

AMISTAD VILLAGE, AMISTAD DAM ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
670 Texas Spur 349
Del Rio vicinity
Val Verde County
Texas

HABS TX-3563-A

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
AMISTAD VILLAGE
AMISTAD DAM ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

HABS No. TX-3563-A

Location:

The Amistad Dam Administration Building is located in the Amistad Village along Amistad Reservoir approximately 12 miles northwest of the city of Del Rio on Texas Spur Highway 349 in Val Verde County, Texas. The village is approximately 2 miles east of Amistad Dam, which forms Amistad Lake out of the Rio Grande.

The building is at latitude 29.461991, longitude -101.028525. This coordinate was taken near the front door on March 7, 2012, using a Global Positioning System (GPS) mapping grade accurate to +/- 3 meter after differential correction. The coordinate's datum is North American Datum of 1983. The location of the resource has no restriction on its release to the public.

Significance:

The Amistad Dam Administration Building is a historic resource within the National Register-eligible Amistad Dam and Village Historic District. These resources are significant for their role in the flood control and irrigation systems of the Rio Grande Valley and in the international politics related to the U.S. border between Texas and Mexico. Additionally, they have played a noteworthy role in the growth and economy of the city of Del Rio, Texas.

Description:

The administration building is a small building with no distinctive style. The building was originally L-shaped: the front portion was 31' x 44' with an ell on the rear that measured 29'-3" x 26'. Two additions have been made to the rear of the structure. The first extended the ell by 20'-9". The second addition filled in the open portion of the ell, creating a full rectangle in plan. The original roof form was a hipped ell. The first addition created a rear gable on the ell. The second addition has a shed roof angled into the hip roof. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles, with exposed rafter tails. The eave of the roof is 10' above the edge of the building's concrete slab.

According to the plans, the slab has perimeter footings and footings below interior bearing walls. Exterior walls are of brick cavity construction, built on a concrete slab with concrete footings. The light orange colored brick is laid in a common bond pattern. The additions are frame construction with a brick veneer. Brick on the two additions is similar to the original but not matching and is laid in a running bond pattern. A two-sided, concrete block windscreen, with some decorative openwork blocks, partially encloses the rear entry (Photograph TX-3563-A-3).

The front of the building features an 8' deep, nearly full-width porch (Photograph TX-3563-A-1). The porch roof is a shed roof with an open gable above the entry door. While the entry door is

centered in the façade, the open gable is off-set to the west, framing the door and the window of the interior lobby. Five 6" diameter, unornamented, metal pipe columns are irregularly spaced across the porch, with two to the west of the entry and three to the east. The existing front door is an aluminum-framed glass door, though the original, as reflected in plans, was intended to be a wood door with a single, large, upper light with an aluminum screen door. The rear door, in the first addition is a solid wood door.

All windows are aluminum with either three or four horizontal panes—three panes on the front façade and four on other façades. Some windows are grouped in pairs. Windows in the original building and second addition all have awning-type operable sashes, while those in the first addition are fixed. All sills are brick and all lintels are steel plates.

The interior was originally composed of six offices, four of which surround a central lobby. The remaining are along a double-loaded corridor in the ell of the building. Also in this corridor are the mechanical room, men's and women's restrooms, a kitchen and janitorial room, and a vault (Figure 4). One of the offices has been reduced in size to create an additional mechanical room. The first addition added a single open workroom to the end of the hall. The second addition added a large conference space, accessed through one of the original offices off the lobby, and extended the width of the workroom on the rear of the building (Photograph TX-3563-A-10). The conference room and workroom are separated by a folding, retractable partition wall.

Although the overall exterior dimensions of the building match the original construction plans, the interior dimensions do not. Wall thicknesses were not properly accounted for in the original plans, and interior spaces are all generally a few inches smaller in each direction than indicated on the plans.

Interior walls, with the exception of the concrete vault, are wood framed. Walls in the original building are finished with plaster and wood wainscot paneling in the lobby and front offices. Other walls are plaster with vinyl baseboards. The restrooms and kitchen feature a tile wainscot. The large conference room is finished with wood paneling and the added workroom is sheathed in sheetrock. Flooring is linoleum in most spaces, although tile is used in the restrooms and carpet in the conference room. The ceiling is a dropped panel system with fluorescent lights.

The administration building is set off the highway in front of a parking lot which is separated from the road by a grass median (Figure 3). The building, roughly oriented to the southeast, faces the parking lot, and the highway. A private road loops behind the administration building to access the residences of Amistad Village. A historic water tower sits just northwest of the administration building. Across the highway are several storage buildings, also considered to be historic elements of the village. Adjacent to the storage buildings is a modern border inspection station. The main section of the dam is approximately two miles west of the village.

The residences of the village sit in a row along the road to the west of the administration building. The houses are all single-family, single-story structures of the same plan. All the houses are built with similar materials as the administration buildings. Each house has a gable roof, with side-facing gable and an integrated carport on one end. Each house has its own fenced yard, with a small storage shed in the rear.

History:

The history of Amistad Dam reflects the history of the use and management of the Rio Grande and the international policies that have been developed in relation to the river. The Rio Grande begins in southwestern Colorado, passes through New Mexico, and flows between Texas and Mexico as the international border before finally emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. The river played a significant role in the exploration and settlement of the region. It has been used as a source of irrigation for agricultural development since at least the 1600s. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the development of modern, mechanical irrigation systems made the Rio Grande Valley a major agricultural center for citrus and sugar. But the area is known for unpredictable rainfall and the extensive agricultural development in the river's basin led to significant stress on the water supply during times of drought and even normal rain, and fear of uncontrolled flooding during periods of high rain. In addition to the potential harm to the economy and development, significant fluctuations in the river were also threats to international relations.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which signaled the end of the Mexican War, established the international border between the United States and Mexico. The treaty, subtitled "Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement,"¹ recognized the establishment of Texas as a state of the United States and surrendered to the United States the land that would become the states of New Mexico, Arizona, and California in exchange for \$15 million from the U.S. government.² Through extensive negotiations, the boundary between Texas and Mexico was established as the middle of the deepest channel of the Rio Grande to the point where it intersected the southern boundary of New Mexico.³ Because of the fluctuations in the size and course of the river, disputes continued to arise throughout the late nineteenth century regarding the boundary, as neither country wanted to lose land to the other. Surveys were conducted in the 1850s but not legalized until the Treaty of 1884. This treaty allowed that gradual changes in the course of the river would constitute a change to the boundary following the new river course, but that the boundary would remain the center of the old riverbed when changes in course were sudden.⁴

A treaty signed four years later established the International Boundary Commission (IBC) for the purpose of overseeing the Treaty of 1884. The IBC was to comprise a commissioner and an engineer from both the United States and Mexico, along with other supporting staff as deemed necessary by each country individually. The commissioners would meet to adjudicate whenever

¹ United States of America-Mexico, *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic*, February 2, 1848 (accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Treaty_of_1848.pdf).

² David Pletcher, "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nbt01>).

³ United States of America-Mexico, *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic* February 2, 1848 (accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Treaty_of_1848.pdf).

⁴ Don M. Coerver, "Treaty of 1884," *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nbt03>).

boundary issues arose on either side of the river.⁵ The work resulted, at various times, in the elimination of bancos (large u-shaped curves of the river that would be cut off by shifts in the river), in the channeling of the river, and in major flood control projects.⁶

The first major project related to irrigation and flood control of the Rio Grande came as a result of another treaty in 1906. The Treaty for Equitable Distribution of the Waters of the Rio Grande allowed for the construction of a dam and water reservoir on the river in New Mexico. Construction of the dam would allow for a regulated flow of water, of which the Juárez Valley in upper Mexico was guaranteed 60,000 acre-feet per year, a reflection of the percentage of water that reached the Rio Grande from portions of the river basin in that area of Mexico. The Elephant Butte Dam was completed in 1916, 120 miles upriver from El Paso.⁷ The Elephant Butte Dam also slowed the flow of the river, which caused a build-up of silt and other debris and modified the channel of the river.⁸ A treaty in 1933 established the Rio Grande Rectification Project, which shortened and stabilized the river through the removal of bancos and the construction of a new river channel and levees between El Paso-Juárez and Fort Quitman, Texas. This project, overseen by the IBC, served as flood control for the upper portions of the river along the Texas-Mexico border as well as establishing a more permanent border for this section. This treaty also allowed for the construction of a smaller dam just south of Elephant Butte.⁹

While construction of Elephant Butte Dam was beneficial to areas to the north, it did little to control the waters to the south. Significant agricultural areas in the lower river basin were unable to pump water from the river as needed during times of drought. Severe floods periodically swept downriver causing significant damage to agricultural areas and towns along the river and threatening to change the course of the river. After a major flood in 1932 in the lower Rio Grande Valley, with intermittent years of water shortages, the United States and Mexico entered into another treaty in 1944. This treaty, which transformed the IBC into the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), authorized the construction of three dams and storage reservoirs on the river along the Texas-Mexico border to regulate the flow of water

⁵ United States of America-Mexico, *Convention between the United States of America and the United States of Mexico*, March 1, 1889 (accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/TREATY_OF_1889.pdf).

⁶ “International Boundary and Water Commission,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nci02>).

⁷ Geoffrey Henry and Ellen Jenkins, *Section 106 Preparation and Coordination for a Facilities Renovation Project: Amistad Dam Administration Building, Val Verde County, Texas* (Norcross, Georgia: TRC, September 2011).

⁸ Leon C. Metz, “Rio Grande Rectification Project,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mpr02>).

⁹ United States of America-Mexico, *Rectification of the Rio Grande*, February 1, 1938 (accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/TREATY_OF_1933.pdf).

during both shortages and floods.¹⁰ Falcon Dam and Reservoir—the first dam constructed under this treaty—was completed in 1953 in Zapata County. A massive flood the following year demonstrated the need for an additional dam further upriver to regulate the combined flow of the Rio Grande, Pecos, and Devil’s Rivers.¹¹

Planning began for a dam just below this confluence, 12 miles north of the town of Del Rio in Val Verde County. The IBWC acquired over 50,000 acres to build the Amistad Dam and impound the river to create a reservoir. Construction began in 1963 and was completed in 1968. It was dedicated on September 8, 1969, by Presidents Richard Nixon and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.¹² Funding of the dam was split between the United States and Mexico based on the amounts of water allocated to each country. The United States paid for 56.2 percent of the \$125 million cost, and Mexico contributed 43.8 percent.¹³ The 6-mile-long dam, with 1.8 miles in Texas, serves as a bridge and a border crossing between the countries. Both the United States and Mexico have small hydroelectric power plants on their respective sides of the dam. The U.S. Section of the IBWC (USIBWC) oversees operation of the U.S. portion of the dam as well as the production of electricity on its side of the dam. The amount of water released through the dam is governed by the Water Master of Texas, under the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which assures that proper amounts of water are available for agricultural, domestic, and manufacturing uses downriver.

Funding was also appropriated by Congress as part of the reservoir project on the U.S. side of the border for the establishment of a recreation area by the National Park Service.¹⁴ With the completion of the dam and the reservoir, the city of Del Rio, originally founded in 1885, experienced a population growth of 40.8 percent in the 1970s.¹⁵ The Amistad Recreation Area

¹⁰ United States of America-Mexico, *Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande*, February 3, 1944 (accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/1944Treaty.pdf>).

¹¹ Jacqueline E. Timm, “Rio Grande Water Apportionment,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mgr05>).

¹² T. McDougall, C. M. Tinsley, M. D. Wurtz, and M. Prior, *Architectural Resources Investigation of Customs and Border Protection Modernization of Amistad Land Port of Entry, Val Verde County, Texas* (Plano, Texas: Geo-Marine, Inc., 2009).

¹³ International Boundary and Water Commission Unites States-Mexico, *Minute No. 210: Recommendations Regarding Construction of Amistad Dam*, January 12, 1961 (accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Minutes/Min210.pdf>).

¹⁴ “Amistad Dam to Cost \$169,792,000,” *San Antonio Light* (San Antonio, Texas), April 23, 1964 (accessed March 23, 2012, www.ancestry.com).

¹⁵ Robert C. Overfelt, “Del Rio, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hed03>).

was renamed Amistad National Recreation Area in 1990, after they received ownership of the USIBWC's undeveloped lands, not including those on which the Village sits.¹⁶

The Amistad Dam administration building was built as part of a small village 2 miles east of the dam (Figure 2). The village originally consisted of the administration building, four residential houses, storage facilities, and a water tower. The buildings were built in 1963 to support the construction of the dam, with the administration building serving as a regional USIBWC office for the project. The residences housed personnel key to the construction. Because of the size and significance of Amistad Dam, less attention has been devoted to the village itself and little historical information exists regarding it. No architect is known for any of the structures; original design drawings are unmarked, and the buildings were likely designed in-house by the USIBWC. The Amistad Dam village structures are similar in style and appearance to the administration building and residences at Falcon Dam, though Falcon Village has more housing units. The buildings have served their original use since the completion of the dam. Residences are occupied by the area operations manager and other key personnel. A small addition was made to the rear of the building in 1980 and a second addition made at a subsequent, unknown date. Two additional houses were also constructed as part of the village during the 1980s.

¹⁶ Amistad National Recreation Area, *Amistad Dam* (Del Rio, Texas: National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 2009), <http://www.nps.gov/amis/planyourvisit/upload/Dam%20Brochure%2003-31-09.pdf>.

Sources:

“Amistad Dam to Cost \$169,792,000.” *San Antonio Light*, April 23, 1964. www.ancestry.com.

Amistad National Recreation Area. *Amistad Dam*. National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Del Rio, Texas, 2009. <http://www.nps.gov/amis/planyourvisit/upload/Dam%20Brochure%2003-31-09.pdf>.

Coerver, Don M. “Treaty of 1884.” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nbt03>.

Henry, Geoffrey, and Ellen Jenkins. *Section 106 Preparation and Coordination for A Facilities Renovation Project: Amistad Dam Administration Building, Val Verde County, Texas*. Norcross, Georgia: TRC, September 2011.

International Boundary and Water Commission. *Minute 210: Recommendations Regarding Construction of Amistad Dam*. January 12, 1961. Accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Minutes/Min210.pdf>.

“International Boundary and Water Commission.” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nci02>.

McDougall, T., C. M. Tinsley, M. D. Wurtz, and M. Prior. *Architectural Resources Investigation of Customs and Border Protection Modernization of Amistad Land Port of Entry, Val Verde County, Texas*. Plano, Texas: Geo-Marine, Inc., 2009.

McDougall, T., C. M. Tinsley, M. D. Wurtz, and M. Prior. *Viewshed Analysis for the Proposed Amistad Dam Land Port of Entry Relocation Site*. Plano, Texas: Geo-Marine, Inc., 2010.

Metz, Leon C. “Rio Grande Rectification Project.” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mpr02>.

Overfelt, Robert C. “Del Rio, TX.” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hed03>.

Pletcher, David. “Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nbt01>.

Timm, Jacqueline E. “Rio Grande Water Apportionment.” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mgr05>.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection. *Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Modernization and Operation of the Amistad Dam Land Port of Entry Val Verde County, Texas*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Homeland Security, October 2010.

United States of America-Mexico. *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic*. February 2, 1848. Accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Treaty_of_1848.pdf.

———. *Convention Between the United States of America and the United States of Mexico*. March 1, 1889. Accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/TREATY_OF_1889.pdf.

———. *Rectification of the Rio Grande*. February 1, 1938. Accessed March 23, 2012, http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/TREATY_OF_1933.pdf.

———. *Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande*. February 3, 1944. Accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/1944Treaty.pdf>.

United States International Boundary and Water Commission. “Amistad Village Office Building Plans.” 1962.

———. “Amistad Dam and Reservoir, Amistad Village, Specifications and Schedule: Addition to Existing Office Building.” July 1980.

———. “Construction Contract: Construct Addition to Existing Office Building.” July 18, 1980.

Historian:

Caroline Wright, HDR Environmental, Operations and Construction, Inc. (HDR EOC).

Project Information:

This research and documentation project was conducted by HDR EOC under contract to the USIBWC. The project was completed as part of the coordination of the demolition of the structure under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on behalf of the USIBWC. Caroline Wright was the Principal Investigator and researcher. Large-format photography was completed by Timothy McGrath, principal of Image West Photo, Colorado, as subcontractor to HDR EOC on March 7, 2012. All fieldwork was conducted March 7, 2012.

Supplemental Material:

The supplemental materials consist of a portion of an IBWC map outlining the key area impacted by the Amistad Dam, a portion of U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle showing the Amistad Village area, a sketch plan of the Amistad Village area, a sketch plan of the Amistad Dam Administration Building, and two 1961 IBWC architectural drawings for the Amistad Dam Administration Building.

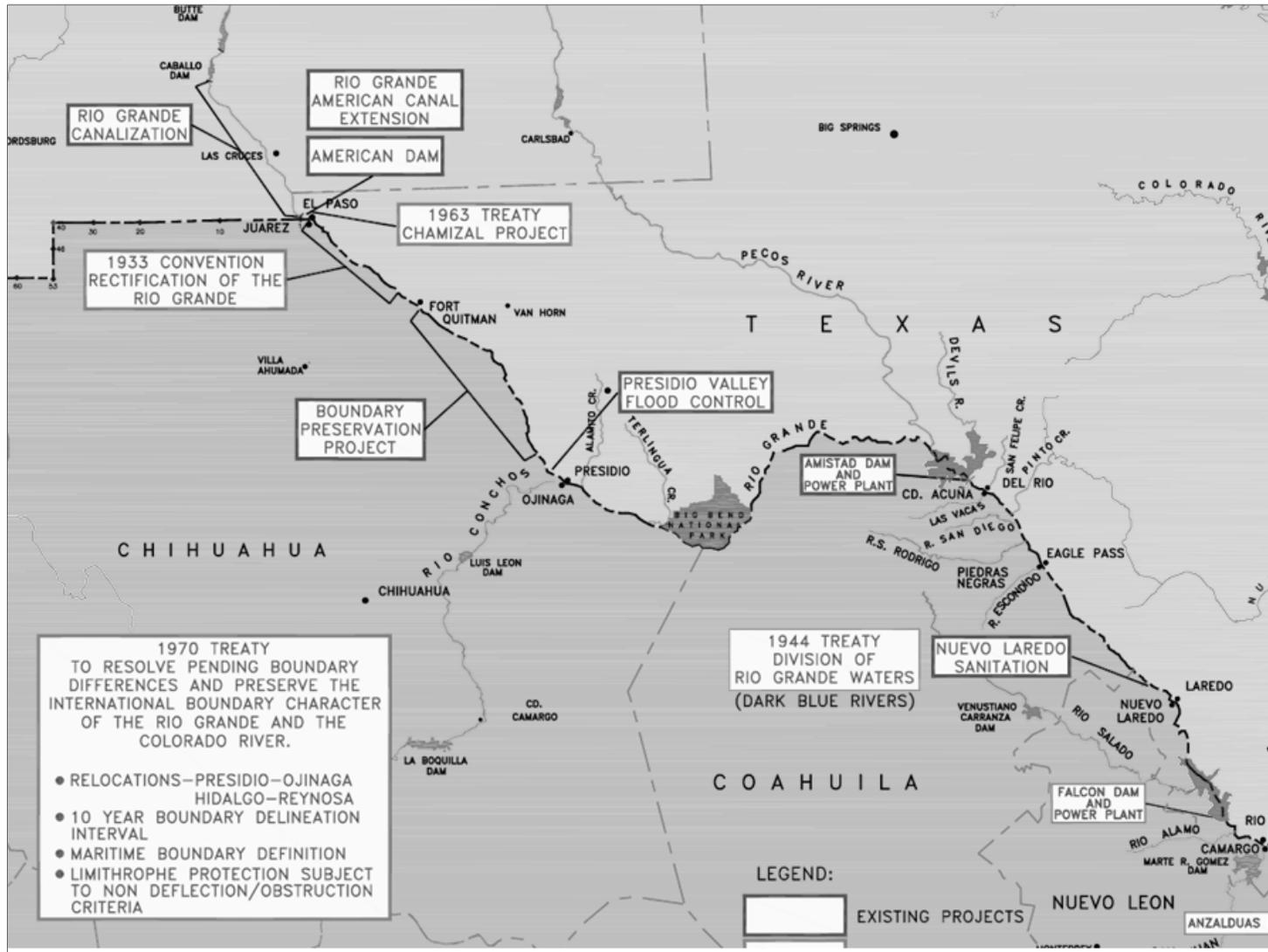


Figure 1. Portion of the *International Boundary and IBWC Projects* map. Scale not given. El Paso, Texas: IBWC, 2005. Image is free from copyright restriction.

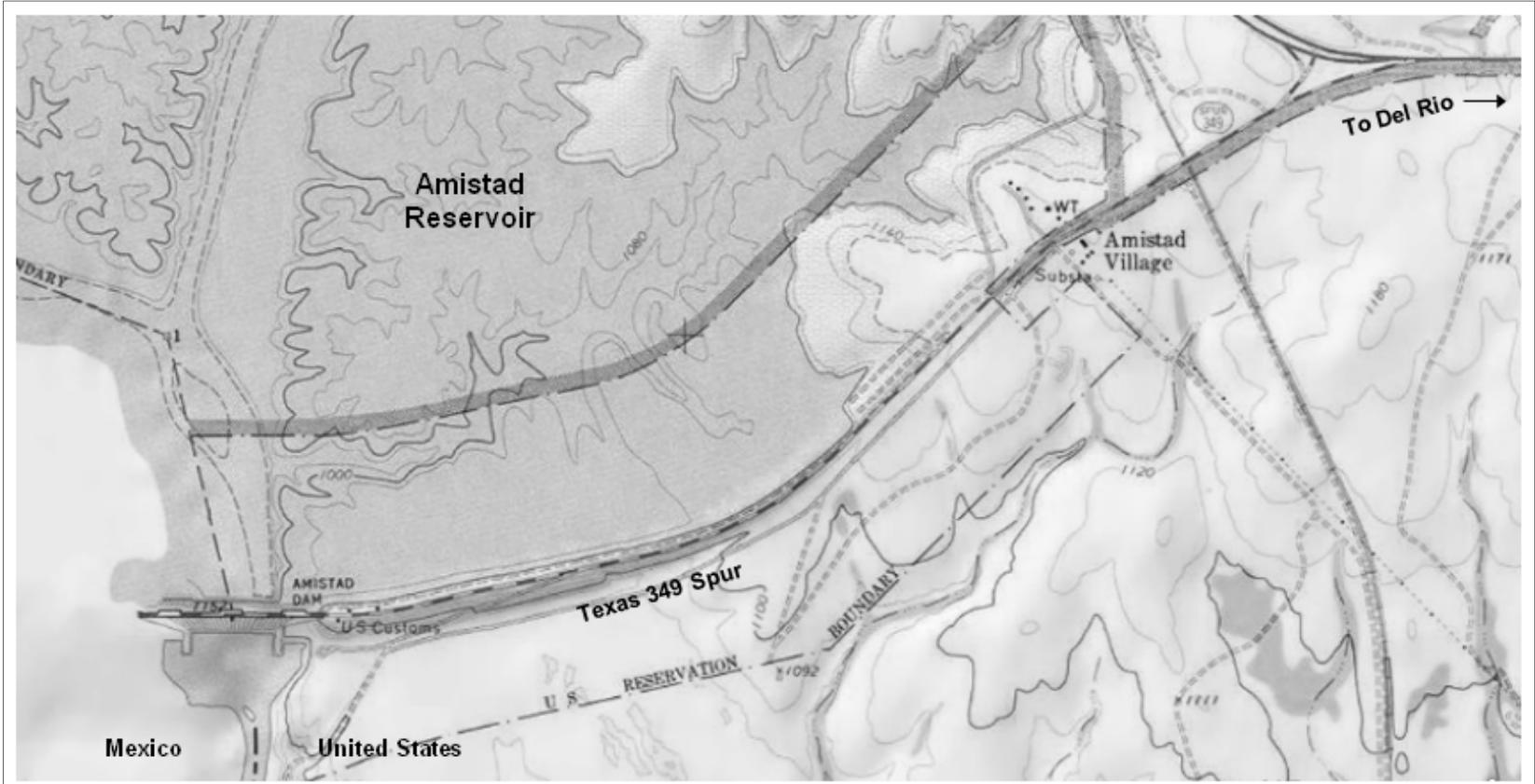


Figure 2. Topographical map showing area of Amistad Village. Background image: U.S. Geological Survey *Amistad Dam Quadrangle*. 7.5 minute series. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1972. Image is free from copyright restriction.

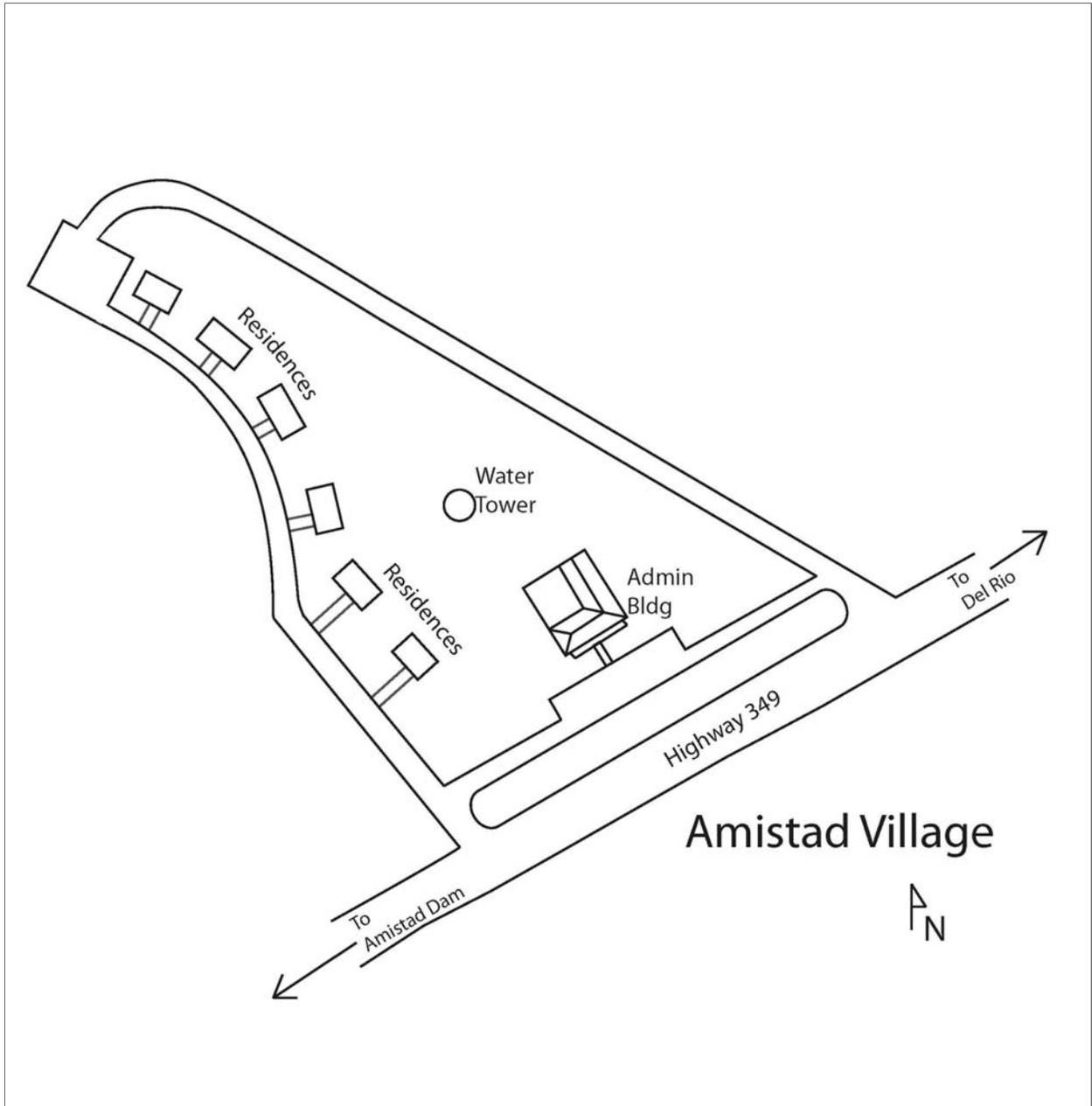


Figure 3. Sketch plan of the Amistad Village showing location of the Amistad Dam Administration Building in relation to other nearby structures. Sketch plan by Caroline Wright, HDR EOC.

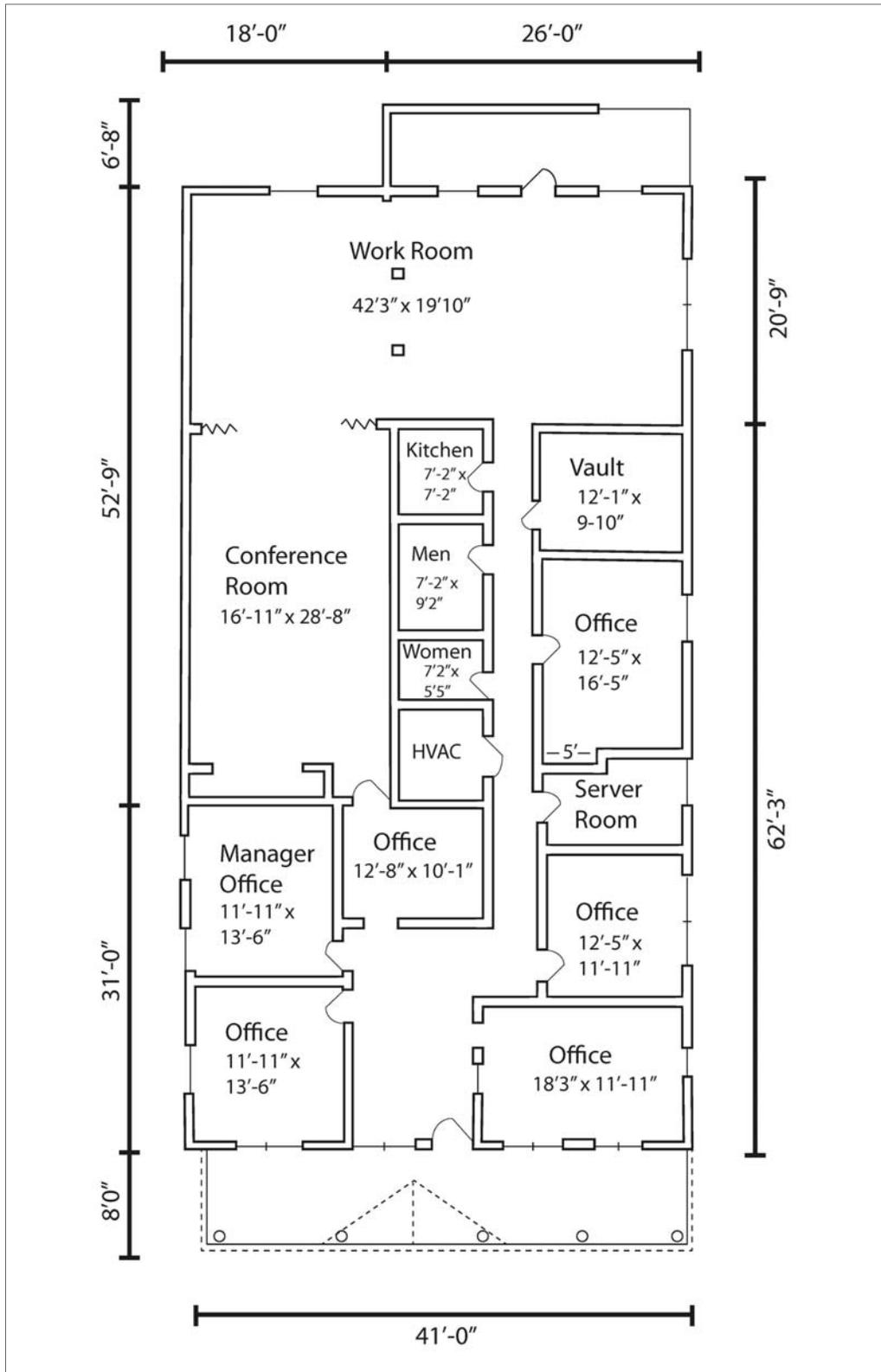


Figure 4. Sketch plan of the Amistad Dam Administration Building by Caroline Wright, HDR EOC.

AMISTAD VILLAGE, AMISTAD DAM ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
HABS No. TX-3563-A
(page 13)

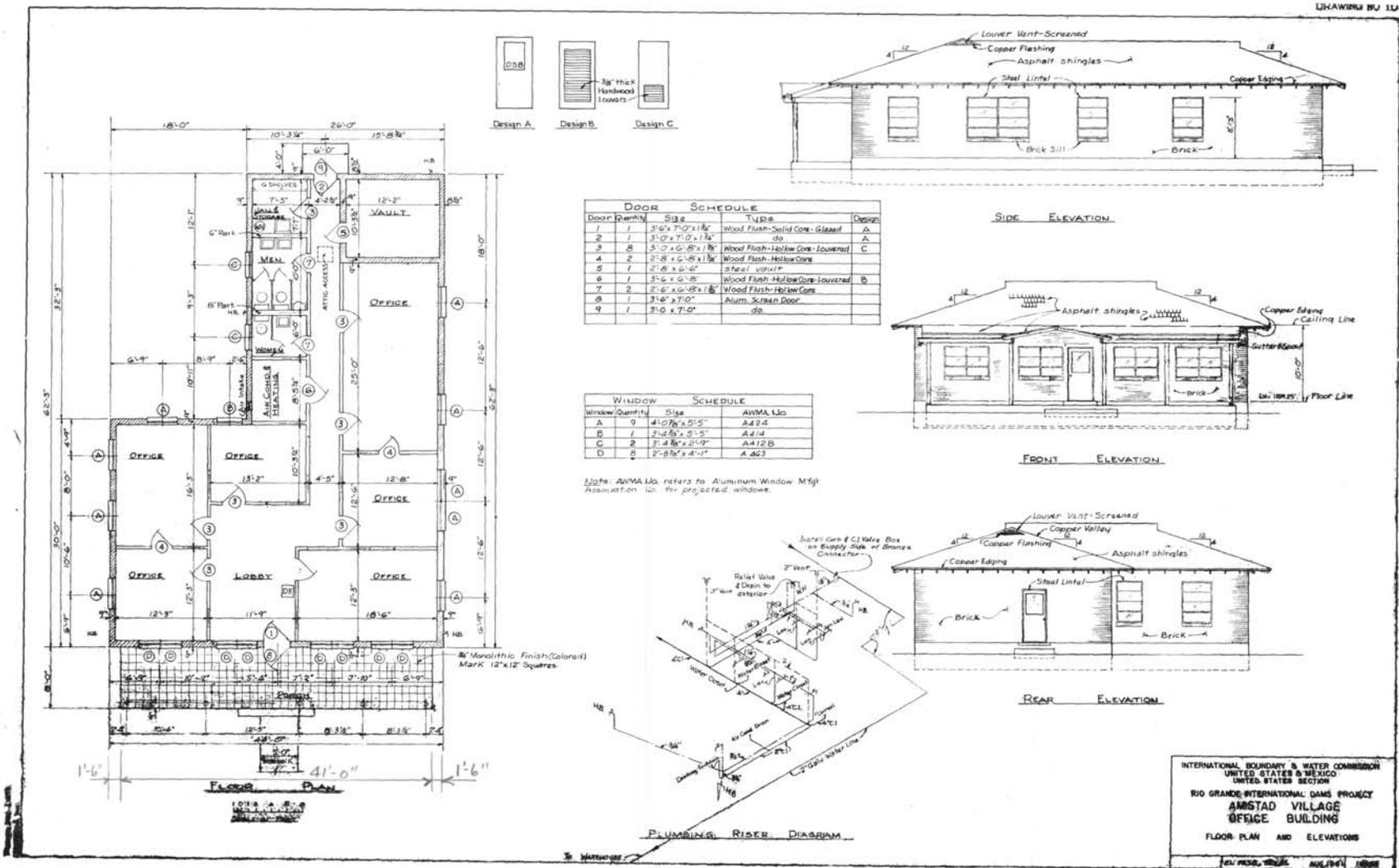


Figure 5. 1961 IBWC floor plan for the Amistad Dam Administration Building. Original drawings located at the Amistad Dam Administration Offices. Image is free from copyright restriction.

AMISTAD VILLAGE, AMISTAD DAM ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
HABS No. TX-3563-A
(page 14)

DRAWING NO. 11

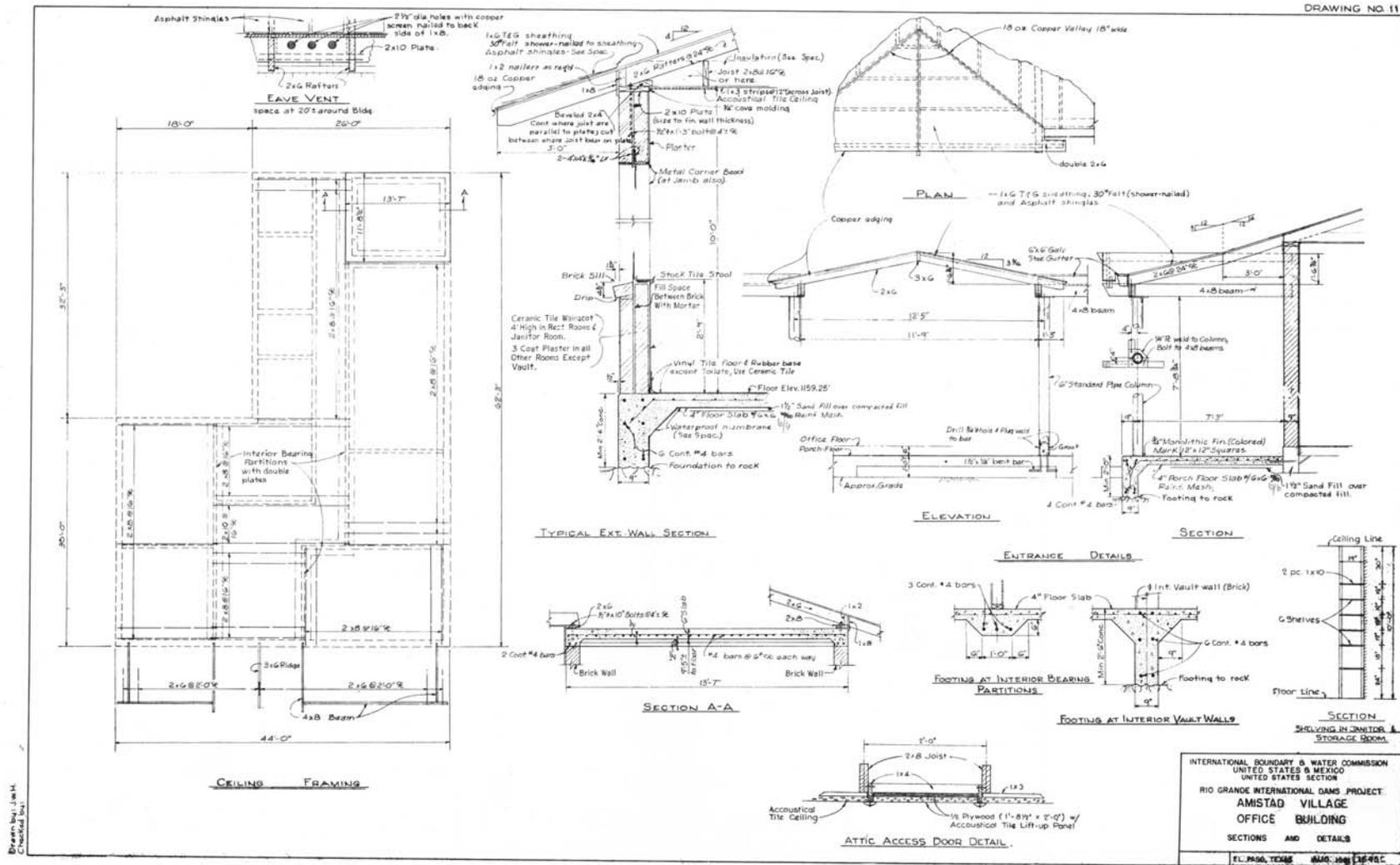


Figure 6. 1961 IBWC detail drawing for the Amistad Dam Administration Building. Original drawings located at the Amistad Dam Administration Offices. Image is free from copyright restriction.