

The Past is Still Visible: The Woods/Neuhaus Buildings

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The Past is Still Visible column normally focuses on one building on the square. This story is different in that the story of these two buildings is so intertwined that it is complicated to separate one from the other. So in this article the story of the Woods building and the Neuhaus addition will be told as one story.

When the census taker visited the home of F.W (Frederick William) Neuhaus in 1900, among other questions, he asked the 65 year old Neuhaus what his occupation was. Neuhaus looked directly at the census taker and proudly answered: Capitalist. The native of Westphalia Germany prided himself on having become a landmark in Hallettsville with his cattle, real estate and money-lending ventures.

In many ways Neuhaus' equal, John Woods was the grandson of an early settler of Lavaca County the famous, or to some infamous, W.G.L. Foley. Woods, a lawyer by profession, maintained a private practice while also serving in public office in his home county which eventually led to election to state office. Woods built up an extensive business in Lavaca County in land and financial interests and like Neuhaus was involved in money lending ventures.

In July of 1888, Woods and Neuhaus consummated a real estate venture that would change the appearance of the west side of the courthouse square forever.

On September 1, 1887 Woods had purchased part of Lot 4 in Block 2 from Lillie Sheley, the widow of William Sheley. During 1887 and 1888, Woods built two brick buildings on the lot, one a single story that fronted on the courthouse square and behind it a two story brick building.

Wood's first tenant was the local barber. E.W. (Earnest Walter) Halls' barbershop moved into the single story structure in February 1888 while Woods set up his office in the second story of the back building.

In July of 1888, Woods sold his lot and buildings to F.W. Neuhaus. The *Hallettsville Herald* noted in the July 26th edition that:

"Hon John Woods has sold his handsome property including two brick buildings on the west side of the square to Mr. F.W. Neuhaus for \$5000.00."

By October 1888, Woods had vacated the second story office and the Hon S.C. Patton, a local lawyer, set up shop in the available office space where he remained until 1891. In February of 1889, Neuhaus placed an ad in the local paper that the lower story of the two story brick building was for rent.

Neuhaus, while pleased with his investment, had bigger plans. In the May 30, 1889 issue of the *Hallettsville Herald* an article appeared that informed the reader that an addition was to be made to Neuhaus's brick store on the west side of the square. Mr. James McGall was the contractor and the building would be a one story brick fashioned after the Rabb drug store.

Sidebar: The local newspaper announced in July of 1889 that John Woods and his family would be leaving for Del Rio within the month. Woods, his wife Mary, and their two sons moved to Del Rio in Val Verde County and established the banking firm of John Woods & Sons. In the summer of 1896, they moved to San Antonio and in July of 1904 established the Woods National Bank. John Woods died in Bexar County Texas on March 14, 1915.

The announcement was made that the Neuhaus addition would be completed in August of 1889 and ready for occupancy. The addition had been leased to Mr. Henry Krause, originally of Columbus, Texas who would open a dry goods and clothing business that fall.

Sidebar: John Gerdes of Antioch murdered. John Gerdes was stabbed in an altercation with two individuals at the home of his uncle, Casper Gerdes in Hallettsville. Gerdes had been working on the new Neuhaus brick building on the west side of the square and intended to go home Sunday after having boarded with his uncle. HH August 15, 1889

Mitchel & Krause Dry Goods & Groceries opened in the Neuhaus addition in October of 1889. Emil Henry Mitchel had also moved to Hallettsville from Colorado County and partnered with Henry Krause in the local business. The two men had an established location on the square prior to the move to the Neuhaus building.

By May of 1891, Henry Krause was a prominent merchant in Moulton, Texas. Sometime after December 1889 the two men parted ways and their partnership was dissolved. Krause moved to Moulton and Mitchel remained in business in the Neuhaus building until 1912.

Sidebar: Mitchel Bankruptcy from the Houston Chronicle January 2, 1912.

Emil Henry Mitchel, proprietor of a general merchandise store at Hallettsville, Texas, has filed a voluntary petition in bankruptcy in the United States district court. This action followed the filing of a petition of involuntary bankruptcy against him. Claims were filed against the estate

including F.W. Neuhaus for rent for the store building. Mitchel's holdings were sold and his business dissolved.

In July 1891 the local newspaper announced that the barbershop owned and operated by E.W. Hall in the Neuhaus building since 1888 would vacate its current location and move in the Appelt building.

While E.H. Mitchel remained in the Neuhaus addition until his unfortunate professional demise in 1912, the original Woods building had a variety of tenants who experienced various degrees of professional success. They included J.M. Vesmirovsky & Co., Eugene Blakeslee, the barber Jack Walton, Reichmann Bros., Charles Senftenberg Grocery and Confectionary and Dan Gandy Grocery.

On February 27, 1913 the self-proclaimed capitalist Frederick William Neuhaus died. His estate was valued at \$266,115.67 or little over 6 million dollars in 2018. When Mrs. F. W. (Elizabeth Gerdes) Neuhaus died, the couples substantial estate was left to their seven children, daughters Agnes Aschbacher, Faye Rouse, Selma Imrie and Alma Tusa; sons Ernest, Edward and Frederick Jr.

After F.W.'s death, the extended Neuhaus family retained ownership of this property until the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the family ownership the tenants included S.M. Levy Furniture Store, Hill & Bonorden barbershop, Bonorden & Zavesky barbershop, Theatre Confectionery, Dickey's Cleaning & Pressing Shop, Rogan Beal's Confectionery, Beal's Cleaners and Jahn Cleaners.

In 1969, Neuhaus heirs C.F. Aschbacher and wife Agnes sold their ½ interest in lots 4 and 6 to Toubin Bros. In 1972, E.T. Neuhaus sold his ½ interest in lots 4 and 6 to Gussie Bucek.

“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...”