

December 30, 2018
Friends for the Preservation of
Historic Landa Park

Rosemarie L. Gregory
Arlene K. Seales

Photo: Lindheimer Home
Caption: The Ferdinand
Lindheimer home, 491 Comal
Ave. was the first
restoration made by the Conserva-
tion Society.
Courtesy of the Conservation Society

The Landa Family Is A Gift That Keeps On Giving

Already it is the end of 2018. The major subject for this column during the past year has been the story of the Landa family and their contributions to our community.

We recently learned of one more unintentional gift that the incredible family left us.

First Federal purchased the Landa mansion across from the plaza. In time the impressive Landa mansion came down to make way for a parking area.

There were those local preservation-minded citizens like Bill and Nan Dillen, Edward Dedeke, and Jolene Staats Erben who were distressed that such an impressive dwelling was destroyed. They were not alone in their remorse. The Landa mansion was a downtown icon. Its destruction caused a major void and gave an entire community an awareness of the importance of preservation.

Losing the Landa mansion set the stage for the response to a request made a short time later by Ferdinand Lindheimer's granddaughter, Mrs. Sida Simon Martin. Mrs. Martin shared that if an organization was formed to preserve the historic Lindheimer home at 491 Comal Avenue, the home would be given to the organization.

The result was the formation of the Conservation Society on June 4, 1964 when it was chartered by the state to preserve historical structures. Bill Dillen was its first president. Curt Schmidt gave his legal expertise to acquire the charter. The 1852 Ferdinand Lindheimer's home and gardens was theirs to preserve. This the Conservation Society has beautifully accomplished. Check our column at <http://herald-zeitung.com/> on May 21, 2017 for more information on Lindheimer.

Today the home of Ferdinand Lindheimer, the “Father of Texas Botany”, is open at special times for tours. The Lindheimer gardens are faithfully maintained by the Master Gardeners. A tour of the Lindheimer home includes a tour of the gardens.

The second acquisition of the Conservation Society was the Plaza Hotel. There were other offers of historic buildings but each needed to be moved from its site. In 1972 Bill and Nan Dillen solved the problem. They gave the Conservation Society 3.5 acres on Church Hill Drive to house and restore the buildings. The acreage became known as Conservation Plaza. Today a visit to Conservation Plaza displays restored buildings that are charmingly arranged as a 19th century village.

Forke Store is considered the meeting place of Conservation Plaza. In 1865 Caroline and Jacob Ludwig Forke purchased property on the corner of Seguin Ave. and Jahn St. from Joseph Landa. There they built what came to be known as Forke Store and ran a mercantile business while raising their 10

children. The youngest son inherited the store and it eventually became an antique shop.

Forke Store is of German fachwerk construction. It arrived at Conservation Plaza in 1972. To prepare for the move, the 90-foot building was cut into two pieces and later rejoined following the move. Fortunately, the original floor and ceiling were salvaged and restored. An old photograph served as a guide to restore the building front to its original appearance using the initial doors and window frames.

Now the focal point of activities at Conservation Plaza, Forke Store is consequently the setting of joyous events that provide many happy memories for the fortunate participants.

Each restored building in the Conservation Plaza village is considered a jewel and has a story. In our column on January 27, 2019, we plan to share information on what is considered the Crown Jewel of Conservation Plaza, the Baetge House.

We thank Conservation Society Director Martha Rehler and historian Barron Schlameus for sharing information with us for this column. We wish them and all of you a Happy & Blessed New Year.

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, Facebook, or call Jo Heideman @ 830-625-3186 for information on obtaining a book.