



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**America's Cities
Fort Worth: Cowtown**

Fort Worth: Cowtown Report One

March 3, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I recently traveled to Fort Worth, Texas, to attend the Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting, and listen to presentations made by two friends from New Mexico. I was also here to gather information about Texas and Fort Worth, and report my findings to you.

I like Fort Worth. It's down to earth. It's humble. Fort Worth's icon is the cow, and the city is known as Cowtown. What could be more unaffected? In contrast, Dallas, its neighbor and archrival, touts the *cowboy* as its symbol. The cowboy is more glamorous, more up-scale than an unassuming cow. Consider America's legends of the Southwest, the Cowboys, and America's team, the Dallas *Cowboys*.

Cows are not on anyone's list for sought-after monikers. For example, who in their right mind would use "Cow" for a team name? *Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight, at the south end of the field, representing the fair city of Fort Worth, let's welcome the Fort Worth Cows!*

First Day

The conference lasted three days. On the first day, I sat-in on several presentations:

- **"Texas Baptists and World Issues"**: Not a big crowd for this presentation. One of the main topics was the controversial split between "liberal" Baptists and "conservative" Baptists. As a certified (baptized) Baptist, and someone who knows Baptists pretty well, I had difficulty in picturing a Liberal Baptist. It seemed an oxymoron.
- **"Politics of the New Deal in Texas"**: This lecture was geared to John Nance Garner, the U.S. Vice President during FDR's first two terms. The gist of the talk was Nance's dislike of the New Deal. The lecturer said Nance's reaction to New Deal discussions in the House of Representatives would be sticking his thumbs in his ears and waving his hands at a New Deal speaker.
- **"Archeology of Military Sites"**: I walked into the middle of this presentation. On the screen was a picture of a World War I German plane, the famous Fokker. The speaker was explaining a Texas archeological dig, in which his team unearthed this plane in east Texas. The speaker showed a slide explaining the specimen was actually a *concrete* model of a real plane, which was used by American pilots to practice shooting at German planes.

Everyone in the audience seemed impressed, so I remained silent. I wanted to ask if an airplane made of cement, fixed firmly to Mother Earth, really presented a life-like simulation to, say, an airplane that actually lifted off the ground. But I was a late-comer and assumed someone had asked this question.

- **"Texas Weather"**: I passed up on this presentation. I'm pretty certain it dealt with (a) wind, (b) humidity in the east, (c) sand in the west.

- **“Texans in World War II and the Cold War”:** Having had enough politics with the New Deal lecture, I passed on this one.
- **“Archeology at Teran’s Forts”:** Having had enough archeology with the excavation of a cement airplane, I also passed on this one.

I came away from these presentations thinking Texans might be a bit self-absorbed with themselves. But this thought came from a New Mexican---not from the mind of an unbiased observer.

My favorite presentation of the day was made by three women (my friend and school classmate, Sylvia Gann Mahoney was one of the presenters), “Women in Rodeo, Past and Present.” I learned cowgirls in the 1920s and 1930s were participating in steer roping and bronc riding contests. And during World War II, the rodeos and rodeo culture were held together largely by a group of women while the men went to war. Later, gender correctness led to the demise of females participating in the more dangerous and robust rodeo events.

I was impressed with Sylvia’s presentation, as well as her presence in general. Since our childhood days, she has come across as a female of quiet strength, one that would lead to her solid core.

Reporterette and I had dinner at a fine Fort Worth restaurant named Del Friscos. My only complaint was about the Hennessy XO. Not the drink itself (it’s a fine after dinner treat); its price. This place set a new record. Not just a slight push of the price envelope, an obscene breakthrough. Thus far in our investigation, we have found the most expensive pricing for XO was \$28 at the Bull Ring in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Del Frisco’s charged \$35.50 for a drink!

I made this observation to the waitress, “Miss, just wanted you to know your restaurant holds the distinction, among some very predatory places, of being---thus far in my survey--- the greediest cafe I have come across.”

As discussed in an earlier report, we would all like to be Clint Eastwood-like during moments when normal humans are dumbfounded. Truth is, I did not say anything remotely akin to these witticisms. In fact, I am so far removed from the cool Clint Eastwood world that I forgot what I said.

I paid the bill, hoping I was not going to experience an ever-increasing inflation of XO prices during my on the street reports. If so, I decided I would change to another libation to survey during my reports; say, Thunderbird wine.

For our next report, we examine the thorny and horny issue of Fort Worth, Dallas, cows, and steers. As well, we return to the Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting.

Fort Worth, Texas: Cow Town Report Two

March 4, 2005

I'm back again on the streets of Fort Worth, Texas, the famous cowtown). I'm reluctant to expose the public relations errors of Fort Worth's city managers and historians. With the exception of Cow Town's ridiculous prices for XO, I have developed an affection for the city (and Texas historians). I still consider it low-key and whimsical, at least in comparison to its sophisticated rival, Dallas.

But reporters must be reporters, and thus report. Therefore, Fort Worth, the famous Cow Town, does not really advertise itself as a Cow Town. It pushes its image as a Steer Town. Steer, as in a *castrated* member of the cattle family. Castrated critters are not in keeping with the Wild West's testosterone-laden image. Consider two pictures I took in downtown Fort Worth. First, take a look at Figure 1.



Figure 1. Steers galore.



Figure 2. Ivy beef.

See any cows in this mural? Only one. A small heifer (a young cow), walking among a herd of steers...and destined for profoundly disappointing experiences. Figure 2 shows a statue of a steer, prominently displayed near the mural in Figure 1. It's constructed of wire and interwoven Ivy. I liked this mannequin and its statement about the importance of cattle....OK, steers...to Fort Worth's image.

Second Day

More meetings and presentations at the Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting. I sat-in on parts of these lectures:

- **“Exploring Texas History through Photographs”**: A fascinating display of old-time photos with explanations of their origins. I thought you might enjoy an old picture (Figure 3) from my family archives, which is similar to the photos shown in this presentation. Mom told me this photo was snapped of some local cowboys by an Eastern photographer who was

traveling through New Mexico in the early 1930s. The photo was choreographed by the photographer for use in an article about the West. ...Straight out of an old B-grade movie.



Figure 3. An old snapshot.

- **“Route 66 Across the Texas Panhandle”**: The lecturers and their groups are trying to hold back the assault of the 21st century buildup of Walmarts and super highways...at least for a while in order to record some of the old buildings and bridges in a national register for historical places.

The lunch featured U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison as the guest speaker. She started her talk by saying Texans are unique because of the way they treasure their history (I’ll second that). To guarantee the Lone Star citizens don’t become too enamored with being Americans, she also mentioned that Texas celebrates its independence from Mexico every year and its entry into statehood every 30 years.

As I listened to Senator Hutchison, I thought about the motives of the organizations in the U.S. that organize these kinds of luncheons, for sharing stories and ideas, for pushing their causes. For the Texas State Historical Association, its Texas history; for the Friends of the Shenandoah, it’s preserving a river. On and on: PTAs, Scouts, Jaycees---thousands of them. It occurred to me the fabric of our country is woven with the threads of our parochial institutions more than the threads of our political institutions.

XO Larceny

The last part of this report had your Reporter (with Reporterette and our friends, Sylvia and Jim Harris, introduced shortly) return to the scene of the Hennessy XO crime: The restaurant that charged an arm and my (wooden) leg for a brandy last night. (We returned also because we liked the food). I confronted the manager at Del Frisco’s about the \$35.50 for a drink of the liquid. Here’s what happened:

“Hello, folks,” as he shook our hands, “I’m the manager. What can I do for you?”

Reporter, “Hello. We like your place, had dinner here last night. I’m writing a report on up-scale restaurants’ prices. I’ve selected Hennessy XO as a benchmark. Take a look at this list of XO

prices at several upper echelon restaurants.” I passed him a list of restaurants included in my price survey.

The manager had no response, as he passed my list back to me. Insolence personified.

Reporter, “As you may have noticed, you are overpriced by an enormous amount.”

Manager, “Not at all, sir. Most restaurants serve one and a quarter ounces. We serve two.”

I was looking for a Clint Eastwood response but couldn’t come up with one. I said, “OK, fair enough.”

Tomorrow, I’ll wrap up the reports on Fort Worth and the Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting.

Fort Worth, Texas: Cow Town Report Three

March 5, 2005

Your on the Street Reporter is not on the street but in my hotel room in Fort Worth, Texas.

Background Noise

I've been listening to small cheerleaders bounce off the walls in the hallway and the adjacent hotel room. Fort Worth is hosting the National Cheerleader Finals this weekend. Unbounded energy and enthusiasm pervade the place. The hotel is flooded with prancy spruced-up young girls (and Texas historians looking for a publisher).

As I was walking down the hallway this morning to the history meetings, I encountered my 10^N cheerleaders, chanting assorted happy cheers and sing-songs. Passing by them, I said, "Stop being so *cheerful!*" My remark gained a few seconds of silence. *Gimme a K..I..L..L..J..O..Y. What da' a got? Killjoy!*

I lunched at a BBQ café down the street from the Association Meeting hotel. I'm told a tourist is should not leave Fort Worth without getting a BBQ fix. I hear the same advice for Kansas City, Atlanta, Houston, London, Sleepy Hollow---you name it. This meal was not much to write about. If you want fine BBQ, use the recipe in *Traveling America (I)*.

The only meeting I attended today was "**The Newspaper Reporter's View of Texas History.**" An interesting session, the topic dealt with the role of journalism and newspapers in reporting Texas history. A panel of five columnists and reporters gave their views on the subject. My friend, Jim Harris, started the meeting (I'm paraphrasing Jim's comments, taken from notes):

"I grew up in this part of Texas. I recall not far from here was a string of whorehouses. The best...ah, that is, a well known house was on Jackson Street. I seem to recall the employees there had unusual names, like Joy."

"Coming into town yesterday for this meeting, I kept looking for Jackson Street." Fine start, one that got the audience's interest. And the session continued in this spirit. Jim is a natural speaker, and a gifted, creative museum curator. If you happen to be in southeast New Mexico, stop as Lovington to visit the Lea County Museum. Jim's hand is shown in the wonderful exhibits.

The End

The Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting was finally over. An entire hotel, full of Texas historians and tiny cheerleaders, was about to evict its guests back into Americana.

I liked the cheerleaders. They reminded me of my high school days. And I had grown fond of historians, even if they spouted Texas history. But it was time to leave the past and face the present. Off to DFW airport for the flight to Virginia.

As I re-read this last report before sending it to you, it occurred to me my remarks about the Texas State Historical Association's choice of topics for its meetings may have been flippant. For example, my critique of the expenditure of a lot of money and effort on an archeological dig of a concrete airplane. Perhaps. But I'm reminded of a famous adage, "Those who do not look to their past are blind to their future."

It's not really famous. I made it up. But the saying does have resonance about the value of history. Anyway, philosophy aside, I'm happy the Texas State Historical Associations of the world organize lectures, dig up concrete airplanes, promote history, and stage lunches featuring good-looking, interesting speakers. I'm glad these organizations exist. I'll wager all of us are.

In closing, as I said in my book, *The Light Side of Little Texas*, I like Texas. I like its bravado. I like its people. I like the idea that my parents were born in Texas. But I'm also glad they moved from the Lone Star State to the Land of Enchantment.

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