THE LAST DAYS OF THE NUSBAUM HOUSE

— A CHRONICLE

BY MARK HEYMAN

—CONTINUED

The first part of this chronicle was published in the September-October issue of NMA. As before, all quotations are from “The New Mexican.”

SEPTEMBER 14. CITY READY TO RAZE NUSBAUM BLDG. “... A legal blockade was removed, a mild victory was gained by the Old Santa Fe Assn., and the city of Santa Fe is ready once again to move forward with its plans to raze the 100-year-old Nusbaum building on Washington Ave., for a parking lot.

The agreement, as read by Judge Scarborough, stipulated that the city would, after awarding the contract, enter an agreement with the contractor that the firm would apply to the building inspector for a permit to raze the building, and that the application would, in turn, be referred to the historical style committee and the City Planning Commission . . . .”

SEPTEMBER 18. Oliver LaFarge’s column: “... Let us look again at this Nusbaum parking lot proposition ... . Given the questions involved, nothing could have been more advantageous to the city as a whole, nor more generous, than the Old Santa Fe Assn.’s offer to pay the rent on the property until the professional city planners who are being brought in could render a decision on preserving or razing the Nusbaum building. . . .”

SEPTEMBER 23. STATE ARCHITECTS RECOMMEND SAVING OLD SF NUSBAUM BUILDING. “The historical style committee . . . has received a recommendation from the state chapter of the American Institute of Architects for the preservation of the Nusbaum house . . . .”

OCTOBER 6. Under a photograph of the Nusbaum building, this caption: “Printed proof of the Nusbaum Building’s status as one of Santa Fe’s historic buildings is found in an old volume in the archives of the Museum of New Mexico. The book, published in 1885 by William G. Ritch, includes a full-page picture of the building—then the Spiegelberg residence—and reports that President and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes lived there during an 1880 visit to Santa Fe . . . also Generals Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, stayed in the building . . . .”

OCTOBER 6. HISTORICAL STYLE COMMITTEE REBUFFS COUNCIL PARKING PLAN. “The historical style committee of the city planning commission last night handed the city council a rebuff. The style committee voted 4-1 to recommend to the planning commission the denial of . . . a permit to demolish the Nusbaum house . . . .”

OCTOBER 7. PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDS NUSBAUM BUILDING DEMOLITION. “... In an unexpected move last night, the City Planning Commission at a special meeting voted by the narrowest of margins to recommend to the City Council that the application for a permit to raze the 100-year-old building be approved.

The vote was 5-4, with Chairman Kenneth Clark casting the deciding ballot. Voting to demolish the building were Clark, Robert Anderson, Forrest Mapes, Walter Keesing and John T. Kirby. Voting against it were Irene von Horvath, Jim Adler, Ben Padilla, and Ralph Digneo. ... Chairman Clark said, “The building we’re talking about preserving goes back to 1906. The building is sound, if left alone. I don’t consider it of any architectural value, any more than 50 other buildings in Santa Fe.”

Anderson said, “The question of off-street parking is a critical one for the downtown area . . . A parking lot further away would be worthless . . . One menace facing us is the outstanding shopping center . . . The loss of one building won’t destroy the spirit of Santa Fe.”

Favoring preservation of the building, Adler spoke of its structural soundness, architectural value, and historical value. He said it was questionable whether the site was a desirable spot for a parking lot. He noted the congestion on Washington Ave., and the nearness of the police and fire stations . . .

OCTOBER 12. NUSBAUM BATTLE AT END. “The long, occasionally bitter fight to save the old Nusbaum building on Washington Ave. apparently is at an end. John Gaw Meem . . . said today the OSFA board of trustees has decided to present no further appeals . . . .”

OCTOBER 18. The razing of the Nusbaum building was begun. It was found that the building was structurally sound. Both the century-old and newer walls had been laid with lime or cement mortar, rather than adobe “mud”.

By Thanksgiving the destruction of the Nusbaum house was complete.

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