Bennett Fire Station and Plaza Hotel Information
Compiled by Norman Rozeff

4/21 E.C. Bennett arrives. He will become Manager of the Water and Light District operated by the city. Born in Farmersburg, IN 9/29/90, he attends public schools. Married to Jennie Reed on 5/18/11, this First Methodist member is also a Mason and Shriner.

3/6/22 E.C. Bennett, in charge of all city equipment, unloads first solid wheel fire engine, a 350gpm American-La France Type 40 pumper. Fund raisers have helped to defray its cost. Bennett is city manager of utilities, 1921-1929. He authorizes the street name changes for the south-north cross streets but these are not implemented until 1926. Those east of the intersection of Harrison and Commerce get numbers and those west, letters. The cross streets west are given consecutive alphabet letters starting with A at Commerce and to the east, consecutive numbers. Street names which were lost, starting with Mexico Street becoming F Street, and moving east were: Matamoras, Hidalgo, Winchell, Bell, Hill, Fordyce (later 1st Street and also called in part New Combes Road), Brooking (sic), Van Arsdale, Beggs, Vanderbilt, Bennett, Whitaker (7th Street), Grace (8th), Bryan (9th), and Regan (10th). The south part of part of 9th was also named Harper for a time and south 10th Marie. As the city expanded west, Perry (Eye) and Cook (G) were added. The correct numbering of houses is also accomplished. These changes occur in late 1925 or early 1926.

1/1/27 E.C. Bennett succeeds Bert Gamble as elected fire chief and serves until late 1934. He will serve again from 1/36 until 8/36. William Winters is assistant fire chief and maintains the equipment.

1934 Bert Gamble is fire chief from 1934 until 1/36 when E. C. Bennett resumes the job. 8/36 This month E. C. Bennett completes the reorganization of the fire department and recommends fireman Jake Childress for the position. Childress commences his tenure as fire chief and will continue until April 1943 when he resigns to become deputy sheriff in Harlingen under Sheriff Tom Morrison.

1/1937 The city commissioners reappoints E. C. Bennett as a fire chief in order to tie up some loose ends in the department reorganization.

1950 Fire Station No. 1, 121 W. Jefferson, built as a $90,000 central facility and by 2002 valued at $910,720, opens this same year and is named the E.C. Bennett Station in honor of the early chief. R.C. Berna serves as fire chief for the period 3/15/50 until 3/15/51 when W. T. Hamilton takes over.

1925 Chris Daments and Joe Hauft operate the popular City Bakery and Candy Kitchen at 113 North A.

8/1925 Chris Damants and Joe Hauft build a new Rex Theater on the southwest corner of W. Monroe and A Streets facing Searle Furniture. Constructed by R.E. Ewing for $40,000, it seats 700. It is leased to Pickens. By 1927 it was too small to accommodate the increasing number of movie fans. On 9/24/26 a new theater corporation is announced, Valley Theaters, Inc. L.L. Dent is president, W.E. Paschall, treasurer, and D.B. Pickens, secretary. Jack Pickens, v.p. and manager of the Rialto and Rex is included in the new corporation. Six months later the group announces that it will construct a 1,500 seat
theater, the largest south of San Antonio, across from the Rialto. A beautiful sketch of
the building to be named The Aztec appears in the paper. Nine months later on 12/27
plan changes are announced. The Rex will be closed in January 1928 so its interior can
be rebuilt at a cost of $160,000. It is enlarged by building a new structure right over the
old one. A pipe organ is also installed. This was to be the Acadia Theater. It had its grand
opening 5/1/28. The Acadia will burn down in1970. Audiences at the Rex saw their first
"talkie" on 2/14/27. It featured Edward Everett Horton and Louise Fazenda in "The
Terror." The premier movie in the new Acadia was Richard Dix in "Easy Come, Easy
Go."

8/6/26 Chris Daments' Hotel Daments opened 6/8. The two-story building cost
$123,000. Its ground floor will house a café, shoe store, electric fixture store, barber
shop, and cleaning establishment as well as the lobby. By October a roof garden to cost
$45,000 is to be added. It is on A Street across from the Nelson apartments. It does not
get a roof garden but eventually gets a third floor and becomes the Plaza Hotel in 1930.
In November 1928 it advertises "The most home-like hotel in the Valley", a room for one
$5.00 a week without a bath, $8 for two. C.C. Hinds is the hotel manager. By mid-
November 1928 Mr. & Mrs. William W. Langham will be operating the Close Inn
restaurant in the hotel, having taken over the premise started in July by Mr. & Mrs. H. G.
Whisler and known as the Am-Café.

4/50 The City Hall at 202 E. Van Buren is being demolished. While the new one is
being built the city temporarily places its offices in the Plaza Hotel.