Just as apprehensive Fort Worthians proceeded into the depression years with cautious hope, the advent of the new decade had them clinging to another kind of uncertain optimism, one that would keep them out of the world war that was already engorging much of Europe and Asia. Of course, it was beyond the ability of Fort Worth to escape something so pervasive as the economic depression of the Thirties, and once again it could not avoid being touched by the larger events of the Forties. Yet, just as the federally funded New Deal projects had provided an unexpected boost that lifted the city’s fortunes, the war effort brought another round of government spending. Once more the face and fortunes of the Panther City would be forever changed.

In the fall of 1940 almost every edition of the *Star-Telegram* heralded the movements of German troops and the Nazi’s bombing of London. But ever so briefly the war clouds parted as Fort Worth showcased *The Westerner*, starring Gary Cooper. “Everybody but Hitler Here for Premier,” trumpeted one of several headlines. The “City Where the West Begins” rolled out the red carpet for the show’s stars, Cooper and Doris Davenport, as well as the movie’s director, William Wyler, and its producer, MGM mogul Samuel Goldwyn. Other luminaries included comedian Bob Hope and America’s favorite sidekicks Walter Brennan and Chill Wills.

Organizers whipped up enthusiasm for the star-studded event by staging a parade. In front, on horseback, was the tall, handsome Cooper; beside him rode a beaming Amon Carter. Davenport trailed behind them in a buggy and delighted in talking to adults and children alike, who crowded around her as the procession cut a slow path along the route.

As hundreds of spectators leaned out of the windows of office buildings for a commanding view, thousands of others lined the streets, many dressed in range attire, waving cowboy hats and kerchiefs. Several times the parade ground to a halt, but the effervescent Cooper took the delays as an opportunity to sign autographs—mostly on the hats of admirers—until he was forced to move along. A *Star-Telegram* reporter surmised that he “accumulated enough fuzz off of ten-gallon hats to stuff a pillow.”

The parade ended at the Will Rogers Auditorium, where *The Westerner* premiered at 2 p.m. It rolled again that evening at both the Worth and Hollywood theaters. Outside, the reconstructed street took on the appearance of a western movie set. Crowning the day of festivities was “The Westerner Movie Star Ball,” an invitation-only event where well-heeled patrons danced alongside their screen idols at the Hotel Texas’ Crystal Ballroom.

If Gary Cooper took Fort Worthians minds off of world events, the 1940 publication of a best-selling fiction, *The Inheritors*, caused another kind of sensation. The provocative novel by Philip Aile, pen name of James Young Phillips, rocked Fort Worth
society a generation before Grace Metalious's *Peyton Place* would cause the blue blood of New Englanders to run cold. Phillips had spent his teenage years growing up at a Crestline Drive home on the prosperous west side, where most of the city’s movers and shakers then resided. The peccadilloes of their silver-spooned children provided plenty of grist for a story filled with prodigious drinking, gratuitous sex, and favors due the privileged. “Her kiss was soft and searching, an insinuating pleasure that moved warmth over my mouth and shook me,” read a lurid passage. “Desire stiffened in me like wonder, and I put her down on the bed, looked at her rounded loveliness…”

The wagging tongues of gossipers guessed at the thinly veiled identities of the characters, while the real-life subjects recoiled in indignation. At the library, so many books disappeared from the shelves that the sole remaining copy was kept under lock and key, its readers assigned a place near the eyes of watchful staff members.

The early 1940s also saw the Jim Hotel, located at 413 East Fifth Street, hit stride as a center for an emerging jazz and blues culture. The Cooper brothers—Levi, Bob, and Oscar—acquired the complex from Bill McDonald during the Depression and nurtured its College Inn nightclub into an underground institution. By the 1940s white Fort Worth had shrugged off the social risks of packing into the cramped Jim alongside the regular African-American clientele to see such performers as Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, and Billie Holiday. Even white entertainers like Sarah Vaughan, Chick Webb, and Paul Whiteman played to mixed audiences late at night after performing at other venues.

The white owners of those nightclubs, however, complained that the Jim, which did not usually start hopping until after midnight, was siphoning off their late night business and appealed to local authorities to impose a 1 a.m. curfew. About a day or so

Gary Cooper rides alongside a beaming Amon Carter, just in front of a banner that read “Where the Westerner Begins.”

Former TCU All-American Sammy Baugh made a better Indian than a cowboy. At the beginning of the decade, the Washington Redskins quarterback and future Hall-of-Famer tried his hand at acting. Here, Baugh poses for a still shot publicizing his starring role in the serial, *King of the Texas Rangers*.

Fort Worthians loved a parade and enjoyed a steady procession during the Forties. This one celebrated the dedication of the Will Rogers Memorial Coliseum, just before the decade’s first Thanksgiving.

A generation before Peyton Place, high society in Fort Worth recoiled in indignation over *The Inheritors*.

**JACKET COVER FROM THE INHERITORS BY JAMES PHILIP ATLEE. USED BY PERMISSION OF THE DIAL PRESS/DELL PUBLISHING, A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.**
after the edict had been handed down, the Jim’s staff got a call from prominent socialite Anne Burnett, who said she was bringing along a little group that night. “I told her she couldn’t do that because the police wouldn’t let us play music late,” remembered Bob Cooper. “She said not to worry about the police, that she’d take care of the police. She did. We never had a problem with the police after that.”

Despite the emotional display and the appearance of America’s number one box office cowboy Gene Autry, the show lost money in 1942. When officials wondered aloud whether to continue holding the North Side tradition, nature itself provided the answer. A few weeks after the show closed, the one-two punch of a flash flood ended any hope that it would continue to enjoy its Stockyards home. The first wall of water rose five feet over the banks of Marine Creek, the second one over seven. Small buildings became battering rams that caved in the brick walls of more substantial structures. Entire inventories from store shelves, the contents of desks and file cabinets, and even trophies and loving cups swept from the Livestock Exchange Building swirled among cars and trash and dead animals as the flotsam mass hurtled toward the swollen Trinity.

Efforts to rebuild the heart of North Side focused on meeting the needs of a city at war, and in 1943 the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show failed to open its gates for the first time in forty-seven years. “There is a strange quiet hovering over Exchange Avenue these mid-March days,” read a Chamber of Commerce brochure in 1943. “Back of it all, of course, are the same three fellows who have been causing all of the trouble of late—Hitler, Tojo and Mussolini.”

John B. Davis, the show’s secretary-manager, stated: “the entire energy and equipment of the livestock industry should be devoted to the task of increased production in line with our Government’s request.”

By that time, of course, Fort Worth and America were in the thick of the conflict. On December 7, 1941, Dave Naugle was the first man in town to get the news of Pearl Harbor. He was on duty at radio station KFJZ, when suddenly the bells on the teletype machines started going crazy. “Flash—Japs Attack Oahu.” Government wires conveying the news at first ordered radio staff not to give the identity of the island town that was under attack, nor to give the local weather—presumably in the event that another wave of Zeros had targeted the mainland. Soon, however, Americans were poring over globes and atlases looking for the small dot on the map that denoted Pearl Harbor.

Amon Carter sent his own cable to his friend President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Looking for a silver lining, the publisher calculated that the sneak attack might be “a blessing in disguise.” With the country unified as never before, he declared that Pearl Harbor would at least “silence those damned isolationists and America
First sons-of-bitches...If they open their mouths again they should be put in a concentration camp."

Carter’s diatribe was not the idle talk of a rabble-rouser. Fort Worth, largely behind the boostering of the publisher and American Airlines’ founder C. R. Smith, became what the Star-Telegram called the “fountainhead of America’s air might.” In 1940 the city won an Army contract to transform a pasture south of Lake Worth into a bomber plant and airbase. Downtown, the T&P Building became headquarters for the Army Air Force Training Command in July 1942. From its offices Lt. General Barton K. Yount and his 250 officers directed the activities of almost one-eighth of all the entire Army, overseeing the supervision of every air training facility in the country. Fort Worth took note of that fact, boasting that it was home to the single largest educational institution in the world.

On the outskirts of the city, the groundbreaking at sleepy little White Settlement unfolded on April 18, 1941. At the ceremony, Major General Harry C. Brant turned the earth with a silver spade, then looked resolutely upon the crowd: “We’re starting to dig Hitler’s grave this afternoon,” he declared. The factory, built for the Consolidated-Vultee Aircraft Corporation (Convair), was to be identical to ones in Oklahoma and Georgia. In fine Texas fashion, however, an extra twenty-nine feet was added to the Cowtown site, making it the longest aircraft plant in the nation. Just one day short of a year after construction began, the first B-24 Liberator rolled off the mammoth assembly line. More than thirty thousand men and women built over three thousand B-24s before switching to B-32 production at the end of 1944.

Next door, at the Tarrant Field Airdrome, over four thousand World War II pilots of the Army Air Force Training Command earned their wings. The base underwent several name changes before finally adopting Carswell Air Force Base in 1948 to honor local hero Horace S. Carswell, Jr. One of many Fort Worth men to contribute the ultimate sacrifice during the war, the former TCU gridiron star commanded the 308th Bombardment Group in the Pacific Theater.

Among the accomplishments that won Carswell a Distinguished Service Cross in 1944 were the separate sinkings of a Japanese cruiser and a destroyer. A week after the second score, anti-aircraft fire crippled his B-24 as he was bearing down on a Japanese convoy. One-by-one his four
engines failed, all the while fuel leaking from a puncture in the tank. Somehow Carswell managed to make it over land so that his crew could bail out. When his bombardier reported that flak had ruined his parachute, the pilot remained in the cockpit, hoping to glide to safety. Luck ran out, however, and the plane crashed into a mountain and exploded. His hero’s death earned Carswell the Medal of Honor and the condolences of a grieving city.

The war effort in Fort Worth, as in other American cities, was total. Its citizens bought rationed goods and participated in scrap iron drives. They worked in military factories and daily scanned the papers for news of Allied progress. They sent sons and even daughters to distant theaters of action in every corner of the globe. They also bought war bonds out of proportion to their numbers.

In the summer of 1942 Ben E. Keith chaired a bond drive that netted $5,314,000 in pledges ranging from $50 to $50,000. Fitting tradition, city fathers organized a parade to whip up enthusiasm for the sale, while high rollers met with Texas Governor Coke Stevenson at the Fort Worth Club for a private fundraiser. The Panther City donated twenty planes, one bearing a gold plate with the name “City of Fort Worth,” and another “County of Tarrant.”

As legions of young Fort Worth men left for basic training and war, a labor shortage created unprecedented job opportunities for Mexican immigrants and women, mostly Anglo. Hispanic jobseekers, many returning
Even window shoppers got a dose of patriotism when they walked past Striplings Department Store.

COURTESY OF THE FORT WORTH PUBLIC LIBRARY.

to the Panther City after being forced back across the Rio Grande during the Depression, found the INS in a more relaxed mood. The new reality did not erase racial barriers, but a kind of social thaw nevertheless encouraged tejano families and immigrants to test de facto segregation.

At the beginning of the decade, land east of North Main comprised the so-called “Mexican side,” where dirt roads led to rude shacks within clear view of spacious homes and well manicured lawns on the thoroughfare’s west side. Youthful probes across the divide normally invited fights and rock tossing, inquiries from Tejanos about property brought cold stares and stoned silence. Population pressure and the prosperity of war, however, pushed the burgeoning barrio across North Main and into Diamond Hill. Hispanic families began to make inroads into other once-forbidden neighborhoods scattered around town as well.

For women, the image of “Rosie the Riveter” came alive in the Convair plant and other war-related industries. Even if society was not quite ready for gender equality, it nevertheless welcomed women who did their part by toiling behind welders’ masks and driving forklifts. The burdensome

A Panther City “Rosie” places rivets in a Liberator.

COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, D.C.

A labor shortage during the war years and continuing prosperity afterwards encouraged Hispanics to test segregation. The brown faces among an otherwise white Christmas crowd at Leonard’s toy department in 1948 evidence the beginnings of racial tolerance.

COURTESY OF THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARKINGTON LIBRARIES, ARLINGTON, TEXAS, AR 409 1-30-19.

The Fort Worth “Guardettes,” attached to the Texas National Guard, drill with wooden rifles.

COURTESY OF THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON LIBRARIES, ARLINGTON, TEXAS, AR 409 1-26-38.
demands of wartime production allowed them, however briefly, to prove they could maintain a man’s pace on the factory floor.

On the other hand, the headline “2 New Bus Conductors Never Shave!” did raise a few eyebrows. After the transit company hired the two women in September 1943 to make change on buses that transported hundreds of workers between the business district and the bomber plant, several nervous customers called, wondering if the company was planning on putting them behind the wheel. Spokesmen remained noncommittal, even though women were already driving buses in Dallas and other cities.

No doubt a recent near-catastrophe in Fort Worth raised some concerns. In that incident the brakes had failed on an inbound bus, forcing the male driver to zigzag through the intersection at Seventh and Penn and across a service station parking lot, where it left a spewing gas pump in its wake. It finally crashed into a retaining wall, leaving fifty customers dazed and shaken.

Yet, with bus fares doubling from fifteen million a year to over thirty million between 1941 and 1943, it was just a matter of time before labor demands put that first woman in the driver’s seat. Soon, customers grew used to the “lady drivers,” just as they had grown accustomed to women occupying so many other previously male-only jobs. The next year, when a bus rolled over twice on a slippery stretch of White Settlement Road injuring fifty-four people, no one asked about the driver’s gender.

White-collar jobs also went begging during the war years. The North Fort Worth State Bank, for example, made Eve Randle the city’s first woman bank officer. Over at the Star-Telegram, Managing Editor Jim Record hired seven women reporters during one month in 1942. Soon they were known as “JRR’s Harem.” With the blessings of their male counterparts the women mortified the puritanical staff boss at an office party by arriving bare-bellied in sheer harem costumes. Record finally had

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Downtown on the eve of the war, looking north from the lower end of Main Street; the Bowen Bus Station is at the left, foreground.

COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

A jubilant Amon Carter greets his son upon the young man’s release from a German prisoner-of-war camp.

COURTESY OF TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, MARY COUTS BURNETT LIBRARY, FORT WORTH, TEXAS.

With France liberated but beaten down in 1944, nationally syndicated columnist Drew Pearson originated the idea of a “Freedom Train” to provide relief. With Amon Carter’s backing, Fort Worth responded with fifteen carloads of food. Once the country began to recover, they returned the kindness with a “Gratitude Train” filled with French wines and cuisine.

COURTESY OF THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON LIBRARIES, ARLINGTON, TEXAS. AIR 03-29-07.
enough and fled down the hall when a porter—dressed like a palace eunuch—gunned a motorcycle through the city room. It was a more somber office when the immediacy of the war left the newspaper’s owner with a sense of impending mortality. Lieutenant Amon Carter, Jr., was reported missing in action in North Africa on Valentine’s Day, 1943. The same Amon, Sr., who could seemingly move mountains—or at least enough dirt to raise a mile-long building, plus twenty-nine feet—suddenly found himself helpless. Frantic phone calls and telegrams to the Red Cross, the Army, and even the White House failed to turn up any information on the whereabouts of his precious “Cowboy,” as Carter always called his son. In return, reams of sympathy notes, including one from Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as a resolution from the Texas Legislature only left the newspaper giant more despondent.

Then, after two agonizing months, Lieutenant Carter finally got word to his father that he was being held at a POW camp in Gdansk, Poland. Later, it was learned that Carter and a sergeant were left

River Oaks, incorporated in 1941, registered explosive growth during the decade. Most of its working class population depended on industrial jobs at places such as the bomber plant and the Stockyards. Note the downtown skyline in the distance.

Texas Christian University toward the end of the decade reflected the area’s growing affluence and a renewed emphasis on higher education.
on a mountaintop observation post when the tanks of German field marshal Erwin Rommel broke through American lines. For ten days the pair made their way across the rugged terrain, holing up in caves and splitting apart cactuses for their sustenance. Hiding in a clump of that plant so familiar to the West Texan, shotgun-wielding Bedouins rousted them from sleep. After being beaten and stripped by the nomads, Carter and the sergeant were sold to a German patrol that soon had them shipped to Italy. From there they were herded aboard a cattle car and sent to the concentration camp.

As the war wound to its conclusion the lieutenant was moved to Luchenwalde Prison, not far from Berlin, where he again scratched off a note to his father. Immediately, the publisher wrangled a seat aboard a Paris-bound airplane. From the French capital, he made his way by jeep toward the recently liberated prison camp, stopping at the makeshift headquarters of the Eighty-third Division. As he was climbing back into the vehicle, Carter heard a familiar voice yell: “Dad, here I am.” In a storybook ending conveyed almost immediately to anxious Star-Telegram readers who had been following the saga in faraway Fort Worth, father and son shared a weeping embrace. For the Carter men the war was over, and on August 14, 1945, the rival Fort Worth Press declared it official for the rest of the world, its own banner headline shouting: “IT’S OVER!”

Those who returned found a different Fort Worth than the one they had left. “Since you went off to war, Texan, Fort Worth’s metropolitan population has jumped 85,000,” crowed reporter Hugh Williamson. Not long before he wrote that piece in 1946, the city limits encompassed little more than sixty-five square miles; within just two years the boundary would embrace over a hundred. As returning servicemen and others came seeking jobs and housing, industrialists responded by developing tracts of land adjoining the city and then filing for annexation.

In response, many of the outlying communities incorporated during the decade to avoid being roped in by Fort Worth and saddled with its burdensome taxes. Yet they grew so fast that new residents clamored for the benefits of city services. Soon, their own local governments began raising taxes almost annually to satisfy the demands of homeowners and builders. In this way, a patchwork of incorporated places emerged during the 1940s. White Settlement, Westworth Village, and River Oaks gained that status in 1941. In 1944, Haltom City joined them. The next three years saw Everman, Forest Hill, Kennedale, and Benbrook Village answer the roll call. In the decade’s final year Dalworthington Gardens, Pantego, Lake Worth Village, Sansom Park, and Saginaw incorporated as well.

The effect of such sudden growth thrust upon the city by a mobile population that came from every point on the compass radically altered the city’s demography. “The encroachment of damyankees and airplanes has got the old-timers confused,” Williamson observed. To illustrate his point, the writer related how a group of Eastern women in town for a fashion show were privately making fun of some local cowboys walking toward them. But when the men got a load of the latest women’s styles, they turned the tables on the visitors and doubled over laughing.

Guffaws and merrymaking also radiated from a three-and-a-half mile strip along Jacksboro Highway, but what was going on there was no laughing matter. The short stretch of road bristled with beer joints and liquor stores as well as red-light tourist courts and clubs that provided a thin veneer for gambling. Lying snug between the Stockyards and the military reservation, Jacksboro Highway catered to the needs of workers in both industries, but also attracted its share of high rollers, politicians, and the partying crowd from the city. Moreover, it was a choice destination for oil field workers and cowboys who drove in from the “dry” counties of old Northwest Texas to get drunk and raise Cain. Like Hell’s Half Acre of an earlier generation, Jacksboro Highway earned its reputation on the winks of compliant lawmen and the inevitable killing when the leash ran slack.

At such high-tone venues as the 2222 Club, Coconut Grove, or the appropriately named Casino, big band leaders such as Benny Goodman and Harry James played for dancers who hung around after the city-mandated curfew to sip on liquor, while in the back rooms patrons rolled dice and played cards. At some of the lowbrow dives, bar owners stretched chicken wire across the stage to protect musicians from flying beer bottles.

B. M. Kudlaty, a wrecker driver whom police also enlisted to take pictures of occasional murder victims, declared that on Jacksboro Highway “you could get into anything you were big enough to handle.”
Learning where that line lay could be hazardous. When two thugs robbed and beat a leading underworld figure at knifepoint outside the Scoreboard Lounge, the man used his connections to track them down. Reportedly, he lured one of the muggers into his car, parked outside a beer joint, and there collected a handful of teeth and an eyeball. He then kneecapped the unfortunate hoodlum and dumped him in front of a hospital and stolidly drove away.

It was a new kind of Cowtown to be sure, but the wide-open reputation that Fort Worth had cultivated in its lusty frontier days seemed fitting to distant observers. Reporter Hugh Williamson conceded as much, but added: “Nowadays you hear more about airplanes than cows.” The arrival of six thousand transfers from the flight base at Sioux City, Iowa, under the direction of the newly formed Strategic Air Command punctuated the continued importance of the city’s military sector. At the Stockyards, total receipts shattered old records, peaking at five-and-a-quarter million animals in 1944, yet boom times there could not match the industrial might of the bomber plant. By the end of the decade aircraft manufacturing replaced meatpacking as the city’s economic cornerstone.

The ending of the war did little to slow production at the bomber plant. Although layoffs cut deeply into Convair’s workforce, thousands of laborers continued to churn out B-29s. Still others busied themselves with developing the B-36, a secret project that set an ominous tone for the postwar era. When the bomber was unveiled at the newly christened Carswell AFB. during the summer of 1948, Fort Worth moved into the national spotlight. Here, the Air Force boasted, was a plane that could fly ten thousand miles before refueling in mid-air, making it capable of delivering a nuclear bomb to any spot on the planet. Soon the flight logs of the B-36 listed destinations as far away as Europe, Asia, and the Arctic Circle. In February 1949 Fort Worth marked another milestone when the Lucky Lady II, a production model B-50 with a regular crew piloted by James G. Gallagher, rose from the Carswell runway, circled the globe and returned home, becoming the first airplane to record a nonstop round-the-world flight.

A fear of communist Russia made the bomber necessary and heightened security around the military reservation. Commander Alan D. Clark issued orders that all civilian traffic would be subject to search and interrogation. No one was beyond suspicion. “Intensive undercover checking” became routine to screen Air Force personnel reporting for duty at Carswell. In a statement that would become familiar in the emerging Cold War, Colonel Clark vowed to “weed out” any men “with known communist leanings or known to have been associated in the past with persons of communist or subversive activities.”

Nothing led ordinary citizens to wonder more what was going on behind the big fence than the role the Strategic Air Command played in the mysterious events that centered on Roswell, New Mexico, in
July 1947. After headlines declared that a flying disc had crashed outside the small New Mexican town, SAC moved quickly to quash the story. Under a cloak of secrecy Air Force personnel loaded the debris into a B-29 and flew it to Fort Worth, where military brass displayed the wreckage of a high altitude research balloon. The “aliens” who went down with the supposed flying saucer, they insisted, were merely anthropomorphic test dummies used in the experiment. Yet the tight security surrounding the Roswell incident as well as the way the Air Force controlled the release of news forever linked Fort Worth to the most bizarre conspiracy tale in the nation’s history.

Everyday life would never quite be the same. Officials of the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show managed to resume the annual event in 1944, but at a new site, the Will Rogers Memorial Coliseum and Auditorium. Over the protests of a few die-hards at North Side, voters passed a $1.5-million bond package that expanded the exposition facilities and provided a year-round administration building. In 1946 the show turned the corner, kicking off its golden anniversary with a parade that drew a large share of the city’s thirty-two-thousand-plus students who were given a holiday.

A few months later, along those same downtown streets, black pride manifested itself in the observance of the eighty-second anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. None were more aware of the sense of postwar change than African Americans, who were loath to return to the racial status quo after doing their part to defeat totalitarianism abroad. The Juneteenth celebration brought together almost every church and civic organization in Fort Worth’s black community. The parade featured six floats, twenty-two horseback riders, and no small measure of patriotic music to underscore the message that they too were loyal Americans. Following the parade, groups split up to enjoy picnics, toss horseshoes, and play softball games.

Quietly, African-American leaders pressed the city government to post some real gains. While black Fort Worthians saw city services improve modestly and enjoyed new funding for public schools, the city council left them disappointed when it rejected a request to hire African-American police officers. “If these people were employed as policemen,” concluded Chief R. E. Dysart, “they would have to work only as an isolated group, and would be restricted to work among the Negro race.” A police officer, he added, “should be able to work among all groups of people.” In the 1940s that was simply a concept that white Fort Worth was not ready to grasp.

Seemingly, the only constant in a decade of change was the performance of Fort Worth golfer Ben “Hawk” Hogan. The one-time Glen Garden caddy dominated the Professional Golf Association in the 1940s, standing atop the money board five times despite serving a three-year hitch in the Army Air Force. In 1948 the PGA named Hogan “Player of the Year.”
Then, in February 1949, the Hawk suffered a life-changing tragedy. On their way home from the Phoenix Open, Hogan and his wife, Valerie, crashed head-on into a bus that had crossed into their lane outside of Van Horn, Texas. Just as the two vehicles were about to collide, the quick-thinking golfer covered his wife, saving them both. The wreck left him shattered, however, and an ambulance transported Hogan to an El Paso hospital, where he almost died. The decade ended with the once-great golfer struggling just to grip a club. His brilliant career, it seemed, had met an untimely end.

Television, the medium that would one day popularize professional golf among the masses, debuted publicly in the Panther City on September 29, 1948, when Carter pitchman Frank Mills faced the camera and announced: “This is WBAP-TV, Fort Worth.” So began the first regular broadcast in the Southwest. The city had previously laid claim to the first demonstration of this technological marvel back in 1934 as one of that year’s expositions at the Stockyards fair. But this time the potential viewing audience was ready for it.

Earlier, in June, the station had previewed a closed-circuit feed for an excited crowd of local dignitaries, representatives of RCA Victor, and prospective television dealers at the Hotel Texas. What they expected to see was a professional program featuring the singing Flying X Ranch Boys. What they saw instead was a bunch of musicians clowning in front of the camera, telling lame jokes, and falling down laughing. Up in the studio, master of ceremonies Frank Mills had been waiting interminably for his cue from the red recording light. Mills finally asked a floor man, “What’s going on?” To which the man replied, “I haven’t heard from the truck.” So, in the spirit of the moment, Mills mugged at the camera: “Okay Amon, you got all those tin-horns down there…”

Suddenly a frantic, red-faced crewman burst through the door: “You’re on the air! You’re on the air!” Realizing that both the camera light and the studio telephone were not working, Mills gathered his equanimity, faced the camera and intoned: “I’m sorry, Mr. Carter. We’re just up here rehearsing…we’ll take it from the top now.” The mortified emcee just
knew his first day in front of the camera would be his last, but graciously, Carter never mentioned the incident.

By the end of the year WBAP-TV—Channel 5 to generations of local couch potatoes—signed the first dual network affiliation in the nation, tapping both NBC and ABC. Sports and movies provided the main programming, since both took up a lot of time while producers experimented with how best to exploit the new medium. Station officials became so desperate that they begged the Fort Worth I.S.D. to broadcast high school games on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.

The decade ended with the commemoration of Fort Worth’s centennial. With the occasion came the sober reflection that few physical reminders had survived the formative days when the mythical panther took its nap on Main Street. Aroused citizens began surveying the remnants of their past and determined to save what they could from the ravages of time, and commemorate the vestiges already lost. The Star-Telegram’s Oliver Knight, gathering information that would soon be used for his classic Outpost on the Trinity (1953), lamented the “decay, neglect and destruction” that was then “erasing the imprints left by the era of frontier adventure.”

The newspaperman-author admonished that Fort Worth might come to be known as “the city with much history and few markers.” He observed that within the past two years the last standing relic of the old Army fort, Frenchman’s Well, had been reduced to rubble when a garbage truck crashed into it. The loss left a mott of trees in front of the County Health Center as the only first-hand witnesses to the founding of the city. According to Tom Slack, an old pioneer banker, Major Ripley Arnold and his Second Dragoons had tethered
their horses there at the fort’s aborning moment. Among the few remaining historical objects still capable of being rescued was a painted sign in an alley near the courthouse. The old shingle had advertised the detective agency of former city marshal Timothy “Longhair Jim” Courtwright.

Into the vacuum stepped the newly formed Tarrant County Historical Society, which planned to begin marking important sites. Among the first was the pool at the Botanic Gardens. There, early in the 1840s it was then believed, the first two white men in the area, Arkansas trappers Edward S. Terrell and John P. Lusk, camped and traded with local Indians.

The Fiesta-cade, another of Fort Worth’s Texas-sized celebrations, also marked the hundredth anniversary. More reminiscent of the Diamond Jubilee than the Frontier Centennial, this one commemorated many of the same events as the 1923 pageant. Appended to the arrival of U.S. dragoons, Civil War days, the long trail, and the coming of the railroad were more recent milestones as the emergence of the bomber plants, and even Casa Mañana.

Margaret Woodruff, a great-great-granddaughter of city namesake General William Jenkins Worth, made her first visit to the Panther City as the invited guest of the pageant’s organizers. “I’ve been wanting to see Fort Worth all my life,” the gray-haired matron told a reporter. “After all these years, I’m glad I finally made it here at last.” From her fifty-yard-line box, Woodruff seemed pleased with the way script writers portrayed Worth as a gentle spirit that cantered through the Fiesta-cade’s founding scenes.

She also registered some amusement when a stubborn pony pitched its “Indian” rider directly in front of her. Grinning, she exclaimed: “He got policed…as we say in the Army.” Then, as a spotlight searching the crowd finally landed on her box, Woodruff rose hesitantly and waved to the crowd, which returned her blessing with a long, rolling round of applause.

The year 1949, however, would not be remembered for the Fiesta-cade. Long after the celebration grew dim in the city’s collective mind, the great flood of 1949 would remain a vivid memory. There had been some monumental trash movers before, but this one killed eleven people and left some thirteen thousand others homeless. At its crest, the floodwaters reached the second story of the Montgomery Ward building on West Seventh Street and cut off the west side from downtown.

On a night that also brought tornadoes and fifty-mph straight-line winds, a horrified Mrs. Ira Adams watched helplessly as the swirling waters carried away her husband and eighty-year-old mother. Momentarily she saved herself by clinging to a Forest Park Ferris wheel, only to be knocked loose by drifting wreckage. Somehow she managed to reach a tree, where her screams attracted some railroad workers who managed to rescue her.

Yet just as city officials saw the great fire of 1909 as a kind of blessing, so too, did proponents for new area lakes see this latest disaster as opportunity in disguise. In the name of flood control city fathers convinced Congress to pass emergency funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin construction for Lakes Benbrook and Grapevine. Earlier projects had already resulted in Lake Worth, Eagle Mountain, and Lake Bridgeport. Such a bountiful resource on the edge of the arid West led to open-ended possibilities. During the next half century a new generation of boosters would prove as adept as their predecessors in touting the natural assets of a city that possessed all the ingredients for greatness.