The New York Store and The Diana Shop, A Sweet Connection

Norman Rozef, HHPS, November 2008

At the entrance to the D'Arte Centre at 115 E. Jackson, Harlingen is a large fancy flowing letter D constructed in terrazzo tile. The people at the D'Arte Centre tell me that their name was selected with a starting letter D because of the existing symbol. The story behind this letter D goes back to the late 1930s. It is an interesting one.

This article comes about because of an e-mail generated by items on the CCHC website. The correspondent wrote: My name is Shirley Hewitt, and I am the Granddaughter of Rose Adolph who owned and operated The New York Store. I believe the timeline was sometimes in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and she ran the business, I believe, until the 1950s. I hope you can share any details or pictures to which you have access. I am also the daughter of Mildred Adolph Davis and Gerald Davis. My Uncle Charlie owed The Diana Shop. My parents first met while my mother was selecting an outfit for a date. My father always said, "It was love at first sight." My Father, Gerald Davis, who was a clerk in The Diana Shop offered to buy Mildred the outfit she chose if she would go out with him and cancel her prior engagement. Mildred Adolph agreed... and as they say...the rest is history!

I would love any information you have on any of the Adolphs (Rose, Mildred, Dorothy, Leo) and the Davis family, Gerald and Charlie. All these family members are now deceased. It would mean a great deal to me to have any information that can be found. Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

The New York Store is first documented in 1930 in the Harlingen telephone directory of that year. This is the first city telephone directory currently on file. The store's location was 218 W. Jackson Avenue, the town's main street. It was on the northeast corner intersection with Commerce Street, another important commercial thoroughfare. When the store actually began to occupy the site is unknown. The store occupied one of Harlingen's first structures, that of the Letzerich Building which still exists. It was built in 1909 by the physician brothers Casper and Alfred. To make use of a vacant triangular plot of land between the two-story building and Commerce Street, a one-story addition had been added at some unknown time. (A 1928 post card appears to show part of the addition being there by that date and it definitely was by July 1929 in the Sanborn Insurance Map). The wall into brother Hugo Letzerich's former pharmacy store was removed thereby making a large sales space for The New York Store. The store specialized in "dry goods", a term seldom used today. Dry goods were textiles, ready-to-wear clothing, and notions as distinguished from hardware and groceries.

The proprietor of The New York Store was listed as Rose Adolphus. Her surname was misspelled in the directory and should be Adolph. Listed as the widow of Adolf Adolphus(sic), her residence was 605 E. Monroe Avenue. Residing with her were three children under 18 years of age. The modest one-story frame house that once stood at 605 is now gone and the lot is vacant.

The 1931-32 again misspells her name but this time as Adolphs.
In the 1935 directory not only is Rose listed but also Leo Adolph who is at least 19 now and clerking in the store that has moved into 110 E. Jackson. This was a 1920s two-story building with only about 50' frontage but with a depth of up to 140'. During Hurricane Dolly on July 23, 2008 water accumulated on its roof and caused the collapse of the whole internal structure.

By 1939 all the Adolph children, Leo, Dorothy, and Mildred are listed separately. This year finds the first listing for The Diana Shop at 115 E. Jackson. Charles J. Davis is its owner. It specializes in ladies ready-to-wear merchandise. Charles and his wife Florence live at 404 E. Madison Avenue. The original frame house no longer exists. 115 E. Jackson is now the D'Arte Center, a very attractive gallery owned and operated by the Harlingen Art Forum.

In the 1941 directory Dorothy Adolph is listed as a student, Mildred as a college student, and Leo the proprietor of the Co-Ed Shoe Store. This store is located at 109 S. 2nd Street. For whatever reason Rose's store is simply listed as Adolph's, and it has changed locations once again, this time to 104 E. Jackson. This corner location, formerly a western store, has recently been renovated and is currently a large Subway franchise.

This same year Charles Davis has moved his residence to 214 W. Pierce Avenue. The small frame house that once occupied the lot has been replaced by a modest brick veneer structure.

With World War II having commenced in late 1941 for the US, we find that the 1942-43 directory lists Leo as being in the US Army while the status of his sisters remains the same. Rose's store, now again The New York Store, is back close to its original location, this time down the block to two-story 212 E. Jackson. This is also one of Harlingen's earliest commercial structures having been built about 1913 or earlier.

Charles has moved his residence again, this time to 717 E. Tyler Avenue, one of the city's main traffic routes. The house at 717 is a small frame one now being utilized as a women's salon.

In 1944 Dorothy and Mildred have become employees of the store. Leo has risen to the rate of staff sergeant in the Army Air Corps. He may be serving at the Harlingen Air Gunnery School at the Harlingen Army Air Field.

The Diana Shop continues to operate under Charles's direction. At his residence no wife Florence is listed. They may have separated, or she may have died.

By 1946 Rose has moved her residence to 918 E. Polk Avenue where Mildred lives with her. The site which likely once had a small frame house now has a small newer brick one. The New York Store is still in business this year.

Davis this year is living in the Madison Hotel on E. Polk. Built in 1928 this large hotel had suites for rent. It was demolished before 1951 to make room for a multi-storied bank building. There is no mention of his wife Florence.

We learn from the 1948 directory that Leo is married to Ann and is a merchant. The 1950 directory notes him to be a merchant in Weslaco. He and his wife reside at 918 E. Polk together with Rose and Mildred. This year there is no listing whatsoever for the New York Store. The 212 E. Jackson site is now occupied by Levine's Department Store.

The itinerant Charles has moved to 1620 S. 1st Street where Gerald (Jerry) Davis also resides. Gerald, Charles's brother, is noted to be an employee of The Diana Shop. 1620 is a modest sized cottage.
By 1950 Leo and Ann have moved into their own home at 1213 E. Polk. While Rose is still at 918 E. Polk, Mildred is not listed and may have married by that year.

In the 1952 directory Rose Adolph is not listed, but there is a listing for The New York Store at 212 W. Jackson.

The year is significant because Leo and Ann have had their first child by then. Gerald Davis, now the manager of The Diana Shop, has married Mildred Adolph and they are living at 918 E. Polk.

A change has also occurred in Charles's life. A wife, Carol, is noted at his residence together with a child under 18.

In 1954 Rose is to be found living at 817 E. Parkwood Drive together with Leo, Ann and a grandchild. Gerald, Mildred and their child also provide the same address. This brick veneer home was in an upscale location though modest in comparison to its neighbors.

The New York Store notes Gerald Davis as its owner and while 212 W. Jackson is listed as its address it has no classified ad in the directory.

1956 Leo Adolph has opened Leo's Department Store at 202 E. Jackson. This store will operate into 1958, but in 1959 the site is occupied by the Cannon Shoe Store with Tony Munguia as manager. That site is currently Alexandre's Jewelry and the Java Cafe. He and his family now reside at 1213 E. Polk. The house is a small stucco cottage.

By the 1956-57 publication Rose is to be found at 1913 Bell Street together with Gerald and Mildred. The address 1913 no longer exists as a house but has become a medical office strip.

1958 appears to be the last year that The New York Store is in business. In the following years the site is occupied by the Amigo Store, discount clothing.

Charles Davis appears to have lost or separated from his wife Carol by this year. The following year all Adolphs have apparently left Harlingen. The Gerald Davis family has also gone elsewhere. Gerald who was born 12/14/08 was to die 6/11/76.

Charles Davis will continue to own and operate The Diana Shop at least into 1974 when he may have died or retired. In 1975 Gerald is back in Harlingen, residing at his father's old abode at 1620 S. 1st Street, and operating the shop. The Diana Shop continues into 1979 and 1980 but by the latter year has moved into the attractive new Mercado Mall at 712 77 Sunshine Strip. The Diana Shop had been sold to Carol Graham. In 1980 the former downtown store was vacant. By 1981 The Diana Store is nowhere to be found.

The modest residences that the Davis and Adolph families occupied in Harlingen over the decades indicates that they were not ostentatious.

All the Adolphs and Davis family members noted here were to move to California by 1958. In the 1950s Rose and the Adolph children, Leo, Mildred and Dorothy formed a company named Adolph Properties and leased their many storefront locations in Downtown Harlingen. These properties were eventually sold and the partnership dissolved in the 1980s.

Because Mildred, born 3/20/21, died 2/26/65, her sister Dorothy Adolph Lutz (b.12/10/23, d.10/12/07) was to raise her two daughters, Shirley and Tobie. Rose, who had been born 7/6/1896, died 9/9/74. Leo passed away in the 1970s.

That The New York Store operated at least 29 years and The Diana Store 42 years is a testament to good management and high customer satisfaction.
Additional information furnished by granddaughter Shirley Annette Hewett of Vallejo, CA on April 3, 2010:
Rose and Abbish Adolph left the security of family and friends in Baltimore, MD in 1923 to start a new business in Harlingen Texas. On the way to Harlingen, The family needed to have what has since then been affectionately called a “pit” stop in Victoria, Texas.

The third and final child of the young couple was born on Dec. 10, 1923 in Victoria, Texas. Her name was Dorothy Adolph. The proud parents also had a son Leo and another daughter Mildred.

The young family opened the Adolph Store, then renamed it the New York Store, and the latter would operate over the years at different locations in the Downtown area. The Adolph has dedicated themselves and their lives to each other and the Harlingen community.[The store moved several times to locations on Jackson Street when the widow Rose believed that she could rent the former site for a good lease amount. She also owned rental household properties on Monroe Avenue. Later still the family would purchase a home to live in then move to another house and rent the first one.]

When they were old, enough Leo and Mildred helped Rose run the family business. Leo joined the Masonic Order.
Dorothy was the baby was always protected, as well as cherished.
Leo served in the World War II met and married Ann Dezettel and had a daughter Diane.

Mildred met Jerry (Gerald) Davis while shopping at the Diana Shop in Downtown Harlingen. Jerry always said it was love at first sight. They had two daughters Tobie and Shirley.

Dorothy graduated from Harlingen High and was a proud member of the Marching Band. Dorothy met and married Irving Lutz a young man who was stationed in Harlingen during the war. They had two children together.

Dorothy and Irving moved to California to start a business and their family Mildred and Jerry, their children moved to California in 1958 along with Rose Adolph
Leo, Ann and Diane moved that same year.

Mildred died in 1965, Leo died in the early 1970s.
Rose died in 1974, and Jerry died in 1977. Dorothy the youngest became the family Matriarch. We all depended on and loved the once sheltered baby. Dorothy became the strength and sole survivor. Dorothy raised her deceased sister’s children, took care of her sick Mother, aided her brother, and continued the goodwill of the Adolph name. Dorothy died in 2007.

The Adolph has left their hearts with the community here. [Harlingen] They had fond and cherished memories often spoke about the people and their businesses.

Knowing and having Lewis Levine as a friend meant a great deal to the Adolphins and in the history here, on behalf of the Adolphs we thank the Levine family and the community of Harlingen for the love and memories they have given all of us.