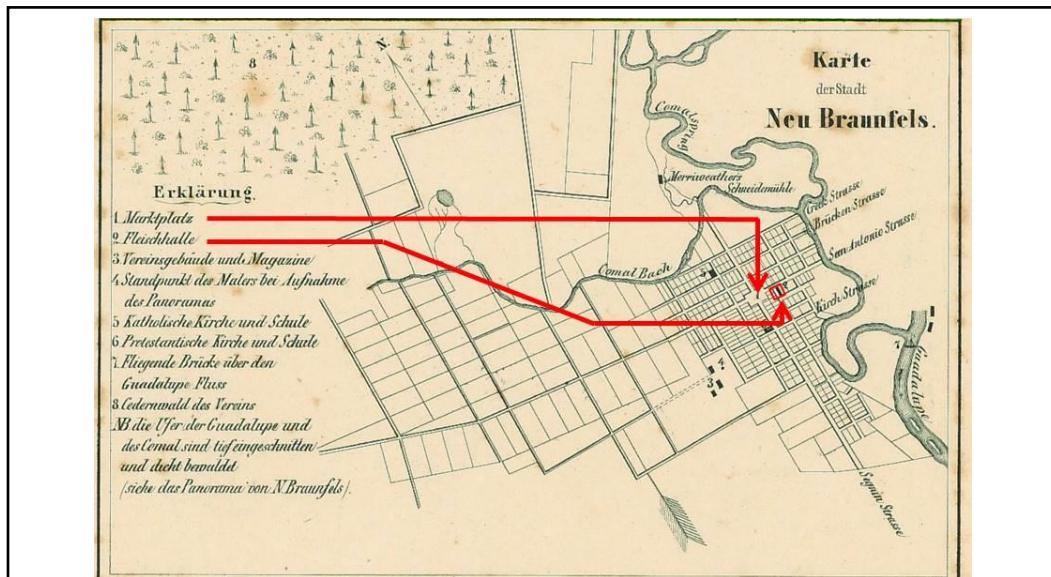


New Braunfels Market Plaza

I. CONTEXT

In New Braunfels, Texas today, there is a small park called the Market Plaza. It is just a few minutes' walk from the Main Plaza, which is located in the center of town. Compared to the Main Plaza and other more prominent historic areas in the city of New Braunfels, the Market Plaza history has remained relatively unknown or at least rarely mentioned. It is located on 292 Tolle Street and sits in a quiet area near the Comal River. The Market Plaza area was intentionally set aside at the time of the founding of New Braunfels and it has had many names over the years. Today, many would be surprised that it was not originally meant to be a park, instead, it was to serve to assist the German immigrants survive. An early map (circa 1850) shows that the large lot had a building located on the Southeast end of the lot called the *Fleischhalle*. *Fleischhalle* translates literally as "Meat Hall," but "Meat Market" or "Butcher Shop" would be a more recognizable English name.



Early map reflecting important areas of newly established New Braunfels. No. 1 *Marktplatz* is now known as the Main Plaza. No.2 identifies the location of the *Fleischhalle* (Meat Market) a short distance to the east of the Main Plaza and, at that time, near the outskirts of the town. Source: *Texas State Library and Archives Commission*.



Interestingly, the 1850 map shows that it was what is called Main Plaza today in the center of town was originally called *Marktplatz*, which in English is Market Plaza. As in most in the United States or in Europe, the Main Plaza or Town Square was reserved for special occasions, festivities, parades, and was placed in the center of town. The Market Plaza, which is the subject of this narrative, is not to be confused with the original 1850s *Marktplaza* (Main Plaza). It may not have had a name initially, as the early map only refers to it as the location of the *Fleischhalle*. However, research reflects that the same property upon which the *Fleischhalle* was located was called several different names over its history, sometimes on the same page of the newspaper. The most common early names (in English) for the site include Meat Market, Market Plaza, Market Square, and Market Oval. For the purpose of this narrative, the current name Market Plaza will be used in the narrative except when quoting an early source.

A. Early History

With German immigrants awaiting on the Texas Coast, then moving inland following the Guadalupe River, Prince Solms had quickly purchased a portion of the Veramendi Plat about

half way between San Antonio and Austin. It was located on the Guadalupe and Comal Rivers, and adjacent to the *El Camino Real*, popularly known at that time as the San Antonio Nacogdoches Road. The town Prince Solms established was to serve as a stopover for the immigrants on their way to the distant Fisher Miller Grant already purchased by a group of German noblemen called the *Verein Zum Schutz deutscher Einwanderer in Texas* (Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, hereinafter referred to as the "Verein").¹ The *Verein* was not fully aware that the location of the Fisher Miller Grant, was very isolated at the time, with no direct roads to get there, especially from the Texas Coast.

Prince Solms named the town New Braunfels and it seemed to be a perfect place with trees available for building of homes, some rich land nearby for farms, and an abundance of fresh water. Although the Native Americans had visited and lived in the area for short periods, it was not known to be a particularly dangerous area subject to attacks. What was lacking were two important necessities, housing of any kind and adequate food supply. The closest towns were San Antonio to the South, Seguin to the East, and Austin to the north. All would be unsatisfactory to rely on for food supply on a daily basis as well as inexpensively.

Prince Solms had Nicholas Zink, the *Verein's* Civil Engineer, to survey the area and lay out streets and town lots for the immigrants as well the future location of churches, and town property. As for homes and food, the immigrants would help one another to build their own homes of various kinds, but they were promised, and they expected, the *Verein* to assist in the beginning to furnish basic foodstuffs to sustain them until gardens and farms could be established.

The *Verein* did attempt to provide some food supplies kept in their storage areas on the hill. Often overlooked is that as part of that assistance, there was a special lot allocated by the *Verein*,

to provide meat products from its *Fleischhalle*. It appears that in the early establishment of the town, neither the *Verein* nor the city (who took over after the *Verein*), charged for the butchering service until the successful establishment of the town was assured. The only charge was for the cost to purchase the cattle for butchering. This prevented additional hardship for the immigrants who, besides having little money, had to have houses built, home gardens to plant and draw from, and cattle of their own to raise at nearby farms.

While it is not known exactly when the first butcher may have begun work at the *Fleischhalle* there are some early references of the Butcher Market that would indicate it was in the same year the town was founded in 1845. Early German Pioneer resident and first schoolteacher in New Braunfels, Hermann Seele wrote:

On Monday the eleventh of August [1845], I was to begin my teaching. If, on that morning, we had not been awoken by the noise of the people who, already before dawn, were scurrying past our house to Henry Burkhardt's slaughterhouse (Burkhardt was the society's butcher . . .) to pick up the ration of beef supplied them every morning by the society, the report of the cannon would have aroused us. It was fired each day at dawn by the civil guard.²

Dr. Ferdinand Roemer, a German Scientist/Geologist, who explored and studied various areas of Texas, wrote about his stay in New Braunfels:

Coffee, cornbread, and beef were the mainstay of our meals; but occasionally we were served wild turkey and venison. In accordance with an American custom, we would receive warm meat for breakfast, mostly beef. The latter was the cheapest commodity, since it could be bought for three cents a pound. The management of the *Verein* would buy a whole herd of cattle at one time and then slaughter several head daily. The meat was sold to the colonists at cost. All other foodstuffs were very high in price, since they had to be brought from long distances.³

As time progressed, while other butchers began to set up their own butcher shops, in 1857, the city imposed a requirement that the animals must be sold through the Market House (*Fleischhalle*).

No butchering within city except in approved facilities. Animals must be sold through Market House from 9 a.m. or 5-7 p.m. on Saturdays. All hides are to be registered with City records within 24 hours with fees.⁴

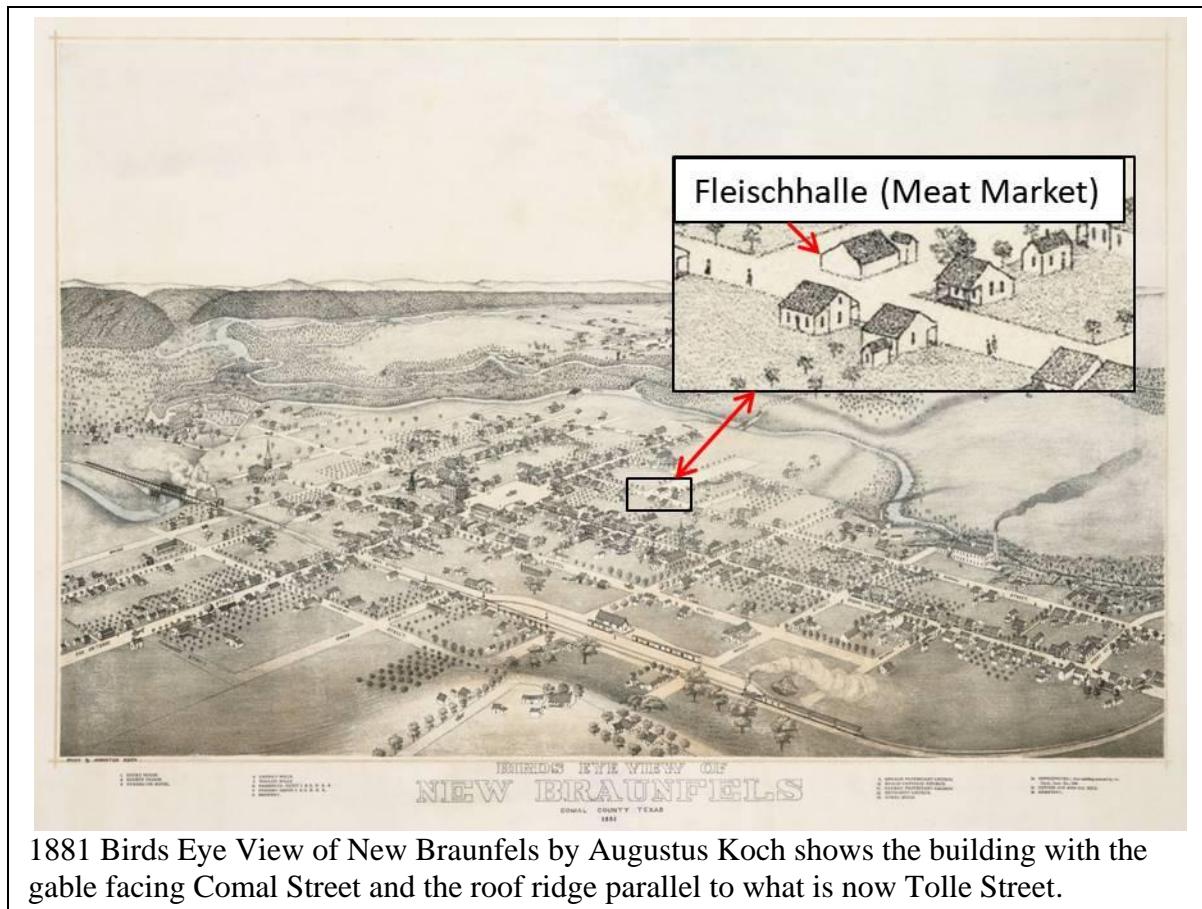
The city requirement was restated in August 1863:

... there is no cause to alter the ordinance regulating the sale of meat other than . . (that) meat of all animals butchered and brought for sale within the limits of the corporation has to be brought to the Markethouse (it stood on Market Plaza) and shall be sold only at the Markethouse during the summer months till 7 a.m. and during the winter months till 8 a.m. after which time the meat left . . may be sold outside the Markethouse.⁵

The following is an interesting and more detailed record of a personal recollection of the Butcher House and the property there from the early 1900s. It has been slightly revised for this narrative. It not only substantiates that the city still maintained a building for butchering, on the Market Plaza, it gives some insight of what the Butcher House and the Market Plaza were like:

Paul Jahn, born in around 1892 and first attended school in 1899, remembers that as a child, four or five of the town butchers rented from the city a shed which was built by the city on the portion of the Market Plaza alongside Comal Street. The rest of the Plaza was bordered with Crepe Myrtle trees and served as a children's playground.

The shed was about 20' wide and 40' or 60' long and was never painted. The walls were 1x4's or 1x6's nailed to the frame horizontally with about 1" between the sidings to allow free circulation of air. This building appears on the 1860 map of the city of New Braunfels, and the 1881 Birds Eye View of New Braunfels by Augustus Koch shows the building with the gable facing Comal Street and the roof ridge parallel to what is now Tolle Street, so evidently the door opened on the north side of the building, facing what is now the S.W. Bell Telephone Co. as no door or windows are in evidence on the Koch drawing, [see map below] evidently windows were not needed as the sides of the building were open to the breezes.



1881 Birds Eye View of New Braunfels by Augustus Koch shows the building with the gable facing Comal Street and the roof ridge parallel to what is now Tolle Street.

Each butcher had his own cutting block beneath his signs in an area which he rented from the city. In the afternoon, the butchers would go out to the farms to purchase the beeves, then they would butcher and field-dress and skin the carcasses there in the country, then bring the carcasses to the shed to hand and cool out overnight, dropping the skins off at either of the two tanneries . . .

About four o'clock in the mornings the butchers would gather at the market and cut up the beef and the town dogs would gather around from their breakfast handout of scraps.

Paul Jahn relates the following story that was passed on to him by Arthur Mergele, son of butcher Emil Mergele. On one such morning a heated political discussion ensued, and as the pro and cons of the Democrats versus the Republicans progressed while the butchers were wielding their cleavers in the performance of their chores, Emil Mergele cried out: "Ach,

**I've cut off my finger! Oh Doggone! The dogs already swallowed it!"
Before Mergele could bend to retrieve his severed digit, it had been gulped
down by one of the dogs along with the other meat scraps.**

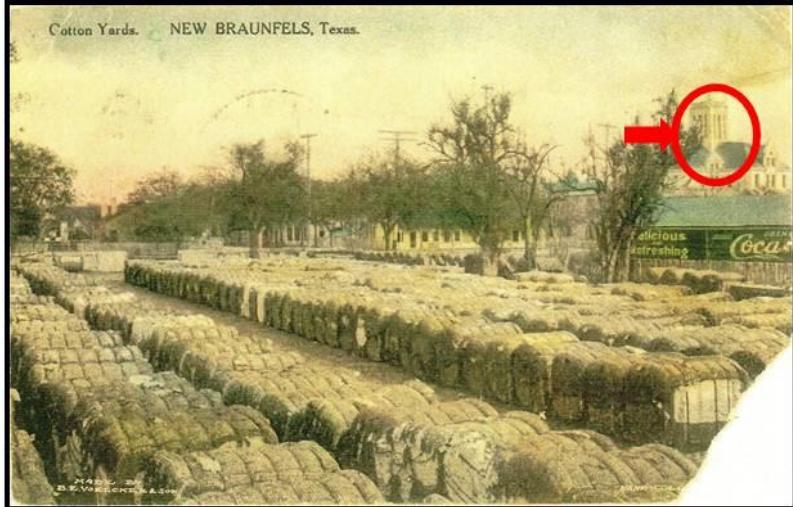
...

After the butchers completed their task of turning the sides of beef into roasts, steaks, etc., they loaded up their two-wheel horse-drawn carts which had a box for the meat with a hinged double lid that provided access from either side of the cart, and started on their rounds of morning deliveries. Each little wagon driven by the butcher mounted on a seat across the front had its own distinctive bell, which he rang as he proceeded up and down the streets. Housewives and servant girls listened to his progress and became [made] ready to go out to the street to hail the driver and make their daily purchases at their front door.⁶

While the Butcher House on the Market Plaza served an essential need for survival of the immigrants in the early years of New Braunfels, the Butcher House would eventually go away as several other establishments began to take its place. In addition, the residents likely began to tire of having it so close to them and the sanitation was undesirable. The following was reported in 1908

A petition by citizens on Market Square called attention to the unsanitary condition of the surroundings. On motion, the matter was referred to the proper committee.⁷

Throughout the years, the Market Plaza was used for many reasons and rent would be collected.⁸ An old postcard reflects that one of the uses of the plaza was to store cotton brought in from the fields, before it was sent to the mills.



The photo at the top, ca. 1909, shows cotton bales being stored at the Market Plaza before sending to the mills. The photo at the bottom, 2017 (J.B. Coers), is at the approximately same angle. Note that the Comal County Courthouse may be seen in the top right hand angle in both photos.

During the early 1900s and particularly the 1920 and 30s, the use of the Market Plaza area began to change more toward entertainment for the whole community. This is clearly shown by the newspaper ads and articles. It was also a period that more attention was given to the use of the property. Some of the examples follow:

The Park Amusement Carnival Company has pitched tents on the Market Square, and of course everybody is going to see it, as usual.⁹

The following reflects samples of larger ads about entertainment:

New Braunfels Herald,
December 11, 1908.

A foot ball game can be witnessed on Market square Sunday evening.

New Braunfels Herald, December 11,
1908.

The J. H. G. Show is a good one. It's free, too. On Market Place to-night and every other night this week and next.

New Braunfels Herald, July 15, 1921



DO YOU LIKE GOOD MUSIC ?
Hear the Calkins Sisters— Piano, Accordion, Violin
and Cello with Grandi Bros. Stock Co.
MONDAY, JANUARY 15th on MARKET SQUARE
NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS

New Braunfels Herald, January 12, 1923

New Braunfels Herald, November 4, 1921

New Braunfels Herald, December 21, 1923

CONGRESS OF RIDES

Here all Next Week

ON THE MARKET SQUARE

Parker's Jumping Horse Merry-go-Round

Eli Ferris Wheel, the Largest Portable Wheel Mac

The Aeroplane Swing, most Sensational Ride of the a

June the 4th to the 11th

Come One, Come All !

Everybody Welcome !

New Braunfels Herald, June 1, 1923

It is possible that one of the first movies shown in New Braunfels was at the Market Plaza. In an article in the *New Braunfels Herald* in 1973, Frederic Oheim recalled from his childhood the following:

The first film show I remember in New Braunfels was part of a traveling carnival and consisted of several short subjects shown in a tent set up on Market Plaza I did not get to see this show, being but a kid at the time and family finances had not budgeted any outlay for movies. Besides, rumors had gotten around that at least one of the shorts might have deserved an X-rating. I do know that few women (pardon me—few Ladies) were seen to be entering that tent, and most of the men, at least after 9 o'clock, had a sneaky look about them as they tipped their hats over their faces and ducked into the tent.¹⁰

While on the subject of movies, in 1972, a portion of the filming of the movie "The New Legend of Sleepy Hollow" took place at the Market Plaza. An article said that the park was the perfect place to film a festival of an earlier age.¹¹

Beginning with the 1920s, the Market Plaza also began to attract even more attention as a potential site to build upon. Some examples of those proposed, but none of which were successful, include An American Legion Memorial Hall (1921); New City Hall (1929); a Community Center (1934); the first Public City Library (1937);¹² and a parking lot (1956). One change that was successful had nothing to do with building on the property. It was the naming of the street that surrounds three-fourths of the property. In 1929, to promote some consistency about eighteen streets received new names. "Market Plaza" was changed to "Tolle Street."¹³ The street was most likely named after the Tolle family. Herman Tolle built a home at the north

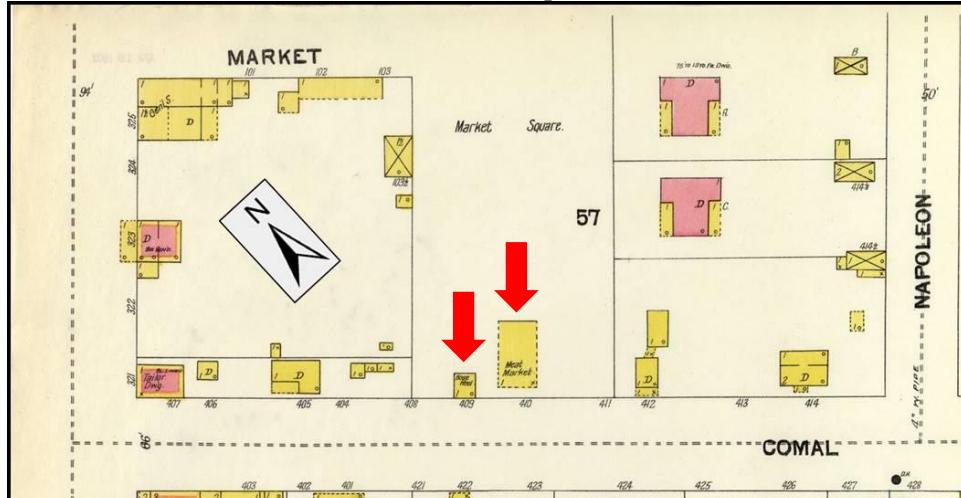
end of the Plaza, around 1893. The house still stands at 393 Tolle Street and has been designated as a historical home by the city.¹⁴ Originally acquired by Christopher August Tolle, it stands on the original Acre Lot 171 as shown on a map re-surveyed by J. J. Gross in 1860.¹⁵ The deed from Christopher August Tolle to Hermann Tolle indicated that the lot fronted the "Meat Market."¹⁶

The Market Square [Market Place] stood the test of time and began to become known as one of the parks in New Braunfels. The mayor in 1929 in calling for various propositions to be passed including more parks, he included the Market Square [Market Place] as one of the existing parks:

We proudly boast of being the beauty spot of Texas. We have many things of which we can rightfully boast, but we are inadequately provided with parks and play grounds. It is true we have our Main Plaza neatly kept, we have our market square maintained, and now Lindheimer Park is being beautified through the cooperation of the Civic Improvement Club. But here we stop. We have several squares in Comal town, which should be properly built, planted and improved and so maintained. They can and should be made a pleasing attraction to all who may behold them and certainly a pleasure and a proper improvement so far as the property owners surrounding the same are concerned.¹⁷

By 1902, a map shows that in addition to the old *Fleischhalle* (Meat Market) building, there was a small building close by that housed a hose cart for the fire department. However, similar maps show that by 1912, and by 1922 they were both gone.

1902 Market Square



New Braunfels 1902. The Market Plaza is identified as Market Square. The old *Fleischhalle* is identified as "Meat Market." For protection against fires in this area of town, a fire hose building for a fire hose cart has been added near the *Fleischhalle*. Both were gone by 1922. Source: *Sanborn Maps, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, TX*.

The Market Plaza park at 292 Tolle Street as it appears today (below). The park is approximately 500 feet long and 60 feet wide.

2017 Market Plaza



Map of Market Plaza, 2018, Comal County GIS Public Viewer.



Signage at south end of the Market Plaza facing Comal Street.

II. SIGNIFICANCE

As stated at the beginning of this narrative, compared to other historical areas in the city of New Braunfels, the Market Plaza history has remained relatively untold, if not unknown. From the writings by visitors during the town's origin, the Fleischhalle and its establishment was clearly essential to ensure that the newly arrived immigrants would survive by being adequately fed. Initially, the newly established town of New Braunfels and the immediate surrounding area was devoid not only homes, but also stores, farms, or other sources of food. To sustain the immigrants during these most difficult years, the *Verein* established a site for a meat market. The meat market was the primary source of affordable meat for a number of years until the town and farms developed. Later, the meat market served as a clearing house for all meats butchered to be sold in the town.

As more qualified butchers began their own establishments, the need for the meat market faded and the area, now known as the Market Plaza, was found to be ideal for other uses, particularly entertainment. The entertainment ranged greatly from carnival and circus shows; football games; goat roping contests; church revivals; and string concerts.¹⁸ When not in use for entertainment purposes, it also served as a neighborhood park for the residents nearby. The location was known by several names including *Fleischhalle* (for the business there), Meat Market, Market Square, Market Oval, and Market Plaza, for which it is now known.

Lastly, the Market Plaza (*Fleischhalle*) area was clearly recognized as being important from the earliest time of New Braunfels. When reviewing the map of 1850 of New Braunfels on page one of this narrative, it is noteworthy that it is one of the six significant areas identified on the map. The other five were the *Marktplatz* (now the Main Plaza), *Vereinsgebäude und Magazine* (buildings for the *Vereins* organization and their storage), *Katholische Kirche und Schule* (Catholic Church and School), *Protestantische Kirche und Schule* (Protestant Church and School), and a *Fliegende Brücke über den Guadalupe Fluss* (small suspended bridge over the Guadalupe River).

Today, this little known historic area serves as a quiet neighborhood park, a respite from traffic and crowds, but open to the nearby towns people and visitors alike

A. Research

Research by John B. Coers, Comal County Historical Commission, review, proof reading, and editing by Comal County Historical Commission members. Resources are listed in the Endnotes.

B. Endnotes

¹ For clarification, Prince Solms was also a member of the Verein, but the purchase was made after he departed Germany, and he was unaware of the purchase until he arrived in Texas.

² Seele, Hermann, *The Cypress and Other Writings of a German Pioneer in Texas*, (University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1979), p. 80. Originally published as *Die Cyppresse und Gesammelte Schriften* by the Neu Braunfels Zeitung, 1936. Translated by Edward C. Breitenkamp,

³ Roemer, Dr. Ferdinand, *Roemer's Texas*, (Texian Press, 1983 © German-Texan Heritage Society), p. 98. Originally published in Bonn in 1849, translated in 1935 by Oswald Mueller of Houston, Texas and reprinted in 1967. This account of New Braunfels likely occurred in 1846.

⁴ *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung*, April 17, 1857, p.3 c.5. (Sophienburg Museum and Archives, translations).

⁵ *New Braunfels Herald*, *Comal County in Civil War –LV*, February 13, 1862, p.2.

⁶ Author of notes unknown. New Braunfels Sophienburg Museum and Archives, Vertical Files.

⁷ *New Braunfels Herald*, July 10, 1908, p.1.

⁸ *New Braunfels Herald*, July 23, 1920, November 12, 1920, February 11, 1921, plus many other instances reported before and after these dates in city financial statements throughout the years.

⁹ Ibid., December 5, 1908, p.4.

¹⁰ *New Braunfels Herald*, "First Movies in New Braunfels Shown in Tent on Market Plaza," March 1, 1973, p. 3B

¹¹ *New Braunfels Herald*, "New Legend of Sleepy Hollow Filming Slated After Labor Day," April, 20, 1972, p 33.

¹² Emmy Seele Faust had proposed to fund the library if it were to be located on the Market Plaza. There was some discord among the residents surrounding the property, but eventually, the library was located on the Sophienburg Hill and was known as the Emmy Seele Faust Library. No longer a library, the historic building stands on the property of the Sophienburg Museum and Archives.

¹³ *New Braunfels Herald*, October 22, 1926. p.4.

¹⁴ *New Braunfels Herald Zeitung*, "The Tolle-Hartnell-Williams House," July 7, 1993,

¹⁵ The Acre Lot 171 sat just northeast of Market Plaza and butted against the Comal River. It is not to be confused with Town Lots, especially Town Lot 171 which was south on Seguin Street (now Avenue) near the Lindheimer property. Town Lots were smaller and more numerous.

¹⁶ Erben, Jolene, New Braunfels Historic Landmark Commission, notes found in Sophienburg Museum and Archives, Vertical Files.

¹⁷ *New Braunfels Herald*, "Mayor Outlines Improvement Plans," May 3, 1929. p.9.

¹⁸ In addition to the references already mentioned from the local newspaper (*New Braunfels Herald* in particular), there were a number of articles relating to the these events mentioned here.