

SAVING HISTORIC LANSDALE

MOYER BUILDING HOME TO MANY



LATE 1800s VIEW OF THE ORIGINAL MOYER BUILDING

By **DICK SHEARER**

If you want a glimpse of what life was like in downtown Lansdale in the late 19th century, look no farther than the Moyer Building.

What is the Moyer Building, you ask? Glimpse at the photo accompanying this story and you'll recognize it immediately. Today a big portion of it is home to the Chantilly Floral Boutique. About 125 years have passed since a Matthew Brady-era camera captured that old-time image of W. Main and Walnut Sts. The same can be said for many businesses – more than 100 have come and gone in the intervening years.

Despite a dozen decades and many retrofits to satisfy all those tenants, the Moyer Building still looks great, perhaps better than ever. That is why it's near the top of our list of historic downtown commercial structures that deserve long-time preservation.

It was built by Tobias D. Koffel who first came to

Lansdale in the late 1870s to erect a general store at Main and Broad Sts. where McQuillan's Photography Studio is now located.

Koffel ran the store for a few years but sold it to J.M. Slifer and moved out of town for a period. He returned in 1885 and purchased the valuable strip of land on Walnut Street from Main to Second. On it he erected his new store, which was strategically located within a snowball's toss of the railroad tracks. In short order it attracted many additional businesspeople who became his tenants.

In August, 1890, Koffel enlisted Lansdale architect Milton Bean to draw up plans for an addition on Walnut Street that would include a post office. Like the original building, it was rented out quickly.

But Koffel's time in the store was limited to about seven years. He sold the business - but not the building - to Brand and Kratz in 1892. The reason was illness; he contracted acute tuberculosis in 1892

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1)
and died in 1894

Koffel's passing led to a public auction of his buildings in September, 1895, but it failed miserably despite the advantage of their track-side location. Bidding on the entire tract started at \$9,500 but there were no takers.

Two years later, the buildings still remained unsold so the heirs of his estate agreed to allow Koffel's widow to retain ownership for \$11,000.

The name "Moyer" was finally attached to the structure in April, 1904, when the Moyer Brothers purchased it from the widow. Like Koffel, they started out operating a general store in the Slifer building in 1899 before moving to Main and Walnut.

The Moyers made extensive improvements to the building which included refitting the ground level stores as well as the offices, meeting rooms and apartments on the second and third floors. Among the changes was the addition of a meeting room (capacity 75) for use by lodges.

Over the next four years, the Moyers completed renovations that expanded the Walnut Street portion of the building to three full stories by building atop what was there before. Among the improvements was a "commodious toilet for the use of office tenants". The exterior on the Walnut Street side was reworked to give the building the appearance it has today.

Because of its size and adaptability, the Moyer Building as it was called after 1904, attracted a wide range of businesses over the decades, far too many to list here and some which may have been long forgotten.

They were as diverse as an umbrella factory, a Ford dealership, furniture stores, shoe stores, at least four grocery stores, a drug store or two, a cigar factory and store, a camera shop, a hosiery mill, a millinery parlor, a Chinese laundry and countless clothing shops.

It is safe to say that if one downtown structure is a testament to Lansdale's once-vibrant commercial district, it is the Moyer Building, still going strong after all these years.



VIEW OF WALNUT STREET SIDE OF MOYER BUILDING CIRCA 1915