

Downtown Through Time: Garland's Historic Square

Garland's Square incorporates elements of three agricultural business districts. The earliest was old Duck Creek near the present crossing of Avenue B and the creek. The two railroads circumvented them by three-fourths of a mile to the north and one mile to the east in 1886.

At the track crossing, the Santa Fe Railroad purchased development land from William A. "Uncle Billy" Tinsley. After building a depot, the Santa Fe subdivided the land into lots and blocks. They named the town Embree in honor of local physician Kelley H. Embree.

From remaining Tinsley acreage on the MK&T line, other investors platted the third incorporated district of "new" Duck Creek. MK&T located their depot there.



Seen here around 1888, Embree benefitted from its proximity to the Santa Fe Railroad line.

On the morning of Jan. 7, 1887, a fire reduced old Duck Creek's commercial district to ashes. Among those businesses destroyed or severely damaged were a blacksmith and hardware establishment, a druggist, grocer, barber and jeweler. With the exception of Robinson, Brown & Co., a general merchandise store, none had insurance and only the general merchandise establishment of J.T. Beaver & Co. escaped the fire.

Undaunted, each of the businessmen immediately announced plans to resume business as soon as arrangements could be made; so with other inhabitants of old Duck Creek, they simply picked up stakes and moved eastward across the creek to the new townships. Those who could rolled their surviving buildings on logs over a bridge that spanned the waterway.

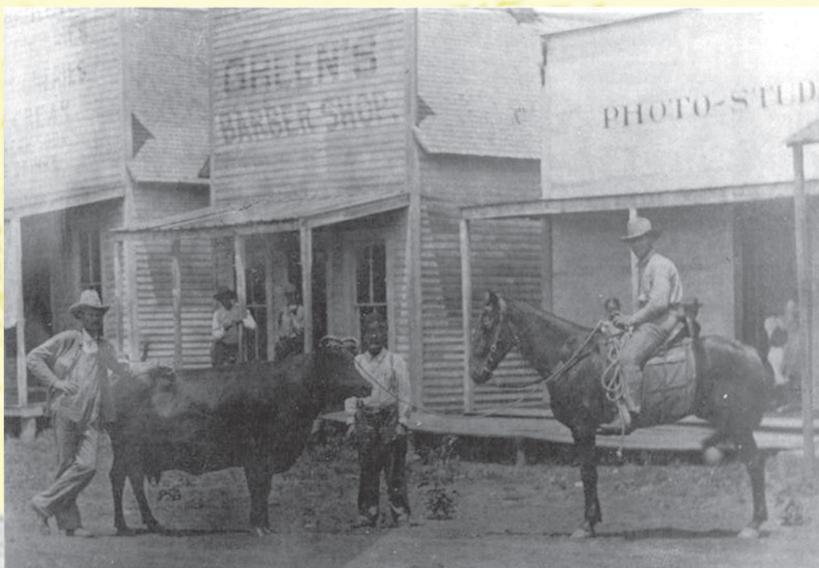
Since there was no central square or open space at the time to interpose a respectable distance between Embree and the new Duck Creek, the "dead line" was Harbison Street (now State Street), named for Dr. Hugh Harbison of old Duck Creek. Except for occasional mud and frogs, Embree and the new Duck Creek rubbed together like two flint stones and sparks flew with every strike. Each proudly claimed its own residents, businesses, and newspaper, but Embree had the only post office, served by the Santa Fe.

-Michael R. Hayslip, *Garland: Its Premier Century*

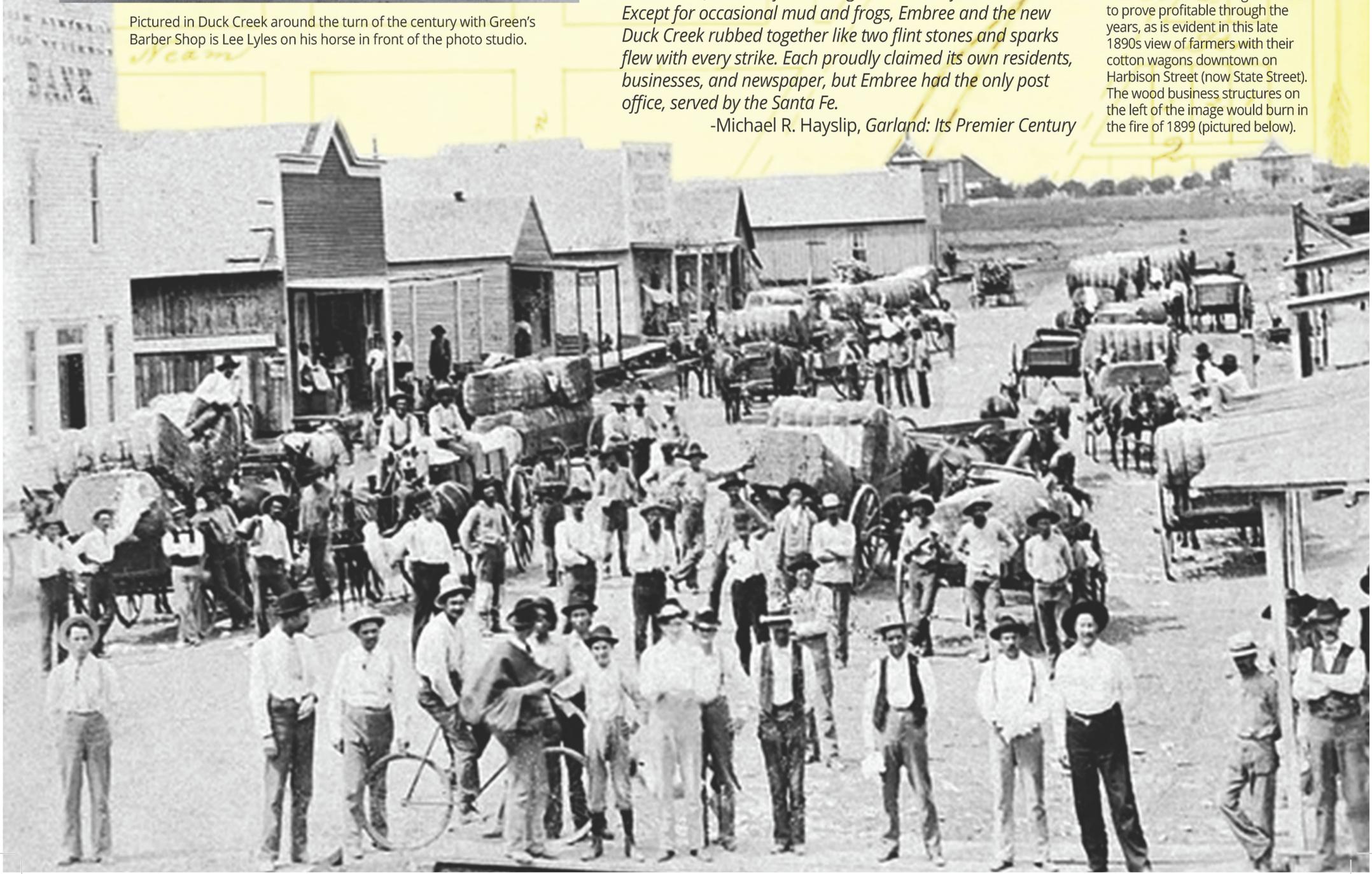


It is uncertain whether this image was made in old Duck Creek prior to the 1897 fire or after in the new town of Embree, where the building was later moved.

Early Duck Creek Settlers raised vegetables, wheat and cotton for income. Cotton farming continued to prove profitable through the years, as is evident in this late 1890s view of farmers with their cotton wagons downtown on Harbison Street (now State Street). The wood business structures on the left of the image would burn in the fire of 1899 (pictured below).



Pictured in Duck Creek around the turn of the century with Green's Barber Shop is Lee Lyles on his horse in front of the photo studio.



Dallas & Greenwood Road

After a compromise, the Embree post office was relocated to a neutral midpoint between the two depots and renamed Garland. The peace and prosperity that followed was shattered on November 30, 1899, Thanksgiving Day, when a fire broke out. It is said it began with a smoldering cigar stump left in the offices of The Garland News, and spread quickly through the surrounding wood structures in town.

The fire burned from the MK&T side to the Santa Fe side, emptying two wells and all volunteer bucket brigades before burning itself out. By nightfall there were 40 or 50 men guarding merchandise dumped into the street from the flaming buildings. When the townspeople and surrounding farm families assembled the next day to review the ruins, they were appalled to discover that some 30 business houses and residences had been damaged or destroyed entirely, including Beaver Brothers, whose antecedent had survived the Duck Creek inferno, and Crossman Insurance, the town's only fire insurance agency.

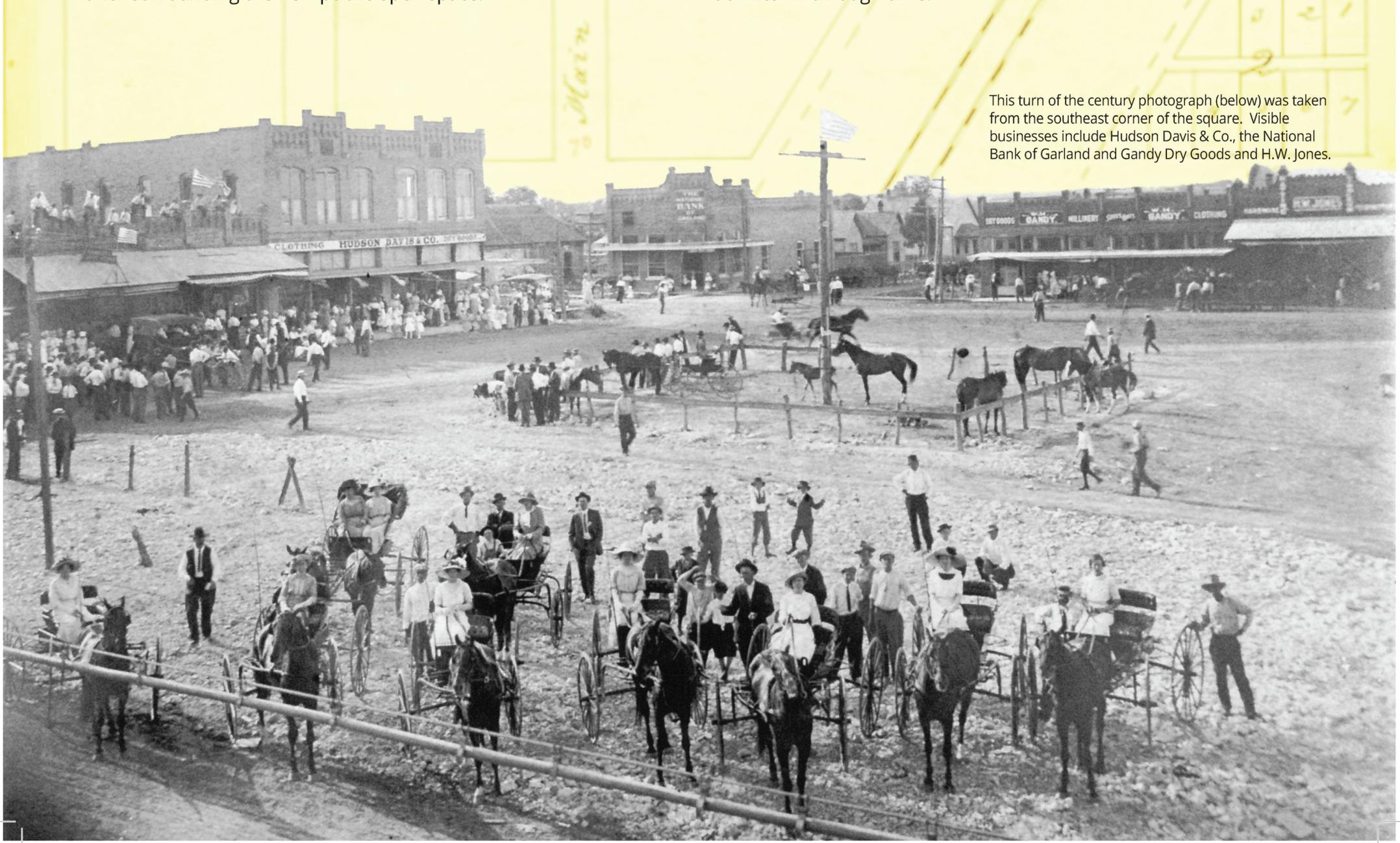
- Michael R. Hayslip,
Garland: Its Premier Century



Garland residents gathered for a photo in front of the new M.D. Williams building, which was built after the Thanksgiving Day fire. These buildings were destroyed in 1902 when another fire, caused by the explosion of an oil lamp held by M.D. Williams.

With the center of Garland now a blank slate from the fire, the lots were acquired to create a public town square. A well was eventually incorporated into the plans to fight future fires, which did, of course, arise. Soon, an improved business district arose, constructed of brick surrounding the new public open space.

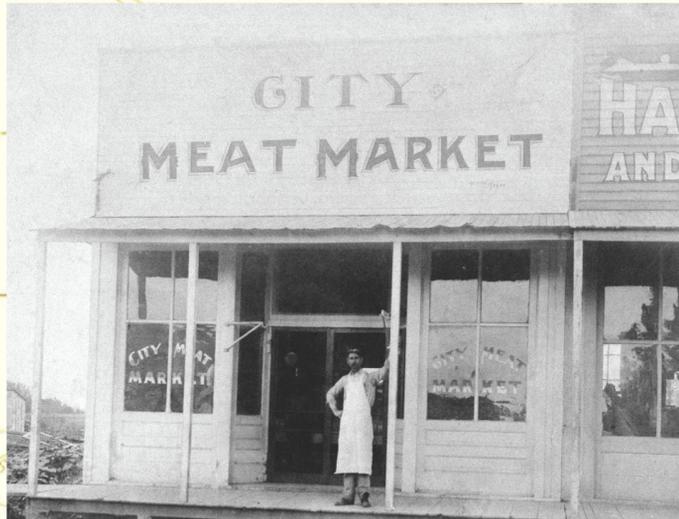
Though we still have an open public space at the center of downtown today, its use and appearance has continually changed. From horse and wagon hitch posts to a well, parking lots to memorials, fountains to green space, the square has evolved with downtown through time.



This turn of the century photograph (below) was taken from the southeast corner of the square. Visible businesses include Hudson Davis & Co., the National Bank of Garland and Gandy Dry Goods and H.W. Jones.



When the Citizen's National Bank original building was destroyed by the fire of 1899, Garland's first bank built a new brick building on the northeast corner of the square. Sharing the east side of the square were two restaurants and the W.W. Gully Drug Store.



Both the City Meat Market, pictured here in 1906, and its frame-structure neighbor, H.B. Hicks's Harness and Saddle, would have numbered among the buildings damaged by a fire in 1911.

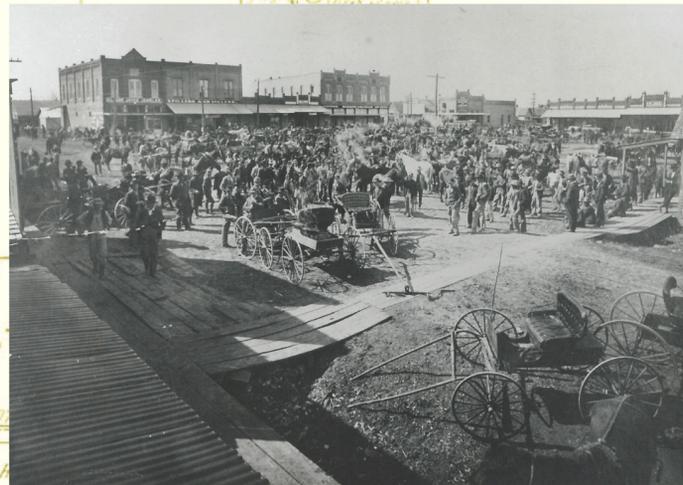
1900s to 1910s



The Garland News occupied this spot on Main Street in 1911, and the words can still be seen outside the building today. By this time, the paper was owned, published, edited and promoted by William A. Holford, a relative newcomer, self-appointed as the one-man pep squad for the city and its interests.



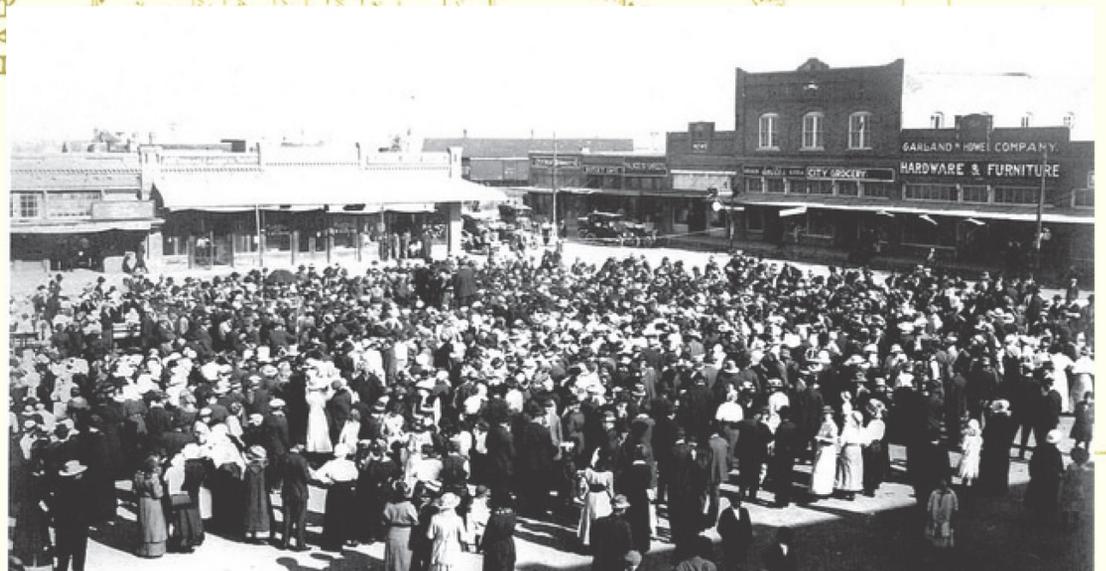
The Garland Square was unpaved when this photo framed its northeast corner (ca. 1906).



Seen here in 1908 is a typical Monday on the downtown square. Merchants offered special bargains to draw buyers from the surrounding areas.



Cyril M. and Cecil E. Flook are pictured in the Garland Grocery Wagon around 1915. The Garland Hotel and the east side of the square are visible in the background.



Shoppers in full dress milled casually about the south side of the Garland Square during the afternoon on Dollar Day, April 3, 1915. This group gathered for a drawing for a horse and buggy. The image was taken from the upper stories on the square's west side.



The west side of the square hosted only horse-drawn buggies when this image was made (ca. 1915), the year Texas Power & Light Co. strung electric wires through town.



Businesses occupying the north side of the square in this 1915 photo include Joe J. Hickle & Son, a general store selling dry goods, clothing, millinery supplies, shoes and hats, groceries and harnesses; H.W. Jones Hardware, selling hardware and furniture; the Lyric Theatre; C.D. Flook Grocery; A.J. Beaver Staple & Fancy Groceries; and the Garland Hotel.