

A VISIT TO HELL'S HALF ACRE.

Presentation by Brendan Smart.





Fort Worth's first steps, at a fast sprint

- Fort established (at site of courthouse) in 1849 to enforce the boundary between Anglo and Native American settlement, as defined by Sam Houston's Treaty of Bird's Fort.
- Boundary is aligned with natural border of the Cross Timbers forest
- Fort Worth is where we leave the Timbers and step onto open prairie, on the edge of the Comanche territory.



Pictured: *Sunset, Where the West Begins, Old Fort Worth, 1849-1853, William B. Potter, undated*



E.M. Daggett, Father of Fort Worth

- Brother's trading outpost, just north of Pioneer's Rest Cemetery
- Family of French-Canadien Mississippi River traders
- Take 1 pinch of New Orleans, 1 dash of the Comanche frontier

Daggett knows Whiskey=power

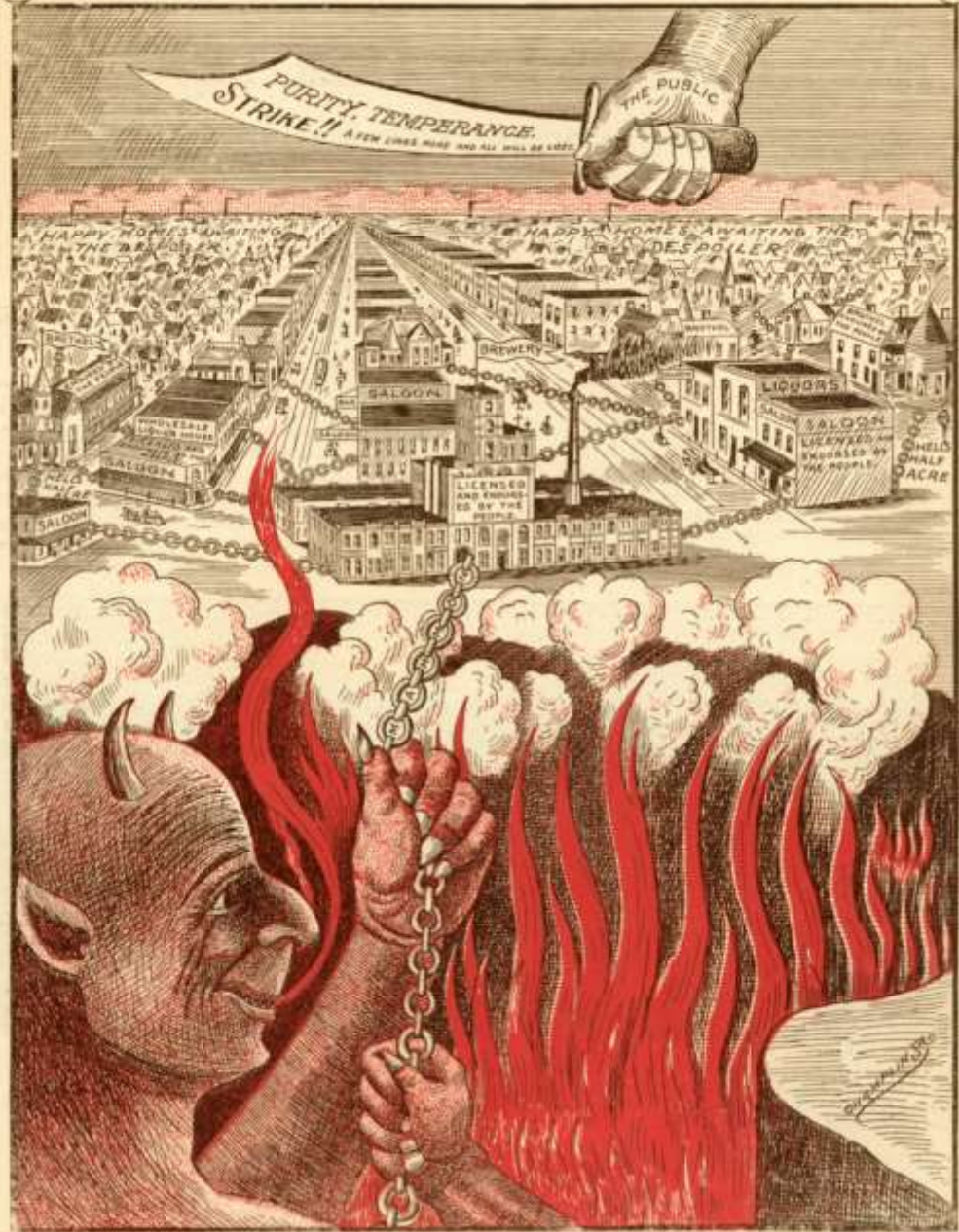
- County seat election swayed by barrel of whiskey
- Daggett's Addition (land grant) is the heart of the Acre

THE PURITY JOURNAL

VOLUME II

MARCH, 1906, STATION A, DALLAS, TEXAS.

NUMBER 9.



FORT WORTH, A MODERN SODOM

Hell is 'loved' Beneath Thee to Receive Thee at Thy Coming.



FORT WORTH, A MODERN SODOM
Hell is Moved Beneath Thee to Receive Thee at Thy Coming.

THE ACRE/THE THIRD WARD

- Origin of the name is a mystery— Webberville outside of Austin had been called “Hell’s Half Acre”, pre-Civil War. Described as place of gambling especially.
- Possible connection: Faro gambling houses were called “Hells”.

A fast run down on Faro

- For the masses/gambling houses, it was THE game of the west
- Group play around table like in craps encourages excitement
- On the face of it a game with fairest/best odds for players, BUT 100% cheating on the part of the dealers or “faro artists”.





John Law, patron saint of Faro

- His abilities as Faro gambler inspired French monarchy to place him in charge of banking
- Introduced paper money and central bank created unlimited credit; blew up economy
- The Duke of Arkansas and in many ways The Godfather of New Orleans

What was the Acre?

- Saloons
- Dance Halls
- Gambling
- Brothels, Crib Girls

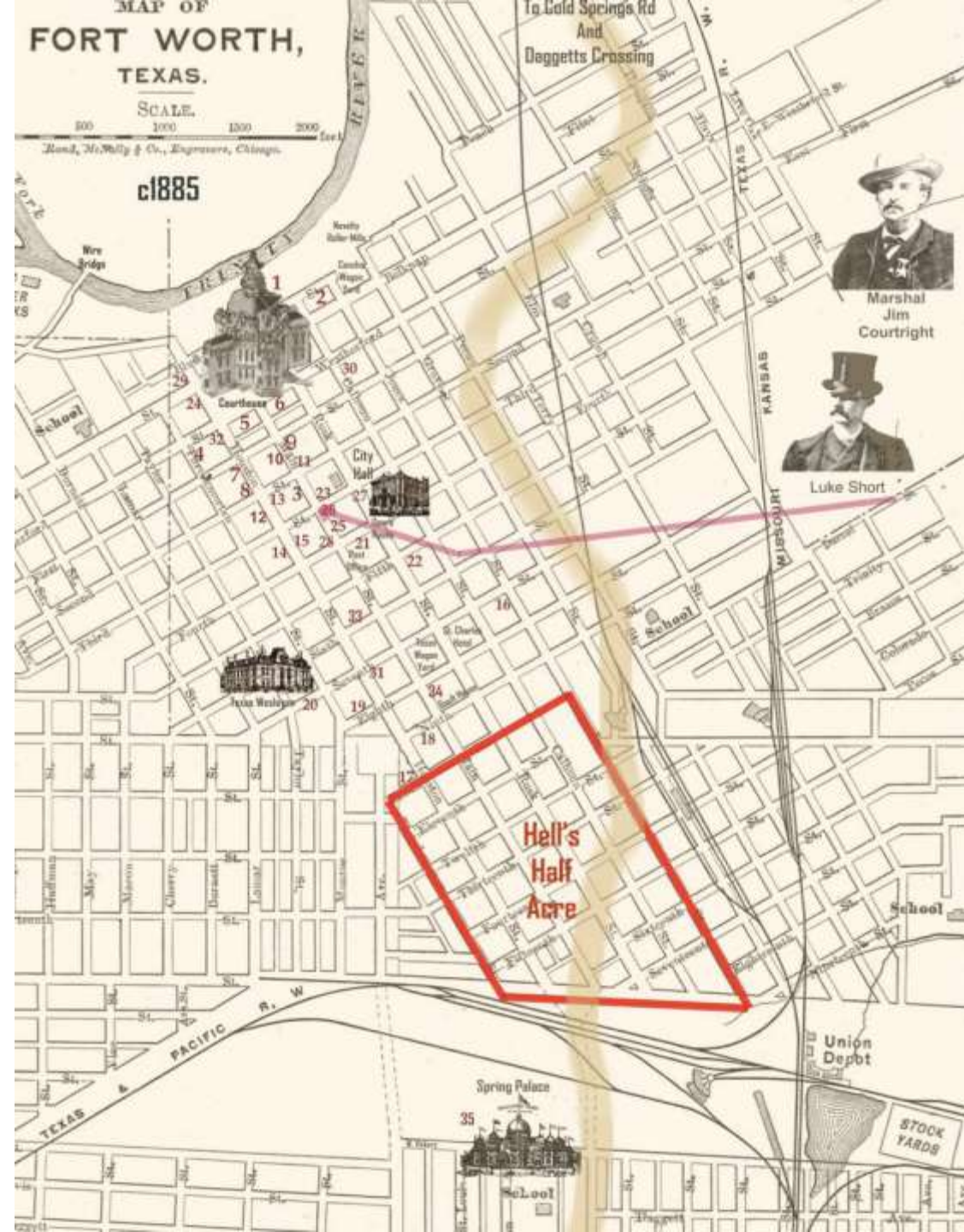




Hell's Half Acre:

- Much more than $\frac{1}{2}$ acre

Map credit: Pete Charlton



<<Commerce Street

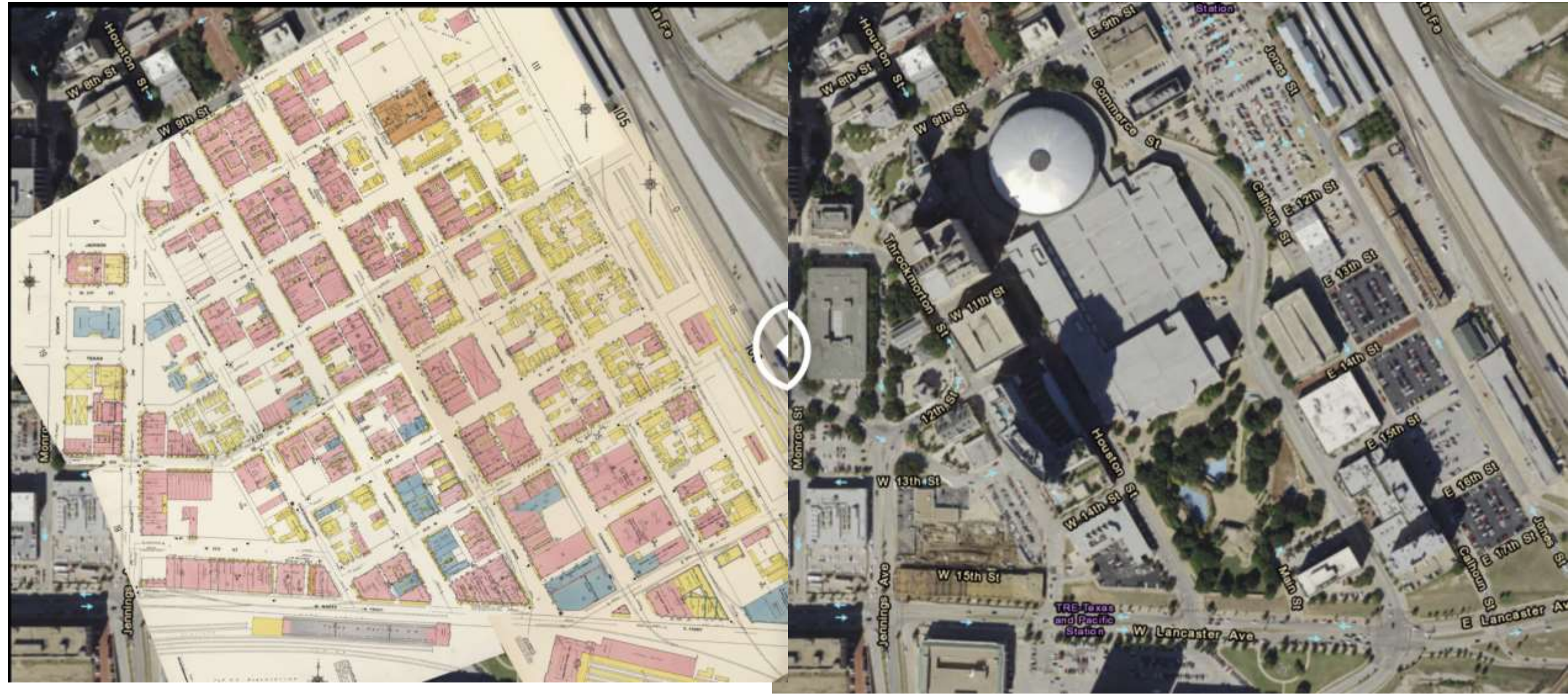
Hell's Half Acre

<<A&M
Law

Where did the Acre go?

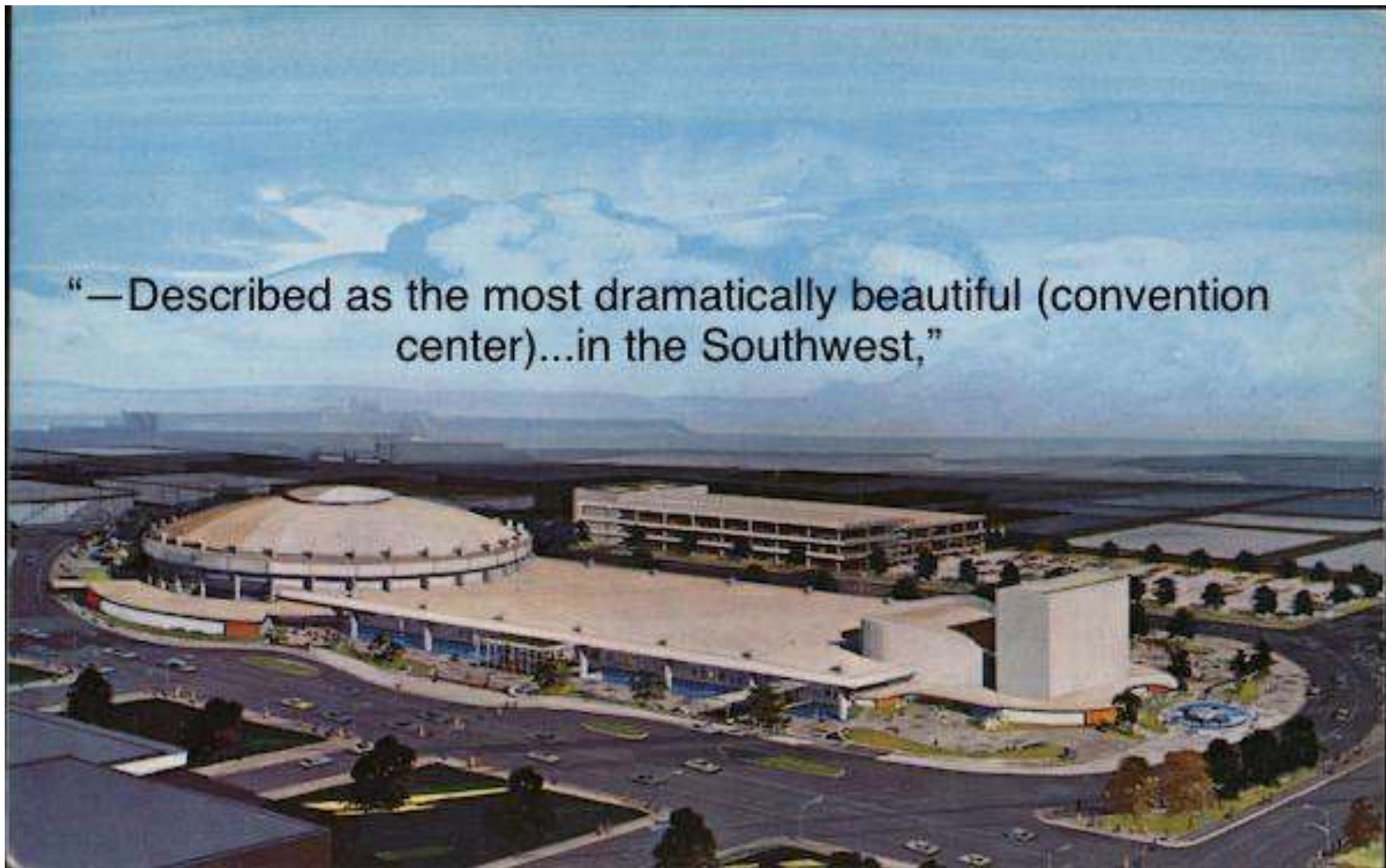


Acre, before and after. *Credit: Adam Fogel.*





“—Described as the most dramatically beautiful (convention center)...in the Southwest,”



Whence came the Acre?

- Cattle-drives followed a natural path, from Commerce (Rusk) to a ford across the river at Samuels Avenue.
- Where the cowboys go, the Acre will grow, giving them what they want: whiskey saloons with “ride in service”, dance halls, gambling houses (faro, monte) and prostitution.





W. Russell
1909



Cattle Drive Dynamics

- 1.5 million Texas cattle driven to Kansas between 1866-1873.
- Typical herd: 3000 cattle, 11 men.
- Cowboys or “waddies”, aged 12-18, usually white. Earn \$20-40 per month.
- (Horse) Wranglers, Ramrods, Cooks: more experienced, frequently African American, Hispanic, or Native American. Earn \$50-75\$.



COL. O. W. WHEELER'S HERD, EN ROUTE FOR KANSAS PACIFIC RAILWAY, IN 1867.

- 1871: 600,000 cattle driven through Fort Worth. Estimate at least 2000 cowboy visitors in town with pop. 300.
- 1876: saloon licenses pay \$4000 per year, Fort Worth's largest business tax base.

The Acre served to separate the Cowboy from his money as efficiently as possible.

One Stop Shop To Take All The Cowboy's Money

"Company"

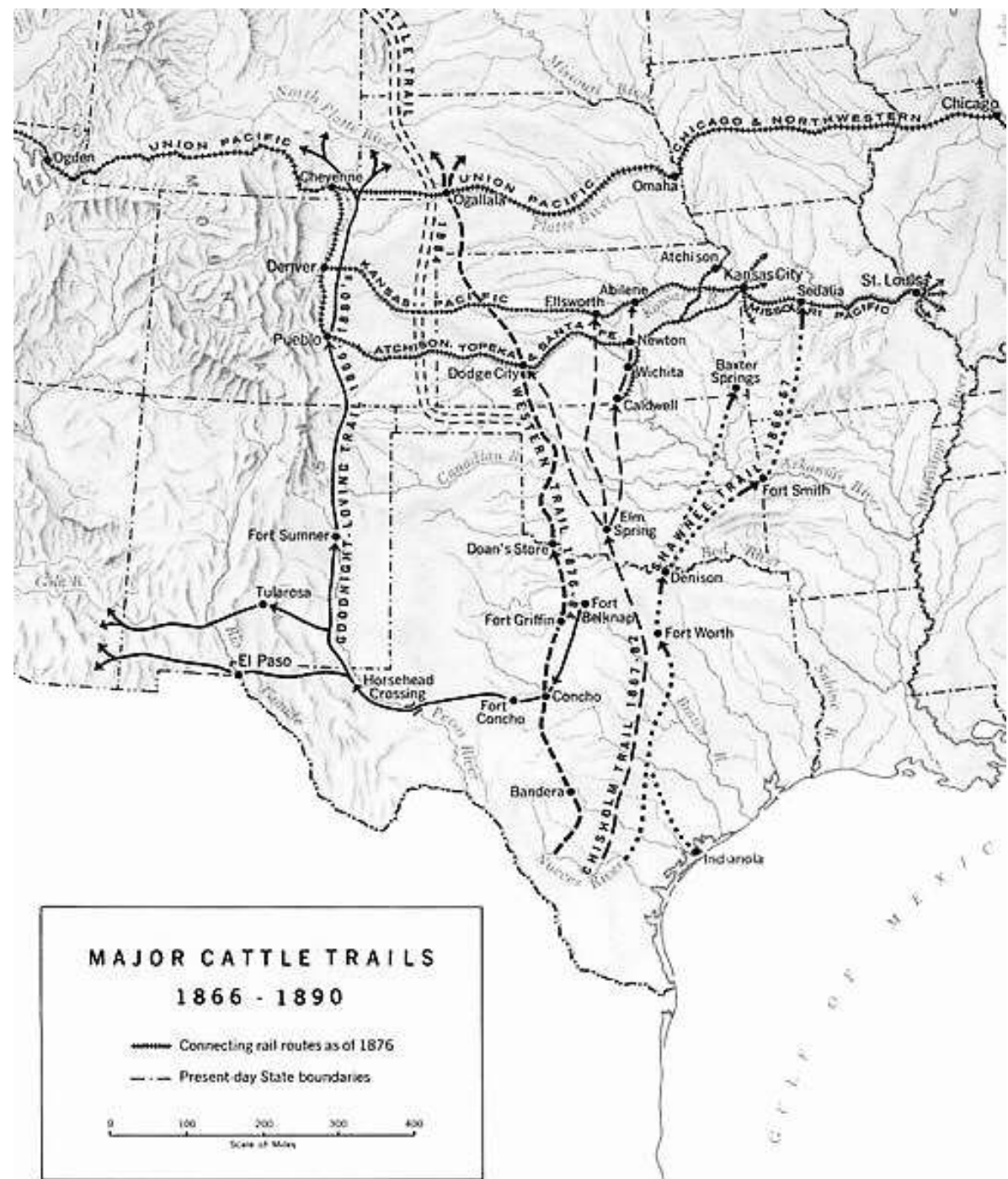
Faro

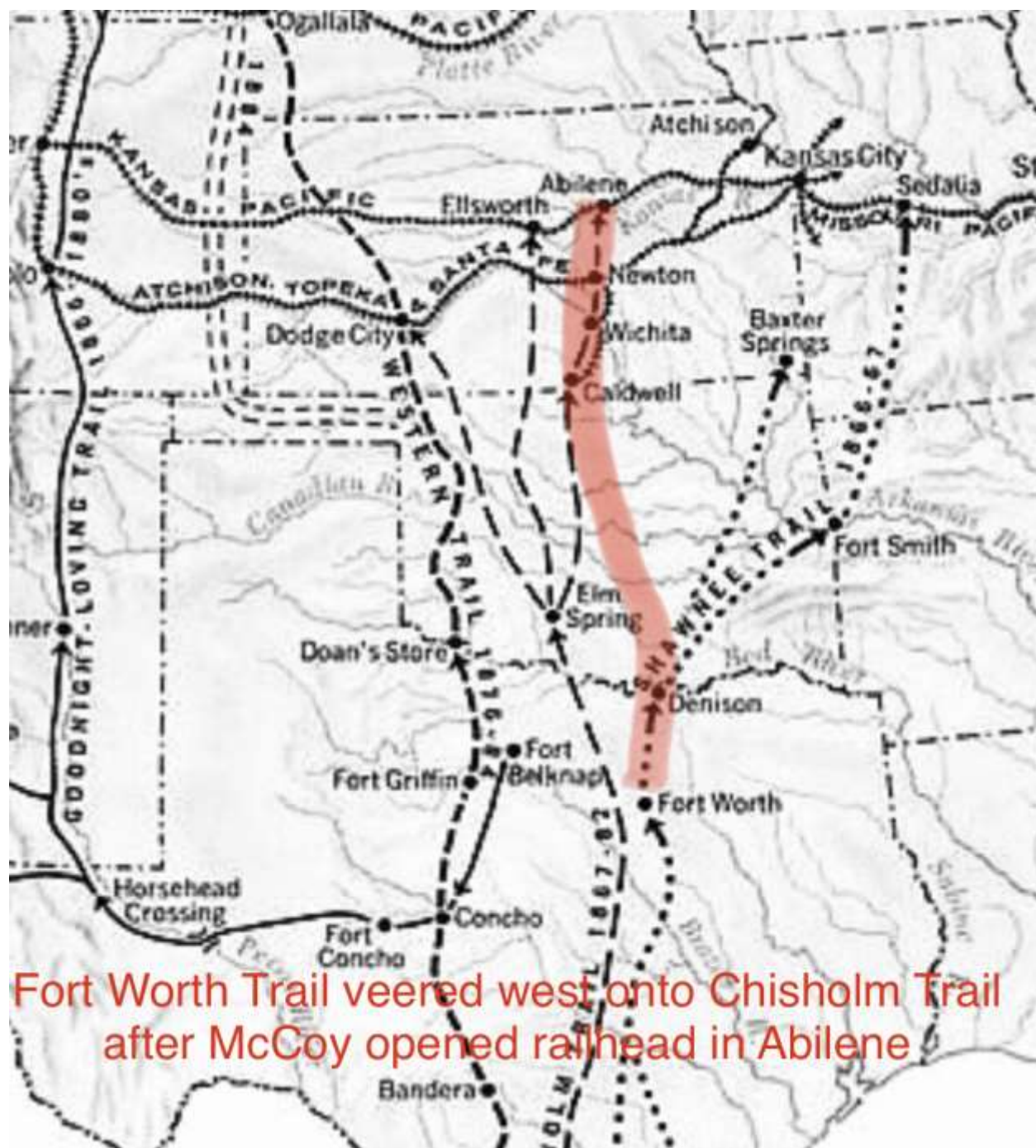
Booze





- Layout of Trails, with traffic moving west over time.





Fort Worth Trail veered west onto Chisholm Trail
after McCoy opened railhead in Abilene

Cattle Drive dynamics

- Cattle Drives are routing from San Antonio to Fort Worth, and then to points in Kansas: Abilene, and later to points further west as the railways extend and the quarantine line is pushed further.
- Quarantine: Texas cattle bring the Texas/"splenetic" fever in mature unexposed cattle— our cattle wipe out Kansan farmer's own beef and dairy cattle. This leads to barricades, taxes on cattle to pay damages, and eventually quarantine lines mandated by state legislature
- Texans refused to believe in fever but McCoy convinced them with British scientist, and the solution of a five cent tax per cattle (where they might earn 20\$).

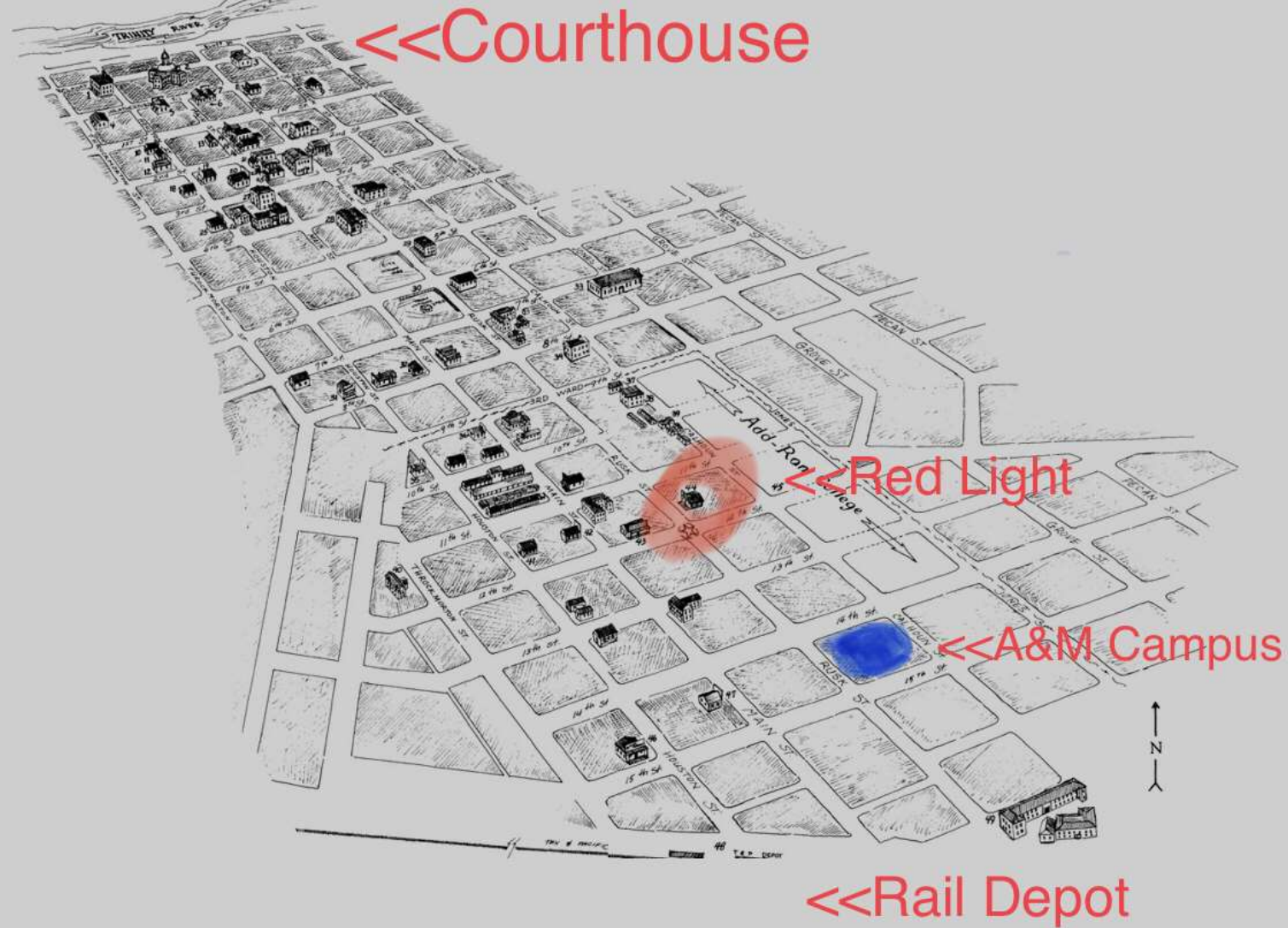
(In)Famous Establishments of the Cattle Drive Era

- The Waco Tap
- The Two Minnies (glass ceiling with nude women disporting— playing ten pins, etc).
- The Red Light: owned by “Rowdy” Joe Lowe.

Two photos of Rowdy Joe



Credit: Dr. Richard F. Selcer



**Hell's Half Acre—with Key Spots from
Fort Worth's Early Days, ca. 1876—1880.**

Legend:

- 1. Transcontinental Hotel
- 2. Tarrant County Court-house, 1879
- 3. Tarrant County Jail
- 4. Eclipse Saloon
- 5. Pacific Billiard Parlor & Saloon
- 6. Fort Worth Standard offices
- 7. Trinity Saloon & Billiard Parlor
- 8. Texas Express Co. office
- 9. T. I. and Elizabeth Court-right's residence
- 10. Office Saloon

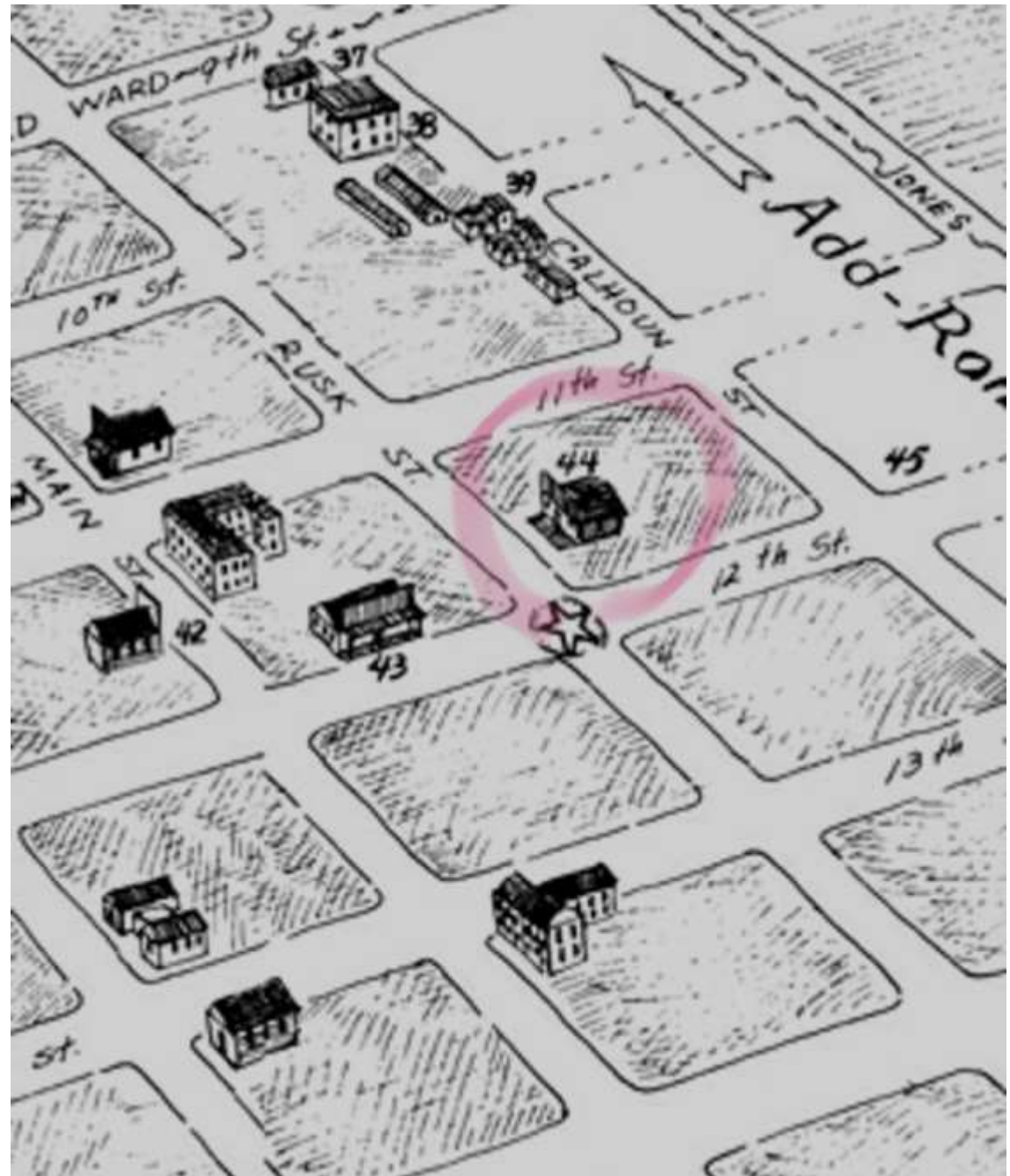
- 11. Herman Kussatz' Tivoli Saloon
- 12. Fort Worth Democrat offices
- 13. Club Room Saloon (& Ten Pin Alley)
- 14. Johnson's Ranche Saloon (later the Bismark Saloon)
- 15. Club Room Saloon (Henry Burns, prop.)
- 16. El Paso Saloon
- 17. Fort Worth City Hall
- 18. Occidental Saloon
- 19. R. J. Winder's Cattle Exchange Saloon
- 20. White Elephant Saloon
- 21. Theatre Comique (formerly the Adelphi)
- 22. Centennial Theater (later "My" Theater)

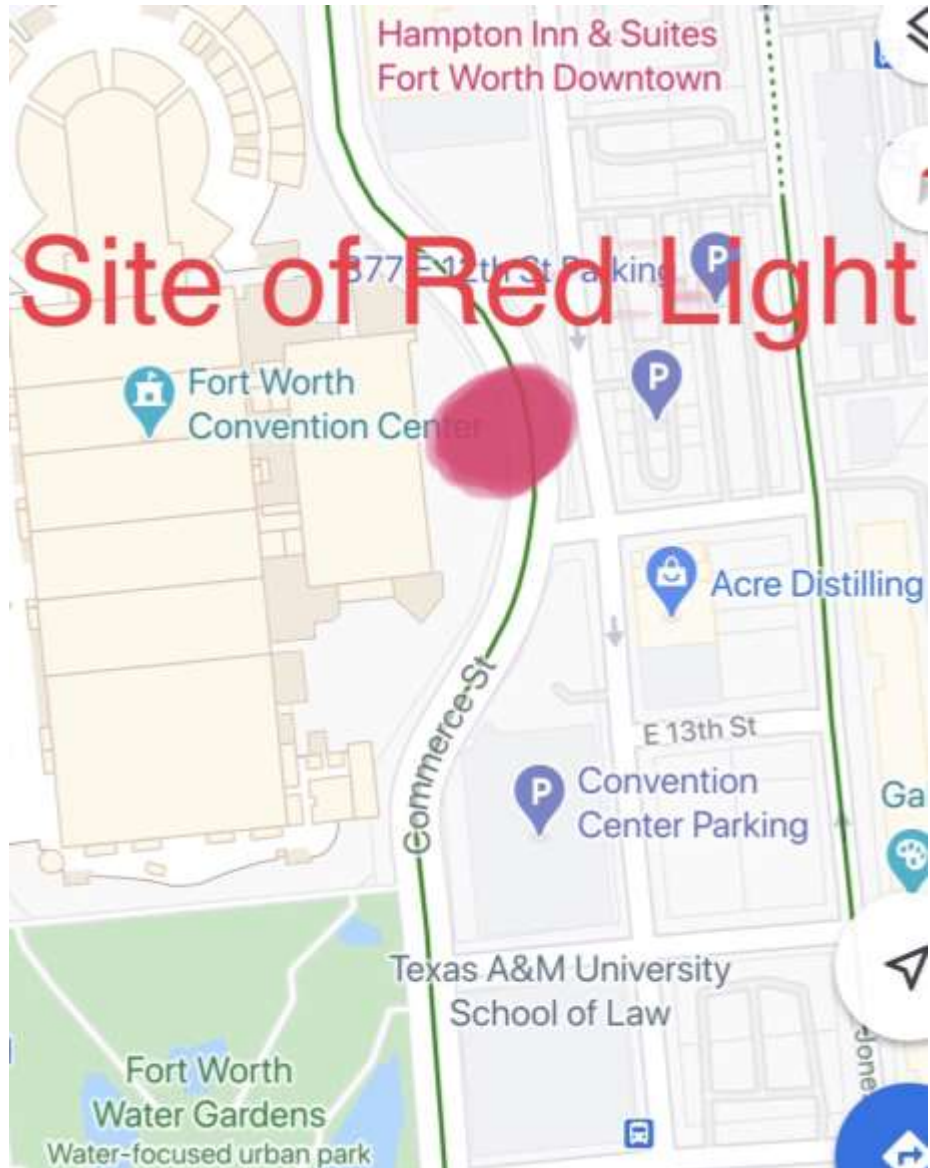
- 23. Merchants Restaurant
- 24. Old City Jail
- 25. Empress Saloon & Beer Hall
- 26. Lee Summer's Sporting House
- 27. El Paso Hotel
- 28. Mansion House Hotel
- 29. Commercial Hotel
- 30. Texas Wagon Yard
- 31. Comique Saloon (John Leer, prop.)
- 32. Street Railway Mule Barn
- 33. Waco Tap Saloon
- 34. Sporting House, 1877

- 35. Texas Exchange Saloon
- 36. Headlight Bar
- 37. Jim Earp's residence
- 38. Sporting House, 1877
- 39. City Gas Works, 1877
- 40. St. Stanislaus Catholic Church
- 41. Frank's Saloon
- 42. Emerald Saloon

- 43. Cowboy Saloon
- 44. Red Light Saloon
- 45. Add-Ran College (proposed site, 1871-1872)
- 46. Palace Saloon
- 47. Local Option Saloon
- 48. Texas & Pacific Depot
- 49. Fort Worth Cotton Compress Co.

- Rowdy Joe's Red Light







Almost TCU>>

A&M>>

Streetscape

- Pineboard houses
- Dirt/dust/mud roads
- Hogs







Arrival of Railroad in 1876.

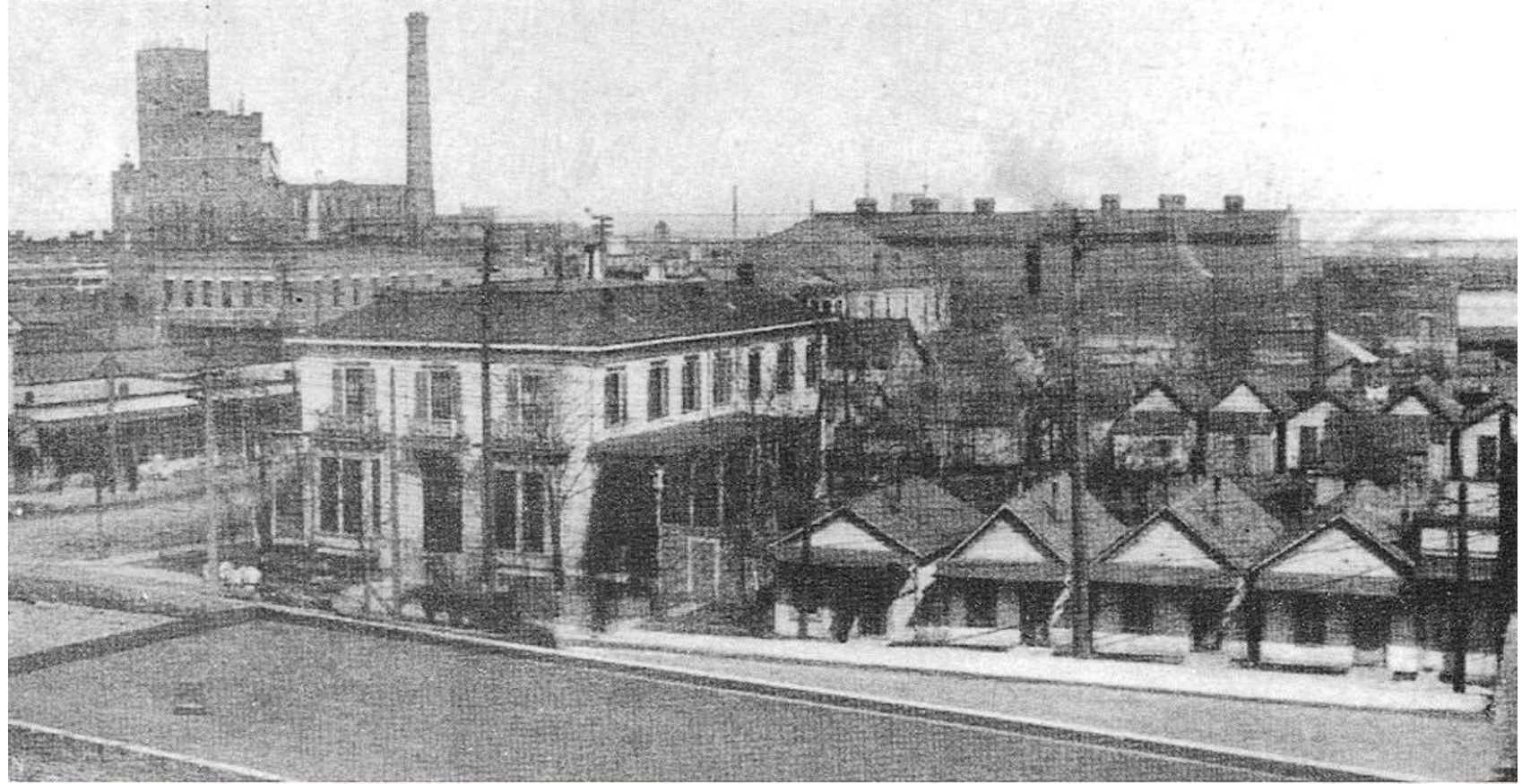
- Fort Worth is the western terminus.
- Fort Worth's population booms.
- The Acre expands/is built up, as the railroad brings in more customers (transients, railroaders) and the presence of the railroad tracks, warehouses and depot begin to drive-off middle class residential construction and retail.

Crib Girls and Brothels.

- Crib girls operate on their own account in one-room, one-door, one-window, street or alley facing sheds rented on a monthly basis.
- Crib girls earn 25-50 cents per customer.
- Brothel girls “board” in a house operated by a madame, having a much higher monthly rent deducted from their earnings but afforded care and protection (physical, legal).
- Brothel girls earn 2-5 dollars per customer.

Photograph of
brothel and cribs,
11th and Rusk, Fort
Worth. ***Purity
Journal.***, 1906.

*(Very close to
previous site of
Rowdy Joe's Red
Light. Note the Fort
Worth Brewery in
the background.)*



A black and white photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a row of small, single-story houses with gabled roofs sits along the street. Behind them is a large, multi-story building with many windows. In the background, a tall industrial smokestack rises above other buildings. The word "Brothel" is written in red text over the large building, and the word "Crips" is written in red text over the small houses.

Brothel

Crips

- According to interviews conducted by H. Gordon Frost of El Paso with surviving crib girls, brothel girls and madames, the economics of the industry were counter-intuitive: the crib girls would end up earning more money than the brothel girls and might eventually have the capital to open a brothel on their own account.

Mary Porter, Fort Worth's most famous madame.

- Established in Fort Worth from 1886-1905.
- Brothel at 1116 Rusk, the corner of Rusk and 11th Street. *One block from previous site of Rowdy Joe's Red Light.*
- Eventually owned the entire East block of 1100 Rusk, and left an estate of \$20,000 (about \$500,000 in today's value).
- Her brothel first operated under the name of "Maison de Joie", later simply listed as a "Boarding House".

Mary's boarders

- 6-12 women.
- Also employed: bartender, an errand boy, a piano player, and an African American couple to tend the house.
- In many brothels one man served the role of bartender, piano player and bouncer, and was referred to as the "Professor."

The photographic record of FW brothels is sparse-to-nonexistent, but we can look at photos from similar establishments in same time period:

Brothel staff.

*Image credit:
Colorado
Historical
Society.*



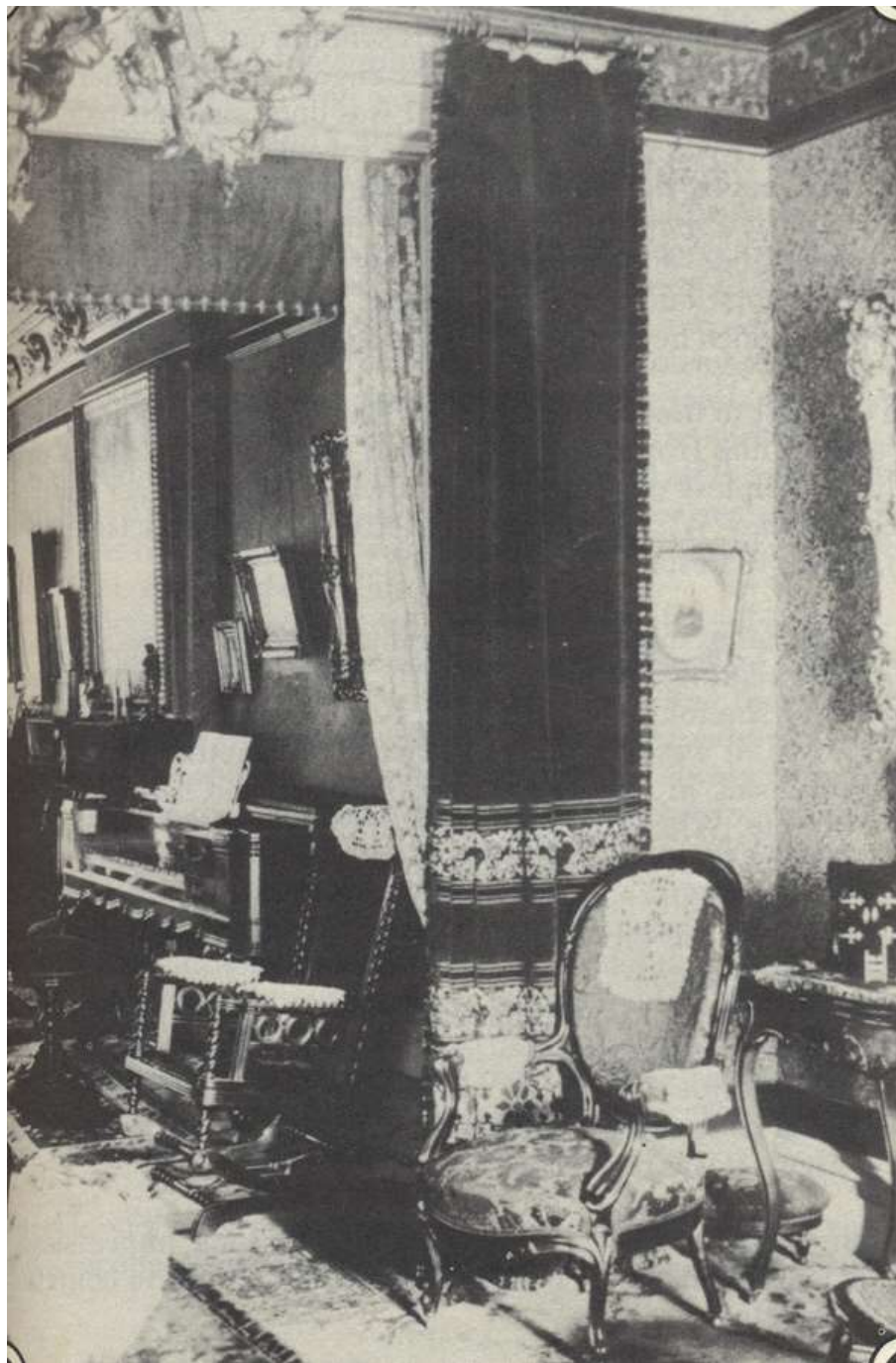
- Personal album of Madame Alice Abbott, of El Paso.



- Alice letting posterity know her feelings about a rival madame



Etta Clark's
brothel parlor,
El Paso. Circa
1890. *Alice
Abbott Album.*



Room in
brothel,
New Orleans.
E.J. Bellocq.



Prostitute posing,
New Orleans.
E.J. Bellocq.



For Mary Porter, going to court was a cost of business

- Between 1893-1897 brought to court 130 times.
- Her bonds were posted by some of Fort Worth's leading businessmen, E.B. Daggett (son of E.M.), and Bill Ward— city councilman, owner of the White Elephant Saloon and Fort Worth Cats baseball team.
- Most charges in Municipal Court, for “keeping a disorderly house,” or “vagrancy”.

“Vagrancy”

- Catch-all ordinance used to regulate— and garner fines/fees— from prostitution.
- Usually resolved in single day, on payment of fine.
- English custom of regulating prostitution thru the 1714 and 1744 Vagrancy Act, which treated prostitutes as “Idle and Disorderly Persons” and proscribed one month’s confinement in workhouse and then removal to their Parrish of birth/origin.

Vagrancy laws of England

- English custom of regulating prostitution thru the 1714 and 1744 Vagrancy Act, which treated prostitutes as “Idle and Disorderly Persons” and proscribed one month’s confinement in workhouse and then removal to their Parrish of birth/origin.
- From 1660s the enforcement of Vagrancy laws had conferred on constable or beadle a small monetary reward— 2 shillings.
- Only selectively enforced, and the overseeing official of London from 1729-1746, Thomas De Veil, was known as a “Trading Justice” (a justice who could be corruptly purchased) because of his perceived friendly arrangements with brothel keepers.

Thomas Rowlandson,
*An Arrest of a Woman
at Night*, circa 1800.
Courtauld Collection.



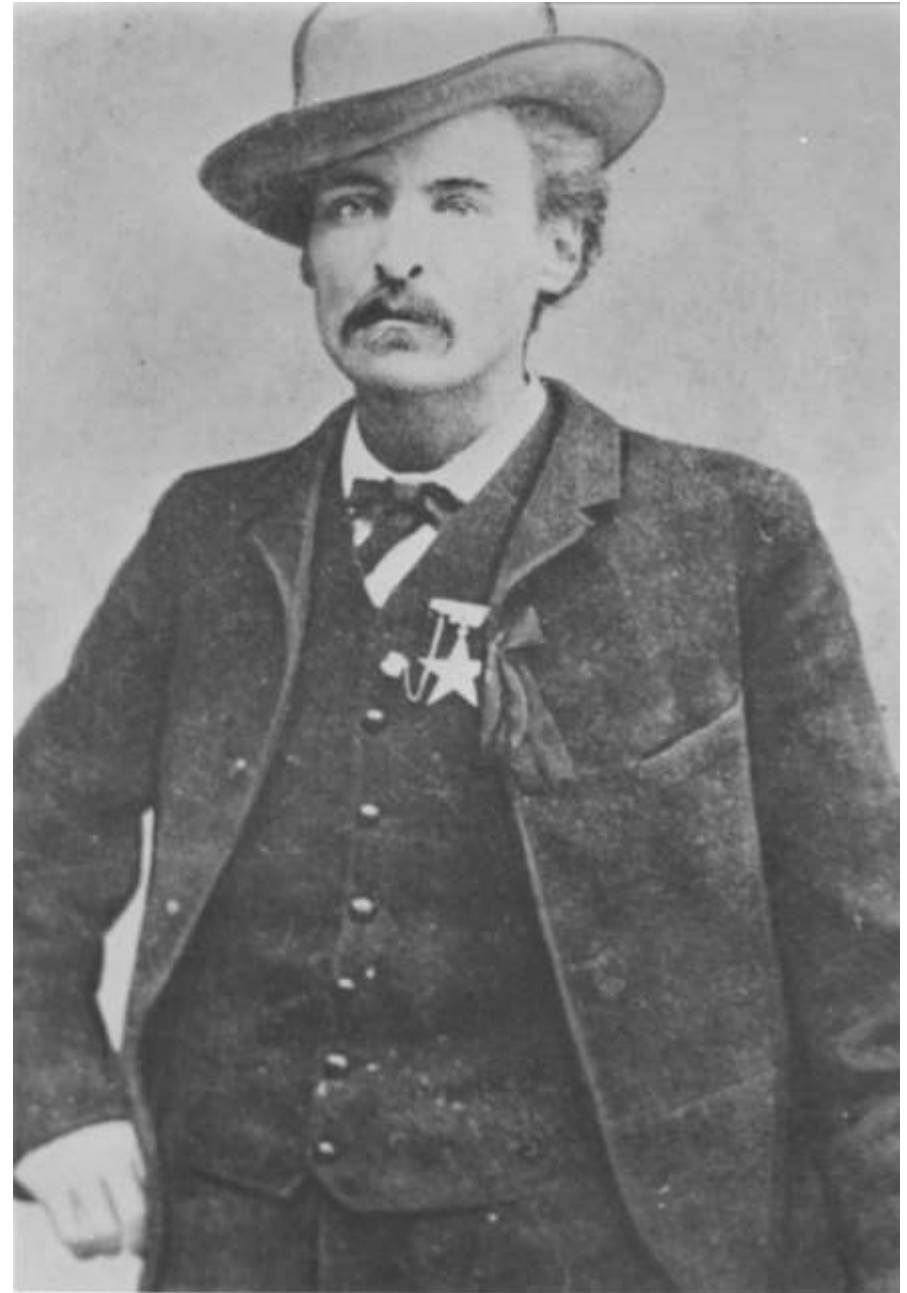
Frontier adaptation of English traditions of policing and vagrancy

- In England, policing had been a communal responsibility devolved leading citizen, who would hire a “deputy” to undertake the trouble of patrolling the streets, removing refuse, and apprehending undesirables (“vagrants”).
- In Fort Worth the Marshall, appointed by the municipal gov or elected, was expected to fulfill the customary English duties of a constable’s deputy: the Marshall was expected to patrol the streets, conduct night watch, remove rubbish and stray animals, in addition to enforcing city ordinances.

(continued)

- The first appointed Marshall retired from his post, apparently fed-up with low salary, troublesome duties.
- Later “successful” Marshalls like Jim Courtwright thrived in their positions by earning a commission on the vice/vagrancy ordinances they enforced— a tradition harkening back to the 2-5 pence reward per vagrant, in London of the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Effectively speaking: the courts and law enforcement of Fort Worth and many other Texas cities were paid out of fines on vagrancy or gambling ordinances, and increasingly during 1880s this income subsidized city gov.
- The fines acted as “effective license fees” on the vice industry.

- Jim Courtwright, Marshall.
- Jim and his deputies apparently saved the Court some trouble by pocketing many of the fines directly, cutting out the middle man.
- Later tried to enforce a protection racket as a “private detective”, killed by Luke Short in front of White Elephant Saloon in a shoot out.



What cleaned up the Acre?

- WW1: Army directed the closure of Vice districts near Army installations— Camp Bowie on Fort Worth's west side:
- Texas Supreme Court ruling in 1915, *Spence vs. Fenchler*, established that municipality (El Paso) could not regulate Vice districts, when such vices were prohibited by state law; an Article 1, Section 28 provision. *Bonus fun fact: this case was brought by Lessing, who served as attorney for both Pancho Villa and Walt Disney, who cheerfully referred to Lessing as the RHB or Red Headed B—rd.*

What cleaned up the Acre? (continued)

- The vice district naturally moved to Jacksboro Highway, in keeping with the fashion of the times (cars) and a discreet removal from public view.
- Prostitutes increasingly operated on their own account as call girls or independent operators in modern hotels.
- Sexual liberation removed much of the demand for prostitution; and a superior gambling environment was only a plane flight away in Las Vegas.

The Last Brothel In The Acre

- Eunice Gray's Waco Hotel, situated across the street from today's A&M campus— approximately at present site of cascading fountain in the Water Gardens.
- Eunice Gray— real name was Ermine McEntire—was a retired madame who lived in her premises, died in a fire in 1962 at the age of 82.
- The Waco was torn down in 1969, and \$100,000.00 worth of WW1 bonds were found hidden in its walls. Probate court passed the Gray/McEntire's money to her niece.

Eunice Gray.



Waco Hotel, just before demolition
before construction of Convention
Center/Water Gardens.



No. 18 1600 to 1608 Commerce St

Camera position Northeast corner
Commerce and East 15th - Southwest

