Side (east) elevation

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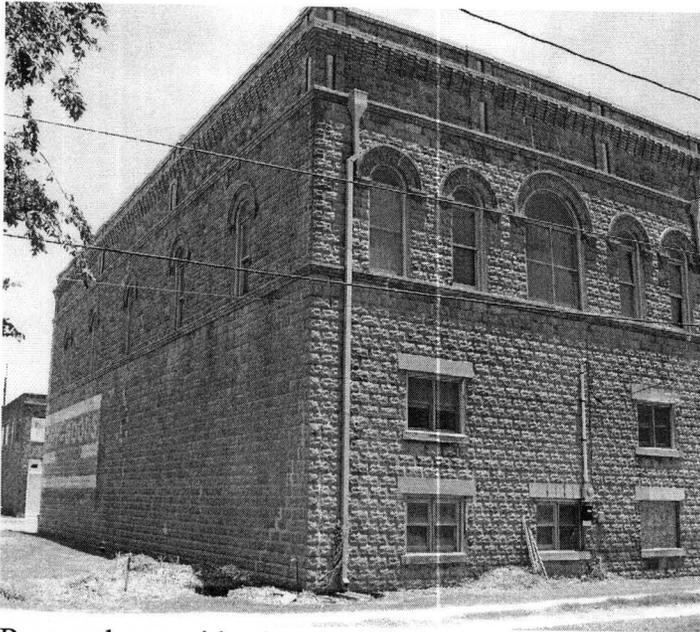
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Section FIGURES Page 23

R.J. Hill Building
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Rear (south) elevation



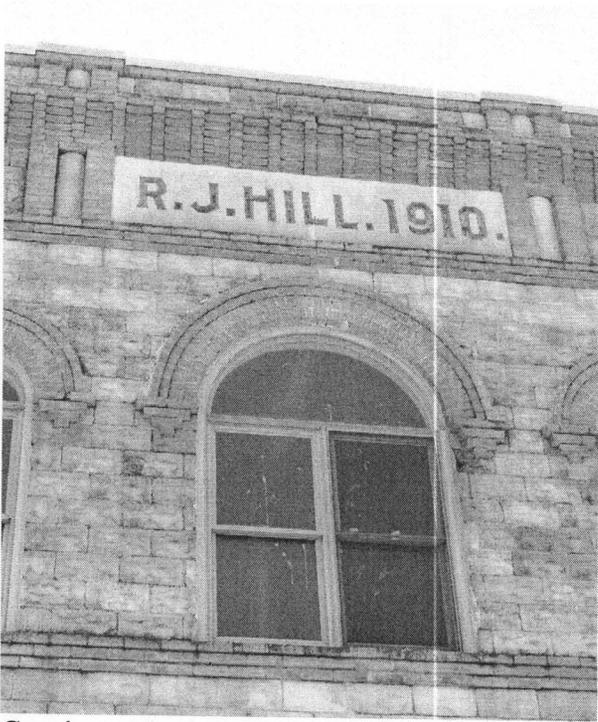
Rear and west side elevations

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R.J. Hill Building
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Cornice and window surround detail



Storefront detail showing restored transom windows



R.J. HILL. 1910.

CITY OF THE SEA RESERVE
RESTORATION BY
PADGET
Construction Co.
1970

R.J. Hill Building
Palacios, Texas
Photo 1

R. J. HILL. 1910.

DRY-GOODS

CITY OF THE SILL PROJECT
RESTAURANT BY
PADGET
Contractors
SILL, KTS. 10

STOP



R. J. Hill Building

Palacios, Texas

Photo 2



401

RESTORED BY THE DE WILSON
RESTORATION
PADGET

R.J. Hill Building

PALACIOS, TEXAS

Photo 3

44



R. J. Hill Building
Palacios, Texas
Photo 4