Fort Worth, as a popular phrase of the times put it, was “going some.” It could be seen on the crowded sidewalks downtown and on the busy streets, where the drivers of automobiles grew impatient with the sluggish wagon traffic. It was registered in the books of thriving businesses that flocked to join the Chamber of Commerce, which replaced the old Board of Trade. It was manifest in row upon row of neat new homes on the fringes of the city, their yards dotted with spindly saplings and infant shrubs. When Majestic Theater manager Mr. Mullaney interrupted a show to read the results of the 1910 census, everybody expected some big numbers. As he called out, “seventy-three thousand, three-hundred and twelve,” a spontaneous chorus of cheers broke out. The tremendous growth that had marked the century’s first decade would continue almost unabated during the 1910s.

Few vestiges of the old frontier survived these years. The White Elephant Saloon, made famous in the 1880s for its part in the Short-Courtright “shootout,” became a chili parlor. When Majestic Theater manager Mr. Mullaney interrupted a show to read the results of the 1910 census, everybody expected some big numbers. As he called out, “seventy-three thousand, three-hundred and twelve,” a spontaneous chorus of cheers broke out. The tremendous growth that had marked the century’s first decade would continue almost unabated during the 1910s.

When the “mortal threat” was finally over, the Star-Telegram reported that Earth had passed through the twenty-five-million-mile-long tail—“and the world still revolves.” Those who attended the many comet parties in Fort Worth were disappointed by a thick cover of clouds. Perhaps no one was more forlorn than the young swain who had planned to pop the big question to his girlfriend by Halley’s light.

The very next day reformer Carrie Nation paid a brief visit to Fort Worth, and, like Halley’s Comet, “was just about as effective.” A reporter chided that “cocktails are still concocted and fizzes are still fizzing.” While her notorious hatchet “remained unhatched,” she nevertheless “bawled out” some smokers, declaring Fort Worth “the worst cigarette smoking city in the country.”

The Great War and Other Crusades
1910-1919

Fort Worth had taken great strides during the new century’s first decade, but its downtown silhouette in 1910 had yet to cut the sky in a way that bespoke its rising prominence. Nevertheless, several buildings reached upward, as this view looking north from the base of Houston Street attests. In the distance to the right is the Wheat Building; the tall, white structure to its left is the First National Bank, located at Houston and West Seventh. The Tarrant County Courthouse peeks through the gap between them. Across Houston Street from the bank is the Board of Trade Building that had enjoyed an unobstructed vista when it was completed in 1889. Farther down the street, what appears to be a rather plain structure is actually the back side of the ornate Flatiron Building. Continuing to its left, across Jennings Avenue, the top of the Carnegie Library is barely visible; beyond it, the spires of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church point heavenward. The expanse of low rooftops between City Hall and the Federal Building (its view partially blocked by St. Patrick’s Catholic Church) by then had developed into a residential area that stretched all the way to the bluff overlooking the Trinity River.

COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, D.C.
“Downtown Fort Worth,” 1915. Murray P. Bewley, a Fort Worth artist who studied in Paris from 1907 until the Great War compelled his return, produced this impressionist-inspired art on canvas at his studio in the Continental Bank building at Houston and West Seventh Streets.

COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF SAMUEL A. DENNY, FORT WORTH, TEXAS.
Even though Nation got the cold shoulder, Fort Worth continued to turn out for other visiting celebrities and notable events. In 1915 it was the inanimate Liberty Bell that drew a crowd of seventy thousand. Weeks of preparation resulted in more than thirty historically themed floats to accompany the “nation’s most treasured relic.” A holiday was declared, and most businesses closed long enough for their employees to see the parade and a pageant depicting events from the country’s founding era. As usual, out-of-town officials declared the people of Fort Worth to be among the most enthusiastic on the tour.

Several times aerial shows commanded crowds of curious spectators. The first one came to town on a train in 1911. Business leaders raised $5,000 to lure a group of touring European aviators to Fort Worth, where a crowd of fifteen thousand assembled across the Trinity, just northwest of downtown. There, they waited four hours for the wind to die down before marveling at a diminutive yellow Demeliselle that skipped across the field and made a few jerky hops before landing. Soon, however, the crowd again grew restless, which provoked Frenchman Roland Garros to challenge the capricious breeze in his Statue of Liberty. The “birdlike contour of the aeroplane became a blur against the sky,” wrote a reporter, and when his ride was over, Garros “alighted gracefully in almost the exact spot where the rubber-tired wheels of his machine had left the earth.” With that, the crowd went wild and rushed the infield to congratulate the daring pilot.

Teddy Roosevelt also returned, his visit coinciding with the fifteenth annual Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show of 1911. At a breakfast at the Westbrook Hotel, a jovial TR led a hundred Fort Worth notables in singing “Ain’t Got No Style.” Making his way into the Coliseum, the former Rough Rider was hailed by a fellow veteran of the Cuban campaign, one-legged Charley Buckholtz. The old soldier—his wife and six children standing off to one side—touched the sensitive Roosevelt with his story about the government holding up his pension. While five thousand people inside were beginning to wonder what was going on, TR was calmly dictating a note to his secretary. Buckholtz got his pension.

By the time of Roosevelt’s second visit, the Fat Stock Show had put a distinct “Cowtown” stamp on Fort Worth. Befitting its southern-cum-western roots, the festivities regularly opened with the Stock Show Band marching into the Coliseum arena playing “Dixie” to a crowd that always “threatened to raise the roof,” as one observer remarked. Typical of the venue’s horse show, the Fort Worth Record noted of one performance: “Every seat was filled and hundreds lined the walks on either side.” During the decade an indoor rodeo—billed as the world’s first—was added to the program and quickly became a key feature of the extravaganza.

Elsewhere, citizens enjoyed the amenities of a growing and prosperous city. The River Crest Country Club opened in 1911, east of Arlington Heights. Its developers, headed by D. T. Bomar, bought 640 acres and laid out a handsome eighteen-hole golf course financed by selling home lots in the exclusive addition. Like its precursor at Arlington Heights, this one, too, had sand greens, but at least it had a fence around it to keep out
livestock. A social event and tournament to promote the course and neighborhood drew five-hundred men and women, many who bid on lots that averaged over two thousand dollars apiece. The Star-Telegram’s Bert Honea walked away with a silver loving cup for winning the inaugural round. When the affair was over, lot sales covered the cost of building a clubhouse with eight thousand dollars to spare. The next year Glen Garden opened, boasting an even grander clubhouse and Scotsman Wilbur Larimer as course pro.

Shortly after the completion of Lake Worth in 1914, a million-dollar casino arose at the center of a three-thousand-acre park. Surpassing the amusements of the century’s first decade, the beachside facility offered any number of rides, boat races, carnival attractions, and a pavilion built over the water’s edge, where hundreds of couples did the fox trot and other popular steps to the music of featured bands that often played until the wee hours of the morning. On the lake itself, a double-decker boat cut a lazy wake through the water, impressing sightseers with breathtaking views of the wooded hills beyond the shoreline.

On the baseball diamond Fort Worth enjoyed an intense rivalry with Dallas, but it would be the next decade before the Cats, or minor league baseball for that matter, gained a true measure of professionalism. The volatile John King, for example, was always the crowd pleaser, but not particularly for his prowess on the field. Once, he fell victim to the “hidden ball trick.” As King took a lead off of first base, the opposing player stood on the bag and chided: “John, take a look at what I’ve got!” Seeing that he had been suckereded, King turned on him, threatening: “You son of a bitch, don’t touch me with that ball!” Suddenly, the angry Cat was on the first baseman’s heels, chasing him around the field and finally beneath the bleachers, the entire time screaming, “I’m going to kill you, boy!”

Free weekend concerts that rotated among outdoor locales provided a milder diversion during the summer months. From the balconies at the Westbrook and Metropolitan Hotels, and on bandstands at Trinity and Triangle Parks, symphony orchestras began limbering up their instruments just before dusk, while concert goers bought peanuts and sodas at concessions opened for the occasions. When the hand played at Forest Park, families spread out blankets and picnic baskets under the massive oaks.

Most of the crowd arrived by special streetcars, but each year the line of automobiles grew longer. Men were willing to put up with a few inconveniences for the privilege of mobility. The autos had to be hand-cranked, and drivers were compelled to get out at dusk to light the kerosene headlamps of older models. They measured their fuel supply with a stick, pinned up side curtains against storms, and did tire and mechanical repairs on the spot.

Even so, women, too, began showing an interest in driving. Five of them, in fact, caused a stir when they were seen alighting from an auto on Main Street—“and there was no man at the wheel.” But not all of them were as sophisticated. Tom Leahy, who worked at the Allen-Vernon dealership, remembered a couple of women who came in to look at his Packards. “Like I always did, I started it up, and they took out screaming…thought it was going to explode.”
A special feature of the annual Stock Show was a pageant, held inside the Coliseum. In 1916 the theme was the "Persian Garden." Note the band, tucked just under the platform, right.

COURTESY OF THE AMON CARTER MUSEUM COLLECTION, FORT WORTH PUBLIC LIBRARY.

The North Texas Traction Company had opened the first interurban line between Fort Worth and Dallas in 1902. By the 1910s, customers were demanding better facilities, so the Fort Worth Traction Company teamed up with Dallas's Stone & Webster to build an improved interurban line. Here, a construction crew lays parallel rails next to an existing streetcar track. Long after this form of public transportation became a quaint memory, the Amon Carter Museum would occupy the empty lot to the right.

COURTESY OF THE JACK WHITE PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON LIBRARIES, ARLINGTON, TEXAS, AR 407 1-6-518.
Increasingly, the automobile was becoming the preferred choice of transportation. In 1910 the “Buick Texas Special”—a forty-one-car freight train loaded with the largest single consignment of autos ever shipped—made its way through the Panther City, where it dropped off 127 cars. Shortly afterward, a Chevy plant went into production in Fort Worth, and by 1917 workers were turning out forty cars a day.

The growing traffic put pressure on the city to begin regulating the movements of drivers, who had not quite mastered the law. The chief of police distributed twenty-five thousand copies of a new handbook and gave the public fair warning. “These people who take the wrong side of the street,” he advised, “will be arrested and fined.” Shortly afterward, he gave copies of the city traffic laws to his force with instructions to “learn it by heart.” He then stationed men at the four busiest crossings on Main Street where they were expected to “enforce it to the letter.”

City departments themselves became motorized early in the decade. “Jealous of the new automobile fire wagon,” read a 1910 newspaper article, “the police department is to have an automobile patrol” to “replace the rickety old wagon that is now in use.” Envy no doubt turned to smug satisfaction, when just five days later the new fire truck hit a telephone pole after failing to extinguish a fire that destroyed two houses and a grocery store on West Bluff Street.

Despite the network of all-weather roads that was beginning to emerge by the end of the decade, trolley and interurban lines continued to provide regional transportation for the masses. The Fort Worth Record, pointing to lines that fanned out to Dallas, Cleburne, Denton, and Mineral Wells, trumpeted Fort Worth as the “interurban center of Texas.” A car left for Dallas every thirty minutes for a trip that lasted about an hour. After passing through the outskirts of places like Handley, where pleasure seekers might get off at Lake Erie, passengers rode through open country on the electric line without the bother of smoke or cinders, or the worry of having to stop and fix a flat tire.

Passengers arriving in Fort Worth could get around on streetcars or take a jitney to places where the lines did not go. These taxies opened up a new occupation, attracting a host of moonlighters who competed with men who made the service their livelihood. In the space of a few months in 1915, the number of “nickel fare cars” jumped from sixty nine to over a hundred, and then to about three hundred, putting a tremendous strain on the sixty five who bothered to file for licenses and join the jitneurs union. Freelancers flouted regulations, such as the one that forbid them from allowing fares to ride on the running boards, and otherwise operated as they pleased. Soon, however, a spate of tickets put the illegal operators out of business.

Likewise, the 1910s saw motion pictures eclipse the variety theaters. “Show Row”
developed along a South End strip that included such movie houses as the refashioned Majestic, the Gem, the Hippodrome, the Bijou, the Rialto, the Gayety, and the Princess. There was also the Egypt that played mostly to a female audience as well as the first suburban theater, the Isis, which opened at North Side in 1914.

The last of the holdouts was the Standard Theater at Commerce and Twelfth, whose owners decided to go legitimate, rather than throw up another movie screen. With the variety shows went a form of entertainment that for decades had characterized downtown nightlife. The band that played outside to attract customers fell silent. No longer would patrons enter the auditorium through the bar, where they could sit in the balcony and drink beer and throw bottles and vegetables at the rube acts that performed behind a net curtain.

The passing of Fort Worth University heralded another change. The school retreated to Oklahoma City after Texas Christian University and the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary abandoned Waco for Fort Worth in 1910. The latter had outgrown its facilities; TCU was left homeless after a fire destroyed its main building.

Even as TCU trustees were arranging temporary quarters for their four hundred students, a committee from Fort Worth was formulating a plan of action. Organized as the Fairmount Land Company, a group of businessmen offered the school $300,000 in cash and donated fifty-six acres on a hill southwest of Forest Park, promising also to provide city services and a streetcar line. After rejecting bids from Dallas and some other hopeful cities, the Texas Convention of the Christian Church announced that the institution was coming home.

TCU actually traced its origins to Fort Worth, where in 1869 brothers Addison and Randolph Clark opened a one-room private school for children. Unfortunately, it sat on the fringes of the district that developed into Hell’s Half Acre. Disgusted, but not disillusioned, the brothers determined to find a place where the moral climate was more salubrious, and in 1873 they relocated to Thorp Spring, near Granbury. The next year they chartered the Add-Ran Male and Female College. After another move, this time to Waco in 1895, the school attracted the support of the Disciples of Christ Church, which gave the growing institution of higher learning its present name.

During the 1910-1911 school year, TCU convened in a group of two-story brick
buildings called Ingram Flats at the corner of Weatherford and Commerce. The next fall students made their way out to a barren and lonely prairie, where their new campus awaited. An administration building and two dormitories—all four-storied, classical-styled halls—provided a stark, but impressive sight. If nothing else, there was plenty of room to grow, and soon a new section of town was springing up around the busy campus.

The Christian enlightenment represented in TCU and the Baptist seminary certainly elevated the city’s reputation, but at ground level, religious forces cultivated in a rural Southern tradition seemed to eclipse some of the gains. Pulpit-pounding preachers regularly condemned Sunday baseball, and churchgoers drew up resolutions condemning as wicked the excursions that competed with Sabbath worship. Congregations also cast out pastors whom they felt had fallen out of step with their doctrinal beliefs. The Reverend N. T. Bell, for example—“given to speaking in tongues”—refused to budge while members of his Baptist church “waited upon him” to recant. Aligning himself with the Apostolic Faith, he took with him a large following of working class families from Glenwood and the North Side.

Nobody, however, could galvanize a congregation—or divide a city—like combative crusader J. Frank Norris of the First Baptist Church. The recent divinity school graduate got his first taste of power when he breathed life into the Baptist Standard, the denomination’s leading Texas newspaper. His muckraking style attracted a wide circulation. The success he enjoyed in haranguing the state legislature into outlawing racetrack gambling put Norris in the public eye. Along the way, he accepted a $25 fee to speak at the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, known popularly as the “Church of the Cattle Kings” for the thirteen millionaire ranchers who were members there. Norris was soon at the head of the congregation, where he became the highest paid minister in the South. “Anytime they heard of a pastor making more money than me I got a raise,” he crowed.

Norris could have settled into the comfortable life of ministering to the large and prosperous congregation, but the fiery preacher was determined to shake things up. The whole city,” he later reflected, was “given over to idolatry and wickedness. And I was not causing a ripple.” Norris’s first holy war targeted Hell’s Half Acre. His refusal to take down a revival tent that violated city regulations provoked Mayor Bill Davis to order the fire department to disassemble it.

Before long the confrontation escalated into a feud that pitted Norris against many of the city’s most prominent politicians and businessmen. It also provoked an exodus of the millionaire cattlemen and others. Then, in the early hours of February 4, 1912, fire raced through the church at Fourth and Taylor. At the very same time Norris and his wife said they were awakened by the smell of smoke at their home on Fifth Street. The results of an investigation sent a
shockwave through the city—Norris, the police charged, had set fire to his own church. Claiming that he was the object of a conspiracy, the preacher produced some threatening letters he claimed to have received before the fire. Behind the plot were “the president of the Board of Trade and 156 prominent men,” whom he alleged, “gave me 30 days to get out of town.”

At the trial, a milkman provided damning evidence that he had plainly seen Norris running from the church just as flames were erupting from the building. While Norris’s attorneys picked away at the antagonistic witness, prosecutors, it seemed, found positive proof that Norris had manufactured his tale of a conspiracy. A scrap of paper the police pulled from the preacher’s pocket fit the torn corner of one of the threatening letters. The type print, moreover, matched the machine confiscated from Norris’s home. In the end, however, the smoking gun had been loaded with blanks. When the judge rendered his verdict of “not guilty,” the courtroom burst into a spontaneous revival meeting of hymns and hosannas.

Certainly, Norris had not cornered the market on that “Old-Time Religion.” The Fort Worth Record reported in December 1918 that at the first meeting of his month-long campaign, popular revivalist Billy Sunday is “turning ‘em away.” Thousands converged on the Coliseum for a Saturday evening worship, packing the auditorium “from platform to exits.” Other disappointed thousands returned to the city or stood outside to catch what they could. At the revival’s conclusion, ten thousand people listened to Sunday’s farewell sermon. Many in the crowd got so emotional that 983 reportedly “hit the sawdust trail,” coming up to the platform to be saved at such a pace that ushers could barely take care of them all.

More quietly, several congregations built impressive houses of worship, lending a majestic diversity to the growing city. The Disciples of Christ erected a Neoclassical building of cast stone near the center of the
business district, while the Episcopalians established the medieval-inspired St. Andrew's just down the street. Also downtown, African Americans built both the Allen Chapel A.M.E. and the Mount Gilead Baptist Church. On the North Side, a small community of immigrants established the first Greek Orthodox Church, and as the Hispanic population there grew, it organized the Iglesia de San Jose. To the black, the brown, and the immigrant, their houses of worship provided a wealth of services such as day nurseries, gymnasiums, sewing rooms, and even swimming pools, that would otherwise be unavailable.

During the 1910s a significant foreign enclave emerged on the North Side. Greeks, Bulgarians, Russians, Serbs, Romanians, Hungarians, Poles, Czechs, Spaniards, and Mexicans transformed the area surrounding The Metropolitan Hotel, where a deadly scandal unfolded.

On January 13, 1913, Amarillo rancher Beal Sneed strode purposefully into the marble and mahogany lobby of the Metropolitan Hotel (above), where he spotted cattleman A. G. Boyce sitting in a chair reading a newspaper. According to witnesses, Sneed then drew his revolver and made quick work of the “Captain,” as the seventy-year-old rancher was called. The killer had directed his incendiary temper at the elderly man for helping his son, Al Boyce, escape criminal charges for abducting Sneed’s estranged wife. Sneed had confined her to an Arlington Heights sanitarium for mental problems, yet it appeared to observers that she was merely crazy in love. Mrs. Sneed, in fact, had confessed to her husband that she planned to run away with Al Boyce to South America. A few weeks earlier, she had telegraphed a message to her paramour: “For God’s sake, come and get me.” He did. With $100,000 Boyce withdrew from the bank, the fleeing lovers made their way to Winnipeg, Canada, where Sneed caught up with them. The wife was sent back to the sanitarium, and Boyce was held for abduction, the charge for which his father had extricated him. Incredibly, Sneed was acquitted of the killing. Even more fantastic was a second acquittal following his slaying of Al, on whom he reportedly unleashed both barrels of a shotgun on September 14, 1922, in Amarillo.
Swift and Armour into an ethnic babble, each group adapting its traditions to the new environment. The Czechs, for example, founded the Fort Worth Sokol, an Old World institution that used gymnastics to impart the virtues of health, self-discipline, and patriotism to its young people. Like the Germans, imbibing formed part of their cultural fabric, and the Sokol saw no conflict joining with the SPJST, or Slavonic Benevolent Order of Texas, in building a lodge at 2400 North Houston Street. Originally created as an insurance agency, the SPJST had grown into a fraternal organization that provided a place for Czech immigrants to drink beer and socialize. Many European immigrants saved their money and opened stores or developed truck farms and restaurants, eventually assimilating into the general Anglo culture. Social and material progress for African Americans and Hispanics, however, grew from within their own communities. The black population expanded into the Lake Como area after a flood forced families to move from the Trinity bottomland that adjoined Purina Mills. A lot sale at a dollar down created a modest building boom, and African-American leaders soon established the Industrial & Mechanical College there and built a Union Church, shared by Methodists and Baptists. Although the college soon failed, one of its remaining buildings became a grade school, where such teachers as Mrs. Tennessee Smith lovingly instructed students in the basic skills. Black commerce began to thrive, too. One of the most successful Como businessmen was Sebastian C. Crook. In 1915 he established a dairy and poultry business that thrived on its delivery service to Arlington Heights.

During these years, barrios also emerged around la empaka—packing plants. It was a logical migration for Mexicanos who traced their communal origins to the late 1880s and “Lower Calhoun,” which lay roughly between the Acre and the first stockyards, about where I-35W and I-30 meet today. Other barrios emerged east of the stockyards and a few blocks west of the courthouse, north of West Belknap. These residents worked mainly as domestic and manual laborers, but they also opened businesses such as groceries, food stands, bars, and barber shops. After Swift and Armour arrived, however, the proportion of Mexicanos in North Side grew steadily as Eastern Europeans assimilated and found other places more inviting.

Although Hispanic Fort Worth can claim a presence as old as the founding of the military post—cavalryman Anthony Méndez was among the soldiers who arrived with Major Ripley Arnold—many, if not most, of the city’s leading families trace their arrival to the turbulent revolutions that rocked Mexico during the 1910s. As the civil war heated up, and the United States became embroiled with Pancho Villa along the border, the Fort Worth Record in 1914 criticized local Hispanics for not doing their part. Of the “2,000 Mexicans” who lived in the city, “there is not one who has as yet expressed himself as being ready to fight.” No doubt the caustic reporter knew little of the oppressive racial conditions on the border; otherwise he might have added that no one
was ready to fight for Uncle Sam. Indeed, another report passed the rumor that a recruiting officer in Villa’s army had just left Fort Worth by train with a “squad of Mexicans” bound for El Paso.

A brief preoccupation with the revolutions in Mexico was soon eclipsed by the Great War. For three years Americans remained on the sidelines, most of them determined not to get involved in the European conflagration. Yet, when German aggression finally pulled the United States into the war, Fort Worth inserted itself into the middle of the action. While on a business trip to Austin, Chamber of Commerce President Ben E. Keith learned that the government was going to make Texas the home of several camps. Immediately he began working his contacts and phoned associates in Fort Worth, urging them to survey some prospective sites. Soon, he and former State Representative Louis J. Wortham were in Washington, D.C., boasting of the Panther City’s advantages—splendid rail lines,

A map of Camp Bowie. Arlington Heights Boulevard was changed after the war to Camp Bowie Boulevard. Notice the inset map, lower right, with locations of the three airfields.

A SOUVENIR PROGRAM OF THE MILITARY REVIEW, PANTHER DIVISION. COURTESY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON LIBRARIES, ARLINGTON, TEXAS.
access to agricultural markets, a ready labor force, and a good year-round climate.

The enthusiastic pitch brought Army brass from San Antonio, who looked over the land around Lake Worth, a spot south of town near where the Seminary South shopping center would much later arise, and suburban Arlington Heights. A deluge that greeted the military’s decision makers left the Fort Worth delegation nervous, but the heavy rain actually proved a blessing for Arlington Heights. The natural drainage there helped convince the Army that the site should be a serious contender.

To sweeten the pot, Fort Worth offered General Charles G. Morton land inducements for trench warfare training, a hard-surface road, a railroad spur, and municipal services. The city's commitment cinched the deal. After selecting a 1,140-acre site in Arlington Heights, the government named the grounds for James Bowie, co-commander of the Alamo. It took over five thousand laborers only a hundred days to erect fifteen-hundred buildings. When it was completed, the camp became the home of the fighting Thirty-sixth, appropriately named the Panther Division. The headquarters arose just west of where the Bowie Theater would be built.

At the same time Keith was vying with several other Texas cities for additional sites where the Air Corps could train fliers. His efforts took him back to the nation’s capital. There he attended a going away party for General Benjamin D. Foulois, who was departing for the Western Front. America's first military pilot, Foulois had developed a fondness for Fort Worth when the city entertained him and his aero squadron in 1915 while they were en route to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. As they dined, the general scribbled a note on a cigarette paper, appealing to a counterpart in the British Royal Flying Corps: “Do what you can for this Texan.” He did. Fort Worth beat Austin, Dallas, Midland, Waco and Wichita Falls for three aviation sites that eventually became Hicks, Benbrook, and Barron Fields.

The training facilities meant boom times for Fort Worth. The Army payroll alone neared $2 million a month, much of it redistributed throughout the city's business community. Just before Christmas, 1917, the Fort Worth Record published an account of the soldiers’ “invasion” of the city on payday, describing the men as “a heavily cash-armed force” that advanced on the city “afoot, in automobiles, and in streetcars.” The soldiers, read the report, “were repeatedly repulsed at the picture shows, public dance halls and other establishments put under temporary ban,” but “they were never utterly defeated,
due to fresh troops being rushed to the scene after each repulse."

Before the war was over, the entertainment fare was trimmed considerably when military authorities joined forces with city and county officials to kill Hell’s Half Acre. The effort was praised as “the most sweeping anti-vice crusade ever put into execution in Texas.” Reformers had made such boasts before, and the cancer-like Acre had always returned. This time, however, the military police and civil authorities went undercover, provoking complaints that the measures bordered on martial law. “Civil guarantees requiring warrants for arrest and for search and seizure have been virtually suspended,” noted a reporter. The police station became a revolving door through which prostitutes and gamblers came and went twenty-four hours a day. At one time there were eighty men and women in jail and 150 more released on bond. Fortunately for the troops, most of them got the message.

The city had been a good host to the soldiers, and when the Panther Division paraded for the first time, banks, businesses, factories, and schools closed their doors. Almost 225,000 people turned out for four hours of marching and drills. The “Sammies”—Uncle Sam’s boys—were outfitted in khaki, puttees, and broad-brimmed field hats, their rifles slung over shoulders that bore the “T-Patch.” The insignia noted the origin of these recruits, composed almost exclusively from Texas and Oklahoma. Less than half a year later the Panther Division went into action in France. On the first day, one regiment suffered 691 casualties; by Armistice Day over twenty-six hundred had given their lives or were wounded.

While the Allies were prosecuting an end to the Great War, another enemy, the Spanish Influenza, marched relentlessly across the world’s borders, threatening the lives of everyone in its path. In Fort Worth the Record announced “an appeal for mattresses, blankets, cots, and bedding of all kinds.” The reports of individual suffering evoked more terror than pity. A twelve-year-old orphan who had been working in a dairy contracted the flu and was turned away by the hospital, because it did not have a contagion ward. At the orphan’s home itself, ten of the forty-five children there fell ill. West of town, an entire family living in a tent was found sick, their mortal plight made even more perilous by a rain that had drenched their beds. The flu had claimed so many victims that doctors could not treat them all. Nurses, too, were stretched to the limit. Some fell ill themselves, others were rumored to have gone into hiding. Seeing the conditions at one home, where the flu had infected all five family members, a nurse simply refused to

People from all over Texas and Oklahoma gathered on the streets of Fort Worth, April 11, 1918, and bid farewell to the well-trained Panther Division before it departed for France.

COURTESY OF THE DALTON HOFFMAN COLLECTION, FORT WORTH.
stay. Then, as suddenly as it had come, the Spanish Influenza disappeared with the onset of winter.

At the same time another, more welcome, event would make Fort Worth a player in the lucrative petroleum industry. With the Allies desperate for oil, the price in 1917 had skyrocketed to $3.50 a barrel. Then, in October, black gold shot out of the derrick of a wildcat well near Ranger. Soon, it seemed as if all of old Northwest Texas was awash in oil as gushers came in at Desdemona, Burkburnett, Brekenridge, and Electra. In Fort Worth the lobbies of banks and hotels turned into oil stock exchanges as wildcatters solicited eager subscribers, many who put up Liberty Bonds for security. The Westbrook Hotel, in particular, commanded the center of the oil trade. The lobby, cleared of furniture, could not accommodate the throng of men who spilled onto the sidewalks buying and selling oil stock. The lone remaining fixture, a statue that watched impassively over the frenzied dealing, earned the nickname “The Golden Goddess.”

By the end of the next year three refineries were operating in Fort Worth, with four others under construction or financed by builders. Before long, pipelines would connect the city with New Jersey. An almost unimaginable wealth of business showered the Panther City as new companies were formed to manufacture, warehouse, sell, and transport all manner of oilfield equipment and supplies. Will Fox, who produced The World in Pictures, stopped in Fort Worth on his way to West Texas to capture the oil boom on film and declared that its nightlife rivaled New York City’s “Great White Way” for its crowds and attractions.

After all the confetti from the Armistice Day Parade was swept up, Fort Worth turned its attention to capitalizing on wartime developments. Camp Bowie itself left a ready-made site for homes and businesses that at last fulfilled the dreams of the failed developer who had envisioned it. Upon their discharge from the Air Corps, Russell H. Pearson and two fellow fliers founded the Fort Worth Aerial Transportation Company featuring thirteen Curtiss JN4 “Canucks.” A publicity stunt in which the pilots delivered candy to mayors and oilmen throughout old Northwest Texas did not cultivate enough business to keep the company afloat. Still, Pearson predicted that “within a few years, we’ll have planes flying as fast as 150 miles an hour, carrying passengers who sleep on the planes just as they do now in Pullman’s.” It was a vision sown in the seeds of the Great War, and one that Fort Worth would eventually make a reality. More immediate was the oil industry that transformed the economy and skyline of Fort Worth.

During the last days of the decade, Fort Worth boasted that it was the “fastest growing city in America.” The cry is heard that “we are not building fast enough,” declared the Fort Worth Record. “This cry is not coming from boomers or irresponsible persons. It comes from staid, conservative businessmen who have never been known to let loose a dollar unless they had two in sight.” The newspaper claimed that a measuring of bank clearings, post office receipts, and building permits for the century’s first two decades would show that “each year found the city a step in advance—some years she was a long stride ahead.”
In an age when barnstorming was all the rage, Fort Worthian Ormer Locklear reached the top of his profession. He first took to the air as a teenager, when he and his brother built a glider—its wings fashioned from bamboo fishing poles—that was lifted into the sky behind their father’s Maxwell. When America declared war on Germany in 1917, Locklear enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Service and trained at Barron Field, near Everman. He became so proficient at maneuvering his Curtiss Jenny and making repairs in mid-flight that he was made an instructor, much to his dismay. Aces returning from the war remarked that his flying surpassed anything they had seen in France. After the Armistice, the retired Army pilot put together “Locklear’s Flying Circus,” which routinely brought all other activity to a standstill wherever they appeared. Locklear graduated from wing walking and boarding planes from a moving automobile, to jumping from one plane to another. His most daring stunt was called the “Dance of Death,” in which he and another pilot would actually switch planes while in flight. In 1920, Locklear signed a lucrative Hollywood contract to perform stunts for a film, *The Great Air Robbery*, but his luck ran out. During a night-time scene, he nosedived toward a set of blinding spotlights that were supposed to be turned off as a signal for him to pull up. For whatever reason they remained on, and the camera kept rolling, capturing the crash that killed him and fellow pilot “Skeets” Elliott. Locklear was twenty-eight years old. Six days later, August 8, 1920, he was buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Fort Worth with fifty-thousand mourners in attendance. Afterward, a considerably larger number of people witnessed the double fatality on the big screen—the temptation to show the crash scene was too much for the producers to resist.

The lobby of the Westbrook Hotel appears serene in this image, but it was the scene of frenzied dealing in oil stocks later in the decade. The “Golden Goddess” stands in the center. After residing recently at a Stockyards restaurant, her restored figure now greets members of the Petroleum Club as they step into the elevator lobby.

Rich strikes in West Texas, like this one in Burkburnett in 1918, made Fort Worth an oil capital for a multitude of speculators, equipment manufacturers, and salesmen.

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