

A LITTLE PIECE OF HISTORY

By The Heritage Society

Since its unveiling in 2013, the colorful mural painted by Gonzo247 at 315 Travis Street entitled *Houston is Inspired* has already become a recognizable symbol of Downtown Houston. Under the paint, the building that hosts it represents a much earlier period in the city's development. The Baker-Meyer Building at 315 Travis Street is one of several 19th century buildings in the Market Square Historic District and one of the oldest commercial buildings in the city. These buildings once surrounded Market Square, which included City Hall and the Market House. Though the Market House itself is no longer standing, the surrounding buildings were also central to commerce in the early days of the city. Several of these remain, dating from the 1860s to the 1930s, and the Baker-Meyer Building is among the oldest.

Constructed around 1870, the two-story Greek Revival building with its distinctive corbelled brick cornice was first owned by George Baker, an early Houston resident. In its earliest years, it housed retail stores, including a piano and musical instruments store in the late 1870s and dry goods in the early 1880s. Baker later passed the property on to his daughter Rebecca and her husband, Joseph F. Meyer, Sr.,

Commerce in Early Houston: The Baker-Meyer Building



The Baker-Meyer Building was constructed facing City Hall and Market Tower, shown here in 1904. Photo from the University of Houston Digital Library.

who Rebecca married in 1884. Meyer was a German immigrant who arrived in Houston with his family in 1867 at the age of 16 and also was closely connected to commerce in the growing city. Before he married Rebecca, he lived with his stepmother, Mary Meyer, at 313 San Felipe. The house has since been relocated to Sam Houston Park, where it is cared for by The Heritage Society and operated as a museum.

The same year he arrived in Houston, Meyer opened a hardware store at Franklin and Milam Streets near Market Square. As the Joseph F. Meyer Hardware Company prospered, Meyer began to acquire land in the Houston area, particularly southwest of the city. Joseph and Rebecca Meyer had three

sons, and the property was later divided among them. Though the land was used primarily for rice farming, much of the property was redeveloped in the 20th century. The most recognizable development is the Meyerland subdivision, which was developed by Meyer's son George in the 1950s. By the time he married Rebecca, Meyer had also served as the chief of the volunteer fire department and helped organize the Houston National Bank.

Though much of Meyer's property has been developed or redeveloped, the building on Market Square remains intact. Through the years, the Baker-Meyer Building has remained an active part of Houston's historic commercial center. Early on, it housed a feed store, drug store and tailor shop. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, it was home to a succession of nightclubs. In 1980, Treebeards Restaurant – then only two-years-old – relocated to the building from a nearby location on Preston Street. Treebeards continues to occupy the building today, three decades later.

Today, the Baker-Meyer Building remains under the ownership of descendants of Joseph F. Meyer, Sr. and Rebecca Baker Meyer. Designated a City of Houston Protected Landmark in 2010, the building will continue to serve Houston's historic center for generations to come. ▶



The Baker-Meyer Building still stands near the corner of Travis and Preston streets on a row of historic commercial buildings facing Market Square Park.