

## Chapter 5b

### The Weigele Family and the Hotel Weigele

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George Weigele, Sr., his wife, Alama, and his son, George, Jr., were some of Alamogordo's pioneers, arriving ca. 1903. The family operated a bakery, store, and boarding house as well as the Hotel Weigele, a popular establishment into the 1960s (albeit under a different name by that time). As noted in the previous chapter, the younger Weigele founded the first long-term soda bottling plant in Alamogordo.

#### History

George Weigele<sup>1</sup> was born in Indiana in 1859. The son of a German immigrant, he was married to Alma Weigele (born in Pennsylvania) and had a son, George, Jr., who accompanied the couple to Alamogordo (Figure 5b-1). George, Jr. was also married, and his wife, Amelia, was a naturalized citizen, originally from Sweden. George, Jr., and Amelia had eight children: Alma, Albert, Ernest, Eda, Georgia, May, June and "Junior" – who was actually another "George" (14<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, 1920; personal communication, Carol Worth, 2003).



Figure 5b-1 – George & Alma Weigele, 1905 (Courtesy of Carol Worth)

The Weigele family arrived in Alamogordo around 1903. Although I have found little about the Weigele family prior to their arrival at the town of the fat cottonwoods, they apparently had operated a bakery at Oro Grande, New Mexico, ca. 35 miles south of the town – about half-way to El Paso. An undated photo in the June Harwell collection shows two men standing in front of a small building with a single front door. Two signs are on the front of the building:

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<sup>1</sup> The 1920 census listed him as "Weigele, Geo. A.," but I have never found another reference to "A" or any other middle initial for either George or his son (George Weigele, Jr.). A 1903 deed record stated the senior Weigele's name as "Ernst George Weigele" and another early deed noted him as "Earnest" – almost certainly a misspelling rather than a comment about his honesty. Otherwise, he was always listed as George Weigele.

“GENERAL MERCHANDISE” to the right of the door and “WEIGELE BREAD” to the left. At the foot of the wall is an “ORO GRANDE” sign, with a sign for “FURNISHED ROOMS” out front. The man on the left looks like a younger George Weigele, Sr. (Figure 5b-2).



Figure 5b-2 – Weigele’s Bakery at Oro Grande; the man on the left is probably George Weigele (Courtesy of June Harwell)

On December 21, 1903, Alma and “Ernst George Weigele” took out a \$2000.00 mortgage to purchase Lot 12, Block 16 – the southeast corner of New York Ave. and Ninth St. (822 New York). The mortgage interest was 12% with payments on “the 25<sup>th</sup> day of each and every month of the term of the loan” adding up to a total interest of \$1,095.60! The Interstate Savings & Trust Co. released the deed to the couple on December 18, 1905 (Otero County Deed Records, b. 6, p. 414; b. 21, pp. 6-10, 181).

George, Sr., originally ran a bakery on the corner with help from his son, George, Jr., while Alma offered furnished rooms for borders on the second floor of the same building (Figure 5b-3). The back of the lot (east end) was devoted to the actual baking facilities, including the oven, a large flour storage shed, and cooking space. The bakery was one of the few buildings in Alamogordo to have a corner doorway (NMSBD 1903; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1905).

In July and August of 1904, “Weigele’s Bakery” advertised “Specialties for Saturday” that included such items as German Coffee Cake, Lemon Cream Pies, Lemon Cream Layer Cakes, Lemon Roll, and Jelly Roll as well as “Fine Fresh Bread and Rolls Daily” (*Alamogordo Journal* July 18, 1904). A January 1905 ad included “Rye Bread, Graham Bread, White Bread and the Famous Quaker Bread, all kinds of Cold Meats for Lunches, Hot Coffee, Tea and Milk” (*Alamogordo Daily Journal* January 9, 1905), and “Cheese! Cheese! Imported Swiss Cheese, Brick, Limburger, Neufchatel, Imperial and Imported Cervalet Sausage, Baked Ham, all kinds of Bread, Cakes and Doughnuts, fresh every day” was included in Weigele’s final ad for the month (*Alamogordo Daily Journal* January 30, 1905).

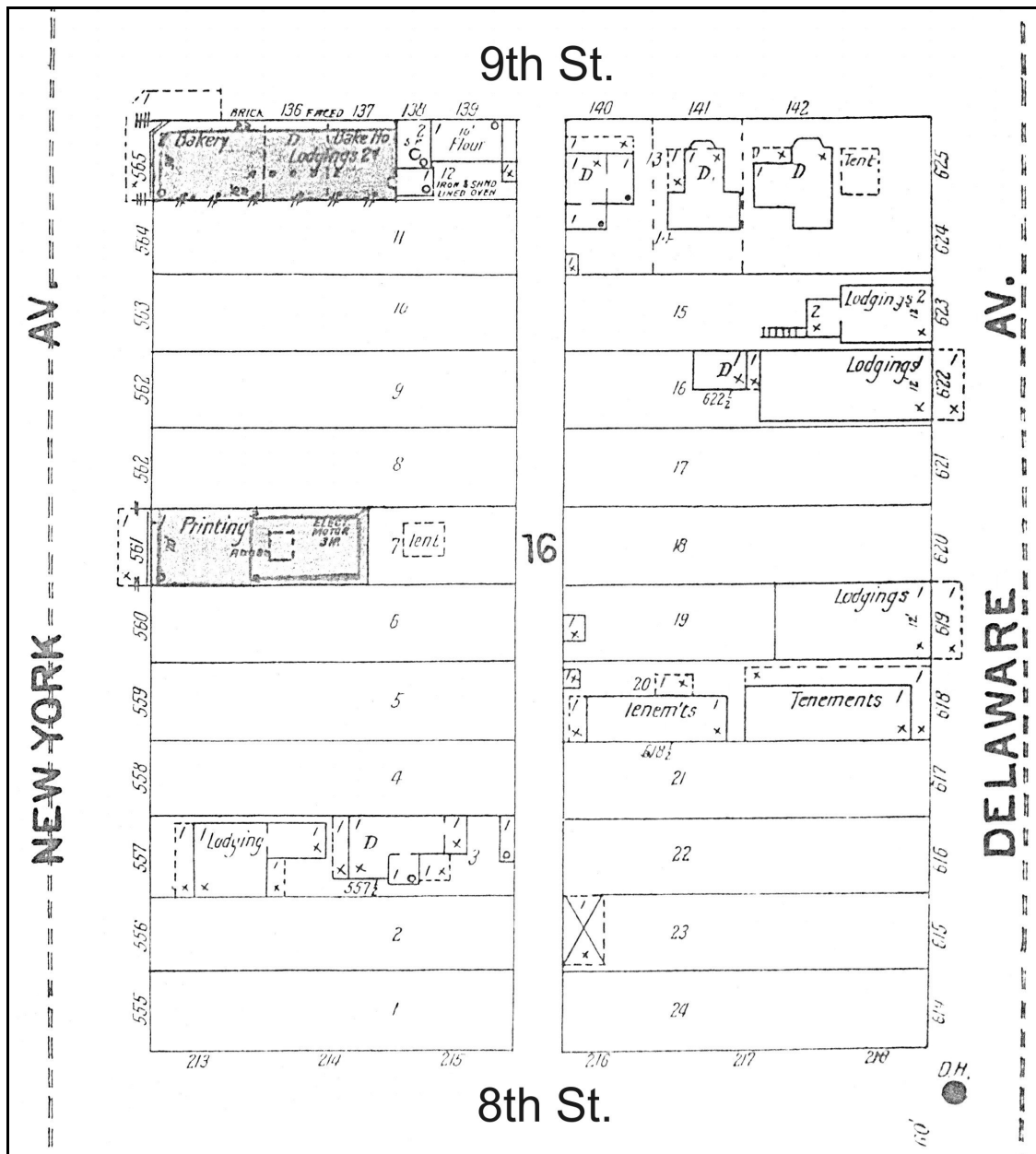


Figure 5b-3 – Weigele’s Bakery and Boarding House, 1905 (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1905)

George and Alma apparently dreamed of a bigger venture and began accumulating the needed land on March 6, 1907, with the acquisition of Lot 11 on Block 16 – the plot that adjoined their 822 New York Ave. property – from the New Mexico Real Estate Co. at a cost of \$450.00. The deed spelled George’s name as “Earnest George Weigle” (Deed Records, b. 25, p. 351). The misspelling of “Ernest” accidentally suggests that George was very honest, although I cannot find an equally cute reference for the misspelling of “Weigele.”

Meanwhile, the couple sought living quarters for themselves with no boarders. On January 12, 1906, they entered into a mortgage with J.M. Rhomberg, one of the town's two jewelers, for \$1,500.00 on Lot 9, Block 75 (Figure 5b-4), situated on Ohio Ave, one lot south of 12<sup>th</sup> St. The couple satisfied the mortgage on October 12, 1908, and sold the lot and house to George Weigele, Jr., the next day for \$1,000.00. George (Jr.) and his wife, Amalia, in turn, sold the lot to Ida C. Thomas on May 21, 1910, for \$1,000.00 (Otero County Deed Records b. 23, p. 95; b. 23, p. 373; b. 23, p. 545; b. 24, p. 154).

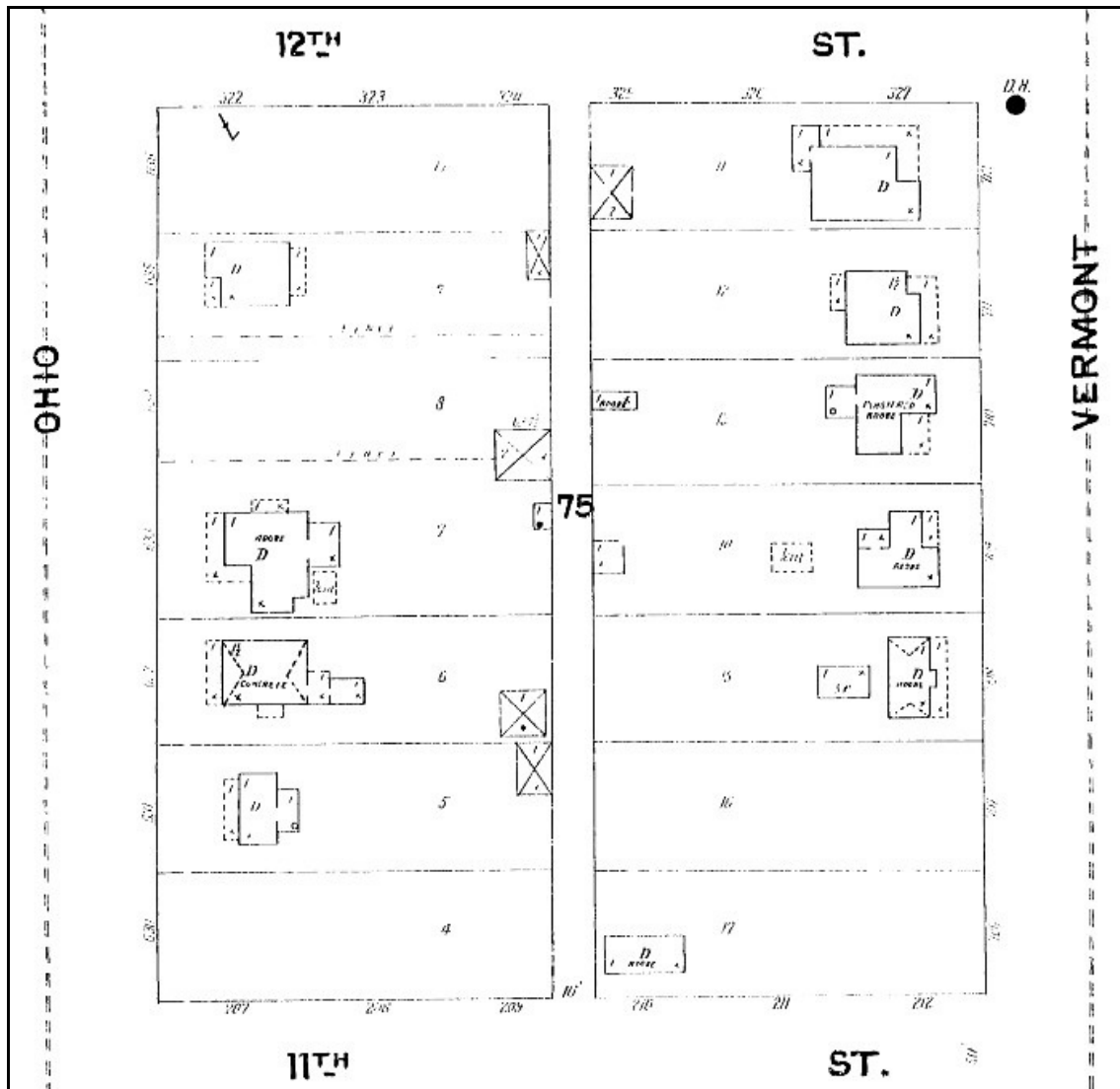


Figure 5b-4 – Block 75 – dwellings of both George and Alma and of George, Jr. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1905)

George and Alma opened another mortgage, this time with the Alamogordo Improvement Co., on July 24, 1907. This \$250.00 mortgage was for Lot 17, Block 75, the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> St. and Vermont Ave. (southeast corner of Block 75). The small house faced 11<sup>th</sup> St. near the middle of the block. George, Jr., and his wife, Amelia, purchased the lot just north (Lot 16, Block 75) on January 18, 1916 from the Alamogordo Improvement Co. and sold it to the older Weigeles a year later on January 17, 1917 (Otero County Deed Records b. 22, p. 82; b. 49, p. 492; b. 49, p. 496). This may have become their next home, but the record becomes unclear due to the numerous real estate transactions discussed below.

George and Alma wanted to expand, so they took out a mortgage with C. Ferguson for \$800.00 on Lot 19, Block 16, on October 18, 1908. Although this was in the same block as their bakery and boarding house, it was on the east side of the block, facing Delaware Ave. (see Figure 5b-3). The building was listed as “Lodgings” on the 1905 Sanborn map, and that was probably the Weigele’s initial use of the facility. However, when George, Jr., began soda bottling in earnest in 1911, he moved the operation to the Delaware Ave. location (Figure 5b-5; see Chapter 5a for history of the bottling plant).<sup>2</sup>



Figure 5b-5 – George & Alma Weigele (left) with George, Jr., standing on right (Courtesy of Carol Worth)

On January 30, 1909, the couple took out a mortgage for \$300.00 for Lot 10, Block 16, on New York Ave., adjoining their other two lots (NMSBD 1905-06, 1907-08; Otero County Deed Records, b. 18, p. 460; b. 22, p. 116). The acquisition of these three adjoining lots gave them a large contiguous property at a good commercial location. This made their holdings on New York Ave. complete and would change the direction of their lives in a few years.

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<sup>2</sup> As a postscript, George and Alma eventually acquired Lot 18 on Block 16, immediately north of the former bottling location. Although the couple sold most of their holdings earlier, they held onto these two lots on Delaware Ave. until April 1925, when they finally sold them to Albert and Helen H. Beck for “One Dollar and other valuable considerations” (Deed Records b. 85, p. 152).

When George opened Weigle's New Store in 1910, he broke his pattern of land ownership by renting a building on Tenth St. next to Evans Jewelers (Figure 5b-6 – see Figure 5a-1 for a copy of the ad).<sup>3</sup>

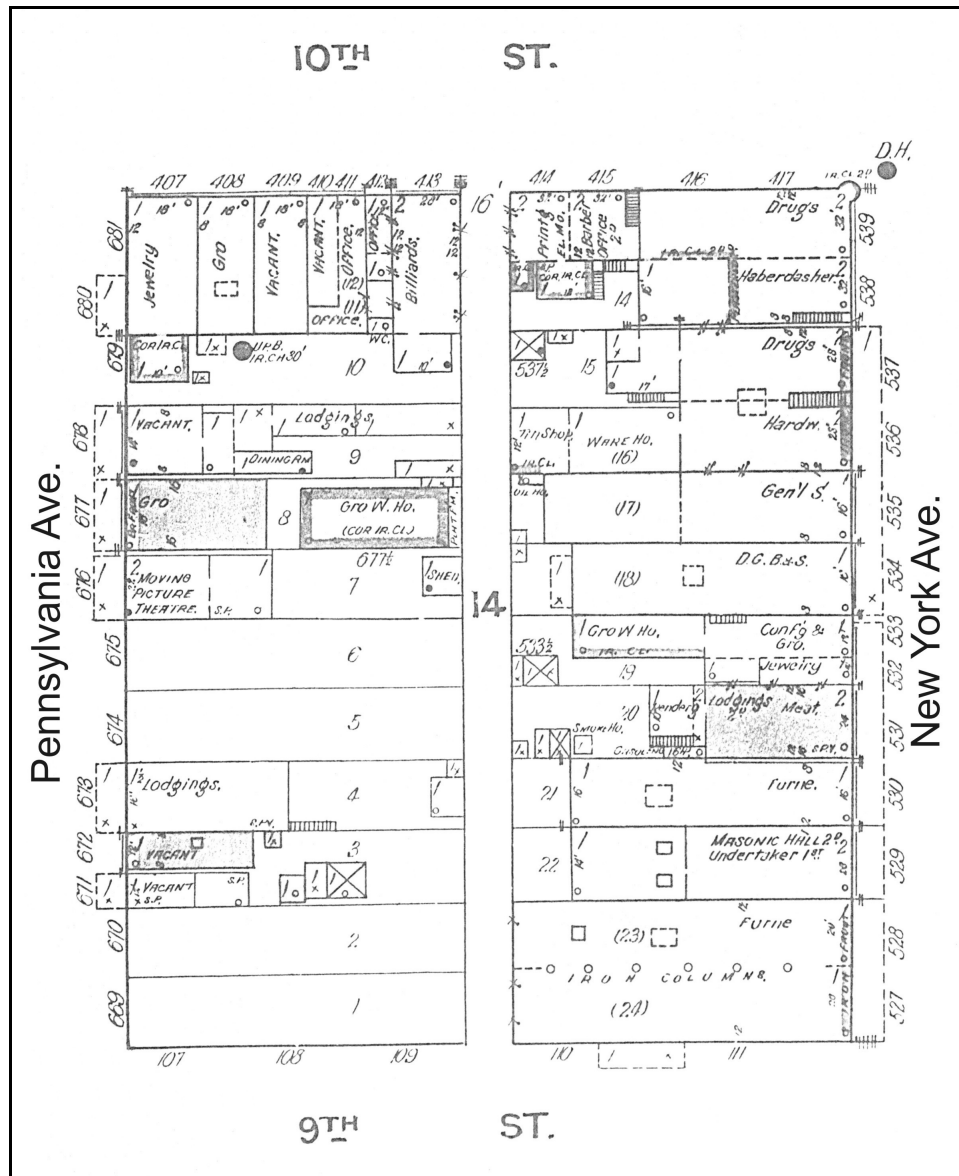


Figure 5b-6 – Weigle's New Store on 10<sup>th</sup> St.; 408 10<sup>th</sup> St. – next to jewelers (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1911)

<sup>3</sup> See the section on Location for a discussion about how I traced locations.

Just two years before the opening of Weigele's New Store, the city had added some of its earliest concrete sidewalks along Tenth St. in front of the two shops. The imprinted mark of the W.H. Miller Concrete Co., Alamogordo, remains (in 2011) in the sidewalk that extends along Tenth St. between New York Ave. and Delaware Ave. The mark bears the date of 1908 (Figure 5b-7).



Figure 5b-7 – W.H. Miller's concrete stamp on 10<sup>th</sup> St.

Miller advertised in the *Alamogordo News* (August 20, 1913) that he was a “Cement Contractor” ( 5b-8). By at least 1911, Alma had begun using St. Elmo as the name for her boarding house at 9<sup>th</sup> St. & New York Ave. (Stanley 1963:8; NMSBD 1911-12, 1913-14; Otero County Deed Records, b. 23, p. 601-602; Sanborn Maps, 1911).



Figure 5b-8 – Ad for W.H. Miller, Cement Contractor (*Alamogordo News* August 20, 1913)

George and Alma became involved in a number of real estate deals between 1911 and 1916 that included lots on Alamogordo's south side (Chihuahuita – the “Mexican” section of town), the business district, and other residential sites. In addition, they owned property at Cloudcroft and locations outside of either town. In 1923, the couple began selling of their holdings and released their last economic ties with Alamogordo in April 1925.<sup>4</sup>

One other set of real estate transactions is worth mentioning. On September 26, 1912, George and Alma purchased Lot 23, Block 18 from P.E. and Guadalupe Portillo for \$200. The property was on the Delaware Ave. side of the block at Sixth St. When the couple prepared to leave Alamogordo, they set the property in trust as a “place of divine worship for the use of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church South (Mexican Branch)” for \$75. Although I have not found any supporting documentation, it appears that the Weigeles had some strong connections in the Mexican-American side of town.

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<sup>4</sup> This information came from numerous deed records. These may be found with a search at the Otero County Clerk's Office. They are not especially relevant to this work, and the citations would take up a great deal of space.

The Weigele family also supported civic activities, such as the big Alamogordo Fourth of July celebrations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1912-1914). George Weigele, Jr., helped provide the music offered at the bandstand at Alameda Park, and “Dad” Weigele (George, Sr.) donated loaves of bread from his bakery for the free feasts offered to the public at the park and at vacant lots throughout town. Along with such fun events as a greased pig chase for the



Figure 5b-10 – Mike Missik’s concrete stamp

kids and a greased pole climb, people were entertained by calf roping, bronc riding, and other rodeo-like events (Tower

1999:231). Weigele’s support also went beyond individual celebrations. When the Rotary Club of Alamogordo was chartered on April 30, 1923, George Weigele was one of the charter members (Harris 1999:200).

In late 1917, the Weigeles closed the store, demolished the St. Elmo, and contracted with Mike Missik, a local general contractor, to build a new and larger structure (*Otero County News* 11/15/1917). Missik was active in Alamogordo construction, and his marks may still be seen in the concrete sidewalks on Michigan Avenue between Twelfth and Sixteenth



Figure 5b-12 – George & Alma inside the hotel with guests (Courtesy of Carol Worth)

Streets in no less than twenty-nine places (Figures 5b-9 & 5b-10). This was apparently the end of George Weigele’s baking activities – at least outside of the Hotel Weigele kitchen. I have found no record of how he felt about this complete change of identity.

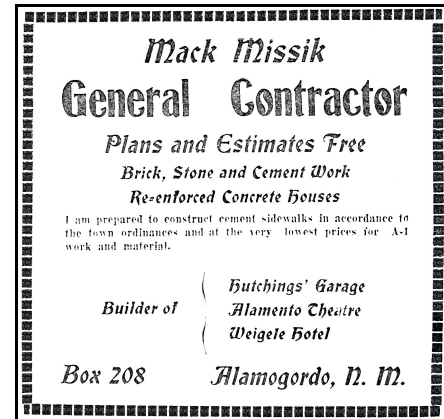


Figure 5b-9 – Ad for Mike Missik, General Contractor (*Alamogordo News* November 15, 1917)



Figure 5b-11 – Ad announcing the opening of Weigele’s New Hotel (*Alamogordo News*, 9/6/1917)



The New Hotel Weigele retained the 822 New York Ave. address (as well as the corner entrance) and offered private baths, hot and cold running water, and steam heat along with free transportation to and from the railway depot (Figures 5b-11, 5b-12, 5b-13). Covering all of Lots 10, 11, and 12 of Block 16, the hotel contained thirty rooms and had a large lobby. An ad in the *Alamogordo News* claimed reasonable rates and “Every Convenience for Commercial Men.” The New Hotel Weigele was scheduled to open on October 1, 1917 (*Alamogordo News* September 6, 1917; NMSBD 1915-1920; Sanborn Maps, 1921).

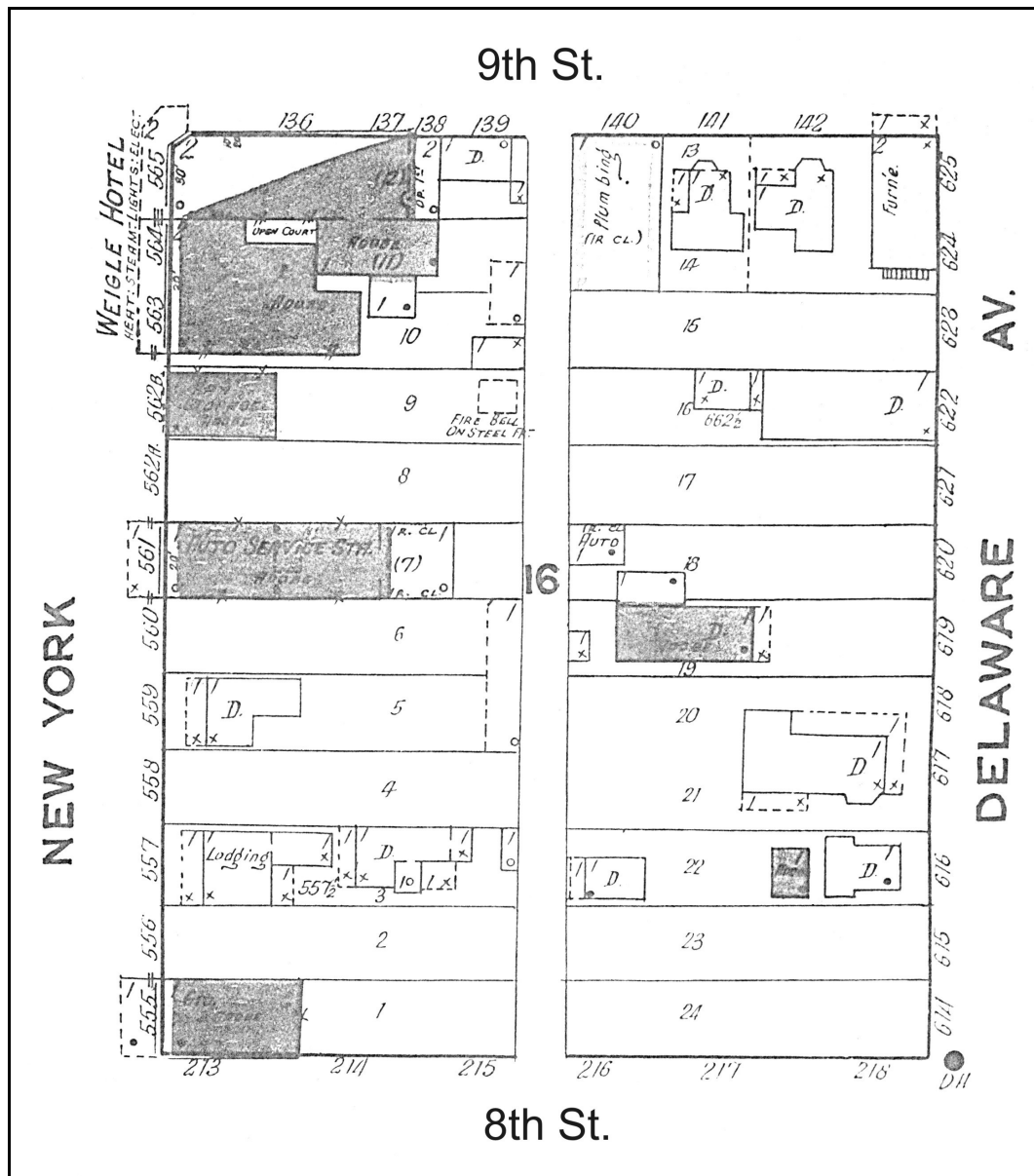


Figure 5b-13 – Hotel Weigele (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1921)

In 1921, the Weigele family went East on an extended visit. While they were gone, they “leased the New Weigele Hotel to Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Holme, who will continue to operate this popular place along the same lines as has [sic] been pursued by the owners.” Coming to Alamogordo from Denver, the Holme family was experienced in the hotel business, having operated the Palms Hotel in that city (*Alamogordo Cloudcrofter* March 18, 1921). I have not found a notice of Weigele’s return.



Figure 5b-14 – Hotel Weigele – photo appeared in the *Alamogordo News* July 21, 1927 (Courtesy of the Tularosa Basin Historical Society)

George, Sr., and Alma Weigele sold the hotel to William A. Randle and Bessie D. Randle on April 14, 1924, for \$25,000 with payments of \$350 per month during the first year and \$400 per month thereafter. Randle was also required to insure the hotel in Weigele’s name for \$20,000. The deed, like all land transactions of the time, contained a liquor clause whereby the owner promised that “intoxicating liquors shall never be manufactured, sold or otherwise disposed of, as a beverage or medicine . . . upon the premises”



Figure 5b-15 – George & Alma later in life with two of their grandchildren (Courtesy of Carol Worth)

(Otero County Deed Records, b. 80, p. 669, b. 81, p. 315, 357, b. 82, p. 530). A photo of the hotel appeared in the *Alamogordo News* on July 21, 1927 (Figure 5b-14)

The new owners promoted the Hotel Weigele (no longer New) as a “Home for the Traveling Public.” George and Alma began to liquidate their holdings prior to leaving town. One of their final sales, on April 18, 1925, was the first home of the Alamogordo Bottling Works, although the couple may have left prior to the final sale (Figure 5b-15). They attended a picnic for former Alamogordo residents in Pasadena, California, on November 1, 1925 (Anderson 1986:15; NMSBD 1923-1927).

Randle operated the hotel until March 15, 1928, when John R. Dowdle (1871-1958) and his wife, Bessie D. Dowdle took charge of the operation (Figures 5b-16 & 5b-17). Dowdle was 56 years old when he began running the hotel and advertised the establishment as a “home for commercial men and the traveling public, modern, reasonable rates” – combining the slogans used by both the Weigeles

and the Randles. Rooms were available for “\$1.00 and \$1.50, \$2.50 with bath” (NMSBD 1927-1931, 1936, 1938, 1940-41; Tombstone of John R. Dowdle, Alamogordo Cemetery). The *News* (March 8, 1928) bragged that:

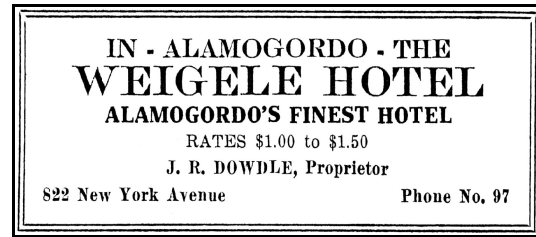


Figure 5b-16 – Hotel Weigele ad, J.R. Dowdle, proprietor (Alamogordo City Directory, ca. 1930)

the new owners expect to give the hotel their personal attention and it is a foregone conclusion that Mr. and Mrs. Dowdle will make their guests feel at home. They are each imbued with that characteristic hospitality that makes their guests feel at perfect ease.

The Hotel Weigele has always enjoyed a splendid patronage from the traveling public and it is certain that the reputation it has enjoyed in the past will not suffer in the slightest when Mr. and Mrs. Dowdle take charge.

Dowdle, along with his wife, Bessie did not actually buy the hotel until June 29, 1936, for a price of \$30,000. The Dowdles operated the hotel until 1943 (Otero County Deed Records, b. 107, p. 439). Dowdle also owned the Alamogordo Theater in the 1920s, although the couple sold it to their son, George Dowdle, and George P. Robertson in May of 1927 then left town for Luftkin, Texas. John and Bessie told the newspaper that they planned to return and live in Alamogordo for the rest of their lives (*Alamogordo News* May 5, 1927). Russ Henderson described Dowdle as:

“a large, jolly man who owned the theater. He had trouble remembering what was playing at the theater. We kids had a thing going with him when he was away from the theater. We would ask, “Mr. Dowdle, what’s on tonight?” His stock answer was, “ Well, boys, I don’t rightfully know what is showing, but it is a finnnne film, a great picture.” That went on and on (Henderson 1999:200).

On September 8, 1943, John R. Dowdle sold the “Weigle” Hotel (note different spelling) to “Mrs. J.C. Wilborn and Mrs. Wilborn’s sister, Mrs. M.M. Ward,” although the new owners would not “take over management [until] September 15.” The *News* noted that “Mr. and Mrs. J.R. Dowdle who have operated the hotel for many years, are retiring because of health consideration and will go to Deming to live with their son George Dowdle” (*Alamogordo News* September 9, 1943).



Figure 5b-17 – Room Key, Hotel Weigele

The deed for the hotel identified the new owners as “Maude A. Ward (a single woman) and Ethel Wilborn” and gave the price as “\$1,000 . . . and other valuable considerations” (Otero County Deed Records, b. 124, p. 189). Two years later, on September 25, 1945, “Maude T. Ward (special partner) and Mrs. J.C. [Ethel] Wilborn (general partner)” formed a partnership called Wilborn & Co. with a capital of \$10,000 “contributed equally by the Partners hereto” (Otero County Deed Records, b. 128, p. 41, b. 129, p. 278)

The partnership was specifically created to buy the Weigle Hotel and change its name to the Wilward Hotel, named for the two new owners. The partners were to divide profits equally, although “the General Partner shall be in control of the operation of the Partnership business. . . .” Both partners moved into the hotel. Wilborn & Co. bought the Weigle Hotel on the same day as the partnership agreement for \$10,000, payable to the Weigle Hotel. The hotel was a two-story, frame building with plaster on the outside and a large sign over the corner doorway (Otero County Deed Records, b. 128, p. 41, b. 129, p. 278).

After 17 years of successful operation, the ladies dissolved the partnership on February 10, 1962, because – “due to her physical inability to carry on her activities in the partnership business, Ethel Wilborn is retiring as an active partner in the business, and selling her interest in the said business to the remaining partner, Maude T. Ward.” The price had appreciated considerably since their purchase in 1943. Ward now paid Wilborn \$30,000 for her half, the same price the partners originally paid for the entire hotel. Despite the hotel’s location next door to Alamogordo’s fire station (Figure 5b-18), the property (along with the fire station) burned to the ground later in the 1960s (Callaway interview, January 23, 1998; Otero County Deed Records, b. 282, p. 291, b. 287, p. 475-476).

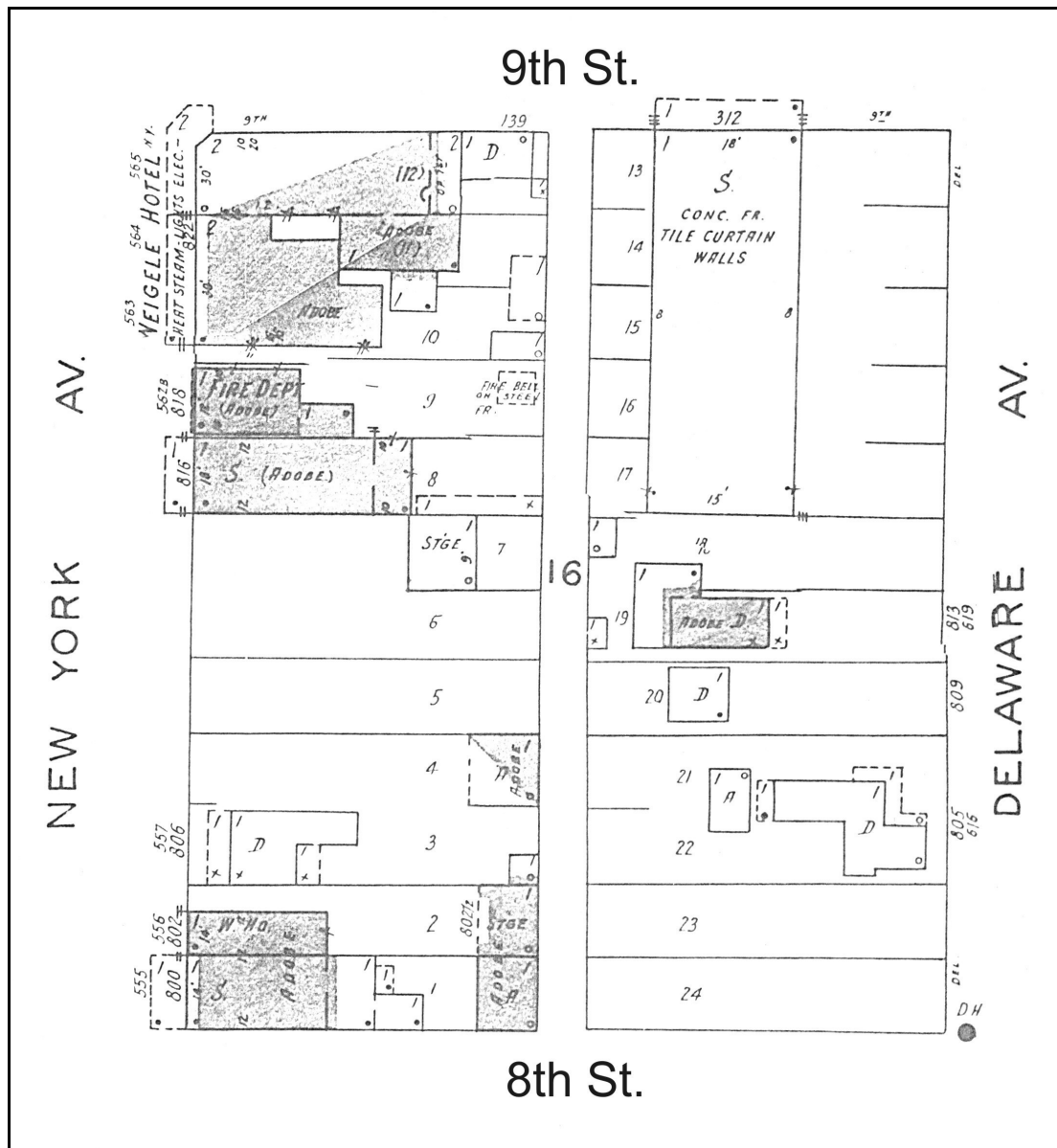


Figure 5b-18 – Wilward Hotel, next to fire station (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1942)

The Wilward Hotel fire has an interesting sequel. During the late 1960s or early 1970s, a group of downtown property owners met to discuss installing new sidewalks along Ninth St. Present at the meeting were Maude Ward and Leonard Sheffield. With great embarrassment, Ward disclosed that she was unable to pay her share for the proposed sidewalks because she was still in debt from her former business and had no assets other than the three lots that formerly contained the Wilward Hotel (Sheffield interview, March 28, 1998).

After some internal debate, Sheffield decided that it was his Christian duty to help out and, on February 2, 1971, he bought the lots through his business, Sheffield Furniture, Inc. That same day, he acquired the fourth adjoining lot along New York Ave. from Jack and Maude Rathgerber and, within a few years, negotiated with Montgomery Ward to build a building on the property and lease it to them. Interestingly, the four properties combined to make a total perimeter of 100x120 feet – the exact size to fit Montgomery Ward’s smallest store plan. Sheffield’s generosity was rewarded (Otero County Deed Records, b. 378, p. 723; b. 380, p. 272; b. 382, p. 822; b. 376, p. 625; b. 381, p. 922; Sheffield interview, March 28, 1998).

## Location

The Weigeles owned and/or operated a bakery, boarding house, store, hotel, and bottling works. In addition, both the older Weigeles and the family of George, Jr., owned their own homes and other properties. In all but one case, the respective families owned the property, and the locations are very straight forward due to deed records. The location of Weigele’s New Store, however, is a bit more nebulous. See Figure 5b-19 for an overview of the Weigele properties in the central parts of Alamogordo.

### New York Ave. and 9<sup>th</sup> St.

This was the original Weigele property, acquired in 1903. George and Alma built a bakery and boarding house on the corner, then bought the two adjoining lots. The 1905 Sanborn fire insurance map only shows the bakery and boarding house. By the time the 1911 map was drawn, the couple had built a building on Lot 11 that was marked “Vacant.” When the property was paid off, the couple built their dream business – the Hotel Weigele. They ran the hotel until they left Alamogordo.

### Delaware Ave.

George Weigele, Jr., purchased this property on October 18, 1908. Since this property was originally a boarding house, the senior Weigeles may have intended to shift their rooming trade to the Delaware Ave. location. George and Alma bought the lot from their son on May 5, 1911, possibly with the business shift in mind.

Meanwhile, George, Jr., had begun a soda bottling operation in the back of the Weigele bakery at the corner of New York Ave. and 9<sup>th</sup> St. in 1910 to provide sodas for his father's new store. When the bottling business expanded at some point during 1911, the younger Weigele built the first Alamogordo Bottling Works in the former boarding house building. He made sodas there until he sold the business to Jerry Johnson in 1914. Johnson relocated to New York Ave., near 10<sup>th</sup> St.

10<sup>th</sup> St. Near Pennsylvania Ave.

On April 21, 1910, the *Alamogordo News* announced the opening of Weigele's New Store "Next to Evans Jewelry Store." Unlike their other ventures, there is no evidence in the deed records that the Weigeles ever purchased this property. Thus, the proximity of Evans Jewelry Store is the only link to the location.

In January 1909, Henry S. Evans purchased the Rhomberg Jewelry Store. Frank M. Rhomberg's store was originally adjacent to the post office (where he was postmaster), but he moved it to the Gilbert Building on New York Ave. in September 1903 (Anderson 1998:95-96, 98). Anderson (1998:98) quoted a 1909 newspaper that Evans was "now the sole owner of the corner jewelry store."

Alamogordo had two jewelry stores that were shown on the 1905 and 1911 Sanborn maps. One was on the corner of Pennsylvania Ave. and 10<sup>th</sup> St., and this was almost certainly the location of Evans' store – a corner location. An awning extending into Pennsylvania Ave. indicated an entrance on that side of the building, and a room extended south into the adjoining lot. A restaurant was positioned south of the extension with a barber shop to the immediate right. On the 1911 map, the restaurant was marked "VACANT," and a grocery (almost certainly Weigele's New Store) occupied the spot next to the jewelry store (see Figure 5b-6).

A slight complication comes from the location of the town's second jewelry store, on New York Ave., between 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> streets. This, too, was shown on both maps. In 1905, there was a "Confec" (confectionery) immediately to the north that grew into a "Conf'g & Gro" (probably confectionery and grocery) with a "Gro W Ho." (grocery ware house) just behind it to the west. Since Weigele also advertised as a confectionery in connection with his bakery, it is tempting to assign this business as his location.

However, three things argue strongly in favor of the Pennsylvania and 10<sup>th</sup> St. location, with the grocery next door. First, the jewelry store *is* a corner business as noted for Evans Jewelry Store in the 1909 newspaper. Second, the grocery store appears on the 1911 map but not on the one from 1905. Remember that Weigele opened the New Store in 1910, so that business should *not* have appeared on the 1905 map – and that was the case at the New York Ave. location. Finally, the New York Ave. location was already present on the 1905 map – suggesting that it was in continuous business – a situation that should *not* have occurred with Weigele’s store.

Weigele’s New Store, therefore, was located on 10<sup>th</sup> St., one door east of Pennsylvania Ave. – next to Evans Jewelry Store.

### Block 75 and Other Properties

The Weigeles either rented a home or lived at the St. Elmo (boarding house – New York & 9<sup>th</sup>) until they bought the lot on Ohio St. (Block 75) in January 1906. The couple sold the lot to George, Jr., in 1908. From that point on, both the elder and younger Weigele families owned and sold various properties, commercial and residential in the city and as far away as Cloudcroft. It is thus impossible to trace their actual living quarters through deed records and Sanborn maps.



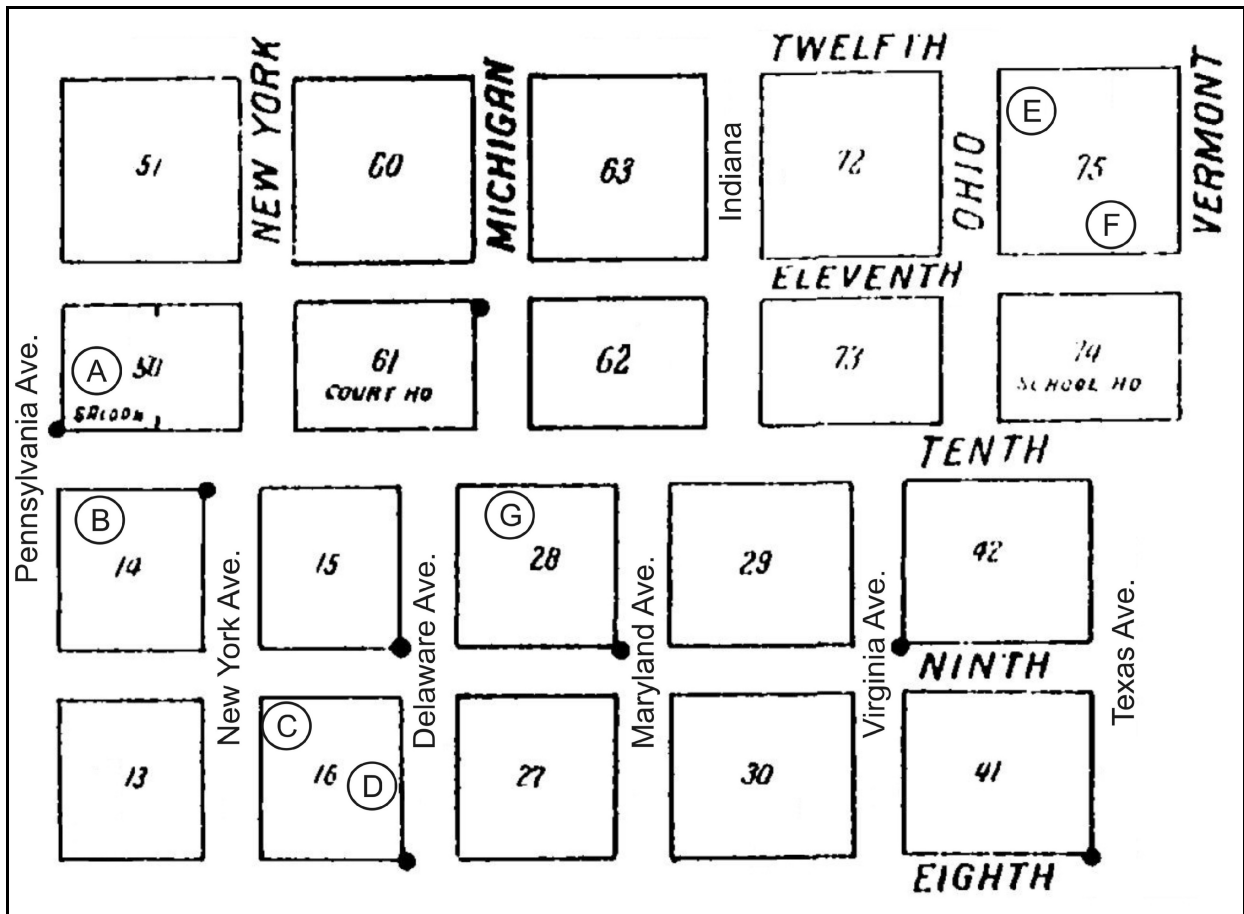


Figure 5b-19 – Area of Alamogordo occupied by the Weigele Family

- A – Saloon
- B – Weigele's New Store
- C – Hotel Weigele
- D – Alamogordo Bottling Works
- E – Home of George and Alma Weigele
- F – Home of George, Jr., and Amelia
- G – Alamogordo Hotel

