

The Past is Still Visible: the H. J. Heye Building

Brenda Lincke Fisseler

As he walked down Fourth St toward his new building it gave him time to think. When he really thought about it, he didn't know what he liked better, saddles, buggies or cars. Granted, he had been in the saddle and harness business since he was a young man, but he recognized, maybe before a lot of others in town, that cars were the future. He had known that as early as 1910 when he sold a Firestone-Columbus high wheel to his fellow businessman, T. Y. Hill. Everyone in town says that was the first automobile sold in Hallettsville and that made him smile. He liked thinking that he had been the first at something important.

Wait, I see my son Walter standing in front of our new building and he waving to get my attention. I wonder what he needs now. No, he's not waving, he's pointing up toward the front of the building. Well, what do you know, the sign arrived. H. J. Heye Auto Co. I better get over there for a closer look.

Hans Jacob Heye was born on April 2, 1866 in Utterson, Holstein, Germany. As a teenager, he apprenticed in his father's saddler business. At the age of 16, Heye sailed from Hamburg on August 31, 1882 and arrived in New York City. He then traveled to San Antonio, Texas by rail where he worked in this uncle D. Heye's saddler business. He later worked in San Diego, California, Monterey, Mexico and LaGrange, Texas before moving to Hallettsville in December of 1888.



He established the H. J. Heye saddle business in 1889 and set up shop on the east side of the courthouse square in the old Speary building.

As Heye walked toward his new building he thought about the original Heye saddle business. I might have started out small he said to himself, but I had plans. I wasn't going to stay in that old Speary building for very long.

On July 1, 1891, Heye purchased part of lots 1 and 3 in block 7 on the south side of the courthouse square from Wm. Von Rosenberg. By October of 1891, Heye had built a corrugated one story iron building on the lot and reopened his business in the new location. Heye expanded his business to include buggies and other leather products.

Those next thirteen years were good ones he thought. I returned to Germany in 1894 to visit my family and was able to convince my brother to come to America in 1897 and make Hallettsville his home. I even fell in love again. After losing my dear Letta (Zoller) in 1892 I never thought that would happen, but Emma changed my mind and my life.

Heye married Emma Bonorden in 1896 and they lived out their married life in Hallettsville. With Emma, Heye had daughter Adele and son Walter. His daughter, Marie, had been born from his marriage to Letta.

As he waited for the traffic to clear so that he could cross the dirt road, he suddenly thought about the photographers Fey and Braunig and the jeweler Andrew Stankiewicz. You know, he thought I have been really lucky when it came to my neighbors. We ran our businesses side by side; Fey and Braunig to my east and Stankiewicz to my west. Later, I had Paul Renger and Michael Saccar's City Drug store to my west, but they proved to be good neighbors as well. I don't know how many folks in town have noticed, but we even share common walls between our businesses.

On November 20, 1912, Heye purchased what was known as the Stankiewicz property from Mother Superior Agnes with the Nazareth Academy in Victoria, Texas. Stankiewicz had previously sold the property to the Mother Superior in May of 1906.

Once I had the Stankiewicz property, I knew I could move forward with my plans. My business had outgrown my small one story shop so the time had come to expand.

In April of 1914, work began on the new H. J. Heye two story brick building. Contractor Howard from Eagle Lake removed the Stankiewicz building and part of the old Heye building to make way for the new two story brick structure. The new building would be a two story structure of modern design with fine grade brick, a plate glass window and other furnishings. In July of that year, the building was nearing completion. The glass front had been placed, the finishing stucco work was on and the inside steel ceiling was practically complete. The base for the glass front was beautiful marble furnished by Hallettsville

Monument Works.

During the building process, Contractor Howard was able to erect the new building without having to interfere with Heye's established business, further than it being necessary at the time to move stock from one part of the building to the other. For example, the cast iron columns that had once graced the exterior of Heye's original building were part of the interior of the new building.

Victoria resident Jules Leffland was the architect of the Heye building and also designed the remodel of Heye's family home on North Main that same year.

How proud I was of my new building. I even had an Otis freight elevator installed to haul buggies and later automobiles to the second floor. And my plate glass windows were so big I could park a car where folks walking by could see it. I had Braunig take a picture of my building with all of my employees and I sitting on the sidewalk and you can see the car in the window behind us.

Heye entered the automobile business in 1916 when he became the local Ford dealership. His association with Ford was short lived and became a Chevrolet dealer in 1917.

In July of 1924, Heye sold his saddle, buggy and harness businesses to J. G. (Griff) Traxler and P. L. (Pete) Netardus who operated the shop under the name Traxler & Netardus.



Talk about two great fellows Heye thought as the carefully crossed Fourth Street. Griff worked for me for 21 years and Pete for 13 years. We were like brothers and I was happy to sell the saddle shop to them. By then, Walter had already been talking to me about coming into the family automobile business. And so here we are, Heye said quietly, as he finished his walk now standing in front of his building gazing up at the new sign. H. J. Heye Auto Co. he said out loud. He nodded his head slowly; he knew automobiles were the future.

Heye remained in the automobile business until January of 1931 when he sold his interest in the H. J. Motor Company to his son Walter and Anton Zaruba. The business became Heye-Zaruba Chevrolet Co.

The two story brick Heye building on the south side of the courthouse square remained in the Heye family until August of 1963 when the family sold the building to William E. and Mary Caldwell Browning.

“Great minds are related to the brief span of time during which they live as great

buildings are to a little square in which they stand...”

SIDEBAR

Jules Carl Leffland (1854 – 1924)

Leffland, was born in Denmark in 1854. He attended the Institute of Technology of Copenhagen where he received his architectural training. Leffland and his family immigrated to Texas in 1866. His first jobs involved moving homes from Indianola to Cuero after the hurricane of 1886. By 1910, from his office in Victoria, Leffland had designed and supervised the construction of at least eighty structures in an area from Wharton to Kingsville. He designed churches, schools, banks, city halls, hotel and residences. Victoria, Leffland’s adopted hometown, has numerous examples of the buildings he designed, most located in and around Main Street in the old part of town. Shortly before his death on October 21, 1924, Leffland became a citizen of the United States.

Source: Handbook of Texas Online