TCU Skiff

etCetera

February 22, 1982

Behind Cowtown— Old Fort Worth at present

By Kerry Bouchard

Nobody takes pictures of new buildings.

Seventy-five years from now, if this neighborhood declines and Berry Street becomes a ghost town, someone with a camera will stumble across the ruins of Long John Silver's and preserve on film the faded paint and light reflecting off shards of broken windows, perhaps pausing before they leave to snap an image of the wrecked sign silhouetted against the late afternoon sun. A couple of students from far down the road, drawn by a strange love of desolation, will poke through the cold ashes of the collapsed stove, peer at the labels on the rotted cardboard containers in the storeroom, and conjure up the melancholy ghosts of a thousand other afternoons.

There's some sort of sentimental foolishness going on here. I don't feel melancholy all that often, do you? Why should we feel melancholy 75 years from now when we're ghosts? Surely we won't be pining away for the good old days when we could have gone to eat at Long John Silver's.

Still, the fascination of desolate places can't be denied.

Drive a couple of miles down University Drive toward downtown; take a left on North Main, past the Mexican bars and the neon "Tattoo" sign, and you'll find yourself in the midst of "old Fort Worth"—the part of town surrounding the stockyards.

It's concentrated on Exchange Street, over about a four-block area. This stretch of road looks like something you'd see at Six Flags. At Six Flags, there's a street where all the souvenir shops have French sounding names, and a street where all the souvenir shops have Spanish sounding names, etc. On Exchange Avenue, all the souvenir shops have western sounding names.

Once you get to the stockyard area (sometimes called "Cowtown," though that used to mean the whole city) you can go drink over-priced booze at Billy Bob's and gawk at the polyester rednecks--or even be one.

Or you can go eat a good lunch at Maedean's Cafe for $2.85, and listen to the old-timers tell stories about the brothels and gambling dens that used to fill this part of the city.

You can go get a tatoo from Audrey Ford at the tattoo shop she and her husband own. She'll tell you about all the other college students who have trooped through with cameras and tape-recorders in the last few months—tattoo parlors having enjoyed something of a neophyte journalistic vogue of late, possibly because of the title of the Stones' last album.

If you're nice, she may even show you pictures of her friend in England, a beautiful, young blond woman covered from the waist up in tattoos.

(If you're real nice, she'll show you a photo of the tattoo she wears on her back—a picture of Jesus suffering under a crown of thorns.)

Or you can wander around the empty cattle pens and horse and mule barns, and dream of the glory of days gone by when 4,000 head of jostling, screaming, excreting horses, cows, and hogs could be heard raising riot under the Texas sky. (There were sheep too, but when was the last time you

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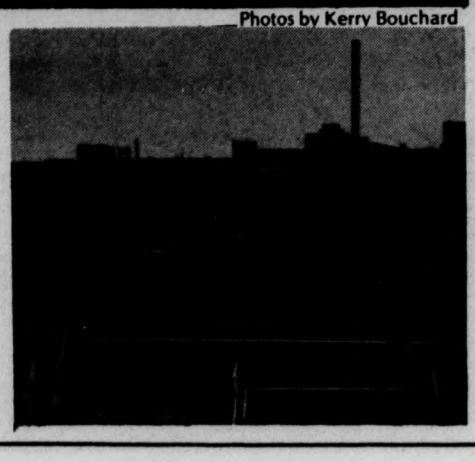
Photo by Kerry Bouchard

Photo by Ben Neev

Photos by Kerry Bouchard

Fort Worth's stockyard area includes artifacts not often sought after by the average tourist. At the top is the inside of the Lone Star Cafe. Directly above is the remnant of a gas station around the corner from Boot Hill saloon on Exchange. At the right are the cattle pens outside of the Fort Worth Live Stock Exchange.



Stockyards

saw a sheep raising riot?) They had good reason to scream – they were all destined to be chopped to bits at the Swift and Armour meat packing company.

The Swift and Armour Company began construction on its factory on March 13, 1902. It was the last term in the economic equation upon which Fort Worth was built, and the most prosaic. Nobody tells any romantic stories of the adventurous days when bold roughnecks packaged meat. John Wayne is always pictured riding around on horse-back, spitting dust from his mouth and crying, "Wo, dem der doggies!" or some such utterance. You don't expect to see him crouching over the ledger books of a meat-packaging firm.

But the bottom line – what made the romance of the cowboy possible and ultimately built Fort Worth's art museums as well as its stockyards – is that a great majority of human beings in the United States enjoy eating dead animal flesh, but would rather not deal with the mess, inconvenience, and nausea created by raising and killing the animals. Cowtown was built on the traffic in flesh. And, there's a sort of gruesome humor in the fact that the area of town that sold tons of cattle meat was also, during its heyday, the redlight district where most of the city's whorehouses were.

The hotels where the dice tables were are closed now. Tan, sheet-metal boxes are sprouting up on the streets where madames used to ply their trade in shot-gun houses. The horse and mule barns are boarded up.

You can still wander around in the cattle and sheep pens, however. And on Mondays you may hear the muffled roar of motorcycles next door to the Fort Worth Live Stock Exchange, where they're chasing cows around for the auctions that are still held on Mondays.

The cattle pens are a maze of ramps, stalls, and underground causeways running under West Exchange that look like the passages through which the slaves run in the movie "Spartacus." Surprisingly, there are not many signs of derelicts or winos using the shelters, though they seem like a perfect place to curl up from the rain. Perhaps the dingy air hangs too heavy from the death squeals of thousands of dumb animals for anyone to dare spend the night there. The only sign of recent life was an anonymous looking black-and-white cross someone had spray-painted over the crumbling cement of one of the underground tunnels – as if to seal off the stink of death within a crypt.

On the mounds of grass facing out from The Old Spaghetti Warehouse, cheerful looking white letters spell out the name of the Swift and Armour company. However, the sign on the factory building itself says Bunge Edible Oil Corporation. Real meat has been replaced by petroleum derivatives.

Behind the Spaghetti Warehouse are crumbling wrecks of buildings that look like pictures of London after a V-2 strike. The brick walls have fallen into vast heaps of rubble, revealing rows of squat, doric columns holding up the enormous concrete floors. Undoubtedly the buildings look better now than when they presented the world nothing but flat, brick walls.

If one's fascination with devastation starts to wear thin, Fincher's White Front Western Store sells belt buckles that read "Fincher's Welcomes Tourists." One can also stroll along looking in the shops that line the sidewalks of West Exchange. The windows reveal lots of leather and lots of things made from cattle horns – reconstituted relics from the days when the Hell's Angels ran on horseback.

There might be a horse parked in front of one of the buildings, looking a trifle out of place in the midst of the stoplights and surging traffic. It belongs to the Fort Worth Police Department, and every now and then a stern looking, black haired cop goes riding down Exchange like a kind of curator.

If you want, the visitor information center inside the Fort Worth Live Stock Exchange building will sell you a $4 tour of the whole area. (I signed up, but the tour was canceled due to sub-freezing drizzle, and I didn't really want to spend the money anyway.) After the tour, you can go drink a $4 pitcher of beer at one of the bars.

You might see a cow somewhere, probably in the pens right next to the Live Stock Exchange. There are a couple of truly enormous horses painted on the sides of the Brumbauch Furniture and Carpet Warehouse. On the corner of NW 25th Street and Ellis, there's a fenced-in lot with a couple of ponies and a dog.

Old-timers recall stockyard boom days

"What now of the Trojan War if it had been passed over by the artist's touch? Dust. A forgotten expedition prompted by Greek merchants looking for new markets. A minor redistribution of broken pots. But it is we who stand enriched, by a tale of heroes, of a golden apple, a wooden horse, a face that launched a thousand ships. . . ."

– "Travesties," a play by Tom Stoppard

"I tell you what, if you had got here early this morning you could have done the damnedest story you ever seen in your life. . . . Old Red and Virgil man, they remember that.

"He can tell you where there was, the address, how many women there

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was, and how much it was. He was tellin' me this morning that it was two dollars and some of 'em would beat you out of the rest."

–Denis Stevens, one of the regular customers at Maedean's Cafe on West Exchange Street

No kidding. There really is an old guy named Virgil who eats almost every day at Maedean's Cafe on West Exchange Street, about two blocks up from Cattleman's Steakhouse and The White Elephant. The morning I took a tape recorder down there, Virgil left early without telling many stories, though he did stand around for a while pinching and stepping on the feet of some really tough-looking guy he called Blackfoot.

Some people's mission in life seems to be to keep the rest of us from taking ourselves too seriously. If I had been clever when Virgil left, I would have asked to talk with Homer, but three semesters of college have already left me a little slow-witted, and I didn't think of it until two hours later.

When Homer shows up a little later in the morning, he's wearing a dark gray hat like the one Clark Kent used to wear, and a light brown corduroy jacket over an old flannel shirt. His name is Red Murdock; everyone at Maedean's calls him Red. He was a hay hauler at the stockyards, and once ran a dice game at the Hereford Hotel. Apparently in 1904 people really did give their kids names like "Virgil" and "Red." Or maybe when their kids got older and western movies were being shown in the theaters for a nickel, they decided to start calling themselves that.

Anyway, Red would have been born around 1904 if he's really as old as he claims, and I didn't see any reason why he wouldn't be. When he walks in Maedean's everyone who works there shouts hello and finds a seat for him, and if business is slow enough they sit down with some coffee to talk. It all works the way the shows on public TV – the ones where they take cameras into the middle of the jungle to film native tribes – said human society is supposed to work: The younger people listening to stories and wisdom from the older people.

Red obviously knows his audience. He pretty much lays off the wisdom (who wants to listen to wisdom anyway?) and concentrates on the stories – stories about the way Cowtown was when he was growing up before idiotic tourist types from the universities started slinking around with tape recorders trying to get the "real scoop."

The story bounces off walls and skips around a lot. I only heard a brief slice. The reoccurring theme seems to be that at one time this part of town had lots of money, lots of illicit booze (during prohibition), and lots of houses of ill repute frequented by the people who had lots of money – doctors and lawyers as well as cattlemen.

The first thing Red talked about the morning I was there was his feet being cold. "I'm goin' to have to get me a shot in my feet," he says, gazing mournfully at Maedean Houston, the owner of the cafe.

"You ought to get you a woman like old Mr. Odell. I've seen him walking around with that woman of his. I bet his feet don't get cold at night." Maedean plays the role of master of ceremonies, perhaps as a favor to me and my tape recorder, and keeps the conversation going.

"Aw, damn . . . ," Red sighs, smiling into his coffee. The guy obviously has some ambivalent memories of women. His rueful smile looks almost angelic in its resignation.

"I hear they're going to turn Fat Freddy's into a strip joint," says Maedean.

"A strip joint? Well I can't drink, but I'll get in on that strippin'," says Red.

A young woman at the next table who everyone calls "Rosy" (I swear I didn't make that up) says, "Everybody around here done seen you Red, you don't have any business goin' over there and start strippin'."

"I don't want to go over there sometime and see you up on that stage," says Maedean. "You'll be out of my heart for a long time."

Somehow the conversation turns to the subject of brothels.

"The police didn't close it . . . the customers closed it," says Red, "don't you remember? They used to call that the chicken shack, wasn't it?"

"Where's that, down at La Grange?" Maedean asks.

"Yah," says Red. "I've been in, I've been there several times. They sure kept a herd of girls there, I'll tell ya."

"Did you go see . . . you was?" (Maedean was trying to steer the conversation around to the play "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," but was surprised at this last revelation.)

"Yah, I been in there. Did you know James Fox . . . drove a truck for Bill Fox?"

"Oh yah, I know Bill Watts."

"Well that's his daddy . . . ."

"Hell . . . when you're young . . . hell. I remember sometimes you'd bust a cup of home brew and blue smoke would just curl out the top from the iodine," says Maedean. "It was 15 cents a bottle. . . .

"I remember Mama Eve's – used to be over yonder in the block with the jail house. They were sellin' that stuff, and it was so close you could have hit the jail with a rock. Some of that stuff would sure make you drunk. . . ."

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Photo by Kerry Bouchard

The horse parked to the left is one belonging to the Fort Worth Police Department. It is sometimes ridden down Exchange by a stern looking police officer. Below are four old-timers in the stockyard area who are pictured here relaxing on the windowsill of a shop on the corner of North Main and Exchange streets. At the bottom is an old-time employee of a Cowtown liquor store standing outside of the store where he works.

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"I remember gambling houses that never did close. One of them was at the Hereford. Old Johnny Williams run a dice game there for years and years.

"One day he came in a joint down the street. His wife was sittin' in a booth with another man – her and Johnny were separated. He shot her with a pistol."

Red turns to a guy in overalls at the next table, who's been fiddling with a retractable steel tape measure.

"What the hell are you goin' to measure with that thing anyway?"

"Well I don't know, it's just not long enough."

Maedean Houston has owned the cafe for the last two years; before that, it was Billy's Cafe. Her daughter owns a beauty shop next door. Before Maedean bought the cafe she worked at Lee Optical, which did all the work for employees at the Swift and Armour plant before it shut down.

The day before I came to listen to Red, she, Lee Stevens, and Denis Stevens told me some stories they'd picked up second-hand, or that Lee and Denis remembered from the '50s. Denis worked at the Swift and Armour plant from the time he was 15, before "I quit, and went to playing pool." Lee sold ice up and down Exchange Avenue.

Like a lot of people, they seem to long for the good old days.

Denis: I wish this street was back like it was years ago.

Lee: I tell you what, back in '56 and '57 it was damn sure jumpin'.

Denis: There was more money on this street than there was in Fort Worth. And the money to make money too. . . .

Lee: I was peddlin' ice.

Maedean: They say it was pretty good.

Maedean sounds a bit pensive. I can't help but wonder if the stories of gambling and prostitution don't get to seem a bit tedious after a while, but it's bound to be better than listening to executive types discussing the Dallas Cowboys and the condition of their ulcers.

Denis: They had more doctors and lawyers, you know, down at the Hobo Maverick. . . . Red was tellin' me about doctors and lawyers jumping out the back windows when they raided. And the police come in there to see if they was gangsters and everything – he said, hell there wasn't no gangsters, you had doctors and lawyers and bankers down there, buyin' them women and shootin' dice."

Lee: Hell, old Red was runnin' dice, here at the Hereford Hotel. . . .

Maedean: How long was it open like that?

Lee: Hell, it wasn't open; it wasn't legal. Yah, they'ld raid 'em. They'ld raid 'em and before you could turn around, they'ld open up another hotel. They had free beer and all that. . . .

Denis: When Swift and Armour shut down, this street shut down.

In Norse mythology, the place where heroes go after they die is Valhalla, a big hall with a warm fire where everyone relaxes, drinks mead, and tells stories. (They were also supposed to go out and hack each other to pieces in jousts during the day, to be healed at night if they were wounded, but we'll skip that part.)

In a way, I suppose Maedean's Cafe is a sort of Valhalla for people like Red. The stories are a bit crude and not all that heroic, more like James Joyce than Homer really. In fact, they aren't so much stories as just rambling descriptions of what life felt like in a certain area at a certain time – oral history kept alive by amateur historians like Maedean Houston. Unlike stories, reminiscences never really end, they just skip from one place to another. Life doesn't come with plots, only burial grounds do. *etC.*

Mammalian Chronicles

By Gregg Franzwa

There's a thing that happens to a lot of people I know at this time of year. From mid-January to mid-February there seems a general tendency toward colds, flu, whining, complaining, grousing, and general befuddlement.

What we're dealing with here is N.D.W.T.S.G.S. – the Natural Dead of Winter Tendency to Sickness, Grouchiness, and Stupidity. (It's altogether appropriate that the acronym should sound like a stifled sneeze.)

Humans, unlike other more sensible species, refuse to hibernate. And so during this time of the year when much of the rest of Nature is taking its nap, the humans are up dragging around trying to buck the trend. Clearly, if Darwin makes any sense at all, then there's a part of each of us that's trying to grab its annual siesta.

But of course we have all sorts of reasons to stay up. And we no doubt will continue in this quixotic rejection of our biological heritage.

So the least we could do for ourselves would be to publicly declare that it's OK to be out of sorts in JanuaryFebruary. Thus I would like to suggest that we designate the period in question as National Low Energy Month. That way we could all avoid worrying each year at this time that some permanent deterioration of our faculties has begun.

Even better, our tolerance of each other's moments of dumbness would be increased, and surely anything that does that is a good thing.

Part of my plan would be to eliminate Ground Hog Day in favor of National Nap Day. Ground Hog Day, after all, has ceased to have much meaning for most of us. And I doubt it ever meant a thing to the little marmots themselves. They, after all, have the good sense to sleep through it – save perhaps one or two insomniacs in their number who emerge bleary-eyed on Feb. 2, pause momentarily to blaspheme the Great Ground Hog, and then return to their holes.

We are the ones who've stayed up. This ought to be *our* holiday. Everyone should simply stay in bed on Feb. 2, as a symbolic acknowledgment of the fact that we ought to be sleeping then. We could also exchange Nap Day cards, congratulating one another on having emulated a state of full consciousness for two weeks, with wishes of good luck for the following fortnight.

What's called for here is a great degree of public honesty about our phylogenetic affiliations. We're involved in all sorts of animal behavior all the time (this is the discipline of ethology), and the sooner we recognize it the better off we're going to be.

I, for example, would feel a whole lot more positive about Ronald Reagan if, on Feb. 2, he and Nancy were interviewed while sprawled out in the sack, each with a Bloody Mary, encouraging their fellow humans to chuck it in for the day.

"Jane, honey," he would say to Ms. Pauley on the Today Show, "why try to fight your natural rhythms. Face it, half your brain's checked out for the season. Take my advice and lay back in the weeds until Mother Nature plugs your head in again."

But on the hypothesis that this little scene will continue to be only a fig newton of my imagination, perhaps the best we can hope for is recognition of our seasonally limited capacities among our friends. The period is just about over for this year. Spring can't be far away. Until then let's agree to take it easy on one another, and it will be all better soon. *etC.*

events etC.

Monday 22

Campus Crusade 9 p.m. Student Center Room 205.
Pi Beta Phi 5:15 p.m. Student Center Room 207.

Tuesday 23

Ozark Mountain Daredevils in concert 7 p.m. Student Center Ballroom.
Traffic Appeals 11 a.m. Student Center Room 202.
Creative Programming 5 p.m. Student Center Room 203.
Student Affairs 5:30 p.m. Student Center Room 205.
Academic Affairs 6 p.m. Student Center Room 206.
BSU 6 p.m. Student Center Room 218.
House of Reps 5 p.m. Student Center Room 222.
CPPC Workshop What in the World Can You Do?: Skill Assessment 9:45 a.m. Tom Brown Lobby.

Wednesday 24

Dick Gregory lecture 7 p.m. Student Center Ballroom.
Homecoming Committee 4 p.m. Student Center Room 203.
Bible Study 8 p.m. Student Center Room 207.
Cheap Thrills--Bread Dough class 7 p.m. Student Center Room 211.
Delta Sigma Theta Art Show 11 a.m. Student Center lounge.
Angel Flight Meeting 6 p.m. AFROTC Detachment.
VITA 6 p.m. Dan Rogers Hall Business School Library.

Thursday 25

Alpha Kappa Alpha 7:30 p.m. Student Center Ballroom.
SOC 3 p.m. Student Center Room 202.
Arnold Air Society 4:30 p.m. Student Center Room 204.
Speech class 12:30 p.m. Student Center Room 205.
Brachman Gala 6 p.m. Student Center Room 205.
FCA 8:45 p.m. Student Center Room 207.
Panhellenic 6 p.m. Student Center Room 214.
Pre-Law Assoc 5:30 p.m. Student Center Room 218.

Friday 26

Film "Stir Crazy," 5, 8, 12 p.m. Student Center Ballroom.
Delta Sigma Theta 7 p.m. Student Center Room 203.
TCU Flying Club 5 p.m. Student Center Room 222.

Saturday 27

Film "The Defiant Ones," 7, 10 p.m. Student Center Ballroom.
Rotary Club 8 a.m. Student Center Room 202.

Sunday 28

Tae Kwon Do Karate Club 1 p.m. Rickel Building Room 218.