

# The Past is Still Visible: Hallettsville City Hall

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Located on the SW corner of the Lavaca County Courthouse square is a two story, red brick structure built in 1917. This 100 year old building is the home of the City of Hallettsville. In spite of its age, this building was not the first structure to occupy this corner; the history of this corner goes back to 1852 when Hallettsville looked completely different...



## The Dibrell Era 1854 - 1866

When the Dibrell brothers arrived in Hallettsville the fledgling town consisted of a small unassuming courthouse on a square surrounded by dirt streets and an occasional wooden building. "This town doesn't look like much does it brother" said William Dibrell. "You're right" said Charles Dibrell, "but we are here so let's

look around and see if anything on the square will work for us.” So despite of, or maybe because of its appearance, the brothers decided to invest in the newly formed town and become local business owners.

Charles Crockett Dibrell and his younger brother, William Carter Dibrell, were both natives of Tennessee and sons of Anthony Dibrell a merchant and banker.

The location on the courthouse square that the Dibrell brothers chose was a lot on the SE corner of the square which belonged to A. W. Hicks. On May 18, 1854 Hicks and his wife Fredonia sold Lot 8 on Block 2 to the Dibrell brothers. Soon after the purchase, the brothers built a store house and opened a large mercantile firm named C. & W. Dibrell.

In December of 1855, the brothers sold part of their lot to Dr. William A. East who constructed a small building adjoining the Dibrell store house. East used the building for an office and drug store. East later formed a trade agreement with druggist J.J. Ballard. Ballard was the nephew of town promoter Collatinus Ballard.

In July of 1857, East sold his part of Lot 8 Block 2 back to the Dibrell brothers and left Lavaca County to settle in Washington County, Texas. East eventually returned to Lavaca County and practiced his profession for many years.



The firm of C. & W. Dibrell was a mainstay in Hallettsville before and during the Civil War. The firm was one of the few in town to survive after the war. However due to the financial hardship that the firm did sustain during the war, the Dibrell brothers decided to sell the business and part ways.

In March 1866, the Dibrell brothers sold their town lot and store house on Block 2 to Frederick W. and Abigail Fahrenthold. In June of that same year, the Dibrell brothers sold their interest in a livery stable to the Fahrentholds as well.

Sidebar: William Dibrell moved to New Orleans where he established a boot and shoe business. He and his family lived in New Orleans for approximately 12 years before moving to Galveston, Texas where William was a cotton broker. He later purchased property in Coleman County where he could live close to his son Frank and his family until his death.

Sidebar: Charles Dibrell was living in Galveston, Texas in 1880 and later died in Austin Texas in 1888.

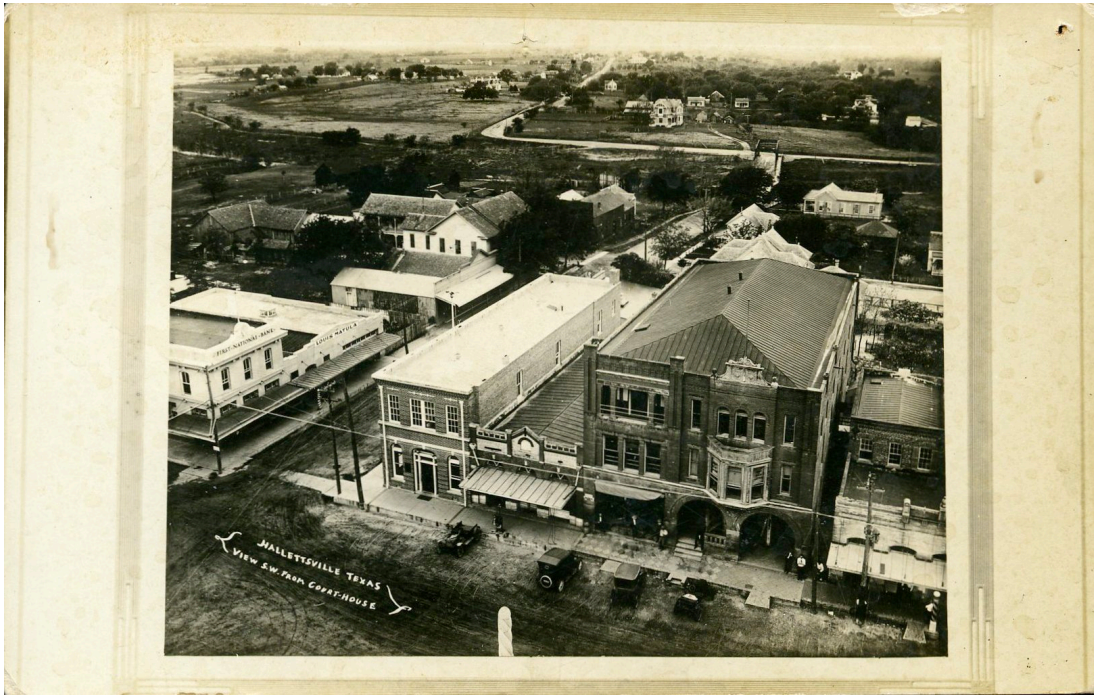
## The Fahrenthold Era 1866 - 1886

When the Fahrentholds purchased the lot in 1866, the Dibrell building occupied the south side of the lot. In 1876 the Farentholds added a rock building on the north side of the lot that shared a wall with the Dibrell building. In 1878, the Dibrell building was sold to Abigail's daughter, Mary Elstner Meininger and her husband William.

During the early 1880s the Dibrell building changed hands three times until F. W. Neuhaus purchased the south side of the lot along with the Dibrell building in a sheriff's sale on April 7, 1886.

## The Neuhaus Era 1886 - 1916

The Neuhaus family owned the S ½ of Lot 8 and the old Dibrell building from 1889 to 1916. During those twenty seven years many different business rented the Neuhaus building including the Elstner & Appelt saloon beginning in January of 1894.



## The First State Bank Era 1916 - 1928

In September of 1916, the First State Bank of Hallettsville was authorized to begin business with a capitalization of \$50,000.00. Henry J. Strunk served as President and T.Y. Hill as cashier. On October 2, Mrs. E. Neuhaus and others sold the building and the ½ lot to the newly formed First State Bank of Hallettsville.

The fledgling bank let a contract for the construction and completion of a two story brick bank and office building. The plans were prepared by Emmett T. Jackson, architect, of San Antonio, Texas and H.H. Snowden was selected as the builder. The building would be completed within 100 working days and would cost \$11,500.00. For an additional \$7.00, the builder agreed to face out the front and south side of the building with "Acme" Face brick No. 100. Snowden employed local talent including painter L.F. Mohrmann and E.J. McKinney as a foreman of the woodwork construction.

Sidebar: Howard Hibbard (H.H.) Snowden was born in Pineapple Alabama. In 1912, Snowden was awarded the contract to erect the Shiner High School for \$13,130.00 and organized a builder's supply business in Cuero in 1914. He died in Dade County, Florida in October 1964.

The building was completed, but was plagued with legal issues. During the construction, a combination of at least eleven unpaid bills, mechanic's liens, contracts, and labor's liens were filed against Snowden by local merchants and out of town subcontractors. After much finger pointing, accusatory letters and threats of litigation, the matter was finally settled.

In the fall of 1917, the First State Bank moved into its new modern two story bank building on the SW corner of the square. The building was equipped with all modern conveniences including the novel feature of a ladies' rest room located on the second floor which, at a considerable expense, was equipped for the convenience of its lady customers.

The First State Bank remained in business until 1928 when it closed its doors and was liquated. According to the FDIC, on average, more than 600 banks failed each year during 1921 and 1929. The failed banks were primarily small, rural banks such as the First State Bank.

## The Peoples State Bank Era 1928 – 1974

In January 1929, the first meeting of the stockholders of the new bank to be called the Peoples State Bank of Hallettsville was held at the National Hall. A majority of the stock holders were present among which were ten ladies. A charter with a \$40,000.00 capital stock was awarded to the bank by the Banking Commission of Austin.

A contract to purchase the building of the former First State Bank with fixtures for the sum of \$15,000.00 was signed and the new Peoples State Bank would open once the bank inspector with the necessary certificates and books arrived. The sale took place on January 30, 1929.

## The Hallettsville City Hall Era 1974 – Present

In 1974, the Peoples State Bank moved to its new location on the south side of the square. On April 3, the former home of the First State Bank and Peoples State Bank was sold to the City of Hallettsville.

A two story red brick building gracing the SW corner and marking one hundred years of history on the Lavaca County Courthouse square

