

# The Pagel Family Times

Volume 26

June 2026

## COMING HOME

### The Story of Johanna's House

by Janis Richardson

*This year's story revolves around the widow of Gottfried and Friedrike Dickow Pagel's second child, Charles Pagel.*

When Johanna Kuehne Pagel was sixty-one and newly widowed, she settled into one of the finer houses in Hallettsville. Her husband, Charles Pagel, had died in December 1903, after forty-two years of marriage and fourteen children. Within two years, Johanna had made her decision: she would leave the farm north of town and move into Hallettsville proper.

Rather than selling the land to fund her new life, she divided it—roughly a hundred acres to each surviving child. The house she found waiting for her had been built in 1902 by Dr. C.A. Lee, a dentist and oral surgeon, and his wife, Eva Ratliff Lee, who had married in 1898 and moved to Texas from Mississippi. Dr. Lee maintained a practice in the Neuhaus Building in Hallettsville before moving to Houston, where he became a prominent dentist and one of the founders of the Texas Dental College, now the University of Texas School of Dentistry.

A Hallettsville newspaper reported on November 9, 1905, that "Mrs. C. Pagel has purchased the handsome cottage known as the C. A. Lee place and will move to town shortly and occupy same." By the end of that year, 507 Second Street was hers.

The house announced itself. It featured a prominent turret capped by a conical roof, a wraparound porch supported by turned columns, steeply pitched gabled dormers, and tall arched windows with decorative hood moldings. A white picket fence enclosed the yard, and a swing hung from the porch. It was the home of a woman who knew her place in the community and intended to keep it.

For twenty years, the house was the center of Johanna's life in Hallettsville. A devoted Methodist, she contributed, in the words of her obituary, "no little labor and money for the upbuilding of that

## 2026 PAGEL FAMILY REUNION

Saturday, July 11th

**10:30–11:30 Tour Johanna's House in Process of Restoration**  
406 N. La Grange Street, Hallettsville 77964

**11:00–3:00 Noon Meal, Brief Business Meeting, & Visiting**  
Hallettsville Methodist Church Fellowship Hall  
206 S. Dowling Street, Hallettsville 77964

Our catered noon meal of chicken-fried chicken breasts and 3 sides will be \$10/plate, payable at the door. You are welcome to bring a dessert. We'll pass the hat to cover the hall rental and postage.

If you have questions, please email Rox Ann at [roxannjohnson@me.com](mailto:roxannjohnson@me.com) or call 512-925-4804. It would be great to get an approximate meal count and also to hear about recent births, deaths, and marriages.



*Johanna (Kuehne) Pagel's Home at its original location in Hallettsville*

church." Her home was where the family gathered and where the community found its way to her door. When she died in July 1925, at eighty-one, the Hallettsville newspaper called her "one of Texas' and Lavaca County's earliest pioneer citizens and among the most respected and beloved ladies of our county," and the funeral was held in the house itself. She was buried at the Pagel family cemetery, three miles north of town.

### The Family Under One Roof

Census records tell us who lived in that house with Johanna over the years. By 1910, she was living there with her daughter Emilie and Emilie's husband, Bert Peterson—newlyweds, married just

the year before. By 1920, they had moved to their own home.

In 1920, the house housed four generations under one roof, brought together by circumstance and loss, as much as by choice. Her daughter Lizzie—Elizabeth Johanna Pagel Haeusler—had been widowed in 1918 and moved in with her mother, bringing two adult children, Theodore and Lydia, and three-year-old Lillye Harvey Haeusler, Lizzie's granddaughter. Lillye Harvey's father, Lizzie's son Victor Carl, had lost his young wife in childbirth in 1916 and, undone by grief, could not care for the child. Lizzie raised her instead. Lizzie's obituary would later say that Lillye, left motherless at an early

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age, “found in her a mother as well as a grandmother.”

Lizzie’s other children had their own households by then, but knew the place well. Among them was Christine Johanna Haeusler, who had married William Repschleger in 1910 and moved to Port Arthur. Every summer, Christine brought her four children—Lillian, Helen, Billie Mae, and Bill—back to Hallettsville to visit grandmother Lizzie. There, young Billie Mae looked up at the turret and gave it the name she’d use for the rest of her life: the “upside-down ice cream cone.”

The 1930 census shows the same household still in place, five years after Johanna’s death. Lizzie is listed as a renter, paying rent to live in the home that had passed to Johanna’s children as part of Johanna’s estate.

### 1935: The House Is Sold

Johanna had willed her estate to her eleven living children, and in 1935 they sold the house to P. M. Brown. Around the same time, Lizzie moved out, and the O. H. Bock family moved in as the Browns’ tenants—a Hallettsville newspaper noted that the house had been “formerly occupied by Mrs. J. J. Heisler.” Lizzie remained in Hallettsville for several more years before moving to Schulenburg in her final nine months to be near her daughter, Lillian. She died in 1941.

The house changed hands several times over the next two decades. The Browns sold it to the Moores in 1945, and in 1957 the Moore estate sold the property to First Baptist Church for \$6,500, as the congregation raised funds for a new building. Ground wasn’t broken right away—the new building didn’t go up until the early 1960s—and around then the house was finally moved to clear the lot. It was relocated to La Grange Street, about three blocks north of the courthouse square.

The move came at a cost. The wrap-around porch was removed, the turret and gabled roofline stripped off, and a simpler roof fitted in their place. The house survived, but it arrived changed and humbled. The number 507 above the

This issue of *The Pagel Family Times* was edited by Rox Ann Johnson, Pagel Family Reunion historian, who takes full responsibility for its content. You may contact her at (512) 925-4804 or roxannjohnson@me.com.

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front door—original to the house—traveled with it and remains there today.

At some point, the interior was divided into two units. The original kitchen became the apartment’s kitchen; the dining room—which Johanna’s granddaughter Helen Zumwalt remembered in her family memoir as holding a crystal chandelier—became its living space and bedroom; and the sleeping porch was enclosed to create a bathroom and closet. In the front, one bedroom became a kitchen.

The house continued to change hands for decades, growing less recognizable with each owner. After the last owner passed away, it stood vacant for more than ten years, all but forgotten.

### What Kept the Memory Alive

Billie Mae Repschleger Johnston—daughter of Christine and granddaughter of Lizzie—carried her summer memories of the wraparound porch and the upside-down ice cream cone throughout her life.

In 2003, her daughter Janis Johnston Richardson moved to Hallettsville with her husband, Merle, to be near her aging parents. Lovers of old houses, they renovated one just around the corner from Johanna’s former home and saw it daily—coming and going, from their yard and from their side windows.

Billie Mae, who lived just two miles away, would point it out: that house, there—that was my grandmother’s house. She knew it as Lizzie’s house and may not have fully traced the line back to Johanna herself. But she kept pointing, and Janis kept looking.

That’s how family history travels—not through documents, but through a person saying, again and again: this matters, don’t forget.

Janis didn’t forget. When the house came up for sale, the family connection made the decision. They knew what they were taking on—utilities hadn’t been turned on in eight years—but they took the leap of faith and purchased it in February 2026.

Carefully, since the front steps were gone, Janis walked through the door for the first time and stopped in the front parlor, tears in her eyes. The rooms were

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## IN REMEMBRANCE

This issue of *The Pagel Family Times* is dedicated to the memory of those who have passed away since the last newsletter, which was sent in 2024.

Barbara Horbal Ahrens  
Ronald Wayne Chapman  
William M. “Bill” Chenault, Jr.  
Wynoka Patteson Chenault  
Annette (Marlow) Geffert  
Mary Rose (Strauss) Grafe  
Patricia Kay Leffingwell Halm  
Peggy (Bellinger) Jones  
Horace Albert O’Neill  
James Doyle “Corky” Pagel  
James Emil Pagel  
Rhonda (Burt) Pagel  
Charles Roy Pankey, Jr.  
Elizabeth (Zimmerman) Petcosky  
Alice Faye Rector  
Jean (Arnim) Rothenberg

stained with decades of cigarette smoke, the grand windows replaced with smaller aluminum ones, and the plumbing and electrical systems were in need of complete replacement.

Yet the original woodwork was still there, and the bones of Johanna’s floor plan were intact beneath everything time had layered over them. She could feel the weight of those who had stood in that same spot before her—Johanna, Lizzie, and all the family and friends who had passed through those rooms and made memories there.

### The Restoration

Using the 1906 Sanborn fire-insurance map and the original family photograph as guides, Janis and Merle intend to restore the roofline to its original form: the turret, the center dormer, and the wraparound porch with its turned columns. The apartment division will be reversed.

When the restoration is complete, the house will open as an Airbnb—perhaps under the name Johanna’s Cottage. The family has come home to it, and it, in its own way, has been waiting.

### www.pagelfamily.org

Our cousin, Clay Maeckel, generously provides space on his server for our family reunion web site. Thank you, Clay!