

ELKS Clock - SLAYED at 11:00 30
they could toast whomever
was not at the meetings

HISTORY OF THE "MILLER BUILDING"
BORGER, TEXAS
AS I HAVE COME TO KNOW IT
by ED BENZ 1-19-98

According to photographs I have seen, the Miller Building was constructed in 1927 as a one story brick structure. Rosa Pace has the earliest photo of it hanging in her office. Photos and our Boomtown video show the 2nd and 3rd stories were added in approximately 1931. The building was a fancy high rise landmark here during the Oil Boom days and may have even been the tallest building for a time.

I understand it was named for John R. Miller, Borger's first mayor. A look at the Building Abstract could verify that. Miller was a curious fellow and close friend of Ace Borger and they were alternately known as good guys and bad guys, depending on who is telling the story. However, we know that Miller was elected Mayor here six times. According to Slim Jones' book "BORGER the LITTLE OKLAHOMA", he said that Miller went bankrupt and barely escaped with his life under cover of darkness on a mule that was tied up outside of town. He came back to Borger several years later. John R Miller was an attorney. More can be learned of him in the Museum Surname file under John R. Miller.

Building features that are unusual are the curved window tops on the top floors and the stone clock over the North West door. Danny Scarborough said that the clock was a Masonic Symbol. There are also cast stone high lights around the windows. I always thought the gold brick color was very attractive and probably was quite expensive. The covered walk thru is unique on our main street. All in all the building is a very striking structure and symbolizes the oil boom riches here in the 1920's.

The Miller Building was the first home of Barney's Pharmacy at about 1931 to 1942 which was a Borger "Institution" started by Pharmacist Byron "Barney" Andress. That business later moved to the corner of Main & Grand St. and became a Borger landmark. There were soda fountains in both pharmacy's according to photographs. (See J.B. and "Barney" Andress file here at the museum). The downstairs had a stamped tin ceiling like most of the buildings on Main St. Dentist Dr. C. L. Hopper was a resident of the building in 1927. We have his sign in our collection.

Slim Harrel told me there was a concealed tunnel from one of the buildings near the Miller Building, if not in the Miller Building, to a "speak easy", or "safe house", across the block where Business Concepts is now. However, a tunnel has never been found. A large underground room lined with wood was found in that alley behind the Miller Building. It may or may not have been

related to this tunnel. (See the 1976 Hutchinson County Museum Scrapbook).

A list of all the businesses that were located in the Miller Building could be made by going through the old Borger Phone books or referring to the abstracts.

We have a 1934 photo in the collection of a teenager holding out a dead rattlesnake by the tail and standing by that building. The snake appears to be 6 feet and must have weighed 25 pounds. He killed the snake right there in a building on Main St.

James and Tim Wright, current owners of the building said that they had to tear out an old cedar swamp cooler from the downstairs back of the building. The boards were 1 1/2" thick. It measured 6'x8'x6' tall and had cedar trays for cooling. It must have been the state of the art in cooling for 1927.

All in all the Miller building has survived now 71 years in Borger and is a part of our history as a well known early landmark. My hope is that the Wrights will fix a simple display about the building and put a plaque in the window that relates to some of its interesting history.

by Ed Benz

Director,
Hutchinson County Museum