



The Sheley Building: Where There’s Smoke...

By Brenda Lincke Fisseler

Sometime around midnight, H. J. Strunk smelled smoke; then he spotted the flames. From his home north of town, Strunk called the night telephone operator, Miss Alma Doehring, who phoned the power plant. Immediately the whistle sounded followed shortly by the fire bell. The fire department and others rushed to the scene, but the fire, fed by a stiff north wind, had fully engulfed the two-story wood frame Sheley building. Only the prompt and continued hard work of the firemen and excellent water pressure saved the adjoining buildings and subdued the fire.

At the time of the fire, the Sheley building had three tenants: the dental office of Drs. Sheley & Beck upstairs and the Hill & Bonorden barber shop and the Clyde Dickey cleaning and pressing establishment on the ground floor.

When it was safe to return to the building, Dr. Sheley and Dr. Beck discovered that they had lost their instruments and office fixtures, while Mr. Dickey’s loss was total including articles of clothing belonging to some of his patrons. The only items saved from the flames were several suits and Dickey’s desk and chair. Hill & Bonorden saved their three chairs and some other equipment.

**Note: After the fire, Clyde Dickey re-opened his cleaning and pressing establishment in the building adjoining the Nolen Produce Co. and Hill & Bonorden moved to the Strunk Building.*

The owner, Mrs. Lillie Sheley, was undaunted. She immediately informed the public that she intended to rebuild on the site. On April 23, 1915, the *Hallettsville Herald* reported that the architectural firm of J. Henry Yentzen & H.J. von Rosenberg of Yoakum would supervise the construction of a one-story brick building for Mrs. Sheley, on the west site of the square where the two story frame building had stood. The dimension of the building would be 34 X 80 feet faced with red mat brick and a plate glass front facing the square.



“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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Sheley Building

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While the building faced some delays due to lack of materials, it was reported in mid-June that the building was nearing completion and would be occupied by a new tenant, Miller Bros. As predicted, the Miller Bros. moved and selected Wednesday, July 7, 1915, as opening day for the White Front Sanitary Grocery.

Note: None of the previous three tenants from the fire ever returned to the new Sheley building including Lillie Sheley's son Dr. Scott Sheley. Dr. Sheley died on October 2, 1916 of serious liver ailments. . Scott, who had been born and raised in Hallettsville, had been a resident of Baltimore, Maryland for several years then moved 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.

On March 8, 1917, Josephine Sheley Warnock became the owner of the building. Josephine the daughter of Lillie Sheley lived in El Paso, Texas with her husband Dr. W.J. Warnock. When Josephine was deeded the property by her mother, the Miller Bros. grocery store were still tenants.

In March of 1929, the Sheley family ownership came to an end. H.H. and Alice Ahrens purchased the Sheley building from Josephine and had big plans for the building.

Almost immediately, workmen were engaged in remodeling the building to house Ahrens large and growing business. Ahrens planned to spend between \$1,500.00 to \$2,500.00 in remodeling to make the store complete and up to date in every way. When completed, the Ahrens would move their dry goods store from its present location in the Neuhaus building to their new location

Note: When H.H. Ahrens moved his store from the Neuhaus building, the firm of F.K. Bucek and Sons rented the Neuhaus building for their store.

The Ahrens remained in this location from 1929 until 1956 when it was announced in the local newspaper that a final sale would begin in July of 1956. Mr. Ahrens had announced his retirement and the doors of his store would be closing forever.

Note: Two deaths of note took place during the Ahrens era at the Sheley building. First, Mrs. Henry H. (Alice Thulemeyer) Ahrens died on January 20, 1932. H.H. Ahrens later married Lillie Braunig, the daughter of local photographer H.J. and Mary Braunig. Second was the death of Lillie Sheley in El Paso, Texas in 1936.

The closing of the Ahrens store provided a new opportunity for a business already established in Hallettsville. On May 7, 1957, Perry Brothers and H.H. Ahrens Sr. closed a deal in which Perry's purchase the dry goods stock of Ahrens Dry Good Store and acquired a long-term lease on the building. Immediately, Perry's Bros. staged a huge sale to move all the Ahrens merchandise. Once the stock was sold, a remodeling project could begin.

Note: The Perry's Bros. store was previously located in the Matula building on the west side of the square before acquiring the lease to the Sheley building.

In June, the remodeling was underway. The cost of the remodeling would be approximately \$7,500.00 including the building work and fixtures to equip the store. The front of the building was torn out and replaced with a new glass front. All new lighting and fixtures would be installed as well as air-conditioning. The grand opening took place on Thursday July 25, 1957.

Note: On June 15, 1963, Henry H. Ahrens Sr. died in the Renger Memorial Hospital. Ahrens had first been associated with the dry good business in Yoakum, Texas before moving to Hallettsville to establish the Ahrens-Cook dry goods store. He later bought out his partner and remained in business until his retirement in 1956.

The Sheley building remained in the Ahrens family in 2005