

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BONDS – HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS: 1898-1943
Finding Aid

Compiled by
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Museum of South Texas History
Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives
Edinburg, Texas

2013

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SUMMARY

Size	2.86 cubic feet
Geographic Locations	Hidalgo County, Texas
Inclusive Dates	1898-1943
Bulk Dates	1914-1922, 1932-1942
Languages	English
Summary	The collection consists of Texas State Comptroller’s Registration Certificates for capital improvement bonds along with supporting documentation for local governments in Hidalgo County, Texas.
Access Restrictions	The collection is open for research. If you wish to examine items in the manuscript group, please contact the Archivist at 956-383-6911 to make an appointment to visit the Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives (MHMMA) reading room.
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Related Collections	Austin LeRoy “Roy” Cramer collection. RGDOC 263, 262, 264, 264A-E, 265, 265A-B (E:2 and E:3), Joseph Alexander Card collection. RGDOC 5, E:5; RGDOC 6, E:6; RGDOC 15, E:8
Citation	Capital Improvement Bonds – Hidalgo County, Texas: 1898-1952. Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives, Museum of South Texas History, Edinburg, TX.
Stack Location(s)	RGDOC 670-673, (E:4); RGDOC 674-682, (E:5)

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Local governments, such as counties and towns, use capital improvement bonds as a way to borrow money to fund projects that will serve the community. Once voters approve a bond proposition on an election ballot, the government is then authorized to sell bonds up to the amount indicated in the proposition on the ballot. Examples of projects funded by capital improvement bonds in Hidalgo County, Texas, include county buildings, water districts and waterways, schools, and roads and bridges.

In the past Texas counties were legally required to send file copies of capital improvement bonds to the office of the Texas State Comptroller of Public Accounts in Austin, Texas. When the law was changed in the early 1990s, the Comptroller's office retired the records. The Hidalgo County Historical Museum (now Museum of South Texas History) requested and received the records for Hidalgo County.

Hidalgo County is located in south Texas with its southern boundary being the Rio Grande. It was created in 1852 from parts of Cameron and Starr Counties. It is 1,596 square miles in area. According to the U.S. Census of 1900, the county's population was 6,837. There were about forty to forty-five ranches in the county when it was created.

The town of La Habitación on the Rio Grande was chosen to be the first county seat. At that time the name of the town was changed to Edinburgh and was changed again in 1861 to Hidalgo. In 1909 the county seat was moved to Chapin because of annual flooding in Hidalgo. Chapin was later renamed Edinburg.

In 1852 court was held in John McAllen's store, a building owned by E.D. Smith. In 1853 the county bought the building and remodeled it in 1858. The first actual courthouse was built in Hidalgo in 1886. The first Chapin courthouse was built in 1909-1910. Documents concerning the construction of these two courthouses are found in the collection.

Some major cities, towns and communities located in Hidalgo County are listed below. The dates in parentheses are the year of incorporation.

- Edinburg (1928)
- McAllen (1911)
- Mission (1910)
- Mercedes (1909)
- Weslaco (1921)
- Donna (1911)
- San Juan (1917)
- Sharyland
- Progreso
- Pharr (1916)
- Hidalgo (1876)

Alamo (1919)

Hidalgo County is in a region known locally as the Wild Horse Desert and aside from the Rio Grande there is not much natural water in the county. In 1893 John Closner built an irrigation facility that used a centrifugal pump powered by a 25-horsepower engine. The pump provided 4,750 gallons of water per minute for 100 acres planted in sugar cane and corn on Closner's San Juan Plantation near Hidalgo, Texas.

With the arrival of the railroad to the Lower Rio Grande Valley, private companies began building irrigation systems in the early 1900s in order to encourage agriculture in the region. Among the private irrigation companies that were founded at that time were Chatfield Irrigation Company, Santa Maria Canal Company, American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company, Hidalgo Irrigation Company, and Rio Bravo Irrigation Company. Due to economic and environmental conditions after World War I, most of these companies became county water districts. For instance, the American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company in Mercedes was bought with a bond issue of \$3.5 million and thereby established as the Hidalgo & Cameron County Water Control and Improvement District No. 9. A total of 15 water districts were eventually created in Hidalgo County.

In 1854 Governor Elisha Pease established the Texas public school system. Public schools were established in Hidalgo County as early as 1904 when a two-room school with 22 pupils was built in Run, Texas, near Donna, Texas. A school was opened in Donna in 1909 on the corner of Sixth Street and Miller Avenue. In 1913 the state named Donna High School as the first certified educational institution in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

The Mercedes Independent School District was the first in Hidalgo County created by the Texas state legislature in 1908. Independent School Districts were established in McAllen in 1915 and in Donna, Mission, and Pharr-San Juan in 1919. Weslaco had an Independent School District by 1922.

The first public school in Chapin (later named Edinburg) was built in 1909 the same year the town became the county seat. In 1926 separate schools surrounding Edinburg consolidated to form the largest Independent School District in land area in the United States. As a result the district began using school buses to transport the students. The first Edinburg public school for Blacks, George Washington Carver Elementary, was erected on East Lovett and 21st Street in 1938.

In 1927 the Edinburg College was organized as part of the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District, and its program consisted of a fifth year added to the high school curriculum. The first graduation at the College took place in 1929. The class consisted of twelve girls and eleven boys all of whom received Associate of Arts degrees. The College changed its name to Edinburg Junior College in 1933.

Schools and school districts were also being built and established in other towns in other towns in Hidalgo County in the early 1900s. Pharr's first school was built in 1911 and had nine students the first year. By 1915 the citizens of Pharr and San Juan decided to consolidate their schools and created a Common School District with one central high school. The Pharr-San Juan Independent School District was created by the state legislature in 1919. The Mission Independent School District was established that same year. The Weslaco Independent School District erected its first school building in 1922.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of Texas State Comptroller's Registration Certificates for capital improvement bonds along with supporting documentation for local governments in Hidalgo County, Texas, covering the years 1898-1899, 1909-1911, 1914-1922, 1929-1930, 1932-1943. The records document long-term debt actions of Hidalgo County's local governments and their creditors for such projects as roads, schools, county buildings, water districts, and fire prevention.

In addition to the Comptroller's Registration Certificates, documents include correspondence, non-litigation certificates, lists of bonds and their denominations, original bond orders authorizing the issuance of bonds, election orders and notices of election, proceedings of the County Commissioners Court, statements showing the indebtedness of the county, statements showing taxable values, copies of the tax levy, lists of suits relative to bond issuances, receipts, proceedings of irrigation district meetings, amendatory orders, spreadsheets, contracts, and minutes of various boards' meetings. Items of special interest include the 1898 bond records for the courthouse and jail constructed in Hidalgo, Texas; the 1909 bond records for the courthouse and jail constructed in Edinburg, Texas; the 1931 charter for the city of Mercedes, Texas; the Map of Hidalgo County Water Control Improvement District No. 15, Mission, Texas (circa 1942); and an undated, hand drawn map showing Donna Independent School District, Pharr-San Juan Independent School District, McAllen Independent School District, and School District Numbers 2, 5, 7, 8, and 12.

Cities, towns, and communities represented in the collection include Edinburg, McAllen, Mission, Mercedes, Weslaco, Donna, San Juan, Sharyland, Progreso, Pharr, Hidalgo, and Alamo. Entities whose projects benefited from bond issuances include Hidalgo County Road District Numbers 1-8; Hidalgo County water districts numbers 1-3, 5-7, 9, and 15; and school districts in the cities, towns and communities listed above.

Since there was no discernable original order, the archives staff arranged the folders according to the register numbers applied to the original folders by the comptroller's office staff.

INDEX TERMS

Alamo (Tex.)--History.
Bonds--Alamo, Texas.
Bonds--Donna, Texas.
Bonds--Edinburg, Texas.
Bonds--Hidalgo, Texas.
Bonds--McAllen, Texas.
Bonds--Mercedes, Texas.
Bonds--Mission, Texas.
Bonds--Pharr, Texas.
Bonds--San Juan, Texas.
Bonds--Weslaco, Texas.
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Civic improvement--Texas--Edinburg.
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Civic improvement--Texas--McAllen.
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Weslaco (Tex.)--History.
Public investments.