

February 2020 Column

I guess I'm going to have to admit that I've been around a while now. In other words, I'm getting old, and starting to prattle on about how things used to be.

Marty and I attended an event at the Heritage Museum last week, and my mind really took a trip in the Wayback Machine. If you don't know what the Wayback Machine is, you're probably under 50 years old, and never watched Mr. Peabody and Sherman on the *Rocky & Bullwinkle Show*.

At the Heritage museum, they have an entire wall full of photos of Seguin entitled "Now and Then" which shows various locations around Seguin as they are now, and as they were then. I realized that I was getting old because I distinctly remembered most of the "Thens".

I must have spent the better part of an hour staring at that wall of photos, and explaining (prattling) what was what to various folks who are not native Seguinites, or are too young to remember. I probably bored them silly.

My reference only goes back to the 1950's, so there are still many photos that even I am too young to remember.

The photo wall was a reminder of how many of our meaningful structures have disappeared, like the Ranger Station and the blacksmith shop at Guadalupe & Court, and the beautiful art-deco swimming pool at Starcke Park. My friends and I spent many a summer day in that pool. Then there was the classic railroad depot building that was demolished virtually overnight, despite the protest and the disappointment of everyone in Seguin.

However, much of downtown still remains intact, albeit with altered facades and different names in the front. There were the clothing stores like Reichman's, Geo. Mendlovitz, Schmidt's, and A. Deutsch. There were the hardware/appliance/ sporting goods stores like Vivoux's, Western Auto and Sagebiel's. There were the "5-10 cent" stores like Duke & Ayers, Perry's and Lehman's. There were even grocery stores downtown like the Red & White, Diebel & Bettge's and the White House Meat Market. There must have been 5 or 6 barber shops tucked into the narrower buildings throughout downtown.

The Far West News Stand was in one of those narrow slots on Austin Street. I must have bought hundreds of comic books in that store. I remember sneaking to the back of the store with my friends and catching a peek at some of the more – ahem - "adult" periodicals.

Starnes' Music Center was located on Austin St. in what is now the parking lot across from First United Bank. They sold everything, and I mean everything musical. They had sheet music, vinyl records, instruction books and every instrument known to man crammed into that store. Mr. Starnes even taught music. I bought all my vinyl records there, and you could actually play them before you bought them! Don McLean lamented the demise of stores like that in his song *American Pie*... "I went down to the sacred store/ Where I heard the music years before/ But the man there said the music wouldn't play."

I could be wrong, but it seems to me the only retail building downtown that still remains unaltered and under the same name is Starcke Furniture. Heck, it's even been run by the same family for 110 years, and sells the same product. Now that is quite a record, and says a great deal about the Starcke family's devotion to downtown Seguin.

It's not really what you would call retail, but on that same block with Starcke Furniture is the Palace Theatre, where the façade remains unchanged from the 1950's, and has been under continuous operation by Dan Daniels and his family since way before I was born. I can remember being dropped off at the theatre with a quarter – admission was 15 cents, which left enough for a 10-cent bag of popcorn!

A few blocks north of the Palace, the Texas Theatre was also owned and operated by the Daniels family until it was purchased by the Seguin Conservation Society in the mid-nineties. It's been expanded, but its original facade remains unchanged.

It seems that a quarter could buy a lot in the 1950's. I remember having a quarter, and walking from my school, (St. Joseph's, which is now St. James) during lunch hour to Lehman's on Austin St. next to Vivroux's Hardware. At the Lehman's soda fountain, I'd have a chili dog for 15 cents and a nickel root beer. On the way out, I'd stop at the candy counter for a "nickle's worth" of chocolate stars, which they weighed on a scale and put in a little white bag, for the walk back to school.

And then there's The Oak, which is also unchanged, and has enough stories to fill 10 columns!

I guess I've done enough prattling now, so the Wayback Machine has now returned to base.

Gosh, I love this town!