Some History of 210 W. Jackson Avenue (Main Street)

Norman Rozeff, Updated March 2015

The Sanborn fire insurance maps show the structure to be there in 1919. It was likely constructed about 1911 as it shows in Runyon's 1912 photo taken from atop the water tower. While 50' wide, it extends only about 70' of the 140' length of the lot. It may have been constructed by its early occupants, the Franklins. The Chronology reports: 1910 Arriving by train, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Franklin are soon to set up a confectionery store adjacent to Elmore's Barber Shop. They may later have been proprietors of the Franklin Variety Store to the west of Edelsteins Furniture Store at 217 W. Jackson. By 1930 William and his wife Lillie had three children under 18 living with them. Early on the building has a rectangle false front to it. This feature will be retained over the years. In a 1920's photo the building is shown front-on. One can discern painted on its front in large lettering "Restaurant." This may be when it was owned by Webber or Weber for which no information has been found though we do have "On 1/11/19 Baker sells the remainder of block 44 to William B. Weber for $4,000."

In April 2011, Patty McConell of New Jersey provided some unusual history. She wrote "My grandfather, John Harris McConnell of South Carolina, bought a business called Weber or Webber's Café in Harlingen in January 1924 from one Frank B. Weber (or Webber). Probate papers give the location as Lot No. 17, Block 45 in the City of Harlingen. Tragically my grandfather was mortally injured in an auto accident near San Benito several weeks later and died January 23, 1924 in Mercy Hospital in Brownsville. My grandfather was apparently going to bring his entire family from South Carolina once he had gotten his new restaurant business up and running...He had sold all his holdings in South Carolina (about 4,000 acres along the Broad River) in the few years prior to going to Texas. While William A. Franklin held the note on the café, a W.E. Johnson was said to be ready to purchase the café upon the death of my grandfather and the subsequent settlement of his estate. My dad, Walter Ross McConnell, who lived to be 102, had the sad task of coming to Brownsville from Chester, SC to bring my grandfather home to Chester, SC for burial in Evergreen Cemetery."

Here is some information on Johnson:
1916 William E. and Jennie Johnson of Walnut, IL comes this year. They will own and operate early Harlingen cafes, one at 210 W. Jackson and later another at 717 E. Harrison, and produce baked goods and food items in the first wholesale bakery. He is to be a sales representative for the Lee Land Co., which houses home seekers in its Community Building, later to be the Stuart Place Clubhouse. In 1918 he brings his family. The children are Bill, Norma (Mrs. C.L. Carey), and Peggy (Mrs. Briggs). Over the years the Jackson Street café will see various owners --Mr. and Mrs. Heslop by 1931, Phil Edie by 1944, and the J. R. Fitzgeralds by 1948. Johnson has his hands in other business ventures as we glean from this entry:
"5/21/29 W. C. Brumley, Edinburg department store owner, commences remodeling W. E. Johnson's City Storage Garage between 1st and 2nd Street, E. Jackson, in order to open his new store by July."
The Harlingen Telephone Directory of 1930 lists William E. Johnson as proprietor of Johnson's Café at 210 W. Jackson. This year he provides space to E. B. Thompson for Thompson's News Stand. By 1937 Thompson will have moved next door to his own store.

By the 1931-32 directory 210 had changed hands and Dan Heslop is now the proprietor. The same holds true for 1935. Dan and Margaret reside with one child at 206 W. Madison. In 1937-38 the directory had W. E. Bryant as proprietor, but in 1939 it is Heslop again.(perhaps Bryant could not keep up with the notes on the sale?). In 1939, and this year only, space in the cafe is made for Feldman's Liquor Store. The Feldmans, Sam and Clara, also operate stores at 115 W. Van Buren Avenue and 107 South A Street. The cafe ownership status remains the same into 1942-43. The Heslops also owned an apartment complex called by their name. In 1944 Phil Edie is noted to be the manager of Johnson's. He will go on the next year to own and operate his own extremely popular restaurant, Hi-Way Inn at Four Corners.

By 1944 the restaurant has been purchased by the Fitzgerald family. John Robert Fitzgerald is the president of Tri-Pak Machinery, a going Harlingen firm that manufactures equipment for produce handling. The restaurant had been incorporated with John as president and his son Joe C. as VP, also Lloyd Killen as secretary-treasurer. In 1946 Bert R. Keyes is the restaurant manager. The Heslops are no longer listed in the Harlingen directory although the apartment is.

By the year 1950 Joe Fitzgerald is listed as Johnson's owner as he is through 1954. By 1956 the building is vacant, and we have seen the last of Johnson's.

In 1958 Lundy's Coffee and Sandwich Shop gives 210 a go. This enterprise is short-lived, for by 1959 it has become Lundy's Antique Shop with Ellen Franklin listed as its owner. After a two-year go at it, this business too shutters its doors only to see partners Eduardo & Eulalia Navarreta open their Fiesta Turista Cafe in the premise.

1962 sees Ellen Franklin back in 210 as owner of the Needle 'n Thread Shop Sewing and Alterations. By 1965 and for a number of years to follow the store is vacant.

In the year 1980 for one year, and one year only, one directory lists the occupant of 210 as Marty's Food Store, a partnership of M.J. & E.M. Franklin and G.F. Wallace. In 1990 the building was occupied for a short time by Maria's Ceramics. By 1994 the building was occupied by the Bernal Mexican Restaurant which will remain there until 2000 when it closes its doors. In the years 2004 and 2005 the Cole's Directory notes a Rosa Elia Galvan under 210 but with no telephone. After a number of years of vacancy The El Sombrero Restaurant, moved in by 2011 and has been there ever since.