

The Past is Still Present: The Sheley Building 1852-1914

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In the Past is Still Present series, normally the history of a building on the square can be adequately told in one story. However, the Sheley building will require two stories. This first segment will cover the time period from 1852 to 1914 when a cataclysmic event changed the building forever.

The story of the Sheley building begins with local Dr. William Sheley. Sheley, a local dentist and oral surgeon was serving the local community in the mid-1870s with his office located in various local drug stores including the Bennett & Sheley Drug Store. Sheley also served as the local postmaster in Hallettsville in 1875 - 1876 and advertised that his dentist office was located at the post office.

In 1874, William married a local young lady by the name of Lillie Dubois. Lillie will soon become the principle decision maker concerning the future of the building.

On July 19, 1877, William Sheley purchased from John Woods Lot 4 in Block 2 with the improvements there on. The improvements included a two-story wooden building. Originally this block had been the home of the Hicks Hotel and following the Civil War the firms of Shoemaker & Posey, James W. Walker & Co. and later Walker & Wheeler were located on this block.

In 1879, Dr. William Sheley died and his widow, Lillie and their children, Josephine and Scott, became the owners of the Sheley building.

During the 1880's, little documentation exists about the Sheley building. In an 1890 Hallettsville newspaper mention is made of the Rauh general merchandise store which later became the Mose Steiner store in this location. Steiner later moved his business to the C.B. Elstner's rock building in 1892.

In May of 1891, Dr. W. C. Baird of Houston visited Hallettsville prospecting for a location to practice surgery and medicine and was so impressed with the city that he and his brother, Dr. J.B. Baird, decided to locate here. The Baird Bros. set up their practice in the second story of the Sheley building

In October of that same year, the Baird's moved their practice to the Riemenschneider building and in January of 1892, Dr. W. J. Warnock set up his dental practice in the vacated second story of the building. Warnock became Lillie Sheley's son in law when he married her daughter Josephine.

The first story of the Sheley building housed a variety of clients. Around the 1st of March 1892, J.J. Krudwig moved his plumbing establishment, bath fixtures and barber shop to the Sheley building. Krudwig, a competent stone mason from Missouri, had recently been awarded a contract for the foundation of the water works being built in the city. In 1891, Krudwig had joined with two local businessmen, Mr. Hedrick and Mr. Greathouse, to open a bathhouse and barbershop in the Arnim building on the square.

Also, in March of 1892, another tenant took residence in the building when Mrs. Ella Tippet moved her millinery store to the Sheley building. In 1894, Tippet moved her shop to the Simpson rock building adjoining the National Bank.

During the 4th of July celebration in 1895, the Sheley building came under fire, so to speak. During the night, local boys decided to amuse themselves with fireworks. A spark from a Roman candle ignited the mosquito bar on the gallery of the Sheley building. Only timely intervention prevented serious results.

The building had a carousel of tenants for the next several years. S.G. Tarkington, Dr. J.R. McCowan and Dr. H.C. Moore all maintained offices in the Sheley building.

One of the more amusing tenants were the Reichman Bros. who opened for business in the Sheley building on August 1, 1900. According to the *Hallettsville Herald*, they will call their new quarters the Red Front and have it painted the color of their hair. They have also engaged two red-headed clerks.

In the early 1900s, the building also became the home of Arthur P. Bagby Esq. and barber E.K.H. Handloe of Moulton.

Since the death of Dr. William Sheley in 1879, his wife, Lillie, had taken over the day to day operations of the building while her children grew up, moved away and pursued their own lives and careers. However, that situation was about to change.

In the November 26, 1903 issue of the *Hallettsville Herald*, an article appeared announcing the visit of Dr. William Scott Sheley. Scott, who had been born and raised in Hallettsville, had been a resident of Baltimore, Maryland for several years and was visiting Hallettsville before traveling to El Paso, Texas where he would join his brother in law, Dr. W.J. Warnock, in the practice of a Surgeon Dentist.

By July 1904, Scott had opened a practice upstairs in the Sheley building and in February of 1905 announced that he was forming a partnership with Dr. Mansberg of Galveston. This partnership allowed Scott to keep his Hallettsville practice

while allowing him to also work with this brother in law in El Paso and travel into Mexico to perform dental procedures.

Another short-lived tenant of the Sheley building was the Bazaar. In March 1905, Mr. and Mrs. A.H. Mayer of Yoakum reached an agreement with Mrs. Sheley to rent the lower half her building. According to the local newspaper, Mrs. Sheley immediately put carpenters and painters to work placing the building in an attractive and excellent condition. Mayer's store, The Bazaar, would carry a line of millinery, dress goods, ladies' furnishings etc. The store opened on April 10th and 11th of April.

The business failed within a few months and the Mayers returned to Yoakum.

By August of 1906, Lillie was now sole owner of the Sheley building. Previously in November of 1900, Scott Sheley had deeded his interest in the property to his mother and now Josephine Warnock deeded her interest to her mother as well.

For the next eight years the tenants of the Sheley building were Dr. Scott Sheley, with various partners, on the second floor and the Hill & Bonorden barbershop on the first floor. A.J. Hill formerly a transient photographer, took over the barbershop that E.K.H. Handloe of Moulton had opened in 1903.

But owning rental property was not without its challenges. In April of 1912, a rash of attempted burglaries had been reported and the most definite attempt occurred at Dr. W.S. Sheley's dental office.

The burglar came up the back staircase and broke into the rear door of the second floor and entered the dental office. While nothing of valuable was missing, the intruder overturned a table containing many dental instruments, scattering them all over the floor and broke the connection in the fountain-cuspidor, causing the water to flood the dental office and Hill & Bonorden's barbershop below.

In March of 1914, the local newspaper talked about improvements on the courthouse square including the completion of the drop awning on the Strunk building and that work was in progress to extend the awning to the Neuhaus and Sheley buildings.

Then in the early morning hours of December 4, 1914, everything changed.

This story will continue in an upcoming issue of the *Hallettsville Tribune Herald* with "The Sheley Building: Where there is smoke..."

