

Flatonia, Texas

Early Settlement and Establishment

For some time before European settlers arrived, autonomous bands of hunter/gatherers generally known as Tonkawas roamed the region in which Flatonia is now located.⁴ The only traces of their culture to remain are the stone blades and points frequently found in the surrounding countryside. During Spanish colonial times, the La Bahia Road, also known as the lower road of the Camino Real, passed within two miles of present day Flatonias but no permanent settlements took root in the area during that period.

The first Anglos to arrive in the area in any numbers came in the 1820s as a part of Stephen F. Austin's "Old Three Hundred" land grant from the Mexican government, settling mostly along the Colorado River well to the north and east of present day Flatonia. Following the war for Texas Independence, the second Congress of Texas authorized the establishment of Fayette County in 1838. La Grange, located in the center of the county near a crossing on the Colorado, was the largest settlement and was designated the county seat.⁶

The southern part of the county remained far more sparsely populated than the north for several decades after statehood with only a scattering of trade centers developing in the 1850s and 1860s. Following the Civil War, German and Czech immigrants attracted by cheap and fertile land began moving into the area in great numbers.⁷ It was in 1870 that another small trade center in the far southern part of Fayette County achieved sufficient population density to warrant the establishment of a post office.⁸ This outpost was named Flatonia after local merchant and early postmaster, F. W. Flato, a German immigrant who had moved to the area in 1866.⁹

Located approximately two miles southeast of present day Flatonia, the village had two mercantile stores, a butcher, a barber and a saloon, with perhaps a couple of dozen residences scattered on either side of a dusty road.¹⁰ The 1870 census numbers about 475 inhabitants for the entire Flatonia postal area, a fair sized territory covering the southern end of Fayette County bordered on the north by the census areas of Cistern, Oso, and High Hill. Aside from the inhabitants of the village itself, the remaining population in the surrounding area consisted of farmers, ranchers, field hands and share croppers, along with their wives and children.¹¹ Relatively small tracts of land were farmed for a wide variety of produce and livestock. Sale and trade was enhanced by cart and wagon trails which connected Flatonia with neighboring settlements.¹²

⁴ F. Lotto, *Fayette County: Her History and Her People* (Schulenburg, TX: Sticker Steam Press, 1902), 86.

⁵ Gary McKee, "El Camino Real de los Tejas through Fayette County" (Schulenburg, TX, 2015).

⁶ Lotto, 96.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁸ Unpublished listing of post offices provided by the U. S. Postal Service, undated, E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX

⁹ "Obituary, Frederick William Flato," *La Grange Journal*, May 25, 1899.

¹⁰ Rocky Reagan, *G. P. Reagan Country Doctor* (San Antonio, TX: The Naylor Company, 1963), 1.

¹¹ 1870 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Texas between Hallettsville Road & Buckner's Creek, Flatonia, p. 67-78, Ancestry.com.

¹² Lucy Sullivan, *Diary of Lucy Sullivan, 1869-1870*, (transcribed copy), E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

In the 1870s, railway construction, which had been disrupted by the Civil War, began pushing to the west in earnest. It was only then that land sales and population growth burgeoned in the southern part of Fayette County. The Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway (G.H. & S.A.) began acquiring their right of way through the area to connect Harrisburg in the east with San Antonio in the west, with further plans to extend all the way to Mexico.¹³ The route would become known as the Sunset Route.¹⁴

Depots were established at roughly 12 mile intervals between Harrisburg and San Antonio, but often bypassed the older communities nearby. Flatonia was one such community that would be narrowly missed by the rail line, but sensing an investment opportunity, its namesake F. W. Flato and two other local entrepreneurs, John Cline and John Lattimore, acquired land for a town site adjacent the rail line and set out to re-establish Flatonia in a new location.¹⁵ “New” Flatonia owes its design as well as its location to the railway. With an interest in promoting and controlling business along its lines, most 19th century railroad towns were platted by the railroad companies themselves,¹⁶ including the town sites established in the 1870s along the Sunset Route, which were predominantly designed by James Converse, the G.H. & S.A. Railway’s chief engineer. Rail companies generally platted new towns according to one of three designs, including a symmetric plan,¹⁷ which Converse applied to Flatonia. The town’s 1873 plat shows an almost perfect mirror image of a strict grid pattern on both sides of the tracks, creating two business streets facing the main artery of commerce: the railroad. A wide strip of land, owned by the railroad, flanked either side of the tracks and was intended to be used for businesses that needed direct access to the line.¹⁸ The east/west streets running parallel to the tracks were given ordinal numbers from 1st through 11th Streets, except those nearest the tracks which eventually took the names of North and South Main Streets. The crossing north/south streets, unnamed on the plat, became Ledyard (later Faires), Hudson, Penn, Market and Converse (this latter was so named according to the custom of the chief engineer to name one street in each town after himself). As it was laid out, the downtown could well have accommodated the commercial district of a good-sized city with eight full blocks of 25’ x 50’ lots north of the tracks and almost nine of the same size south of the tracks. Lots gradually increased in size as the grid progressed further away from the tracks until they were drawn to the size of a quarter of a block in the outer reaches of the residential district.¹⁹

The first town lots were sold in new Flatonia in February of 1874.²⁰ Many of the residents and most of the commercial concerns of “old” Flatonia, including the post office, which had been established there in 1870, began a wholesale migration to be near the new depot just two miles to the northwest.²¹ It is said that one of the first houses in town was loaded onto ox wagons and moved whole.²² Other communities in the area, such as Oso, Pin Oak, Cistern and Praha, followed suit. Cistern and Praha retained at least some commercial enterprises but “old” Flatonia and Oso dwindled in fairly short order to nothing more than cemeteries to mark their prior existence.

¹³ *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, (Flatonia, TX: Flatonia Printing Co., 1913), 9.

¹⁴ The route operated under G.H. & S.A. Railroad until 1934 when the company merged with the Texas and New Orleans Railroad. Southern Pacific later acquired it, but the route changed hands again in 1996 when Union Pacific Railroad took over Southern Pacific. The company maintains the route to date.

¹⁵ In some documents Cline is found spelled as Kline, and Lattimore as Lattimer. *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, 11.

¹⁶ Hudson, “Towns of the Western Railroads,” 43-47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ James Converse, *Plan of Flatonia on the GH & SA, R-R, Fayette County, Texas, 1873* (Luling, Texas: Office of Chief Engineer,

G.H. and S. A. Ry, certified copy Feb. 1, 1875)

²⁰ W. A. Faires, Unpublished paper (Flatonia, TX, 1932), E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

²¹ Lotto, 351.

²² *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, 11.

On Saturday, April 18th, 1874, the first train arrived at what was for a brief period the terminus of the railway.²³ Within just a few months of the opening of the line, a special correspondent to the *Galveston Morning News* wrote this about Flatonia:

Some sixty buildings grace the town (see Figure 1 for building numbers used throughout this document), including seven stores, five barrooms, three hotels, two drug stores, blacksmith shop, two barber shops, tin and saddlery shops, and some five lumber yards deal out plank at living figures. Five gin mills are in full blast, and, as I write, one can see that they are well patronized.²⁴

By December of 1875 the town was incorporated, and by 1876 it had become an important shipping center along the Sunset Route.²⁵

Area of Significance: Commerce

The opening of the rail line as far as Flatonia in April of 1874 marks the beginning of Flatonia's commercial development. The G. H. & S. A. Railway had an interest in much of the land along its right of way—including a half interest in Flatonia's town sites—and actively promoted land sales and settlement along the line.²⁶ Their 1876 *Immigrants Guide to Western Texas* described Flatonia as one of the most promising of the new towns of Texas:

Up to November 15, the shipment of cotton for the season opening September 1st had been 4000 bales. There is a good church and school-house. There are fourteen business houses, including one bank, that of F. W. Flatto [sic], Jr. Good water can be had by digging forty feet. There are a number of steam saw mills and gins in the vicinity of Flatonia. Gray sandstone of good quality is found within a convenient distance of the town. Good prairie lands may be purchased in the vicinity of the town at from three to eight dollars, and timber lands at from ten to fourteen dollars. The county is fine and rolling, with post and live-oak timber.²⁷

A lithograph of Flatonia (Figure 2) from that same publication shows a row of buildings on what has been identified as South Main Street. A two story corner saloon with a hipped roof figures prominently in the scene.²⁸ W. A. Beckham, one-time mayor, Justice of the Peace, newspaper editor and merchant, described the Flatonia of these days in his memoir as “a long row of small shacks, thrown in temporarily. The sidewalks were of plank and were up and down, nothing uniform.”²⁹ None of the structures from this early period, save the railroad tracks themselves, are extant. Many of the new towns that grew up along rail lines typically developed with the commercial center of town on one side of the tracks and industry on the other.³⁰ Contrary to this pattern, Flatonia's commercial and residential districts developed rather evenly on both sides of the tracks. Virtually all of its commercial activity was centered on the two streets that fronted on to the railroad tracks—North and South Main—and extending little more than a block away on the cross streets of Penn and Market. Industry too was distributed fairly evenly on both sides of the tracks—tending toward the south side in earlier days but later concentrating on a railroad spur line that ran right behind the commercial district down the middle of 7th Street.

²³ No title, *Galveston Daily News*, April 22, 1874.

²⁴ “Texas in Slices,” *Galveston Daily News*, July 2, 1874.

²⁵ Lotto, 351.

²⁶ *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, 11.

²⁷ M. Whilldin, *Galveston Harrisburg and San Antonio R.R. Immigrants Guide to Western Texas* (Galveston, TX: “News” Steam Book & Job Office, 1876), 39.

²⁸ Whilldin, 38-39.

²⁹ W. A. Beckham, “Life Story of a Pioneer of Texas,” *Yorktown News*, July 31, 1924 (transcribed copy, 56).

³⁰ Mead & Hunt, Inc., *Development of Texas Road Networks: A Historic Context*, prepared for Texas Department of Transportation (2011), 58.

For more than a decade after its establishment, Flatonia enjoyed the position of being the only rail shipping point in the middle of a large trading area. Merchants prospering from this trade gradually began to replace their hastily erected wooden structures with more permanent and imposing edifices of rock or brick. The first of these was the mercantile store erected in 1876 by H. W. Yeager on South Penn (#67). Flatonia's first Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1885 shows a total of nine rock and three brick buildings—the rock was locally quarried sandstone, the brick manufactured of local clay.³¹ Yeager himself expanded his business in 1880 by adding an adjacent rock building on the corner of Penn and 6th (#68). Neighboring him on the north was John Cline with a grocery and dry goods store built in 1879 (#66). Around the corner on South Main were the twin Fordtran buildings (#44, #45), which were erected in 1879 and 1880, and the 1880 Post Office (#46). On North Main were the Harrison & Lane dry goods & clothing store (#8, erected 1881), the two Wolters buildings (#10 and #11, both erected 1880), Stoffers Harness & Saddle Shop (#12, erected 1879), and Lieck's Sunny Side saloon (#13, erected 1880). These buildings were built to last; the only one of this era no longer extant is the two-story rock Vanham & Bunting mercantile which once stood opposite the Yeager building.

The *Texas State Gazetteer* of 1884-85 lists a population of 1,500—a considerable increase from the 866 enumerated in the census of 1880.³² This *Gazetteer*, along with an illustration from about the same time (Figure 3), depicts Flatonia as a flourishing town on the G. H. & S. A. Railway with Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational churches and four public schools (three white and one black), two steam cotton gins, a weekly newspaper, and a bank. Other enterprises listed included no less than fifteen general stores, three grocers, one meat market, one dry goods store, two lumber yards, four drug stores, one furniture store, two tin ware shops, and one jeweler. Additional goods and services were provided by three shoemakers, one tailor, two barbers, two carriage makers, one blacksmith, two saddle and harness makers, three livery stables, three lawyers, one railroad agent, one telegraph agent, two insurance agents, and three physicians. Five saloons provided the entertainment and four hotels catered to travelers.³³

Three more brick buildings soon replaced earlier wooden structures in the commercial district. In 1886, Emil Miller added a grocery store (#65) and at probably about the same time J. M. McGinty built his brick faced rock building (#64)—these two buildings completing a solid row of rock and brick structures on the west side of South Penn. Decades after Powhatan E. Edmondson moved his newspaper from Schulenburg to Flatonia in 1878,³⁴ the *Flatonia Argus* found a permanent home in the Emil Miller building in 1934 and later expanded into the adjacent McGinty building. For almost Flatonia's entire existence, the weekly has reported on local news, social, entertainment and sporting events, as well as providing a vehicle for promoting commercial interests through its advertising. Still in this location today, the *Argus* is recognized as the oldest continuously published newspaper in Fayette County.³⁵ E. A. Arnim, a former clerk for Harrison and Lane on North Main partnered with Jonathan Lane to build a very substantial mercantile store on the corner of West North Main and North Penn (#1). Architect J. Riely Gordon who would later garner acclaim for his Texas county courthouses, designed the building.³⁶ The façade of the building was similar to the one owned by Arnim's old boss and mentor, J. M. Harrison, but Arnim had his building designed with four windows across rather than three.³⁷ The Arnim & Lane mercantile store operated continuously from 1886 to 2001 with just two generations of Arnims at the helm.

³¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, *Flatonia 1885* (New York, NY: Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., Limited, 1885).

³² "Fayette County's Population," *La Grange Journal*, December 24, 1891.

³³ *Texas State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1884-5*, (St. Louis, MO: R. L. Polk & Co., 1884), 325.

³⁴ This contradicts a generally held belief that the *Argus* was published in Flatonia as early as 1875. "The Patrons of the *Argus*," *Schulenburg Argus*, March 8, 1878; "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, March 13, 1879.

³⁵ "Fayette County's Oldest Newspaper – Established 1875" printed at the bottom of the front page on each edition.

³⁶ J. Riely Gordon, Blueprints for Arnim & Lane Store, 1886 (private collection).

³⁷ J. D. Arnim, Unpublished paper (Flatonia, TX, 1995), E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

Another long time Flatonia institution was established in 1887 when Magnus Fernau erected a handsome two story building (#41) on South Main. In addition to selling caskets and serving as the city's undertakers before there was a funeral home, the Fernaus, father and son, sold furniture from this building to generations of Flatonia families. The closing years of the 1880s saw Flatonia passing from the realm of a somewhat lawless frontier town, where gambling dens operated freely, saloons that were said to sell "Flatonia fighting whiskey"³⁸ outnumbered churches by at least three to one, and hard-riding, hard-drinking, trigger-happy cowboys were a frequent menace on the city's streets. Flatonia had City Marshals from its earliest days, but law and order finally came to town with a vengeance with J. A. Jamison, a no nonsense Civil War veteran.³⁹ Those who didn't receive more summary justice at Jamison's hands soon found themselves facing a Justice of the Peace in a newly built courthouse (#79). In 1890, a new two cell "calaboose" (#32), affectionately known as the Hotel Jamison, replaced an older jail. Calaboose, from the Spanish word "calabozo" for dungeon, was the term applied to small one story jails in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though once fixtures in small town Texas, few remain and Flatonia's is one of only two known extant in Fayette County.⁴⁰ Though it has been moved to save it from destruction, the calaboose is a well preserved symbol of its times, complete with prisoners' signatures and dates from 1900 to 1952.

As more peaceful times prevailed, more trappings of civilization were becoming evident. A new two story frame schoolhouse was built just southeast of the business district in 1884 (replaced in turn by a large and imposing brick edifice in 1912 which has since been demolished). City waterworks were suddenly under discussion and the city installed a large cistern and windmill next to the freight depot. An 1890 city ordinance banned cattle on the streets. Trees were planted. Pleas for better sidewalks appeared frequently in the press—and sometimes even heeded—all making it easier and more pleasant to shoppers and merchants alike to go about their daily business around town. The general optimism about Flatonia's prospects as a successful railroad shipping center led to a successful effort on the part of local businessmen to secure a second railroad line through the town—the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway. Hopes were high at the time that it would mean continued boom times for Flatonia, but some of these hopes were dashed as new trade centers grew up along this north/south line.⁴¹ Following a trip to Flatonia in 1890, the editor of the *La Grange Journal* acknowledges the town's loss of considerable trade since the construction of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass railroad (S. A. & A. P.) but says, however, that it is still doing a large business. He states that its citizens are turning their attention to manufacturing and goes on to name a horn furniture factory, a broom factory, two steam gins, an ice factory, a Kaolin ware factory, and a planing mill/cistern/door and sash factory (#57).⁴²

Although a hook and ladder company had been organized—and reorganized—from at least 1878,⁴³ half a block of wood frame buildings on North Main Street east of the rock saloon (#13) were all lost in an 1895 fire. Immediately following the fire, city council denounced the construction of new frame buildings in the business district.⁴⁴ Despite this, a single frame building was rebuilt in this burnt out area, but this was soon followed in 1897 by the construction of three identical brick buildings at the eastern end of the block (#19 and #20 are extant but one of the three burned in a later fire of 1907).

³⁸ "Flatonia Items," *Schulenburg Argus*, January 25, 1878.

³⁹ Sadie Redmond Kubena, "A Bit of Early Flatonia History and the Descendants of Some of the Early Settlers," *Flatonia Argus*, October 24, 1963.

⁴⁰ William J. Moore, "Tiny Texas Jails," accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.tinytexasjails.com/?s=fayette+county>.

⁴¹ *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, 13.

⁴² "Trip to Flatonia," *La Grange Journal*, September 11, 1890.

⁴³ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, January 23, 1879.

⁴⁴ "Flatonia Flashes," *La Grange Journal*, December 5, 1895.

That same year one more prominent building was constructed on South Main Street, which along with all those that preceded it, gave Flatonia a sense that lingers to this day of being anchored in its 19th century frontier town past. Using bricks he had manufactured locally, Dr. G. W. Allen Sr. had a two story hospital erected that spanned two lots on West South Main Street (#35). The building, which only served as a hospital for about eight years, had the distinction of having a windmill and cistern on its roof for its water supply.

Flatonia's population, which reached what was probably its peak of about 1,800 in 1887 (no doubt temporarily swollen by workers constructing the S. A. & A. P. Railway at that time), declined to 1,304 in 1890, then to 1,210 in 1900 and further dropped to only 886 in 1910.⁴⁵ Despite this rather dramatic decrease in population, the first decade of the 20th Century was not without its notes of commercial success. A handsome new brick post office was built on South Main (#42) in 1901. G. C. Simmons replaced a frame building with a one story brick building for his produce business on West North Main (#3) in 1904 and in about 1906 the Cowdin Wholesale Grocery Co. built a new brick office and warehouse on North Market (#76). A year later the two story brick Wheeler building was constructed on the corner of West South Main and South Penn Streets (#33) and leased out to house a clothing store, displaying its stylish garments in newly fashionable large glass picture windows.

To close out the decade, a new bank was chartered in 1909. The Flatonia Bank (later Flatonia State Bank) moved into the rock building on North Main (#12) that had long been occupied by a harness and saddle shop.⁴⁶ The Southwestern Bell Telephone switchboard, which had first been established in Flatonia in 1900 moved to quarters on the second floor over the bank in 1910.⁴⁷

Despite these signs of continuing strength, there seemed to be a general perception that Flatonia's fortunes were in a slump. The year 1910 is, however, widely regarded as a watershed in the history of Flatonia's commercial endeavors. A group of energetic young businessmen resurrected a defunct commercial club under the banner of the "Flatonia Committee" and made it their business to seek new industries for the town. They were successful in many of their endeavors, including the establishment of a large creamery and several processing plants.⁴⁸ Though none of these enterprises or the buildings that housed them survived the changing times, they thrived in their time and helped maintain the local economy.

A trend to replace the remaining frame buildings in the commercial district with brick started in the teens and continued in the 20s. In 1913, a dilapidated hotel on North Main was replaced by a row of three tin-clad storefronts (#4). The same year a confectionary (#40), which later became a barber shop, replaced another old frame building on South Main. In about 1926, a row of three identical one story brick buildings (#14, #15, #16) replaced several of the remaining frame buildings on North Main between Penn and Market.

⁴⁵ Ed Janecka, "Footprints of Fayette: Census of Fayette County in 1887," *Fayette County Record*, March 21, 2008; "Fayette County's Population," *La Grange Journal*, December 24, 1891; "Census Report," *Flatonia Argus*, September 30, 1920.

⁴⁶ "Flatonia Flashes," *La Grange Journal*, May 13, 1909.

⁴⁷ "Flatonia Flashes," *La Grange Journal*, May 5, 1910.

⁴⁸ *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, 15-17.

The Flatonia State Bank moved its operation to a new two story brick building (#7) on the corner of North Main and North Penn Streets, replacing a wood frame storehouse that had stood on that site since Flatonia's earliest days. The Southwestern Bell Telephone switchboard moved along with the bank—the switchboard and several insurance agents and cotton buyers all had offices on the second floor of that building. On West North Main, the Flatonia Lumber Company, cleared its frame structures and replaced them with a large one story brick building (#6), and G. C. Simmons did the same in constructing an adjoining building that later housed the Flatonia Gas Company (#5). With all of these new brick replacements, Flatonia had by and large achieved a cityscape that would have been immediately recognizable to citizens today were they to be transported back in time to the late 1920s.

In the years leading up to the Great Depression, Flatonia was still experiencing some modest growth in industry. While cotton and cattle remained important parts of the local economy, poultry and egg production were enjoying significant growth as well. A promotional “Facts and Figures” piece published by the Chamber of Commerce in 1926-27 proclaimed that Flatonia was shipping year round from one of the largest poultry and egg producing counties in the state. It went on to say that Flatonia was also an important turkey raising center marketing thousands every fall.⁴⁹ Southern Produce built a large new tin clad processing plant (#59) and brick cold storage unit (#58) on 7th Street to accommodate this growth.

Further developments along the 7th Street railroad spur included a large new Alexander Grocery Company warehouse (#71) and the expansion of the Cowdin Wholesale Grocery into a second warehouse building (#75). Finally, with what would become a mainstay of the local economy for many years to come, the Flatonia Crate and Box Factory (#77) began production and shipped its cottonwood egg crates all over the country.

The 1920s brought much needed municipal developments as well. Following a successful bond election in 1925,⁵⁰ the city installed the first comprehensive public utility system, complete with sewage and water pipes, a pumping station, and elevated water tower (#53). In addition to creating a safe and reliable water system, this steel plate water tower, like others of its kind, became a visual landmark and one of Flatonia's most identifiable structures.

Although the Great Depression of the 1930s brought a downturn to the Flatonia economy, it seems to have been less drastic as elsewhere in the country. Many stalwart businesses soldiered on throughout the Depression and bankruptcies appear to have been rare, if not nonexistent. With the help of promotions and free entertainment by the Chamber of Commerce, people continued to flock to downtown Flatonia and a wide variety of goods and services were still available despite the hard times. By the time World War II came along, Flatonia was poised to do its part, not only in sending its young men to fight, but in small but important industries that supported the general war effort. Southern Produce (#58, #59) hired many young war brides to crack the eggs that were scrambled, frozen and sent in five gallon containers to military bases.⁵¹ The Eidelbach Cistern Factory (#54, #57), in business since the 1880s, pivoted with the times and put dozens of government employees to work manufacturing war materials such as ammunition boxes and wooden cases for mine detectors and radio supplies.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Facts and Figures* (Flatonia, TX: 1926-1927), E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

⁵⁰ “The Waterworks and Sewer Bonds Carry,” *Flatonia Argus*, April 16, 1925.

⁵¹ Amelia Mica, interview by Judy Pate, April 9, 2016.

⁵² Louis B. Engelke, “Flatonia,” *San Antonio Express*, February 24, 1952, 21.

Flatonia has its own documentary film of its experience of the early war years. The local Methodist Minister, Reverend Vernon Perry, purchased a Technicolor movie camera and his efforts captured a remarkably complete picture of small town life in 1941. In addition to showing shopkeepers and customers inside most of the businesses in town, he filmed such things as production at the cottonseed oil mill, the fuller's earth plant, the produce plant and the box factory. He showed the paving of the new US Highway 90 through town, the waterworks, cattle and horses loaded and unloaded downtown on North Main Street, firemen's races, Boy Scouts collecting metal for the war, church picnics, school classrooms and activities at both white and black schools—and more. It shows a bustling, vibrant little town full of neat and orderly shops—inside and out.⁵³

Aside from the construction of a small new hospital on East South Main (#50) and some extension of travel related services along Highway 90, the late 1940s and the 1950s saw few physical changes in Flatonia's townscape, but there were economic changes which would affect the future of the city. As soldiers returned from the war, many did not return to the farm—or the life of a small town like Flatonia—but sought opportunities for jobs in the cities, some taking advantage of the GI Bill for furthering their education.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, small industries remained and continued to provide jobs to those who wanted to stay. Within the commercial district, Southern Produce (#58, #59) and the Flatonia Crate and Box Factory (#77) were still going strong. The ever-resourceful Eidelbach plant (#54, #57) was now busy making pre-fabricated homes that were providing housing on military bases near San Antonio.⁵⁵ Since the 1930s the clay industry had grown to become a strong component of the local economy with plants in the surrounding area mining and refining fuller's earth and bentonite in great quantities.⁵⁶

By the 1960s, however, some industries were in decline—Eidelbach's once thriving concern (#54, #57) was reduced to functioning as simply a lumber company. The Flatonia Crate and Box Factory (#77) closed in the mid-60s. The Flatonia Oil Mill finally closed its doors in about 1967 following a steady decline in area cotton farming. At the same time some new enterprises had come along: the Flatonia Livestock Commission (one of the largest sale barns for cattle in Central Texas), Smith Farms (a large egg producer), Balcones Minerals, and Prototype Machine Shop. Though they helped keep the local economy alive, these latter concerns were all outside the city center and didn't impact building construction or usage downtown.

In 1969, land adjacent to the railroad tracks was transferred from Southern Pacific (which had absorbed the G.H. & S.A. Railway) to the City of Flatonia, which resulted in the construction of several civic buildings in the ensuing years.⁵⁷ The first of which is the last building within the historic district to be constructed during the period of significance. Under the Post Office Department's lease construction program, the City of Flatonia constructed a new post office (#38)—the fourth building extant in the district to serve in this capacity. The city sourced all the materials and hired a local contractor to supervise the construction. It was proudly dedicated on April 19, 1970, with Congressman J. J. "Jake" Pickle in attendance.⁵⁸

⁵³ Vernon F. Perry, *Flatonia Texas and the Surrounding Area*, video recording (Flatonia, TX: 1941).

⁵⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *Remaking the Heartland: Middle America since the 1950s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 119-121, 135-136; J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York, NY: Dember Books, 1986), 111-113.

⁵⁵ Engelke, 21.

⁵⁶ "Two Clay Plants to Start Production," *Flatonia Argus*, June 4, 1936.

⁵⁷ The land transferred to the City of Flatonia included the land on the north and south sides of the tracks from just west of Penn Street to just east of Market Street, including the land where the civic center, the new police/fire station and the rail park are now located. Plat of Flatonia Rail Corridor, Southern Pacific Railroad Real Estate Department, January 2, 1969.

⁵⁸ "Cong. J. J. Pickle to Dedicate Flatonia's New Post Office Sunday," *Flatonia Argus*, April 16, 1970.

June of 1970 brought another momentous change as Interstate 10 opened as far as Flatonia in its push west from Houston. Unlike the G. H. & S. A. Railway and the Old Spanish Trail/Highway 90 before it, this major east/west traffic artery would not bisect the existing business district but would skirt the edge of the residential area on the north. Businesses such as filling stations, garages, cafes and a motel that had long catered to travelers on Highway 90 would all feel the pinch of a decline in through traffic. It was only a matter of time before the Interstate extended on to the west, but this event marked the beginning of a trend in Flatonia that small towns all across America would experience as interstate highways passed them by.⁵⁹

Flatonia has resisted the tendency to move away from its historic center and businesses continue to exist in the longstanding downtown buildings. The population, which had dropped so dramatically in the early years of the 20th century, had stabilized at around 1,000 inhabitants, inching up to 1,109 in 1970. Nevertheless, the opening of Interstate 10, coupled with a slow but steady post-war decline in the way people patronize small hometown business, marked a decisive change in Flatonia's economy.

Area of Significance: Transportation (Railroad)

The railroad was literally and figuratively at the heart of Flatonia's development from its arrival in 1874. The passenger depot stood at the very center of the new town on the south side of the tracks and a freight depot with a long platform was opposite on the north side. With the two rows of buildings that grew up along North and South Main being set well back from the tracks, a wide open area was left in the middle. In the beginning these were filled with stacks of lumber, conveniently off-loaded as freight and ready to supply the construction needs of a growing town. Later these open spaces were frequently used by circuses and medicine shows which often arrived by rail and attracted hundreds (some said thousands) to the business district for shopping as well as the shows.⁶⁰

No less than four hotels rose up with the coming of the railroad to serve the traveling public and the many "drummers," or traveling salesmen, who touted their wares up and down the line. The Wheeler Hotel was located slightly outside the boundary of the Flatonia Historic District and is now a residence. The once proud St. Louis Hotel was razed to make way for brick storefronts in 1913. The Louisiana—later called the Central—burned and the lot remains vacant to this day. Only the Leicester of these original four, converted in the 1950s to a nursing home, still stands but retains no sense of its historic character. When the Central burned in 1915, however, another building joined the ranks of Flatonia's historic hotels when the residence of Dr. G. W. Allen Jr. was converted to a hotel/rooming house. This two story brick building on South Market, originally built in 1901-1902, later took the name of the Olle Hotel (#80) and is the only one of Flatonia's early hotels to survive as a functioning hotel into the 21st century.

The railroad was the big game in town when it came to transportation, but many shops in Flatonia's early days catered to horse drawn equipages. If the rails moved the goods to and from the freight depots, older forms of transportation had to do the work of hauling there and back. Wagon makers and wagon sellers, harness and saddle makers, blacksmiths and livery stables were there to serve their needs. Two important buildings that survive from these days are the old Stoffers Harness and Saddle shop (#12) and J. M. McGinty's building (#64) in which he manufactured wagons, buggies, and plows.

⁵⁹ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 33-36; William Kaszynski, *The American Highway: The History and Culture of Roads in the United States* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000), 175.

⁶⁰ "Flatonia Flashes," *La Grange Journal*, October 21, 1890.

It is hard to fully appreciate the impact of rapid and regular transportation and shipping that a railroad had on an area previously accessible only after days or even weeks of arduous travel and transport. But here are just a few of the many ways it could be felt in everyday life. Mail and news of the greater world arrived daily. In May of 1880, a woman noted in her diary that she “got a dimes worth of fresh fish brought up in ice from Galveston.” A café advertised fresh oysters daily. Among its other more prosaic wares, a grocery store in the 1890s prominently displayed a large basket of coconuts and a giant hanging stem of bananas. Mr. Harrison bought up to the minute goods for his dry goods store (#8) at markets in St. Louis and New York. Nothing was beyond reach—local citizens could—and did—take the train to San Antonio for the day to attend a festival. An 1885 publication advertised elegant Pullman cars to all points in the United States and Canada, with direct connections to Europe through Houston, New Orleans, or New York.⁶¹

By 1887 the railway, which had transformed open grasslands into this small, but thriving community was about to transform it again when the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad began surveying a north/south line through the area to connect with Waco. Deciding it would be a good thing if this route were to be secured through Flatonia, a mass meeting was held and a committee appointed to try to negotiate this outcome with the railway. They succeeded, at a cost of some \$8,000 in payments to the railroad.⁶² By late November of that same year, the *Argus* was eagerly anticipating potential development to accrue to Flatonia from this bold move “. . . on Wednesday the iron horse of that road will enter our corporation. Then comes the tannery—next the compress, the porcelain factory etc, etc, provided our moneyed men have the enterprise that builds up towns and cities.”⁶³

Flatonia’s investment in bringing a second rail line to town is often told as a cautionary tale of being careful of what you wish for, ascribing a general decline in Flatonia’s fortunes to the construction of the new S. A. & A. P. Railway line through town. They cite the loss of trade and population here as a result of the new towns that sprang up along the line to the north and south. Though it is true that some of its citizens did move on to seek greener pastures in the next new boom town, the rise of other trading centers in the region was inevitable wherever the line was built and the results would likely have been the same or worse had it bypassed Flatonia altogether. W. A. Beckham, who lived through it all, described the situation rather prosaically:

It had already become apparent that our expectations of a considerable city had to be modified. Other towns were building up. Railroads were projected and being built, cutting off our trade territory. A bridge had been built across the Colorado River at La Grange. Cattle shipping and the cowboys were only local institutions now. Many of the folks who were here in the boom days had departed but there were more substantial buildings taking the place of the shacks.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Texas State Gazetteer*, 325; Sullivan, 147; “The Local News,” *Flatonia Argus*, October 17, 1901; J. H. Sloma Grocer, unpublished photo, c. 1890s; J. H. Harrison, Unpublished correspondence, March 6, 1886; “Looking Back (from the files of 13 April 1905),” *Flatonia Argus*, April 7, 1936; *The Industries of San Antonio* (San Antonio, TX: Land & Thompson, 1885; repr., San Antonio, TX: Norman Brock, 1977).

⁶² *Flatonia Almanac 1913*, 13.

⁶³ “Flatonia Flashes,” *La Grange Journal*, November 10, 1887.

⁶⁴ Beckham, 57.

In 1902 a railroad switching tower was constructed at the junction of the G. H. & S. A. line and the S. A. & A. P. line (#46).⁶⁵ It was the last functioning interlocking plant in Texas when modern technology finally led to it being decommissioned in 1996.⁶⁶ Scheduled for demolition, a successful effort was waged to save it, but it had to be moved to do so. It now stands downtown near one of the lines it once served and is a monument to rail history in Flatonia.

Freight shipped by rail long played an important role in Flatonia's economy—in the early days it was cotton, cattle, cabbages, and corn. Later as small industries developed around milling cotton seed oil and cake, the butter produced by the Flatonia creamery, the turkeys and eggs processed by Southern Produce (#1, #2), the wood products of the Eidelbach factory (#41, #42) and the Flatonia Crate and Box Factory (#7) all relied heavily on rail shipments. Even toward the end of the period of significance, feed stores still received quantities of their inventory by rail.

Passenger service, however, which had once been the lifeblood of travel to cities near and far had been decreasing steadily. Passenger service on the S. A. & A. P. line had already been reduced to a one-car "Dinky" that ran between Waco and Yoakum when the railroad tried to discontinue even that in 1947. This threat prompted a number of prominent citizens from Flatonia to attend a Railroad Commission hearing to protest the removal of the Dinky.⁶⁷ A court judgment stayed the railroad from discontinuing it at that time but it was only a temporary reprieve. In 1949 another court reversed the decision and the railroad, citing operating losses for several years, removed that remnant of passenger service on the north/south line.⁶⁸ Service on the east/west Sunset Limited line survived a few more years as a flag stop but by the time the last passenger train stopped in Flatonia in the 1950s⁶⁹ rail travel was proving to be little competition for the new king of the road, the private automobile.

Area of Significance: Transportation (Automobile)

Shortly after the advent of the Ford Model T in 1908 – the first car affordable to the masses – automobiles appeared beside horses and buggies in downtown Flatonia and auto-oriented businesses soon began to open their doors.⁷⁰ The 1912 Sanborn map of Flatonia shows the city had two early filling stations / garages: one in the heart of W. South Main with a curbside pump (#35) and one drive-in station on S. Faires (#55).⁷¹

⁶⁵ Some archival evidence shows that by the late 1890s the railway through this section was already known as Southern Pacific, while other sources still referred to its original name of the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio line. Both names continued to be used at least through the 1920s. This might indicate an earlier change of ownership than commonly recognized, but at the very least the G.H. & S.A. appears to have been doing business as Southern Pacific long before the name was officially changed. No title, *Flatonia Argus*, May 1, 1902; Railroad Commission of Texas, Thirteenth Annual Report, 1904, Texas State Archives, ARC 385, 1T, 427, quoted in Robert J. Macdonald, "Farewell to SP Tower 3, End of an Era at Flatonia, Texas," *SP Trainline*, Summer 1997.

⁶⁶ Bob Macdonald, "Where Dalsa meets the Sunset," *Trains*, March 1993, 70.

⁶⁷ "Large Crowd from Section Appears at Rockdale Hearing before R. R. Commission July 24," *Flatonia Argus*, July 31, 1947.

⁶⁸ "Court Favors Railroad in Train Service Fight," *Flatonia Argus*, April 21, 1949.

⁶⁹ Timetable No. 93, San Antonio Subdivision, February 24, 1952, E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX; Jacqueline Robins Moncrief, interview by Judy Pate, July 5, 2016.

⁷⁰ Jon Todd "JT" Koenig, *Postcard History Series, Fayette County*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 66; "First Automobile in Fayette County," *Flatonia Argus*, March 22, 1923.

⁷¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Flatonia 1912 (New York, NY: Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., Limited, 1912).

By 1915 there were enough automobiles in the area to warrant considerable local interest in the Good Roads Movement, an effort by private organizations nationwide to improve and expand the nation's roads. As part of the movement, three routes were under consideration to connect Houston and San Antonio. The "middle route," which paralleled the Southern Pacific Line and ran through Flatonia, was the shortest and most direct. Despite competition from other towns, the Flatonia Good Roads Committee, in collaboration with parties from Houston, San Antonio, and other towns along the route, lobbied successfully for the middle route,⁷² and in August of 1917, the State Highway Commission officially approved Highway No. 3 (SH 3) connecting Houston and San Antonio through Flatonia.⁷³ In January of 1918 Flatonia voters overwhelmingly passed a bond election in support of the highway, providing financing for the construction of the road which would run directly through downtown along North Main Street.⁷⁴ In May of 1920, SH 3 was completed through Flatonia, transforming Main Street to a segment of a highway, and ushering in a new auto-centric era in Flatonia's history.⁷⁵

At the same time that SH 3 was being planned and constructed in Texas, other Good Roads supporters were advocating for a southerly transcontinental route that would connect San Augustine, Florida on the east coast with San Diego, California on the west. The proposed route, called the Old Spanish Trail, was named to evoke and promote the south's Spanish Colonial history and associated sites. The Old Spanish Trail Association, like others of its type, was charged with delineating the exact route and securing the funding for construction.⁷⁶

In Texas, the proposed Old Spanish Trail would generally absorb SH 3, and though some debate occurred in Flatonia regarding the need versus cost of having the route through the business district, Flatonia's Good Roads supporters prevailed and improvements to SH 3 began in downtown Flatonia in 1922, transforming it into SH 3 / Old Spanish Trail.⁷⁷ Local contractor William Ungerer poured the concrete curbing along North Main Street and trains brought carloads of gravel from La Grange to top the road's surface.⁷⁸ By September of 1922, "Flatonia on the Old Spanish Trail" was printed at the bottom of each day's program for the Flatonia Fair. Thus was Flatonia connected in stages with the coasts, eventually making the city's roadside establishments a welcomed stop for travelers.

⁷² "Good Roads Meeting," *Flatonia Argus*, September 9, 1915; "Held Big Meeting," *Flatonia Argus*, September 23, 1915; "Sure to Get Highway," *Flatonia Argus*, October 14, 1915 and "Good Road Club Doings," *Flatonia Argus*, October 21, 1915.

⁷³ "Direct Route Designated," *Flatonia Argus*, August 16, 1917;

⁷⁴ "People of Fayette Say They Want the Highway," *Flatonia Argus*, January 17, 1918; "Route Decided," *Flatonia Argus*, March 11, 1920.

⁷⁵ "Inspect Highway," *Flatonia Argus*, May 27, 1920.

⁷⁶ Mead & Hunt, *Development of Texas Road Networks*, 24.

⁷⁷ "Highway Work Progressing," *Flatonia Argus*, March 16, 1922.

⁷⁸ "Cement Curb About Finished," *Flatonia Argus*, July 13, 1922; "Road Work Resumed," *Flatonia Argus*, October 5, 1922; "Highway Through City Will Be Completed Soon," *Flatonia Argus*, November 23, 1922; "Dirt Roads," *Flatonia Argus*, March 1, 1923.

The promise held by the construction of SH 3/Old Spanish Trail through Flatonia coincided with an increase in facilities to sell and service private automobiles. The 1920 Citizens Auto Supply building (#34) was the first built in the town specifically for automobile sales. Like other early auto showrooms, the one-story building was located in the heart of Main Street nestled between other small shops and businesses, and its large picture windows provided passersby a view of a neat showroom with Ford products.⁷⁹ Quickly outgrowing this space, the owners moved into a much larger building in 1924 on West North Main (no longer extant). A Chevrolet dealership and garage was built near the corner of East North Main and North Market in 1922, and later replaced by a larger structure in 1931 which continues to operate as a garage (#22). All of the showroom/garages had curbside gas pumps and even Rue Miller's café (#10) had a pump right in the middle of the North Main business district. Free standing gas stations associated with major oil refineries soon followed. Two such were the 1925 construction of Tip's Texaco (#30), which extended the business district out from the center and east along the new highway, and the 1931 Gulf Service Station on the corner of East North Main and North Market (#21).

In another name change for the same highway, SH 3/Old Spanish Trail became SH 3/U. S. 90 in about 1930 when the road became a federal highway.⁸⁰ Later, in 1939, when road improvements were scheduled for U.S. 90 (by this point the SH 3 portion of the name had been discontinued),⁸¹ Flatonia was again faced with the possibility that a new route bypassing the existing business district might be selected. After years of material benefit from its location on the Old Spanish Trail, Flatonia's citizens and business owners keenly understood the importance of maintaining U.S. 90's existing location through downtown along North Main Street.⁸² Once again, Flatonia's leaders, who were described as "unstinting" in their efforts to secure the right-of-way, were successful and the highway would maintain its existing location through downtown.⁸³ Following the opening of an underpass on the west side of town in 1942, the Flatonia section of U.S. 90 was considered complete.⁸⁴

Keeping the flow of traffic through the business district paid off after the war as tourist dollars continued to support service enterprises in the heart of Flatonia's downtown long after businesses in other towns began to shift away from the center when the main traffic artery passed even a few blocks away. New filling stations (#29, #31) were constructed on the highway and one of the older ones was converted into a small roadside café (#30). The City Café(#10) downtown fronted on to Highway 90 and benefited as well. Several garages were on hand to assist travelers in need, and for the road weary, the Olle Hotel (#80) on South Market, and the Palace Courts just outside the business district along 90, provided places to break a journey. As roads continued to improve, bus service extended public transportation to many places not previously served by rail. In the 1940s the Greyhound, the Kerrville, and the Continental bus lines all stopped at Mikulik's Drug Store (#20)⁸⁵ (operating as Chas. Cooper's Bus Station from 1950 through the P.O.S.).

⁷⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 75-76.

⁸⁰ Gregory Smith, *Old Spanish Trail, Colorado County, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, (Texas Historical Commission, Austin, TX, 2012) 13.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Minutes of the Flatonia Chamber of Commerce, April 28, 1939.

⁸³ "Resolution," Minutes of the Flatonia Chamber of Commerce, March 29, 1940.

⁸⁴ "Completion of Underpass Ends Local Hiway Work," *Flatonia Argus*, March 19, 1942.

⁸⁵ "Daily Bus Schedules," *Flatonia Argus*, October 16, 1947.

Once again it proved to be a change in transportation patterns that marked the end of an era for the downtown commercial district. On June 23, 1970, a new, four-lane section of Interstate 10, a Federal-Aid Highway Act project which would connect the coasts via high speed road travel, was formally inaugurated about one mile north of Flatonia.⁸⁶ Though it would take a bit longer to extend to San Antonio, the coming of the interstate highway marked the end of an era for Flatonia. For the first time in its existence, Flatonia would no longer enjoy a place immediately on a preeminent east/west traffic artery.

America's new superhighways had far-reaching unintended consequences that would forever alter the landscape of the country.⁸⁷ In a pattern that would be repeated in small towns all along their routes, it was inevitable that much of Flatonia's growth thereafter would occur at the exits and feeder roads on both sides of the interstate, with new filling stations, motels, and fast food eating establishments. Likewise, it was inevitable that many of the filling stations, garages, cafés, and hotels located downtown along Highway 90 would eventually close. The rise of big box stores in neighboring communities coupled with a car—or two—in every garage has further sapped the vitality of Flatonia's downtown. Nevertheless, Flatonia has been tenacious in surviving ebbs and flows of changing patterns of transportation and commerce, still striving to fight the pull of the interstate and maintain its downtown identity.

Area of Significance: Architecture

The Flatonia Historic District contains a collection of locally significant commercial buildings reflecting building practices and design common to rural, south-central Texas in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. A large proportion of the district's buildings are classified as one-part commercial block and two-part commercial block buildings, which are building types based on the compositional arrangement of the façade.⁸⁸

One-part commercial block buildings are small to moderately-sized one-story buildings commonly used for retail purposes and services. Typically rectangular in plan, they have a narrow street frontage which is almost entirely devoted to the entry and expansive windows of a storefront or storefronts. These buildings often have transom windows to allow additional light and air circulation, a horizontal band above the storefront for signage, and a parapet obscuring a flat or slightly sloped roof. 124 and 104 E. South Main (#46 and #37) are examples of early and pre-war (respectively) one-part commercial block buildings within the Flatonia Historic District.

Two-part commercial block buildings are like one-part commercial block buildings with additional stories. The buildings have a horizontal division which creates two distinct zones: a lower zone and an upper zone. The lower zone retains the storefront organization of the one-part commercial block and is traditionally used for retail space. In contrast, the upper zone is more private in nature and used for offices, storage, meeting space, etc. Though they can have up to four floors, all of Flatonia's buildings of this type are two-stories tall.

Some of the district's buildings conform to what could be considered a sub-type of the one- and two-part commercial block building. Known as the Texas Vernacular Arched Front (or Flat Arched Front), this regional typology is associated with the earliest stone and masonry commercial buildings in the region.⁸⁹ The ground level of early Flat Arched Front buildings consists of a series of evenly spaced, narrow arches separated by masonry piers, which support the structure above. Spanning the entire façade, the arches,

⁸⁶ "Interstate-10 Formally Opened Tuesday to Traffic Eastward," *Flatonia Argus*, June 25, 1970.

⁸⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 33-36; Kaszynski, *The American Highway*, 175.

⁸⁸ Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2000), 24-75.

⁸⁹ Lila Knight, *Fayette County Courthouse Square Historic District*, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (2000), 22.

which contain double doors and windows with fanlights, provide optimal ventilation and light, and open the establishment to the sidewalk and passersby. Upper levels are lined with narrow, arched windows or rectangular windows with arched lintels, placed in relation to the storefront openings below. Full-width canopies project from the buildings to provide shade from the Texas sun. The Flatonia Historic District has a variety of examples of Texas Vernacular Arched Front buildings, including two of the district's oldest buildings: 218 and 220 S. Penn Street (#67 and #68).

When Flatonia's early frame buildings began to be replaced with more permanent structures, both sandstone and brick were used for the new buildings; however, most of the district's oldest extant commercial block buildings – which date to the 1870s – were built of stone. The sandstone, which was locally quarried, was a common building material in the region at the time and though often clad in stucco or brick, where exposed, it is rough and irregular, giving the buildings a rustic appearance. An example of this is the Yeager and Sons Building (#67), the oldest stone building in the district, which dates to 1876. The district's oldest extant brick buildings include the Fordtran Buildings (#44 and #45), which date to 1879 and 1880, and the former post office on South Main (#46), which was constructed in 1880. By about the mid-1880s, the use of rock was phased out and brick was used more or less exclusively to construct the district's commercial block buildings. In comparison to their frame counterparts, which have long ago succumbed to time and, sometimes, fire, the district's sturdy 19th century stone and brick buildings have endured.

One- and two-part commercial block buildings can be standalone structures or part of a commercial row or block. In some instances, a series of similar or identical buildings can be found in a row (e.g., 115, 117, and 121 E. North Main Street). These buildings may have an architectural style or stylistic elements applied to the façade; however, early commercial block buildings in rural Texas were not typically architect designed, as is the case in the Flatonia, and instead are more vernacular. Though lacking in high style design, some of the district's commercial block buildings have stylistic elements and architectural features, such as pressed metal cornices and pediments, pilasters, belt courses, recessed panels, arches, and decorative surrounds. Examples include 103 E. North Main (#8) and 109 W. South Main (#35) which have Renaissance Revival influences, and 102 E. South Main (#36), which has Neoclassical influences. Other commercial block buildings in Flatonia are decidedly pragmatic in appearance with design being limited to a simple masonry cornice or stepped parapet (e.g., 112 E. South Main and 214 S. Penn, #40 and #65 respectively).

A small number of the district's contributing buildings were architect-designed. The 1886 Arnim & Lane Building (#1) is attributed to architect J. Riely Gordon, who later became known for his Texas Courthouse designs.⁹⁰ The building subscribes to the Texas Flat Arched Front type, though it is more refined than its vernacular counterparts with Renaissance Revival influences. The *Flatonia Argus* reported that the 1901 post office (#42) was designed by a San Antonio-based architect, though a name was not provided.⁹¹ Additionally, the Craftsman filling station at 131 E. North Main (#21) is attributed to a Gulf Refining Company design ⁹² and the 1970 International style post office (#38) is a stock design from the U.S. Post Office.⁹³

⁹⁰ J. Riely Gordon, Blueprints for Arnim & Lane Store, 1886 (private collection).

⁹¹ No title, *Flatonia Argus*, August 15, 1901.

⁹² "Plans for Gulf Station about Ready," *Flatonia Argus*, January 29, 1931.

⁹³ Minutes of the Flatonia City Council, September 10, 1968.

Most buildings within the district are attributable to local builders rather than architects, with 25 of the 60 contributing resources having a known builder. The G.H. & S.A. Railroad was responsible for constructing the rail tower (#63).⁹⁴ Robert Allert and Pat Redmond built a number of Flatonia's early one- and two-part commercial buildings, including the Arnim & Lane Building (#1),⁹⁵ the post office at 124 E. South Main (#46),⁹⁶ the Yeager Building annex (#68),⁹⁷ and the Harrison Building at 103 E. North Main (#8).⁹⁸ The two also erected the eastern portion of the Fordtran Building (#45),⁹⁹ one year after Allert collaborated with W. C. Turbeville on the western portion (#44).¹⁰⁰ Redmond was individually responsible for the post office at 116 E. South Main (#42) and the identical one-part commercial buildings at 127 and 129 E. North Main (#19 and #20).¹⁰¹ Six of the district's contributing resources are attributed to William Ungerer, a prolific local builder who built the aforementioned filling station (#21) and its garage (#22),¹⁰² three late-1920s one-part commercial buildings (#5, #6, and #37),¹⁰³ and the warehouse on E. 7th St (#71).¹⁰⁴ The Allen Brothers built one of the district's more architecturally significant buildings: the 1907 Wheeler Building (#33).¹⁰⁵ Anton Freytag built the stone Stoffers Building on E. North Main (#12),¹⁰⁶ W. C. Turbeville & G. W. Allen, Sr. built the one-part commercial building at 110 W. North Main (#3),¹⁰⁷ mason Harry Beale built the warehouse at 118 N. Market (#76),¹⁰⁸ Messrs. Chambers and H. Moeller built the frame building at 214 S. Market (#78),¹⁰⁹ and a "Mr. Moore" built the Polasek Hotel (#28).¹¹⁰ Lastly, builder Frank J. Pihoda is responsible for the aforementioned International style post office (#38).¹¹¹ Many of the buildings built by builders in the late 19th and early 20th century have windows, doors, cladding, cornices, pediments, etc. – if not entire storefronts – which appear to have been sourced from architectural trade catalogs of the time.¹¹² With its location along the railroad, goods of this nature would have been readily available to Flatonia's builders.

⁹⁴ No title, *Flatonia Argus*, May 1, 1902; Railroad Commission of Texas, Thirteenth Annual Report, 1904, Texas State Archives, ARC 385, 1T, 427, quoted in Robert J. Macdonald, "Farewell to SP Tower 3, End of an Era at Flatonia, Texas," *SP Trainline*, Summer 1997.

⁹⁵ J. D. Arnim, Unpublished paper (Flatonia, TX, 1995), E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

⁹⁶ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, December 4, 1879.

⁹⁷ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, December 18, 1879.

⁹⁸ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, June 9, 1881.

⁹⁹ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, October 16, 1879.

¹⁰⁰ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, September 4, 1879.

¹⁰¹ "Paragraphs from the Flatonia Record," *La Grange Journal*, May 20, 1897; *Ibid.*, May 27, 1897.

¹⁰² Billie Grace Ungerer Herring, Unpublished documents, undated, E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

¹⁰³ #5: "Building News," *Flatonia Argus*, April 11, 1928; #6: "Building Activities," *Flatonia Argus*, July 18, 1929;

#37: "New Brick Building for South Side," *Flatonia Argus*, November 21, 1929.

¹⁰⁴ Herring, Unpublished documents, undated, E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.

¹⁰⁵ *Historic Marker Application: Wheeler Building* (Texas Historical Commission, 1989), accessed June 29, 2016, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth477604/m1/1/>.

¹⁰⁶ "Local News," *Flatonia Argus*, July 31, 1879.

¹⁰⁷ No title, *Flatonia Argus*, April 28, 1904.

¹⁰⁸ Sandra Pavlica Mica, photograph and interview.

¹⁰⁹ "Flatonia Happenings," *La Grange Journal*, October 12, 1893.

¹¹⁰ "Building Activities," *Flatonia Argus*, Jan. 14, 1932.

¹¹¹ Flatonia City Council Minutes, Feb. 27, 1969.

¹¹² For example, *Mesker Brothers Iron Works catalogue* (St. Louis, MO: 1898).

Many of the district's buildings sustained alterations during the 1930s at a time when storefront modernization was quite common in the United States. This trend was fueled by the New Deal's Modernization Credit Plan, a Depression era program which provided commercial building owners with loans to modernize their storefronts, which by then were often seen as old-fashioned and uninviting. Intended to stimulate the building industry, promote shopping activity, and revive the local economy, the Credit Plan markedly changed the landscape of Main Street.¹¹³ A number of buildings within the Flatonia Historic District were modernized as part of this trend (though it is unknown which / if any buildings were financed by the Modernization Credit Plan), the most drastic of which is 110 W. North Main Street (#3), which was remodeled in 1930 with a barreled ceiling recessed entry with expansive display cases, moldings, and tile work. Originally a general store, the modern, opulent appearance was more appropriate for its then use as a fashionable clothing store. Other examples of Depression era storefront modernizations include 109 W. South Main (#35), as well as 103, 107, 109, and 113 E. North Main (#8, 10, 11, 13) which were modernized in 1932, 1934, 1930, and 1929, respectively.¹¹⁴ Though today these storefronts can seem incompatible with what remains of the original building design, they are significant in their ability to provide an additional layer of history about how Main Street countered the Depression.

¹¹³ Gabrielle Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* (Chicago: IL University of Chicago Press, 2008), 54-55.

¹¹⁴ #8: "New Business," *Flatonia Argus*, June 23, 1932; #10: "Improves Building," *Flatonia Argus*, June 7, 1934; #11: "Fine Front for Daehne's Drug Store," *Flatonia Argus*, February 27, 1930; #13: "Another Building Ready," *Flatonia Argus*, December 5, 1929.

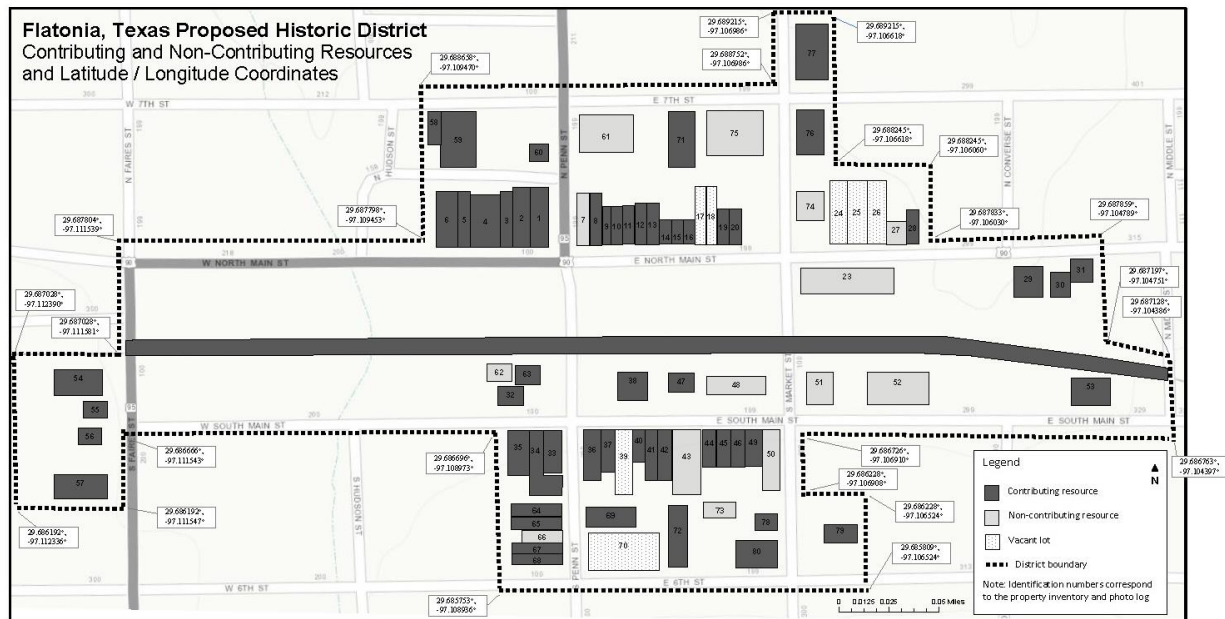


Figure 1: Flatonia Historic District Reference Map and Building Numbers



Figure 2: Lithograph of Flatonia, c. 1875, depicting South Main Street in its earliest years, soon after the arrival of the rail road and prior to the construction of more permanent buildings. Image reproduced from: M. Whilldin, *Galveston Harrisburg and San Antonio R.R. Immigrants Guide to Western Texas* (Galveston, TX: "News" Steam Book & Job Office, 1876).

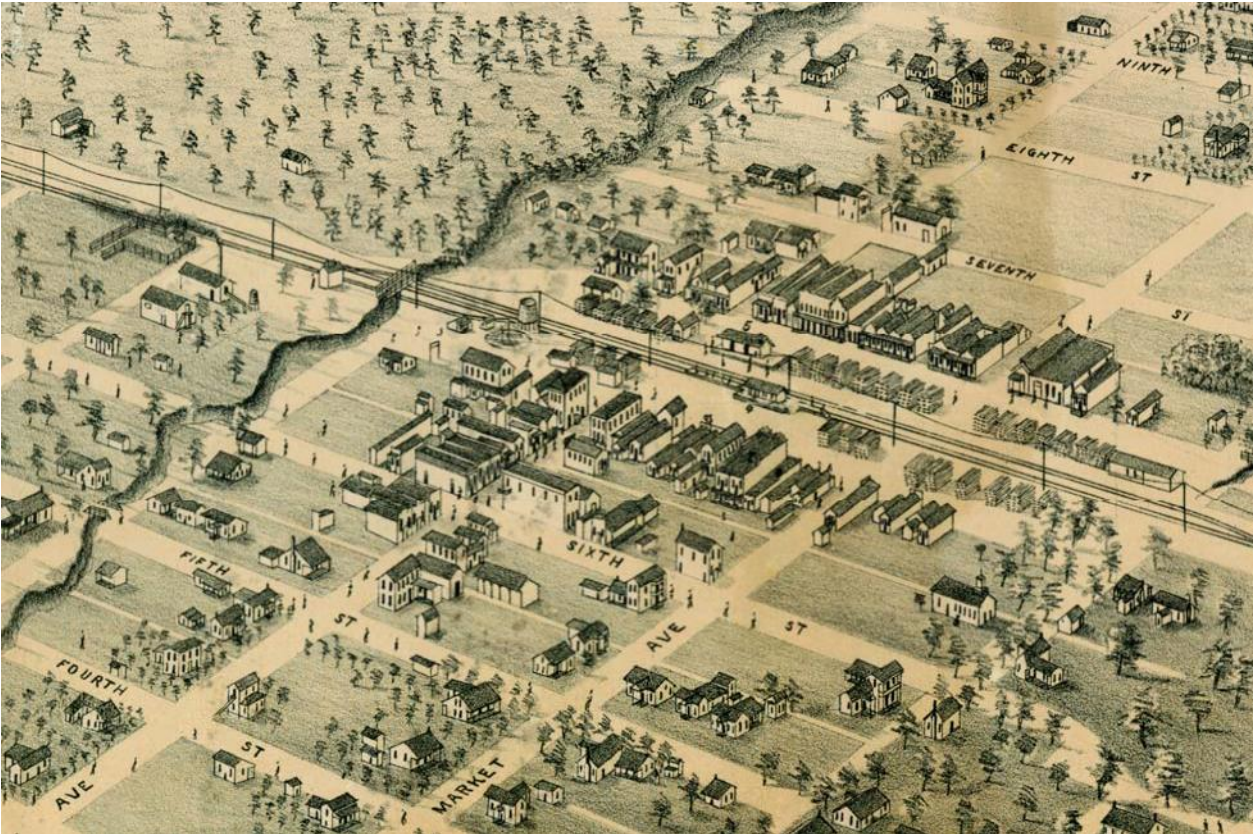


Figure 3. Bird's eye illustration of Flatonia, 1881, depicting a flourishing small town with life – and building development – centered around the railroad. Image by Augustus Koch and reproduction courtesy of E. A. Arnim Archives & Museum, Flatonia, TX.