

PHOENIX SALOON

CONTEXT

When Ross and Debbie Fortune became interested in applying for a Texas Historical Marker for the Phoenix Saloon, our Downtown New Braunfels took another step forward. Downtown New Braunfels has become a viable area in the fast-growing metropolis. This is a step in the right direction for preservation. The Phoenix Saloon at 193 West San Antonio Street,



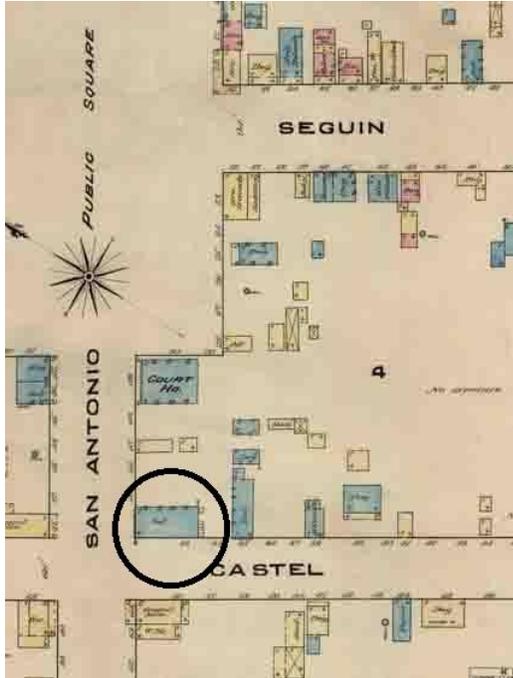
New Braunfels, Texas, really does live up to the name “Phoenix”, the legendary bird that builds its own funeral pyre, throws itself into the fire, lays an egg in the ashes and hatches a new Phoenix bird. This metaphor of the Phoenix fits this local saloon. The original building was built in 1871 as a two story

brick, rock and stucco building. It has housed a variety of businesses over its lifetime and was renovated in the 1920s into the three story building that it is today. The building has been a central gathering place for celebrations, discussion of politics, organizational meetings and innovative businesses throughout the history of New Braunfels. The building also has the City of New Braunfels historic designation, is part of the New Braunfels Downtown Historic District and is also included on the historic walking tour of the city.



OVERVIEW

The property at the corner of east Castell and west San Antonio Streets, according to the late Roberta Mueller, was originally owned by Valentine Sippel, her great grandfather. Valentine married Anna Ossman and they had three children: Kaytrina, who was crippled from birth,



Henry, who was killed in the Civil War, and finally son John, who lived to be only 50 years old as a result of suicide. The family is buried in the Comal Cemetery.

John Sippel married into the successful Gruene family by marrying Johanna Gruene. After six children, the marriage ended in a bitter divorce, according to family members.

Sippel had built the two story building in 1871 and moved into the second floor. Christian Hohmann and Henry Meier operated a bar and billiard room on the first floor of the building. The 1877 Sanborn map shows that the construction was concrete or cement brick and was labeled as a saloon. There are no photos available prior to 1895 to view what the actual construction materials were. H.R. Schumacker operated a brewery in the basement from 1872 to 1875, selling a keg of beer for \$2.25 and a glass for 5 cents, the going rate at the time. The saloon operated under several names before it finally became the Phoenix Saloon in 1895.



The above photo, unknown date, from the Sophienburg Museum and Archives was taken during some type of downtown parade. Barely legible on the front sign is Phoenix and then Holzmann. A newspaper advertisement found in the Sophienburg Phoenix Saloon file, written in German from unknown date reads:

PHOENIX SALOON

Holzmann & Co.,

Owners

Corner of San Antonio and Castell Streets

The best wines, liquors and cigars. Lager beer always fresh from the cellar on tap.

The Saloon has a restaurant and beer garden.



The Sophienburg Museum and Archives photo below was taken after 1895 when the name of the Phoenix was established. The construction appears to be combination of stone, cement block and brick. Stone block construction is visible in the basement.



Rooms were rented at some point as shown on the early Sophienburg Museum and Archives photo below (unknown date but after the 1895 Phoenix name emerged). A small sign at

the Castell Street entrance on the right says “Rooms”. Note the mis-spelling “PHEONIX SALOON” on the side of the building. The story of the sign is unknown. The Plaza gazebo can be seen in the photo showing the location of the building in relation to the plaza.



About 40 different persons are associated with the proprietorship, bartending of the saloon, and sometimes restaurant, too many to name but can be noted in Appendix A Phoenix Timeline.

An unfortunate incident occurred in 1885 when proprietor at the time, Walter Krause, fought with a customer named James Alexander. Testimonies of two men in the saloon that day (Harry Mergele and Emil Mertz), stated that Alexander asked Krause how much he owed and Krause told him a quarter. Alexander said that he would pay him after payday. Krause took exception to this and called him ugly names. Alexander left the building to go to Naegelin’s Bakery (apparently he worked there) and returned with one dollar, put it on the bar and retaliated with more ugly names. Krause jumped him from behind the bar and they exchanged blows. Alexander then left the bar as Krause was bleeding near the eye. Twelve days later Krause died as a result of the wounds.

A big attraction of the saloon in 1892, was William Gebhardt's back room café where Gebhardt served a sort of stew, spiced with Tampico Dust - his own special concoction of herbs and dried chili peppers. Prior to this, chilis were typically only used fresh. Gebhardt, however, devised a process to crush and dry fresh peppers. Spices were ground up and mixed with ancho chili peppers (that he imported directly from Mexico) and run through a

home coffee grinder twice and then through a large coffee grinder. Gebhardt's Tampico Dust is now widely regarded as being the first chili powder. In 1896, Gebhardt moved to San Antonio in order to manufacture what he trademarked as Eagle Brand Chili Powder. His uncle, Albert Kronkosky, Sr, helped him establish the Gebhardt Chili Powder Company. Gebhardt's wife was Rosa Rosa Kronkosky, sister of Albert. Incidentally, son, Albert Kronkosky, Jr. was a very successful businessman who eventually owned the San Antonio Drug Company as well as being a major stockholder in Merck & Co. Thus the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation was founded. It is worthwhile to visit <http://lib.utsa.edu/special-collections/exhibitions/gebhardt/> for the whole story. The University of Texas at San Antonio houses the Gebhardt archive. Gebhardt brand chili powder is still available today. Although William Gebhardt was not in New Braunfels long, the success of the Gebhardt Companies lasted for over 70 years.

In 1895, fire possibly caused by arson damaged the saloon as well as Fritz Maier's "German Advocate" newspaper that was operating on the second floor, but the Phoenix rose again. After the reopening of the saloon there were once again many proprietors. It is interesting to note that the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1885 through 1902 show the building in "pink" indicating construction of brick whereas the 1877 Sanborn map shows the construction in "blue" indicating a different construction.

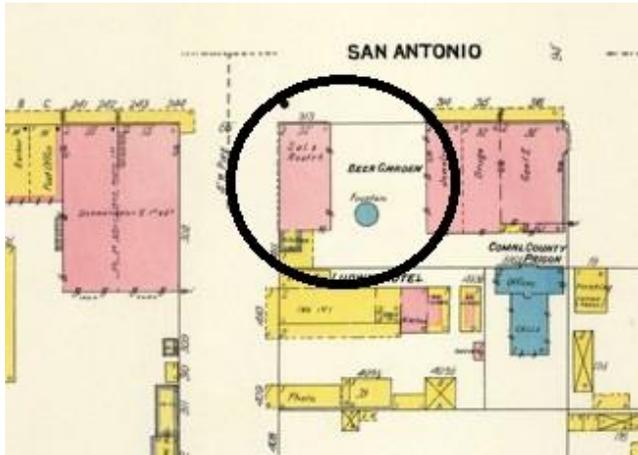
One of the attractions of the Phoenix was its beer garden facing San Antonio Street. Women were welcomed out there, but not inside. Back in those days, a ladies reputation would



be tarnished if she entered a bar. The beer garden was between the saloon and the old Comal County Courthouse facing San Antonio Street. The garden was also accessible from Castell Street at the back of the building next to the Ludwig Hotel which was located in what is now the parking lot of Chase Bank. Sippel had built a small pool with a fountain in the garden containing gold fish, a large

catfish, and even a baby alligator. Bells hanging from the trees summoned waiters from inside. The Sophienburg Museum and Archive photo of the garden shows the large pond where the

alligators were kept. Current owner, Ross Fortune, says that there may have been badger fights



in the alligator pit. He has heard reports that the beer garden also contained a deer pen and a stage that featured live music every Saturday night. It was reported to him that there was a parrot on a perch just inside the front door that was taught to say, “Have you paid your bill?” He says there are many interesting stories that cannot be verified but are legend. In 1901, Henry Tolle, proprietor

from 1900 to 1903, placed two young alligators in the pond. The “fountain” is shown in the Beer Garden of this 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. The building is labeled as a saloon and restaurant. It was a popular gathering place downtown.

Then came the tumultuous era called Prohibition. The institution of Prohibition dealt a blow to the saloon world. In New Braunfels as early as 1887, part of the second floor of the Phoenix had become the headquarters of the Anti-Prohibition movement for Comal County. Prohibition was a national issue so each state was to vote either for or against. New Braunfels held rallies around the Plaza and when the vote came up, Comal County voted 100% against Prohibition. “Gambrinus”, the legendary inventor of beer, had many followers in Comal County. At that time there were four breweries in New Braunfels: Rennert Brewery, Dampmann Brewery, Guenther Brewery and New Braunfels Brewing Company. This last one managed to stay open by producing a “near beer” called Busto.

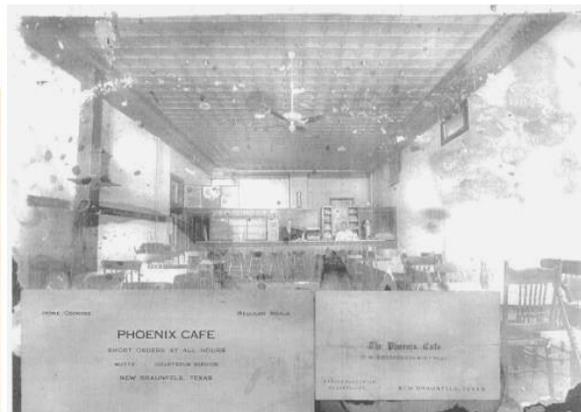
During World War I, prohibition had linked itself with patriotism. First saloons were closed to soldiers and then in a burst of wartime feeling in 1918, the state of Texas voted in favor of Prohibition. Comal County voted 100% against Prohibition.

Rumors of an illicit brewery have circulated in New Braunfels but there has been no proof found. In the basement of the Phoenix there is a hole in the wall that some have speculated was an underground tunnel, but it turns out that it was probably a storage place for coal for the heating system. The photos below are taken at opposite sides of the basement with the photo on the right a view of the Castell Street side.



Prohibition went into effect January of 1920, but the Phoenix Saloon closed down from 1918 to 1922. Then came two financial blows to the country, especially the government – the Great Depression and the fall of the stock market. One solution to these problems for the government was to repeal Prohibition so that taxes could be collected from the sale of liquor. Prohibition was repealed by 1933.

In 1922 the building was owned by Albert Ludwig, who expanded the building. Contractor A.C. Moeller renovated the building and added a third floor for the Masonic Lodge #1109. The Phoenix Café continued during Prohibition and into the Depression as can be seen in these photographs from the John D. Rightmire Personal Collection.



During the renovation, the front of the building was changed adding picture windows, brick front, the name Ludwig at the top front of the building, as well as expanding the square footage on two sides of the building (sides not facing Castell Street or San Antonio Street) as can

be seen viewing the aerial Google image. The original footprints of the building are visible on the street sides. The Sophienburg Museum and Archives Isabel Ludwig Collection photo below was taken from the Castell Street side just prior to the renovation.



Jacob Schmidt bought the

building in 1928, changing the name on the outside, front, top of the building. He and his wife operated a clothing store for the next 60 years. Schmidt had an interesting background. He was born in the German speaking section of Hungary to successful parents. The family made their fortune by having the exclusive rights to sell beer in the taverns where they lived. Young Schmidt dreamed of America and in 1897 he sailed to New York. Heading towards Seguin, Texas, he sold dry goods and household wares along the way out of a wagon hitched to a mule. He opened his first store in Seguin with his brother-in-law. He soon moved to New Braunfels because of the predominant German language. In time, Jacob Schmidt included his son, Max, in the ownership of the store and it then became “Jacob Schmidt & Son.

In 1995 the Schmidt store closed and other businesses opened. The last business of a 10 year duration was Color Express from 1997 to 2007.

The latest rise of the Phoenix occurred when the Ross and Debbie Fortune bought the property in 2007 and brought it back to its original purpose, a saloon that has music and even serves chili. It is recorded that the building occupies 4,860 square feet out of Lot 3, Block 22, New City Block 1004, City of New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas. The renovation process took two years. The Phoenix has risen again and remains a historic site! Fortune makes this statement about the property: “We are not just another bar. Just trust and believe in us, we really are trying to embrace the history of the building as well as celebrate the history and culture of the town.”

From the inside of the building, the original beams that were on the north wall are still visible. The original bricks have been exposed on the Castell Street side. The tin ceiling is original in the central portion of the building as well as the wooden floors and beams. The bead-board on the wall behind the bar was re-purposed from scrap lumber during the 2007 renovation. The following are photos showing the ceiling and original exposed bricks and windows. The new bar is not original as the building had been a department store for 60 years. Old shutters found in the basement were re-purposed as swinging doors to the food preparation area and restrooms. The new bar has been constructed out of the old department store cabinetry (including the drop down lights, shelves and shoe department mirror) thus embracing the full history of the building.





The basement still maintains the original footprint of the two story building.

The second floor houses four business and an apartment for the Fortunes. The business space partition walls with decorative glass are all original as are the craftsman style appointments in the apartment. According to the Fortunes, the Schmidt Family lived in the apartment while operating the department store. The third floor, is divided into three business spaces. The floors and walls of the Masonic Lodge are still present.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Phoenix Saloon has been an important building containing a variety of businesses since 1871. It is one block off of the Main Plaza in New Braunfels and like so many other small towns, was part of the hub of the community. The building went through many changes in the past 140+ years and many businesses have occupied its spaces. It has seen the early business years of New Braunfels, women's rights, business ingenuity, Prohibition, the Great Depression, renovation, tragedy, disaster, fire, the Anti-Prohibition movement, and the rise again of the Phoenix. The most colorful times were during the original Phoenix Saloon years which included William Gebhardt and the invention of commercially available chili powder. The adaptive years occurred during Prohibition and the Depression. It was a clothing store for more than half a century and has finally returned to being the Phoenix Saloon. Preservation of this building and telling the story of its many business inhabitants is important not only to downtown, but to the whole city of New Braunfels.

Myra Lee Goff prepared this narrative and would like to thank Ross and Debbie Fortune, John D. Rightmire, Preston Kronkosky and Roxolin Krueger.

APPENDIX A-PHOENIX TIMELINE researched and recorded by John D. Rightmire, Archivist and Historian (printed with permission) and Ross Fortune. The list is not all inclusive and can be expanded as information is available.

1871 Dec	John Sippel has completed his new two story business building
1872 Oct-1875 Sept	In the basement Heinrich Konrad Schumacher had a beer brewery (Schumacher Brewery)
1872 Dec-1873 May	Christian Hohmann and Henry Meier have a saloon & billiard room
1873 May-1875 Dec	Christian Hohmann is sole proprietor, partnership with Meier is dissolved
1873 Dec-1877 Jan	Lorenz "Wunch" Kronkosky operates the bar
1877 Jan-1877 Aug	Christian Hohmann & Heinrich Ludwig operate the saloon
1877 Aug-1881 July	Heinrich Ludwig is sole proprietor after partnership with Hohmann dissolved
1881 July-1885 Aug	Walter Krause operates the saloon and billiard hall. In 1882 John Sippel builds a bowling alley at the rear of the building. Walter Krause dies Aug 7, 1885 from injuries sustained in a fight July 26 in his saloon with James Alexander.
1885 Nov-1886 July	Heinrich Streuer is saloon proprietor
1886 July-1893 July	Heinrich Ludwig is proprietor again. In May 1887 the Knights of Honor Lodge is established on the second floor. It served as headquarters for the anti-prohibition movement of 1887. A pool/fountain is built next to the building which first shows up on a map in 1891.

1892-1896 Wilhelm Gebhardt operated a café in the rear of the Ludwig Saloon. In 1894, when the Mittendorfs were proprietors, he first served his now famous chili made with Tampico Dust. Willie was living with former proprietor Lorenz “Wunch” Kronkosky at 359 S. Academy (in a cottage out back). He married Rosa Kronkosky September 5, 1895 in Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church. In 1896 Willie Gebhardt moved to San Antonio when, Albert Kronkosky Sr., agreed to finance the commercial development of his chili powder.

1893 July-1895 Apr Erhard and Louis Mittendorf established Mittendorf & Son Saloon. In January 1894, fire, theft and arson destroyed a large part of this bar as well as Fritz J. Maier’s “German Advokat” newspaper on the second floor.

1895 May-1898 May Phillip Holzmann and Gottlieb Oberkamp have taken over Mittendorf & Son Saloon. They have changed the name to the Phoenix Saloon.

1895 May-1899 Jun Gottlieb Oberkamp is sole proprietor of the Phoenix Saloon as Mr. Holzmann moved to Schertz, Texas.

1899 July-1900 May Carl Luerson and Henry Fischer operate the Phoenix.

1900 April 25 John Sippel, owner of the building, kills himself on the second floor with a pistol shot in the right temple.

1900 May-1903Nov Hermann Tolle is proprietor. In December 1901, he placed two young alligators in the pond. In February 1903 the second floor was remodeled creating space for men to play cards and an elegant dining area was assigned as a women’s party area.

1903 Nov-1906Apr Edward Kalies is proprietor of the Phoenix Saloon.

1906 July-1909 Apr Otto Reeh is proprietor of the Phoenix Saloon. The Alves Brothers operated the Phoenix Restaurant from July 1908 to April 1909.

1909 Apr-1912 Mar The Pape Brothers (twins Bruno and Alfred) operate the Phoenix Saloon and Restaurant. In 1909 they built a band platform next to the pond. (the platform is noted as a “stage” on the Sanborn maps from that time).

1912 Mar-1914 Mar Adolf F. Moeller and Henry Warnecke operate the Phoenix Saloon and Restaurant. Warnecke left in November 1912.

1914 Mar-1915 Dec Emil Mergele is proprietor of the Phoenix.

1915 Dec-1916 Jul Gustav Becker & Oswald Ulbricht operate the saloon.

1916 Aug-1917 Oct Edwin Alves is the proprietor of the Phoenix Saloon.

1917 Oct-1918 Jun Charles Soechting was the last proprietor of the Phoenix Saloon prior to Prohibition June 26, 1918. The Phoenix Café closed in 1928.

1922 Albert Robert Ludwig expands the building changing the architecture, enlarging the footprint and adding a third floor.

1923-1932 Mendlovitz Department Store operates in the building.

1927 Jacob Schmidt bought the building and changed the name displayed on the front to from A.R. Ludwig to Schmidt.

1932-1936 Stehling Brothers Men & Boys Wear operates in the building.

1935-1936 The building undergoes a major renovation.

1935-1995 Jacob Schmidt & Son department store renowned for “quality goods a fair prices” and a policy of “credit on trust”. Also always featured a defiantly non-segregated, chilled water fountain.

1996-1997 Attic Antiquity operated in the building.

1997-2007

Color Express print and copy center run by former Mayor Adam Cork.

2007 Building purchased by Ross and Debbie Fortune, renovated and the first floor reopened as the current Phoenix Saloon. Businesses occupy the second and third floors.