

# The Past is still visible: the F. W. Neuhaus Building

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F. W. Neuhaus knew what he wanted. He hadn't achieved the level of success that he now enjoyed, both financially and socially, without having a plan. When he looked at the corner of the courthouse square that he was about to purchase, his vision did not include the aging two story wooden building that now rested there. His building would be made of grander stuff, brick and lots of it, with plate glass windows and a substantial turret on the corner. He wasn't a fool. He had done his homework. The roller coaster history of this place did not surprise or alarm him. Neuhaus did not plan to make the same mistakes that had plagued the past owners. He would pay cash for this place, \$7,000.00 to be exact. This piece of real estate would be his free and clear. No liens, notes, court cases or any other such nonsense would derail his plan.



He saw himself as a fair and honest man. He wanted this piece of prime real estate, but he did not want to ruin Lindenberg's livelihood, so as part of their agreement, the current owner Fritz Lindenberg had until May 1st to dismantle and move his hotel to the southeast corner of this same block. There he could set up shop and continue to serve to the needs of visitors to their fair town. After all, the Lindenberg family had operated their fine hotel on this spot since 1868.

Neuhaus knew that the Lindenberg family were the only previous owners that had actually owned the property long enough to be successful. Since 1854, the property had changed hands so many times that it boggled even his mind. It has started out simply enough; John Harrell had purchased the property from Josiah Dowling and John W. Kelly and built a two story wooden hotel, complete with a bell, that he called the Harrell House.

However, financial difficulties soon followed, and after nearly losing the property in court, Harrell sold the property to Zachariah N. Hanna and the hotel became the Hanna House. In less than one year, Hanna sold the property to Morehouse Latting. Latting and his wife operated the hotel, now known as the Latting House, from 1858 to 1863.

What followed was that very distasteful business with W. R. Davis of Washington County. What Latting had hoped to accomplish by duping Davis, Neuhaus could neither accept nor condone. The debt ridden Latting had sold the property in 1863 knowing good and well that he could not provide Davis with a clear title because there was a lien on the property. Poor Davis did not realize he had been had until he tried to sell the property to Mattias Lindenberg, Fritz's father. In the end, after two long and complicated court cases, Lindenberg purchased the property at a sheriff's sale and Davis was left empty handed.

So now, he was about to become the new owner of a lot on which he planned to build a beautiful building that he hoped would grace the courthouse square for years to come. It was Valentines Day 1900 and it was time to stop reminiscing and meet Lindenberg so that he could close the deal.

On that day in February the Neuhaus building was born. In March 1900, Neuhaus accepted the plans of Henry Schurbohm. Schurbohm had recently been involved in the building of the Lavaca County Courthouse. The plans called for the one two-story and two one-story brick buildings with iron front, plate glass show windows and a tower in the northeast corner of the building. Bids were opened on March 28 and Allert & Schurbohm were awarded the contract.

By April 5th the Lindenberg building was removed and work on the foundation began in mid April. In mid August, Allert and Schurbohm had completed the work on the Neuhaus building and left for Gonzales, Texas. The first known tenant of the two story corner building was Sam Goldberg who moved his dry goods store into the building which included a millinery and dress making department. According to the 1900 Sanborn fire maps, the occupants of the two one-story building were a grocery and a saloon.

By 1906, the dry goods store remained, but the saloon had been replaced by a grocery store and the original grocery store had been replaced by Albert Saft's Book Store that sold crockery, toys, books and confections. Before 1912, the dry goods store was replaced by another grocery store. The buildings also housed offices for the Neuhaus family and the dentist office of C. A. Lee.

In February of 1913, F. W. Neuhaus died followed by his wife Elizabeth Gerdes Neuhaus in November of 1922. The couple's substantial estate, including the Neuhaus building, was left to their seven children, daughters Agnes Aschbacher, Faye Rouse, Selma Imrie and Alma Tusa and sons, Ernest, Edward and Frederick Jr. (Fred). Eventually, Fred Jr. became the owner of the two story building, E. A. owned the one story building in the middle and Agnes Aschbacher owned the one story building on the end next to the building owned by Fey and Braunig.

The tenants of the two story building, owned by Fred Jr., included the Appelt Bros. Grocery in the back and Henry Ahrens in the front. When F. W. Bucek moved his store into the building in the 1930's he occupied the entire first floor. Bucek was followed by the United States Post Office from 1949 to 1959, Tom J. "Percy" Rees' Place and, for a short time, Rengers Bar.

Ernst A. Neuhaus owned the middle one story building until his death in 1950. His estate sold the building to its long time tenant Peter J. Brom in 1952. Brom operated Brom's Jewelry store in the location for many years. Brom also sold furniture at that location while his sisters operated a dress shop on the second story balcony overlooking his store on the first floor. After Brom's death in 1969, the building was used as a temporary youth center for a couple of years. In 1971, the Brom estate sold the building to Robert R. Vasek.

The one story building owned by Aschbacher was the home of P.M. Brown Star Brand Shoes and the City Café, which was operated by several different individuals, including Carrie Wasserbauer. Wasserbauer, who had first worked at the East Hotel, later formed a partnership with Annie Krenek and they operated the White Café. The partners later purchased the City Café and merged the two

cafes. Carrie eventually bought out her partner and in 1953, she purchased the building from Aschbacher. On October 30, 1954, Wasserbauer was found unconscious on the kitchen floor of her café and later died at a local hospital.

The Wasserbauer estate sold the building to Charles Zavesky in 1960. Zavesky, and later his son, Charles Jr. operated Charlie's place, a local barber shop, out of that location until 1994.

As F. W. had hoped, the Neuhaus building anchored the southeast corner of the courthouse square for over 70 years, but change was coming. On September 3, 1971, Fred Neuhaus and Marjorie Wallace, the son and daughter of Fred W. Neuhaus, sold the two story building to People's State Bank. That same day, Vasek also sold his one story building to People's State Bank.

In August of 1972, the old landmark was demolished. First the inside of the buildings were gutted, then a dragline was used to remove the tower tip. The remainder of the demolition work was carried out by Hobbs Demolishing Inc. of Austin. Peoples State Bank was then erected on the site.

The remaining one-story building of the Neuhaus complex was not demolished until 1994. The Zavesky family owned and operated the barbershop in that building until October of 1983 when Charles Zavesky Jr. sold the building to Margaret Hermes. At the time of the deed, Zavesky was given the right to use the front part of the premises for a period of 10 years from the date of sale. At the end of such 10 year period or 90 days after his retirement or his death, the premises would convey to Hermes. So when Hermes sold the building to Peoples State Bank in 1990, the bank honored the agreement with Zavesky.

One interesting note was that when the barbershop building was torn down for the bank expansion, a well was discovered near the front door which probably dated back to the early hotels on this site.

*“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...”*

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