As one century came to an end and another began, Fort Worthians boasted that their hometown had grown into the state’s most livable city. If their claim rested on amenities, then certainly they could make a strong case. A thriving tourist industry had emerged that was one part Cowtown and one part sophistication. The self-professed city “Where the West Begins” resonated with the bustle of earthy recreations at the Stockyards and more sublime activity of Sundance Square. As a cultural center Fort Worth possessed the kinds of museums, galleries, botanical gardens, live theater, symphony, ballet, and a zoo that much larger cities would gladly take in trade. It was also home to the Colonial National Golf Tournament and the Texas Motor Speedway; a short drive away were Texas Stadium and the Ballpark in Arlington.

The reemergence of downtown living, too, endowed Fort Worth with a cosmopolitan feel that some other Texas cities were hoping to achieve. An efficient transportation network linked the component parts of the metropolitan area to the growing suburbs and area lakes. Students from every state and dozens of countries attended institutions of higher learning in Fort Worth and Arlington—including a highly regarded medical school, the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (part of the University of North Texas Health Science Center), and the Texas Wesleyan University School of Law. A reputable community college system, too, had continued to add new branch campuses.

Backing up its bold proclamation as the state’s most livable city, Fort Worth could point to an energetic and diversified economy that could survive without a dominant petroleum industry. The success of Fort Worth Alliance Airport, the acquisition of a U.S. Treasury Department printing plant, and the continued development of the central business district created a synergy that spun off in dozens of profitable directions. The coup de grâce came in 2001 when Lockheed Martin, the descendant of Convair, won the largest single government contract ever awarded. The combined effect of so many public, private, and shared endeavors fashioned Fort Worth into an urban center that far surpassed its many parts.

Fort Worth no doubt could have survived without Carswell Air Force Base, too, but city officials were unwilling to give it up without a fight. As the Pentagon reassessed the nation’s strategic arsenal in the years following the end of the Cold War, Congress ordered a number of bases around the country to close. Carswell, a victim of its own success, appeared to be among the losers in 1991. Colonel Richard Szafranski, commander of the Seventh Bomb Wing, certainly seemed resigned to the fact, declaring: “SAC’s historic mission has been fulfilled.”

All sorts of speculation about what would become of the property followed the creation of the Carswell Redevelopment Authority. The board heard plans that ranged from selling it outright to making it a reservation for the Tonkawa Indian tribe. In the end the federal government simply reconfigured Carswell’s mission when it announced the creation of the Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base in 1994. The conversion brought to town reservists from bases being shut down in Dallas, Tennessee, and Illinois.

In an earlier time the threat of losing the base would have thrown city leaders into a panic. By the 1990s, however, a new Fort Worth had emerged whose multiplicity of economic activities had chartered a new course. When Douglas Harman moved from his post as city manager to president and CEO of the Fort Worth Visitors & Conventions Bureau, he had a good idea of the kinds of assets at hand. His problem lay in tying together the disparate parts into a whole that would make Fort Worth a preferred destination for vacationers and conventioneers. Drawing on the concept of
“heritage tourism,” he sought to exploit Cowtown’s rich frontier history and the tradition of philanthropy that resided in the arts community.

Certainly Harman enjoyed a head start on cities with similar aspirations. All he needed was a theme that would appeal to the imagination of prospective tourists. He found his mantra in “Cowboys and Culture.” What distinguished Fort Worth from Dallas, Houston, or San Antonio, and especially cities beyond the borders of Texas, was that here the long drive to the railheads in Kansas took the great herds of cattle straight through the business district. The arrival of the railroad itself and the eventual emergence of the Stockyards made the city a final destination for all that walking stock. West Texans considered Fort Worth the market and social capital for their bovine-heavy economy, and second homes in the city became a mark of distinction for the region’s great cattle barons.

Fort Worth, then, really was Cowtown. Through the years, many heirs of the old cattle empires found that underneath their ranges lay vast pools of oil. Those fortunes and others provided the endowment for the kinds of cultural outlets that helped Fort Worth overcome the “second city” inferiority of being so close to their better-heeled neighbor just downstream on the Trinity River.

For most visitors as well as the average Fort Worthian, it was the Stockyards that best came to embody the city’s identity. Those who never beheld the rows of empty cattle pens and ghostly silhouettes of the vacant packing plants could have scarcely comprehended the transformation. The geographic center of activity shifted from Billy Bob’s Texas to the brick-paved Exchange Avenue. Friendly competition with the “World’s Largest Honkey Tonk”—filled out mostly by cowboys of the drugstore variety—added immensely to the scenery that sightseers enjoyed. New family-friendly shops and restaurants filled in the spaces among the pioneers who had opened their businesses in the Eighties. Live rodeo and Wild West shows unfolded almost every weekend at the Coliseum. Next door a museum chronicling the district’s history opened at the Livestock Exchange Building, and across the street the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame honored the state’s rodeo and cutting stars as well as featuring a gallery of antique wagons, buggies, and stagecoaches.

To commemorate the city’s 150th anniversary the Fort Worth Herd was put together in 1999. Billed as the nation’s only daily cattle drive, the mottled longhorns would bring traffic on Exchange Avenue to a standstill. Nobody seemed to mind waiting...
as they watched the hard-looking cowboys drive the herd down the middle of the street. In the morning it was “head ‘em up and move ‘em out”, in the afternoon it was “bring ‘em on in.”

No attraction, however, could outdo the Stockyards Station. The former maze of covered hog and sheep pens reemerged as a pedestrian mall where tourists could eat and browse western boutiques, galleries, antique shops, and other kindred stores. There was even a livery stable there for horseback rides along the Trinity. When the faintest note of the distant, but distinctive whistle of the Tarantula Train wafted through the station, the effect was magical. Suddenly, young and old alike were transported to another time as the restored nineteenth-century steam locomotive puffed into the covered station, let out its passengers, and eased onto a massive turntable. The experience provided the crowning touch to a district that had strived mightily to recreate the bygone days of the frontier.

During the first month of 1992 the Fort Worth & Western Railroad’s Tarantula Train pulled out of the austere gravel yard on Eighth Avenue for its inaugural trip to the Stockyards. The four-and-a-half-mile journey, as its bulletin promised, delivered “majestic views of the...skyline.” Yet, it also revealed a scene of blight along the river bottoms of which even few longtime citizens were scarcely aware. Like the Stockyards itself, however, the route was a work in progress, and it improved with each passing year.

Four years later the Tarantula made another inaugural run to its new home at the Cotton Belt Depot in Grapevine, a growing suburb that also reaped dividends by refashioning its typical small-town Texas Main Street. All along the route traffic stopped and small crowds gathered to exchange waves with the passengers aboard the three antique passenger cars. When the locomotive pulled into the station,

assembled delegates, including the Tarantula’s owner Bill Davis and Grapevine Mayor William D. Tate, commemorated the occasion by smashing a bottle of champagne on the restored 1927-vintage turntable. Paeans to the many individuals who made the entire vision a reality greatly impressed those who heard the speeches.
The same kind of personal commitment to the city's welfare was reflected in the generosity of patrons who continued to develop Amon Carter Square. The publisher’s namesake museum received a “subtle, yet substantial” makeover and expansion, earning the high praise of architectural critics, when it reopened in 2001. The following year, the same fastidious crowd gathered once more to admire the Museum of Modern Art’s new home next door to the Kimbell. A creation of acclaimed Japanese architect Tadao Ando, the fifty-three-thousand-square-foot showcase was perhaps described best by one awestruck critic as “Modern Magic.”

Joining the arts district in 2002 was the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. The $21 million building, designed to complement the Wills Rogers complex, was a far cry from the library basement in Deaf Smith County where the museum got its start in 1975. Its Cowtown debut featured a wealth of artifacts, memorabilia, and exhibits that brought this overshadowed icon into the light of day.

Despite all the attention focused on Amon Carter Square, the crowning achievement of the arts community unfolded downtown with the completion of the Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall, “the building with the angels.” Critics hailed the center as “the last great concert hall of the twentieth century.” The multipurpose facility, with its spacious lobby and grand center dome—three-quarters the size of the state capitol—would host live theater and the quadrennial Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in addition to a full schedule of concerts.

Unlike most other kindred venues, the Bass Hall enjoyed the advantage of private funding. That meant neither pressure groups nor city government could become the arbiter of moral standards in the event of controversial bookings. “The Modern Museum of Fort Worth,” explained Sid Bass, “would bring in an exhibition with frontal nudity or a Mapplethorpe, and a handful of people would go down to the city council and complain, and one or two councilmen would threaten to withhold funding for upkeep or maintenance. It just wasn’t worth it.” At the Bass Hall, he continued, “we can bring in Hair if we want it.”

Always near the top of the Bass’s priority lists was the goal of continuing to revive the central city. Judging by the projects of other private developers and the public works of the city itself, they reached their goal, and then some. Cowtown native Joe Nick Patoski, who went on to become a feature writer at Texas Monthly magazine, glowingly wrote that “Downtown Fort Worth has become Texas’ liveliest urban environment.” Boasting “redbrick streets… lined with restaurants, nightclubs, and...
shops… the streets are jammed on weekends, and they bustle with activity from Monday through Friday.” Some of the pedestrians even lived downtown or just off the bluff as condos and lofts made inner city living fashionable. After several failed efforts, the Blackstone Hotel was back, too, as the Courtyard Hotel by Marriott. There was also a spacious new bookstore, a corner deli, twenty movie screens, and four live-theater venues.

For a “city center that had been left for dead twenty-five years ago,” wrote Patoski, what had been achieved was nothing short of a complete renaissance. The trend of refurbishing once-derelict hulls continued, and they reemerged even more elegant than when they were new. As developers planned additional downtown growth, they largely kept the architecture integrity of those earlier eras in mind.

Among the other notable triumphs of reinventing downtown Fort Worth was the removal of the I-30 overhead that rejoined West Lancaster Avenue to the central business district. For four decades the 1.4-mile stretch symbolized what one critic identified as “the conflict between the need to move traffic quickly and the desire to protect a city’s character.” The demolition was one of the last steps in a $173-million highway project that rerouted the obsolete and obtrusive mixmaster behind the Depression-era post office and T&P buildings.

The occasion brought together key city leaders and state highway officials, who had earlier come to loggerheads over the design. The transportation department’s plans to double the size of the overhead motivated preservationists, neighborhood associations, and other concerned groups to form I-CARE, or I-30 Citizen Advocates for Responsible Expansion. Activism, backed up by a lawsuit, brought the two sides to the negotiating table, where they found common ground. On a rainy morning during the summer of 2001 there were no hard feelings among the former adversaries as they watched a jackhammer shake loose the first slice of concrete, marking the official beginning of the demolition.

West Lancaster, I-CARE proponents crowed, would soon become a people-friendly, tree-lined boulevard that would pull development to the lower end of downtown. The immediate future indeed looked promising. With the construction of a terminal for the Trinity Railway Express, the downtowns of Fort Worth and Dallas became linked, hearkening comparisons with the long-gone interurban line completed a century earlier. A renovated Convention Center and improvements to the Water Gardens were also hailed as catalysts for the anticipated revival.

The great hall that had seemed so modern and cavernous when it opened in 1968 felt drab and confining by the Nineties. Douglas Harman, from his new post at the Convention and Visitors Bureau, remarked that without giving the facility an overhaul, Fort Worth risked becoming a “fourth-rate convention city with a first-rate
downtown.” With every passing year, he noted, professional associations whose members had “fallen in love with the city,” reluctantly dropped Fort Worth as a preferred destination.

Passing ownership from the county to the city allowed Fort Worth voters to issue bonds and raise hotel occupancy taxes to pay for the $75 million renovation and expansion of the re-christened Fort Worth/Tarrant County Convention Center. As fireworks burst in the sky over the lower end of downtown, the facility reopened its doors at the ninth annual “Party in Fort Worth” in April 2002. Visitors and dignitaries, who remembered the stark concrete floors and unadorned interior, marveled at the ballroom’s twenty-one-color carpet featuring giant Texas wildflowers. Suspended on the ceiling were artful aluminum stars of various sizes. The distinguishing feature of the renovation, however, was a ten-sided glass and brick “Star Tower.” The city’s public events director, Kirk Slaughter, called it the “focal point of arrival,” and a landmark for nighttime travelers passing along the interstate who would be attracted to its glow.

All of the positive changes that Fort Worth enjoyed as the millennium clock turned did not come in a helter-skelter string of successes. Going into the Nineties, city leaders recognized that a social and economic recalibration would be a necessary step in plotting a course for the future. In 1992, just as in 1963, the city council checked the pulse of its citizenry at a town hall meeting. And, as before, the forum led to the kinds of activities that earned Fort Worth its second All-America City Award.

Cowtown was among thirty finalist cities that sent a delegation to Tampa, Florida, to make its case before a National Civic League jury. The presentation went so well that one jurist threw out a good-natured barb about Fort Worth’s rivalry with Dallas. When Chamber Vice-President Donna Parker pronounced: “We consider Dallas our strongest asset,” the roar of laughter and applause left no doubt that the delegation would return a winner.

The next year Mayor Kay Granger headed a committee that put together more than two hundred events in an eleven-day celebration of its All-America City designation called “Fort Worth Open House.” Many of the activities such as cleanup days and blood drives tapped into the well of civic pride. Others centered on entertainment, culture, and sports. One of the most popular attractions was “Fort Worth on the Move,” a historical exhibit that demonstrated the progression of transportation that developed alongside the city. Everything from wagons and futuristic automobiles to vintage railroad stock and airplanes were gathered at the long-dormant T&P Building, which proved to be a draw in itself.

It was a new concept in transportation that spurred development in far northern Tarrant County. Less than a month before the new decade began the first jet cargo plane landed at the new Fort Worth Alliance Airport, erasing any skepticism that the world was ready for
such a facility devoted entirely to industry. Even before the airport opened, American Airlines had invested almost a half-billion dollars in a mammoth maintenance complex. During the Nineties, Federal Express, Nestle, Tech Data, Unison Industries, Texas Instruments, Zenith, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America, JCPenney, Michaels Stores, and dozens of other corporations opened distribution centers enclosing millions of square feet of floor space.

The project far exceeded the expectations of its optimistic originator. Recalling what had been an immense rolling prairie scarcely a decade earlier, Ross Perot, Jr., expressed simple disbelief in what lay before his eyes at the century’s end. In fact, there was no trace of immodesty when he honestly gawked: “We never envisioned anything this big.”

Perot and his Hillwood Development Corporation associates had placed all their chips on aviation development, little expecting the synergy that set so many other plans in motion. While they were busy compiling lists of prospective clients gleaned from the World Aviation Directory, Santa Fe Railway made an unexpected call. Soon, the Gilded Age transportation giant was building an automobile unloading facility designed for the twenty-first century. It also joined with Burlington Northern and moved its headquarters into the vacant Western Company campus built during the Eighties oil boom by maverick businessman Eddie Chiles.

Connections via ocean, rail, truck, and air soon had Alliance plugged into the global economy.

Other successes could be tracked by the announcements that rippled across the headlines of the Star-Telegram throughout the Nineties: the Drug Enforcement Administration was moving its air wing headquarters to Alliance; Galaxy Aerospace wanted to finish the interiors of its corporate jets there; the nearby Circle-T Ranch would become home to a corporate office park and new residential and retail developments. Most spectacularly, and farthest afield, the Texas Motor Speedway would become a next-door neighbor.

With over one hundred and fifty thousand seats, only the Indianapolis Speedway provided a larger venue. The number of spectators that congregated in the pit area for the annual NASCAR Winston Cup and music concerts almost doubled the capacity. Overlooking the track, the nine-story Speedway Club provided a fitting monument to this expensive sport. Inside the glass tower its members could work out, get a massage and relax in a Jacuzzi. The Starlight Room Restaurant with its cherry paneling and antique reproduction chairs became a meeting place for high rollers—many ferried in by helicopter to avoid the massive traffic jams—who came to town to enjoy the major events.

At one point, according to the Texas Workforce Commission, companies tied to the new growth in and around Fort Worth Alliance Airport accounted for one in every twenty civilian jobs in Fort Worth. The population pressure in northern Tarrant County set in motion a familiar transformation as developers set out to reinvent the areas small communities. In Westlake, residents waged a bitter but futile fight with Perot over his plans for the Circle-T Ranch. Keller and
Southlake, discovered by developers during the previous decade, just wanted to assure that the new boost would be well planned. By the mid-1990s Keller had recorded four straight years of adding at least four hundred new homes that ranged between $130,000-to-$500,000 apiece. The pace at Southlake was not as brisk, but the half-million-dollar house was closer to the median price.

What happened to the Fechtel Farm in formerly rural Southlake could have happened just as easily at many of the family plots swallowed up by the emerging suburb. Joseph and Hazel Fechtel had bought the seventy-acre tract in the 1940s, where they cultivated a thriving egg hatchery and raised six children. Among their fondest memories were horse rides to Grapevine Lake for picnics, two weddings, and family gatherings that continued long after the kids grew into adults. Their decision to sell the land predictably stirred mixed emotions. “We love this place,” said daughter Alicia, “but we’re being crowded out by the city.”

The prospect of entering into an extraordinary partnership also made it an ideal time to concede to progress. The farm that son Charles described as “the center of our family togetherness” became part of the new center of a community that had never known a traditional downtown. Designed by architect David Schwarz, who helped create much of Sundance Square, the $65 million Southlake Town Square echoed an old-fashioned downtown with shops built along street blocks, beyond which lay a tree-lined plaza. Brian Stebbins, who navigated the project through straits of red tape, predicted: “Five to ten years from now, when…the trees grow and the thing takes on some wear, it’s going to be a real head-scratcher to figure out when this was built.” On the very site where the old Fechtel farmhouse had stood, City Hall and the school district offices enjoyed a commanding view of the new town square.

Areas that had developed in earlier decades redoubled their efforts to compete with new rivals. The Ridgmar Mall on the city’s west side spent $70 million trying to retain the loyalty of old customers. New tenants, an eighteen-screen theater, and a “playscape” over which a biplane was suspended from the ceiling helped the twenty-five-year-old mall make a successful comeback. Yet even at 1.3 million square feet it trailed in size behind the new Grapevine Mills; and, when the Northeast Mall followed suit with its own renovation, Ridgmar slipped to third place. From the west side of downtown, the competition did not seem threatening, however. Pointing to the county’s explosive population growth, Ridgmar’s marketing director, Jenelle Gossman, shrugged confidently: “The market can support [all] of us.”

In its plans to help the Simon Property Group of Indianapolis expand the Northeast Mall and develop the land around it, the City of Hurst followed an ominous trend in using eminent domain to assist private enterprise. Almost all of the 128 homeowners whose residences were targeted for demolition gladly sold at a premium. The unwilling few, however, protested loudly. Theirs was a cause that engendered wide sympathy, but in the end it was a losing battle.

Fort Worth itself annexed vast tracts of land, and at the century’s end the city encompassed over three hundred square miles, extending the fingers of its boundaries toward developments in every direction. The map of incorporated land came to resemble what reporter Valerie Fields described as “a humpbacked dragon—with lots of claws.” Several pockets of resisters agreed that the predatory image was appropriate and formed

Droopy-eyed Dodger, the Cats’ mascot, is anything but a sleepy panther. Here he livens up a home crowd; he also has competed in the Olympic Mascot Games in Orlando, Florida.

A scene from the 2004 All-Star game played at LaGrave Field. The Central League, to which the Cats belong, beat the Northeast League 9-4.
a protest group that won some small victories. On the other hand, when owners of
the Walsh and Sendera Ranches asked to be
annexed, it became apparent that before long
the area’s big spreads would be no more.

Tarrant County itself added two hundred
thousand people to the state’s population
during the Nineties, surpassed only by Harris
and Dallas Counties. Increasing diversity and
greater political representation and economic
opportunities for minority citizens
characterized the growth. Consequently, a
sense of ethnic pride became manifest in any
number of festivals and cultural contributions.

Fort Worth’s African-American community,
whose roots reached as far back as the city
itself, projected its culture into the mainstream
of life in a number of ways. Even before the
decade began, city employees and many
businesses and schools had already grown
accustomed to taking a day off to
commemorate the birthday of Martin Luther
King, Jr. In 1992 the Jubilee Theater outgrew
its storefront home on East Rosedale and
moved to Sundance Square. That same year
the city welcomed a national convention of
more than seventy regional black chambers of
commerce. At libraries and museums, patrons
enjoyed exhibits that showcased the works of
prominent African-American authors and
artists. In 1996, the Central Library itself
became the new home of the Tarrant County
Black Historical and Genealogical Society,
which moved its archival holdings from a
tenuously maintained house on East
Humboldt Street.

Earlier, in 1993, the black community
invited members invited members of other
races to come celebrate “Juneteenth,”
commemorating that day on June 19, 1865,
when most Texas bondsmen learned of their
emancipation. “When we chose ‘Just for
Today’ as [this year’s] theme, we mean that we
want you to come on down, just for today,”
remarked the event’s chairperson, Opal Lee.
“Just for today, let’s set aside our differences
and celebrate our freedoms.”

While many did, the overwhelmingly
black crowds nevertheless revealed a
reluctance on the part of Anglos to
acknowledge the end of a historical chapter
they had spent the better part of a century
fousting. Black History Month itself
exposed some other wounds that refused
to heal. With each passing February
the well-meaning effort did bring an
increasing media emphasis to the culture.
Yet some of the area’s most distinguished
black intellectuals criticized it as “belittling”
and “perfunctory.”
Star-Telegram columnist Bob Ray Sanders and UTA professor Marvin Delaney, both prominent African Americans, declined speaking invitations, explaining their purpose “is to bring black history programs into the mainstream so the subject will be integrated into the year-round curriculum.” Not everyone agreed, and Black History Month continued to be a popular outlet for increasing the general awareness of the African-American past. At the same time, the response of local school administrators indicated that in the classroom multiculturalism was the rule, rather than the exception. Indeed, times were changing.

While racial tension in Fort Worth certainly remained, it was also matched by the willingness of city leaders from every culture to meet problems head-on. Following the Los Angeles riots of 1992 black organizers invited the mayor, their U.S. congressional representatives, and others of different races to join them at the first “African-American Summit on Peace, Justice, and Equality.” As black Fort Worthians aired out their concerns over matters such as representation, education, and the media, the establishment listened. Deputy Police Chief Sam Hill, responding to a proposal for a citizen board to review officers’ actions, affirmed his faith in the department’s internal investigations branch. Still, he responded positively: “I personally don’t see a need for a citizens’ review board…but if citizens of Fort Worth want a citizens’ review board, that’s what we are going to have.” State District Judge Maryellen Hicks, the county’s first elected African-American judge, called the meeting historic. “There’s a new day in Tarrant County, and I’m very excited and very enthused about that.”

The Hispanic community, which comprised twenty percent of Tarrant County’s population in 2000, also asserted itself. North of the river, the symbiotic development of the Stockyards and the “Hispanic North Side” generated some grumbling among old-time residents. “The Stockyards in every direction is bordered by the Hispanic community, yet it’s just simply Cowboy,” complained Danny Zapata Johnson. “I grew up in that area and we have no representation in the Stockyards.” His remedy came swiftly. Together with business partner Tony Sanchez, Johnson opened Zapata’s Tejano Club Y Sports Bar across the street from Billy Bob’s Texas in the spring of 1997.

A more ambitious project, the Mercado de Fort Worth, targeted several blocks
between the Stockyards and downtown for redevelopment. Enthusiastic backers—Anglo as well as Hispanic—in the mid-Nineties envisioned the Mexican market as a boon to the growing tourist trade. With both the city and the federal governments involved, however, the development grew long on planning and short on action. Finally, in November 2002, officials broke ground to construct a three-story, $3.8 million building. The project promised to fulfill the dream of many North-Siders who longed to add a Southwestern flair to the tourist district.

Certainly, by the turn of the new century, the ascending influence of tejano culture had made an indelible mark. “Fiesta! Fort Worth,” organized by the League of United Latin American Citizens of Tarrant County, became the Hispanic community’s third yearly celebration, joining Cinco de Mayo and Diez y Sietes de Septiembre on the events calendar. From its inception the downtown festival drew a crowd of thousands that browsed dozens of vendor booths and listened to the music of such tejano bands as the ever-popular David Lee Garza y Los Musicales. Other performers bedecked in Aztec dress and brightly colored traditional costumes provided exhibitions of dance. Like the other two celebrations, “Fiesta,” said one participant, “belongs to everyone, not just Hispanics.”

Still, it was Cinco de Mayo that drew the most eclectic crowd. So much, in fact, that competition with Mayfest led the Hispanic organizers to move their date up to April to accommodate others who would have otherwise attended the larger festival on the banks of the Trinity River. What began as a source of friction ended up reaping benefits for Cinco de Mayo as event officials realized they would be able to attract the kinds of acts that were already booked on May 5 for places like Los Angeles and San Antonio.

In 1995, however, the fifth of May would be remembered not as a typical Cinco de Mayo, but as a day of tragedy at Mayfest. The hot, muggy afternoon ended when a violent supercell formed over the festival, catching about ten thousand people in the open. Suddenly hail began falling, in places propelled by winds that reached eighty miles per hour, throwing the crowd into a panic. Everywhere, people ran pell-mell for shelter; others huddled close together, while parents lay across their children. The sound of loud praying competed with the roar of fist-sized stones careening off everything exposed to the sky and the cracking limbs of giant oaks.

Five years later Fort Worth ran out of luck again. It was thought to be the only major American city without a recorded tornado death. Then, on March 28, 2000, a Gulf breeze had turned the otherwise humid weather into a salubrious springtime day marked by clear skies and sunshine. Chief meteorologist Skip Ely of the National Weather Service, however, was growing more wary as the afternoon unfolded. To the west, a warm dry front was converging with an approaching cold front from the north. “It reminded me of Mayfest, another gorgeous day,” he said. “The sky had that same look late in the day, a hazy thing off to the west, sort of dark and fuzzy and just a little early for sunset.”

Downtown, the rush-hour traffic was ebbing and office workers who remained were either working late or had retired to shops and eateries by the time the skies began to take on the hue of a deep, green bruise that signaled hail—or worse. At the KXAS-TV studio of Channel 5 News, meteorologists monitoring the storm could only gape in silence as they watched it intensify, wrapping almost completely around the top and left sides of their screen.

The storm became a killer even before it spawned the first of two tornadoes. At Lake Worth, a softball-sized hailstone split the skull of a nineteen-year-old man as he ran into the parking lot at CiCi’s Pizza to move his pickup truck. The dark wall gathered strength as it began its rotation just north of downtown. At
River Oaks it snapped power lines, uprooted hundred-year-old oaks, and ripped the roof from a building at Castleberry High School, where drama students and the softball team had taken cover.

Between the arts district and downtown, the first tornado cut a violent path along West Seventh Street. Douglas Thornton, a shuttle driver, stopped at Montgomery Ward to spread the alert. “He was warning people to get down, get down, but the tornado caught up with him and he never made it,” said a maintenance worker.

Crossing the Trinity River into the heart of the business district, the swirling mass of debris battered everything in its path. From their vantages in office buildings, awestruck men and women stood riveted in place; just as many made a mad scramble for the safety of stairwells on first sight. At the Reata Restaurant atop the thirty-seven-story Team Bank Tower (originally the Fort Worth National), over a hundred diners watched the tornado barrel down on them from the floor-to-ceiling windows. Most of them ignored the sirens. Not until three windowpanes shattered did the stampede for cover begin in earnest. Diner Chris Batch, bringing up the rear, witnessed the tornado hit the building. “As we started to run, we could tell the windows were starting to blow out.” In all, the storm shattered or damaged 3,200 of the 3,540 panes covering the building.

Almost three years after the storm, the city council finally approved economic incentives for yet another redevelopment plan. This one succeeded. As 2004 segued into 2005, the former bank building—rechristened The Tower—was beginning to look like the architect’s rendering posted on the plywood wall that blocked off the construction site. Then, at last it was finished.

Among those who attended The Tower’s ribbon cutting were men and women who had done business there during the 1970s. Never would they have envisioned the building’s fate. Even among the most optimistic, few would have predicted the economic course that resurrected the downtown surrounding it.
Every decade during the last century imparted unique surprises, and the city “Where the West Begins” will most likely look different than the one that sits on drawing boards today. If planners have their way, however, the Fort Worth of the future will see changes as breathtaking as any that citizens today have experienced. City officials predict that a light rail system to be developed over the next three decades will one day connect every corner of the greater metropolitan area. It might have to.

Demographers foresee that suburban growth will continue to mushroom, and that new waves of residents will be drawn to the central business district. At the top of the city’s wish list is a vision that would transform the Trinity River into a bustling waterfront with a town lake. Dreamers predict that condominium towers, restaurants, and retail businesses will someday arise on the water’s edge along several miles of lake and river frontage. If that happens, the twenty-story Pier One Place, a breathtaking glass and gray granite building that opened in 2004, will enjoy a commanding view. So will the corporate offices of its ultra-modern neighbor, RadioShack, whose thirty-eight acre campus straddles the bluff where Major Ripley Arnold founded the military post in 1849.

In twenty years, insiders say that downtown Fort Worth could be twice as large as it was at the beginning of the new century. Seventh Street, between the edge of the bluff and the arts district, seems particularly poised for development, as does Lancaster Boulevard, where foot traffic would be within walking distance to the Trinity Railway Express. Taken together, downtown projects already started or planned by 2003 involved an investment of almost three-and-a-half billion dollars.

In Tarrant and seventeen other counties, the recent discovery of an estimated twenty-seven trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the Barnett Shale formation may well take all of North Texas in a direction no one ever envisioned. As energy companies swing deals with suburban communities for the rights to punch holes through golf courses, ball fields, and other municipal lands, the possibilities are open-ended. The likelihood of gas wells producing individual fortunes seems certain. Perhaps the philanthropic successors of the men and their heirs who helped shape the area’s unique history and culture are one big strike away from realizing the same kinds of dreams.

Standing on the threshold of the new millennium, Tom Vandergriff, Arlington’s “Boy Mayor” of the 1950s, was asked to reflect on the growth Fort Worth and Tarrant County had enjoyed over roughly the past half-century, a phenomenon of which he had played a significant part. Characteristically, he chose to look at the possibilities in the area’s future, rather than taking a long, satisfying look backward. What he conveyed in one brief comment will someday fill the books of men and women whose passion is precisely what Vandergriff avoided—embracing that reflective journey. Flashing a furtive smile, he said: “We probably haven’t seen anything yet.” If the past provides any indication, the “ride,” so to speak, may not always be smooth, but it will certainly be worth remembering Fort Worth!
Introduction

Note to Introduction: No era in Fort Worth's history has been covered so thoroughly—or so uncritically—as the "old frontier." In the author's effort to address some of the most common misconceptions and errors of fact, he felt it necessary to provide explanatory notes and documentation out of proportion to those in the chapter text.

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Just as surely as the frontier story of the pioneers... Few would argue that the best single-volume survey of the areas history is Oliver Knight's Fort Worth: Outpost on the Trinity (1953, reprint, Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1990). As a journalist writing at a time when scholarship in western history was undemanding, he produced a delightful entertaining narrative, but it also came to represent a foundation upon which many long-term Fort Worth Star-Telegram columnists have built upon his work, revising and expanding a basic story that still resides at the core of Knight's monograph. Originally published in 1953, it naturally magnifies the era of formative development. Nevertheless, long-time Fort Worth Star-Telegram correspondent Cissy Stewart Lale composed a perceptive essay that ably extends the history forward to1990. Her "Suggested Readings and Other Sources for Fort Worth History" includes an annotated bibliography of the areas broad survey works as well as a discussion of local history and photographic collections.

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Amon Carter Museum. (caption) Bryan Woolley, The Edge of the West and Other Texas Stories (El Paso: Western Press, 1990), 44

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The first inhabitants, of course, are lost to history. FWST Fort Worth Star-Telegram (morn. ed. when morn. and eve. ed. printed)

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Anticipating the boom to civilian settlement... Knight, 19-21, Julie Kathryn Garrett, Fort Worth: A Frontier Triumph (Austin: Encino Press, 1972), 108-9. It should be noted that scarcely a month after the Army founded the post, Edward Tarrant, in the words of Indian Agent Robert Simpson Neighbors, determined to take up to one-hundred and fifty men on an expedition to the Wichita Mountains in Indian Territory "to attack any Indian villages he may fall in with, destroy their cornfields, and capture their horses, etc." Even for one who so zealously embraced the spirit of Lamar's Indian policy of expulsion or extermination, the intent to cross the state's border was stupendously irresponsible. To his credit, Major Arnold cleverly "persuaded General Tarrant out of his trip" by informing him that "if the settlers..." (quote).

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For a detailed account of TR's visit, see FWR, April 9, 1905.

Progress could also be measured... Ibid., March 7, 1909.

The welcoming speech for the event... Ibid., March 16, 1909.

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Fort Worth, as a popular phrase of the times put it... FWR, Sept, 23, 1910 (quotation); RD, 7745.

The transformation was total... FWST, March 17, 1909, Nate, 27-33.

The transformation was total... FWST, March 17, 1909, Nate, 27-33.

Over four thousand stockmen... Ibid.

The very next day... BOOM!... Ibid.
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• Standing tall in the center of all the action... Jerry Flemmons, Amon: The Texan Who Played Cowboy for America (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), xx (quotation), 27.
• Bowie native Amon Carter... Ibid., 13-14, 46-7 (quotation 46), 58-9.

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• It was West Texas that boasted... Ibid., 23, 226-31 (quotation, 229).
• Amon Carter cultivated his contacts... RD., 18621; Flemmons, 110-14 (first quotation, 110, second quotation, 111).

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• Change also engendered a sense of history... RD, 2263-4 (quotation 2262), 2266, 5632, 5671; FWST, Sept. 10, 24, 30, 1923, FWP, Oct. 29, 1923.
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1. In the waning days of 1979… Janice Williams, “‘Blame’ marks hotel groundbreaking,” FWST, Aug. 9, 1979, 1, 2C.

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2. Miraculously, the explosion claimed no lives… Earnest L. Perry, “UT professor cut by flying glass,” FWST, Dec. 8, 1986, 8A.
3. A deep roar, followed by a numbing concussion… Koreescu, “Downtown FW explosion,” 6A.

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5. Dominating Sundance Square… Sumner, “New Fort Worth.”

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1. At 6:03, as 191’s captain Edward Connors… Ibid.
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1. Bringing up the bold proclamation as the state’s… “It’s Knocked! Fort Worth plant wins historic fighter contract Decision to secure thousands of jobs,” FWST, Oct. 27, 2001, 1A.
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4. Of 165 passengers, only two walked away… Ibid.
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