

# LANDMARK INN STATE HISTORICAL PARK

## *National Register of Historic Places 1972* *Historical American Buildings Survey* *Texas Archeological Landmark*

The distinct early Texas vernacular buildings at Landmark Inn State Historical Park reflect the adapted European style of architecture found elsewhere in Castroville. Building traditions from northern Europe required modification, due to the subtropical climate of the area. The buildings are sited to take advantage of the natural landforms and climate. Orientation of structures and window placements capture and draw summer winds out of the southeast, and afford maximum protection of a building's openings from extreme summer sun. The cross ventilation created by the building's orientation helps control humidity by allowing breezes to flow through the structure, creating a cooling effect. The thick masonry walls help modify temperature extremes to keep interiors comfortable.

The Vance Hotel/Landmark Inn Structure has gone through a series of modifications since the first period of construction. The buildings are located on what was to become the major freighting route from San Antonio to Mexico, then El Paso, then known as Main Street, now Fiorella. The location, immediately after the ford in the Medina River, was extremely favorable for commerce.

About 1849, Cesar Monod, a Frenchman, purchased two lots in Castroville, and built what was to become the first floor of the present Landmark Inn. Monod, who was mayor of Castroville in 1852, used the building as his home and as a general store.

The one-story plastered stone kitchen, built at this time, possesses a small fireplace for cooking, a Texas adaptation, for kitchens in regions the Castro settlers originated from commonly had built-in stoves. The cypress shingled roof is a reconstruction of the original style roof; standing seam tin roofs came later in the century. Today, guests at the inn enjoy coffee in the kitchen and the fireplace warms them in the winter.

In 1853, John Vance, an Irish immigrant with mercantile connections in San Antonio, bought the property and opened his own general store. Vance added the second story to the inn and the first and second-floor galleries. The staircase is identical to inn staircases found in several 19th Century German inns. Vance also expanded the store by adding a wing in the mid to late 1850s. This wing now houses the park's exhibit area. Because the building was located on the heavily used road from San Antonio to El Paso, Vance often rented rooms to travelers and outfitted them with supplies. The place soon became known as the Vance Hotel.

Vance made most of the additions to the property. To provide more space in the inn for travelers, he built a story-and-a-half residence for his family between the inn and the river. While the upper floor of the Vance House served as the family residence, the basement served as a warehouse and wool press room.

A dining room and kitchen, demolished in the early 1900s, were added between the store wing and the Vance residence for hotel guests. A two-storied structure, identified as a washhouse in an 1860 - 1870s map, according to popular legend was a bathhouse. The second floor supposedly contained a leadlined tank for bathing and this was melted down for Confederate bullets during the Civil War.

Vance also intermittently served as the Postmaster from the 1850s to the 1870s and during those times the store doubled as post office. Rowena Vance, John Vance's wife, an educated woman and teacher from New England, helped operate the store and provided us with early images of the Vance Store through her paintings.

### Mill/Gin Complex

Vance sold the riverfront portion of his property to George L. Haass and Laurent Quintle in 1854. They built a stone grist mill and a wood and stone dam across the river to provide water power. The mill and the arched stone waterway have been preserved. The Haass-Quintle mill proved a real boon to the residents of the area since they no longer had to take their corn to San Antonio for grinding. The site bustled with commercial activities through the rest of the nineteenth century. In 1876, Joseph Courand bought the mill property and his son purchased the Vance Hotel in 1899. The mill, enlarged and modernized by the Courands to offer lumber milling and cotton ginning, continued in operation until the 1920s.

In 1925, Jordan T. Lawler purchased the mill, the inn, and the Vance residence and out-buildings. He converted the mill to an electrical generating plant which provided Castroville's first electricity. Lawler operated the plant until 1936 when he sold his equipment to the municipal supplier.

During World War II, Lawler and his sister, Ruth Curry Lawler, reopened the hotel and named it Landmark Inn because of its many historical associations. The inn gained a widely held reputation as a peaceful oasis under Miss Lawler's operation. In 1974 she donated it to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as a state historic site.

The philosophy of Landmark Inn remains the same as that adopted by Miss Ruth, who posted an Alsatian inn motto in each room: *Qui tient a sa tranquillite sait respecter celle des autre.* ("He who values his own tranquility, knows to respect that of others.")

The park also contains the dedication site of Castroville and the encampment site of the first Castro Colonists to arrive in September of 1844. The majestic Castroville Pecan, where the town was dedicated by Bishop Odin, sadly has died in the past few years. One of the last giant pecans in the park is visible nearby.

The Landmark Inn has two PCH Markers, one for the inn itself, and one on the site of the old kitchen.



LANDMARK INN STATE HISTORICAL PARK