

The Groos House 1873-1963

Home of the St. Joseph's Society

For many years, St. Joseph's Hall was one of the fun places to visit. It appeared that adults enjoyed it as much as we kids. It was a large house, built in 1873 on East Commerce for the family of Friedrich Groos, a banker and prominent member of the German population in San Antonio. In 1925 the Groos family sold it to St. Joseph's Society, a benevolent group made up of men from St. Joseph Church two blocks down the street.

St. Joseph's Society is a benevolent organization founded in 1868 largely to help fund the new church and to aid members in need. They also extended their charitable efforts to victims of the 1900 Galveston hurricane and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. In 1909 they sponsored benefit concerts to raise funds for the restoration of San Antonio's old Spanish Missions. Their early meetings were held in Meyer's Hall, home of F.I. Meyer's fine wine import business on Alamo Plaza. In 1892 the membership built their first hall on Commerce St. across from the church and rectory.

After remodeling the house, the organization moved into their new home in 1929. In 1946 they added four bowling lanes that extended to the rear of the property on Market Street. The three-story house served as a meeting place for the society as well as the women's St. Elizabeth Society and other groups. The Liederkrantz, a male singing group formed at the church in 1892 practiced in one of the upstairs rooms. The kids also used the upstairs rooms for spooky games of hide-and-seek. The bowling alley with the adjoining bar and pool tables was the definitely the social hub of the building. I heard that there

were slot machines, probably in a small room behind the bar. I recall my mother telling my dad that her mother and other women played them after their morning bowling leagues were complete, and he said that she better watch out or she would be arrested. The hall was definitely a community home for local Germans. Entire families would accompany Dad on his bowling night. There was a lady who talked too loud and too long and kindly old gentlemen named Krause, Reininger, Mayer, etc. It was where I learned to set pins, and where my sister met the boy she would eventually marry. The parking lot provided free parking to members' wives when shopping. I still recall my sisters going to their driver's test and being concerned about the parallel parking segment. My mother told them, "don't worry, just tell them that you park in St. Joseph's when you go to town."

It was sad when my mother wrote me that the building was going to be torn down to make room for the big fair coming to town. It still had a chance in 1966 if only agreement could have been reached to slightly change the location of the proposed marina. But finally it became official. As with many homes and buildings in the areas, a lot of memories were mixed in with the pile of rubble.

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