

Naval Air Station Kingsville, Fire House
(Naval Air Station Kingsville, Building 776)
802 Mitscher Avenue
Naval Air Station Kingsville
Kingsville Vicinity
Kleberg County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3468-D

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PROGRAMMED REPRODUCTIONS OF FRAMES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
Southwest System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NAVAL AIR STATION KINGSVILLE
BUILDING 776
(NAVAL AIR STATION KINGSVILLE, FIRE HOUSE)

HABS No. TX-3468-D

Location: 802 Mitscher Avenue
Naval Air Station Kingsville, Texas
Kingsville vicinity
Kleberg County
Texas

U.S.G.S. Ricardo, Texas, Quadrangle (7.5)
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
14.617160.3041410

Present Owner: United States of America
Department of the Navy
c/o Chief of Naval Education and Training
250 Dallas Street
Pensacola, Florida 32508

Present Occupant: Naval Air Station Kingsville, Texas

Present Use: Building 776 is used for its original purpose, a fire house.

Significance: One of thirty-three surviving historic resources dating from the original construction of the base in 1942, Building 776 was erected to provide emergency fire fighting services at the base, and it continues to serve its original function. Building 776 is significant because it fulfilled an essential role to the safety of base personnel and to the protection of planes and training equipment. Under the supervision of the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks, Robert and Company, Inc. designed the building and Brown-Bellows-Columbia served as general contractors. Building 776 retains a high degree of physical integrity and appears much as it did when originally constructed. Despite its utilitarian function, Building 776 is residential in feeling and reflects important trends in architectural theory of the time, which is unusual given the utilitarian, military function of the air station. With the exception of the asbestos siding, the building appears much as it did during World War II.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: Original architectural plans were approved June 1, 1942. The exact date construction began is unknown.
2. Architect: Robert and Company, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia, and Corpus Christi, Texas.

3. Original and subsequent owners:
United States of America, Department of the Navy (1942 to present)
City of Kingsville / County of Kleberg (revocable lease) (1946 to 1951)
While the City of Kingsville / County of Kleberg subleased some of the air station to the Texas College of Arts and Industries (now Texas A & M), it is not known if this sublease included Building 776.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Brown-Bellows-Columbia, Houston, Texas
5. Original plans and construction: Reproductions of original plans for the building are available at the Public Works Department, NAS Kingsville, Texas, and at the Public Works Department, NAS Corpus Christi, Texas. (Department of the Navy, Bureau of Yards and Docks Drawing Nos. 189798 to 189802).
6. Alterations and additions: The building shows relatively few modifications overall. Major alterations include the addition of an auxiliary power shed to the rear (east) wall and the reconfiguration of the front porch. Other alterations include the application of asbestos siding onto exterior walls ca. 1960, the addition of a second-floor-recreation room in the truck storage wing, and boarding up windows. Although specific dates for these changes are unknown, documents show that Building 776 underwent rehabilitation in 1951. Major changes occurred in March 1971 (\$32,334); and \$7,018 worth of changes occurred in 1982. Property files indicate that minor, routine maintenance-type alterations occurred between 1971 and 1991. An addition to the northern truck storage wing was proposed between 1958 and 1961, although it appears to have never been built. The building was slated for demolition in 1992.

B. Historical Context:

Erected to be the firehouse for NAS Kingsville, Building 775 is representative of the kind of support facilities that contributed to the daily operation of the naval air training station. The base was established in 1942 and was part of the Navy's War Construction Program, a massive build-up of domestic bases at the outset of direct U.S. involvement and participation in World War II. Building 776 survives as a tangible link to this pivotal era in American history and to the founding of NAS Kingsville. Throughout its history, NAS Kingsville has been closely affiliated with NAS Corpus Christi, and the development of NAS Kingsville and its facilities are better understood knowing the relationship between NAS Kingsville and NAS Corpus Christi and the role both bases played as training centers for advanced fighter-pilot training during World War II.

NAS Corpus Christi was established following passage and enactment of the Naval Expansion Act of 1938. Reflecting growing U.S. concerns of widespread military build-up and increased tensions in Europe, the bill called for the construction of additional naval bases throughout the country. One provision of the bill called for the establishment of a new naval air station, which ultimately became NAS Corpus Christi. Navy officials selected a large parcel of land just outside Corpus Christi, Texas, as the station, and groundbreaking ceremonies occurred on June 29, 1940. The base was officially

commissioned on March 12, 1941. The Atlanta, Georgia-based architectural and engineering firm of Robert and Company, Inc., provided architectural plans for most facilities at the base, and Brown-Bellows-Columbia served as general contractors. Upon completion, NAS Corpus Christi was the Navy's largest air training station.¹

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the Navy embarked on an ambitious plan to further develop and improve its network of domestic bases and targeted NAS Corpus Christi for rapid expansion. This effort resulted in the construction of many new buildings at NAS Corpus Christi and also led to the establishment of six auxiliary fields within a 60-mile radius of the base. Of the six sites, the auxiliary fields at Kingsville and at Beeville (Chase Field) featured sufficient support facilities and improvements to operate semi-autonomously.²

The new base at Kingsville was initially called "P-4," but was soon renamed Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) Kingsville. Encompassing a large tract of land just east of the city of Kingsville, the base supported the advanced fighter pilot training mission of nearby NAS Corpus Christi. The Navy retained Robert and Company, Inc., the architects of NAS Corpus Christi, to provide plans and specifications for NAS Kingsville facilities.³ The firm also served as architects of NAAS Chase Field in Beeville.⁴

Robert and Company was founded in 1917 by Lawrence Wood Robert, Jr., and it remains a vibrant architectural concern based in Atlanta. The firm's earliest commissions were principally involved with large-scale and highly technical designs, such as water treatment plants and textile mills, for municipalities and private manufacturing concerns. Mr. Robert became a big promoter of industrial development in the southeastern U.S. and was well known in the business community. Active in politics, he served as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in charge of Public Works in the Roosevelt Administration from 1933 to 1936.⁵ In subsequent years, the firm's practice grew at a phenomenal rate, and in the late 1930s and early 1940s Robert and Company received a number of military-related commissions-most notably NAS Corpus Christi-that necessitated the opening of branch offices across the nation. At its peak, the branch office in Corpus Christi, Texas, employed over 175 persons and was featured in *Life Magazine*. In 1943, the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks commended for the firm for "outstanding services," and noted "their devotion and unswerving fidelity to the tasks in hand when preparing plans and specifications for Naval Air Station Facilities and Landing Field in furtherance of the Navy War Construction Program."⁶

Like Building 775 (the Gatehouse), Building 776 presents a residential-like character and has a lowlung appearance that is suggestive of Ranch-style housing. This architectural expression was a new and innovative architectural trend at the time, and it later attained widespread popularity in the residential construction of post World War II America.

The general contractor for the base and Building 776 was Brown-Bellows-Columbia, a consortium that included Brown & Root of Houston; W. S. Bellows, also of Houston; and Columbia Construction of Oakland, California. This same consortium served as the general contractor of NAS Corpus Christi and NAS Chase Field. Brown & Root, the lead firm in the consortium, was a thriving construction firm in Texas during the second quarter of the twentieth century and successfully completed numerous federally

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funded projects prior to its work at NAS Corpus Christi and NAS Kingsville. Among their more notable projects were the series of dams built for the Lower Colorado River Authority in the 1930s.⁷

The original layout of NAS Kingsville featured separate runways at the base's north and south ends. Most support and administrative facilities, including Building 776, were in a central location between the two runways. Building 776 needed to be in a such a central and strategic location because of the critical need it fulfilled. In case of emergency, firefighters had to have easy access to all parts of the base. Moreover, the semi-arid climate made grass fires a potential hazard and crashes related to flight training activities also posed a serious fire threat. As a consequence, base planners deliberately placed Building 776 in a central location near the runways.

For the remainder of World War II, Building 776 remained NAS Kingsville's firehouse; however, the entire base was abandoned after the war when the Navy closed NAS Kingsville and other surplus bases. Decommissioning ceremonies took place on August 1, 1946, and the Department of the Navy subsequently leased the base and all improvements to a local governmental board, comprised of the City of Kingsville and the County of Kleberg, for a nominal \$1.00 yearly fee with a provision enabling the Navy to reoccupy the base for national security reasons. The locally based Texas College of Arts & Industries (now Texas A&M University at Kingsville) subleased the complex and established a satellite campus. The fate of Building 776 during the period in which the college occupied the base remains undocumented, but other facilities, such as Building 700, were rehabilitated and converted into education-related uses.

Texas College of Arts & Industries occupied the former military base for the remainder of the 1940s, but North Korea's invasion of South Korea in the summer of 1950 and the United States' subsequent involvement in the conflict proved to be pivotal events in the history of Kingsville and the former naval air station. Navy officials reactivated many of the previously closed World War II-era bases, and NAS Kingsville was among those reopened.⁸

NAS Kingsville was officially recommissioned as a "permanent" station on April 1, 1951; however, Texas College of Arts & Industries continued to use facilities at the base until the end of the spring semester.⁹ When NAS Kingsville reopened, Building 776 was designated a warehouse facility and it has continued to be used in that capacity to the present time.

Since its construction in 1942, Building 776 has been modified only slightly. The only major exterior alteration is the application of asbestos siding over the original wood exterior finish. The building retains integrity to a noteworthy degree. Although not directly associated with the primary mission of NAS Kingsville as a naval air station, Building 776 played a supportive role in the base's operation and survives as a good illustration of World War II military architecture.

NOTES

1. David Moore et al., "Historic Resources Survey & Assessments, NAS Chase Field, Beeville, Texas," (Austin, Tx.: Hardy•Heck•Moore, [1992]), p. 33.

2. Ibid., p. 35-36.
3. Diane Williams et al., "Historic Resources Survey and Assessments, Naval Air Station Kingsville, Kingsville, Texas," (Austin, Tx.: Hardy-Heck-Moore & Associates, Inc., [1995]), p. 67-68.
4. Moore et al., "Historic Resources Survey & Assessments, NAS Chase Field, Beeville, Texas," p. 33.
5. Mary Goldsmith, "Lawrence Wood Robert, Jr., Founder of Robert and Company." Paper presented for AH690D, Seminar in Atlanta Architecture, Atlanta, Ga., Spring 1991, p. 3.
6. Robert and Company, Architects-Engineers-Managers, *The Organization and Activities of Robert and Company, Architects-Engineers-Managers Washington, Atlanta, New York: 1917-1944*, (Atlanta, Ga.: Promotional brochure by the firm, c. 1945), n.p.
7. Tamara Scott, National Register of Historic Places Application, Brown Building, National Register Division, Texas Historical Commission, Austin, Tx.
8. Williams et al., "Historic Resources Survey and Assessments, Naval Air Station Kingsville," p. 78.
9. Ibid.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Classified as an Operational Support Facility, Building 776 exhibits design features associated with Ranch style residential architecture, which was just gaining national attention in the early 1940s, and as a non-residential building is unusual for that reason. While this building's scale is too great to be residential, the overall massing and form are reminiscent of the Gatehouse (Building 775). The building has three-part massing; its two end wings have front gabled rooflines of differing heights while the connecting bay is articulated by a partial width recessed porch and a side gabled roof.
2. Condition of fabric: The building stands in good to fair condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-story building measures 88'-0"-long, 60'-0"-wide and 17'-0"-tall. It has a modified H-plan, with a small vestibule added onto the rear of the center bay.

2. Foundation: The building rests on a concrete slab foundation.
3. Walls: The exterior walls have cement-asbestos siding applied over the original wood siding that is specified in the original drawings as pattern number 117, with the occasional use of 1" x 4" center-matched boards.
4. Structural system, framing: It is a wood frame building.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: One of the few exterior alterations to the building is an extension to the main entrance porch. The low-pitched, front-gabled roof is attached to the garage wing and is supported by wood posts. It extends beyond the original integral porch, also supported by wood posts, one of which remains in place. The southern end of the original porch has been enclosed to create additional office space. The porch paving is an extension of the concrete driveway leading directly to the front door.
6. Chimneys: The building has no chimneys, but multiple metal vent stacks protrude from the roof.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Twin overhead rolling, metal doors provide access to the truck storage room from the front gabled west end. Set inside the original wood framed doorways with concrete wheel guards, the metal doors replace the original wood-and-glass panel service doors. The main door is a two-panel single wood door with six-light, clear glass in the upper portion. Original drawings note that it once was fronted with wood-framed screen doors. A similar glass and wood door opens from the porch into the south wall of the garage. A solid single door with a screen door provides a rear (east) exit from the garage, and a solid single door opens into the attached auxiliary power shed added onto the rear of the center bay.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Throughout the building are the original double-hung six-over-six windows with wood sashes and wood frame screens, although some openings have been covered with painted plywood panels. On the dormitory wing, the windows are regularly spaced along the south wall and grouped in fours on both its gabled ends. On the taller, truck storage wing, these windows were originally topped with six-light transom windows. All of the transom windows have been boarded over, except one which has been replaced with a vent.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Front gabled roofs cover the north and south wings, which are connected by a central side gabled wing. The front porch has a low pitch, front gable, and the small auxiliary power vestibule addition on the rear has a shed roof.

Composition shingles cover the entire roof.

- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are boxed and have circular vents on the underside.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: The interior space is divided into three primary uses: fire truck storage, offices, and day room. The northern wing consists of an apparatus room which holds one fire truck and a galley (originally two storage rooms) at its east end. The southern wing consists of a large open room that originally served as a dormitory; it now functions as a day room. The west end of the room is subdivided into a private bedroom. The connecting wing contains offices and toilet facilities. It also provides for two mechanical rooms. The rear vestibule addition houses auxiliary power equipment.
 - b. Second floor: The east end of the truck storage wing had an 11'-0"-wide recreation room added above the galley between 1958 and 1977. The second floor space now functions as a fire extinguisher storage room. A scuttle in the dormitory, now day room, ceiling provides access to the attic.
- 2. Stairways: A stair situated against the north wall of the garage leads up to fire extinguisher storage room.
- 3. Flooring: Original drawings note that all floors were originally cement. The former dormitory is now carpeted, the apparatus room flooring is trowel-finished concrete, and the remainder of the building's floors are covered with vinyl composition tile.
- 4. Walls and ceiling finishes: Most interior walls have a painted plywood wainscot and upper walls covered with painted gypsum board. The walls of the garage and the men's toilet are painted and exposed shiplap, respectively. Most ceilings are painted gypsum board, and ceiling heights are typically around 9'. In the former dormitory and the garage, wood knee braces protrude from the interior faces of north and south exterior walls. Original drawings note the use of plaster board for most walls and ceilings. Shiplap (1" x 8") is specified for the toilet and shower facilities. Both the toilet area and the truck storage room were to have exposed ceilings.
- 5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Some interior doors consist of four panel doors with a glass top panel and two-panel doors with a vent in the lower panel. Paired two-panel glass and

wood doors open from the passageway into the garage. Paired wood doors between the passageway and the former dormitory are two-panel with louvers in the lower panel and a vision panel in the upper. A metal door opens into the fire extinguisher room addition. Openings are typically framed with wood.

- b. Windows: There are no interior windows.
6. Decorative features and trim: Most interior walls have a simple 3-½" painted wood baseboard and a painted plywood wainscot.
 7. Hardware: Hung windows are furnished with a pair of lift handles on the bottom rail of the lower sash and sash lock. Interior doors to offices, storage spaces, etc. have a pair of 3-½" butt hinges and latchsets or locksets. Paired doors between the passageway and the garage have double-acting hinges. Paired wood doors between the former dormitory and passageway are equipped with closers.
 8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The building has a central air conditioning and heating system. Sheet metal ductwork is exposed in the former dormitory, and some ceiling fans assist in ventilating this room.
 - b. Lighting: Lighting typically consists of suspended four-lamp fluorescent fixtures with baffles. Single incandescent bulb fixtures with metal shades hang from the garage's ceiling.
 - c. Plumbing: Original drawings indicate that the east side of the central wing contains a communal lavatory. It is unknown whether the original fixtures remain in place.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Building 776 is located in the east central area of the developed portion of the base at the corner of Mitscher Avenue and Rosendahl. Built on level terrain, the building is surrounded on three sides by a grass lawn. Trees shade the building at the front. A tall brick tower used for drying hoses stands east of the south wing; it is not part of original construction.
2. Historic landscape design: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: Reproductions of a complete set of original architectural

drawings are on file at the Public Works Department, NAS Corpus Christi. These drawings list Robert and Company, Inc., of Atlanta, Georgia and Corpus Christi, Texas, as the architects of record, and H. W. Howarth as the architect in charge. Available drawings include the foundation and roof framing plans and details; the original floor plans and exterior elevations; interior wall, ceiling, window, and door schedules; and plumbing, heating, and electrical plans.

- B. Early views: The U.S. Navy maintains an archive of aerial photographs which provide an overall understanding of site development but minimal information on individual buildings.
- C. Interviews: No oral interviews were undertaken to prepare this form.
- D Bibliography:
1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Robert and Company, Inc. Plans and drawings, 1942.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Williams, Diane E., Anne Malanka, David W. Moore, Jr., Terri Myers, Laurie A. Marder and Sara Kirtland, *Historic Resources Survey and Assessments: Naval Air Station, Kingsville, Texas*. Prepared for the Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, North Charleston, South Carolina, March 1995.

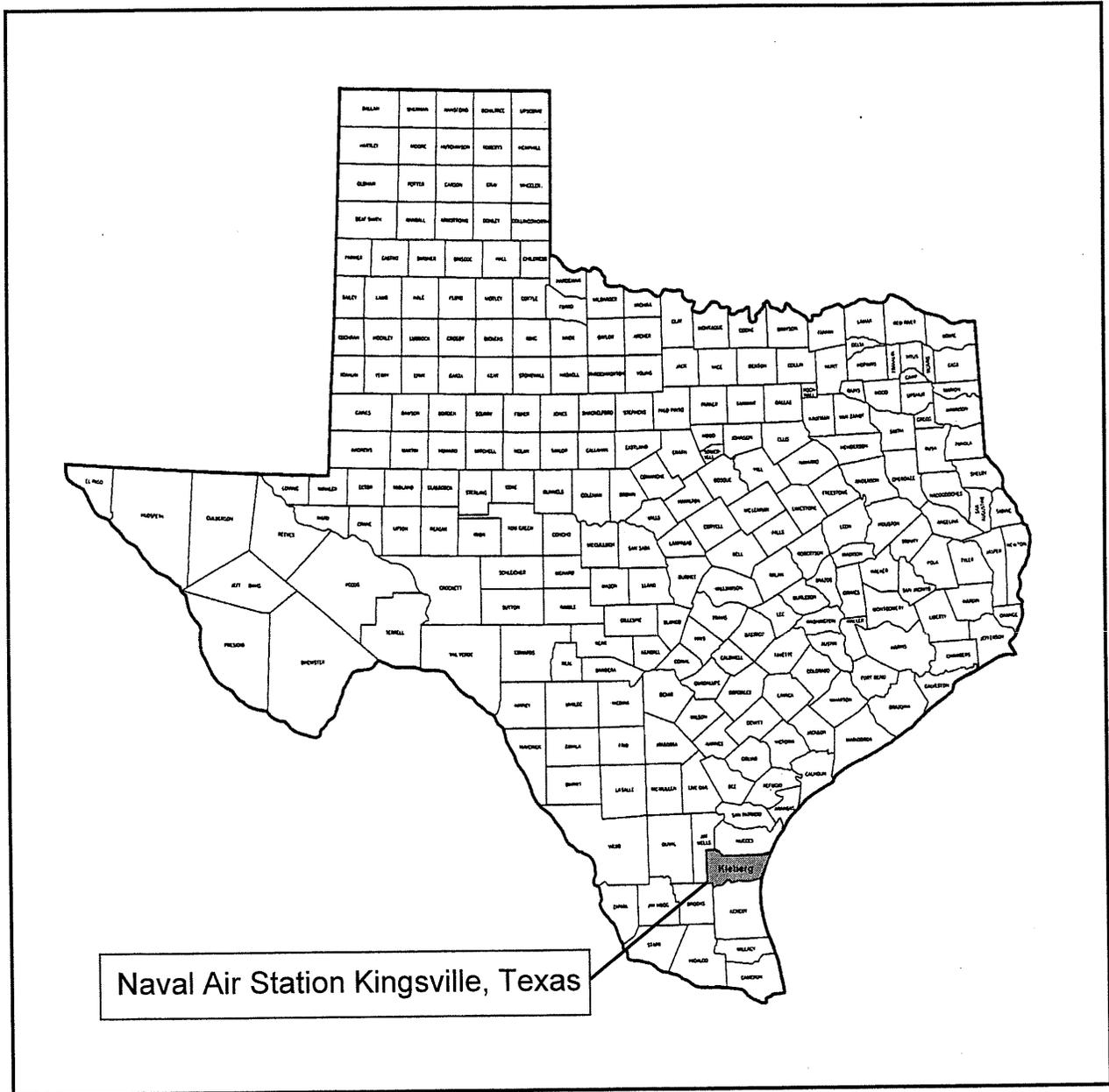
Southwest Branch of the National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.
- E. Likely sources not yet investigated: Information on NAS Kingsville may be held in the Federal Records Center in Fort Worth Texas. The Navy Historical Center and the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and the architectural collections of the archives in Suitland, Maryland may also contain some project-related information. These repositories will not be investigated for the purposes of this project.
- F. Supplemental Materials: N/A

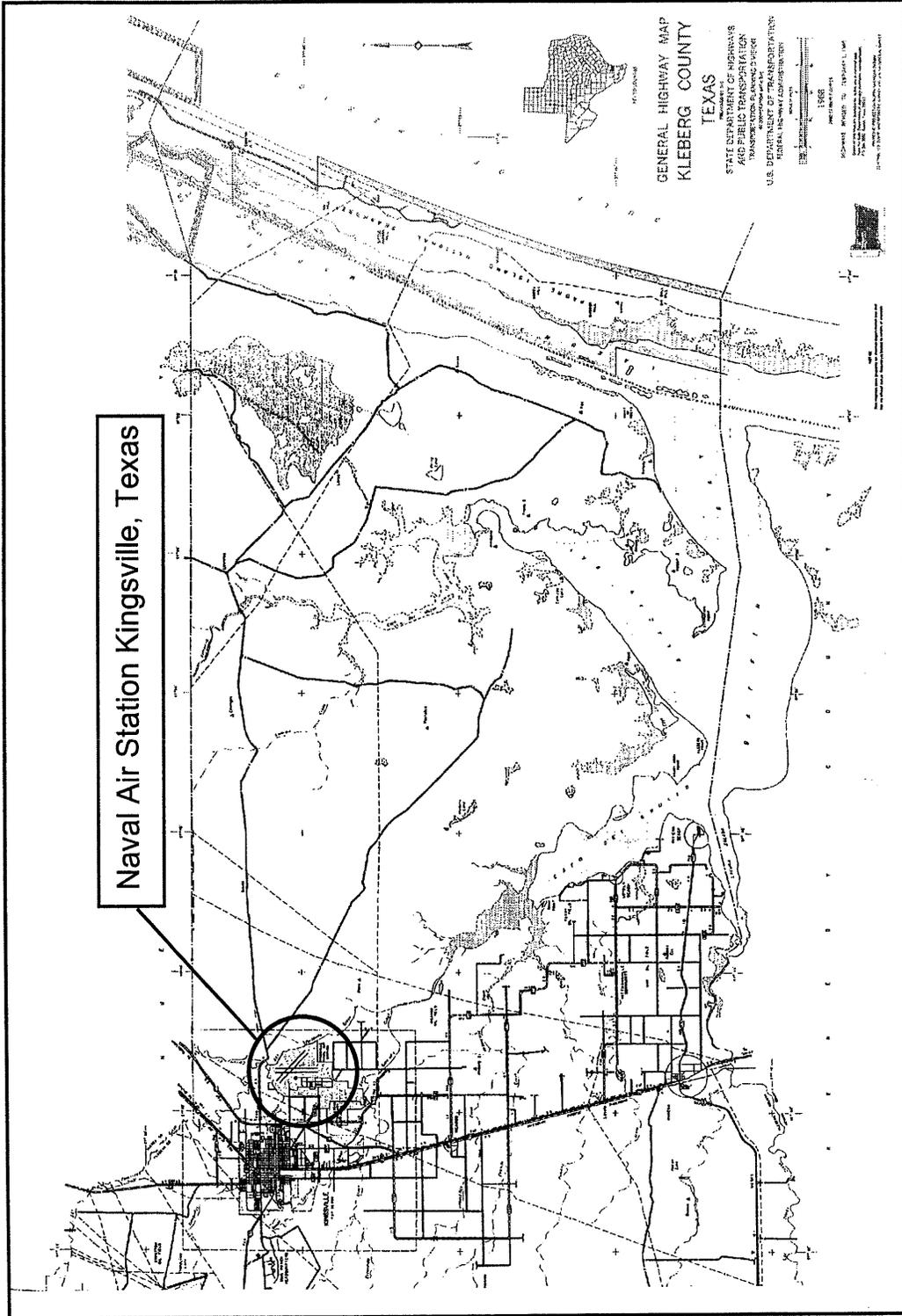
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was completed in compliance with Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and complies with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by representatives with the Department of the Navy, the Texas Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Under Contract No. N62467-94-D-1128, Delivery Order No. 00190, Southern Division Naval Facilities Engineering Command (SOUTHNAVFACENGCOM) contracted with Turner Collie & Braden (TC&B) Inc.,

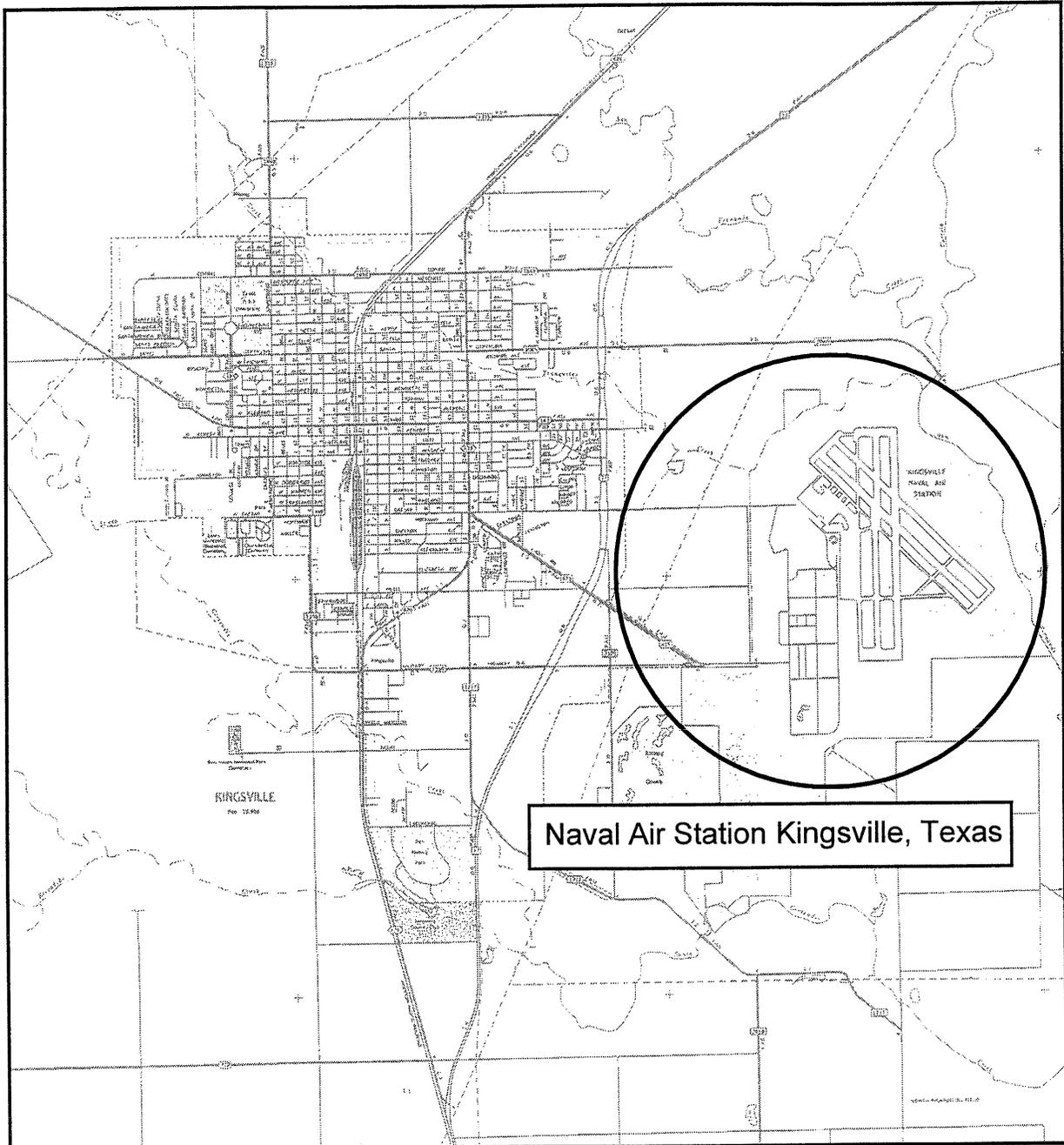
of Houston, Texas, to oversee the preparation of the HABS recordation. As subcontractors to TC&B, Inc., Hardy·Heck·Moore & Associates, Inc. of Austin, Texas, gathered historical and architectural information and, prepared a historic context and the HABS forms. All project personnel directly involved with the preparation of the HABS documentation meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards. David Moore served as principal investigator. Contributors include Anne I. Malanka, historian; Diane E. Williams, architectural historian; Tina Roach, associate architectural historian; Terri L. Myers, historian; and Sara Kirtland, associate historian. Preservation architect Thomas Eisenhour recorded the buildings with large format (4" x 5") black-and-white photographs. Mr. Eisenhour also photographed existing measured drawings with large-format black-and-white photography and recorded information on the physical attributes of the buildings.

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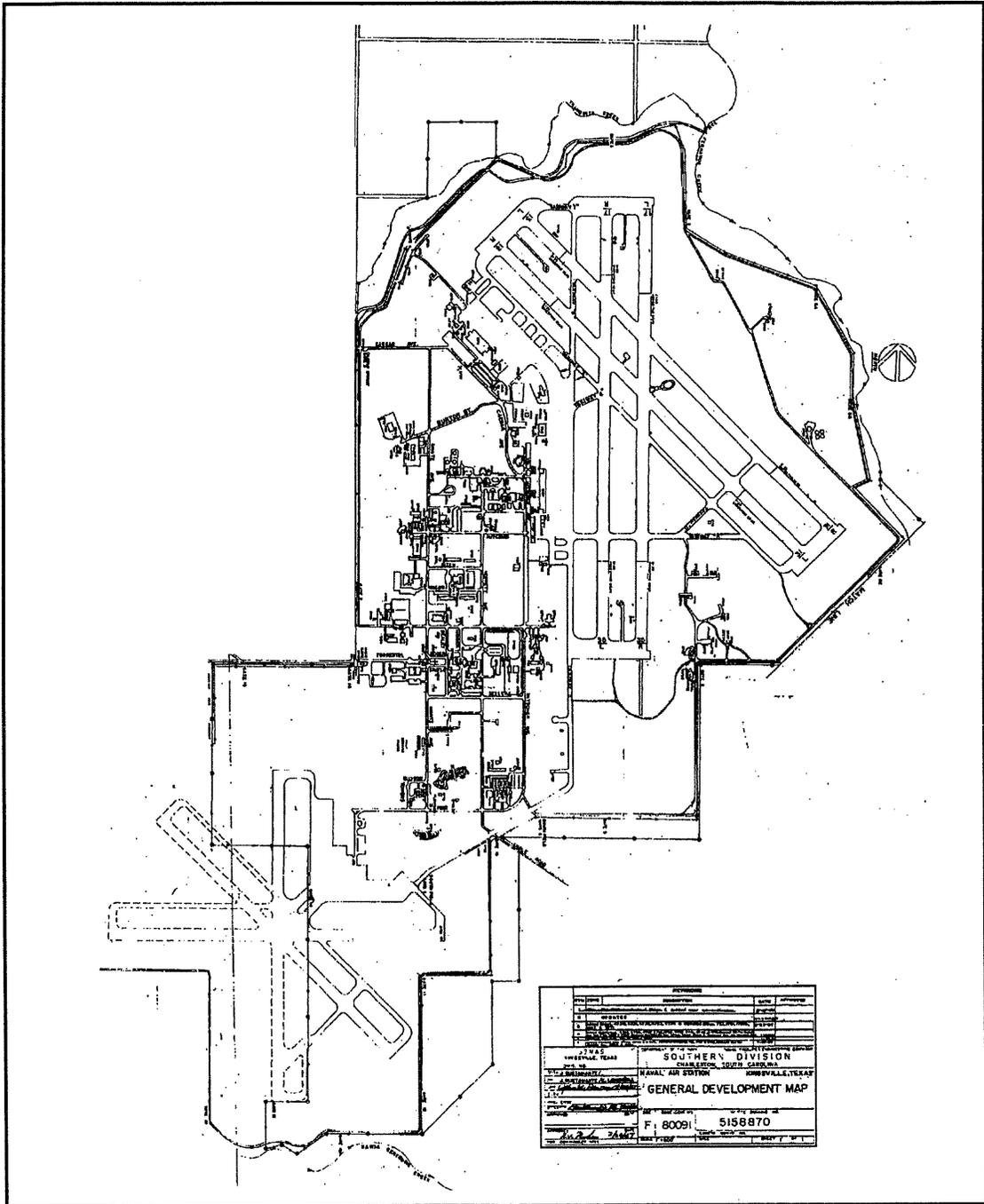


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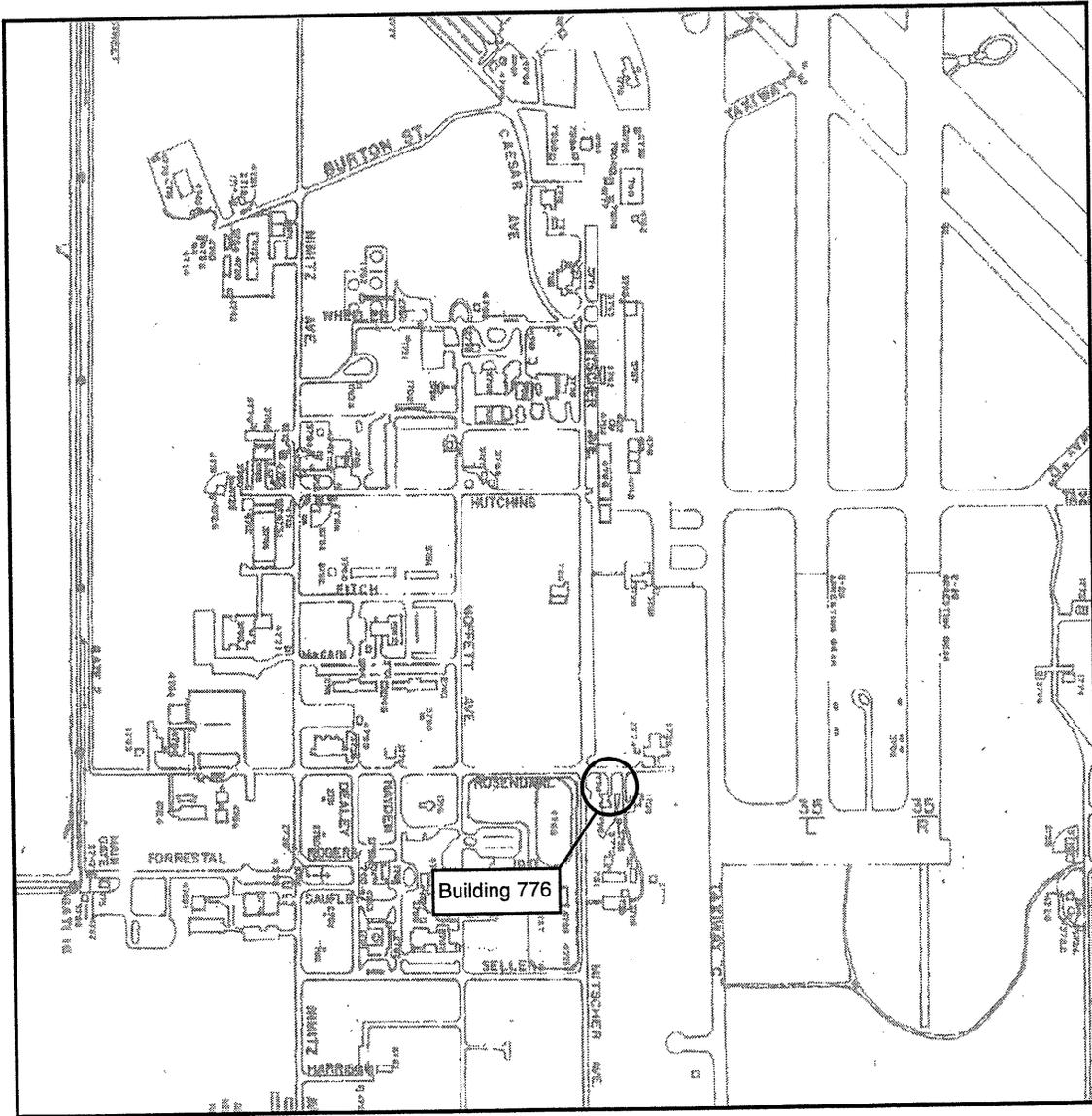
Source: Texas Department of Transportation, 1968, updated 1986

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General Development Map, Naval Air Station Kingsville, 1987
 Source: Public Works Office, Naval Air Station Kingsville

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Detail: General Development Map, NAS Kingsville