TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
School of Law

## TAMU Law Answers Webinars

# "A Visit to Hell's Half Acre and Fort Worth History"

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**Presented by:**

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- Moderator: Alumni Board President Dana Zachry '11, Attorney, Katten & Benson

TRANSCRIPT of webinar video [https://youtu.be/n4xg0f_kyUc]:

- All right. Well, we're about three minutes into the noon hour. I'm going to go ahead and get started, and we'll let people keep trickling in. So howdy, everyone. Good afternoon. I'm Dana Zachry, class of 2011, and president of the Texas A&M University School of Law Alumni Board. And it's my pleasure today to welcome you to the law school's webinar, A Visit to Hell's Half Acre and Fort Worth History, part of the Texas A&M University Law Answers webinar series.

In this series, the law school presents webinars on the CARES Act in April, and continued with webinars throughout the summer addressing various legal issues in the age of COVID-19. And we've added today's topic to spice it up and provide a fun and historical program. And the timing could not be more appropriate, as we ring in a new school year.

The law school's alumni board is proud to present today's topic. Pre-COVID, we worked in tandem with the law school to host alumni networking events. And now, we're working to provide programming that allows for social distancing, of course.

The board recently sent a gift and a letter of support to the group who will be taking the bar exam, hopefully, in September. And we are also putting together an Alumni Awards program to honor the great work our graduates are doing. So if you're a graduate of the law school, we encourage you to follow the law school on social media, read the monthly newsletter, and stay connected. And when this is over, we look forward to once again bringing everyone together in person.

After our initial presentation, we will be utilizing the Q&A function on here for questions instead of using the chat function. So please type your question in the Q&A box at any time, and we will address as many questions as time allows.

I'm excited to introduce our speaker, Brendan Smart. He's a librarian, museum educator, and history guide with several years of experience taking folks on walking tours and bus tours of Fort Worth, with tours highlighting the history of downtown and the Cultural District.

Brendan has lived, worked, and studied all over the world-- in Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, China, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UK, and is deeply passionate about global and local histories, and of sharing these histories to enrich a community's awareness of itself and of its own unique heritage. So Brendan, thanks for being with us today, and welcome.

- Thank you very much, Dana. And hello to everybody. Hello. So we've got a lot of ground to cover, so I'm just going to warn everybody that we may take some of this at a running pace. But just to let you know, everything that I share with you on the PowerPoint will be shared with A&M and will be made publicly available.

So if I go quickly through anything, don't worry about it. The PowerPoint will be there. And also I will be available. You can reach out to me, email me, and I'd be happy to talk with you in greater depth. So let's just get right into it.

We were talking about how we're doing a socially distancing event. But now we're going to talk about Hell's Half Acre, which is the exact opposite of social distancing. So there on the title, you can see the devil.

And maybe some of you already recognize that. That is actually in the fountain next to the Tarrant County courthouse. That's the fountain that was originally placed there back in the 1890s. Sometimes its referred to as the horse fountain, because of that horse you see up on the top, and because it was originally placed there so that people could water their horses.

Now, you have a different kind of a figure on every side of it. And somebody I think was being a little bit cheeky, and the side of the fountain that's facing Commerce Street, which, of course, leads to-- all roads lead to A&M Law campus-- somebody-- Commerce Street was basically the main avenue of the Acre. So somebody was being a little cheeky and was giving the devil his due, as it were.

So to begin with the history of Fort Worth, we're going to go through the first steps in a fast sprint. So it is called Fort Worth because there was a fort there. The fort was established in 1849, more or less, exactly where the courthouse is today.

And it was placed there in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War by the United States Army, effectively to enforce a treaty boundary that existed between Anglo territories to the east, so everything east of Fort Worth would be kind of safe and open for settlement, and everything to the West would be Native American territory, and more specifically, Comanche territory.

That's kind of-- so Fort Worth is situated at that boundary, and that boundary is aligned with a natural border, the Cross Timbers, which is a forest by kind of Texas standards, I guess, or prairie standards. It's a very interesting forest. It's only about 10, 15 miles wide.

But in its previous existence, it was 15 miles wide that ran straight north all the way through Oklahoma. So it was just a very natural boundary. And actually, to the Native Americans, it was one of their main navigation points. If they were moving north or south, they would follow the edge of the timbers.

So naturally, as we move forward with time, that became also the natural path of later cattle drives. And of course, as we know, Fort Worth is Cowtown. So anyways, Fort Worth is where we leave the timbers and step onto the open prairie.

And here we have a nice artist's rendition of what the fort of Fort Worth might have looked like. And again, just to put that in modern context, picture the courthouse plopped on top of that. And that's not an accident. That fort was kind of the seed of all later settlement. So not an accident that they put the courthouse right there.

And then you have to make reference to E.M. Daggett who is, more than anyone, probably the father of Fort Worth. And to back that up, we can point out that the first city seal of Fort Worth literally had this man's face on it.

So he's an interesting character. His family is-- we call him E.M. Daggett, like Daggett Elementary School. But his real name was [INAUDIBLE] He was a French Canadian, a family of French Canadian traders who have been trading up and down the Mississippi in that early frontier pioneer period. In fact, his grandfather was one of the first merchants to set up shop in St. Louis.

So Daggett's connection with Fort Worth was initially that his brother, while this was still a fort, set up the first trading outpost out here, one mile from the fort boundaries, which was a-- funny enough, to bring ourselves to the subject of Hell's Half Acre and vice-- you weren't allowed to sell whiskey within a mile of the fort. So a mile away they were.

And from that connection, the Daggetts kind of became major landowners, major boosters of Fort Worth. And I also bring Daggett into the picture because his specific landholdings constitute most of the area that became the Acre. And again, that's probably not quite a coincidence.

You see, Daggett always knew that whiskey equals power. One of the more famous examples of this-- early in the history of Fort Worth, we were basically in a competition with a previously existing town called Birdsville, that was the county seat. And we had an election to see who would be the new county seat and get to have the courthouse and all the records and all the influence and power that would go with that.

So Daggett came to the rescue with free whiskey. So anytime you see a bar, don't look down your nose. Know that you are seeing something that made Fort Worth possible.

And here, we have a picture of the Acre in it's later fully developed existence in The Purity Journal. And we can see what people in The Purity Journal published by Dallas thought of it. And you see the devil makes an entrance once again. "Fort Worth, a modern Sodom-- hell is moved beneath thee to receive thee at thy coming." Yes.

So the Acre is also known as the Third Ward, because that's basically the city district that it comprised of. The origin of the name Hell's Half Acre is actually a bit of a mystery. There are a lot of theories. One theory is that there was a California mining camp with that name. There is a Civil War battlefield that was referred to as Hell's Half Acre.

But maybe most pertinently for us in Texas, there is a town called Webberville outside of Austin that was called Hell's Half Acre before the Civil War. And it was described as a place of gambling, especially. Now, my own pet theory-- take this for the two cents that it's worth-- is that the connection might be to gambling.

Because in those days, Faro, which was very much the gambling card game of the wild west, Faro houses were referred to as "Hells." So just taking a personal crack at it, two cents, I think that hell might have something to do with Faro.

And I do want to do a quick, fast rundown on Faro, because again, it was a lot of the economy here and the defining card game of the wild west. It had group play, kind of like craps, and would encourage a great deal of excitement. It's a fast game.

On the face of it, the odds are actually very, very fair-- actually, the most fair to the players. But 100% of the time, as Faro was played in the old days, 100% of the time people were cheating. The Faro artist basically had lots of tricks to make whatever card he wanted to appear, or whatever outcome he wanted to appear happen at any given moment-- so rigged games. And here, we see some people playing Faro.

And I wanted to throw this guy in really quickly. Because Faro, like a lot of things that we think of as defining vice in the American Southwest-- we think of New Orleans. A lot of that originally came from France.

And I bring this gentleman up, John Law, because he actually made a reputation for himself as a Faro player in Paris in the 1700s. He so impressed the regent of France with his Faro-playing abilities and his statistical savviness, that they basically placed him in charge of the French-- allowed him to set up a French central bank, gave him complete control of the French currency and finance.

He introduced paper currency for the first time on a wide scale, created a tremendous credit bubble, made everybody rich. Faro became the rage, because everybody thought they were tremendously rich. Their fortunes were being gambled away every day, and then everything blew up.

To bring Faro home to America, during his time of power, he was actually made the Duke of Arkansas. And also, he had a lot to do with the development of New Orleans-- further

development of New Orleans as a vice district. And that when his cards were basically down, and his schemes in France looked like they're going to go up, a big part of his float was to convince everybody that they would make unlimited money from New Orleans and the lands in the Mississippi.

And to drive that point home, he rounded up every beggar and prostitute in Paris, armed them with shovels, paraded them through the streets of Paris to show that they were going to go on and dig out of the Mississippi all the gold that was there. And that's actually the event that led to the explosion of his bubble. At the end of the same day of this parade, everybody noticed that the prostitutes and the beggars had escaped and were standing around trying to pawn their shovels. So yes, the wild west was always wild.

What was the Acre? Well, it was saloons. It was dance halls. It was gambling. It was brothels, and it was crib girls. But from this contemporary illustration, to the average cowboy or person, it was actually just kind of a good time. You have to remember that these were young people just looking for any connection, any bit of fun and excitement. And that's kind of what the Acre was initially giving them. I mean, look at this young man. He could be a young undergraduate.

Hell's Half Acre-- well, it was actually much more than half an acre. This very helpful map by Mr. Charlton kind of helps us situate it on the contemporary landscape. You can see the courthouse. Over there, again, the site of the original fort. You can see the bend of the river.

And then down here at the bottom, actually, you can kind of see-- here, I've highlighted exactly where your current A&M law campus is. And as I mentioned earlier, Commerce Street is really the main access of the Acre, kind of the path on which the Acre grew.

Now, where did the Acre go? Because you may look around when you're in the law school thinking, well, I don't see any surviving traces. Well, we basically deliberately wiped out almost all traces of it with the Convention Center and the Water Gardens, as part of a slum clearance project in the 1960s and '70s.

And again, this map right here by Mr. Adam Fogel, kind of allows you to see how densely built up the Acre was, and then what's there now. And if anything, when it was first done, the Convention Center felt very, very bare before those trees could grow. In fact, the architect at the Water Gardens, his original plan was to put a fence around it and leave the fence up for 15 or 20 years until the trees grew. He was overruled.

So whence came the Acre? Well, the long and the short of it is from the cowboy's desires and capitalism doing what it does, giving people what they want. Thence, came the Acre. You see, the cattle drives followed a natural path, following along Commerce Street, which in those days was known as Rusk, to a ford that existed in the Trinity River past the courthouse on Samuels Avenue.

And where the cowboys go, the Acre will grow-- again, giving them what they want. It gave them whiskey saloons with ride-in service. You could literally, famously, ride your horse into a bar on the Acre, and receive your liquor in the saddle.

There were also dance halls and gambling houses, again, mainly Faro and Monte-- poker really comes later-- and prostitution. And here, we have a nice image by a famous cowboy artist, Russell, capturing, not specific to the Acre, but you have to remember, these were universal themes. These were rowdy folks with lots of alcohol, doing what people do with lots of alcohol.

And I put this contemporary illustration in just, again, drive home the fact that when you're looking at Commerce Street, you should really picture thousands and thousands of cattle being trailed on that road. And I know of-- from the surviving historical record, we know of at least one instance where a stampede did occur, much to the terror of citizens.

So again, early, the Acre really grew from the presence of those cattle drives. And in that period, the peak cattle drives, about 1866 to 1873, 1.5 million cattle were driven out of Texas into Kansas, meeting up with that railhead that was driving through Kansas.

A typical herd-- just to put things in perspective at Fort Worth. A typical herd-- we're talking about 3,000 cattle being driven by about 11 men, so a lot of cattle. And cowboys-- their demographics were [INAUDIBLE]. Most of the cowboys are young. Again, they're about 12 to 18, usually white. And they earn about $20 to $40 a month.

Now, there are other-- this idea that we have of the wild west being a very white environment is something that we kind of got from Hollywood, especially in the early days when people were being segregated and kept out. A more accurate representation, you would have seen more diversity.

In fact, the higher paid cowboys were typically, or frequently, African American, Hispanic, or Native American. Because these were more experienced cowboys, with more developed skill sets-- horse wranglers, because every cowboy on this drive would have to constantly be jumping from one horse to another to remain in play; ramrods, the most experienced cowboys who knew exactly how to maintain and control the herd; cooks, so a lot of diversity.

In 1871, to put things in perspective, about 600,000 cattle were driven through Fort Worth. So basically, we're talking about almost our entire economy. And from the figures mentioned earlier, we can estimate that about 2,000 cowboy visitors must've come through. And at that time, our town had a population of about 300 people.

So again, just from catering to that business, you had our business. In 1876, saloon licenses were paying $4,000 a year and were our largest tax base. But when you get right down to it, the Acre served to separate the cowboy from his money as efficiently as possible, and I think it did a good job.

So here we have it. This is a dance hall, and not in the Acre. Unfortunately, the photographic record for the Acre isn't as strong as we would like it to be. But again, this was a universal kind of an environment. Anywhere there was a cowtown, you had the same sorts of establishments.

So this is actually Dodge City in Kansas, and it's a one-stop shop to take all the cowboy's money. You've got booze. You've got Faro. You got company.

Because remember, people are starved for any kind of excitement, any kind of human contact. And think of this gentleman from an earlier illustration. It was entitled A Texas Grogshop. You see how people felt about it.

So you can kind of see on this map the layout of those cattle drive trails, and you can kind of see the path that these cowboys were taking. And that is important to the history of Fort Worth in that this was really was kind of a launching-off point before they made a big push across the prairie, which probably helped us in that both going and coming, this would have been a place to blow off steam. But again, to put things in perspective, these cattle drives were moving all the way from San Antonio to reach those destinations in Kansas.

Now, the cattle drives-- in some ways, they didn't last as long as we might think, because they were constantly in tension with quarantines. Again, topical-- surprisingly, topical. Texas cattle, you see, had lice on them that would communicate a fever if they bit a cow that was already grown.

If the tick bit a calf, the calf gets sick and would live. If it bit your grown, unexposed cow, all your cattle would die, which created tremendous tension as these Texas cowboys were trying to go into, at first Missouri and Indiana directly, and then into Kansas.

Farmers, with their dairy cows and their own attempts at cattle ranching, would set up barricades and would lobby for quarantines. We, in some level, worked around the quarantines by having each cowman pay a tax. Taxes happen sometimes. But the ultimate dynamic was to push those cattle drives further and further to the unsettled west.

Now, talking about some of the infamous establishments in Fort Worth and the Hell's Half Acre, during the cattle drive era, some names stand out. There was the Waco Tap. There was the Two Minnies, which is maybe one of the more mythical establishments. Apparently, you went to the Two Minnies, you drank your whiskey, you looked up in the ceiling, and then you realized that it was a see-through ceiling with naked women playing bowling and such.

And then maybe the largest operation of all was The Red Light, which was owned by "Rowdy" Joe Lowe. And here we see two photographs of Mr. Joe Lowe. The one on the right, maybe close to the varnished truth. The one on the left, the photo has been retouched to make him a proper gentleman. Although he was apparently a charming fellow, could wear the top hat, could play the part of the civic figure, was a major sponsor of our early firefighting companies.

But his establishment then had everything. He had the dancing, a huge dance hall, a huge bar. And attached to that, floating around that, lots of spaces where prostitution and gambling would have been occurring.

Here, from the work of Dr. Selcer, who I recommend as an authority on Hell's Half Acre, we have a useful map that kind of gives you a feeling for how the Acre might have looked in those early days. Again, I've kind of labeled the placement of the A&M campus.

And one of the things that this map really drives home for me is how empty things actually were. This was a town that was still being constructed, and there was a lot of open space. Again, because this PowerPoint is going to go up later, I left a key so that you could use that map to see where everything was.

And highlighted, we have Rowdy Joe's. And you can kind of think of Rowdy Joe's as being the heart of the Acre. Here, I've kind of placed it on a map where you can see where it would be in our current environment. Again, by entirely on purpose, no real trace of that is left.

And this, I put up because interesting historical irony, TCU, in its initial run, was intended to be placed exactly in the Acre not far where the A&M campus is. Add-Ran College over there, that is basically the first iteration of TCU. They removed themselves from the Acre, however, as it became a vice district. Because preparing young men for the ministry was kind of a core mission for them, so they felt that being in the Acre was not conducive to that.

So again, unfortunately for the really early days, very little of the visual record survives. But again, things are universal. So here we have a nice watercolor sketch that was done in about this time period by a French artist who took a tour through the west. And maybe it gives you a little bit of the feeling. I mean honestly, it's a lot of what we associate from having watched a lot of Westerns.

And here, we have one of the earliest surviving photographs of Fort Worth. So this is actually right in the courthouse square, which in the early days was also our market square. So what's going on in this photograph, it is cotton season. And all the surrounding farmers from probably tens or even a hundred miles away have all come into town, freighted in their cotton, and they are all standing-- oh, and if you look in the back left corner, you can see the name Daggett again. Because again, he is always present.

And then here, once the railroad comes in, those cotton yards are actually located in the Acre. So what we're looking at here is the Boaz Yard. And that trolley over there is the trolley that ran up and down Main Street to connect you from the railroad to, again, the courthouse square, which is where the first banks and the nicest hotels were.

The railroad in 1876 was definitely life-changing for Fort Worth. Their population boomed. But what it meant for the Acre is that the Acre only grew and grew more, because the railroad was bringing in customers in terms of transients coming on-- travelers, if you will, coming in on the railroad, and the railroad employees themselves. And also, the presence of those railroad tracks drove away a lot of the middle class residential construction and retail that might have existed otherwise.

So talking about, again, a big part of the Acre was prostitution. So in those days, that would have consisted primarily of crib girls and brothels. So a crib girl basically operated on their own account in a one-room, one-door, one-window little building facing the street or the alley. They earned only $0.25 to $0.50 per customer, so not maybe the best economic model on the face of it.

Meanwhile, then you have the upscale version, brothel girls, who were boarding in a house that was operated by a madame, who is basically providing them with some physical care, feeding them, doing their laundry, giving them both physical and legal protection. Now, a brothel girl could expect to earn in that parade about $2 to $5.

And kind of to give you an idea, this actually is a picture of the Acre in Fort Worth. On the left, we can see a brothel. And then all those little buildings on the right, all those are cribs. In the distance, you can actually see the Fort Worth Brewery. Fort Worth, almost from its inception, was also a major site of beer brewing. In fact, the engineer who had brought in the railroad, Zane-Cetti, as soon as the railroad was here, he immediately switched to operating that brewery.

Now, interestingly, according to interviews that were conducted with sort of surviving veterans, if you will, of the prostitution business, crib girls often ended up with more money than the brothel girls, because the brothel girls were effectively paying higher rents. And crib girls supposedly might actually end up having enough capital to open up a brothel on their own account, so counterintuitive.

Now, in terms of talking about the brothels in Fort Worth, the most famous one was operated by Mary Porter, originally of Ireland. She established herself in Fort Worth about 1886 and remained here until 1905, the time of her death. The brothel was located 116 Rusk. Again, Rusk is Commerce Street, the corner of 11th, which was about just a block away from where Rowdy Joe's Red Light had been again. So that's really a touchstone.

Eventually, Mary Porter was a major property holder in her own right. She owned an entire block of buildings. And a brothel first operated under the name the Maison de Joie-- very fancy, very French. But later she simply called it a boarding house.

Now, her boarders-- she had 6 to 12 women, but she also employed a bartender and an errand boy, a piano player, and an African-American couple who tended to the house, cooked meals, did the laundry. However, in many brothels there was one man who played lots of those roles. He was the bartender, the piano player, and the bouncer, and was referred to as the "Professor." No disrespect to any professors who might be viewing.

The photographic record of Fort Worth brothels is sparse to nonexistent, but we can look at photos from similar establishments at the same time period to kind of give ourselves an idea what that visually might have looked like. So here's a brothel in Colorado. And there we can see the professor at the piano, looking like he's very tired. In fact, everybody looks pretty tired.

This is actually the most interesting surviving documents. This is the personal album that was put together by a madame in El Paso by the name of Alice Abbott. So here, we can see a photo of herself and some of her girls. And here, we can see a photo that she put in of one of her rivals-- it seems like they may have had some sort of a falling out-- and a photograph of her rival's establishment.

So if you wanted to know what the inside of one of these upper-class establishments would have looked like, this gives you some idea. And in New Orleans, from the work of E.J. Bellocq, this is a photograph of a room and a prostitute.

Now, for Mary Porter, going to court was just kind of a cost of business. Between 1893 to 1897, she was brought to court 130 times. Now, when she was brought to the court on, I guess, more serious charges, her bonds were often posted by some of Fort Worth's leading established businessmen, like E.B. Daggett, the son of E.M., father of Fort Worth, that I mentioned earlier, and also by Bill Ward, a city councilman who was the owner of the White Elephant Saloon, which, of course, is maybe the most legendary of Fort Worth establishments. Bill Ward was also the owner of the Fort Worth Cat's baseball team.

Now, for most of Mary Porter's or any madame's or prostitute's charges in Fort Worth, they would have been through the municipal court. They would have either been for keeping a disorderly house or simple charges of vagrancy. They would usually be resolved by a fine by the close-- almost immediately. It was very routine. They'd pay their fine, and they'd get out the door.

Now, vagrancy-- it was a catch-all ordinance that was used to regulate and garner fines and fees from prostitution. It was usually resolved, again, in a single day on the payment of the fine. And it very much came, apparently, from English customs going all the way back to the 1600s, and kind of codified.

In the year 1714 and 1744, there's something called a Vagrancy Act, which treated prostitutes as idle and disorderly persons. And actually, the sentence given to them was quite harsh-- one month's confinement in the workhouse, and then removal back to their parish of origin, the assumption being that they were migrants who had come in and were overcrowding and disrupting the streets of London.

However, those statutes were apparently only applied very selectively. In fact, the overseeing justice of London, Thomas de Veil, was often referred to as a "trading justice," because of the perception even in those days, that he was on very friendly terms with the brothel owners, and would only apply those laws against the competition, and would receive payment, again, to make things go away.

Another interesting pattern that comes actually from English tradition is that law enforcement in London would often receive an award when they would arrest a person for vagrancy, be they a prostitute or just simply a beggar. And here, we have a photo from London about that time. We can see a woman, probably a prostitute, being dragged into court.

So in some ways, when you read about the wild west, it seems like chaos and anarchy. But I made this reference to the English custom to kind of place it in a deeper-- to show that it really is actually part of a deeper tradition.

You see, in England, policing had been originally a communal responsibility that often you didn't want. To be a Constable was something that would be kind of foisted on you. And then if you had means, you would foist it on somebody else by paying them a salary.

And some of the duties of a constable's deputy in England during the 1700s and forward were very unpleasant. You are basically the sanitation man. You are in charge-- and the policeman, and the watchman, and a host of other things. Now, what's interesting, is that a lot of these roles were actually applied in Fort Worth and other frontier towns to the office of the marshal.

In our minds and from Hollywood, we picture a romantic figure just kind of idling about with a sheriff's star and waiting for the bad guys and having a drink of whiskey, which there's truth to that. But as originally-- these duties were originally defined by the City of Fort Worth, the marshal was responsible for patrolling the streets, yes, and conducting the night watch.

But he was also removing rubbish and stray animals. He was mopping out the city jail. He was filling up the water-- so basically, he was the sanitation department, police department, and animal control all rolled into one, which may have something to do with the fact that the first appointed marshal retired from his post apparently in disgust that he was being paid very little money and being asked to do a great deal of work.

Later, successful marshals, like Jim Courtright, our most legendary marshal, were able to thrive in their position by earning a commission on the enforcements of these vagrancy and other vice ordinances. And again, this hearkens back to the English custom, where in England in the 1700s, all the way back to 1660, they had been rewarded a small two pence, five pence fee for every person that they arrested.

So ironically, what looks like just the chaos and lawlessness of the West, is very much straight out of London. The difference, although, which maybe means everything, is that in Fort Worth and other Western towns-- El Paso, San Antonio-- those ordinances and those fines were effectively defraying all of our court costs, were paying for our police forces, and subsidizing probably a lot of our other projects.

So here, we have Jim Courtright, again, our most legendary marshal. Apparently, Jim and some of his deputies saved the court some of its trouble by pocketing those fines and putting them directly in the pocket. They were kind of caught doing this red-handed. It went to the court, and they were pardoned, so it goes.

Later on in Jim Courtright's career, he basically had lost his position as the marshal, but he tried to remain in this kind of figure of authority and enforcement in the Acre, basically running what was more or less a protection racket which went poorly for him, and that he tried to lean on the owner of the White Elephant Saloon, Luke Short. They got into a argument which escalated into gunplay, and Jim met a bad end.

So what actually cleaned up the Acre? I know that this might be something that some people were wondering about. The long and the short of it is, well, a lot of things. A lot of things finally cleaned up the Acre.

For one thing, there was World War I. World War I-- the secretary of war, Secretary Baker, was a progressive, maybe even a bit of a Puritan. And it was very important to him, and therefore, very important to the Army that wherever the Army was going to open up a major establishment, the vice district would have to be closed down or otherwise heavily regulated.

And Fort Worth was the site, of course, of Camp Bowie, where we had more than 30,000 young men brought in. So really, it was the authority of the Army more than one single factor that shut down or tamped down business in the Acre.

There was also a Texas Supreme Court ruling in 1915-- and I'm not going to pretend to be an expert on the law-- called Spence v. Fenchler, that established in the context in El Paso, that El Paso could not regulate its vice districts. Now, the issue of regulation can almost be a presentation in and of itself.

The long the short of it is in the 19th century, there was very much a model that was first instituted in France and then in England, treating prostitution as a vice that had to be regulated and managed, a vice that would never go away, no matter how punitive we made the law.

So that actually came all the way to Texas. And there were some places, like Dallas was one, El Paso was another, where they literally set up according to municipal charter -- a vice district. And they had doctors going in checking on the girls.

Anyways, in the context of that ruling, Spence v. Fenchler, they ruled that basically a city could not regulate something that was a vice as defined by an illegal act by the State Constitution of Texas. And that was basically an Article 1, Section 28 provision.

A bonus fun fact with that case-- the attorney that brought that case, that prosecuted that case, Lessing, went on to be the attorney for both Pancho Villa and Walt Disney. So vice touches everything.

What cleaned up the Acre, and Fort Worth specifically? In addition to the effects of World War I, the vice district naturally moved over to Jacksboro Highway. Actually, the moment they closed it down in World War I, it was already shifting over to the Jacksboro Highway, keeping up with the fashion of the times. Everybody wanted to be in their cars. And it was also a little bit more discreet.

Also during that period, prostitution especially began to operate-- prostitutes began to operate on their own account as call girls, again, using the freedom of movement afforded to them by cars. And they also began to operate out of more modern hotels, often with a wink from hotel management. Apparently-- I didn't put this on the slide-- but apparently, the Hotel Texas was, during the '20s, there was a lot of this, apparently.

And then also, sexual liberation really changed a lot of the environment. Young men no longer felt that they needed to go to brothels. And as far as gambling is concerned, once Las Vegas was really up and running, once you could truly just hop on a plane and go to Vegas, we could

speculate that that probably, again, removed a lot of the demand that had fed that kind of a vice district.

I wanted to end this presentation by talking about the very last brothel in the Acre. So again, by the time we get to the '50s, almost everything had been tamped down and suppressed. It was still kind of a-- maybe a rundown area. But there was one holdout-- Eunice Gray's Waco Hotel, which is actually situated directly across the street from today's Texas A&M campus, more or less at the site of the cascading fountain in the Water Gardens.

Now, Eunice Gray, whose real name was Ermine McEntire-- you'll find that this is true of most prostitutes and madames of that period. They often took on an alias when they entered the profession, not unlike train robbers, although not to make any comparison.

She was a retired madame, who even at the date of about 1962, was still living on the premises of her erstwhile establishment. And she died actually quite tragically of smoke inhalation in a fire that occurred at that location in 1962 when she was 82 years old.

Now, just seven years later, the Waco was torn down, again, in that big tear-down period right before they put up the Convention Center, and then later on the Water Gardens. That all happened in 1969.

And interestingly, when they were tearing down her establishment, they found hidden in the wall $100,000 worth of World War I bonds most likely stolen. Because they apparently could look at the bonds and could see that they had not been stamped in a certain way. So this led them to suspect that foul play had been involved, but no foul play could be proven.

I guess a lot of time had passed, and the probate court of Fort Worth apparently was able to find a surviving relative of Mrs. Gray/McEntire, and willed all that money over to her niece. So kind of a heartwarming or happy story.

And here we have Eunice Gray. And here we have a photograph of the Waco Hotel just before the parade of demolition. And as you can see, things are already looking pretty rundown there. And here, we have the environment that you would recognize today, again, your establishment and the Water Gardens.

And that about concludes our slideshow presentation. Thank you very much. And now I would love to hear any questions that you might have.

- Well, Brendan, thank you so much. We really appreciate the presentation and you sharing your knowledge with us. That was wonderful. So I'm going to start by-- I did get one question in the Q&A, and so I'm going to start with that one. And then we have some questions that were presented to us when people registered.

So the question from one of our attendees, he asked, my family is all from Alabama, and my grandmother used the phrase Hell's Half Acre routinely. Do we know how the term spread beyond Fort Worth, or are there other sites with the same name in other parts of the country?

- Again, to answer that question, I don't think that the term Hell's Half Acre was owned exclusively by Fort Worth. It did seem to be a term that was applied to vice districts. But again, ultimately, there are a lot of theories as to where the term might have originated. It's going to have to be a mystery I think.

- OK. Let's see. You touched on this a little bit, but someone else-- another question we got sort of last minute was dealing with the Stockyard's reenactment of the shootouts. You touched on the shootout itself a little bit. Can you tell us a little more about the time period where that was-- are the reenactments still being done? Or is that past?

- To my knowledge, they still have reenactments. Whether or not they're marketing that as a specific reenactment of the Luke Short/Jim Courtright, I'm not entirely sure. It is a tremendous irony that we've kind of transported over to the Stockyards a lot of our mythic history. When in fact, of course, the Stockyards, as fascinating as they are, they were in a lot of ways more of an industrial site. They were where the cattle were being brought in and were being slaughtered.

Of course, Hell's Half Acre was situated just 2, 2 and 1/2 blocks away from the courthouse on Main Street where Earth Bones is located today. So I think that's just kind of-- sometimes the stories live on, but we forget the place. And in fairness, a lot of the establishments that were built, even upper-class establishments in the 19th century, they were not necessarily built to last.

- Sure. All right. Let's see. OK. So this is an opinion question, but I like where they're going with this. Someone asked with a building full of some of the smartest law students in the country, should we retake the Hell's Half Acre slogan?

- Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes.

- I like that answer. All right. Let's see. Someone asked, I read that Doc Holliday once shot a man in Lake Worth due to a poker dispute. Is that accurate, do you know? And was Doc Holliday ever chronicled as having visited Hell's Half Acre?

- For the first part of the question, that's not a story I'm familiar with. But there are a lot of stories, but that's not one that I've heard. We do know that Doc Holliday at one point lived in Dallas, and he almost certainly came to Fort Worth and the Acre. One of Wyatt Earp's brothers for a period actually lived and resided in the Acre. And we know that Wyatt Earp came to visit his brother on at least one occasion. So yes.

- All right. We are getting some more questions coming in, so I'm going to switch over here. So someone asked, what was the murder rate or suicide rate in Hell's Half Acre?

- That is a good question. The murder rate-- probably not as high as we would imagine. I'm afraid it's hard for me to pull out a specific statistic. But we do know that the suicide rate, especially moving into the late 1880s and the 1890s, I can speak to that. I can remember that statistic pretty clearly.

At one point-- at times it was at least one girl a week, sometimes three to five girls a week. So a lot of crimes of, I guess you would call them-- a lot of deaths of desperation. And also, maybe just too easy to access things like arsenic.

- Sure. OK, let's see. Someone asked, somewhere I had the impression that Hell's Half Acre was applied to the camps of saloons and prostitutes that were set up at the end of a railroad construction site, and they then moved along with the railroad as the tracks were laid. Would that also be an accurate use of the term?

- No. In this case, the term Hell's Half Acre was specific to Fort Worth, even before the railroad came in in 1876. However, it is absolutely true that whatever the terminus of the railroad was, was a hotbed of vice. Or at least, that's definitely how it was presented in the contemporary press.

- OK. All right. Let's see what else we've got here. Someone asked, I think you, again, touched on this a little bit about there not being a lot of pictures from this time period, specifically of the brothels. But someone asked if there is a picture library as it pertains to Hell's Half Acre available for viewing?

- Unfortunately, not as much as one would hope. I mean, again, there are some great resources. Again, as a resource that stands out, I guess the authoritative text would be Dr. Richard Selcer's book. Another great resource, a website by a local ex-journalist of the Star Telegram, Mr. Nichols, Hometown By Handlebar. I highly recommend it. And he does a great job of documenting things with firsthand clippings and photographs.

- Great. All right. Someone asked, when referring to the area as Hell's Half Acre, what is the time that the era is generally believed to span? It seemed to have its birth shortly after the beef and trains arrived.

- That's absolutely true. And I would say-- so like the classical period might run from about-- when the cattle drives really got running full steam about 1866, and again, the district was kind of severely repressed during World War I, say, about 1916, 1917. But the district was still kind of a city, or there were still elements of vice in the district pretty much until it was torn down.

- OK. Another question from an attendee today. Did Fort Worth have large Hispanic and African-American districts back then?

- Yes. And actually, this is something that I wish I had maybe done a better job of working into the presentation. You see, within the Acre, adjoining the Acre, it was actually a thriving African-American community. In fact, that community had its own section of a vice district. There's the White Elephant. There was literally an establishment called the Black Elephant, because of course, there was a great deal of segregation.

But however that district might have started, moving forward in time, that was absolutely a center for a lot of building and investing in institutions. There was a hotel called the Hotel-- Hotel-- geez, why am I drawing a blank on the name? Hotel Gracie [The Jim Hotel], I think, that

was actually a tremendous jazz club. A lot of the big names in jazz and blues would have come through Fort Worth and would have played there.

That establishment was actually opened up by a gentleman who is referred to as Gooseneck Bill Pickens [William Madison "Gooseneck Bill" McDonald], an African-American gentleman, a banker, and actually the first African-American millionaire in the state of Texas. And tragically, there's next to no trace of that neighborhood. That neighborhood was, like the Acre itself, was treated as a blighted slum and was condoned to being razed, unfortunately.

- Thank you for sharing that. Which Earp brother lived here?

- Oh, I apologize. Off the top of my head, I'm going to draw a blank on the name.

- OK. All right. Let's see. What was gun regulation like in that time period and within Hell's Half Acre?

- Oh, that's actually an interesting and worthwhile question. I think-- it's my understanding that on the books, on the city ordinances, guns were supposed to not be carried around and definitely not bandied about publicly. But again, enforcement is 9/10 of the law. And there was very little interest in-- I think at one point, somebody was a zealous reformer and made the mistake of immediately trying to arrest a city councilor who was carrying a firearm. So again, enforcement never went too far.

- OK. So someone asked, since the Luke Short and Courtright shooting took place in front of the White Elephant Saloon located in the Acre, am I correct to assume that the current location of the White Elephant is a relocation? Does anyone know how the name White Elephant came about?

- A-ha. Well, you're absolutely right. The Acre is an establishment that is been moved geographically. But if we're strictly speaking, the White Elephant was actually not in the Acre. Again, the Acre is really kind of classically confined to the Third Ward.

So as we approach Main Street, moving towards the courthouse, those establishments are catering to a more upper-class group of people. In fact, that was probably half of the tension between Luke Short and Jim Courtright. Jim Courtright had become very much a creature of the Acre, and was trying to expand his territory into the uptown area.

And as for where did the name the White Elephant come from? Apparently, it was a name that was used on more than one occasion. It's my understanding that it was a name that denoted basically something very valuable or very lucky. So good name for a bar.

- OK. Let's see. Where in the Acre was the infamous photograph taken of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, which ultimately led to their recognition in South America?

- That's all absolutely true. Yeah. So it's absolutely true that the stay of Butch and Sundance in Fort Worth kind of proved their downfall in a lot of ways-- posing for that photograph.

So that photograph was taken in the photographic parlor of-- let me see if I can nail the name-- a Mr. Swartz, who was kind of one of the-- I guess the early photographer of Fort Worth. As for the location, I want to say that it is-- oh, I'm going to draw a blank on the street name, but across the street from where the Ashton Hotel is now, if that helps.

But yeah, when that photograph was taken, they made the mistake of basically posing for a photograph that could be printed more than once. Mr. Swartz took the picture, thought of it as a good picture, which it is. He made his own copy and placed it in his window, basically just as an advertisement for his business.

A policeman was able to walk by who recognized one of the party, because of course, up to that time, they had been able to operate so successfully because they were largely anonymous. Nobody knew who they were or what they looked like, so they can meticulously case and plan a job before they carried it out. Anyways, this law enforcement person was able to recognize Curry and the gang, and then just using elementary logic was able to identify everybody else.

- Interesting. All right. So one of the questions that was presented at the time of registration was, how late did the last vestige of disrepute disappear from the Acre, so that the area could transition into a more respectable part of town?

- Again, I would say that the answer is probably about, again, when they just absolutely bulldozed everything in preparation of building the Convention Center. And then again, later on, building the Water Gardens. So we're talking basically 1969.

- OK. I'm trying to make sure I cover everyone's questions if I can. Someone asked, what is something that would surprise folks about their assumptions of this place and time?

- Oh. Well, I mean, for one thing, what I always find surprising is how dynamic all these parties were. Again, everybody from the gamblers to the lawman to the prostitutes themselves, everybody was moving around. So everybody was kind of everywhere, to be honest, at least as far as the American frontier is concerned-- all those iconic places here in Texas and Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, but even traveling into Latin America. So I would say the dynamism is what always surprises me.

- Great. Another just submitted question. Someone asked, when did Rusk Street get renamed Commerce? And if you know, why did it get renamed as Commerce Street?

- Again, I apologize. I'm going to come up short on giving you a specific date.[1909] But I can tell you from reading that once Rusk Street took on definitively its character as being the main axis of the Acre and of a vice district, it was more or less universally agreed that having such a name, such a street named in your honor, was no honor, so they switched it. And I think, quite charmingly, truth in advertising, they just called it Commerce Street.

- That makes sense. Someone asked, is the family of the last madame's niece who inherited the World War I bond still in the area?

- Actually, no, they're not. They are still surviving. And in fact, the main article that's been written on Eunice Gray and her connection to her actual family name, McEntire-- I was able to contact that niece directly. So at least at the time of publication of that article, that niece was still living. But I don't believe-- they never lived in the Fort Worth area.

- OK. Well, I think we have touched on all the Q&A questions and all of the pre-submitted questions. I'm just refreshing one more time to see if anything comes through.

But otherwise, Brendan, I really want to thank you for taking the time to do this today. Again, very informative, and we so appreciate you sharing all of this information with us. And I think you said it was OK if I shared your information. Is that all right?

- Absolutely. And again, just let everybody know, everything on the PowerPoint will be posted for use through universal access, and I'll also append to it a little bit of a bibliography, if anybody wants to do any further reading.

- OK. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe your email is brendan.smart@gmail.com, correct?

- Absolutely correct. And anybody can feel free to reach out to me with any question. Happy to have any conversation.

- OK. Well, we appreciate it. So as Brendan said, any video and any presentation slides from the webinar and all of our previous webinars are available on-- the website is TAMULawAnswers.info. And in September, we're going to be kicking off an engaging series on Latinx civil rights. So you can go to the website to view all of the upcoming webinars.

And I believe we are going to-- let's see. There we go. There's our slide. So there's our upcoming webinar series. And we certainly hope that you all will join us for future webinars. We thank you for being here with us today. And Brendan, again, thank you so much for your time, and I hope everyone has a great afternoon.

- An absolute pleasure.