NATURE'S ENTREPRENEUR: AMON CARTER AND THE REMAKING OF TEXAS

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INTRODUCTION

That Amon Giles Carter has not become a favorite topic of biography for western historians is probably a matter of great consternation to the ghost of Amon Giles Carter. The living man did all he could to become suitably famous and absurdly western. His reputation as "Mr. Fort Worth" was national, making its way into *Time* magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, major newspapers, and even tabloids. He wore cowboy boots and hats. He jumped onto tables in swanky New York and Washington, D.C., restaurants to shout "Hooray for Fort Worth and West Texas!" He lived from 1879 to 1955, bridging the gulf that Frederick Jackson Turner and the U.S. Census Bureau found between the frontier and later Wests. He carried much of the early West across that span, besides his garb: the westerner's ambivalence toward government as he both welcomed federal largesse and resisted the strings that bound it; the logic of growth inherited from the railroad booster and real estate speculator; the oil wildcatter's rugged individualism in extractive industry. He seemed to beckon to the historian of the West.

More specifically, but less intentionally, Amon Carter also courted the environmental historian with his longest-running, most important promotional projects. In the prime of his boosting career Carter held just two projects worth his scarce time but considerable influence, and both sought to reorganize nature. First, from 1930 until his death in 1955, Carter promoted the canalization of the Trinity River from Fort Worth to the Gulf of Mexico near Houston. This would remove the kinks from "the crookedest river in the world," build reservoirs, install a series of locks and dams, and render the river navigable for shipping barges to run through the heart of Texas. Secondly, from 1937 to 1944 Carter led a popular campaign to establish a national park in the Big Bend country of far West Texas. This would entail purchasing almost three quarters of a million acres from local landholders, handing the deeds to the federal government, and rendering

the country off limits to mineral development, ranching, and many other commercial activities. What unites these seemingly disparate ideas for the use of nature is Carter's belief that in both the Big Bend and the Trinity Canal, Fort Worth and Texas had great "trade assets." He promoted the preservation of a distant wilderness and the destruction of the local river's wild aspects for exactly the same reason: commerce. Carter backed each of these projects through his *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, by sitting on the executive committees of boards founded specifically for the causes, and by mining his powerful personal contacts for contributions of time, money, and influence.

In his most unique application of nature, Carter maintained his social network by sending watermelons, pecans, live turkeys, and other produce around the world to ever-growing lists of friends. The lists were a proto-rolodex of wealth and fame, kept up not with the exchange of business cards, but the one-way movement of agricultural products from Texas to country clubs and boardrooms, especially in New York, Chicago, Washington, and San Francisco. From the 1920s through World War II the recipients ranged from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, and other important New Dealers to the Commissioner of Baseball and hundreds of other businessmen, actors, athletes, and politicians. Each year, Carter or one of his *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* associates penned a letter from the fictional "Hired Hand" of Carter's Shady Oak Farm near Fort Worth. It would accompany the shipments describing, tongue-in-cheek, some aspects of the business, political, and social climate in Texas. The practice generated colorful correspondence, but recipients seldom failed to acknowledge their serious thanks to Carter for remembering them. The same went for Carter's Shady Oak Farm parties and the gifts of whiskey-filled canes and Stetson hats that accompanied them, famous among this same class of men.

The several biographical plaques across Fort Worth and the landmarks bearing Carter's name might today be the primary way he is remembered. A roadway near Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport hints at some involvement with the aerospace industry. The name of TCU's football stadium gives some indication of his connection to that institution. His name on parks, schools, a room of the Fort Worth Public Library, and a world-renowned American art museum, among others, tells something more than the fact that he had lots of money and liked to give it away. But they do not tell much more. The plaques are a little better. One on Main Street in downtown Fort Worth describes Carter as "the city's most vigorous booster and champion," noting that it was said at his death "that more than half of the city's workers were employed by businesses Carter helped establish." He "tirelessly promoted Fort Worth and West Texas," brought World War I and II military bases and manufacturing plants to the city. He established Fort Worth's first radio station in 1922, and Texas's first television station in 1948. The plaque in TCU's Mary Couts Burnett Library calls him "a well-known business leader in Texas and the United States." He "influenced" the establishment of West Texas's first university, "campaigned" for Big Bend, "brought" the precursor of American Airlines to Fort Worth, and was "influential" in attracting what are now Lockheed Martin and Bell Helicopter.[1] This all might leave the reader wondering, *how*? His long practice of maintaining a social network by playing the generous farmer-cowboy to the rich, famous, and influential sheds some light on the answer.

Yet for all this, historians of any stripe have given Amon Carter little attention. The only published full-length treatment of Carter's life was written by one of "Amon's Army," a self-referential for *Star-Telegram* employees. In that work, *Amon: The Texan Who Played Cowboy*

[1] Heritage Trails 2006, "Amon G. Carter, Sr. (1879-1955)" (plaque, Main Street, Fort Worth, TX); "Amon G. Carter Collection" (plaque, Mary Couts Burnett Library, Texas Christian University).

for America, longtime journalist Jerry Flemmons tells "Amon stories," the colorful, sometimes maybe apocryphal tales making Carter a piece of Texana in hat and boots. For the scholar it is organized maddeningly, jaunting widely through time and topic. Still, Flemmons captures much of the truly large personality of Amon Carter the man, in some of its complexity and in eminently entertaining prose. It is a wonderful contribution to writing on Amon Carter, even if it is problematic for scholarly use. The work hardly has a place for the Trinity canalization or Big Bend projects in the index, but though it lacks theoretical or historiographical vigor, *Amon* does pose arguments, and this thesis supports them: first, Amon the cowboy was an act put on for various audiences in his public life; and second, his affinity for Fort Worth and Texas, backed by incredible generosity with time and treasure, was genuine and unquestionable.[2]

Two recent unpublished Ph.D. dissertations are helpful in rendering Carter a more fully developed historical actor. That by Brian Cervantez even tries for a full biography. It is long overdue and a welcome contribution, but its frame of analysis—Amon Carter as "typical New South booster"—is insufficient to account for much of Carter's booster life. For Carter's long public career through 1955 to be given a label from the 1880s is facile. His booster rhetoric and actual concerns looked not backward to the Civil War and Reconstruction, but forward and westward to something else, to which Jacob W. Olmstead's "From Old South to Modern West" comes much closer. Olmstead places the planning and performance of the 1936 Frontier Centennial—Fort Worth's rejoinder to the official celebration held concurrently in Dallas—in the context of a Texas-wide process of historical re-imagination with roots in the Progressive Era. Where central and south Texas cities chose Texas revolutionary imagery to create a new positive identity, Fort Worth chose to celebrate a mythic Western past with tentative ties to a real

[2] Jerry Flemmons, *Amon: The Texan Who Played Cowboy for America* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1998).

cattle and railroad history. Carter was central to this process, and its outcome says more about his booster ethic than does the descriptor, "New South." Stuck geographically in what historian Glen Sample Ely has called the "shatterbelt," approximately between the ninety-eighth and one hundredth meridians, Fort Worth in reality exhibited both southern and western traits.[3] Its westward lean was tied to place, but still represented a choice. By steering away from Fort Worth's historical ties to the South and its legacy of secession and Reconstruction, the Frontier Centennial tried to color Fort Worth as both a modern metropolis, and a still-open final frontier. This hearkened to earlier Wests where boosters sold their chosen locations as "closing frontiers," with all of the opportunity and potential implied by the frontier, but without the hardships also associated with it.[4] So while this turn from a southern past is in line with the New South booster's ethic, in important ways Carter and Fort Worth made conscious efforts not to create a New South, but a modern, industrial, western city. Amon Carter's understanding of nature throughout this thesis is a part of that project of modernizing Fort Worth and West Texas.[5]

That Carter and Fort Worthians used frontier imagery in promoting a vision for a modern industrial city is fitting in the context of twentieth-century western history. Historian Carl Abbott, perhaps more than any other, has shown how the West became the most urbanized region on the continent. For all of the attention given the West's wide-open spaces, no region has a greater proportion of its denizens in metropolitan areas, and the process of getting them there began long before Carter's time in Fort Worth. Abbott was among the first historians to study a

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[3] Glen Sample Ely, *Where the West Begins: Debating Texas Identity* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011), 121-22.

[4] David Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 24-33.

[5] Brian Cervantez, "Lone Star Booster: The Life of Amon G. Carter" (PhD Diss., University of North Texas, 2011), 6; Jacob W. Olmstead, "From Old South to Modern West: Fort Worth's Celebration of the Texas State Centennial and the Shaping of an Urban Identity and Image" (PhD Diss., Texas Christian University, 2011).

phenomenon—was it a region? A pattern of growth?—known as the Sunbelt. The Sunbelt appeared in journalism in the 1960s, gained currency in the 1970s, and described any number of metropolitan areas in an arc from Virginia, through the Deep South, the Southwest, and up the West Coast. Acknowledging that it hardly cohered along strict cultural lines, writers nonetheless recognized the Sunbelt's united ascendancy as the result of business-first local policies undergirded by conservative political leadership and the federal redistribution of resources to the South and West. Like the contemporary writers, Sunbelt scholars have told mostly postwar stories with the Depression, New Deal, and war mobilization usually providing prologue. They tend to find a rising class of young businessmen and city council types replacing an old order of complacent city fathers to crown the Sunbelt ideology in local politics.[6] But what if one man transcended those two generations? By many metrics, Amon Carter's pursuit of defense and aerospace industry installations after World War II, coupled with his long advocacy of demographic and economic growth, makes him the quintessential Sunbelt booster. But that ignores the roots of his courtship of federal assistance in the Depression or even earlier. Such a conception implies that Amon Carter mattered as a booster only from his sixties until his death. But Carter was decades into his boosting career by then. He was a great animating force in Texas and nationally twenty years before World War II. His vocation as, first, a newspaper advertising manager and, later, newspaper publisher put him in a long line of entrepreneurs whose business models rested heavily on the premise that business improved when more people came to town. This was the early western railroad booster and real estate speculator. This thesis strives to

[6] Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Shermer's study of Phoenix finds Barry Goldwater the leader of an ascendant young city council group championing Sunbelt ideology. This highlights another common theme in Sunbelt scholarship: it often foregrounds eventual political icons like Goldwater, and strains to connect Sunbelt development to the conservative ascendancy of Nixon, Reagan, and other national figures.

connect Sunbelt boosterism to that earlier period in the West, both temporally and thematically through Amon Carter.[7]

Aside from his belief that both were commercial assets for Texas, the other thing that links the Big Bend and Trinity canal projects for Carter was their potential to rearrange space and resources in distant places. Missing such connections is one shortcoming of Sunbelt scholarship until recently. As historian Andrew Needham notes, the titles and themes of early works in the subfield—*Metropolitan Frontier*, *Crabgrass Frontier*, "edge cities"—hint at their collective treatment of urbanization and suburbanization, especially in the West: the nearness of a perceived frontier has been an attraction to western urbanites, and beyond city edges is wilderness; city and wilderness are not connected.[8] Scholars have made this mistake by treating the Sunbelt as only a type of metropolitan development. Justifiably wary of drawing a contiguous region from such disparate material as Charlotte, North Carolina, and Anaheim, California, for instance, they felt safer describing the Sunbelt in terms of growth patterns, at the expense of region. While Needham does not prescribe making the Sunbelt a monolithic region, he does advocate the revival of region in Sunbelt history to acknowledge the ties between Sunbelt cities and their hinterlands. It is a necessary extension of William Cronon's project to explain the human alienation from nature using nineteenth-century Chicago.[9] With the twentieth-century focus on western cities, scholars momentarily forgot about city-hinterland relationships.

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[7] Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993); Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism*; Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[8] Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 2.

[9] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991).

The idea of many Sunbelts might be helpful in giving each one its region, though in reality they overlap. The conception is reminiscent of earlier movements for such a treatment of the American West, recognizing it as a place of densely populated cities, sprawling suburbs, tiny towns, and the wide-open spaces for which it is known, all with sub-regional variations across the trans-Mississippi West.[10] Wedding the many Wests with many Sunbelts is a good remedy for the silly process of dolling out academic turf. Traditionally, historians of the West have gotten the cowboys and Indians, the wide-open spaces and the myth, while scholars of the Sunbelt, labor, and ethnicity have taken the cities. This study hopes to unite metropolis to hinterland in a proto-Sunbelt West.

This is the story of nature's entrepreneur, about the ways that distant places became drawn into an urban development strategy of unbounded financial and demographic expansion. It follows Needham in reconnecting Sunbelt ideologies of growth with the vast hinterlands from which they draw resources, people, and cultural capital. For his part, Needham has shown the intimate and unequal connections between Phoenix and its energy hinterlands on the Navajo Nation of northern Arizona. Power lines, once a wonder to Phoenix residents, quickly became so ubiquitous that few thought about the people and places from whence that power came. The lines connecting Amon Carter's Fort Worth to his hinterlands come in along a spectrum of visibility. Carter's metropolis and the Big Bend region were connected mostly by an idea, the National Park idea. Because other people liked the idea, Carter thought, a park there would bring money-spending tourists to his state and city. Although the Trinity canal project is a part of this study because of its proximity to Carter instead of its distance from him, the river connected him to people and places downstream of Fort Worth and Dallas by what should have been a highly

[10] David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner, eds., *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997.

visible means. But here the Trinity was similar to Needham's power lines: what was once a wonder and central to people's existence became less visible. Where the power lines had disappeared through their ubiquity, the Trinity River had vanished out of obsolescence. It had been a busy commercial artery in the nineteenth century, but with the arrival of railroads in the Dallas and Fort Worth area in the 1870s, water travel lost its importance. By the time Carter and others were reviving an old dream to navigate the river to Fort Worth, the ways that it attached the city to landowners downstream, especially the intermediate places between Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, were either forgotten or ignored. The West Texas produce that Carter sent to his friends, finally, drew almost infinite lines between Fort Worth and Carter's influence hinterland.

The seed for this study was the biography-plaque understanding of Amon Carter's natural world. Like historian Brian Allen Drake's *Loving Nature, Fearing the State*, it asks about unlikely (or forgotten) environmentalists.[11] But instead of including Carter among Drake's political conservatives and antistatists—indeed Carter was quite comfortable with government, despite his occasional complaints—it asks what the promotion of wilderness preservation looks like when undertaken for no "green" reason at all but money. Thus it will not use the term "environmentalism" or its derivatives in any adjectival form to describe Carter and his class of environmental promoters. Carter used environmental power, he sought to reorganize nature, and he distributed natural or environmental gifts, but he was no environmentalist. Similarly, this study asks, what could Amon Carter, a newspaperman five hundred rough-road miles from the Big Bend country, have to gain from a park in the region? How about the conservation of water

[11] Brian Allen Drake, *Loving Nature, Fearing the State: Environmentalism and Antigovernment Politics Before Reagan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013). Drake uses the examples of Henry David Thoreau, Barry Goldwater, and Edward Abbey to revive a history that we have mostly forgotten in our polarized modern political landscape, one of environmentalist attitudes among political conservatives and antistatists.

and soil along the Trinity River? These questions and others follow environmental historian Mark Fiege's method for recovering the nature of American history: "Choose a topic. Ask the question: How did nature matter? Gather evidence. Think about it. And begin."[12] While the method has its logical limits, it is fruitful here in examining the environmental biography of Amon Carter and his class of businessmen between the World Wars. It raises questions for the later environmental movement about support for, and opposition to, conservation and preservation. It requires that one think about the strange bedfellows brought about by the hoped-for uses of nonhuman nature. It probes platitudes about the Texas businessman's relationship with the federal government, the New Deal, dependency, and the rise of Sunbelt cities relative to both wilderness and industrialization.

To the questions about why businessmen would crusade for a remote national park, part of the answer is that much of the history of wilderness preservation in America is surprisingly bereft of emphasis on wilderness for wilderness's sake. At their arrival in North America, Europeans carried thousands of years of Judeo-Christian tradition that had embedded bad attitudes toward wilderness. Indeed the word itself had a meaning hardly recognizable to our modern understanding of it. The Bible used wilderness almost interchangeably with "waste" and "desert." In the Christian's conception, wilderness was the "antipode" of paradise, and remained for a long time—still today, in some ways—something best used as an object to overcome in the name of Christianity, civilization, and progress.[13] The idea of setting aside national parks descended from romanticism, itself a child of the Enlightenment. In the Enlightenment people

[12] Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 403.

[13] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind, Revised Edition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), xv, 8-9.

discovered the world to be a vast, complicated system that was at the same time organized and ordered, which seemingly pointed to some divine influence over nature. The romantic sublime was the idea that, though God could appear at any time or place, he was more likely to appear at some places than others. These were the mountaintops, waterfalls, canyons, rainbows, sunsets, and other natural wonders people had come to appreciate.[14] These were also the first places to be preserved, but not just for their nearness to God. These same wonders provided Americans with a natural nationalism. Almost from the founding of the republic Americans felt acutely their cultural shortcomings as compared to Europe. Many felt that, especially in the West, the new United States had natural scenery that could come to represent the nation and overtop Europe in at least this one cultural category. The mountains and valleys of Yosemite and the geologic curiosities of Yellowstone were distinctly American, as opposed to derivatively European, like American art and literature. So it was that natural landscapes became recognized as cultural assets.

As Amon Carter's promotion of West Texas will show, the distance from cultural asset to financial asset was short, especially in national park promotion. From the beginning of the national park idea, as railroad executives began to understand the popular appeal of parks, they were among the staunchest supporters of setting aside western monuments from development. In the late nineteenth century, railroads were the only mode of transportation to reach such landscapes. Into the 1920s they remained the most comfortable and timely. Travel from eastern cities to western parks meant business and legitimacy for the railroads, but it also represented greater potential. Railroads owned wide swaths of western land on either side of their beds, and made huge financial windfalls from selling that land. As a rapidly urbanizing East sloughed off

[14] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995), 73-6.

its dense population westward, demand for accessible land would drive land prices up. Railroads had lots of accessible land. Upon hearing about Yellowstone's curiosities in the 1870s, railroad magnate Jay Cooke of the Northern Pacific contracted with an early Yellowstone visitor to give lectures in the East. Cooke's railroad also gave a surveyor the idea of bringing the artist Thomas Moran to paint Yellowstone. He became the primary rival of the famed Yosemite painter, Albert Bierstadt, in painting the West. Other parks and other railroads have similar stories. Amon Carter was not the first to recognize the economic asset inhering in the cultural asset. In this earlier era, however, the railroads masked their economic self-interest. After setting legislation in motion behind the scenes, they remained invisible from the House and Senate debates about park creation.[15] Amon Carter sold Big Bend on its appeal as an economic asset.

By the time Carter entered the fray of Big Bend promotion, the national park idea had become a system overseen by the National Park Service (NPS), a federal bureaucracy created for the purpose. There were already twenty-four national parks. Ideas about them, their uses, and their administration had changed greatly from the days of Yosemite and Yellowstone promotion. The greatest debates over the park system were between conservation, the idea that wise use of resources could make the landscape produce for sustained human consumption, and preservation, the complete setting aside of wild landscapes from commercial development. That debate's greatest test was at Hetch Hetchy valley in Yosemite National Park, a picturesque, cliff-lined valley fed by majestic waterfalls along the Tuolumne River. In 1913 San Francisco interests were able to dam the valley to provide water for the Bay Area, over complaints that such a use was at odds with national park enabling legislation. The episode gave wide attention to the national parks and prompted debate about their uses. But at that time, the alternative to human

[15] Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience, fourth edition* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010), 33-38.

use of the landscape was not preservation for the sake of wilderness. It was development for human enjoyment of the wild landscape, served by roads, lodges, and other tourist amenities.[16]

These sentiments armed Big Bend promoters and the National Park Service in the 1930s. The NPS recognized how unprecedented funding from New Deal conservation programs could allow it to expand services, but also how the potential for rapid development tugged at its established ideals and developing ecological attitudes within the service. The funding came at an opportune time for the park service, as it was expanding its notion of what constituted national park scenery. The NPS knew it could only sell new parks by granting access to greater numbers of Americans, but that expanded access also compromised its budding ecological sensitivity. From its early emphasis on monumentalism, the NPS was growing more aware of biological and geological treasures in potential park sites. Big Bend presented itself as a complete museum, though it did possess some monumental mountain scenery. It could also be justified as useless from a resource standpoint, an old but persistent measure for a site's national park potential. The NPS, recognizing that the New Deal Era's glut of labor and funding was probably going to be temporary, established new parks like that in the Big Bend instead of over-developing its existing parks with expanded roadway access and more lodging.[17] For the national parks' entire existence, the burden of proof was on park promoters to show that, by preserving a landscape, America was not missing out on any potential material wealth. It was, then, a rare landscape that could attract defensive effort from national park promoters, especially those like Amon Carter, with business sensibilities. This left most nonhuman nature open to utilitarian arguments for development.

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[16] Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[17] Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 94; Runte, *National Parks*, 99-123.

Unlike his national park promotion, which had its precedents mostly in the arid West, Carter's Trinity River canal project took its cues from the damp east. Also unlike the national parks, inland waterways as part of state and federal internal improvement schemes had changed little in their justifications over more than a century. After about 1815, canals became the most important internal improvement in the United States. They were far more expensive to construct and maintain than turnpikes, all but ensuring that state and federal governments had to assist private capital in their development. They were promoted on the assumption that they connected remote places to distant markets. Canals would empower farmers and encourage settlement in places previously isolated from cities. They would bring untapped resources into development. Even if the canals themselves were not profitable for owners or the public that helped fund them, they would benefit wide swaths of the population, from small farmers to common consumers, by driving down transportation costs. But they did not benefit everyone; cheap goods brought in from far away could out-compete local producers.[18] In the late nineteenth century water transport lost its urgency as railroads spread across the country. Quickly, though, railroads came to dominate transportation, and near the turn of the twentieth century people revived inland waterways as a means of relieving their regions from high freight transportation rates. This time, projects along the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers, among others, were conceived as part of a national system of waterways that included older routes, like the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes. And instead of old steamboats, shallow-draft barges would carry heavy industrial and agricultural freight in uniform nine-foot deep canals across the eastern half of the country.[19] The

[18] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 214-221.

[19] Robert Kelley Schneiders, *Unruly River: Two Centuries of Change Along the Missouri*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 4, 60.

nineteenth-century arguments for and against waterway development rang familiar when Amon Carter and a group of like-minded Dallas-Fort Worth businessmen hoped to link the Trinity River to this system beginning in 1930, and free Texas from railroad freight rates.

These ostensibly natural entities—a mostly-wild river and a remote desert-mountain landscape—could not seem more different. For Amon Carter, one was close to home, indeed running through downtown of his beloved Fort Worth. The other was over five hundred miles distant, hardly accessible in a day's automobile trip at the time. That one of these landscapes should be conserved and another preserved seems to reinforce their innate differences. But each needed treatment for its perfection as an entrepreneurial resource. Without those treatments, the landscapes remained useless, the Trinity River whisking water and soil to the sea unused, and the Big Bend withering in the West Texas wind. Amon Carter preserved and conserved his influence hinterland, but also cultivated it. The shipment of his natural gifts around the country kept him, Fort Worth, and Texas before the most influential people in business, government, and even entertainment. This thesis argues that Amon Carter united all of those—preservation, conservation, and his environmental benevolence—in a metropolitan growth strategy that made a commodity of West Texas, establishing the region's value for trade and investment. Conservation and preservation were his means to perfecting wild nature as resources, and his natural gift giving allowed for his elaboration on the region's cultural and human value to those with the means to invest in it.

For the environmental historian there is much in Amon G. Carter's war whoop, *Hooray for Fort Worth and West Texas*. One part describes a vast region, the other a city that is hardly *in* that region at all, but it is a *part* of that region nonetheless. It is a part of that region not only because Amon Carter and the *Star-Telegram* said that's "Where the West Begins" since 1923.

Carter linked Fort Worth to West Texas in ways that might have seemed a little odd to Fort Worth citizens voting to secede from the Union, or to the post-bellum lynch mob. But that tie between a city and its region—what historians call a hinterland and Carter called its "trade territory"—reached not only to the West but also in virtually every other direction from Carter in Fort Worth. If historians and people in general have not often enough recognized the bonds between cities and far-flung hinterlands, we cannot blame Amon Carter, for it was all right there in his cowboy holler.

CHAPTER ONE
AMON CARTER'S NATURE

The people themselves were an exportable West Texas crop. They were of such high quality that their existence increased West Texas's value. In 1940, trying on a new folksy, "American Way of Life" theme, the New York World's Fair held a contest to find the "Typical American Family." Major newspapers selected representatives from each of the forty-eight states, who lived at the fair for one week in Federal Housing Administration-approved houses furnished by Sears, stocked with Swift food products and a Deluxe Ford V-8 sedan for their use. Amon Carter, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and the West Texas Chamber of Commerce (WTCC) came together to sponsor Texas's winner, the Leathers family from the Panhandle town of Clarendon. The boosters hoped the family would convey a message about West Texas not only to onlookers and judges, but also to the editors of *Fortune* magazine and *Readers Digest*. Just before the Leathers family's week at the fair, *Fortune* ran an article titled "The U. S. A." A decade into the Great Depression, whose most iconic Dust Bowl imagery centered on parts of West Texas, the article painted the region as a desert at the whims of a savage and capricious climate. Even worse, it made West Texans out to be shiftless and dependent, charges for which the WTCC would not stand. The WTCC drafted a resolution for the Leathers family to carry to New York and give personally to the editors of *Fortune* and *Readers Digest*, who had published a summary of the slanderous article. They put human faces before the New Yorkers, but also some pointed written words about West Texas, which, they wrote, had "the Nation's cleanest and most progressive cities," growing faster than any section in the country. It had "the Nation's largest percentage of American-born whites and lowest percentage of illiteracy." West Texas produced large percentages of the nation's cotton, wool, mohair, oil, livestock and other raw

materials, the WTCC wrote. The resolution demanded a retraction from the magazines, and that they send reporters to find "that our conception of West Texas as the Nation's Happiest, Busiest, Richest Region—the Land of Opportunity and the Raw Materials Capital of the world—is well grounded and amply supported." The Leathers family won at the World's Fair. They were the "Typical American Family," earning them another week's stay at the fair.[1]

The "Typical American Family" contest illustrated to the extreme the workings of Amon Carter's environmental mind; anything on, in, or of the West Texas landscape was a resource not only for direct profit, but also for the more abstract process of establishing the value of his beloved region to distant markets—that is, commodifying it. It was "an unexcelled opportunity for West Texas to put over some worthwhile publicity and to overcome the eastern and northern erroneous impressions of our region," as the WTCC's Max Bentley put it.[2] The Leathers family was of the West Texas environment. They were the kind of product cultivated through another regional contest, called "My Home Town," a speaking competition for high school students in West Texas. Carter approved of it wholeheartedly. He was inspired by the way the students' five minute orations illustrated "the splendid manhood and womanhood we are raising in West Texas."[3] From "My Home Town" all the way to the "Typical American Family," the contests captured Carter's boosting position at the confluence of West Texas, federal bureaus like the FHA, and large corporations like Sears or Swift. It was at this intersection that Carter did his

[1] Max Bentley to WTCC Directors, Secretaries, and local Chambers of Commerce, 2 April 1940, box 221, West Texas Chamber of Commerce folder, Amon G. Carter Papers, Special Collections, Mary Couts Burnett Library, Texas Christian University (hereafter cited AGC Papers); Bentley to J.R. "Jim" Record, 7 May 1940, box 221, West Texas Chamber of Commerce folder, AGC Papers; WTCC Resolution to Editors, *Fortune* and *Readers Digest*, May 17, 1940, box 221, West Texas Chamber of Commerce folder, AGC Papers; New York Public Library, "World's Fair: Enter the World of Tomorrow," accessed February 14, 2016. http://exhibitions.nypl.org/biblion/worldsfair/enter-world-tomorrow-futurama-and-beyond/story/story-american-family.

[2] Bentley to WTCC Directors, 2 April 1940, AGC Papers.

[3] Amon Carter to C.M. Caldwell, Abilene, TX, 8 March 1937, box 221, West Texas Chamber of Commerce folder, AGC Papers.

most fabulous environmental boosting, playing a folksy West Texan and communicating with high government and corporate types.

Carter's nature manifested itself locally, too. After 1919, anytime he retired from his public cowboy role to the privacy of his home, he did so at 1220 Broad Avenue in Fort Worth, along the exclusive River Crest Country Club. From the late nineteenth century, country clubs made open green space and relaxing shade available to affluent people hoping to escape the stultifying city of steel and smoke.[4] River Crest was platted in 1911 as the first country club in Texas to include residential home sites on its acreage, an important intervention into country club history. No longer would the wealthiest cattlemen, bankers, real estate speculators, and oilmen in Fort Worth just repair to the country club for the weekend. At River Crest they built expansive suburban homes on huge, rolling lots, to live full-time the country club life. Where much of Fort Worth's earlier development had been to the south in streetcar suburbs, after World War I the richest people in town drove home to west Fort Worth in their own automobiles. In the 1920s, the boulevard carrying them home from downtown was paved in attractive red brick. At the same time, reflected across that road from River Crest, a neighborhood was developing that would lack paved streets until the 1950s. The Lake Como area was populated by domestic workers for the white households in River Crest and the bungalow neighborhood of Arlington Heights. The pace of its development picked up after a 1922 flood pushed many of the city's African Americans from shantytowns in the Trinity River bottoms.[5] The establishment of River Crest and Como were contemporaneous but not parallel phenomena born of environmental

[4] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 98.

[5] Richard Selcer, "Fort Worth, Texas, Where the West and the South Meet: A Brief History of the City's African American Community, 1849-2012," accessed February 23, 2016, http://www.blackpast.org/perspectives/fort-worth-texas-where-west-and-south-meet-brief-history-citys-african-american-communi.

encouragement. Notwithstanding the veracity of claims about West Texas's tiny non-white population (or, conversely, Fort Worth's place in West Texas), this residential segregation by race, and its desirability, would have been readily recognizable to Carter's correspondents from other parts of the country.[6]

That the wealthy moved westward was no accident in a city rapidly growing and industrializing by the 1920s, yet hanging onto its livestock industry. River Crest was not only west of downtown, but southwest of the stockyards, meaning the prevailing south and west winds spared residents from foul odors and industrial particulates.[7] Further, the nearby West Fork of the Trinity River was flowing *toward* and not *from* the industrial or stockyards sections of the city, in an era where rivers were convenient conduits for effluent. Carter lived at River Crest until his death in 1955, and for most of that time he spent thousands of dollars annually on flowers for his yard and gardens. He hired professional landscape architects to draw blueprints and execute plans to beautify, order, and rationalize his yard and gardens, creating the ideal of a suburban retreat. The plans made Carter's place bloom perpetually in a drought-prone region. Carter completed his yard—perfected it, he might have thought—by installing a special sod advertised to love heat ("the hotter it gets the greener it is") and crowd out undesirable crab

[6] Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Grace Elizabeth Hale has shown how southerners created a common whiteness on segregation as a culture, as opposed to simply a convention or policy, after the Civil War. She argues, in part, "The expansion of consumer culture both drew [the South] into the nation and played an essential role in the re-creation of racial identities between 1890 and 1940." I argue that the connection to consumption is not distinctively southern with regard to race. Carter's booster ethic is entirely founded on consumption, and he drew the nation into that culture as much as the reverse was true. Further, recent scholarship on the roots of the urban crisis (Gordon, Sugrue, above) has shown segregation to be never only a southern ideal.

[7] Wini Klein, "History of River Crest-Crestline" accessed February 14, 2016, http://817realty.com/history-river-crest-crestline/; Thomas J. Larkin and George W. Bomar, *Climatic Atlas of Texas* (Austin: Texas Department of Water Resources, 1983), 90-93.

grass. It was developed in Connecticut, and no comments survive on the lushness of Carter's lawn.

In 1925 Carter established a seat even beyond River Crest's suburban country club setting. From the heirs of a pioneer rancher he purchased 780 acres along Lake Worth, an artificial body of water created only eleven years prior. Carter built a rambling frame house in a grove of live oaks on the land, and in time added outbuildings befitting a farm. He filled the home and buildings with historical artifacts, adding constantly to his collection, including life-sized wooden Indians, steer horns, and the mounted head of the last buffalo killed on the property by the previous owners. He displayed the Frederic Remington bronzes that formed the foundation for his art collection now housed at his namesake museum in Fort Worth. Most notably, in 1927 Carter purchased the Parker family cabin, where in 1860 Quanah Parker's mother lived after American soldiers recaptured her from twenty-four years with the Comanche. Carter had the cabin moved to Shady Oak Farm and outfitted with all the pioneer accessories, all part of an effort to recall aspects of his country childhood in Crafton and Bowie, northwest of Fort Worth.[8] Eventually Carter added a small pond and had it stocked with black bass, another way of shaping nature for his entertainment and that of his many guests. The farm became the site of his most extravagant boosting and most famous hospitality, a place where he would not retire the cowboy persona but capitalize on it to its limits. Indeed it was, at least in part, the possession of a farm that made the cowboy. But Carter's Shady Oak parties—for the American Petroleum Institute, President Franklin Roosevelt, high-profile Texas political campaigns, the Junior League of Fort Worth, and many others—are among the most well known aspect of his boosting career. There he gave specially made Shady Oak Stetsons and whiskey-filled canes to

[8] Amon G. Carter Museum of American Art, "Amon G. Carter: A Chronology," accessed February 14, 2016, http://www.cartermuseum.org/sites/all/files/about/acm_agc_timeline.pdf.

dignitaries and celebrities, and held booze-soaked parties only whispered about during Prohibition. This aspect of a wealthy man and his farm finds its place among a long line of Americans to create lavish country retreats misleadingly called "camps" or "ranches," despite their amenities and functions. At such places the upper classes sought experiences closer to wild or manly nature than what could be found in the industrial cities.[9]

Less known is Amon Carter's other uses of nature's bounty. If conveying the Leathers family to New York in 1940 for consumption indicates the lengths to which Carter went in selling West Texas on the reputation of its produce, it was far from his first shipment. Around the time of his move to River Crest he began sending West Texas products around the country to maintain and augment his burgeoning social network. In the early years a letter from the "Hired Hand" of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* farm—variously thought to be Carter, early publisher Louis Wortham, or possibly circulation manager Harold Hough—preceded the shipments, letting people know they would receive a gift, and describing the state of affairs in Texas and at the newspaper in a simple country dialect.[10] The Hired Hand moved to Shady Oak Farm on its creation. An artful cartoon label joined the watermelon shipments, usually depicting the Hired Hand struggling with jumbo watermelons and displaying the landscape of a fictional Shady Oak Farm. In reality, Shady Oak Farm did not produce the melons. They came from a farm in Parker County, twenty miles west of Fort Worth.[11] Watermelons arrived at the homes and businesses of Carter's friends in giant washtubs after ripening on the vine, usually in late August. Turkeys arrived—alive, in the earlier days, later already smoked—in wooden crates in time for the

[9] William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995), 78.

[10] Flemmons, *Amon*, 119. Flemmons believed Hough to have always been the Hired Hand. Hough did indeed own the Hired Hand Mule Farm west of Fort Worth.

[11] Ibid.

Christmas season.[12] Pecans and, rarely, grapefruit, seem often to have accompanied the Turkeys and watermelons. Some friends, especially Fort Worth locals, received only the nuts. These all sparked colorful correspondence from the amused recipients. Eventually the gifts were so famous among a certain class of Americans that some wrote jokingly about the status of their friendship with Carter, miffed that others had received greater items in what became a taxonomic hierarchy of Carter's natural gifts.

The men—for only a few celebrity spouses and other famous women ever made the lists—replied to the Hired Hand's letters with great enthusiasm. Most importantly, they explored in the correspondence their relationships of power over others in society. Beginning as it did in the 1920s, the watermelon exchange revealed acute pressures white men felt from many angles in the period; exploding immigrant populations, threats of organized labor from working classes, African American migration, and women all pressed upon roles these men hoped to keep atop society. Similar anxieties continued into the later 1930s, World War II, and the Cold War period.[13] Unlike working people, the men seemed hardly affected by the Great Depression itself—Indeed Carter's watermelon expenses alone in 1937 were equivalent to almost $40,000 in 2016 terms.[14] But the wealthiest businessmen in America *were* under duress during the 1930s, just not in the hand-to-mouth straits of more common people. As historian Kim Philips Fein has shown, they felt keenly the erosion of their positions at the top of the social and cultural

[12] Ibid, 121-123.

[13] Jennifer Guiliano, *Indian Spectacle: College Mascots and the Anxiety of Modern America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 3. Guiliano's story is of higher education's goals in producing athletic, white, male bodies for service to community and country. It is primarily concerned with the amorphous "middle class," between the easily identifiable DuPonts, Carnegies, or Rockefellers, and equally identifiable working people, but the anxieties she describes for the period fit well with those examined by Amon Carter and his watermelon correspondents, many of whom were *not* captains of industry, but rising, upper middle-class managers. Indeed Carter himself grew up poor and was educated only until age eleven (while Amon Jr. would attend Yale).

[14] Office Memorandum, n.d. (ca. 1937), box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

hierarchy. They believed the New Deal—not their own greed or speculation commonly found as causes for the Depression—to be causing that erosion. Many went to work lobbying to dismantle the New Deal's most progressive social justice components.[15] This class responded so enthusiastically to the watermelon letters because of the contrast that Carter's Texas made with their own, usually eastern lives.

Much of the banter in the men's replies centered on their difference as upper class men from the working-class Hired Hand. Carter's Hired Hand persona spurred much of the conversation himself.[16] Before the move to Shady Oak, the letters were, as the letterhead stated, "Dictated in the boiler room, by the Hired Hand. Written, edited, spelled—upstairs." Upstairs was, of course, where the educated writers worked. The Hired Hand wrote of his fear of having "tinware" attached to himself by Carter if he did not provide first class melons—that is, being shackled for punishment. "The expressman has no charges" for the shipment, he told recipients, "as I paid them—but not out of my pocket." Of course the Hired Hand could not afford to ship the melons. Conditions were always perfect in Texas. "Only troubles we are having, is that some of our bow-legged cowpunchers find it difficult to drive the new high powered automobiles."[17] Those cowpunchers, of the Hired Hand's class, no doubt, had difficulty joining the modern world of the businessmen. One year the Hired Hand referred to the art on the melon label, "P. S. The shade trees at chuck house … are ornamental only. The only fellow who ever took a nap in

[15] Kim Phillips Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: Norton, 2009).

[16] We can assume that, even if Wortham or Hough authored the letters at some point, they expressed sentiments that met with Carter's approval.

[17] The Hired Hand of the Star-Telegram to S. E. Thomson, n.d. (ca. 1925), box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

that shade, got fired."[18] Even the namesake shady oaks were not to be enjoyed by the fictional help on Carter's farm. Many responded to the Hired Hand's sensitivity about class difference. Some feigned great gratitude at receiving the huge washtub in which the melons arrived. One, who planned to enjoy his melon with a large party of friends at his "ranch," hoped he could convince the Hired Hand to send a second washtub, "because I am doing my own washing at this time and could use a pair of such implements."[19] Walter P. Chrysler even mustered phony trepidation at writing a farmer, since "the language of steel and stone hardens one's phraseology into something very different from the mellow twang of the fields."[20] In the later depression years, several overstated their thanks for the melons as keeping their families "off relief for a few days," and augmenting the family larder.[21] Likewise for pecans received during World War II rationing. No doubt depression and war forced many of the class to tighten their belts, but in many respects their banter makes it difficult to tell if they were living in the same United States as common people. It was especially so as Carter's friends enjoyed his gifts at country clubs and "ranches" across the country, and while sipping highballs at lawn bowling tournaments in the Hamptons.[22]

The washtubs and melons prompted much examination of proper gender roles. Only one of the men may have been doing his own laundry during the hard times, but many more of their

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[18] The Hired Hand of Amon G. Carter's Farm and Things, form letter to watermelon recipients, 1926, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[19] Illegible to the Hired Hand, 21 August 1926, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[20] Chrysler to Carter, 24 September 1936, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[21] R. E. Wertz to Carter, 31 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[22] Illegible, Consolidated Oil of New York, to Carter, 9 September 1937, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

wives had to "take in washing" for extra money."[23] Their consideration of gender roles was often bound in such classist jokes, but also in serious political discussion. They responded profusely to the Hired Hand's letter of 1926, reporting that Texas had generously traded in two governors for one. The reference was to governor Miriam "Ma" Ferguson and her husband and former governor James "Pa" Ferguson. As governor from 1915 to 1917, Mr. Ferguson had been impeached, convicted, and barred from holding state office for improper use of state funds. To circumvent that mandate, he helped orchestrate his wife's election while she assured voters that she would follow his advice in office. The 1926 Hired Hand letter delighted in reporting that Carter's candidate, Dan Moody, won the Democratic primary over the Fergusons. "Jim has to stop picking plums and Ma can resume canning peaches," it said.[24] In other words, the couple had to naturalize their inverted gender roles, where the woman was governor and the man picked nature's bounty for sustenance. Chicago meatpacking magnate J. Ogden Armour quipped, "I guess after all Texas is too big to be run by a woman."[25] Darwin P. Kingsley of New York Life Insurance expressed delight that "'Ma' Ferguson has been told where she and 'Pa' Ferguson get off," and ruminated that he had "a little old fashioned prejudice" against a woman in such a high seat. "At the same time I am obliged to admit that we have a considerable number of women in this office who could run the Company just about as well as the executive officers do if they had a chance."[26] One only wonders who might have the power to give women the opportunity. And

[23] Joe M. Dawson to Carter, 30 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[24] The Hired Hand of Amon G. Carter's Farm and Things, to watermelons recipients, 1926. In one of his best-known public episodes, Carter was forcibly removed by state police from the 1925 football game between the University of Texas and Texas A&M when he traded in his usual cheer—*Hurrah for Fort Worth and West Texas*—for a new one, *Hurrah for Dan Moody and A&M!* repeatedly and within earshot of the governor's party. This was also reported in the Hired Hand's letter.

[25] Armour to Carter, 23 August 1926, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[26] Kingsley to Carter, 30 August 1926, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

aside from their contradictions in logic, the men clearly understood Carter's message: Texas again had her nature right, having deposed its first female governor. The state was safe for their investment. Oil executive S. A. Megeath looked forward to his next run-in with Carter, assuring that he would have something with which to toast "one another on being alive, and that Texas, while continuing to go democratic, has at least gone democratic in the right way."[27] Read one way the comment could be a celebration that a man replaced Miriam Ferguson as Governor. And it may have been, but Megeath's comment also probably had racial undertones, and referred to the Fergusons' antagonism of the Ku Klux Klan. They were not the right kind of Democrats.

That issue—race—was another great topic of discussion in the watermelon exchange. From at least as early as Reconstruction, watermelons became racialized as an African American food. Popular culture contains many examples of freedmen gorging themselves on watermelons in orgiastic picnics that made the people to be childlike gluttons in their new freedom. The infamous silent film *Birth of a Nation* includes such a scene.[28] These depictions likely stemmed from the watermelon's potential as a symbol of black freedom and autonomy. During slavery, especially in the cotton-growing sections, necessity urged planters to allow slaves the ability to procure food for themselves through gardens or hunting. The inadequacies of the plantation diet, planters' unwillingness to augment it at their own expense with nutritious foods, but their continued desire for efficiency from slave labor, meant their only alternative was to give slaves the space, time, and resources to procure their own food. Thus gardens and their produce could

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[27] Megeath to Carter, 4 September 1926, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[28] William Black, "How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope," *The Atlantic*, accessed 11 January 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/12/how-watermelons-became-a-racist-trope/383529/.

carry heavy practical power and symbolic weight as manifestations of some measured freedom.[29] The watermelon, a likely product in cotton climates, could easily have been connected to such notions of freedom. To taste the sweet fruit of the watermelon was to taste freedom, whether during slavery or after. With that connection established, white construction of the gluttonous African American gorging himself on watermelon could turn that small freedom against itself to mock African Americans.

The watermelon correspondence played mightily with the trope of the gluttonous African American. Indeed some of the few photos entering the exchanges were of wide-eyed, grinning African Americans beholding Carter's jumbo watermelons. One was of thirteen-year-old Jimmy Lynch of Salt Lake City, apparently in the right place when the *Salt Lake Tribune's* melon was delivered. "'Yyuummm, that sho' am the biggest melon ah ever did see,'" began the *Salt Lake Tribune* article beside his picture, where he smiled "anticipatingly as he [sunk] a two-foot knife into an 88-pound watermelon." "'Yessir, ah'd even stop a marble game to get some of 'at 'ar melon," the paper reported, even though Jimmy loved playing marbles, as evidenced by his having won the city marble championship the previous spring.[30] To put Lynch's speech in dialect was not unusual for a newspaper, and by 1937, picturing an African American raising an oversized knife and gazing lustily on a giant watermelon had recognizable meaning. The Philips Soups and Vegetables Company produced its own such image in a glossy page, responding to receipt of their melon in 1936. It depicted Lorraine "Oscar" Coleman, "The Kunnell's [Colonel's] Man Friday." He was in chef's apparel and wielding a knife almost identical to Jimmy Lynch's. A note of thanks, supposedly from Coleman, ran beside his picture. It began,

[29] Fiege, *Republic of Nature*, 125.

[30] "Texas Watermelon Wins Okeh of S. L. Youth," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), 31 August 1937.

"Bless Yo' Heart, Mistah Amon! Kunnell Phillips he say much obliged fer dat spankin' millin [melon]. And I'se jist itchin' to karve her." Something of a poem was underneath Coleman's picture, saying that Phillips's soups were delicious and nutritious, and "Ever'body sure finds 'em grand. But a millin by America's Mistah Amon Carter/ Wid a good strong arm And knife to part her/ Is a taste of de' promised land."[31] The promised land envisioned by slaves and freedmen had still not come to fruition, but could be sampled in Amon Carter's watermelon. In what the historian Ira Katznelson has called the last period in American history where "public racism was legitimate in speech and action," the arrival of Carter's melons at offices and country clubs staffed by African American labor meant another in a line of indignities from white management.[32] Carter's natural products held environmental power over far distant others.

As with the correspondence about women, some men had their fun with the watermelon trope itself, and others embedded their racial attitudes in more serious political discussion. A Dallas recipient expressed his thanks that Carter counted him among his friends because, as he wrote, "I love a watermelon better than a nigger."[33] J. C. Penney reported on the high quality of his melon that it was "juicy enough to satisfy the blackest little pickaninny that ever immersed himself in watermelon."[34] A New Yorker reported that when his "colored cook, with bulging eyes and moisture at the corners of her lips," asked him to see something in the kitchen, he looked and viewed a melon so large that he thought he gazed on the rear end of early twentieth-

[31] Phillips to Carter, 28 August 1938, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1938 folder, AGC Papers.

[32] Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Norton, 2013), 17.

[33] Mike H. Thomas to Hired Hand, 19 August 1926, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[34] Penney to Carter, 13 September 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

century professional wrestler Man Mountain Dean at the top of a jackknife dive.[35] Another New Yorker made a similar connection to popular culture. The night of his letter he was attending the heavyweight boxing championship between Joe Louis, one of the first African American athletic heroes, and the Welshman Tommy Farr at Yankee Stadium. "If I thought that Farr would defeat Louis tonight, I'd take the melon with me … and on my way through Harlem distribute it as a peace offering," he wrote.[36] These New Yorkers thus mixed their popular culture jokes with the watermelon trope. But E. H. Moore of Tulsa, beyond admitting his fear that the janitors would eat his watermelon if he left it in the office overnight, racialized his response to the Hired Hand's political commentary in 1926. "Laying all jokes aside," Moore wanted to move onto more serious topics, like the replacement of the Fergusons with Dan Moody as Texas governor, and his state's politics. "We succeeded here in Oklahoma in nominating candidates on both tickets for Governor, both of whom either now belong or have belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, so we have no Klan issue here. We are all Klansmen. We don't have those nasty things that you have down there to contend with." Whatever those nasty things were—racial progressives, agitators, or something else—the Hired Hand certainly had not mentioned that Texas had them. And if the watermelon jokes seemed innocuous enough, such comments as Moore's could not be similarly construed. Likewise, the assertions that Carter and the West Texas Chamber of Commerce made about the region's 98% white population sent another clear message that Texas upheld the perceived natural order of white supremacy, and thus was an attractive place for their investment.

The men of the watermelon lists may have had different pet jokes—about class, gender, or race—but they were united in their understanding that the gifts were products of West Texas,

[35] Rex Beach to Carter, 8 September 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[36] Lee Olwell to Carter, 30 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

a place in perennial boom. The Hired Hand and Amon Carter (who increasingly claimed authorship of the watermelon letters) always kept West Texas's natural resource bounty before their readers. Carter in 1927: "West Texas, Fort Worth's trade territory, is in excellent shape. The crop prospects have never been better and the oil possibilities for future production are greater than any State in the Union."[37] The Hired Hand in 1928: "But I guess we have no complaint, as we have lots of crops and say, have you noticed the price of cattle lately? If the market continues on the up and up a few days longer, a Hereford steer will be worth more than an oil well—and we have plenty of both."[38] 1929 was a billion-dollar agricultural year for Texas, as all years seemed to be. "With 5,000,000 bales of cotton, the largest wheat crop in our history, cattle at top prices, oil production over 800,000 barrels daily, and bank deposits up, everybody is happy. DON'T SELL TEXAS SHORT."[39] But watermelon season, of course, was a couple months before the great stock market crash of November 1929. In 1930 Carter actually admitted that the "big wind" that upset the stock market had reached Texas, but even still the state was in shape to produce "another BILLION DOLLAR year for 1930. Bank deposits are up; everybody is happy and we warn you against selling Texas short."[40] The pre- and post-crash messages were exactly the same.

The watermelon records went silent between 1931 and 1935, but in 1936 Carter wrote, "We are getting along better than we have for many years. We have plenty of everything—

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[37] Carter to Mr. Geo. F. Getz, 19 August 1927, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[38] The Hired Hand of Shady Oak Farm, unaddressed form letter to watermelon recipients, 23 August 1928, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[39] Carter, unaddressed form letter to watermelon recipients, 8 August 1929, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[40] Carter, unaddressed form letter to watermelon recipients, 18 August 1930, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

livestock, agriculture, oil and CHEERFULNESS."[41] Short of caps lock, Carter might have had to say it in more words: no depression in Texas. Positive messages about Fort Worth's "trade territory" bound the watermelon practice with Carter's other environmental boosting on the Trinity Canal and in the Big Bend. Each involved products passing through Fort Worth and leaving something as tribute. The refrain of Carter's cheerful messages was borrowed from commodities: selling Texas short would mean losing out on long-term investment income. One had to look far into the future to see the benefits of a canalized Trinity River allowing access to an inland empire of natural resources. It meant recognizing the financial impact of tourist travel to Big Bend. Most of Carter's watermelon letters ended with some variation of an invitation to come and visit Fort Worth, only implicitly to spend money, "'Where the West Begins' and good folks live in happiness, peace and contentment."[42]

Some of his friends threatened to do exactly that, either out of disbelief that West Texas could produce such melons, or, goaded by Carter's optimism, with the certainty that it could. New Jersey state senator Arthur Foran wrote, "Some of these days I expect to drop down in your back yard in an airplane and … see if Shady Oak Farm is a myth or really so."[43] "What a hell of a big farm you must have to grow melons like that and how do you do it?" asked the novelist and playwright Rex Beach, hunting tips for his own "farm" in Florida. "Don't tell me it's the Texas

[41] Carter to Mr. Henry R. Luce, 20 August 1936, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers. Walter P. Chrysler's letter of September 14, 1936 mentions "The large responsibility that the Hired Hand of Shady Oak Farm has assumed in feeding so many of his fellow men during these last lean years makes one deeply appreciative of friendship with this man who represents the backbone of the great American nation." This seems to indicate that Carter maintained the watermelon custom and the records simply have not survived.

[42] Carter to Mr. J. R. Nutt, 5 September 1928, box 220, Watermelons and pecans 1922-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[43] Foran to Carter, 16 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

climate!"[44] Newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst wired, "gee whiz your ranch must embrace half of Texas and include all of Texas['s] wonderful products."[45] Others, like department store magnate Bernard Gimbel, feigned such persuasion that they made plans to hand over their companies, sell off everything, and move to Shady Oak.[46] Even Pecans convinced Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, an important cog in Carter's environmental boosting on the Trinity and at Big Bend, to load his family into the farm truck and move to Shady Oak in 1945, "if [he] only knew where to find the gasoline."[47] His enthusiasm revealed the power of Carter's natural gifts; just five years earlier the two men had an ugly public spat through the newspapers in which Carter called Ickes a "carpetbagger," and Ickes referred to Carter's editorial as reflecting "the Ku Klux spirit."[48] Evidently, Ickes digested that animosity along with the Texas paper shell pecans. And if Carter could hold a grudge, it was not going to be against a man with such potential as Ickes for mustering energy on behalf of, or against Carter's environmental projects. As Carter stated in the produce correspondence, the incredible size of the melons and plenitude of pecans was merely symbolic of the fine condition of Texas, and many responded to that symbolism.

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[44] Beach to Carter, September 8, 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[45] Hearst to Carter, August 28, 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[46] Gimbel to Carter, August 30, 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[47] Ickes to Carter, 28 April 1945, box 137, Pecan shipments 1945 folders, AGC Papers.

[48] Ickes to Carter, 18 April 1940, box 107, Ickes, Harold L. folders, AGC Papers; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 80. As Limerick reminds us, we cannot use Carter's "carpetbagger" accusation as any evidence of his southern instead of western nature: "The term 'carpetbagger' became almost as much a favored epithet in the West as in the South," she has written. Carter's natural gifts also may have helped smooth over political rifts. Occasionally, Carter vocally backed unsuccessful candidates, then had to ingratiate himself to the winner. The example with the highest profile would be his support of John Nance Garner (of Texas) for president. When Roosevelt was nominated over him, Carter went on a gift-giving spree backed by effusive letters about FDR's great work.

For the booster Amon Carter, optimism was his most important export. The watermelons were simply a conveyance for that optimism to metropolitan audiences. The appeal to ditch the East for Shady Oak—facetious or not—became especially strong for the businessmen on the return of the watermelon lists after 1936. The Great Depression was a few years on. The New Deal was well established. Gimbel was heartened at hearing of the "boundless prosperity that has inundated Texas." Former Texans—once an optimistic, proud Texan, always an optimistic, proud Texan—recognized truth in Carter's letters. So did some who had only visited the state. J. Edgar Hoover wrote that "if this is really 'merely a symbol' of the many big things you have in Texas this year there is no doubt that depression days are over for your State."[49] A Chicago man was certain that "conditions are well nigh perfect in Texas! I reckon there are few places on this earth where products above and beneath the ground are comparable."[50] Percy Ebbott of New York captured best a common sentiment among easterners who were mostly engaged in finance, advertising, and other services far removed from the actual development of resources into products: "I try not to absorb New York atmosphere and let my viewpoint be guided by letters I receive from people out in the country where grain is being harvested, oil is coming out of the ground, cotton is growing and cattle are grazing."[51] Others could only watch fortunes erode, and take pleasure that somewhere out West, somebody was able to do real work extracting, cultivating, producing, and for his fellow man, too.

If only Carter's example and generosity could have saved the young capitalist Errett Lobban Cord, whose namesake corporation owned automobile makers, Checker Cab, New York

[49] Hoover to Carter, 30 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[50] Jim, Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust, Chicago, to Carter, 31 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[51] Percy J. Ebbot to Carter, September 7, 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

Shipbuilding, and the precursor to American Airlines. Having eluded the worst of the market crash after 1929, Cord began dabbling in the market during the depression, and got burned. His heavy trading in Checker Cab stock ran afoul of the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1937. Cord was not among the watermelon recipients, but in thanking Carter for his melon, another friend and publisher of the *Chicago Evening American* veered into the oldest memories of his acquaintance with Carter. One involved Carter's entertaining "story about the miner and the Chinaman" which he "pulled at the dignified meeting of Wall Street." The writer had many times gotten a laugh from remembering Carter's "several unusual performances during that hectic battle of Cord and [Robert] Lehman [head of Lehman Brothers]." As an afterthought, Carter's friend wrote, "By the way, it certainly is tough that Cord has had to fold up. They tell me he is physically wrecked. The old nerves are shot and his goat corralled. The S. E. C. was the final wallop." Perhaps not surprisingly, Carter's correspondent reported, Cord was headed west for his mental health. "He said he was going out on a ranch to see if, in two or three years, he couldn't get himself back in shape."[52] And so he did, re-making a fortune in Nevada real estate and, by 1957, in Utah uranium mining. He even served as a Nevada state senator.[53] So perhaps Carter's example did save him. Cord went west to become a whole man again, like the vigorous West Texans, Amon Carter chief among them.

It was not only the businessmen; another group, those in government bureaucracies, largely stayed clear of the lengthy letters full of raced and gendered joshing, but were equally thankful to Carter. Many described the logistical trouble of an Amon Carter watermelon showing up at the office or apartment. Its mere existence, in all its rotundity, became a reminder of

[52] Babe, Chicago *Evening American*, to Carter, 30 August 1937, box 221, Watermelons and pecans 1937 folders, AGC Papers.

[53] "Business and Finance: Cord Out of Cord," *Time*, August 16, 1937; "Mining: Cord Rolls Again," *Time*, March 25, 1957.

Carter's generosity as a friend, and Texas's potential to produce prosperity for Americans, especially for those with the capital to invest in Texas. Though lines from Carter's generosity to governmental decision-making are hard to draw, the watermelon practice, at the very least, kept Carter and his causes before the most important people in public affairs. Further, the assertions of Texas's vitality and self-sufficiency became part of Carter's courtship with federal assistance for Texas. In his environmental boosting for the Trinity canal and Big Bend, a large part of Carter's strategy was to prove how far Texas had taken the projects on its own. The federal government, he argued, should finish the job, since Texas had paid into the federal treasury and asked for so little.

Amon Carter's nature was about foresight. He enunciated it most clearly in 1947 at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Benbrook Dam, a few miles southwest of Fort Worth on the Clear Fork of the Trinity. Built by the Army Corps of Engineers, the reservoir created by the dam was to be the westernmost Corps intervention on the Trinity for navigation to the Gulf.

> Ladies and Gentlemen: This rolling expanse of land within our gaze looks like any other chunk of good Tarrant County earth. Grass, Trees, a few row crops, a meandering stream and a couple of houses are what we first see. But we must look again. There is something very special about this stretch of ground. Men who can see only what is in front of their faces have no place here today. If ever there was an occasion peculiarly suited to men with second sight, hindsight, and foresight, then this Benbrook Ceremony is the occasion. A second look projects a different picture, a picture of the not too distant future. A great earthen barrier extends from hillside to hillside. The sweep of water shimmers in the afternoon sun. Cool cottages lie sprawled along the lakeside. Bathers dot the beach. Boats skim the surface. The black-mouthed bass plays a splashing melody. … The pleasure of living will run strong at Benbrook Lake! But can we for a moment believe that we have seen all? A third look brings forth a greater vision. We see a new storage place for precious water. Controlled water that will lessen the mighty surge of potential flood descending upon this fair valley and upon our great city, and upon many men and the things of men downstream from us. Stored water that will insure us against periods of drought and against the growing needs of expanding industry. A regulated stream of water which eventually will enable us to send not just our rich top soil to the Gulf, but our products and goods of all description.[54]

[54] "(For Mr. Carter's use at Ground braking Ceremony)," 12 June 1947, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

Here was both the early western booster and the astute modern businessman able to recognize not what was, but what could be, envisioning a bullish commodity in the very landscape.

This was Amon Carter's nature. As the next two chapters will show, his booster ethic for Fort Worth was tied to boundless demographic and industrial expansion. In theory, more people meant more spending, which meant increased prosperity for all, in an endless growth process. The chapters will illustrate, like Carter's address above, that no landscape attained its full value without human improvement. Paradoxically, this was the case equally on the Trinity River, which needed strong human intervention, and in the Big Bend project, which required a human-imposed *absence* of human uses to create a park, the region's best potentiality as a commodity. While the projects to canalize the Trinity River and to create a national park in the Big Bend country sought to reorganize nature for distant peoples and places, they could hardly reach as far or as intricately as his watermelon network. In fact, promotion of those projects called into action much of the influence hinterland Carter created through the watermelon exchange. The watermelons, no less than dominating a river or pushing people off their ranches, illustrate Carter's uses of environmental power over others. Most importantly, the watermelon trade inaugurated Carter's commodification of his region by widening and massaging the group of potential investors who could determine the value inhering in Fort Worth's trade territory, a place where good, white, American-born people lived in freedom and prosperity.

CHAPTER TWO
TO CONSERVE AND IMPROVE: AMON CARTER AND THE TRINITY RIVER CANAL PROJECT

Sometime in the early 1930s Amon Carter took his famous friend, the cowboy humorist Will Rogers, to a spot overlooking the Trinity River near downtown Fort Worth. The men walked the bank, Carter explaining a grand plan he and some Fort Worth and Dallas businessmen had for the river. They wanted to turn it into a shipping canal suitable for barge traffic from Fort Worth to the river's mouth in Trinity and Galveston Bays, on the Gulf of Mexico. They planned to make Dallas and Fort Worth into inland ports. Rogers captured the sentiment of a century and a half of skeptics of Trinity River navigation, from the mid-1800s until today. He listened intently to Carter's plan, saying nothing. When Carter could stand the silence no longer, he asked what Rogers thought. Rogers put his index finger to his lips, asking for silence, and quipped, "Listen! I hear those seagulls now."[1] Familiar as he was with Carter, Rogers likely knew the gravity with which Carter approached his projects. He probably thought Carter and his collaborators would actually do it, especially if he knew how they began the project.

With confidence that would become a hallmark of the movement to canalize the Trinity River, the businessmen began the project near its logical and geographical end. To indicate their seriousness and their cause's practicability, they made their first step in 1930 by digging a turning basin near downtown Dallas to receive barges and their cargo, turn them around, load them up, and send them back on their way to the Gulf of Mexico. Fort Worth's presence in the scheme was apparently so new that most assumed Dallas would be head of navigation. The

[1] "The Press: Mr. Fort Worth," *Time*, July 4, 1955. As Flemmons relates it, Rogers gazed at the river, the banks, the sky, and replied, "I can see the seagulls now." Flemmons, *Amon*, 158.

christening of the hydraulic dredge that would complete the task was a momentous occasion. Delegations from area cities, police and fire department bands, National Guard units, the East Texas Chamber of Commerce, and Dallas commerce and real estate groups wound through Downtown Dallas to the riverside site of the future turning basin in a two-mile parade route. Chairman of Ceremonies W. S. Mosher told the *Dallas News*, "The dedication, starting as it will the actual navigation of the Trinity River, is of vital importance to all the territory. It proves to the people of the Southwest and to the Government that Dallas, Fort Worth and the other cities intend to push the project to earliest possible completion."[2] Before the digging could begin, though, organizers were hopeful that Amon Carter's wife or daughter would be able to break over the dredge a bottle of Gulf water brought from Galveston.[3] They were out of town on the christening date, so Phil Record North, son of *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* editor Jimmy North, did the honors.[4] The request for a Carter family member, and ultimate recruitment of *Star-Telegram* kin, hints at Carter's—and the newspaper's—central role throughout the Trinity canalization movement. At his death twenty-five years later, Amon Carter and a well-heeled group of associates was still pushing the project, even handing it off to sons to carry on.

No riverine port of Dallas or Fort Worth exists today, and the Trinity River itself is much to blame, or to credit, depending on one's viewpoint. The Trinity does not have just one source, or, as hinted by its name, three. It has four, and all are rather humble as sources for a major navigable river. They are not fed by Rocky Mountain snows as the Missouri, Colorado, or Columbia, and they do not originate in well-watered landscapes, like the Mississippi or the Ohio.

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[2] "Navigation's First Actual Move Monday," *Dallas News*, 13 July 1930.

[3] John Carpenter to Amon Carter, 30 June 1930, box 212, Trinity River Canal Association 1930 folders, AGC Papers.

[4] "Dallas-Gulf Union Starts in Symbolism," *Dallas News*, 15 July 1930.

Instead the Trinity begins in trickles north and west of Dallas and Fort Worth. The West Fork and Clear Fork meet near downtown Fort Worth, and are joined by the Elm Fork near downtown Dallas to form the Trinity proper, which is augmented by the East Fork's entry just southeast of Dallas County. The Trinity needs all four forks to be a river of any repute. Its entire watershed forms only a narrow funnel pointing southeast from Fort Worth-Dallas toward its entry into the Gulf at Anahuac, Texas, just east of Houston. It is the only river drawing all of its water from within Texas, a matter of great pride among some Texans, but consternation to navigators through the decades. With so little water, the river is usually in no hurry to reach the Gulf, winding 576 miles en route. The canal plan hoped to shorten that distance to 398 miles by removing some bends in "the crookedest river in the world."[5] In the early twentieth century, the Trinity River was almost useless to north Texas. For Carter, it was either a barrier, as when the *Star-Telegram* had to be flown by plane to the west side of Fort Worth during a flood, or a fine dumping spot; embarrassed by *Star-Telegram* circulation manager Harold Hough's decrepit car, Carter stole it and sunk it in the river, a deed to which he only admitted years later, and a fine utilitarian application of the Trinity River.[6]

In fact the Trinity River *was* and is navigable. It has only depended on the size of one's boat, and perhaps the season of one's trip. From 1836 a large fleet of packet boats plied the Trinity, some as far as Magnolia, near Palestine. One came within forty miles of Dallas to Porter's Bluff in 1854. Upstream these long, narrow steamboats—as many as fifty of them—carried groceries and dry goods, while down they carried cotton, sugar, cowhides, and deerskins.

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[5] "Right Back at You, Dallas!" *Fort Worth Record-Telegram*, 15 July 1930; Roy Miller, "The Canalization of the Trinity River," Radio Address, 7 August 1935, box 213, Trinity River Canal Association 1931-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[6] Flemmons, *Amon*, 52.

Trinity navigation slowed during the Civil War, but revived to a peak in 1868-1869, when boats carried 15,425 bales of cotton downriver. In 1868 one even reached Dallas, to great fanfare and after a trip just over one year from Galveston. That length of time indicates the problems of Trinity navigation for all time: a relatively narrow, shallow river prone to snags formed by downed trees and shifting sandbars. Dallas citizens lobbied Congress for assistance in clearing the Trinity beginning in the 1850s. Their persistence led to a federal survey in 1852 that determined the Trinity to be "the deepest and least obstructed river in the State of Texas," which was something of an endorsement. Through the rest of the nineteenth century, Dallas's lobbying produced more surveys than actual improvement work; in 1872, 1879, 1890, and 1894, the federal government examined various parts of the river to differing conclusions. By that period, competition from the time-annihilating railroads, entering the Dallas area by the early 1870s, ended the supremacy of the steamboats. This was a key deviation from early canal history. The Erie Canal had itself been a time and space annihilator, replacing a swampy turnpike with consistency and relative ease.[7] By the 1890s, though, Dallasites perceived in Trinity navigation a new waterway potentiality; water transportation could give their region a reprieve from what they believed were unfair railroad freight rates. They formed the Trinity River Navigation Company, a precursor to Carter's organizations, in 1891 and kept the river before the federal government. More surveys and consistent appropriations led to actual construction on much of the river, including eight locks by World War I, when work came nearly to a standstill. Worried

[7] Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 4.

as ever about a lack of water, Congress left the Trinity off of the River and Harbor Act of 1922 after over $2.2 million of federal money spent.[8]

In 1930 men of the Fort Worth and Dallas Chambers of Commerce acted on renewed distaste for high freight rates when they dredged their turning basin at Dallas and organized the Trinity River Canal Association (TRCA). Their first meeting convened at the Metropolitan Hotel in Fort Worth six weeks after the christening of their dredge. At it, speakers described navigation of the Trinity River as a new project for Texas and all the United States, under entirely different circumstances than had set back earlier such efforts. Its economic necessity was greater than ever, with the area of the Trinity's watershed showing remarkable population growth since 1900. Advances in technology made canalization more possible than ever, they said, and they had the glossy booster's literature to prove it. Like the platted but uninhabited towns of early westerners, their Trinity canal joined as a dotted blue line—"under consideration"—the solid blue lines of America's existing inland waterways system on a map.

The informational pamphlet and the comments at the association's first meeting only describe the first of four distinct periods in the group's selling of Trinity canalization, periods determined as much by the river as by world events. First, from 1930 to about 1936, the Trinity River Canal Association battled for, as indicated by its name, canalization as its only real goal. It was a period of educating the public as to the necessity of the canal, and encouraging government bureaucracies to conduct surveys determining the same. As it recognized Franklin Delano Roosevelt's and the New Deal's seriousness about a broader conservation ethic, in the second period from 1936 until the American entry into World War II the group pushed a

[8] Wayne Gard, "Trinity River Navigation Projects," *Handbook of Texas Online* (https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ett01), accessed February 5, 2016. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; David Mitchell, "The Trinity River Project, 1852-1922," *East Texas Historical Journal* 28 (Fall 1990).

comprehensive plan for the Trinity, only one part of which was actual navigation. This period saw a name change, notably, to the Trinity Improvement Association (TIA). The third period, from America's entry into the war until 1949, was characterized by the group's redoubled backing of canalization as a national defense measure. Motivated by the threat of German U-Boat activity, the Association also used the war to paint the railroads as un-American for opposing the full exploitation of the region's resources that canalization would have enabled. The period continued after the war with comprehensive plans, always asserting that the end of those plans was canalization. The fourth and final period in Amon Carter's canal promotion represented a decided shift away from canalization, though it remained, less visibly, the ultimate goal. This period was brought on by the devastating 1949 Fort Worth flood, and revealed again the Fort Worth-Dallas-centrism of the entire program, as the group became preoccupied for years with flood control in the upper Trinity basin.

At the Trinity River Canal Association's first meeting, Amon Carter received top billing from his Dallasite boosting counterpart, John W. Carpenter. After briefly reporting on the project's status, Carpenter introduced Carter as the man "leading the work of the association," a man who they should all know, for "the things he takes hold of succeed." After some platitudes about the project requiring hard work, Carter quickly, and interestingly, changed fields. He said, "This thing here is the ting [sic] that faith may build but it takes Congress and the United States Government back of it to do it." He recognized something historians have noted about water projects in the West, but few of his contemporaries would have admitted. It was also something linking the canal to Carter's eventual Big Bend promotion: "schemes for a new independence rested on the old federal dependence."[9] Despite generations of Dallas groups lobbying Congress on behalf of the Trinity, and little to show fort it, the program would remain the same: it would

[9] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 136.

seek federal surveys and Congressional appropriations to realize their dream of accomplishing "the biggest thing that has ever happened to North Texas." The opposition would remain the same, too. "A lot of prejudice" still existed against navigating the Trinity, especially from Amon's "railroad friends," some of whom had recently been in to see him and brought up an old joke about the project. "I am not for navigating it," a railroad man said of the river, "I'm for paving it." At least Carter assured the audience that they had the backing of Texas's Congressional delegation. To uproarious laughter he said he believed Senators Sheppard and Connally were sincere in their support, since it was just after an election. In those senators, he said, "we don't have two better senators in the State of Texas." What *was* new was Fort Worth's involvement. Carter called it "the only job that Fort Worth could really join in with Dallas." They moved the group's office to Fort Worth, almost certainly at Carter's urging, and gave the association the use of general manager John Fouts and President Carpenter of the Texas Power & Light Company, both from Dallas. Only once "Dallas got it in the shape we wanted" did Carter and Fort Worth join up.[10]

The glossy four-panel pamphlet produced around the time of the first meeting explained what had changed in Trinity navigation since the last attempt burned out in Washington. Simply titled "Trinity River Canalization," its front-page image captured much of it: a modern, flat-bottomed barge chugged into the foreground and down the sinuous blue river on an otherwise black and white drawing. It was neither the old steamboat of the 1850s, nor the snag-choked, tortuously twisted river of their reality. Skyscrapers rose in twin downtowns in the background, where the viewer could make out something else that had materially changed the hopes for canalization—five reservoirs in the Fort Worth and Dallas area that would provide water for

[10] "Minutes of the Meeting of the Trinity River Canal Association," Fort Worth, TX, 28 August 1930, box 212, Trinity River Canal Association 1930 folders, AGC Papers.

year-round navigation, enough "for the navigation of two rivers of the size of the Trinity," as the inside of the pamphlet claimed. Never mind that the reservoirs' ostensible purpose was to provide municipal water and mitigate flooding. The cities themselves were funding the construction of the dams creating these reservoirs, something the TRCA would use to encourage the federal government to help them. The additional water was only a part of the canal's "Feasibility." Commandeering language from nineteenth-century government surveys, the pamphlet said "The Trinity River is a natural canal for barge transportation, possessing high banks composed of stable black soil and being comparatively narrow." Its fall from Fort Worth to the Gulf was less than one foot per mile, without mentioning that straightening the kinks would change that to a much steeper grade, necessitating "the lock and dam system in use throughout the world," a pencil drawing of which accompanied the description.[11]

The centerfold of the pamphlet was a full United States map, "The Inland Water Ways System and the Trinity River." What had changed most since its last failure was the Trinity's proposed connection to 14,000 miles of inland waterways. The map showed solid blue waterways from New Orleans up the Mississippi to St. Paul and Minneapolis, up the Ohio to Pittsburgh, the Missouri to Omaha, and all through the Great Lakes connecting Duluth, Minnesota to Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, and the old Erie Canal to the East. This made the Trinity canal a national instead of local project. The Trinity canal would connect in Galveston Bay with the Intracoastal Canal, then under construction from New Orleans to Corpus Christi with eventual plans to Brownsville. The Intracoastal Canal would allow barges to navigate all the way from Texas to Boston in the same vessel, on waterways protected from the rough, open seas. TRCA executive vice-president Roy Miller was the expert on this aspect of the project. From Houston, Miller also served as president of the Intracoastal Canal Association of Texas and

[11] "Trinity River Canalization," n.d, box 212, Trinity River Canal Association 1930 folders, AGC Papers.

Louisiana. His national waterways experience was invaluable to the TRCA, as he craftily negotiated Washington, Austin, and more provincial interests in the Trinity region for over twenty years with the Association. Most importantly, while urging the TRCA to emphasize the Trinity's national scope, he could simultaneously recruit Texans to the cause of an all-Texas project. For Miller, it included the downriver Houston and Galveston too, if not the small communities in between. On one hand he said, "Let's forget anything about it being for Dallas or Fort Worth or North and Central Texas. Let's think of it as being an integral part of the national inland waterways of the United States." On the other, it was all about Texas. With the completion of the Mississippi River system, New Orleans would reap all benefits from inland waterways. By extending the Intracoastal Canal down the Texas coast and canalizing the Trinity, the Texas ports—i.e., Miller's native Houston and Galveston—could head off what they believed was their rightful trade.[12]

After the question of water supply, the other hang-up in early government surveys had been the economic value of a canalized Trinity River. This, the TRCA pamphlet said, "has been as definitely removed as that of the water question." In a refrain the Association would use for years, they pointed out that traffic—meaning shipping and industrial traffic—was doubling every twelve years in the Southwest. By 1929 tonnage that could have been carried by barge had reached nine times the amount of traffic that would commercially have justified canalization according to the federal government's earlier surveys. By their estimates, water transport would save $3.10 per ton, or an annual profit to the Southwest of $16,567,000. But recent statistics and what the canal *could* have done in the past were hardly the TRCA's concern. To these men it was far more worrisome what they could miss in the future by not getting the canal. Texas state

[12] Ibid.

reclamation engineer B. F. Williams told the *Dallas News* it was a "notable fact that all large cities of the world are located on navigable waters."[13] E. D. Minter of the *Fort Worth Press* aired the same sentiment, stating, "The really big cities have waterways. … You have to be on a waterway to grow to be a city."[14] Amon Carter believed in that necessity, too, writing Fort Worth Stockyards interests that "the certainty of Fort worth's position as a shipping and industrial center" depended on the canal.[15] Indeed these men believed, as John Fouts put it to Carter, "The very future of Dallas and Fort Worth depends upon the canalization of the Trinity. If we fail in this undertaking, we will be in the same position as the towns which were not situated on the railways in the earlier days, or, in the next era of transportation, like the towns through which the great highway system failed to enter."[16] Lest one believed it could not get more critical, John Carpenter put it in capital letters, "HOW ARE DALLAS AND FORT WORTH GOING TO COMPETE WITH HOUSTON IN THE FUTURE?"[17]

The founding pamphlet concluded with a note on the Association's provenance. "This association has been organized by substantial business and civic leaders of Dallas, Fort Worth, Galveston, Houston, Corsicana, Waxahachie, Palestine, Liberty, and Crocket." The entire Texas delegation in Congress was behind it. It boasted endorsements by both the Texas Democratic and Republican parties. The Association's position, it stated, was that since approximately $35,000,000 had been spent locally on the river, the federal government should, "in meeting

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[13] "Dallas-Gulf Union Starts in Symbolism," *Dallas News*, 15 July 1930.

[14] "Minutes," AGC Papers.

[15] Carter to L. F. Swift, Jr., E. O Hogue, and Al Donavan, 15 December 1930, box 212, Trinity River Canal Association 1930 folders, AGC Papers.

[16] Fouts to Carter, 21 December 1933, box 213, Trinity River Canal Association 1931-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

[17] Carpenter to Carter, 14 March 1933, box 213, Trinity River Canal Association 1931-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

local endeavors half way," spend a like amount. The project would "not only pay for its construction in a few years but develop an empire whose resources and possibilities have scarcely been touched." That the Trinity's region was a great, untapped empire was a popular theme throughout canal promotion, and interesting here given the pamphlet's closing list of the officers and directors of the TRCA. Unsurprisingly given their centrality to the region's financial and industrial sectors, Dallas and Fort Worth men held the leadership positions. The imbalance of all positions, though, should give pause when one considers the nature of the project to reorganize a wild river. Dallas and Fort Worth had nineteen and twenty-three representatives, respectively. No other town claimed more than two. Combined, Fort Worth and Dallas, which sat on a few formative miles of the seven-hundred-mile river, held almost seventy percent of the officer positions of an organization set on turning the river into an industrial apparatus through rural East Texas.[18] Further, canalization necessitated the combination of these men and their substantial capital with government expertise and funding. In his pathbreaking *Rivers of Empire*, historian Donald Worster has shown how the American West became a "hydraulic society" ruled by just such a combination of private impetus and federal influence.[19] For Carter and company, there was little question of who would direct the Trinity canal's empire.

If that founding pamphlet for the new movement was mostly truth and policy, another of the same vintage had more of the old western booster spirit. Its color scheme and production value make it appear to have the same creator as the first, though no copyright or author adorn it. It includes Fort Worth, but appears mostly a Dallas production. Titled "Trinity River Navigation," the front page centered photographs of the downtowns of each city, above a

[18] "Trinity River Canalization," n.d., AGC Papers.

[19] Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7.

drawing of the dredge then in use on the Dallas turning basin. At the bottom were these words, apparently a quotation from a trade magazine called *Industrial Developers*: "The trend of industry is to the Great Southwest." The inside was all one wide panel, "Dynamic Dallas is Creating an Industrial City." In the center were two drawings. At bottom was a sleepy frontier outpost of false-fronted buildings and a dusty street, apparently Dallas, shown in black and white. That town appeared to be giving celestial birth to a modern skyscraper canyon, future Dallas, above it in blue ink. The images bisected text about this "Dynamic Dallas." "Steam shovels, with hungry iron jaws, bite deeply into the waste lands of the Trinity River," it began, "fashioning embankments to chain a rampaging river." The author's attitude about nature could hardly be clearer. The pamphlet is a piece of booster art, invoking "concrete mixers" and "Sputtering donkey engines" alongside "beautiful boulevards," "Landscape gardens," and "a lake where at night the magic moon will break through swaying trees to play on boaters and swimmers" (though it is unclear where in Dynamic Dallas that will be). Civilization would be fashioned out of the river's wastelands. Dynamic Dallas was creating its industrial city in "a market that is growing so rapidly that the census figures have difficulty in keeping step with it," not only "a key distribution point but also an empire of raw material … untouched … unscratched … waiting for the vigorous to come and claim it." The Southwestward march of industrial progress would stop at "Kingly Dallas and Fort Worth … the key distribution points to a six billion dollar market of twelve million people."

What the pamphlet emphasized was a theretofore less publicized bi-product of the turning basin; the mud and silt from the river channel was formed into levees that would "reclaim" land near the river from potential flooding, allowing industrial development along the future shipping artery. This all for a time "when Dallas and Fort Worth, industrial and agricultural monarchs of

the Great Southwest, meet the sea." And this new form of transportation was the point of the literature. It was captured best on the back panel, "The Four Brothers of Transportation Meet in Dallas," referring to automobile, airplane, railroad, and river travel. The panel is mostly a black-and-white drawing of airplanes playfully bobbing and diving over the "Industrial City," with its proposed downtown airport, and modern viaducts carrying automobile traffic over the canalized river. Passengers would step off of the plane, the text says, to a waiting motorcar, deluxe Pullman, or "luxurious river steamer" (never in the plans for trinity navigation). This "modern miracle of centralized termini" within three minutes of the business district would be reality thanks to, and as adjunct of, a navigable Trinity. The greatest irony was the statement that "Modern business demands that speed be the keynote of all things," in a pamphlet supporting the slowest possible form of non-organic transportation available in 1930.[20] Though it was not captured in pamphlet form at the outset of the campaign, Fort Worth developed a similar industrial vision for its riverfront.

Predictably, the Trinity River Canal Association never could claim endorsements or executive committee membership from anyone associated with a railroad. Maybe they did not recruit from such ranks, but at least the TRCA made many efforts to deny antagonism toward the railroads. "We are not in this movement to put the railroads out of business," said John T. Fortson of Corsicana at the first meeting, "but to take care of the increase in transportation and just have another means and a cheaper means of transportation." The men could not possibly have missed how "cheaper means of transportation" would needle the railroads. Dr. J. B. Cranfill of Dallas, a "pioneer" of Trinity navigation movements from the turn of the century, cited the refrain, "Our freight tonnage is doubling every twelve years. Our railroads cannot haul the

[20] "Trinity River Navigation," n.d., box 212, Trinity River Canal Association 1930 folders, AGC Papers.

freight that is to be offered in the not distant future. So this Trinity River navigation … is an imperative necessity."[21] Not only did the TRCA claim that barge traffic would leave the railroads' existing business intact, it argued that railroad business would increase greatly. Amon Carter believed that "To hurt the railroad means to hurt ourselves." If he believed the canal would hurt the railroad interests, he would not be for it, because every business and citizen's prosperity was intertwined with that of the railroads. The savings in freight that would accrue to Fort Worth from a canalized Trinity would result in "great development" of North Texas cities and towns. "It will mean actual money saved to the farmer on all of his products, to the distributor, the manufacturer and to the ultimate consumer." Here was Amon Carter's booster ethic: "More population means more business, more products to be bought, more payrolls and greater prosperity for every citizen."[22] This predicted prosperity belonged to railroads as much as to canals and newspapers.

Amon Carter's first period of Trinity canal promotion had a difficult time distancing itself from the earlier pork barrel operations for the enrichment of Dallas and Fort Worth businessmen. If anybody doubted that canalization would benefit the region—with the assumed exception of people paid by railroads—they did not yet speak loudly. In 1935 the people of the Trinity River watershed did, however, vote down by majority a proposition that would have created a "Canal District" to administer the project. The District was to be formed by State of Texas legislation, with powers to levy a tax for the canal. From 1930 to '35, the Department of Commerce conducted surveys of the economic benefits the canal would add, and the Army Corps of Engineers studied its engineering feasibility. By the end of the period, the TRCA had

[21] "Minutes," AGC Papers.

[22] Carter to Walter Scott, 12 January 1931, box 213, Trinity River Canal Association 1931-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

convinced itself and others of the canal's physical possibility, but not of its economic necessity.[23] Each time Rivers and Harbors legislation came up in Congress, the TRCA lobbied directly in Washington, D. C., and through participation in regional and national organizations like the Committee on Rivers and Harbors, the Mississippi Valley Association, and the Intracoastal Canal Association. At each development the railroads had an even stronger lobby. The canal movement's methods, goals, and opponents remained throughout Carter's canal-boosting lifetime. They changed relative emphasis, but always the final goal was to make of the shallow, snag-riddled Trinity River a navigable waterway from Fort Worth to the Gulf of Mexico.

By 1936 Trinity canal proponents realized that if they were ever to accomplish their final goal, they had to better align their project with the imperatives of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. For a river project, that meant making it more comprehensive than a simple navigation scheme. They were encouraged toward a comprehensive plan by the failure of their Canal District the previous year, and by in-state examples of rivers being improved with federal aid. Those examples, though, on the Brazos and Colorado, were not navigation projects, but flood control and soil conservation programs. Early in 1936 general manager John Fouts began spreading the comprehensive improvement seed to the TRCA when he gave recommendations for the Association's future. It should be refinanced, and it should seek the creation of a district for flood control and irrigation like that for the Brazos River. He also hoped the Association could hire an engineer and traffic expert to prove that the government's cost estimates were "at least 50 per cent higher than they should be." Most strikingly, though, Fouts recommended that they urge the United States Geological Survey to do a topographical survey of the river, as it had for many rivers in the east, north, and Midwest. Late in 1936 the message was the same, but

[23] Fouts to Trinity River Canal Association Board of Directors, 30 January 1936, box 213, Trinity River Canal Association 1931-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

more pointed: "President Roosevelt has made it clear that the greater portion of expenditures for public works during the next four years will be for the purpose of conservation and use of water and land…. To properly push this flood control and soil conservation program, it was deemed advisable to separate it from the canal project." Fouts then ran through a litany of benefits that Dallas and Fort Worth would see by playing by the government's rules, accepting its money, and getting to canalization once the other parts were done. Finding a total annual savings of $59 million, he concluded with a question, "How does this compare with the benefits derived from the two Centennials held in Fort Worth and Dallas?" digging at the official Texas centennial celebration in the latter (where to go for education) and the Amon Carter-backed Frontier Centennial (where to go for fun).[24] The TRCA was beginning to understand its potential to capture the management process of federal expertise and money, and keep it working toward their canalization goals out of a sort of inertia.

Through two more years of surveys, hearings, new engineering plans, and education programs, the TRCA honed its new mission. In the spring of 1938 it delivered a resolution to a joint meeting of all interests in the Trinity watershed. It stated, because Congress established a policy for the conservation of soil and water, because reports indicated a need for comprehensive planning on the Trinity, and because the Secretaries of War and of Agriculture would oversee a coordinated program for the watershed, the Trinity River Canal Association would take over representation on all of those interests. Further, it would change its name to the Trinity Improvement Association to accurately represent that breadth. The same Chamber of Commerce outfit that wanted to make a canal as an impetus for industry, the exact same group of men, would now be in charge of a seven-point plan for the river encompassing soil and water

[24] Fouts to TRCA Executive Committee, 2 December 1936, box 213, Trinity River Canal Association 1931-1936 folders, AGC Papers.

conservation, flood control, reclamation, pollution, water storage, preservation of wildlife, and navigation. As always, this powerful group hoped to ingratiate itself to the bureaucracies by giving the Secretaries of War and Agriculture copies of the resolution "as an indication of the willingness and of the ability of the Local Interests to properly cooperate with the Federal Agencies." Thus the TRCA became the Trinity Improvement Association (TIA).[25]

All of a sudden Amon Carter sounded like some combination of himself and a Progressive Era or New Deal conservationist. "The Trinity Improvement Association," he wrote President Roosevelt in the summer of 1938, "is of the definite conclusion that there must be a coordinated program" for the Trinity River. In six pages he educated the president on the new seven-point plan. Water would no longer be "permitted to rush seaward unused," and people in the watershed would make use for agriculture and industry of "more than a million and a half acres of fertile land, now periodically overflowed." Carter related statistics about how erosion devastated valley farmers.[26] Before the letter even reached Roosevelt, Carter got to speak with him in person about the river, at the home of Roosevelt's son, Elliott, near Fort Worth. "Incidentally"—one of Carter's favorite words—the president asked Carter for more information, including maps.[27] When Roosevelt returned to Carter's letter in Washington, he promptly sent it along to the Secretaries of War and Agriculture, "asking them to give their best attention to the information in your letter. You may be assured," he wrote Carter, "that I am

[25] "An excerpt from the minutes of a joint meeting of all the organizations and individuals interested in the proper conservation and development of the soil and Water resources of the entire Trinity Watershed," 26 May 1938, box 214, Trinity River Canal Association 1937-1938 folders, AGC Papers.

[26] Carter to Roosevelt, 9 July 1938, box 214, Trinity River Canal Association 1937-1938 folders, AGC Papers.

[27] Carter to Fouts, 18 July 1938, box 214, Trinity River Canal Association 1937-1938 folders, AGC Papers.

pleased to lend you and your people a friendly hand in this matter."[28] Later that year Carter provided the president with the maps and information for which he had asked. He knew well his audience, framing the Trinity project's necessity in national terms aligned with Roosevelt's policies. He pointed out that "Over 95% of [Trinity watershed] people are native Americans and it is to their aggressiveness and self-reliance … that its substantial growth is due." Carter acknowledged that the region had been handicapped by disorganized flood control and conservation efforts, arguments that never arose in the early canalization push. Anticipating a future TIA tenet, Carter even argued for the project's importance to national defense and economy as helping to decentralize industry from the coasts.[29]

But not even Amon Carter's relationship with Franklin Roosevelt or Roosevelt's suggestions to his secretaries could guarantee favorable surveys. Perhaps the largest problem was an assumption the TIA made about who would use a canal on the Trinity. As part of surveying the economic importance of the whole project, the Corps of Engineers sent questionnaires to prospective industrial shippers on the canal. John Fouts wrote Carter in March of 1939 that the oil companies were proving slow to return information on the tonnage they might move by water. "The major oil companies will perhaps be the largest users of the Trinity River, and they could be of tremendous help if they will fill in the questionnaires and return them to [the Corps's office at] Galveston." Knowing that Carter was friendly with many oil executives, Fouts and Colonel Besson of the Corps hoped Carter might draw some response from them. Indeed Carter hosted many of these men at his Shady Oak Farm for American Petroleum Institute annual

[28] Roosevelt to Carter, 25 August 1938, box 214, Trinity River Canal Association 1937-1938 folders, AGC Ppaers.

[29] Carter to Roosevelt, 4 October 1938, box 214, Trinity River Canal Association 1937-1938 folders, AGC Papers. Regardless of the statement's veracity, certainly Carter meant the Trinity watershed residents were 95% white, American-born, and not 95% American Indians.

parties, so he wrote them letters and enclosed questionnaires. The responses were not as helpful as he, Fouts, or the Corps of Engineers hoped. Most responded that they had not furnished anything to the Corps because they simply did not see their companies using the canal. "The survey we have made indicates that we would not have any tonnage to move either up or down the Trinity River," wrote W. W. Bruce of Continental Oil Company. Some, like J. M. O'Day, of Sinclair, moved all of their oil through their own pipelines. Others did not have operations close enough to the Trinity, or plans to place any there. Perhaps most damning, Carter's own reply to the Corps's B. F. Chadwick indicated that he could not fill out the questionnaire completely because his fields were not in tributary territory through the canal. He did write that he would use the canal for some inbound shipments of tubular goods and field supplies.[30]

As ever, federal bureaucracies made surveys of the watershed, and the Trinity Improvement Association battled with the railroads throughout the late 1930s. In late summer of 1941 the Board of Engineers, U. S. Army, approved the entire Trinity River program. Amon Carter wrote his excitement to John Fouts, "Congratulations! This is a marvelous achievement and you are due 99.44% of the credit." Carter learned of the decision some weeks after it came down, when he returned home from a fishing trip. Presumably, he was not fishing the Trinity River. The TIA's members understood the tenuousness of their victory, though. The project still needed inclusion in Congress's next Rivers and Harbors Bill, meaning another opportunity for the railroad lobby to mount opposition in Washington. In the meantime, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the United States entered World War II, and the Trinity Improvement Association assumed a new set of imperatives.

[30] Carter to Chadwick, 6 March 1939, box 210, Trinity Improvement Association 1939-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

"War Points Up Need for Trinity Canal," headlined Amon Carter's *Star-Telegram* on December 12, 1941. Where one might envision a canalization retreat in wartime, Trinity Improvement Association members doubled down. Carter told the Texas Waterway Conference four days later, "It is my opinion … that the Federal Government from now on should not spend a single dollar except for the winning of the war. I am UNALTERABLY opposed to any other policy." Yet he found it fitting that they should be gathered to consider the River and Harbor Bill, since its programs, as part of the vetting process, had "already been designated by the Administration as essential to national defense." To Carter, then, the Trinity River project was indeed essential to winning the war. He quoted from the Corps of Engineers' report, that "One of the principal intangible benefits" of the program would be "the development of the natural resources of the Trinity River Basin by providing low cost transportation … which will tend to decentralize the nation's industry." That was more critical than ever, as the government realized "the fallacy of having the majority of our aviation plants located on the Coast of California, which are easily subject to bombing."[31]

Here was another aspect of Amon Carter's growth strategy for Fort Worth: to "keep our city properly before the Government in connection with national defense." Eighteen months earlier Carter had helped convince Consolidated Aircraft to locate a plant in Fort Worth on the decentralization argument. With the attack on American soil, he felt Fort Worth could get more, including expansion of the existing bomber plant. "The more money that the government spends here the more apt we are to keep the plant in operation permanently, after the war is over."[32]

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[31] "Amon G. Carter address for Texas Waterway Conference, Rice Hotel, Houston," 16 December 1941, box 210, Trinity Improvement Association 1939-1941 folders, AGC Papers; Carter to Sam Bothwell, 18 December 1941, box 210, Trinity Improvement Association 1939-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

[32] Carter to Bothwell, Ibid.

Connecting the Trinity project to national defense meant connecting it to a massive growth scheme for the city. Getting it in motion on the national defense argument seemed to ensure its success. The same logic applied to other canal appendages. Fouts later credited the TIA with creating a climate in Dallas and Fort Worth where the Corps of Engineers and Soil Conservation Service, "employing hundreds of people and spending locally millions of dollars, will NEVER leave these cities."[33] Carter and company understood, as historian Richard White has written of astute westerners in the twentieth century, that their West had become managed. The only game in town, then, was to capture that management process for one's own interests.[34]

War also created the Trinity Improvement Association's most cutting defense against the railroads. More like an attack, it even used the language of war. The Association joined many Americans in believing transportation shortages were coming with wartime demand. No way could the railroads alone handle the increased traffic, argued inland waterways guru Roy Miller. "I am with Amon Carter that the time has come when the big guns should be turned loose. The people of Texas should be informed concerning what the railroads are doing." Apparently this meant unleashing John Fouts, whose memorial to Congress pulled no punches in accusing the "huge un-American railroad lobby" of "disloyal and pernicious activities." No longer were they only holding back one Texas region by fighting the project, but they were "imperiling the freedom of our Nation and aiding our country's foes." They put "DOLLARS ABOVE OUR FLAG," he said, and deserved the Iron Cross of the Nazis and the order of the Chrysanthemum from the Mikado, "with its scummy yellow ribbon." Not even the fifth columnists were "serving

[33] Fouts to Carter, 12 February 1945, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[34] Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 409.

Hitler and Hirohito half as well as are the truculent, bullying, dollar-hunting railroad corporations."[35]

Maintained and countered over the next two years, the tack seems to have worked. The Trinity project was included—$115 million for reservoirs, levees, and floodways in the Fort Worth-Dallas area—in the 1944 Rivers and Harbors Bill after the Corps recommended it in 1942. Work would not begin until the war ended, and the TIA understood that the railroad interests would maintain the fight, so they must too.[36] The TIA kept its Fort Worth and Washington offices active, knowing that approval and authorizations were not the same as annual appropriations.[37] The war's end seems not to have changed the TIA's approach. Tangible results appeared with a flurry of groundbreaking ceremonies in 1947 and 1948 for dams at Benbrook (see Chapter 1), Grapevine, and Garza-Little Elm. This last dam was downstream from and behind the existing Lake Dallas dam, creating the much larger Lewisville Lake of today. "Trinity Program No Longer a Dream," proclaimed a *Star-Telegram* editorial in 1948. Once considered a Utopian pipe dream, "Today that program [for the improvement of the Trinity River] is an integral, key part of the great miracle of Texas's postwar industrial and allied development."[38] At nearly every turn, Dallas-Fort Worth citizens understood themselves to be in the midst of unprecedented growth.

The 1949 Fort Worth flood, which ushered in the final phase of canal promotion in the time of Carter, passed with hardly a mention from the Trinity Improvement Association. Its

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[35] John Fouts, "Memorial to Congress," 26 February 1942, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[36] Fouts to Carter, 10 December 1944, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[37] Fouts to Trinity Improvement Association Officers and Directors, 5 April 1944, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[38] "Trinity Program No Longer a Dream," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 13 October 1948.

subsequent emphasis on flood control for Fort Worth, however, indicates its presence on their collective mind. In its defense, part of the government's program was to complete the reservoirs and levees in the upper Trinity basin before undertaking navigation improvements. But the TIA's emphasis, even after a fatal flood, was seldom on flood control as a life-saving project, but a property-developing one. It also joined the ongoing project of increasing Fort Worth's visibility to the federal government. Fouts wrote Fort Worth representative Fritz Lanham in 1950, "Several discussions with Fort Worth and Dallas leaders concerning our Trinity flood control program has resulted in agreement that we should ask the Congress for an increase in appropriations so as to complete these works as soon as possible in view of the tremendous importance of this area in national defense."[39] Indeed flood control works were in progress "when the 15-million dollar flood took place here," wrote Carter.[40] With the Consolidated plant, the area made itself important to national defense. The TIA tried to connect Fort Worth flood control to national defense, and then asked for more money based on its national defense importance.

The Trinity Improvement Association received its most pointed non-railroad criticism during this period, as the project took on an increasingly local appearance. Homer Tomlinson of Fort Worth, while including his contribution check, criticized Carter personally for his letter requesting subscriptions to fund the TIA. In it, Carter attempted to justify the TIA's long existence by arguing that Texas had been paying its share into the federal treasury for over a hundred years, but "Only during the past fifteen years has any material portion of such funds

[39] Fouts to Fritz Lanham, 12 August 1950, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[40] Carter to Carter, March 3, 1952, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers. Carter's TIA files often include annual subscription requests addressed to himself, apparently as a way of filing the form letter he sent to others.

been expended in Texas. Consequently, I do not think that we Texans have deserted our democratic beliefs in seeking federal aid in conserving our soils, in controlling our surface waters and in preparing to utilize them for every beneficial purpose, including practical barge navigation."[41] Tomlinson, giving Carter a "frank word" to relieve what had been on his chest "for a helluva long time," thought otherwise. He trusted Amon Carter in the utmost, and that the Trinity project was a sound one if he said so. But "The Trinity is a TEXAS river. … If it's good business to canalize it, then it ought to be done by TEXAS and with TEXAS money." Tomlinson did not indicate whether he knew that that was how New York built the Erie Canal.[42] He brought in his—and Carter's—grandchildren to tug at Carter's emotions in painting a future where they might live "under a system of Government that will make their lives drab, if not indeed desolate and almost unbearably dangerous." That would be the result if powerful men like Carter did not stop "tramping to Washington for every damn thing we need." "If we take Federal money for the Trinity aren't we 'inviting' them to come in and take over there too?"[43] Tomlinson recognized the potential for imbalanced power relationships between federal money and expertise on the one hand, and local people on the other.[44] And this was only the criticism from one in a community that might benefit from the project, worried that inviting the federal government too close was a catastrophic mistake.

If the comprehensive plan for the Trinity was Fort Worth and Dallas-heavy, resistance came from another seemingly unlikely place. A. H. Wheeler of Arlington felt the program had

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[41] Unsigned, unaddressed, form letter, n.d. This letter appears as the others that Carter addressed to himself, leading me to believe that it is another of the same. Tomlinson's response, enclosing a check, indicates likewise. Box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[42] Sheriff, *Artificial River*.

[43] Homer Tomlinson to Carter, 6 March 1950, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

[44] Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 7.

nothing to offer the smaller communities between the two cities, to say nothing of the countless small towns downriver to Houston. "I live very near that famous river, therefore know a little about the travesty going on," he wrote Carter. He accused Carter and the "so-called Trinity Improvement Association" of intentionally keeping the public in the dark about its plans. It was clear, he stated, that the Association had scrapped its original plans for new ones, represented by the local flood control system in Fort Worth. "The public, and the farmers especially, were sold the idea of straightening the Trinity River, dredging in [sic] out, ridding it of pollution, and making a navagable [sic] waterway…. That's what the farmers bought." Now, he said, "It is freely admitted that more than 100 million dollars are to be spent … for the use of Ft. Worth and Dallas." He claimed a source "high-up in the so-called Trinity Improvement Association" stated that the Railroads and public utilities controlled so many votes in Congress that the navigation phase had to be given up. To support his indignation, he dropped statistics to prove that 86% of flood damage in the watershed was suffered by farmers, to only three tenths of a percent in Dallas and Fort Worth, "… yet those cities get the money." Wheeler charged Carter with hypocrisy for condoning such an operation that pulled the wool over people's eyes, while advocating freedom of the press and information, a common populist appeal made by Carter's *Star-Telegram*. He urged Carter to get behind a movement to call in the farmers and elected officials of other towns, ask them their opinions, "and ABIDE BY THEM."[45] Interestingly, Wheeler's complaints seem to verify Tomlinson's concerns; the dams, reservoirs, and flood control aspects then under construction in Dallas and Fort Worth were simply the first stages of the government's plan. The Dallas-Fort Worth navigation dreams were temporarily—maybe permanently—in federal hands.

[45] A. H. Wheeler to Carter 14 April 1950, box 211, Trinity Improvement Association 1942-1952 folders, AGC Papers.

The criticism from local people and on behalf of small communities along the watershed was at odds with Amon Carter's lifelong booster goal of lifting little people in Texas. Intermittently in twenty-five years of canal boosting Carter wrote West Texas interests to argue for the canal's benefits to farmers, his target audience in that region. Eventually the West Texas Chamber of Commerce (WTCC) endorsed the Trinity improvement. Indeed it was Carter's last move on the canal to write the officers and membership of the WTCC to prove his fealty to them. In 1955 the railroads again were stirring up opposition to another Texas legislature movement for a canal and conservancy district. They went after West Texans to argue that the canal was against their interests. Carter wrote the WTCC membership, "Fort Worth has never been for anything it thought was detrimental to the welfare and progress of West Texas but has always supported programs it believed to be to the benefit of your great area."[46] Since a series of heart attacks in 1953 Carter had been taking increasingly longer absences from business and boosting. The TIA even honored him that year as though he were going out, so his return to public work came as a surprise in 1955. That he returned to vouch for the West Texas bonafides of the canal project, though, was not. Within three months Amon Carter was dead.

Dreams to navigate the Trinity River to Fort Worth lived on. Like Carter, John Carpenter of Dallas was fading from public life in the 1950s. Each man was handing business and civic duties off to sons. Amon Carter Jr. and Ben Carpenter carried the canal project to its final defeat in the 1970s at the hands of a true environmentalist movement. More accurately, as the history of Trinity navigation has shown, such defeats, as canal promoters see them, are never permanent. That one has lasted, though. In the 1970s, canalization ran against the notion that a society simply should not give a river such rough treatment. The anti-canal movement also recognized

[46] Carter, telegram to officers and members, West Texas Chamber of Commerce, n.d., box 212, Trinity Improvement Association 1953-1963 folders, AGC Papers.

the realistic expectations for a Texas river relying on Texas rain.[47] But for Amon Carter and his canal associates, who were men of business and industry, assets, investments, and commodities, their Trinity River was useless. Values inherited from Progressive-Era conservation determined that water running to the sea was wasted. Lands kept out of production because of periodic flooding were grievously mistreated by rampaging rivers. Minerals in the earth, which were unreachable by cheap and easy transport without the canal, mocked human ingenuity and progress. They defied the Texas that Carter portrayed in the watermelon correspondence. Carter's promotion of Trinity canalization shows an entrepreneurial relationship with nature that hoped to create value in West Texas by proving that Texas would fully exploit the region's hard resources. If that meant destroying an East Texas river, it was in the service of a better Texas.

[47] Dave McNeely and Lyke Thompson, "The Unholy Trinity Incident," *Texas Monthly*, June 1973.

CHAPTER THREE
TO PRESERVE AND PERFECT: AMON CARTER AND THE BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK PROJECT

Any close reader of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* from 1933 to 1936 would have learned all about the Big Bend country. Such a reader would have known that the region, under consideration for state and national park status, was named for the "remote section comprising a little more than 600 square miles in the huge bend made by the Rio Grande River" in far southwest Texas[1]; that "At least three human races have washed upon the arid lands … and all have ebbed away without marring their essential wilderness state or altering their distinctive character"; that these included pre-historic "basket makers," Comanches (those two being apparently of one "race"), Mexicans, and American pioneers, whose crumbling ranches "[bespoke] a border warfare longer than the fabled wars of old."[2] Such a reader knew that the area was "a textbook of earth history recorded as accurately as on a written page." The exposed rock and its evidence of faulting, folding, sedimentation, and erosion lay bare at least five great ages of geologic time from the pre-Cambrian to Quaternary periods. The reader knew that the real draw, aside from the Rio Grande and its canyons, was the Chisos Mountains, "formed of igneous rock which, in a molten condition, was thrust upward from the earth's interior into the overlying sediments. Here it hardened but subsequent intrusions reached the surface and flowed out upon the land as lava through volcanic vents from which were also ejected volcanic ash and rock fragments." These rocks accumulated in beds hundreds of feet thick. A final lava flow

[1] "Texas' First National Park Will Be Situated in One of Most Beautiful and Picturesque Sections of State," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 25 June 1935.

[2] "National Park Report On Big Bend Intriguing," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 28 April 1935.

formed cliffs thousands of feet tall, called the South Rim of the Chisos. From it one could scan seemingly endless expanses of Mexican and American desert. [3]

The *Star-Telegram* reader knew also that rocks and cliffs were not the only attractions in the Big Bend; the living plants and animals were at least as unique. As the paper quoted from an early National Park Service report, "The varied forest cover in the Chisos is still virgin."[4] The surrounding desert merely hid from view an oasis of vegetation and the wildlife it supported: three distinct species of deer—Mexican Mule deer, Texas whitetail, and Sonora or fantail deer—the couch rock squirrel, Chisos Mountain cotton rat, and peccary, or javelina, a wild hog. None of these animals were found in then extant national parks. In fact the Chisos' isolated position surrounded by the Chihuahuan Desert meant that the proposed park could be the first to contain a complete biological unit. The alpine-dwelling flora and fauna could not traverse the inhospitable surrounding desert to other suitable habitats.[5] But even that forbidding desert had its floral treasures, like the distinctive agave lechuguilla and ocotillo with its brilliant crimson flowers after a rain. The researchers on whose reports the *Star-Telegram* relied were only beginning to appreciate the significance and beauty of the desert. Instead, they focused on the wonder of a forest in the middle of the desert, on "long leaf pine, the piñon, the live oak, white oak, fir juniper, spruce and all types of cedars," and "innumerable species of wild flowers and vines" that covered the canyon floors and, with the trees, provided cover for animals like the bobcat, dove, and wild pigeons "retreating from the ever advancing white man."[6]

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[3] Carroll H. Wegemann, "Big Bend of Texas After Half a Century Is Still a Great Land of Romance and Mystery," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 26 April 1936.

[4] "National Park Report."

[5] "Park's Unit To Be Complete: Will Be Only National Area to Have Full Biological Representation in It," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 1 May 1936.

[6] "Texas' First National Park."

The same reader learned that Chisos was "an Indian word for ghost," and the mystery conjured by that word captured the feeling of the place. In the Chisos a two-hundred-foot waterfall was neither fed by a stream nor issued forth from the pool it created at its bottom. Instead, it was fed by springs, and its pool disappeared mysteriously into the earth only to rise from springs on ranches more than ten miles from the mountains.[7] The Big Bend country was "a land of ever changing lights as variable and interesting as a human personality, but grand and restful in its magnificent distances and its solitude."[8] The play of light and shadow created much of the place's mystery. At the "Glory Hole," some unknown spot in the mountains, only "a few intrepid adventurers and prospectors" had seen the sun shine through a gap in one of the large bluffs, "casting its image as a huge ball of fire on the side of Mount Emory [the tallest peak in the Chisos]. It is also reported that on certain nights ghost fires, large balls of red flame, can be seen dancing on the tips of the peaks." Another "one of nature's masterpieces" was called "The War God." Every morning at ten o'clock, when the sun was directly behind the Del Carmen Bluffs viewed from Boquillas, one could make out the outline of an Indian chief with a long, flowing headdress, "one of the most perfect natural images in the world."[9] Such mysteries contributed to the Big Bend's strongest attribute for *Star-Telegram* readers, "the romance of old frontier Mexico." It was "in the atmosphere of the Big Bend region. In the Chisos Mountains the visitor is continually aware of its presence." One writer asserted that "everything should be done in developing the area to preserve for the tourists … the Spanish-Mexican feeling of manana [sic]. As a unit of the national park system, the region would be unique in this international

[7] Ibid.

[8] Wegemann, "Big Bend of Texas."

[9] "Texas' First National Park."

flavor."[10] For this writer and others, apparently Glacier National Park and the then under consideration Isle Royale, both along the Canadian border, did not taste "international." Further, one wonders if the *Star-Telegram* reader recognized the irony in a call to purchase the park from thousands of landowners to preserve the romance of frontier Mexico already brimming in the place.

In 1937 all this was not old Euro-American knowledge. At that time few even in Texas knew what wonders existed in the Big Bend. One of the earliest *Star-Telegram* articles on the region followed the Texas legislature's passing of a bill to create a state park there. It interviewed the geologist-explorer Dr. Robert T. Hill, one of the first advocates for a Big Bend park. He had floated the Rio Grande in 1899 and published an article about it in *Century Magazine* in 1901. In 1933 Hill told the *Star-Telegram*, "For 40 years I have made approaches toward getting publicity for this region and its phenomena." Like Hill, other early publicizers had first-hand experience that sparked love affairs with the landscapes. These would manifest in commitments of time and writing throughout the promotion of the area for national park status. One was former Texas Ranger Everett E. Townsend, the "Father of Big Bend."[11] Another was the famed historian Walter Prescott Webb. He crossed the Big Bend in 1923 with the Texas Rangers, performing a rather hands-on method of research for a history of that outfit. In 1937, with its understanding of the area's geological and biological attributes becoming clear, the National Park Service contracted Webb to study and write about the region's historical significance. Familiar with his renown as author of *The Great Plains*, the NPS wanted "a study

[10] "National Park Report."

[11] David Edmond Hilton, *The "Father" of Big Bend National Park: Everett Ewing Townsend, Texas Ranger, Frontiersman, Legislator* (Big Spring, TX: Sprinkle Printing Co., 1988).

in which the influence of the environment on individuals would be clearly [delineated]."[12] That spring, Webb made a well-publicized float trip through Santa Helena Canyon, and published a two-article series in newspapers coast-to-coast. The Park Service and supporters like Townsend, Sul Ross State Teachers College president Horace Morelock, and others strategically timed Webb's project to coincide with the Texas legislature's debate on appropriating funds for land acquisition in the area.[13] The result of that debate brought Amon Carter more directly into Big Bend promotion.

By 1937, like the diligent *Star-Telegram* reader, Carter well understood what geological and historical wonders existed in the Big Bend. While he might not have been personally responsible for all of the content of his paper, he certainly knew what went into it. Until June 1937, what went into the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* about Big Bend was a lot of information, but little opinion. And if Carter was only generally familiar with the content of every article in his paper, he was intensely interested in how the paper editorialized on that content, collaborating with editor Jimmy North to form the tenor of the paper's opinions. On the authorized Big Bend National Park the paper published its first editorial on 11 June 1937. What prompted the paper's entry into editorializing on the Big Bend, and how it framed its response, says much about Amon Carter's environmental mind and the direction of his next seven years of Big Bend boosting.

"The Governor has vetoed the legislation which would have put in motion the creation of an eventual Big Bend National Park in Southwest Texas." That sentence marked Amon Carter's entry into the promotion of a national park for Texas. Had Governor James V. Allred approved

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[12] Maier to the NPS Director, Attn: Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings, January 8, 1937, RG 79, NPS, SWRO, Santa Fe, Correspondence Relating to National Parks, Monuments and Recreational Areas, 1927-1953, Box x, Folder: xx, DEN NARA, quoted in: *Big Bend: Administrative History*, accessed 31January 2016, http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/bibe/adhi/adhi5a.htm.

[13] National Park Service, *Big Bend: Administrative History*, accessed 31 January 2016, http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/bibe/adhi/adhi5a.htm.

the appropriations to purchase the Big Bend, Carter might have contented himself with other pet projects and let his newspaper continue reporting favorably on the establishment of Texas's first national park. But when Allred vetoed that legislation, citing the state's financial straits, Carter felt that the park project, and his paper's coverage of it, needed new plans entirely. Instead of the *Star-Telegram* simply informing readers about natural beauty, geologic wonders, and wild animals, it needed to advocate. And instead of a legislative appropriation, the park's establishment required "a serious and business-like movement … to turn the Big Bend into the only tangible asset the region may ever hope to become." The new draw would be the "immediate value" of this last frontier with close "proximity to an all-year transcontinental highway [guaranteeing] patronage from its opening." No longer would the paper be selling Big Bend to Texans so much as selling Texans on the idea that they had much to gain financially from tourist travel to the park. From that day forward Big Bend was an investment. Put in some legwork in the early stages, and the federal government would step in to administer the park at no cost to Texas. The editorial called for a million Texans to donate $1 each, following Virginia's lead. In that state, private individuals had raised $1 million by subscription to purchase land to create Shenandoah National Park. Their legislature matched that amount, but in Texas's case the NPS estimated that all of the Big Bend could be purchased for only $1 million. The example was a recent invention; the first national parks were carved out of the public lands in the West, but eastern ones like Shenandoah, Great Smokey Mountains, and Acadia needed creative fundraising efforts to acquire their land in states that lacked federally owned public lands. Texas, on entry to the United States, had retained its public lands, and so Big Bend would have to follow that eastern model. Carter also saw popular subscription as a way for Texans to have a "direct interest" in the accomplishment.[14]

[14] "The Big Bend Park," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 11 June 1937.

Carter insisted that politicians be kept away from the campaign, and that Big Bend be completed without a legislative appropriation. The latter stance seemed odd, but had several possible motives. Some in the park service speculated that he did not want to become beholden to newly elected governor W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, despite the fact that O'Daniel had appointed Carter chairman of the new Texas Big Bend Park Association (TBBPA). Others thought he had lined up a major donor.[15] They were either keeping a secret for Carter, or were actually unaware that he had long been in contact with thirty-year-old Nelson Rockefeller. Nelson was the son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a philanthropist and himself the son of the famed Standard Oil cofounder. John Jr.'s donations had proven decisive at all three eastern national parks that were providing precedent for the Big Bend popular subscription campaign, at Acadia, Great Smoky Mountains, and Shenandoah.[16] As historian John Jameson asserts, the most likely reason for Carter's spurning of an appropriation was that he simply thought it unnecessary, as the TBBPA believed it would complete its fundraising drive by the end of the legislative session in 1939.[17] And a prime reason for that confidence was, as Carter indicated to several correspondents, the hope that they could "secure a substantial amount" or "a nice donation from some of our friends in New York."[18] But Nelson Rockefeller indicated that he might be the only friend in New York, when he wrote Carter, "I have gone into the matter carefully and while present obligations make it impossible for my father to give consideration to the project, I would

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[15] John Jameson, *The Story of Big Bend National Park* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 40.

[16] Runte, *National Parks*, 105, 107.

[17] Jameson, *Big Bend*, 40.

[18] Carter to Nathan Adams, 19 September 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park [includes Big Bend Park Association and Big Bend Park Project] 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers; Carter to A. D. Simpson, 24 September 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

like very much personally to learn more about your plans for the campaign."[19] Carter sent him information, and Rockefeller asked for satisfaction that the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service deemed contributions to be tax deductible, but it is unclear whether Rockefeller or any other "friends from New York" ever contributed to the Big Bend campaign.

Here was Carter's watermelon exchange (See Chapter 1) at work in the businesslike movement to create a national park. Commodification is the process of "establishing a resource's market value." It is never a static value but ongoing, as a culture changes its valuation of a given commodity.[20] By advertising West Texas with jumbo watermelons and declarations of the region's plenty, Carter began his commodification of the place that was coming full circle in promoting Big Bend as a "romantic" asset and investment. Rockefeller and many other prominent Big Bend correspondents inside and outside of government were perennial watermelon recipients. The act of sending large fruit to these men did not mean that they owed Carter something in return (though it could not have hurt), but it did mean they had been exposed to the magical, mystical West Texas that was now on offer in the Big Bend. The courting of the Rockefellers alongside Texas schoolchildren, Boy Scouts, and parent-teacher associations is emblematic of the liminal space that historian Donald Worster has found between 1920 and 1945. In those years, attitudes about conservation in America had moved beyond a dominant Progressive utilitarian penchant, but had not yet reached a strong and wide acceptance of preservation based on ecological principles.[21] Before Worster's 1920 marker, virtually the only

[19] Nelson Rockefeller to Carter, 6 June 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

[20] Brian Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 19.

[21] Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, orig. 1977), 256.

strong proponents of full preservation of wild places were people like the Rockefellers, urban upper classes with the means to reach distant, monumental landscapes. Indeed a young John Jr. had developed his love for the National Parks on family trips in the formative years of Yellowstone and Yosemite as parks. With the popular subscription campaign Carter drew new classes into investment in the West Texas commodity that was Big Bend.

The Rockefellers' reluctance to donate hinted at a more general problem with fundraising: for most of the Texas Big Bend Park Association's existence, it fared poorly. The Great Depression was several years on, and disposable income was scarce among the classes below Amon Carter and his ilk. If this makes the association's reluctance to pursue an appropriation especially vexing, it also explains their turn to the other aspect of their mission, educating the people of Texas about the Big Bend to make clear the absolute necessity of donating quickly. As historian Brian Cervantez has shown, one of Carter's most useful boosting skills was his keen awareness of audience, his ability to tailor his selling message to various groups.[22] The rhetoric Carter employed with different groups is also helpful in delving into his environmental mind.

The *Star-Telegram*'s first editorial calling for a business-like movement to capture an asset in the Big Bend only hinted at the degree to which Carter and a like-minded class of businessmen centered the language of their professions in the campaign. W. B. Tuttle, local chairman of the TBBPA in San Antonio sent Carter a form letter slated for distribution in his area. Carter likely approved of the first sentence: "Texas has an opportunity to obtain a great trade asset in the proposed Big Bend Park."[23] C. G. Cotten, manager of the Fort Worth Chamber

[22] Cervantez, "Lone Star Booster, 155.

[23] Tuttle to Carter, 19 August 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

of Commerce's Highway Department, wrote Carter on his selection as chairman of the TBBPA's Executive Committee. He expressed much of Carter's logic, writing that his outfit regarded Fort Worth to be the gateway to the Big Bend, despite the great distance separating them. "The tourist's dollar," he continued, "was the second biggest dollar spent in Texas in 1936 and with … a national park, there can easily flow millions of dollars into Texas, of which a large part can be encouraged to clear through Fort Worth."[24] Other aspects of Carter's national park idea arose in a pamphlet created by Horace Morelock and his local park committee from Alpine, near the Big Bend. In glossy black and white, an update of the railroad booster's crude poster, it briefly outlined the fundraising campaign before explaining the park's "Advantages to Texas and Her People." Importantly, those advantages went, in order, "Financial" (the longest section), "Educational," "International Possibilities," and "Scenic," followed by this "Conclusion": "The Hotels, the State Highway Department, the Railroads, the Bus Lines, the Tire Industry, Civic Clubs, the Automobile Industry, Tourist Camps, Oil Companies, and many other business concerns would profit directly from a National Park. Texas is omitting the opportunity of a lifetime if she fails to invest in a National Park."[25] The pamphlet predated the Carter-led campaign, and was certainly created without his influence, indicating a wide businessmen's agreement about the desirability for and derivation of benefits of a park.

When glossy booster literature rolled out with Carter's name on the front, it made similar arguments to those circulating between Carter and his associates. One tri-fold pamphlet captured enough with its front page alone. It was titled, "The Big Bend National Park: A Texas Tourist Magnet." Issued by the TBBPA, it included "Amon G. Carter, President," and this stanza after

[24] Cotten to Carter, 27 May 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

[25] "Big Bend National Park: Bulletin of Information," n.d., box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

the title: "An opportunity for Texans who are willing to make the most of the State's economic opportunities." The pamphlet's preface told prospective donors that "Texans have done much with their heritage in natural resources." They had done well with petroleum, sulphur, salt, coal, lignite, lumber, paper, livestock, and in agriculture, "But there is always 'another mile' so—*Development of the Big Bend area of Texas as a National Park and as an International Vacation Land—a potent tourist magnet becomes the State's number one civic enterprise—a new goal in the economic life of the State*." It went on to explain the national proliferation of tourism in recent years, with rates of automobile ownership, increasing dollar amounts spent on tourism, and the fact that "All forty-eight States, the Dominion of Canada, the Republic of Mexico, Central and South American countries are seeking a slice of this lucrative business." Further, there could be no monopoly on it, but rather "It flows into thousands of retail channels and increases the turnover of the nation's money and the buying power of the public." After challenging the state to claim its "rightful share of the tourist business," the pamphlet explained the need for volunteers in county and community committees. It used a few lines to explain the attraction of mountains, canyons, and colorful plant life before returning to a section labeled "Tourist Dollars Circulate" in conclusion. The national parks were annually breaking their attendance records, it said, and when tourists trekked to a park, they spread their dollars throughout the states they visited. Carter and the TBBPA turned the park itself, a diverse array of landscapes and organisms on 800,000 acres, into a consumable commodity only slightly differentiated by its international flavor and romance from other products in Wyoming, California, Virginia, or anywhere else.

Carter's direct appeals to other businessmen carried related themes. No matter the audience, no matter how far or near his city was to the Big Bend, Carter highlighted the way any

man's city would benefit inordinately from tourist travel to the proposed park. He assured Houston Harte, the San Angelo publisher, that his city "should be as much of a beneficiary as Fort Worth or Dallas, as many of the visitors will pass through your city."[26] This despite the important fact that San Angelo sat off of the "Broadway of America," U. S. Highway 80, which the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce's C. G. Cotten had cited as justification for Fort Worth's gateway status. Carter likewise was sure that Houston's businessmen could "appreciate the importance of this project and will see that the completion of the state's first National Park in the Big Bend area will be of more benefit to the South Texas Cities than to those in North Texas."[27] When proximity to the Big Bend did not work, Carter tried again with Houston's businessmen. Letting banker A. D. Simpson know that Fort Worth had almost completed its quota, Carter tried to motivate him by arguing that "Houston is a much larger city than Fort worth and will no doubt benefit proportionally far greater than Fort Worth" with the park's establishment. Carter's *Star-Telegram* managing editor James Record likely hoped for Carter to give Dallas similar treatment when he sent Amon a memo stating, "I have gone as far as I can with Dallas on the Big Bend Fund. … I believe that you are the only one that can get any action." Carter subsequently urged Dallas banker Nathan Adams that if his city's quota could be "properly distributed among your business institutions," it would be no great burden for returns that were sure to become "permanent and a continual repeater every year."[28] Carter was not alone in making these arguments. The *San Antonio Light* aired similar sentiments in urging its readers to support the "playground within easy driving distance of all Texas communities," that would "also attract a

[26] Carter to Harte, 1 June 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

[27] Carter to A. D. Simpson, September 24, 1938. box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

[28] Carter to Adams, September 19, 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

million visitors a year from other States." San Antonio would benefit "more than any other" because it was the nearest large city to the park.[29]

Carter's logic that proximity to the Big Bend should equal enthusiasm for the park ran aground especially in places nearest the park. The trouble of raising money within the Big Bend region called his environmental entrepreneurialism into question. Though the region showed great enthusiasm by forming local committees and beginning fundraising drives long before Carter and the *Star-Telegram* entered the project, the TBBPA's subscription campaign did not fare well there. Sul Ross State Teachers College president H. W. Morelock wrote Carter twice in two days about "local contribution problems in Alpine, Marfa, and El Paso." The first two were towns of only a few thousand people each, and El Paso had around one hundred thousand at the time. But the issue was not just one of overall contributions; even on a per capita basis the region lagged behind others. Carter was flummoxed. He believed "the per capita allocation may necessarily have to be larger" there than could be expected from far distant sections of the state, since "All of the territory in West Texas near the park will naturally receive far greater direct benefits than, for example, the Panhandle, East or Southeast Texas." Not only should the Big Bend region pay more because they would reap greater benefits, but also because, as he put it to Morelock, "No doubt, you have large landowners in your area, who, though perhaps they live elsewhere, will be expected to give sizable sums." Many absentee landowners found out through the Big Bend project that they had purchased useless, vertical landscapes sight unseen, and would be paid a tiny sum for them.[30] Such owners were probably unlikely to support the campaign. Carter also assured Morelock that he was neither attempting to "dictate or dominate in

[29] "Think" column, *San Antonio Light*, 26 May 1938, and 21 July 1938.

[30] Jameson, *Big Bend*, 46.

any way," nor to undo the good work the people of his section had done. "I am conscious of the fine character of the Big Bend people and I know they will take my remarks in this letter as in the best of spirit."[31] It was maybe best for Carter that the Big Bend people would probably not become privy to his exchange with Morelock.

What Amon Carter failed to pick up in his assumptions about local support for the park project was an attitude about wilderness running through Anglo-American history. For almost all time leading to Carter's era, the people nearest wilderness cared the least about preserving it. For local people wilderness like that in the Big Bend at best represented a livelihood, meager as it was, and at worst was dangerous or even deadly. As the historian Jameson has pointed out, Big Bend people, though they admitted that the land acquisition process usually paid them fair prices, did not often want to sell and be uprooted. In addition to the land's utility for raising stock or supporting what was left of mining operations by the 1930s, it had great utility for local pride. For all the newspaper and National Park Service rhetoric about a last frontier and the romance of Old Mexico, the reality was that life *was* quite difficult in the Big Bend, giving to local people a justifiable sense of accomplishment in surviving in the place. As was usually the case, distant people saw different reasons to appreciate the country than local people, whether the romantic idea of preserving a final frontier, or the pragmatic one of attracting tourists and their purchases of tires, gasoline, tents, sun hats, hotel stays, and candy bars. Further, local people themselves held diverse opinions about the need for a national park.

Two stories help illustrate the complexity of park creation for local people. Alpine attorney Mae Ament wrote Amon Carter in July 1938 that she had foreclosed on 382 acres along the Rio Grande and hoped to sell it to the park project for just what she had into it, $400. A local man had purchased the land from Elmo Johnson, a large rancher and the owner of a successful

[31] Carter to Morelock, 2 June 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers.

local trading post. The property came with some delinquent state and county taxes, the man got behind on his payments, and Johnson asked Ament to help him foreclose. To Carter of the Texas Big Bend Park Association this was great news, acreage in the future park up for sale for almost nothing; it had sold for $10 per acre several years prior, and Ament was asking barely over a dollar per acre. But for local people what a web of anguish it potentially wove. Elmo Johnson's trading post drew most of its business from northern Mexico, so much that his wife taught Mexican girls to cook, sew, and can fruits and vegetables. The Johnsons brought public education to the region, housing the teacher in their home. They were at the center of a wide network on both sides of the border. In addition to the good the Johnsons brought to the area, imagine also the strife when Elmo Johnson sought foreclosure against a local man, the process of Ament turning that land over to the park project, and the vacuum left when the Johnsons sold their ranch to the park project in 1942.[32]

The other story is of rancher W. T. Burnham. Big Bend land acquisition was clipping along in the first years of the 1940s, after the Texas legislature appropriated $1.5 million for the purpose. By August of 1942 only twelve thousand of the park's 788,000 acres were still to be purchased. The process was on schedule to set speed records for such projects when TBBPA executive secretary Harry Connelly wrote Carter about Burnham, apparently the only landowner to hold out for more than the appraised value of his land.[33] Burnham owned more than nine thousand of the twelve thousand acres yet to be purchased. Fortunately for Connelly and Carter, Burnham was without water since a neighboring estate, from which he leased wells and tanks,

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[32] Ament to Carter, 15 July 1938, box 21, Big Bend National Park 1936-1941 folders, AGC Papers; Kenneth B. Ragsdale, "JOHNSON'S RANCH," Handbook of Texas Online (http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qcj01), accessed 3 February 2016. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[33] "Record May be Achieved in Big Bend Park Project, Despite War, is Opinion of Interested Texans," *Bryan* (TX) *Eagle*, 18 February 1941.

had sold to the park. If he was left "holding the bag … it will not harm our project," wrote Connelly. The National Park Service was so eager to gain possession of the entire park, Connelly thought, that they might find "some means of satisfying Mr. Burnham. At least they can fence off his water supply and he would have to go out of business."[34] The myriad local interests varied wildly from Morelock and his class of big fish in the small pond of Alpine, Marfa, or Marathon, envisioning economic development in tourism. These diverse views on the park's desirability make it no wonder that the TBBPA had special trouble raising funds in the Big Bend country.

The late historian Hal Rothman has called tourism a "devil's bargain" in the West for its inability to live up to its reputation as a panacea for the ills in remote landscapes like the Big Bend, which never quite found their way in the industrial world.[35] So much more was that notion true when distant businessmen and bureaucrats foisted tourism upon local people as much as the local leadership on its citizens. Further still, Big Bend's salesmen in Fort Worth trumpeted the region's romantic "last frontier" status in the service of the metropolis's own industrialization scheme, one intent on capturing the federal bureaucratic machine, too, as indicated in the Trinity canal episode. For reasons like these Rothman also called tourism "the most colonial of colonial economies," and an extractive industry for "its psychic and social impact on people and their places."[36] Amon Carter and the Big Bend boosters were skipping the region from first nature,

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[34] Harry A. Connelly to Carter, 17 August 1942, box 22, Big Bend National Park 1942-1972 folders, AGC Papers.

[35] Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 10.

[36] Ibid, 11-12, 16; A recent dissertation in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences reveals that, even in the 21st century, long after tourism's predicted benefits should have accrued to the region, there is still incredible diversity of opinion about its desirability. Predictably, those Big Bend residents most in favor of tourism development in the region have either, 1) strong "environmentalist" attitudes, or 2) livelihoods dependent on the industry. While "environmentalists" hardly existed as such in the time of Big Bend promotion, either of these groups

that of the perceived prehuman landscape, to third nature, one where people feel the landscape in an emotional sense, where the land gives them "intangibles, experience, and cachet, to grant identity." Even the process of raising money was to be a popular campaign that would give Texans pride in the landscape in which they had a stake. The names of former ranches, like that of the Johnsons, graced certain areas of park maps when it opened. Instead of illuminating the fact that the region was in a state of second nature—one like Cronon's Chicago, meant to market to the world—the old ranches themselves became part of that romantic third nature. In making that leap, Carter and company created for current and future Fort Worthians (among many others, of course) an attractive "playground." Awareness of the need for recreational landscapes accessible to the city was a hallmark of boosters across the Sunbelt. The colonial relationship to the Big Bend through tourism was thus a tenet of the booster's ideology of growth.

As indicated by the *Star-Telegram*'s earliest coverage of the Big Bend country, Amon Carter was never so callous as to believe he could sell the park on assets and investments alone. Nowhere was his change of tone—from the language of business to that of beauty and education—more clear than with the clubwomen of Texas. But it was not only Carter; in marshaling the women's support, the entire male leadership of the movement betrayed their understanding of proper gender roles. From their introduction to the project in the spring of 1938, the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs (TFWC) enthusiastically backed the campaign, with its Board of Directors voting "unanimously to help in every possible way with this project." Their president, Jennie "Dodo" Turrentine, expressed "pleasure and inspiration" at being present for the planning of the campaign, and requested that Horace Morelock command them if they

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may have been dependent on the region's previous ranching or mining industries before the park, and thus, would have had lives upset by its establishment. Minsun Doh, "Change Through Tourism: Resident Perceptions of Tourism Development" (PhD Diss., Texas A&M University, 2006).

could be of service to it.[37] Evidently, in the men's view, the women could best render service by educating the populace about the park, in keeping with their gendered expectations and perceived core traits as women. Since it meant seeking the preservation of wild country that was Texas's heritage, and performing an educational role in that movement, Texas clubwomen could join the Big Bend project in their proper environmental and social capacities. Not all of the impetus behind their educational roles was gender-driven. Much of it owed to practical necessity for the Depression-era TFWC, which was virtually crippled by, and preoccupied with the debt owed on its lavish club home in Austin. President Turrentine wrote Amon Carter in February of 1938 detailing the club's activities and asking him to "raise a fund in Fort Worth," for its financial troubles. He evaded the task by claiming, "I have long since taken a solemn pledge that I would not harass my friends any more," because he had been doing so for over twenty-five years. His reply included a personal check for $250.[38] Carter, then, knew of the club's financial woes long before Turrentine left hard proof of it, writing to a member, "I promised those interested in the project that the Federation could help [with the educational program] since we were not able to help them financially."[39] The TFWC's financial straits might help explain their being sequestered to education, but it was no unimportant role to the Texas Big Bend Park Association.

The clubwomen of Texas were central to the movement's grassroots popularization of the park campaign. With subscriptions coming in slowly, the TBBPA association intentionally foregrounded their educational campaign, and recognized the clout the TFWC carried. Carter was sincere in telling Emily Perkins, president of the TFWC in 1939, that her committee on the

[37] Turrentine to Morelock, 27 May 1938, Box 3.18, folder 7, Texas Federation of Women's Clubs Papers, The Women's Collection, Blagg-Huey Library, Texas Woman's University (hereafter cited TFWC Papers).

[38] Carter to Mrs. Richard J. Turrentine, 16 February 1938, box 3.19, TFWC Papers.

[39] Turrentine to Mrs. R. E. Hutchison, 13 August 1938, box 3.18, folder 7, TFWC Papers.

park "will prove big factors in the success of the campaign." The TFWC, in educating Texas about the beauty and natural wonders of the Big Bend, and its educational and cultural value, were seemingly heading a different campaign than the Carter-led businessmen's faction. Carter was only trying to raise the initial $25,000 working fund to support the TBBPA. The women were charged with educating the people who would eventually, by popular subscription, raise $1.5 million with which to actually purchase park acreage. They were selling the park to people who would actually *use* the park, where Carter was selling to men who hoped to profit by *others* using it. Carter and James Record displayed serious consideration of how to influence what the women would learn about the project and, subsequently, how they would educate Texans about it. The two exchanged memos preparing Carter to speak at a general meeting of the garden clubs in the Fort Worth area. The program was to be about the Big Bend park, and they sought out Carter to tell them about it. Record suggested some points, in order: first, he said, the committee opposed asking for tax money. He explained why the National Park Service chose the site, its "being perhaps the last frontier of the Nation, because of its natural beauties, because of its accessibility and because it can be maintained and kept open as a park for twelve months in the year." He emphasized that, upon turning it over to the federal government, the park will be maintained without cost to Texas. Record reminded Carter to tell them about the improvements being made to facilitate access to the park's wonders, let him know what leading women of the garden clubs and the TFWC would be present, and finished with, "Some emphasis should be placed on the tourist business that the park will attract." In describing the project to women, Carter and the TBBPA did not ignore the financial aspects of their asset in the Southwest, but relative emphasis on it and natural beauty was almost reversed from their pitches to other businessmen.

With the onset of war in Europe and America's entry into it, the businessmen's movement continued its laggardly fundraising. The Texas legislature's appropriation for Big Bend acquisition in 1941 is evidence of that fact, but also, paradoxically, might be proof of the campaign's success. Indeed the curator of the Texas Memorial Museum, A. Garland Adair, wrote Carter in that vein. Adair recounted the voting patterns on the appropriations bill. Districts west of Fort Worth were overwhelmingly in support. Places east of Fort Worth, while less enthusiastic, were still in favor. The legislature passed its appropriation with little opposition, indicating to Adair how much was owed to Amon Carter and the *Star-Telegram* for publicizing to citizens and legislators the merits of a national park for Texas.[40] But the appropriation and rapid land acquisition program did not end Carter's involvement with Big Bend. The TBBPA closed its office in the Fort Worth Club and cut expenses, and the *Star-Telegram* shifted reporting staff to the ongoing war, but one step remained, and it required Amon Carter. He was tasked with conveying the deed for Big Bend lands to the federal government, so that the National Park Service could begin administering the park in earnest. Not wanting to hand the deed to just anybody, and never shy of a public ceremony, Carter stalled in the spring of 1944 in an effort to align his duty with President Roosevelt's schedule. Carter's dithering caused consternation for NPS Director Newton B. Drury, who warned Carter that further delay might endanger the park. A recent planning party noted "disturbing conditions." Some of the buildings acquired with the land had been vandalized and looted. In an unintended nod to the region's second nature, Drury acknowledged that some of the "fine old trees" on the then-abandoned ranches had been kept alive by irrigation, but with the absence of the ranchers, were showing signs of dying. "We shall need this shade and should have authority to give these trees all

[40] Adair to Carter, n.d., Big Bend National Park 1942-1972 folders, AGC Papers.

possible protection," Drury wrote.[41] On replying, Carter set a date, 6 June 1944. If one has ever seen an image of Amon Carter and his Big Bend promotion, it is of him shaking Roosevelt's hand and turning the Big Bend over to the federal government, a brief respite from Roosevelt's duties as Commander-in-Chief that day, D-Day.

Amon Carter's environmental entrepreneurialism brought the distant Big Bend into his growth strategy for Fort Worth and all Texas. National parks had long been booster clay in the hands of moneyed interests, but in the 1930s the interest looked much different than in the late nineteenth century. Where rails made straight tracks to Yellowstone, money ran in straight lines to railroad corporations. Where railroads set debates into motion and then masked their self-interest in park establishment, Carter sold Big Bend on its ability to make people money. The mountains of Yosemite and Glacier and the geysers of Yellowstone were all very tangible objects for sale to the railroad rider. The lines were similarly straight and palpable in the idea of a Trinity canal. In Big Bend promotion, though, the nebulous "tourist dollar" was projected to float down randomly on all Texas, here in the San Angelo café owner's pocket, there in the Big Spring hotelier's. The thing on sale in the Big Bend was an essence or aura more than the actual Chisos Mountains or Santa Helena Canyon. Carter's ongoing commodification of West Texas hid the real place behind abstractions like "the romance of old Mexico," and a "last frontier." What could be purchased and consumed in the Big Bend was identity and experience, though what was lost there was the real soil of local people. Carter's Big Bend promotion reveals a developing relationship with nature that could accommodate preservation in the service of the greatest commodity of all, an invisible one that gave park visitors a certain feeling that they had experienced something truly *of* the West Texas landscape. Setting the appointment for conveyance of the Big Bend deed with Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Ickes, Carter

[41] Drury to Carter, 24 May 1944, Big Bend National Park 1942-1972 folders, AGC Papers.

wrote, “It seems to me that this deserves to rank as a historic occasion, presenting as it does the unusual spectacle of a State giving something to the Federal Government.” So it was, but do we believe Amon Carter ever gave away anything, whether property or autonomy, without the belief that a return would materialize?

CONCLUSION

Selling Big Bend's essence was the culmination of Amon Carter's environmental boosterism: of the watermelons, understood as proof of West Texas's fecundity and its maintenance of proper gender and race roles; and of Carter's assertions through the Trinity canal that Texas would capitalize fully on its resources. These were all parts of a scheme to create value for potential investors from business and government who held Fort Worth's future in their pocketbooks and pens. This application of wild and tamed nature shifts how we think about two favored topics in environmental history—conservation and preservation—that are supposed be in an antipodal relationship to one another. Amon Carter, sometimes with a like-minded class of businessmen, used those principles to make diverse natural entities into a salable package that could both bestow profits on investors and convey meaning on purchasers, and ultimately, could satisfy his Sunbelt growth strategy.

The businessmen's relationship with nonhuman nature, drawn through Amon Carter, needs to be considered among other causes for this Sunbelt's incredible postwar development. It also helps explain the strained bureaucratic relationships surrounding those principles and the ecological science that was gaining currency during this period. Many have written about conservation and preservation as ideas that were batted between secretaries of the Interior, of Agriculture, chiefs of the Soil Conservation Service, and the Forest Service. Indeed it was a breakthrough intervention in 1959 When Samual P. Hays showed how policy was not just filtered through individual feelings about the proper uses of nature, but through interpersonal, political, and interdepartmental rivalry that often had little regard for the wild. This study adds a dimension, illustrating how distant businessmen, not thinking at all of actual conservation or preservation, might have inflected that struggle. It makes the story more suitably complex to

explain the period in two bodies of scholarship: the liminal ecological period Donald Worster has found between 1920 and 1945; and the rise and fall of ecological ideas in the National Park Service during the same period, highlighted by scholars of that outfit.[1] In capturing the federal oversight and capital management process in this Sunbelt West, Amon Carter's movements to reorganize nature also helped reorganize big ideas about nonhuman landscapes.

Entrepreneurship is the process of conceiving, designing, and starting a new business. For a few years at the turn of the twentieth century Amon Carter lived and sold advertising in San Francisco. As Carl Abbott has noted, in 1890 there were only twenty cities in the United States with populations greater than 20,000, from San Francisco at almost 300,000, to Fort Worth and her 23,076.[2] That the two cities of Carter's adulthood provided those bookends in the last census before his arrival in San Francisco is almost unreal. It creates a readymade story where Carter took the business model for the modern western metropolis and established a concept for the next one, accepting the largest challenge by choosing the smallest city. San Francisco had its natural advantages, like one of the world's premier natural ports protected by the Golden Gate. It was entrepôt to the world for a vast hinterland. Fort Worth could have all of those. It had geographic claims to its West Texas hinterland, if only by being thirty miles east of Dallas. It could be clearinghouse for that hinterland's bounty. It was already the eastern terminus of western branching railroads, and could be the natural head of navigation for a future waterway, and a paved throughway for eastern crowds to the Big Bend. When nature's entrepreneur moved to Fort Worth in 1905, he started both a literal business—a telephone directory and advertising

[1] Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999, orig. 1959, Harvard University Press); Two preeminent scholars on the national parks reach similar conclusions about the period. Richard West Sellars and Alfred Runte betray the findings in chapter titles, "The Rise and Decline of Ecological Attitudes, 1929-1940," and "Ecology Denied," respectively. Sellars, *Preserving Nature*; Runte, *National Parks*.

[2] Abbott, *How Cities Won the West*, 32.

company he would soon trade for an Arlington peach orchard[3]—and the natural entrepreneurship of creating value in the West Texas landscape. West Texas was new business.

The two main legs of Carter's environmental boosting still stand today, one extending into the arid West, the other through damp East Texas. Not that the Trinity River itself is healthy, or the Big Bend is unthreatened, but the booster's goal of attracting the federal management process to Fort Worth and West Texas, and to encourage its service of those places, has been realized. The United States Army Corps of Engineers is embedded in Fort Worth to a degree Carter could have only hoped for, with plans for reorganizing the city's nature in ways Carter could not have dreamed of. The Corps is engaged in a decades-long redevelopment plan, in partnership with other public groups, private interests, and the City of Fort Worth. By diverting part of the Trinity's flow to provide flood control, the Corps is again turning wastelands, in the form of decrepit industrial sections, into valuable property. Admirably, the project proposes to take down the levees that have distanced the city and its people from the river, to allow the mixed commercial-residential development so in vogue in American city planning today. Yet that process may just reinforce the notion that the river can only best be enjoyed, can only be useful, when given intense treatment by human technology. The project will give Fort Worth's central business district the potential to double in acreage over the next fifty years. The other leg of Carter's environmental boosting, Big Bend National Park, consistently draws over 300,000 visitors. Carter and the National Park Service predicted such numbers in their income assessments for Texas, only it took until 1963 to break 100,000. The park remains threatened by

[3] Cervantez, "Lone Star Booster," 24.

commercial interests, as Big Bend supporters—mostly local people, in a twist of irony from the park's early promotion—fight a potential oil pipeline through the park.[4]

Today the project closest to the spirit of Amon Carter's environmental boosting is not a river or wilderness project at all. It is another scheme for the transportation system of the future, but ironically, this time it is a rail plan for travel between Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, based on Japanese bullet train technology. It will annihilate time and space only for the transport of people. The project's website ("Accelerating the Texas Economy at High Speed," it says) features stylized, futuristic images of sleek trains running through undiminished bluebonnet fields between the Dallas and Houston downtowns. Again the places between those cities are invisible. The images, displaying wonders not yet realized, must purse the old railroad booster's lips in a heavenly grin. The plan rightly rankles local people in the in-between towns, maybe even more than did Trinity canalization. At least the canal was supposed to be accessible to local people, a conduit for their own products to market, and a relief on freight rates for inbound goods. Now, though, Texas Central's plan for ninety-minute rides between Texas's two largest metropolises will exclude the intervening towns entirely. Not only that, but right-of-way acquisition and roadbed construction could cut through private property in ways that will force farmers to take miles-long detours to access tracts of their property that are currently contiguous. Landowners have been hard-pressed to find their benefits in the plan.[5] One wonders how Amon

[4] Department of the Army, "Initial Review Plan for Modified Fort Worth Central City Project, Fort Worth, TX," accessed March 2, 2016, http://media.swf.usace.army.mil/pubdata/ppmd/pdfs/Posted_FWCC_Review_Plan_27_Nov_2012.pdf; Trinity River Vision Authority, "The Panther Island Plan," accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.trinityrivervision.org/Development/pantherislandplan; National Park Service, "Big Bend NP," accessed March 2, 2016, https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=BIBE; Big Bend Conservation Alliance, accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.bigbendconservationalliance.org.

[5] Texas Central, accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.texascentral.com.

Carter, who both fought railroad opposition to the Trinity canal, and also had a deluxe Pullman car named for him, would stand on the Texas Central.

Some of the most memorable episodes in Amon Carter's history are those in which he used his Texas cowboy persona to tell people how it was. Indeed he received flurries of congratulatory correspondence when he did so through his editorial pages or public acts: when he took on the Fergusons in the 1920s; when he told off Secretary of the Interior Ickes for meddling in Texas's politics in 1940; the possibly apocryphal story of a hatchet-burying ceremony with Dallas leaders, in which he left the handle of his hatchet sticking out, "just in case"; anytime he stood up to the Interstate Commerce Commission for charging differential freight rates in West Texas, to the Texas legislature for allotting too little highway funding to West Texas, or to New Deal and wartime gas rationing that unjustly affected people in West Texas's wide open spaces. That ruggedness and outspoken advocacy was fairly true, but if all there was to Amon Carter was antagonism of the regional business community and state and federal governments, it seems unlikely he could have achieved so much for his city. Giving his private wealth to local causes after the establishment of his foundation late in life was a fraction of what the city owed and owes his influence. And the outside investment by private and government interests for which he is best known after World War II did not rain down by luck or chance on Fort Worth. Rather, as this study of his nature reveals, Carter had no qualms about working with the larger Dallas business community in multiple mutually beneficial causes. He displayed tact in soothing anxieties among business and government leaders nationwide, and successfully courted the federal government to secure investment of money and commitment far beyond that which even Carter could give. Amon G. Carter would die. The commitments from government bureaucracies, and the national recognition he had aroused for his city and its trade

territory would live on. Much of it came through his far-reaching schemes to reorganize nature and his generosity with that nature's bounty. Hooray for Fort Worth and West Texas, indeed.

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ABSTRACT

NATURE'S ENTREPRENEUR: AMON CARTER AND THE REMAKING OF TEXAS

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Fort Worth newspaper publisher Amon G. Carter is well known as the city's most ardent booster in the middle of the twentieth century. Less understood is the degree to which his boosting invoked nonhuman nature, and how it germinated long before World War II. Carter led campaigns for two projects he considered most important to Texas: to reshape the Trinity River as a shipping canal from Fort Worth to the Gulf of Mexico; and to establish Big Bend National Park. In promoting them, he practiced an environmental entrepreneurialism, maintaining his influential social network by shipping West Texas agricultural products around the country to symbolize his region's fertility. These projects and his other ideas about the natural environment help explain how this Sunbelt city both drew a vast hinterland into its growth scheme, and established its value—that is, made it a commodity—to attract private and government investment.