

The Past Is Still Visible; The Andrew Stankiewicz Building

By: Brenda Lincke Fisseler

The reporter was aware that everyone in town knew Andrew Stankiewicz. For over 20 years, if someone needed to purchase a piece of jewelry or his clock fixed, Andrew was the man for the job. Around Hallettsville, the dark haired and dark eyed Polish immigrant was regarded as an accomplished jeweler and watchmaker. So as he approached Mr. Stankiewicz on this April morning in 1914, he hoped to share with his readers, the man's reflections as his beloved store disappear from the south side of the square.

I don't know if you remember, but this was not my first store in Hallettsville, Stankiewicz said. Shortly after I arrived in Hallettsville around 1882, my business was located on the east side of the courthouse square, fronting on Second Street in a building owned by Louis and Clara Raymond. In 1887 I purchased the property from the Raymonds. My store was very popular, along with jewelry and clocks, my stock included shotguns, rifles, revolvers, ammunition, sewing machines and even musical instruments.



I was very proud to become part of this community. As did many local business men, I joined the Hallettsville Volunteer Fire Department soon after it was formed. One of the proudest days of my life was February 19, 1887 when I became an American citizen. A.P. Bagby and Fritz Lindenburg were kind enough to appear before the court as witnesses in my behalf.

I fell in love with a local girl, Mary Bernardina Henke, and she agreed to become my wife in January of 1888. In December of that year we became parents when our daughter, Annie Bernardina Stankiewicz, was born four days after Christmas. Here I was a 43 years old man with a new wife and a baby daughter.

The reporter noticed that the talkative Stankiewicz had suddenly fallen silent. His face momentarily appeared troubled and his attention focused elsewhere. With a slight shake of his head, Stankiewicz cleared his throat and continued.

In January of 1889, just ten days after the birth of our daughter, my Mary died. I could not believe it, she was only 22 years old and she was gone. Annie was only 10 days old when her mother died and I was left to raise her alone. Sadly my Annie only lived to see her third birthday. She became very sick with pneumonia and died at the Sacred Heart convent on February 23, 1892. I laid her to rest beside her mother.

After giving the man a moment with his thoughts, the reporter asked Stankiewicz to talk about his decision to purchase property on the south side of the square and relocate his business. The reporter showed Stankiewicz a newspaper clipping from the Hallettsville Herald that stated he was part of an upcoming building boom taking place around the square early in 1893.

It was popular knowledge that Stankiewicz had purchased part of two lots on the south side of the square in August of 1891 from Wm. Von Rosenberg, but the lots had sat vacant until popular builder, M.A. McKnight, had purchased the remaining part of the lots sandwiched between Stankiewicz and Von Rosenberg in January of 1893.

Once I heard that McKnight has purchased the property between me and von Rosenberg, and he announced that he was erecting a one story building designed for mercantile purposes, I decided it was time for me to build as well so I entered into a contract with McKnight to build me a one story building as well. McKnight informed me that he designed the two buildings to be very similar in construction and appearance.

The reporter handed Stankiewicz another clipping this one from the February 2,

1893 issue of the Hallettsville Herald which provided additional information about the McKnight/Stankiewicz collaboration. The article stated that it had learned that the work on the two buildings was to begin in approximately one week. "The Herald has seen a drawing of the front elevation of the Stankiewicz building, together with other parts of the general plan, which indicate a building of striking beauty, and as the intention of the projectors is to make one building similar to the other, a description of one will describe the other. The Stankiewicz building is to be 23 ½ by 80 feet, one story in height, the walls to be composed of brick. The front will be built chiefly of iron and glass. The door will stand inward about four feet from the sidewalk, thereby making a sort of vestibule at the entrance. Above the glass front will be some architectural frills and furbelows, while surmounting the understructure cornices of elaborate design will lend an imposing effect to the whole."

The building was beautiful, Stankiewicz agreed, as he handed the scrap of paper back, but remember I still had to pay for it. When you were looking for these articles in the newspapers, did you see my ads? Stankiewicz asked smiling. From March to, I think, July I put ads in the Herald that read "I Need Money on account of removal to my store". I was running a huge sale to raise money and empty out the store of old merchandise.

The June 15th issue of the Herald announced that Stankiewicz had moved into his elegant new quarters. The next week, the Herald announced that Stankiewicz was leaving for Chicago and New York to see the World's Fair and to purchase goods. He would be absent about six weeks.

After I opened the store and before I left for the East Coast, I ran a card of thanks in the newspaper inviting my friends and customers to come by the store and inspect my goods. I also expressed my sincere thanks for the many favors that had been extended to me during my long business experience in Hallettsville.

Stankiewicz returned on July 26th and began unpacking and displaying a handsome line of goods. In August he placed a new ad in the local newspaper advertising his Palace Jewelry Store.

1893 proved to be a good year for Stankiewicz personally as well. Forty nine year old Andrew married for a second time in October 1893 when 23 year old Annie Kolacek became his second wife.

I did not know if I would ever marry again, but Annie came into my life and we have been very happy for over 20 years. As you know, we have three children together, my daughter Mary and my sons Andrew and Alois.

Anna and I decided, once we knew the business was going to succeed at its new location, to sell the old store on Second Street. Julius Pagel purchased the property from us in September of 1896.

On May 30, 1906, Stankiewicz sold his property on the south side of the square to Mother Superior Agnes of Nazareth Academy in Victoria Texas. In November of 1912, Mother Superior sold the building and property to H. J. Heye. Heye owned the building next to Stankiewicz and in April of 1914, Heye had the Stankiewicz building removed to make way for the expansion of his own building. Stankiewicz remained in business until the actual demolition began.

I knew once Heye purchased the store from the Mother Superior, the fate of the building has been determined, Stankiewicz said, but I kept my business open until the very end. It was common knowledge that H.J. wanted to expand his existing building and the only way he could accomplish that was to buy my old building and demolish it. It is sad for me to see the building go, but I understand why Heye is doing it. I have to admit I am curious to see what the new Heye building will look like when it is completed.

Are we about done here, Stankiewicz said the reporter. I still have errands to run here in town and I am looking forward to returning home.

The reporter thanked Stankiewicz for his time and after shaking hands, the two men parted ways.

POSTSCRIPT

On January 21, 1916, Andrew Stankiewicz died at his home about one mile southeast of Hallettsville at the age of 71 years, 4 months and 13 days. He was laid to rest with his first wife Mary and their daughter Annie at the Sacred Heart Catholic Cemetery. His second wife remained in Hallettsville for a few years working as a dressmaker with her daughter Mary. By 1930, Annie, Mary and Alois were all living in California near Los Angeles.

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.