



# Fire Brings a Square to Downtown

## Part 3: What happened to the businesses and people?

This detailed photo of Harbison Street is a recent donation by Don W. Scoggins. The photo originally belonged to his grandfather, the Honorable Joseph Sale Strother. Mr. Scoggins currently lives in Longview. His mother, Nell Wallace Scoggins, who, at 102 years of age, is the oldest living Garland High School graduate known, resides in Abilene. She was kind enough to sit for an oral interview of her years in Garland. Using the above documentation as a jumping off point, the Garland Landmark Society is proud to present a three-part series looking back at the history of the Square, highlighting a few of its early businesses and personalities. Using newspaper articles, advertisements and census records, we were able to create a story of what became of businesses and citizens following the destructive fire. The Dallas Morning News ran an extensive list of damaged businesses lost in the Thanksgiving fire of 1899. Following are the stories of two of those businesses, seen in the picture above.



Downtown Garland, looking west/southwest down Harbison Street (now State Street) from Fifth St. This photo, taken in 1898 or 1899, was prior to the fire on Thanksgiving, 1899. Visible businesses, left to right, include Charlie Coker's Drug Store, Tom Mealer's Confectionery & Restaurant, and the two-story white frame building is the Citizens Bank.

*Garland Landmark Society Archives*

# GARLAND LANDMARK SOCIETY

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GarlandHistorical.org

PO Box 462232  
Garland, Texas 75046

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Hayslip@onlinetoday.com

## VICE PRESIDENT

Museum Affairs  
John Swanson  
JLSwamy@hotmail.com

## VICE PRESIDENT

Membership  
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Jamesjd1@verizon.net

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Carlotta Barnes  
CarlottaBarnes@icloud.com

## TREASURER

Patsy Rogers  
PBRogers1@verizon.net

## CURATOR

Larry Kriv  
Laurence.Kriv@gmail.com

## DIRECTORS

Jim Barnes  
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Pictured is the Garland Band in front of Charlie Coker's Drug Store on Harbison Street as featured in the Garland News in 1895. *Garland Landmark Society Archives*

## Charlie Coker's Drug Store

Charlie Coker's Drug Store was owned by Charles Sledge Coker, born in 1859 in Mississippi. Coker's Drug Store is seen on the extreme left of our newly donated photo. By February 2, 1900, just two months after being destroyed by the fire, Charlie Coker and J.C. Armstrong had already opened up a new drug store venture. A Garland News advertisement states, "We wish to announce to our friends and the public generally that we have opened in the new brick, adjoining the Citizens Bank, a strictly first-class DRUG STORE". These new brick buildings would have been on the east side of the Square, anchored by the 'alamo style', single story Citizens Bank which was also freshly constructed.

Quite quickly, in April 1900, there appears to be a problem as J.C. Armstrong buys out his partner, C.S. Coker. In the same edition of the Garland News, it appears that C.S. Coker's father, a farmer in Collin County, is also doing business in Garland. The elder C.S. Coker is selling farm implements and saddles

with L.D. Anderton. Their business is located 'on Commerce Street, north of the post office'. This advertisement makes it quite plain that this business is having no financial troubles.

**To My Friends and Patrons.**  
I am still in the harness, saddlery and repair business, with Mr. C. S. Coker, successor to S. J. Walker. We are on Commerce street, north of the postoffice. Come and see us. L. D. Anderton.

The next month, in the May 25 edition of the Garland News, C. S. Coker, druggist, is accused of running a 'juke joint' through a refreshment stand in his new building. 'Juke joints' were generally frowned upon as they were associated with dancing, drinking and gambling. Shortly after the 'juke joint' accusation in June of 1900, the Garland News reported, "Mrs. C. S. Coker and babe have returned from an extensive visit to Dallas, where Mrs. Coker went for medical treatment." According to census records, this is probably Charlie Coker's second wife, Gussie Guinn Cocks, born in Louisiana in 1877,

whom he had married just the year prior. In November of 1900, M.M. Clark posts a notice that the accounts of C.S. Coker and C. F. Butler have been placed in his hands. Consider this: C.S. Coker, druggist, had gotten re-married, watched his business burn, started a new drug store business, gotten bought out of that one, started yet another business venture, got accused of running a juke joint, lost that business AND had a very sick wife who had to remain in Dallas for treatment with their brand-new baby. That is quite a year.

In addition, the following year proves to be quite action packed as well. Apparently, C.S. Coker completes his medical certification to become Dr. C.S. Coker. He announces in the August 23, 1901 edition of the Garland News that he is a practicing physician and surgeon, located within the Armstrong and Maxey drugstore. Armstrong and Maxey proudly declared in a February 1900 advertisement that they were located "in the new brick, adjoining the Citizens Bank". By September of 1901, Dr. C.S. Coker declares that he has bought

out Maxey's interests and the drug store shall henceforth be called Armstrong and Coker. Maxey also places an ad that any money due him should be paid promptly as he is leaving the business.

Prior to 1910, Dr. C.S. Coker and wife, Gussie Guinn Cocks Coker, moved to Tyler. They subsequently settled in the Houston area but returned to Garland for a visit in July of 1921. Mrs. Coker's father, S.R. Cocks, lay dying in an 'asylum' in Terrell where he had been for at least 12 years. According to the Garland News, "S.R. Cocks was a much beloved postmaster in Garland for many years before his decline." It would appear that his ex-wife, Sallie Cocks, might disagree as she was living with her son-in-law, C.S. Coker, in Tyler at the time of the 1910 census.

C.S. Coker would live out the remainder of his life in Houston, dying at the age of 76 in 1935. His wife, Gussie, would live in Houston for another 27 years until she died at the age of 84 in 1962.



East Side of Square, circa 1910 including Citizens National Bank on the far left and WW McGully Drugs on the far right.  
Garland Landmark Society Archives

## Tom Mealer's Confectionary & Restaurant

The second business in our newly acquired photo is Thomas Mealer's Confectionary & Restaurant. Thomas Mealer was born to a farming family in Georgia in October of 1852. He made his way to Texas between 1870 and 1880, landing first in Young County (west and north of Fort Worth). The 1880 Federal Census reports him as a 28 year old farm laborer, with a wife, Sarah (Helen Lillard??), 31, and an 8 year old son, Benjamin. By all appearances, he is doing well for himself 10 years later as he owns a carriage, horses, cattle and tools.

By 1900, the family moves to Garland and has increased to 2 children plus a niece whom the family had raised since birth. The census lists Sarah as a carpet weaver and Tom as a day laborer. Tom's job title is an interesting choice, as we know that he owned the confectionary/restaurant until it burned in very late 1899. It is possible he had already gone to work for the Garland Corn Mill. Tom Mealer was known to everyone around Garland as the honest man who ran the mill with

no mention of him ever having owned a restaurant beforehand.

The Garland Corn Mill, and Tom Mealer in particular, were discussed in glowing terms as doing a 'straight' business. A typical advertisement for the corn mill was without frills. "Fresh ground new corn meal at the mill at all times. It is very nice; try a sack. I am grinding new corn right along – grind every day of the week. Quick service and polite treatment – Garland Corn Mills, T.H. Mealer, Prop."

From comments and advertisements in the Garland News, we know T.H. Mealer bought out the interest of Randolph Dugger in the Garland Corn Mill in December of 1907. Before that, T.H. Mealer had been the person running the mill and grinding the corn, but this made him the owner. Business must have been good, because in October of 1909 he moved the corn mill in to a new location, 'one block west of the Flook bricks, where he has nice, roomy quarters'. This would be in the area of Fish N Tails at the southeast corner of 7th and Main Streets. The corn mill would become Morrison's Garage between 1915 and 1919.



Pictured is Morrison's Garage at the southeast corner of present day Main and Seventh Streets, a location previously occupied by Mealer's corn mill. *Garland Landmark Society Archives*

The Mealer family name does not often appear in the local news between the *Garland News* getting back to printing in early 1900 and the purchase of the corn mill rights in 1907. One interesting exception is when Ben Mealer, Tom Mealer's oldest son, was shot in the thigh in the late summer of 1901. His recovery, although still on crutches, is noted in the August 9, 1901 edition with an all-too-short description of him having been in the 'melee between Tip Tinsley and a Katy conductor'.

Thomas Harrison Mealer passed away on July 21, 1921 after a long illness. He was honored with a lovely five paragraph obituary in the July 29th edition of the newspaper. He and his wife were both in the census of 1920, meaning she must have passed away in the intervening months, although a death certificate for her has not been found. Ben Mealer stayed in the Garland area and is mentioned as being exceptionally good at working on gasoline engines, although he is listed as working in a cotton gin for the 1920 census.

-Holly Stevens



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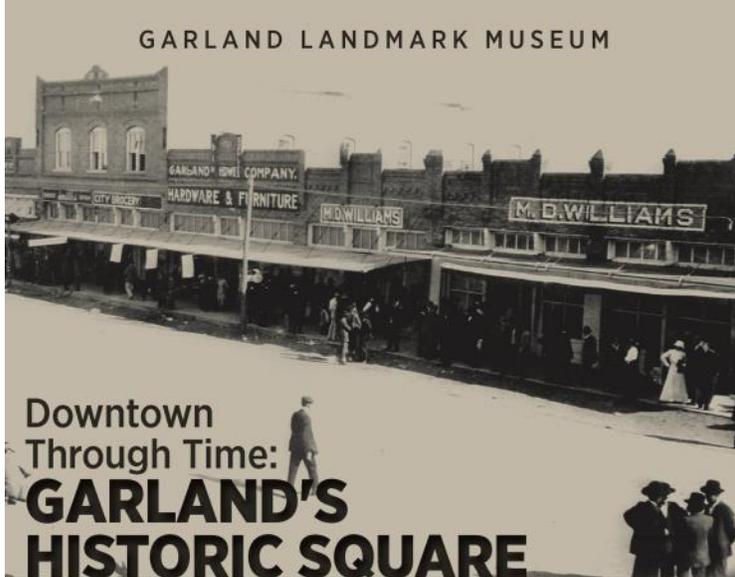
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