For many Americans, the Seventies represented a time of “malaise.” Even President Jimmy Carter intimated as much. The decade certainly had its lowlights, from Richard Nixon resigning in disgrace, to the U.S. pulling out of Vietnam. To describe the condition of the economy, pundits created a new word—“stagflation”—an unsettling combination of stagnation and inflation that set orthodox Keynesian theory on its ear. Then, there was the energy crisis, characterized by long lines at gas stations.

By contrast, Fort Worth seemed almost to exist in another America. The Panther City sat smack-dab at the buckle of what demographers were beginning to call the “Sunbelt,” the swath of air-conditioned states that suddenly appealed to jaded Northerners and others looking for brighter prospects. The Seventies also presented an opportune time for civic and business leaders in Fort Worth to join their counterparts in Dallas. Together they transformed an old rivalry into an alliance that benefited all of North Texas. In the process, developers began to revive downtown Fort Worth and discovered a bankable mystique in their Cowtown heritage. “Malaise?” Not here, partner, not in the city “Where the West Begins!”

In 1971 all of North Texas at last celebrated the victory of bagging a major league franchise. With the announcement that the Washington Senators were headed for the nearby city of Arlington, baseball fans in the Panther City talked about a return to the glory days of the Cats and saw visions of American League pennants. The Star-Telegram predicted that the Senators, who would be going by a new name yet to be determined, “could be revered like Fort Worth’s finest of yesteryear—Clarence “Big Boy” Kraft and
Jake Atz, who led the Cats on the field and Paul LaGrave and W. K. Stripling, who masterminded the city into an exciting baseball town. The new lineup would include Cy Young winner Denny McLain and longball hitter Frank Howard, along with their manager, Hall-of-Famer Ted Williams.

A players’ strike delayed the 1972 season, but when the recently christened Texas Rangers finally hit the home field against the Angels on April 21—San Jacinto Day—it seemed to be worth the wait. First baseman Frank Howard inaugurated the new era with a four-hundred-foot homerun in the first inning. The promising beginning soon turned sour, however, and when the season ended, the Rangers were looking up from the cellar, 38 ½ games out of first place.

After the disastrous debut, Ted Williams called it quits. The following season, manager Whitey Herzog would be the next in a long line of helmsmen who came to town with impressive resumes and promises of pennants. Yet none could deliver, and the Rangers returned to grappling with an omnipresent lineup of the same old diamond-demons.

Other issues and episodes with roots in earlier decades also played out during the Seventies. As the Vietnam War wound to a close, five crewmembers of a downed Carswell B-52 returned to Fort Worth in 1973 from captivity at a Hanoi prison. Unlike most other veterans who came back unapplauded, the POWs stopped over at Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls, where about two thousand cheering well-wishers and tearful family...
members greeted them. On the racial front, Fort Worth during the decade would elect African Americans and Hispanics to the school board, the city council, and the municipal court—again, with little self-congratulation. Both the Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce and the Fort Worth Mexican American Chamber of Commerce got their starts in the Seventies as well.

Sally Rand, from an even earlier era, stepped back into the spotlight briefly in 1976, fans in hand. Although on the long side of seventy, she took the stage at Casa del Sol, still adept at teasing the audience with flashes of the legendary body that had so captivated audiences at the Frontier Centennial. Speculating that she had gone to packing her flesh into a body suit, one young woman in the crowd jeered to her tablemate: “At her age, you can bet she’s not really working nude behind those fans.”

Backstage, columnist Jack Gordon passed on the remark to the dancer and gathered the gumption to ask her whether it was true. Rand just smiled. Allowing a lace robe to fall to the floor, she retorted with her own query: “What do you think?” Standing before him, “completely bare,” Gordon gaped, “was one of the world’s most famous bodies,” still “flawless” in his estimation. The Cowtown date would be one of her last appearances.

Later in the year Sally Rand died of heart failure at a Los Angeles hospital.

Nothing, however, marked the passing of time more than the fiery purge of the vacant Armour complex in 1971. The long-tottering Swift plant had just closed its own doors,
leaving the packing plants a near ghost town. A wrecking crew that had taken Armour’s six floors down to the second level provided about the only activity. Somehow the remaining wood and cork insulation caught a spark.

By the time the station house received the first alarm at about 11 p.m., the blaze had already spread out of control, tapping into the decades-old accumulation of lard and grease that had saturated the plant’s thick floors and walls. More than a hundred firemen were on the scene by midnight, futilely pouring water into the unquenchable inferno. The entire Stockyards district glowed eerily as crowds of silent onlookers beheld one-hundred-foot flames and immense billows of dense smoke that a northern breeze sent spiraling over the city. It would be two weeks before the great fire finally exhausted itself.

Another, more salacious, drama unfolded in public view when flamboyant Fort Worth oilman T. Cullen Davis during the summer of 1976 became “the richest man in America ever accused of murder.” Three eyewitnesses fingered him as the shooter in a late evening bloodbath that left two dead and two others wounded. He certainly possessed a motive. Earlier that afternoon the judge in Davis’ divorce case had boosted the monthly payment to his estranged wife, Priscilla, from $3,500 to $5,000 and ordered him to give her an additional $52,000 to cover bills that had piled up.

According to Priscilla, Cullen waited for her and her new boyfriend, former TCU basketball player Stan Farr, in the darkened kitchen of the Davis’s nineteen-thousand-square-foot mansion, which the judge had earlier compelled the oilman to vacate. Dressed in black and wearing a shoulder-length black wig, Cullen calmly walked up to Priscilla, she insisted, and said “Hi.” He then shot her in the chest and pumped four slugs into Farr, killing him. Outside, Bubba Gavrel and Beverly Bass were coming to the front door as Priscilla beat a path to a neighbor’s house to call the police. When the officers arrived they found Gavrel shot, paralyzed from the waist down. In the basement they discovered the body of Priscilla’s daughter, Andrea Wilborn, who was left there to writhe in agony before dying from a chest wound.

Enter Houston trial attorney Richard “Racehorse” Haynes. In an Amarillo courtroom, the renowned lawyer spent several days grilling Priscilla and working to portray the defenseless Farr as a drug abuser. His ace-in-the-hole, however, was a surprise witness—a nursery owner who had purportedly sneaked onto the grounds to repossess some plants. The man testified that he saw the man in black, and that it was definitely not T. Cullen Davis. After deliberating for two days, the jurors stunned the trial’s followers with a verdict of “not guilty.”

Nine months later T. Cullen Davis was back in the news, this time accused of arranging a mass murder-for-hire. His plan, much of it caught on tape by FBI agents, targeted fifteen people, among them Priscilla, the judge in their divorce case, and even one of his own brothers. So, once again the oilman called on Racehorse Haynes, whose strategy was to convince jurors that Cullen believed he was working with the FBI to ensnare Priscilla. It was she, the attorney contended, who had actually initiated the bizarre episode by issuing a hit on her ex-husband. His client had simply been duped. Somehow, that side of the story came from conversations that went unrecorded. The average wag who had followed every detail of this public soap opera regarded the cover story preposterous. Of course, it was not they who mattered. When the jury reached its final conclusion, they read their verdict: “Move for acquittal.” For a second time Davis left the courtroom with a smug expression of satisfaction, and once more the collective jaw of society dropped in disbelief.

The news of the decade, however, focused on development. Road construction—especially such vital links as the Turnpike, an extension of I-35W to Denton, and U.S. 183—began to yield a regional network connecting the cities and towns within roughly an 8-to-10-county area of North Texas. Like a double-bulb’s-eye, Fort Worth and Dallas sat somewhat unevenly in the center of it all. As a more mobile society emerged, employers and workers took little notice of county lines and professed no stake in decades-old rivalries. Bell Helicopter, Six Flags Over Texas, the Great Southwest Corporation, General Motors and dozens of smaller concerns had already conjoined the destiny of both big cities even before they began openly proclaiming their newfound union.

The realization that together Fort Worth and Dallas comprised one of the nation’s largest inland metropolitan centers induced civic leaders to pool their strategic resources. In 1970, chamber of commerce Presidents...
Harry Werst of Fort Worth and Morris Hite of Dallas helped lead a successful movement to join the two cities into one giant Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). After a non-profit consortium of businesses, chambers, universities, and economic development associations created the North Texas Commission the next year, they charged it with the responsibility of branding the region with a marketable label. By combining the words “metropolitan” and “complex,” the NTC’s marketing consultants came up with a catchy, descriptive term: the “Metroplex.” Copyrighted in 1972, it gained immediate acceptance and quickly endowed the region with a recognizable name.

Joining forces formally was an idea whose time was long overdue. The two camps had already pooled their chips on building the colossal Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, seventeen miles from the center of both downtowns. When completed, the sprawling hub would encompass an area nine miles long and eight miles wide—larger than Manhattan Island. Financing the venture had committed the municipal credit of both cities and put the jobs of several area bankers on the line. No less than eight different airlines had underwritten others costs. Contracts were let in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and a “no work stoppage” agreement was secured with all the trade unions involved with the project. With so much riding on the venture, there was no room for the kind of quibbling that had dogged the ill-fated Greater Southwest Airport. So Cowtowners sucked up their pride, pursed their lips, and got accustomed to saying “Dee-F-Dubya.”

Just after midnight on January 13, 1974, the first commercial flight touched down, long before workers put the finishes touches on the new facility. Despite the staggering achievement and a welcoming crowd so rau- cous that it drowned out the ceremonial speech, the media seemed more concerned

![Dallas Mayor Erik Jonsson (center) and J. C. Pace of Fort Worth (right) accept a $34.6 million check from banker James W. Alston to finance the D/FW airport.](http://example.com/dallas-mayor-erik-jonsson-and-pace-check)

![An aerial view of DFW from three miles up as it neared completion.](http://example.com/dallas-afw-aerial-view)

![Closer to the ground, the “people mover” makes a trial run.](http://example.com/people-mover-closer-ground)
with the plight of a honeymoon couple that
could not locate their luggage. If Amon Carter
had still been alive, several newsmen would
have been looking for other jobs. But it was a
new day, and in the months to come, few na-
sfus escaped the attention of carping reporters.
There was no eluding the fact, however, that
the futuristic airport was everything its boost-
ers said it would be, and soon D/FW was
transforming the broad, bald prairie around it
into a driving economic force.

Nothing did more to prove the wisdom of
the airport’s backers than the relocation of
American Airlines’ headquarters from New
York City to Fort Worth in 1978. It was
something of a homecoming, to be sure. At
Meacham Field in the Twenties, both Texas
Air Transport and Texas Airways got their
start before the merger that created the
transportation giant.
The windfall that brought American
Airlines to Fort Worth actually started out as
a jest as far as D/FW Director Ernest Dean
was concerned. Meeting with AA chairman
Albert V. Casey about the corporation’s reser-
vation center, Dean jovially asked his guest
when he was going to go ahead and move its
entire outfit to the Metroplex. To his sur-
prise, Casey was already amenable to the
idea. The bond package that Fort Worth and
Dallas soon put together was more than even
the Big Apple could offer. After suffering a
blistering rebuke from New York Mayor Ed
Koch, Casey left the city, turning down a
final offer that would have given the airline
space in the World Trade Center.

While D/FW grew accustomed to a daily welter of activity, the Greater Southwest Airport became the haunt of teenagers who raced their cars on the runways and ran amok through empty
halls at the old terminal. Authorities scattered tires and posted patrols to discourage the fun.

D/FW and American Airlines had a
tremendous impact on outlying communities.
Several, such as Hurst, Euless, and Bedford—
the Mid-Cities—had already mushroomed in
the Fifties and Sixties and kept growing until
drivers could pass from the city limits of one
to another without even realizing it. In other
places subdevelopments and shopping centers
that had excited new residents just a decade or
so earlier were now becoming liabilities for
community planners who wanted to continue riding the cutting edge of growth.

In Northeast Tarrant County for example, Richland Plaza had seemed like a shopper’s paradise in 1962 when it was new. But, when the Northeast Mall in Hurst opened in 1971, the once-trendy shops at the plaza began moving to new strip centers or went out of business. The anchor, JCPenney, opened an even bigger store at the new mall and turned the former location into an outlet shop for slow-moving merchandise.

Over in Hurst, boys like Buddy Hamm liked to wile away lazy afternoons shooting BB-guns and riding bikes down the narrow trails in a lush thicket of post oaks where the mall would arise. Then, one day, Hamm recalled, “I topped the hill and just came to a stop. They had scraped it all.” Over the next year local kids watched concrete mixers, cranes, and an army of construction workers turn the land into something unfathomable. While Hamm and the other boys found new places to play, kids too young to remember “the woods” would become the first generation of mall rats.

The same scene had already unfolded at Seminary South Mall, a short drive down I-35W, and it repeated itself at Ridgmar Mall on the west side and at Six Flags Mall and Forum 303 in Arlington. Each of the new complexes boasted enormous department stores that anchored the end of a spoke. Down the great halls were restaurants such as Wyatt’s Cafeteria or El Fenix, and stores with catchy names such as Chess King, Sound Town, Oshman’s, Coach House Gifts, Picadilly Fair, and Miss Bojangles. Shoppers could drop off their children at game rooms like the Space Sport or let them pick out a movie to watch at the malls’ multiscreen theaters. At the center the halls came together at cavernous atriums illuminated by natural light and dotted with fountains and full-sized trees, beside which shoppers rested. It was the Gruen Plan, moved to the ‘burbs and all under one roof.

In the city itself, specifically at Amon Carter Square, the announcement by the Kimbell Foundation in 1964 that it would open a multimillion dollar gallery to house the collection of its founder, the late Kay Kimbell, brought unparalleled praise from every corner of the art world. Despite the breathtaking strides the Arts District had taken during the Sixties, Mayor Sharkey Stovall called the Kimbell “the greatest thing that has happened to Fort Worth in the field of culture for many years.” It was a tall boast—and true.

The building itself was designed by Philadelphia architect Louis Kahn, who came to Fort Worth to sign his contract. “Man has no other reason than to express,” he told an assembly. “It’s the measure of a city when acts of its citizens make art available to all.”

Kimbell’s gift capped a near rags-to-riches story. He went from helping his father operate a flourmill in the Northeast Texas town of Whitewright to serving on the boards of seventy corporations by the time of his death in April 1964. He and his wife Velma bought their first painting in 1931. In time their priceless collection grew to some two hundred works, most of them centuries old. The artists comprised a Who’s Who of the great masters—among them Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Romney, Rubens, Van Dyck, and Goya.
The museum opened in 1972 under the direction of Richard F. Brown. Upon his death, Edmund Pillsbury took charge. The renowned art historian expanded the collection by continuing to acquire paintings of the European masters. His generous loans of the museum’s art as well as bringing exhibits to Fort Worth helped boost the Kimbell’s prestige, earning it world-class recognition.

If Cowtown seemed an unlikely seat of high culture, the thought did not appear to register with local patrons. Just as Fort Worth loved its art, it also embraced the theater. In addition to Casa Mañana, live performances found enthusiastic audiences at the Hip Pocket Theater, the Community Theater, Sojourner Truth Players, Shakespeare in the Park, and the Windmill Dinner Theater.

They also enjoyed ballet and the symphony. “It isn’t unusual, nor is it frowned upon,” asserted one commentator, “when many of the operagoers in Fort Worth show up for a performance in jeans and T-shirts.

Culture and Cowtown have made compatible bedfellows.”

Yet Fort Worth would not be Cowtown without its country and western music. Its popularity ebbed and flowed, of course, but at the core there always remained a die-hard following that frequented honkytonks like the Long Branch Saloon with its deep shag carpet and the Watering Trough, its dim
lights set in wagon wheels that illuminated a sign heralding “Cowtown USA.”

When WBAP 820 acquired a clear channel in 1970 and adopted a “Country Gold” format, it soon became the nation’s number one country music station. Down the long, dark stretches of highway from well beyond the Ozarks into New Mexico and from Old Mexico to Canada truckers and travelers tuned in to hear Bill Mack—the “Midnight Cowboy”—spin tunes and talk country.

At the same time, a new “progressive” country sound found a home at the refurnished Panther Hall when singers like Chet Atkins and Charley Pride were not filling the venue. Willie Nelson, who had once cut an album at the venue during its heyday, played at the reopening of the east side institution. Other bands—Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen, Augie Myer and the Cowboy Headband, and Asleep at the Wheel—also attracted devoted fans. If the sound had a new twist, the audience, men with long hair and tattered blue jeans and women with shag haircuts and haltertops, also reflected the changing times.

As the Baby Boom generation began to reach maturity, leisure activities gained a new importance. That fact was not lost upon a new civic leadership that seemed suddenly to discover the forty-eight miles of untapped riverfront meandering through the county. With its announcement of the inaugural Trinity River Festival, the Star-Telegram in 1973 predicted: “The merry, merry month of May will be a lot merrier this year along the banks of the Trinity.”

Mayfest, as the event came to be called, combined the efforts of the city’s Streams and Valleys Committee and Parks and Recreation Department along with the Junior League and the Tarrant County Water District. The tens of thousands who came to dance around the maypole, browse the booths of arts and crafts, enjoy rides, and listen to music, spent a lot of money, most of it earmarked for further improvements along the Trinity.

A product of that first festival was a one-hundred-foot lighted waterspout situated in the middle of the river, just north of the West Freeway bridge. As Mayfest grew into a much-anticipated annual event, the riverfront came to life. Workers beautified expansive stretches of the Trinity, planting of thousands of trees along banks that flood control crews...
had earlier denuded; they constructed several low water dams to assure the river’s level flow; they poured ever-growing miles of concrete strips over which growing legions of outdoor enthusiasts ran and cycled.

Even before Mayfest became such a hit, local families were already enjoying Oktoberfest, the autumnal fundraiser for the Symphony League. In 1970 the organization’s projects chairman, Lorene Cecil, put together a festival at the T&P Station that attracted a crowd of eight thousand. By the end of the decade the two-day event moved to the Convention Center and was pulling in over a hundred thousand people annually. The money raised by Oktoberfest enabled the orchestra to perform at Fort Worth area schools and provided scholarships for the Youth Orchestra.

Fort Worth was coming of age, and each passing decade marked new milestones. Texas Christian University in 1973 celebrated a century of existence. Two years earlier, the Fat Stock Show counted seventy-five. The Seventies, of course, was also the decade of the country’s Bicentennial, and the Panther City played an important role in preparing for the year-long commemoration. In anticipation, the American Freedom Train Foundation chose a Fort Worth locomotive—the sole survivor of the 600 series steam engines built during the 1920s—to pull its twenty-two-car Freedom Train across the country during the Bicentennial year.

When the Fourth of July rolled around, city officials who planned a city-wide celebration anticipated that as many as forty-five thousand people would defy the ninety-degree-plus weather; it was estimated that over three times as many thinly clad patriots actually showed up to pay tribute to the occasion. A parade and festival, marked by cannon salutes, music, and other activities, were capped off by a pyrotechnics display at Heritage Park featuring a 175-pound “shell of a million flowers”—the state’s largest single firework to that date.

Unexpectedly, a fierce but brief thunderstorm swept through Heritage Park just as the sun was setting. Sharp claps of thunder sent people scurrying for nearby cars and underpasses, while others huddled beneath blankets, newspapers, and even...
garbage can lids. By the time the fireworks show began, however, the crowd had returned, standing in places almost shoulder-to-shoulder in ankle-deep water. Lightning, still visible on the western horizon, continued to play in harmony with the fireworks display as the last rockets burst in the sky.

Also enjoying larger-than-expected crowds was the Tarrant County Convention Center. Truly, it had exceeded the wildest dreams of its backers. When journalist Nancy Madsen found herself on the Turnpike in bumper-to-bumper traffic long after rush hour, her writer’s curiosity got the better of her. “Had everyone in Dallas decided to move to Fort Worth?” she wondered. Sensing a good story, she followed the line of creeping cars down an exit ramp. “I stopped, rolled down my window and asked a pedestrian what was happening.” The reply came matter-of-factly: “Emerson, Lake, and Palmer.” Another concert date, another sellout, and Madsen had her story.

For officials and staff, some who had worked the Fat Stock Show for years, the eccentricities of rock performers must have seemed bizarre. George Harrison demanded three identical kitchens at different locations for the convenience of his Indian cooks. Others ordered rare wines, gourmet food, and even M&M’s of particular colors. A couple of artists had the convention staff redecorate dressing rooms into which they never set foot. Another “redecorated” his own room with uneaten meals that...
custodians had to scrape from the walls and ceilings. Then, there was Elvis. All he wanted was a six-pack of Coca-Cola—that and a considerably larger check than the $500 he split with his agent, Colonel Parker, after his first Cowtown gig in the Fifties.

Other than The Keg, a popular restaurant across the street from the convention center, not much else kept concertgoers and conventioneers downtown after the show. There was, however, the futuristic Water Gardens that at least made the trip to the central city a more pleasant experience. A gift of the Amon Carter Foundation, the full block of fountains, reflecting pools, and waterfalls was greeted at once as “both useless and splendid.” At the ribbon cutting, local woman Marion King spoke like a true Fort Worthian. Surveying the central plaza, she smiled to a reporter: “[This] would make a wonderful place for a square dance.”

The mind’s eye of movie director Michael Anderson, however, beheld a different vision. Just after midnight one Sunday morning in July 1975, a series of explosions and the sight of a panic-stricken crowd scrambling over the walls of the Water Gardens alarmed motorists on the overhead bypass. To the relief of those who called in reports, they learned that it was all part of a movie, Logan’s Run, set appropriately in the twenty-third century.

Downtown was beginning to come alive, even if it was reawakening more slowly than business and civic leaders wanted. Nevertheless, a number of projects gave Fort Worth its greatest downtown building boom since the 1950s. Covering four-and-a-half blocks, the thirty-seven-story Fort Worth National Bank building became the city’s tallest structure when its first occupants began hauling boxes up to their new offices in 1974. A stunning example of modern architecture, the building held enough glass panels to cover five acres. Since each piece was twelve feet tall, a special machine had to be manufactured to set them into place. The Star-Telegram called it a “mechanical octopus with suction cups strong enough to pick up [Dallas Cowboy lineman] Bob Lilly.”

On hand to help open the giant padlock symbolizing the building’s dedication was three-year-old Kate Johnson, the great-great granddaughter of Khleber Van Zandt, who...
The elegant Medical Arts Building also fell victim to the times in 1973. During the next decade the forty-story Barnett Plaza would arise on that site.
served as bank president from 1874 to 1930. Inside, the bank’s chief executive officer, Lewis H. Bond, assembled a collection of art that included two massive tapestries suspended in the five-story lobby. Outside, sculptor Alexander Calder’s sixteen-ton red-orange abstract stabile, The Eagle, stood sentinel at the entrance.

Equally impressive was the construction of City Center (now the Charles D. Tandy Center), its bookend towers—which opened in 1976 and 1978—straddling a mall distinguished by an indoor skating rink. With its completion came a new Cowtown tradition of Christmas candles in lights running up the length of each tower. The mixed-use complex of office and shopping space arose on one of the blocks occupied by the old Leonard’s Department Store, which the rising business giant bought in 1967 and later razed. The project in many respects became an extension of the man who built it.

By the 1970s, Charles D. Tandy had parlayed a Fort Worth leather crafts business founded by his father in 1918 into a retail empire that would eventually comprise more than twenty major companies and subsidiaries. It was the city’s first firm to be listed by the New York Stock Exchange. A broad smile and easy manner that disarmed even the most lowly office worker belied an intensely aggressive salesman. Tandy pioneered modern methods of mail ordering and direct advertising. Among his many interests were Tandy Computers, RadioShack, TandyCrafts, Pier 1 Imports, and Color Tile. He also set up a profit-sharing plan for his employees and gave unstintingly to philanthropic causes, mostly around Fort Worth.

Just when it looked as if he might begin to fill Amon Carter’s considerable boots, he died suddenly at the age of sixty. After a typical day full of meetings with business associates and civic leaders, he and wife Anne headed to the Ridglea Country Club where they danced until midnight. He was still partying long after she called it quits, laughing with friends, playing backgammon, and smoking his ever-present cigars before turning in at dawn.

At mid-afternoon a maid, who had gone into Tandy’s bedroom to awaken him, instead found him dead. The next day flags across the city flew at half-staff. A shaken Mayor Hugh Parmer expressed everyone’s regret: “He was a fine gentleman who has given a lot to the city… His death is a great loss to us all.”

Led by far-sighted developers such as Charles Tandy and Clark Nowlin, business and government had taken great strides in revitalizing the central city, yet entrepreneurs had not kept pace. The Tandy Center and Nowlin’s two-level strip of shops and eateries at 600 Houston Street provided many of the same amenities as the suburban malls, but there were too many dead spaces, and visitors hesitated to take the long walk uptown from the Convention Center. “Any time there’s a convention in town,” groused the Chamber of Commerce, “it’s a common sight to see a couple or group standing on a downtown corner, their convention ribbons fluttering forlornly in the breeze, looking up and down the street for something to do.” On the other hand, perhaps they were simply wary. The ravages of time—weathered façades of derelict buildings, boarded-up windows, litter blowing down the streets, grass growing through cracked and uneven sidewalks—left the impression that downtown was not a safe place to be after the sun went down. But all of that was about to change.

Despite the loss of several landmarks, other timeworn buildings managed to avoid the wrecking ball. The Land Title Building at Fourth Street and Commerce would soon be revived.