

The Past is Still Visible: The von Rosenberg Building

by Brenda Lincke Fisseler

What do you mean you found a bone?" William von Rosenberg said in disbelief as he peered into the very large hole in front of him. "Yes, Mr. von Rosenberg", one of the workmen said, "we found the bone while digging the piers for the foundation and we need to know what you want to do with it." Rosenberg closely studied the piece of bone in the man's hand. He had hoped it was the bone from some animal such as a cow or a horse, but regrettably, it looked too large and heavy. [Narrative continues below](#)

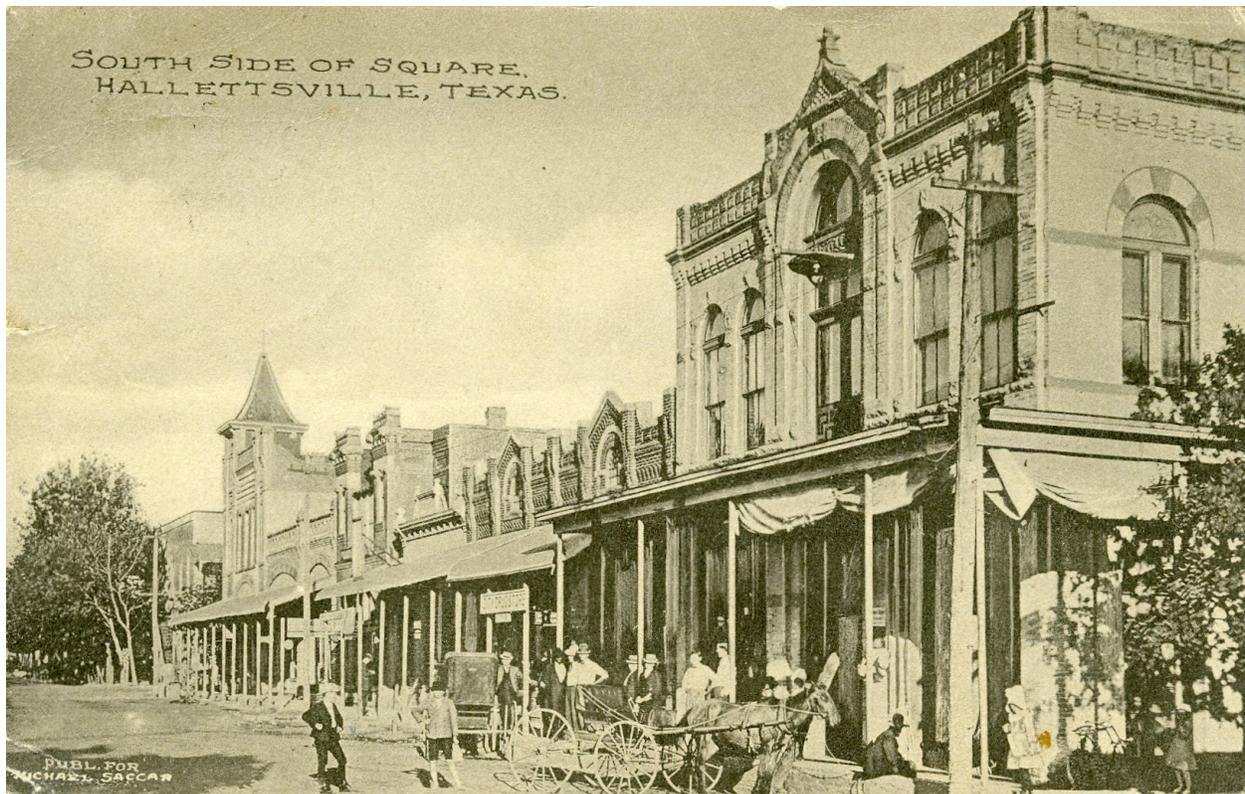
This is just what I need; he thought sarcastically, another delay. First Neuhaus sues me for property damage he says was a result of my builders throwing dirt out of the cellar into the street that allegedly forced water onto his side of the street.

If that wasn't enough, just last week Otto had to make a trip to San Antonio to consult with the architects about the foundation. We were told by McKnight Bros, our builders, that a few feet below the surface of the excavation there was a bed of water and quicksand that would render the structure insecure. So, we did what the architect suggested and had pilings driven down on which the foundation stones could be laid.

And now this! "Don't just stand there," William said. "Somebody find Mr. Lay and ask him if he can help us figure out exactly what this thing is."

After close examination, Lay pronounced the bone to be part of a femur or thigh bone of a mammoth the piece weighing about one pound. Also found was a part of the jawbone of the animal, as the shape and size of the teeth were evident.

"Well, now that question has been answered" said von Rosenberg, "can we please get back to work..."



In 1888 when William and Otto von Rosenberg moved to Hallettsville they purchased the mercantile establishment of John Speary. They renamed the business Rosenberg & Bro. and set up in the Speary rock store. Their business proved to be so successful that they purchased Lots one and three in Block seven on the south side of the courthouse square from Mary Kroschel in May of 1890.

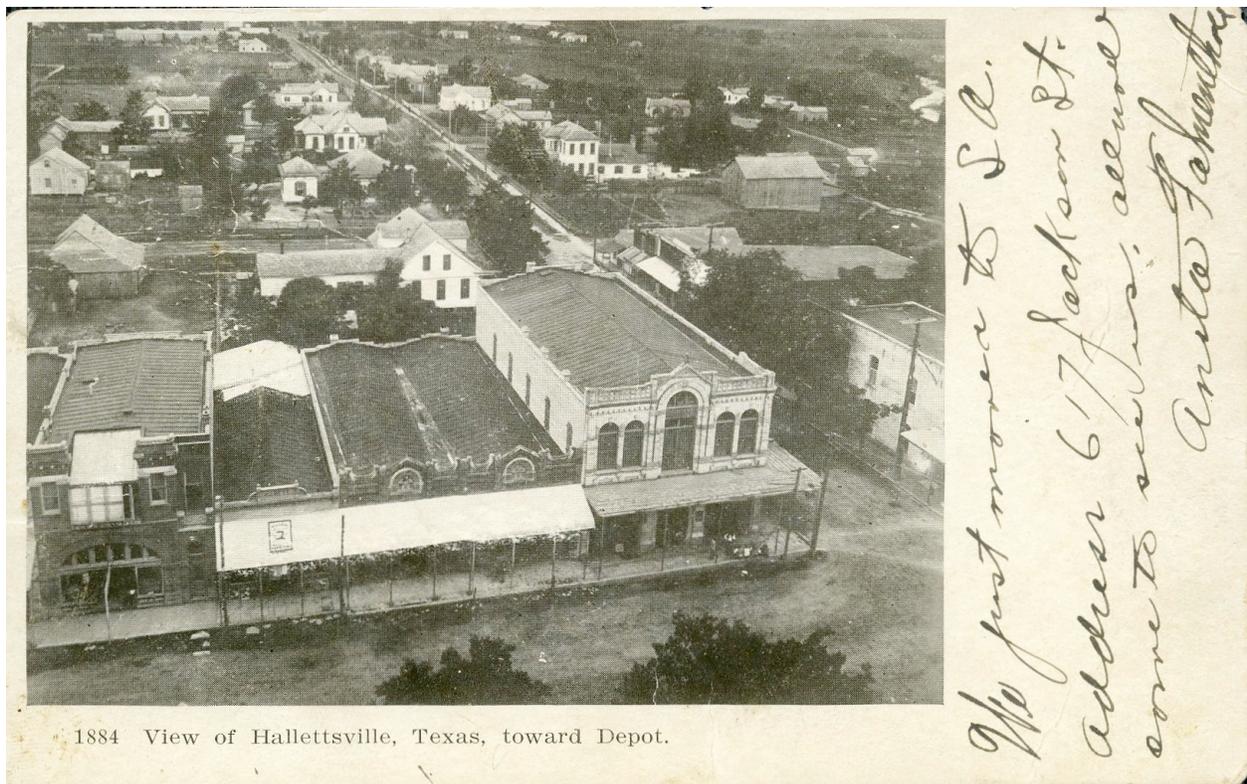
The SW corner lot on the square had long been a popular location for successful businesses. In 1854, William Pearce and Colantinus Ballard opened a saddlers & harness business; in 1857 the Ballards sold the property to Walter R. Hinckley. Hinckley operated a tin shop that sold stoves, iron, coffee pots, smoothing irons etc. The old tin shop remained at this location, under the operation of several owners, until William Kroschel purchased it in 1882 and opened the Wm. Kroschel Grocery. It was after Williams' death that C.J., William, and Otto Rosenberg purchased the property from the widow Mary Kroschel. Four months later, C.J. sold his interest in the lots to William and Otto.

In February of 1891, materials were being selected for the new building. The Rosenberg Bros. had Mr. J.J. Krudwig select rocks from a quarry located near Muldoon in Fayette County for the trimming of the building and white bricks were being hauled to the site from the steam brick yards in Gonzales. The newspaper office reported to its readers that Charles S. Eberhardt, representing

the San Antonio firm of Gordon & Laub Architects, had stopped by the office with a scroll of drawings representing the ground plan and front and side elevations of the Rosenberg building. The newspaper declared that the drawings indicate that the building will be one of the most attractive and handsomest two story business houses in South Texas.

So after many vexatious delays, including the discovery of the bones, work on the Rosenberg building began again in earnest and the work was being pushed as rapidly as practicable.

“Finally we are getting somewhere” said William to his brother Otto as they stood watching the workers wrestle the cornerstone of the building into place. After all of the delays earlier that spring, this day in April found the brothers to be in high spirits. Otto nodded his head in agreement. “The rough masonry has been finished and the workmen have begun laying the dressed stone and brick” Otto added, “and it paid off that the McKnight brothers brought in extra help, such as Pat Heffernan of Yoakum, to make up for the time lost during the delays.”



1884 View of Hallettsville, Texas, toward Depot.

The cornerstone of the Rosenberg building was laid by J.F. McKnight bearing this inscription:

By May, the local newspaper reported that the brick and stone work of the

Rosenberg building was complete and that the structure was an imposing addition to the south side of the square. It also reported that the woodwork and finishing would be completed in about six weeks.

In July, the Rosenberg brothers moved their stock on general merchandise into their new building and opened their business under the name of Wm. v. Rosenberg & Bro.

“We did it” William von Rosenberg said to the brother Otto. “We are all moved in and ready to open the doors for business “I have another idea” said William, “do you remember those old bones that we found during construction and put in the window of the old store? Let’s put them on display in the new store too.” Otto smiled and nodded at his brother in agreement. “Fine by me” he said “now you need to go home to Metta and I know Lisette is waiting for me to come home for dinner.” “We have a big day tomorrow”

From 1891 until the death of William von Rosenberg on February 5, 1905, the brothers maintained ownership of the Rosenberg building and in 1892 opened a bank in the store. In October 1917, Metta von Rosenberg, the widow of William, sold her partnership interest in the store and property she had inherited from her husband to her brother in law Otto von Rosenberg. Otto retained ownership of the business until December 1921 when he sold his interest in the building and property to the 1st State National Bank.

The von Rosenberg building is still located on the southwest corner of the Lavaca County courthouse square and is currently owned by James & Zoy Kocian.

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...”