

Clark Station (Lavaca Junction)

By John Foester

I. CONTEXT

The port cities of Calhoun County, primarily Lavaca (now Port Lavaca) and Indianola, offered shipping interests and passengers a speedy route to Texas but travel further west was hampered by a lack of suitable roads^{1,7}. Wet weather could shut down travel for extended periods. Even the road to Victoria, really just a trail, could become impassable with the soil being a thick, gumbo clay. In wet times the trail could be a quarter mile wide due to traffic avoiding the deep ruts left by previous travelers. The obvious solution was to bring travel by rail to the ports of Calhoun County.

II. OVERVIEW

The Southern Pacific Railroad that terminates at Port Lavaca was the second railroad chartered in the State of Texas. It was chartered as the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad and was one of the first five railroads to be built in the state^{1,7}. It received its charter September 5, 1850^{1,7}. Its incorporators initially chose to construct a road from Saluria to San Antonio. (The Act of Incorporation empowered the company to use any point between Galveston and Corpus Christi as the Gulf terminus. This caused many problems, much debate and often fierce rivalry among competing terminal interests.) While still arguing over the final destination, the company actually surveyed and partially graded the routes to both Lavaca and Indianola. The planned routes intersected in the open prairie about 5 miles west of Lavaca at the common property line of the lands of Moses Johnson and Ysidro Benavides. Several

extensions were necessary and actual construction did not begin at Port Lavaca, the point finally chosen as the Gulf terminus of the railroad, until 1856^{1,2,7}.

To save the charter from forfeiture, five miles of the road had to be built by January 31, 1858. The line was completed only to a distance of five miles from Port Lavaca by late 1857, to the place that would come to be known as Lavaca Junction first and then later as Clark Station. The State Engineer inspected the road and reported that it was a good road, that the five miles had been built from Lavaca, terminating in the open prairie, remote from any settlement or highway. He reported that though the line terminated in the open prairie, it was in "constant use" and carried an "immense business", with hundreds of wagons using the terminus and that it had overpaid running expenses by this time (See Figure 1). The equipment maintained by the railroad consisted of one 21 ton locomotive on the road, six platform freight cars (two not then on the track), and no passenger cars.

The development from Port Lavaca continued to worry the Indianola interests, who chartered the Indianola Railroad Company in 1858 to build a line from Indianola through Victoria and Gonzales to Austin to connect with the Memphis, El Paso and Pacific Railroad Company. To prevent duplication of lines, however, the state required the Indianola line to connect with the SA&MG track at Lavaca Junction, later to be known as Clark Station. By the outbreak of the Civil War the Indianola line was surveyed and graded to the junction, a distance of fifteen miles, but no track had been laid; the ties were still on the docks at Indianola. The San Antonio and Mexican Gulf suffering financial difficulties and unable to complete the last two miles of track to Victoria, was reorganized and refinanced in 1859 and completed construction to Victoria in 1860 or 1861. However, a fully functioning railroad from the port of Lavaca,

through Lavaca Junction, to Victoria was short-lived. In December 1862, when Union forces threatened the Matagorda Bay area, Gen. John Bankhead Magruder, Confederate commander of the Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona district, ordered Maj. Daniel D. Shea to destroy the SA&MG track and the Indianola railroad ties still on the wharves^{1,2,7}. This action hindered the Union forces that finally occupied Port Lavaca and Indianola in late 1863 but made post-war reconstruction much more difficult. A report by H. H. McConnell, a Union soldier who was occupying Texas during the Civil War in 1863-64, indicates the railway from Port Lavaca to Victoria was restored to some semblance of service by that time, but was typically slower than horseback or walking, and passengers would sometimes have to help push the wheezy old locomotive that appeared "patriotically averse to introducing 'Yankee soldiers' to Texas soil"⁷.

In 1865-66, during Reconstruction, the federal government rebuilt the tracks from Port Lavaca to Victoria at a cost of \$45,000, which was levied against the owners. Though they were unable to make the payment, the government allowed the line to continue operation, such as it was. Typically, passengers in Indianola traveled by small ship to Port Lavaca to catch the train during this time. The autobiography of R.H. Williams tells the tale of his travel on the line from Lavaca to Victoria in 1866. The tale of a Sister Antoinette who made the trip in 1868 tells of a similar experience. A non-existent train schedule, drunken engineers, and numerous breakdowns made travel on the line interesting to say the least^{13,7}. The year 1869 proved even more difficult, however, as extended rains weakened the roadbed enough to prevent the use of steam engines; service was reduced to tri-weekly and limited to light cars drawn by mules or even powered by sail.

In 1870 the United States government foreclosed on the property, and the stockholders lost their investment. The government sold the S.A. & M.G. R.R. at auction on May 25, 1870^{3,7,14}. Notices for the auction list all the property, appurtenances, and equipment of the line and does not indicate any buildings at Lavaca Junction or anywhere along the line between Victoria & Lavaca¹⁴, though Sister Antoinette's story from 1868 mentions a section house halfway between the two cities. (See Figure 2.)

The line was purchased by the steamship magnate Charles Morgan and railroad entrepreneur Henry S. McComb. Morgan had already purchased Indianola wharf properties in 1869 and was anxious to preserve his shipping interests from the threat of northern railroads building into Texas. Morgan chartered the Gulf, Western Texas and Pacific Railway Company on August 4, 1870, and on April 22, 1871, merged the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf and the Indianola companies into the new railroad. The combination was approved by the Texas legislature on May 19. The line from Lavaca Junction to Indianola was completed about the end of April, 1871^{3,7}. Again, Lavaca Junction becomes important being conveniently located at the switch of the two fully functioning rail lines.

The town of Indianola during the period immediately following the Civil War and continuing until the storm of 1875 was a bustling port with ships discharging and taking on cargoes, wagon trains arriving with regularity, trains arriving and leaving on regular schedules and the town building homes and businesses at every opportunity. This all ended with the great hurricane of September 16, 1875. The storm damaged the Indianola lines of the Gulf, Western Texas and Pacific Railroad to a great extent and the machine shops belonging to the railway company were a complete wreck while the station buildings and T-heads were chiefly gone.

One section of rail with the ties still attached was discovered to have carried about a quarter mile. There was great damage to the track and rolling stock from Indianola to Chocolate Bayou. Rail service to Indianola was restored on April 3, 1877. Rail service to Port Lavaca was not restored, either due to storm damage or Mr. Morgan's protection of his interests at Indianola. The rails were removed and Port Lavaca again returned to the isolated state in which it had existed before the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad was constructed in 1858. Likely, rail service from Victoria to Lavaca Junction continued during this interim period (Sept. 1875-Apr. 1877) that meant wagons from both Lavaca and Indianola would have caught the train at Lavaca Junction. Once the route doesn't split anymore, the term "junction" was no longer appropriate and would have changed to a "station", which simply implies a place where a train stops for passengers or goods. An ad from 1880 shows the train schedule leaving Cuero at 7 a.m., with stops at Thomaston, Victoria, Lavaca (which would be at Lavaca Junction), and finally arrived at Indianola, 66 miles away, at 11:45. The train then left Indianola at 1:15 pm and arrived back at Cuero at 6 pm. (See Figure 3)

In 1879 and 1880, Louis Foester partnered for a ½ interest with John & Thomas Clark to buy 7,442 acres near the railroad line northwest of Lavaca, including some of the land adjacent to the station. They completed the partition of the land in May, 1886 with Foester awarded the 750 acres of land around Clark Station. It is likely that the name Clark Station began to take hold during this period from 1879 to 1886 as it is the only time the Clark brothers with their combined ½ interest had anything to do with the station site (See Figure 4). The 750 acres awarded to Foester around the station was the highest valued land at \$3.00 per acre. The rest of the partitioned land was valued at \$1.00 to \$2.50 per acre, suggesting the proximity to Clark

Station afforded the higher value. Again, during this period since 1875, traffic from Lavaca would have met the train at Clark Station, likely traveling the raised bed of the old tracks to and from Lavaca. There is, however, no mention of any kind of land set aside outside the standard easement at Clark Station for a depot in the purchase or partition deeds.

On August 20, 1886, a second hurricane hit and wrecked Indianola. Shortly thereafter, in April 1887, a fire sounded the death knell of Indianola. A final train excursion went from Cuero to Indianola on June 18, 1887. The railroad was allowed to abandon the line from Clark Station to Indianola on the condition that it rebuild the line to Port Lavaca.

On February 28, 1887, Louis Foester donated a new easement to the G.W.T. & P. Railroad to place new tracks to Port Lavaca³⁵. On May 14, 1887, Mr. Foester also donated 3 acres of land to the railroad at Clark Station for cattle shipping pens³⁶. Trains were running to Port Lavaca again by Nov. 5, 1887. By 1898, a sidetrack had been put in the ROW at Clark Station to make it possible to load cars and then pick them up as the train was passing through²⁰ (See Figure 5). This sidetrack existed until the late 1980's¹⁷. It does appear that there was a depot or station house at Clark Station within the railroad easement¹⁹. It is unclear when it may have been built. (See Figure 6)

Many of the local ranchers utilized the pens and railroad facilities to get their cattle to markets in the north. A family story told to me by my father, Louis Foester III, says that his great-grandfather, Louis Foester, once sent his teenage son, Louis (later known as Louis Foester Sr.), to ride the train with his shipment of cattle from Clark Station to sale at the Fort Worth

Stockyards, probably around 1890 shortly after the rail at Clark Station was connected to other rail systems.

In 1919, Charles Brett donated land to the Episcopal Church for a church at Clark Station³⁹. The preacher would ride the train to Clark Station each week to perform church services there for the locals of the nearby Chocolate Community. The Episcopal Church remained at Clark Station until 1944, when the church building was moved to Port Lavaca and the land sold back to the Brett Family^{17,42}. In 1929, Louis Foester, Sr. and his sister Bettie F. Whitsel sold 2 acres at Clark Station to H. W. Hillman, who put in a cotton gin and utilized the rail service to get products to market^{6,40}. The cotton gin was purchased by Joe Brett in 1945 and was eventually all replaced with grain elevators and bins with the exception of the old cottonseed house, which still stands today (2022)¹⁷.

During the early 1900's (through the 1930's) passenger service into Port Lavaca through Clark Station was extensive. In addition, regular weekend "Excursion Trains" came into Port Lavaca bringing tourists to the bay waters for swimming, boating, fishing, picnicking and for dancing at the pavilions located on piers which jutted out over the bay waters from the beaches⁷. During this time there was also extensive use of the rail line for shipping of seafood and agricultural products. Many agricultural products departed from Clark Station as well, including cattle, cotton, grains, etc. However, like many rail systems around the country, as the nation's highway systems improved in the mid-1900's, rail traffic through Clark Station decreased over time. The last corn shipped by rail out of Clark Station was sent to California by Joe D. Brett in the late 1980's¹⁷.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

With the many setbacks that affected the railroads of Calhoun County, which include financial difficulties, wars, multiple hurricanes, competing political interests, and fires, Clark Station is the oldest rail site in nearly continuous use in Calhoun County, being established in late 1857 and only offline for a short time in 1863 during the Civil War. There still exists a rail line there today. It was the anchor that kept rail service to the maritime ports of Calhoun County functioning when disaster struck.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

1. Craig H. Roell, "**San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad**," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/san-antonio-and-mexican-gulf-railroad>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
2. Brownson Malsch, "**Indianola Railroad**," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/indianola-railroad>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
3. Craig H. Roell, "**Gulf, Western Texas and Pacific Railway**," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/gulf-western-texas-and-pacific-railway>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
4. Calhoun County Museum, "**Linnville and Port Lavaca**," *Calhoun County Museum Website*, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://calhouncountymuseum.org/exhibits/port-lavaca>.
5. Ralston, Gary, "**The Indianola Railroad in Calhoun County, Texas**," *Indianola, Texas: Queen City of the West Website*, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.indianolatx.com>.
6. Spiller, Walter, "**Cotton Gins of Calhoun County**," Marker Story.
7. Rhodes, George Fred, "**The Railroads of Calhoun County, Texas**," *Port Lavaca Wave*, May 15-July 24, 1987.
8. Gibson, Barbara, "**San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad, Port Lavaca, Texas**," Marker Story.
9. State of Texas, "**Chocolate Community**," Marker Inscription.
10. State of Texas, "**San Antonio & Mexican Gulf Railroad**," Marker Inscription.
11. Atwell, James, "**The Rail Road**," *Lavaca Herald*, December 5, 1857.
12. Yancey, William T., "**Railroad Charter**," *Indianola Courier*, October 22, 1859.

13. Williams, R. H., *With the Border Ruffians: Memories of the Far West, 1852-1868*, University of Nebraska Press, 1992.
14. Newspaper Article, "**The San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad. For Sale at Public Auction**," 1870.
15. Newspaper Article, "**Surveying Site for New Town**," *Victoria Advocate*, 1927.
16. Newspaper Ad and Train Schedule, "**G.W.T. & P RR**", 1880.
17. Joe D. Brett, Interview in March, 2022.
18. *Travelers' Official Guide of the Railway and Steam Navigation Lines in the united States and Canada*, January, 1882 edition. National Railway Publication Company.
19. Clark Station Photo, Joe Boyd Williams (Clark descendant)
20. 1898 Map by surveyor H.M Henderson showing sidetrack at Clark Station prepared for John Clark.
21. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume A, pg. 44, J. Cummings to Moses Johnson, 1847, 1st filing.
22. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume B, pg. 665, J. Cummings to Moses Johnson, 1847, 2nd filing.
23. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume C, pg. 71, Moses Johnson to SA&MG RR, 1851.
24. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume C, pg. 13, Moses Johnson to Charles Brett, 1852.
25. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume C, pg. 224, Moses Johnson to SA&MG RR, 1853.
26. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume ?, pg. 533, Mary Benavides to Charles Brett, 1860.
27. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume I, pg. 28, P. Benavides to Mary A. Shely (784 ac), 1870.
28. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume I, pg. 28, Mary A. Shely to Adams & Wickes (784 ac), 1870.
29. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume I, pg. 61, Maria Benavides to Adams & Wickes (1227 ac), 1870.
30. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume ?, pg. 424, Johnson Hrs to C. Brett, 1878.
31. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume K, pg. 657, Adams & Wickes to Foester & Clark, 1879.
32. Calhoun County District Court Records, File #1455, Decree filed in Vol. E, Pg. 445 in the District Court Minutes, Partition of Foester & Clark Lands, 1885-1886.
33. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume L, pg. 576, John Clark to GWT&P RR, 1887.
34. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume L, pg. 572, Thomas Clark to GWT&P RR, 1887.
35. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume L, pg. 519, Louis Foester to GWT&P RR, 1887.

36. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume L, pg. 562, Louis Foester to GWT&P RR, 1887.
37. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume L, pg. 590, Clark Bros Deed of Exchange 1887.
38. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume M, pg. 539, Thomas Clark to P. Westerlund, 1893.
39. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume 10, pg. 527, C. Brett to Episcopal Church, 1919.
40. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume 17, pg. 223, Foester to Hillman (Grain Bins Tracts), 1929.
41. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume 21, pg. 387, Hillman to Frels (Grain Bins Tracts), 1934.
42. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume 47, pg. 179, Episcopal Church to J. Brett, 1944.
43. Calhoun County Deed Records Volume 50, pg. 476, Frels to Brett (Grain Bins Tracts), 1945.

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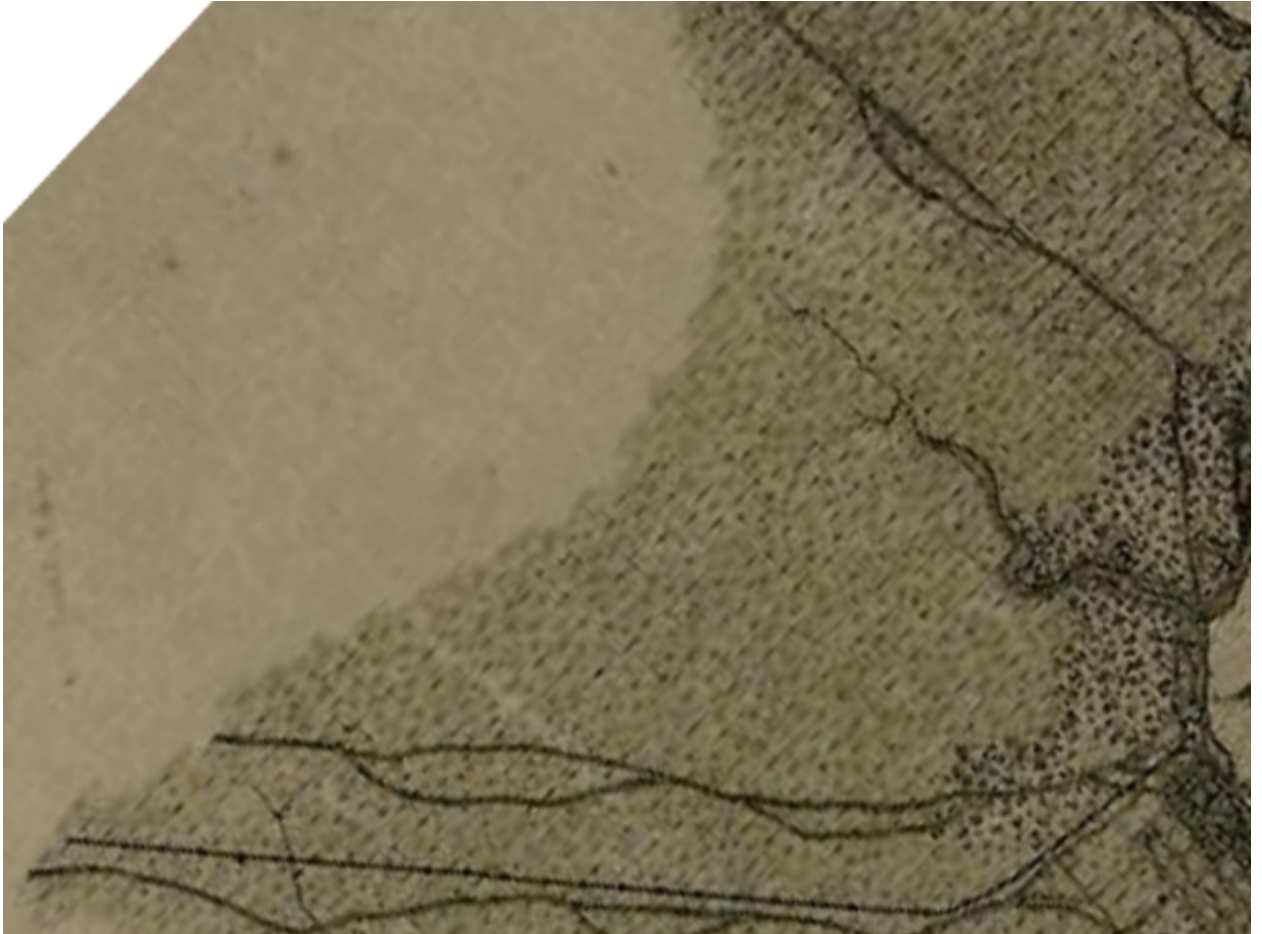


Figure 1: Coast Chart 208 – Called an 1857 map but some portions of it were completed later. This map shows the railroad line headed west from Port Lavaca toward Lavaca Junction. Note numerous wagon trails alongside rail line. There isn't yet a rail line to Indianola shown, which was the case prior to 1871.

The San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad.

FOR SALE AT PUBLIC AUCTION.

HEAD QUARTERS FIFTH MILITARY DISTRICT,
State of TEXAS,
CHIEF QUARTER MASTERS OFFICE,
Austin, Texas, April 11th, 1870.

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE ORDER OF THE Secretary of War, dated March 26th, 1870, there will be sold at Public Auction at Indianola, Texas, between the hours of 12 M. and 3 P. M., on Wednesday, the 26th day of May, 1870, all the right, title and interest of the United States of America in and to the

San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad from Lavaca to Victoria, Texas.

The Sale will include the Road Beds, Tracks and Sidings, Buildings, Water Stations, Turn Tables, &c.

The Railroad Materials and Supplies pertaining to the road, together with the Rolling Stock, Cars, Machinery and other Equipments, as follows:

- 28 Miles of Track, (more or less).
- 1 Passenger Car.
- 1 Baggage Car.
- 6 Box Cars.
- 6 Platform Cars.
- 1 Engine and Tender.
- 1 Engine.
- 1 Engine House at Lavaca.
- 1 Depot Building at Victoria.
- 1 Depot Building at Lavaca.
- 1 Machine Shop at Victoria.
- 20 prs. trucks loose at Depot in Victoria.
- 4 prs. trucks under 2 Platform Cars.
- 1 Miscellaneous lot of Railroad Material, Boxing Straps, &c.
- 1 Worthless lot of Blacksmiths Tools.
- 1 Mixed lot of Machinery being odd pieces, &c., in shops at Victoria.
- 8 prs. trucks lying loose along the Road between Lavaca and Victoria.
- 2 prs. driving Wheels at Victoria.
- 1 Tank at Victoria.
- 1 Pistern at Victoria.
- 1 Iron Safe.
- 2 Shoves.
- 2 pr. Scales.
- 3 Hand trucks.
- 1 Cross Cut Saw.

The property may be inspected on Application to the agent of the Road and any information desired may be obtained from the Chief Quarter Master Fifth Military District, at Austin, Texas.

Full particulars given on day of sale.
Terms of payment cash in United States Funds.

By order of

Bret. Major General J. J. Reynolds,
GEO. E. ALDEN,
Brvt. Major and A. Q. M. U. S. Army,
In charge of Office
Chief Quartermaster.

Figure 2: Newspaper ad with the inventory of the S.A. & M.G. R.R. in 1870. No inventory is listed at Lavaca Junction at this time.

CULF, WESTERN TEXAS AND PACIFIC R. W.

<p>M. D. MONSERRATE, President and Superintendent.</p> <p>FLETCHER S. STOCKDALE, Vice-President and Attorney.</p>	<p>A. DA COSTA, Secretary. M. D. MONSERRATE, Gen. Freight & Passenger Agt.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Offices—Cuero, Texas.</p>
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Train leaves Cuero for Thomaston (12 miles); Victoria (38 miles); Lavaca (54 miles); Indianola (66 miles) † 7 00 a.m., arriving at Indianola 11 45 a.m.
Returning, leaves Indianola † 1 15 p.m., arriving at Cuero 6 00 p.m.
† Daily, except Sunday. October 7, 1880.

Figure 3 Train schedule from 1880

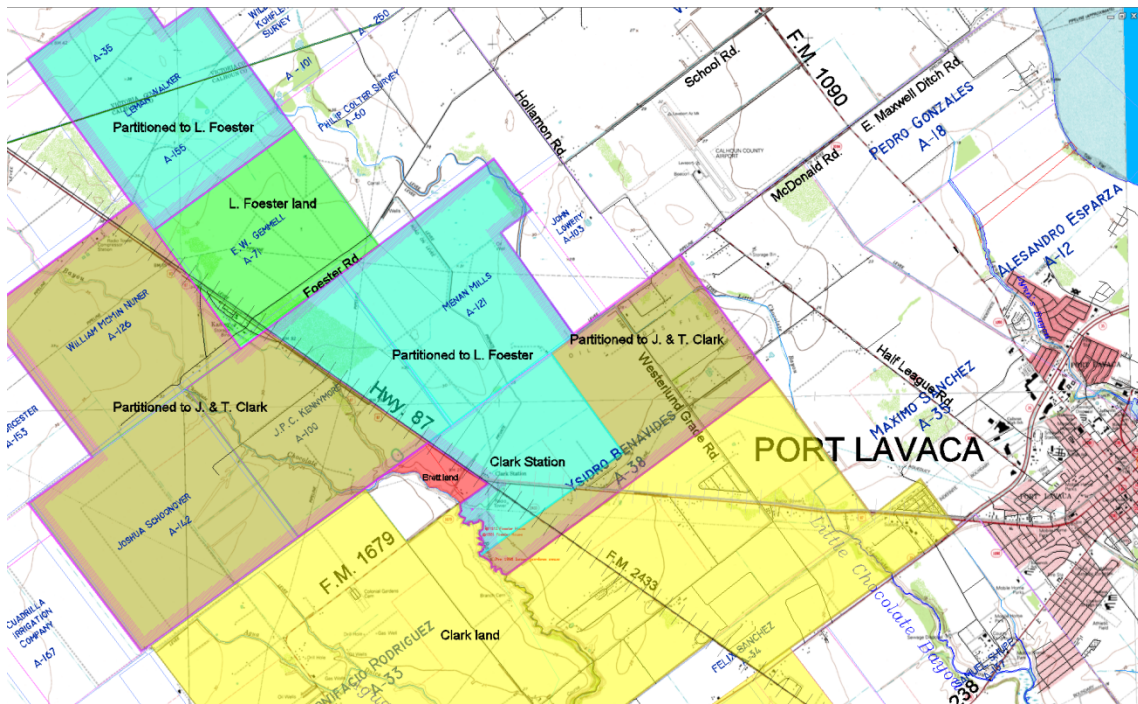


Figure 4 The land in the magenta outline hatch is the land purchased together by Foester & Clark in 1879. It was likely during this period (1879-1886) that the moniker “Clark Station” took hold. The jointly owned land was partitioned in 1886 with the Clark Brothers getting the land shaded brown and Foester getting the land shaded blue, including the land around Clark Station. This map was prepared by reviewing the Deed Records listed in the bibliography.

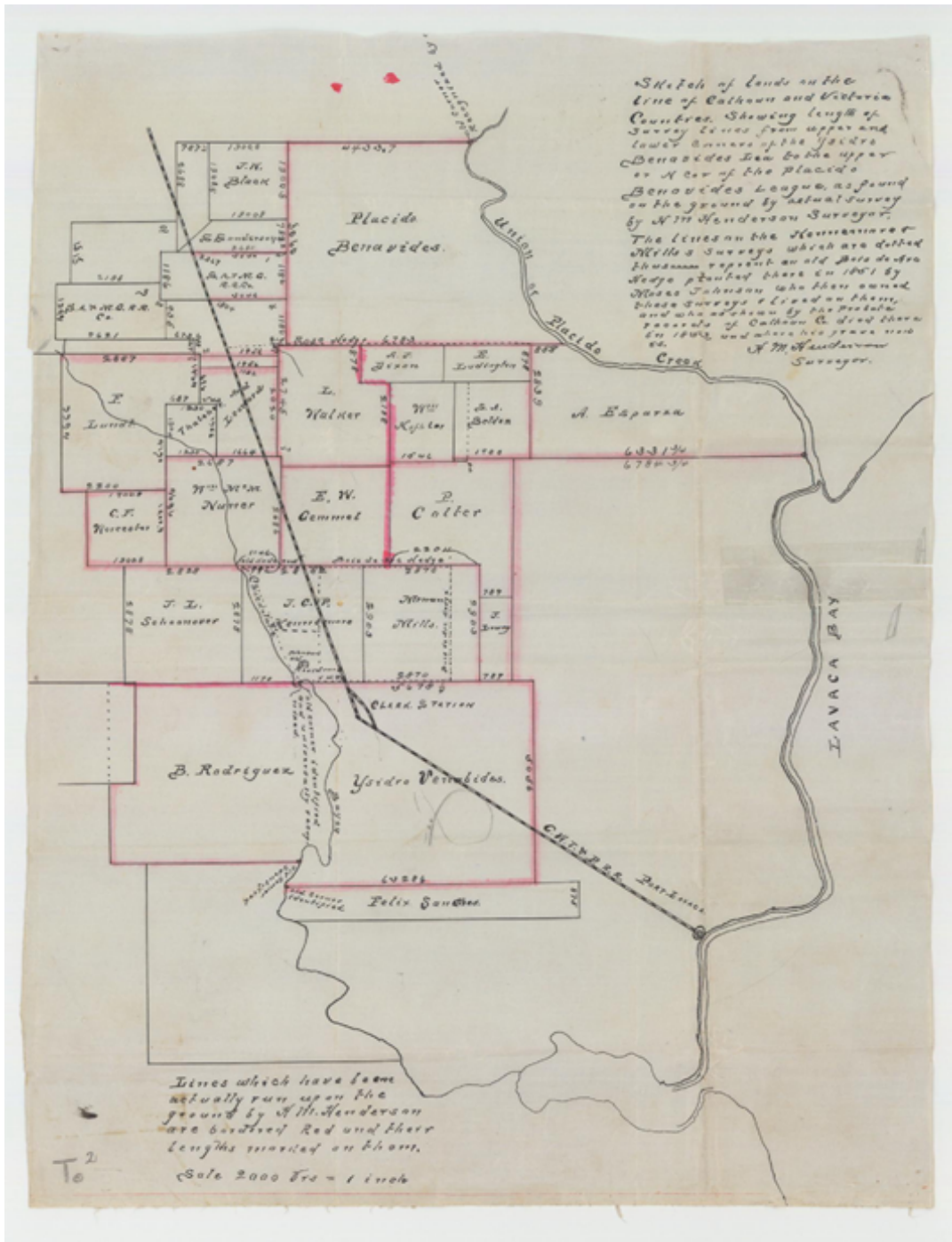


Figure 5: 1898 Map by surveyor H.M Henderson showing sidetrack at Clark Station.



Figure 6 Possible Photo of Clark Station depot. Source Joe Boyd Williams

