



The A.W. Hicks Hotel & Tavern

By Brenda Lincke Fisseler

Aretus William Hicks and his wife, Fredonia, arrived in town in 1846 after a short stay in Houston, TX. Collatinus Ballard staked Hicks to a location for a hotel and tavern on the west side of the town square, diagonally across from Ballard's log store and adjacent to Dr. M.B. Bennett's office. Only after the hotel was constructed and had established itself did Ballard deed the property to Hicks on May 7, 1852. The property was Lots 2 –8 on Block 2. Along with the hotel was outbuildings, a large garden and stables located diagonally west and north from the hotel and fronting on the Lavaca River.

In August 1852, an ad appeared in the Texian Advocate for the sale of the hotel and tavern.

In June 1854, Hicks purchased Lots 1—8 in Block 13 from Josiah Dowling and John W. Kelly for use as a stable for his hotel and tavern.

On October 11, 1855, Hicks found a buyer for his hotel. Dr. Daniel C. Bellows and his wife, Mary, purchased the hotel & stable. When the debt for the purchase was paid, Hicks would give a full and perfect title to the property. Now the hotel was no longer the Hicks Hotel but the Mansion House.

However, Hick's problems with the Bellows began immediately. In January 1856, Hicks filed a civil suit in the Lavaca County District Court concerning an unpaid note. This was the beginning of 18 months of legal issues between Hicks, Bellows and other parties.

*Note: For more detailed information on these suits, please visit www.hallettsvilleblockparty.com.

Along with his mounting civil issues, Bellows was also involved in a local shooting. He escaped from the Lavaca County jail and became a "transient" person. With Bellows in the wind and his location unknown, his wife, Mary, was left holding the bag. She had now become the proprietor of the Mansion House with no visible means to conduct the hotel or care for her family.



Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Hicks, from daguerreotypes made 90 years ago.

"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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Under the circumstances, Mary, after closing the hotel for two months, decided to execute a lease of the premises to N.S. Cheek. The agreement was that Cheek would pay Mary rent and provide Mary and her children was a family room at the hotel and other perks. This lease set off yet another flurry of legal issues based on the premise that Mary did not have the authority to make the lease in the absence of her husband. “Bellows vs. Cheek finally appeared before the Supreme Court of Texas on November 24, 1856.

*Note: The Texas Supreme Court reversed the lower court ruling for Bellows and ruled in favor of Cheek.

Before the case reached the high court, the Bellows attempted to solve their financial woes by selling the Mansion House and stables to John W. Kelly for \$1.00 on September 12, 1856. If Bellows managed to pay off all his debts, the agreement with Kelly would be null and void. If not, then Kelly could sell the property to the highest bidder to pay Bellow’s debts.

This sale and settlement was only possible because the truant Bellows had returned, voluntarily or otherwise, to Lavaca County and appeared in court on September 11, 1856 for the outstanding assault with intent to murder charge. The jury found Bellows guilty of the charge and was fined \$25.00 plus court cost. He was committed to the county jail until the fine and costs were paid.

On June 18, 1857, John W. Kelly sold at auction the Mansion House property sold to him by the Bellows in September 1856. Oddly enough, the property was purchased by A.W. Hicks thru his agent, Collatinus Ballard for \$50.00 plus a credit of \$1,036.00 which was the amount that the Bellows indebtedness to Hicks.

The Hicks Hotel finally closed its doors when the hotel, tavern and stable were sold to Collatinus Ballard and John W. Kelly on July 2, 1857.

Mary Berry Ponton Bellows died in 1856. Daniel C. Bellows escaped Lavaca County virtually unscathed. In the 1860 census, Bellows was found living in Henderson County, Texas and listed his occupation as a school teacher. In 1870, Bellows was living in Blanco County, Texas working as a school teacher with a wife and three children.

A.W. Hicks and his wife remained in Lavaca County. They are buried in the Hallettsville Memorial Cemetery; A.W. died in 1883 and Fredonia in 1896.

*Note: All the Civil and Criminal cases generated a tremendous amount of paperwork. The case are available for your leisure reading at the Lavaca County Archives.

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