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Friends for the Preservation of
Historic Landa Park
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Photo: 122-123

Caption: The award-winning 1936-1937 officers and directors of the newly formed New Braunfels Junior Chamber of Commerce, a driving force for acquiring Landa Park for the City. of New Braunfels: seated (L to R) Nolan Zipp, assistant treasurer; Kermit Zipp, treasurer; Alton Luckett, vice- president; E.P. "Pete" Nowotny, president; Alton Zipp, second vice-president; Mark Fuchs, secretary; Standing (L to R) Martin Dean, director; Joe Sanders, sustaining member; Dr. William Reemtsma, director; Dr. E.G. Bielstein, sustaining member; Louis Stehling, director; Terry Adams, director; Percy Richter, director; Bill Briggs, sustaining member; Marvin Zipp, director; Clarence Haag, director; Joe Wolfsohl, director; Leslie Dedeke, director. Courtesy of Beth Nowotny.

SAVING LANDA PARK

The inevitable happened! In 1935 Landa Park was closed by a 12' high fence. This meant the much-anticipated yearly Easter opening of Landa Park did not take place. Fortunately, the community did have some advance warning.

Charles Scruggs, the publisher and editor of the New Braunfels Herald, heard from numerous sources that Landa Park was to be closed. Scruggs went straight to the source. He contacted E.T. Harrison, president of Trinity Universal Insurance of Dallas. It was Trinity Universal Insurance that repossessed Landa Park in 1933 following the bankruptcy of Jarratt Investment Co. The letter written by Scruggs was dated December 31, 1934.

Scruggs received an immediate response from Harrison who wrote that he appreciated hearing from Scruggs. He stated even though he had addressed the Commissioners on more than one occasion he never had a reply. He went on to say that he knew Landa Park was important to New Braunfels. He further stated that, although it was costly to Trinity Universal Insurance, the company had given New Braunfels almost 3 years to purchase the park. Now Trinity Universal would have to close it. They did just that. Scruggs printed Harrison's complete letter in the January 11, 1935 issue of the New Braunfels Herald.

The following is background of the situation: In 1927 New Braunfels purchased land for a city park from E.A. Eiband on the Guadalupe River off Peace Ave. We know the site today as Cypress Bend Park. In 1934 a debt remained on the original city park purchase. Legally the limit of indebtedness permitted the city for park purposes was \$80,000; consequently, a bond issue was required to purchase Landa Park.

Pete Nowotny went to Dallas to meet with Trinity Universal Insurance to negotiate the purchase of the Landa Park property getting the asking price down from \$125,000 to \$100,000. He took that proposed amount to the New Braunfels City Commissioners who countered with \$80,000. Pete returned to Dallas where a purchase price of \$80,000 was finally agreed on by Trinity Universal with the additional agreement that Pete give them a certain amount of business from his agency over the next 3 years. He agreed even though his commissions would be considerably discounted. This was a

significant sacrifice for a young businessman but Pete considered his contribution an investment. He knew Landa Park was worth it. However, the City Commissioners rejected the \$80,000 purchase price by a two to one vote. George Reininger was the one vote in favor of the bond issue to purchase the park.

In 1935 Hilmar Triesch as the Jaycee president appointed Pete to head the Landa Park Committee. In 1936 Pete became the Jaycee president once again and continued to spearhead the Jaycee efforts to secure the park for New Braunfels. He knew enough about the law to keep the property tied-up in such a way that no one could sub-divide it for a few years. He did this by signing the \$80,000 contract with Trinity Universal in his own name; consequently, the Jaycees had time to work out a way to purchase the park.

The Jaycees organized a citizens' petition. Charles Scruggs used his column "Rambling Around" in the New Braunfels Herald to encourage the purchase of Landa Park. Fred Oheim as editor of the Neu Braunfelser Zeitung and an enthusiastic member of the Jaycees also used his newspaper to encourage acquiring Landa Park for the city.

When the dynamic Jaycees took their project to the citizens, their enthusiasm was catching. They obtained over 700 signatures asking for a bond election to purchase Landa Park for \$80,000.

Initially there were a few members of the Chamber of Commerce opposed to the city purchasing the park expressing concern over the park no longer being private. A paper to that effect "Facts about Landa Park and the Bond Issue" was written and published. Even with that publication, it didn't take long before the majority of the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of City Development joined the Jaycees to bring the bond issue to a successful conclusion.

The April 17 issue of the New Braunfels Herald announced that City Attorney Martin Faust was instructed to craft an election ordinance. The bond issue passed with a rousing three to one majority. The eventual purchase of Landa Park was made without realtor or legal fees. Pete Nowotny handled the land transfer and Hilmar Triesch, attorney and former Jaycee president, did the legal work. Landa Park became the property of the city of New Braunfels.

In October 1936 the Texas State Junior Chamber of Commerce organization, amidst much competition from larger metropolitan clubs, recognized the New Braunfels Jaycees for their accomplishment. Pete Nowotny, as president of the New Braunfels Jr Chamber of Commerce accepted the award for outstanding Junior Chamber of Commerce in the State of Texas for 1936. Presented by State Jaycee representatives at a banquet at the Hotel Faust, the award recognized the New Braunfels Jaycees for their efforts and leadership in helping the city to acquire Landa Park.

Pete Nowotny received many honors throughout his lifetime, each very meaningful to him, yet none touched him more than the street named for him and the tree planted in his honor, both in Landa Park, on the fiftieth anniversary of Landa Park becoming a municipal park of New Braunfels. The honors were given him with heartfelt appreciation from a grateful community for the determination, persistence, and devotion of Pete Nowotny and the Jaycees he organized.

This column is based on the book New Braunfels' Historic Landa Park, Its Springs and Its People by Rosemarie Leissner Gregory and Arlene Krueger Seales. For more information, visit

www.friendsforlandapark.org and Facebook. You may call Jo Heideman @ 830-625-3186 if you would like to purchase a book.