

# The Past Is Still Visible: the Hallettsville City Hall Annex

By: Brenda Lincke Fisseler

Look closely at the picture of the SW corner of the Lavaca County Courthouse square, You will see a small one story building sandwiched between the two story brick building to its right and an impressive three story building to its left. What you might find surprising is that this diminutive appearing building is one of the oldest existing structures on the square and stands tall historically if not structurally.



## THE FAHRENTHOLD ROCK BUILDING & MERCHANDISE STORE ERA 1876-1887

On May 18, 1854, A.W. Hicks sold Lot 8 in Block 2 to brothers C.C. and W.C. Dibrell. The firm of C. & W. Dibrell was a mainstay in Hallettsville and was one of the few businesses in town to survive after the Civil War. In 1866 the Dibrell

brothers decided to part ways and sold their lot to F.W. and Abigail Fahrenthold on March 17, 1866.

Sidebar: F.W. Fahrenthold married the widow Abigail Elstner on June 1, 1862.

The Fahrentholds operated a general merchandise store in that location and in 1876 build a new rock building on the North half of the lot. In early November that year, the editor of the Hallettsville Herald & Planter visited the new establishment. According to the writer "the new rock building is as near the perfection of stores as it is possible to reach. High, ceiled, wide and airy, it is comfortable and pleasant to the visitor and from the great amount of space for storage and with behind the counters, it is equally comfortable for the salesman."

The merchandise store operated under the joint ownership of F.W. and Abigail until May 15, 1880 when a deed was filed at the Lavaca County courthouse. The document was a partition of community estate in which the North ½ of Lot 8 in Block 2 together with the rock store and all the improvements was deeded to Abigail from F.W.

Abigail continues own and operate the store until her death on October 6, 1886. Abigail died without a will and her husband F.W. was appointed the administrator of her estate by the court. However, as in many cases, dealing with the estate was contentious.



As mentioned earlier, Abigail was widow when she married F.W. and her children contested the appointment of F.W. as administrator. Her children, C.B. Elstner, Mary Elstner Meininger and Martha Elstner Goggan stated in the probate paper work that at the time of their mother's death she was living separate and apart from F.W.; that F.W. had abandoned Abigail around February 13, 1881 and had moved in with his son in law Leo Kroschel.

In early January of 1887, F.W. released any right he had in the property owned by Abigail to her three children and sold the Fahrenthold homestead, now occupied by C.B. Elstner, and the rock store house to the three children. By July of 1887, the two women, Mary Meininger and Martha Goggan, had sold their interest in the land, the store and the store contents to their brother C.B. thus making him the sole owner of the commercial property.

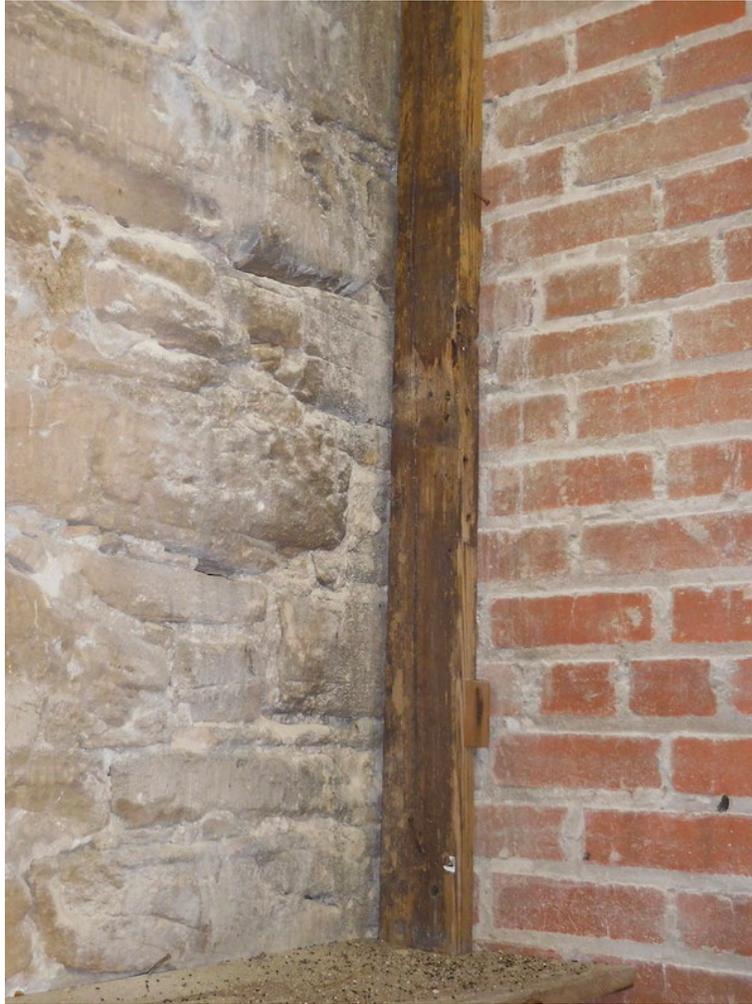
#### THE C.B. ELSTNER DRY GOODS STORE ERA 1887 - 1892

The C.B. Elstner Dry Goods Store was owned and operated by C.B. until his death on October 4, 1892 at the age of 35 years. The bulk of his estate was left to his wife, Adele Elstner. At this point, Adele almost lost the store and the property due to an outstanding debt.

Shortly before his untimely death, the Elstners had borrowed money from Mrs. Ella Austin who was now Mrs. Ella Miller and her husband J.A. When C.B. died, the loan was still unpaid so the Millers went to court and asked that the property on Block 2 be sold to satisfy the loan. The sale did not take place because Adele was able to convince the court that the funds were available from the sale of other assets and that selling the property on Block 2 would not be necessary.

On January 24, 1893, Adele Elstner married local physician Dr. Arthur Franklin Newbury in New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Sidebar:** Dr. Arthur Franklin Newbury was born in Plymouth, NC. He graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans. He moved to Hallettsville in 1891 and was first associated with Dr. A.M. Rabb, then practiced for years by himself until he admitted Dr. Max S. Kahn into practice with him.



## THE ELSTNER/NEWBURY ERA 1892- 1911

Adele Newbury operated the store and maintained the estate of her late husband until after the turn of the century. In June of 1896, Dr. A.F. and Adele were approached by local business men Joseph Kahn and Joseph Stanzel. The two men were interested in building a three story building to the left of the Elstner building for what would become the Kahn and Stanzel Opera House. They, Kahn & Stanzel, need to forge an agreement with the Newburys that their new building would share the north wall of the Elstner building and that each party would own  $\frac{1}{2}$  undivided interests in the common wall. An agreement was reached and the opera house construction began.

In 1907 on June 9th, Dr. Arthur F. Newbury died at St. Mary's Infirmary in Galveston Texas at the age of 40. Newbury died from complications of typhoid fever and was buried at his old home at Plymouth, North Carolina.

In 1911 the Elstner connection to the Fahrenthold building was terminated when Adele Elstner Newbury and her daughter, Nellie Elstner, sold the N  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Lot 8 in

Block 2 along with the rock store house and their undivided interest in the S wall of the Hallettsville Opera House to Valentine A. Hanak.



## THE HANAK ERA 1911 – 1978

From 1911 to 1938, Valentine Hanak offered a variety of services from his building on the west side of the square including a tin shop, saloon, and a watch repair and jewelry shop. In 1916, the First State Bank approached Hanak with an offer similar to the one proposed by Kahn & Stanzel to Adele Newbury 20 years prior.

The bank wanted permission from Hanak to construct and build a wall of their new brick building on top of the south wall of the building now occupied by Hanak and to also extending their north wall west to the alley. Hanak agreed and the bank building was erected.

In 1919, in a notice to the public that appeared in the local newspaper, Hanak announced that he was quitting the jewelry part of his business. He also informed the public that the room that had previously been occupied by the jewelry business would be rented for a different purpose. His intention was to devote his time to his soft drink business.

At some point there must have been a change in plans, because nineteen years later, in November of 1938, the local newspaper ran an article that V.A. Hanak, who had conducted a watch repair and jewelry shop on the west side of the square for many years, had relocated his business to his home, having had a small shop constructed on the premises.

When massive flooding of the courthouse square in June of 1940, the building was occupied by the Sokol Bar and the B&M Cash Store.

After Hanak died in 1951, a series of businesses occupied the building over the next 40 years including the C.O. Bock Hardware and Electrical Supplies, Rothbauer Hardware, Gindler's Budget Store, and a Sear's Authorized Catalog Merchant Store.

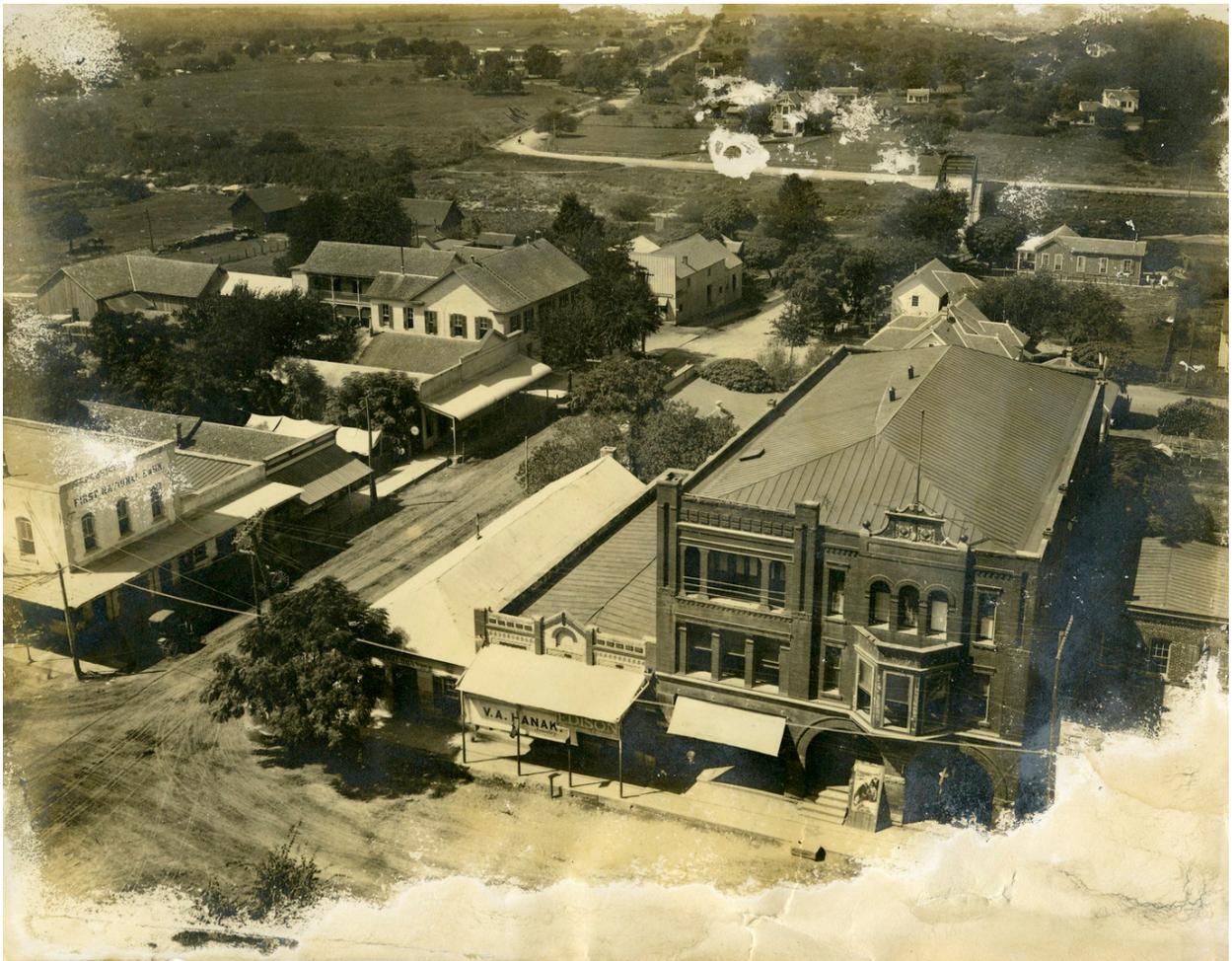
#### THE POTH & CITY OF HALLETTSVILLE ERA 1978-PRESENT

In 1978 Fredrick Hanak, the grandson of V.A. Hanak, sold the rock building to Poth & Poth Inc. who had previously been leasing the building since 1972. Alice Poth sold the building in 1988, but the building was sold back to Poth in 1991. The currently owner, the City of Hallettsville, purchased the property in November of 1994.

The Fahrenthold rock building on the south west side of the Lavaca County Courthouse square. A building this is small of statue yet large in history.

#### *SOURCES*

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- Lavaca County Tribune Sept. 30, 1952
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- Lavaca County Probate #894: C.B. Elstner



- Lavaca County Probate #1524: Dr. Arthur F. Newbury
- Lavaca County Probate #4382: V.A. Hanak
- Louisiana Marriage, 1718 – 1925 [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)