

TEXAS

HAS EVERYTHING



Whether it's skyscrapers, millionaires, glamour girls, scenery, oil wells, beefsteaks, adventure, weather, highways, roses, spinach, or nuts . . . the Lone Star State claims the mostest and the bestest. And to the amazement of our touring reporter, he discovers most of the mostest is true!

by **Don Eddy**



I DON'T know how you feel about it, but I have always been sort of skeptical about Texas. Maybe I've met too many guys called Tex. You know the type—leanish, drawly, dryly droll, thoroughly likable jokers, mostly. You can't tell for sure when they're kidding. They are sure and quick in emergencies; good Joes to have along for a fight or a frolic. But, Lawsy massy, how they brag!

I suppose there isn't a place where Texas isn't known, thanks to guys called Tex. They have spread the fame of their state across the Seven Seas from Tibet to Timbuktu. But the thing that always stuck in my craw was this: How on earth could any one place be as wonderful as Texas is cracked up to be?

To me, Texas has always been a big, wide hunk of stuff to get across as rapidly as possible, and I have crossed it countless times. It's big, all right; so big that it makes most European nations look like cow pastures; so big you could hide inside of it all of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Ohio, and still have 213,760 acres to raise minks for the Fur Deal.

But Texans won't let it stop there. They think up the darnedest things. A guy called Tex said to me one day, "I reckon if all the people in the United States moved to Texas, they wouldn't be any more crowded than the folks in Massachusetts or New Jersey right now." I looked it up, and doggoned if he wasn't right!

Another time, a Texan said he wished he owned all of Texas. I foolishly asked why. "Why, son," he said, "I'd rent it out at \$1 an acre a year, so I could sit on my front gallery and hire me a small boy to count my income. You know how much it would be?" I said I didn't. "It'd be \$19,531.50 an hour," he drawled.

I wore out a pencil trying to divide 24 hours a day into 171,096,960 acres, but I couldn't make him out a liar.

I thought to myself, so what? So the Sahara Desert is big, too, but who wants it? And they've got the answer to that. They've got *all* the answers.

I was sipping a nourishing sarsaparilla in a Miami Beach bistro one time, when a 9-foot-high customer on the next bar stool wheeled around, studied my tan gabardine suit (all loyal male Texans wear tan gabardine) and boomed amiably: "You from Texas, podneh?" I said, "No, sir. I got this suit in California." He shook his head pityingly. "Now, that's a downright cryin' shame," he observed. "It looks prett' near good enough to have come from Texas."

OldMagazineArticles.com

Texas Has Everything

I TOOK a character-building slug of my sugar water and told him: "Yeah. I heard about Texas once." He eyed me with that good-natured appraisal Texans put on when they're about to start chipping their china, and then he cut loose about the glories of Texas. I don't have to repeat all he said; you've heard it from dozens of guys called Tex.

You let 'em get started and they'll tell you that Texas has the biggest men with the widest hats and the fanciest boots; the loveliest women; the finest horses; the most millionaires; the most and biggest and deepest oil wells; the straightest and smoothest highways; the best and cheapest beefsteaks; the fastest-growing cities, and the most remote frontier habitations.



PRETTY GIRLS abound. Here a group of them practice for the South Texas High School Band Festival in Victoria

Texas, they'll tell you, is where you have to go to find the tallest monument, the highest state capitol, the greatest climatic range, the most churches per capita. Also the most airports and the most farms. They'll swear up and down that only Texas produces the pinkest grapefruit, the most cattle, sheep, mohair goats, roses, spinach, bees, and nuts—pecans, that is—among countless other things. And that's only the beginning. They go on and on and on.

AFTER the first 100 years of listening to this bragging, I'll confess I began to get curious. If all this stuff was there, why hadn't I seen it in my many crossings? So, when my chores took me across the nation recently, I decided to steal a week or two and see just how wrong these guys called Tex could be.

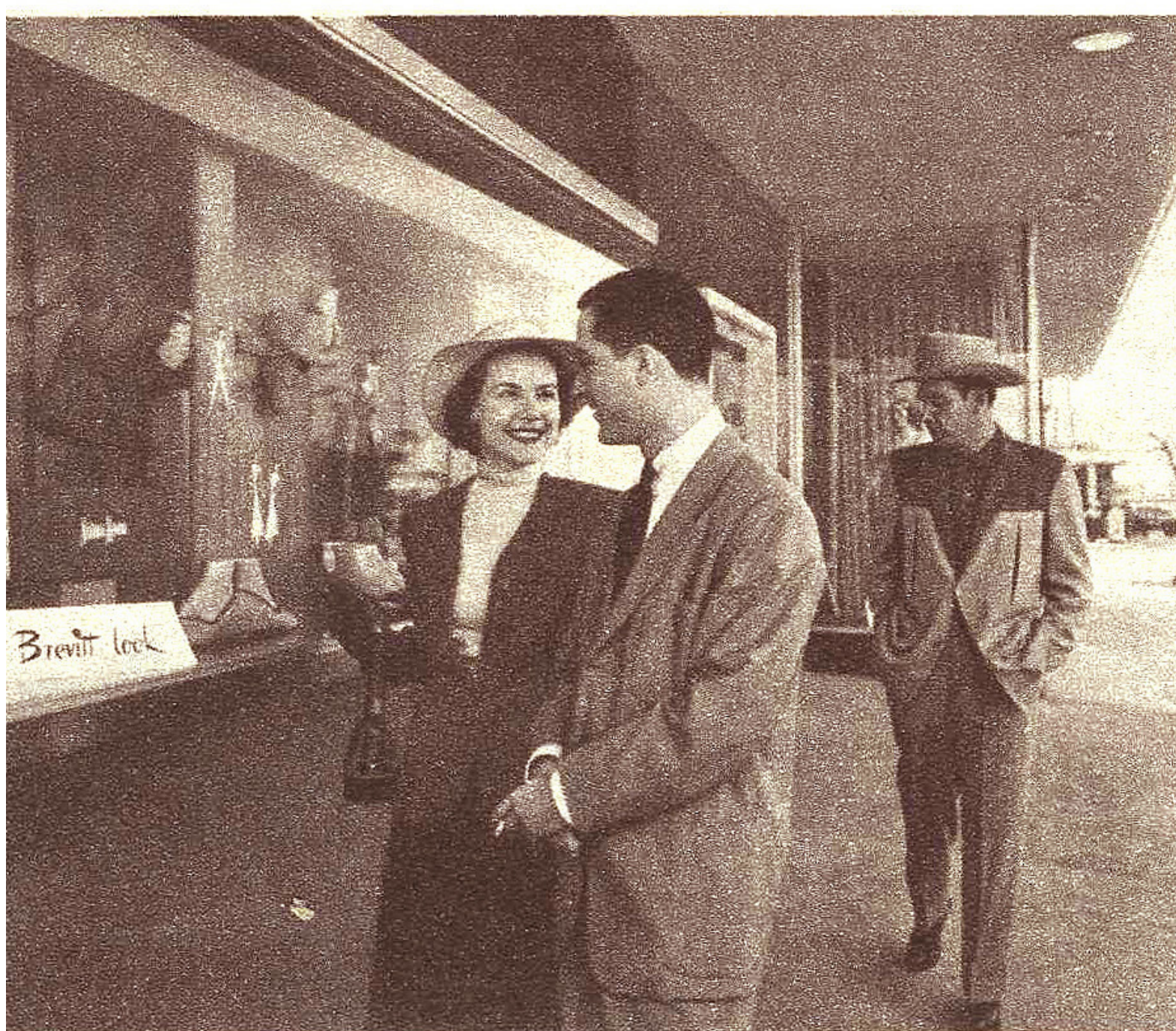
JUICY STEAKS ON THE HOOF: A roundup in West Texas, which boasts of the largest cattle ranches in the world



Texas Has Everything



STATE CAPITOL in Austin, mecca for tourists. To pay for it, Texas gave the builders 3,050,000 acres of public land



SMART SHOP of Neiman-Marcus department store in Dallas which sets feminine styles for all the fashion world

Well, my two weeks stretched into a month and a half. I wore a good automobile down to roller-skate size. I ate so much beefsteak that all I can do is moo. I piled 4,172 miles on the speedometer. And still I didn't see half of Texas. The secret in finding interesting places, I discovered, is to take it slow and easy. Unlike Florida and California, Texas makes no particular effort to exploit its charms; the state constitution, in fact, classes tourists with immigrants and prohibits trying to attract them. I found almost no roadside signs pointing to local marvels. Nine tenths of them aren't even marked on a map; you have to ferret them out.

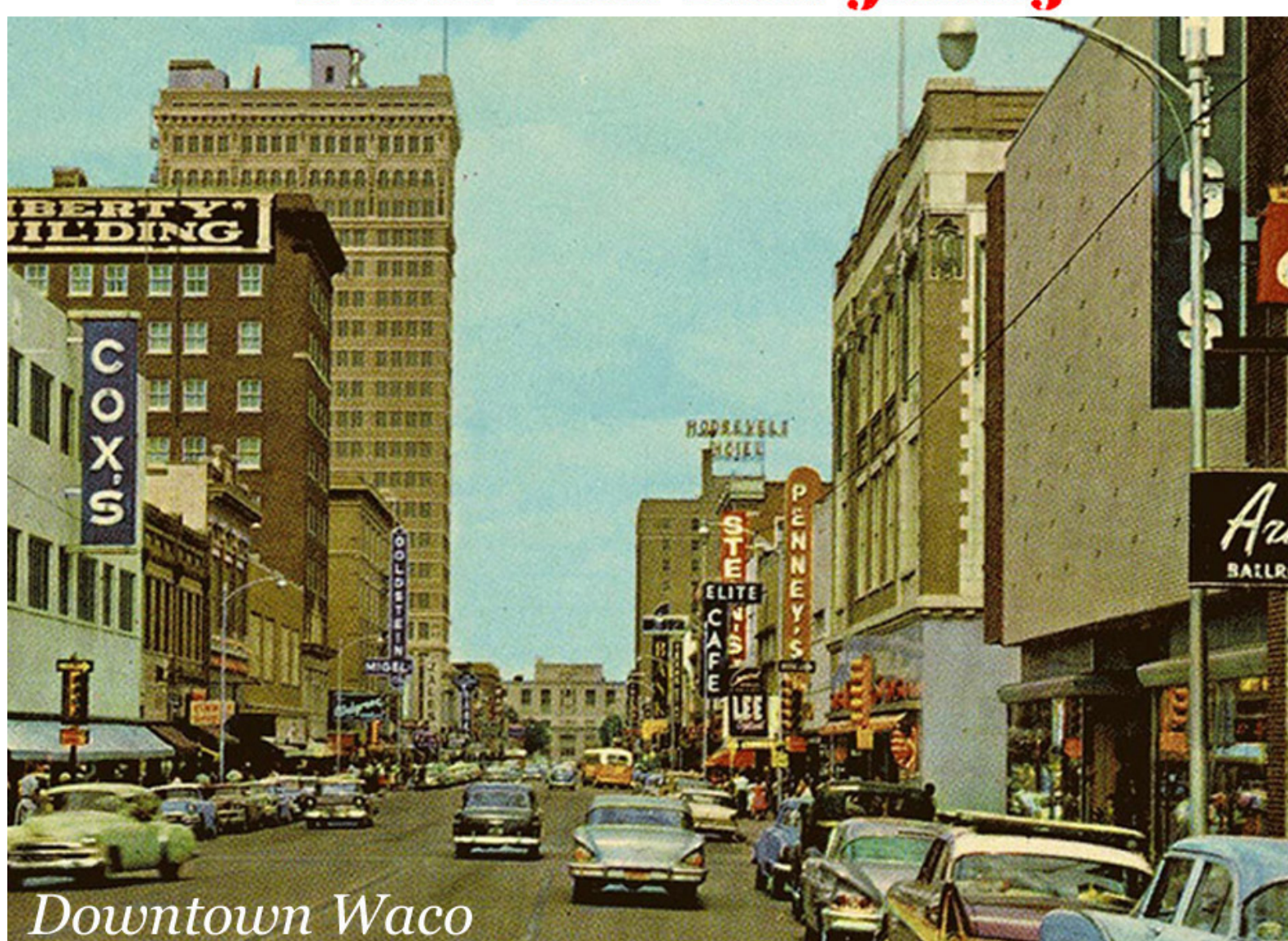
And yet, going over my notes, I hardly know where to begin. All I can say is that any inkpot who could tell all about Texas in one magazine article could copy a Truman budget on the point of a needle with a stub pen. . . .

I entered Texas on U. S. 80 from Shreveport, La., puttered around more or less aimlessly, and wound up 4,172 miles later at El Paso on the western frontier. You may pick any of 42 other highway entrances, or go by bus, train, plane, or steamship. I even met a bonny Scot walking it, but I'll bet he'll be worn down to a midget before he gets out of there. Of 9,156,000 tourists who left \$375,200,000 in Texas last year, 96 per cent were in automobiles. That adds. The best way to enjoy Texas is to *(Continued on page 93)* make like a tumbling tumbleweed, drifting whither the spirit moveth.

Unless you are figuring on colliding with an immovable object, you need no special equipment. No water jugs, emergency fuel tanks, bowie knives, or shootin' irons. All you need is fortitude.



OldMagazineArticles.com



Downtown Waco

A filling station, a feed bag, or a place to sleep will always bob up when you want it. If you break down, just wait; don't walk. A car will come along, it will stop if you're in distress, and there is nothing a Texan can't fix with a piece of baling wire and a judicious helping of thoughtful profanity. But you will never escape a sneaking suspicion that something wild and woolly is about to happen, and this suspenseful excitement is one of Texas' great charms.

You'll have to hunt like a beagle to find a bad road. Texas has 198,273 miles of mapped roads, 43,500 among the world's finest. They're so good that most accidents happen when drivers fall asleep on straightaways. To avoid this sad fate, carry a hammer and tap yourself on the noggin. I often drove 200 miles in 200 minutes without denting the speed limits (60 daytime, 55 nights) too much.

OUTSIDE the clippy joints in big cities, you can get the biggest, tenderest beefsteaks on earth at bargain prices. One you can eat without busting your binnacle may cost \$1.25, including all the trimmings. In a cowboys' hotel at Fort Worth I got a T-bone so big it had to be served on a turkey platter. In a pioneer hotel at Hamilton I sat down to a family-style dinner where they kept bringing bowls and platters of home-cooked stuff until I couldn't reach the table. Chicken-fried steaks, which are the cowpokes' delight, seldom cost \$1 and are, roughly, the dimensions of a bridge table. One reason for this, of course, is that Texas has 1,000,000 more cattle and sheep than it has people, and there are 7,711,194 people.

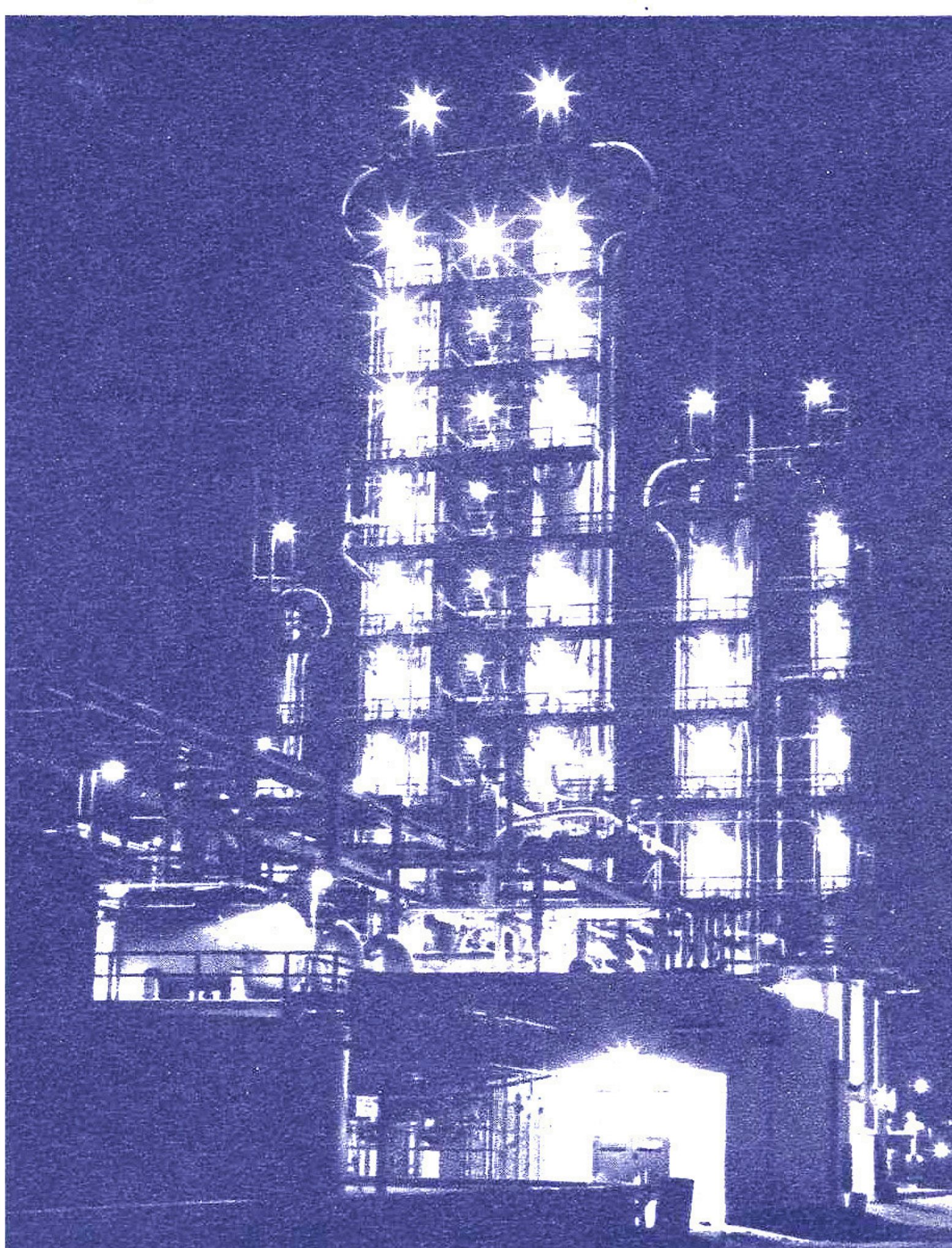
Motels and tourist lodges, like steaks, are big and economical. Texas and California argue about which of them invented the motel, but Texas certainly has elaborated enormously on the original idea. Even in such small towns as Marshall and Fredericksburg I found ultra-modern accommodations at such motels as The Henderson and The Ranch, and along South Main Street in Houston there are spacious places with swimming pools, tennis courts, and even putting greens. On the outskirts of Fort Worth is the new Western Hills, where you may swim in a heated pool, loll in a *cabaña*, or have dinner in your suite before a crackling wood fire. At many Texas motels you may have coffee brought to your room in the morning merely for the asking. It's free.

Don't be offended if Texans fail to thank you for compliments about their possessions or their state; they are

Texas Has Everything



ALL LIT UP: Billions of gallons of aviation gasoline are produced by Texas refineries like the one below in Port Arthur



Don't be offended if Texans fail to thank you for compliments about their possessions or their state; they are weaned on a sublime conviction that everything in Texas is the biggest or best or both. Even billboards; there's one north of Austin 67 by 107 feet, the world's largest. Once when I told a Texan his wife and daughter must surely be the loveliest women on earth, he looked mildly surprised and drawled forthrightly: "Why, hell, yes!" It never occurred to him that they might not be.

Anything in Texas that isn't the biggest or best is bound to be the smallest or worst; there is no mediocrity. The smiling Negro who washed my car at Abilene said his wife was after him for delinquent alimony. "I don't know how she's gonna get it," he grinned. "I'm the poorest boy in the whole state of Texas!" Beside a San Antonio department store which calls itself "The Biggest Store in the Biggest State," stands a one-chair shoeshine stand with the proud banner: "The Smallest Store in the Biggest State."

At the other end of the gamut are fabulous Texans who are themselves

Texas Has Everything

among the state's wonders—such men as Jesse Jones, who thinks nothing of entertaining 200 luncheon guests at his little ol' ranch; Amon Carter, the Fort Worth publisher who gives \$100 cowboy hats to people he likes; Honest John Nance Garner, dean of Uvalde's sidewalk whittlers; Ben Hogan, big drive of the golfing business; "Skinny" Wainwright, hero of Bataan; and countless others. Some of the most famous military men of modern times now live in retirement at San Antonio. And Texas even claims to be the birthplace of General Eisenhower.

If your time is limited you'd be smart to decide in advance what kind of stuff you'd prefer to revel in. You should understand that all Texas is divided into two parts, East Texas and West Texas. They are two different countries. East Texas is lush with farms, forests, and lakes. West Texas is strictly from Hopalong—boundless plains studded with gaunt mesas, buttes, and escarpments. Each Texan takes it for granted that his part of the state is best, can tell you exactly why, and don't argue with him. More durn' trouble starts thataway.

APRIL to December is the best all-round season for exploring, although the Brownsville region is tropical and the Gulf Coast is always pleasant. Whatever you do, make no bets on the weather. The only sure thing about Texas weather is that there always is some occasionally, but don't depend on it, because it is more apt to be than not. If you don't like the weather, Texans will advise you to wait just a minute. One day during my junket they had blizzards in the north, sandstorms in the west, a heat wave in the south, flooding rains in the east, and an earthquake down the middle. That's about normal.

Up in the Panhandle it gets so cold they brag of using medium-sized frozen rattlesnakes for railroad ties. The big ones they save for trestles. I was proudly assured that their dust storms are the biggest, blackest, scariest dust storms the world has ever seen. Folks said they were so thick the prairie dogs dug burrows in the sky. They said it was a wonderful sight, after one of these storms had passed, to watch it rain prairie dogs for a couple of days. That was also where I heard of the tourist who stopped to ask directions of a bandy-legged old rancher and his middle-aged son. "Looks like rain," the tourist remarked. "Be right gracious if it did," the old man agreed sociably. "Not that I care, but it'd be a real treat for my boy, here. Me, I've seen rain." . . .

If it's variety you're seekin', Texas is your cookie. For one thing, there are 7 cities of more than 100,000 population, 9 more above 50,000. One of the magical sights of Texas is to watch shining skyscrapers rise slowly from the distant plains like something out of Aladdin's lamp. Each city is a character.

In Houston, the industrial behemoth, millionaires come 19 to the dozen, but you may dine at a drive-in attended by a dreamboat in theatrical scanties. You may also get even money that Houston will be America's largest city by 2000 A.D.; it's now 14th.

Dallas, next largest, brags that it's about the only Texas town where no-

Texas Has Everything

body ever fought a battle about anything, but it is mostly famous for the largest state fair in America, and for a department store, Neiman-Marcus, which creates and sets styles, not only for the Southwest, but for all the fashion world. It's so flossy that New York dowagers often fly to Dallas to select bridal trousseaux for their offspring, to be sure they're the last word, and it has luxurious private rooms where oil magnates are entertained while trying to decide what dainties to buy as surprises for their dreamboats. Single sales of \$25,000 are commonplace and it is probably the only store in the world which could—and did—advertise 100 fur coats at \$15,000 each and sell every one before noon.

San Antonio, as cosmopolitan as New Orleans or San Francisco, was laid out along the trails of meandering long-horns; old-timers said it was like a skillet of snakes. The Fiesta San Jacinto each April compares with the Mardi Gras and celebrates Texas independence from Mexico. Fort Worth brags of being "Where the West Begins" and likes to tell about two Comanche war chiefs who came to town, put up at a hotel, and at bedtime blew out the gas lights. The one who recovered became a good Indian; he said any people who could survive a night in Fort Worth were indestructible. Visiting firemen often feel that way.



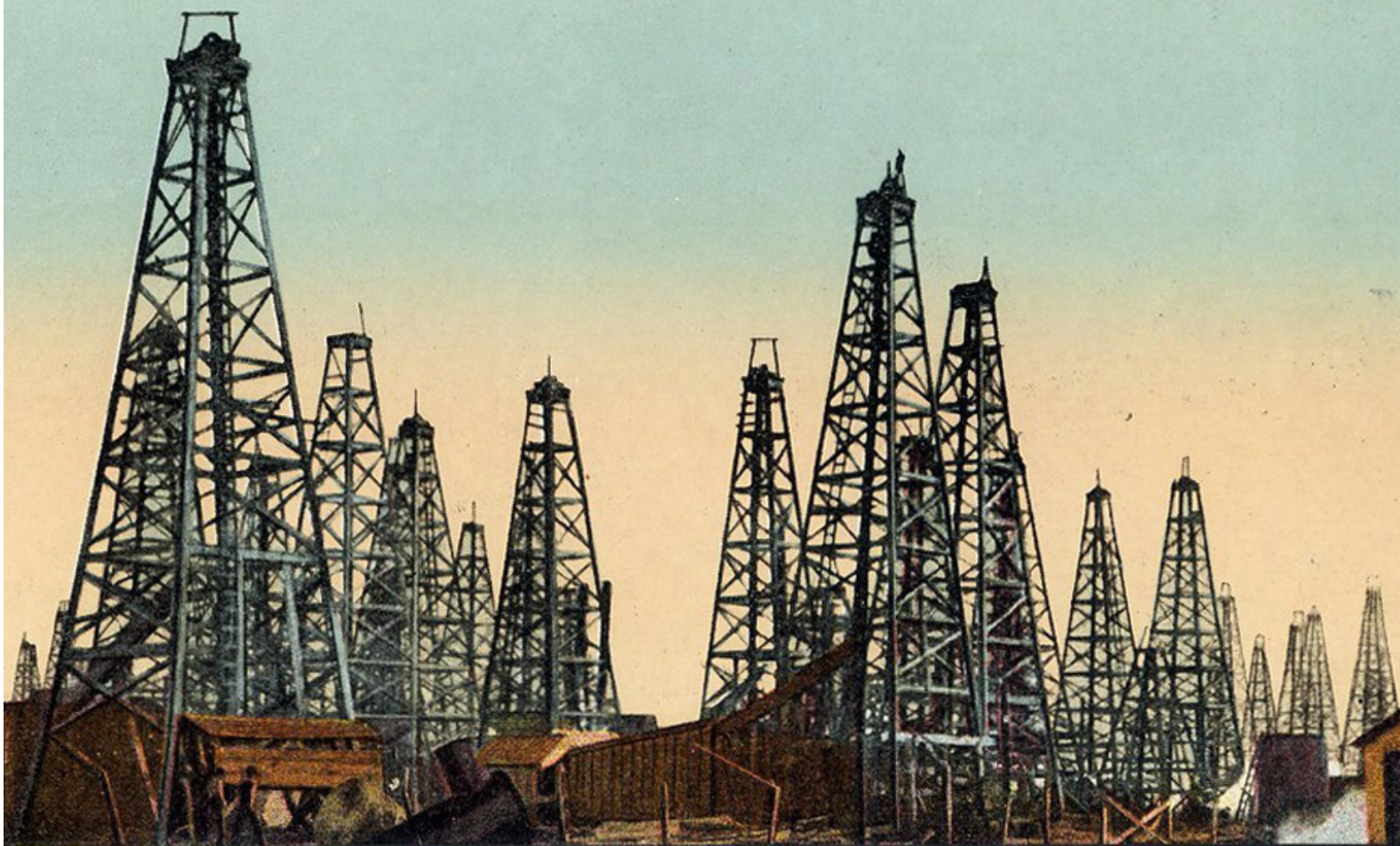
San Antonio, 1957

AUSTIN, the state capital, spreads on green hills and has a statehouse which didn't cost a dime: Texas paid the builders 3,050,000 acres of land which became the legendary XIT ranch. It set aside another 1,000,000 acres to maintain the state university, so they struck oil, and now it is called the world's richest school. El Paso, nestled in a mountain bowl beside the Rio Grande, has been a gateway to Mexico and California 400 years and seen more shootin' than a penny arcade. VIP's are still hustled from trains by two-gun possemen who show them the sights from a stagecoach.

Corpus Christi, beside a blue half-moon bay, has been having fun ever since federal troops in '62 accidentally bombarded it with hollowed-out cannon balls filled with whisky. Galveston has never needed any more firewater than it

Texas Has Everything

Spindle Top Oil Field, BEAUMONT, Tex.



had; pirates and French adventurers set a roisterous pace which has never slackened. Beaumont, on the contrary, was drowsing 'mongst its cabbages when fabulous Spindletop oil field blew in, to launch a zillion-dollar Texas industry and transform Beaumont into such a helldorado that police warned good citizens to walk in the middle of the street after dark with a gun in each hand. Nearby Port Arthur was founded by a Kansas City visionary who swore he was guided by spirit Brownies.

Amarillo, where most of the world's helium comes from, and neighboring Lubbock, in the Panhandle, still retain the flavor of cowtowns, although both are highly industrialized. They fight like wildcats for supremacy. When the 1950 census showed Amarillo slightly larger, Lubbock vociferously demanded a recount. At Waco, I wanted to cry, because progress has wiped out all traces of the brave days when settlers gunned it out with redskins on the banks of the *Rio de los Brazos de Dios*, the River of the Arms of God. I found the same story at historic Wichita Falls, where half-wild local youngsters used to kill wildcats with their bare hands.



Sheep Shearing, San Angelo, Texas

AT SAN ANGELO, the nation's largest inland wool market, I attended a modest little get-together where 110 legs of lamb were barbecued at one time. Incidentally, I learned there how to tell a sheep from a goat: a sheep's tail hangs down, a goat's tail stands up and wiggles. Ain't that edifying? Near Laredo, where rancher Charlie Alexander trains dogs to guard sheep by letting puppies get their groceries from a mother ewe, I was introduced to an elegant eatment called *cabrito*, the meat of an unweaned kid roasted over mesquite coals. Laredo is the border city where the old ballad mourns for the young cowboy who was

Texas Has Everything

shot in the breast and knew he must die. You hear it from every juke box when the town cuts loose with an international fiesta each Washington's Birthday.

Cities are fine, but me, I'm a country boy. So a lot of Texas' little ol' rustic wonders pleased me plumb to pieces. Fishin', for instance; I was amazed to find 3,695 square miles of lakes. My favorite is 40,000-acre Caddo near Marshall, where lunker bass leer from the splayed feet of giant cypresses, but the biggest is Texoma on the northern frontier—1,250 miles of shore line, attracting more visitors annually than the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone Park. That's where those big waves did me no good when a norther blew down. When dams now in work are completed, Texas will have 31,500,000 acre-feet of impounded water; enough to make a 5,000-square-mile inland sea; enough to dunk all of Rhode Island 30 feet down.

Or you take the deep woods. In Texas? Yep! There are 76,000,000 acres of forest, the greatest woodlot of any state. What sent me were the flowering trees—dogwood, redbud, mountain laurel, Grancy graybeard; fragrant magnolia and sweet bay; holly, possum yaw and yaupon, which flame with berries in the fall. Even the mesquite of the western plains is graceful. It saved many a pioneer from death. Old-timers used to boil the roots and leaves for medicine, grind the beans for flour, and use the bush as a weather forecaster. It never frosts after the buds appear, and a cold winter always follows a heavy bean crop. An Indian told me, so it must be true.

Or you take flowers. I'm a pushover for a posy. I got a terrific charge out of driving endlessly between pastures riotous with bluebonnet, red Indian paintbrush, mauve wine-cup, purple coneflower, the pastels of wild verbena and petunia, and the varicolors of lantana, prickly poppy, fire wheel, and niggerhead. The state highway boys, bless their aesthetic little hearts, plant them along the roads. Near Navasota one sunset we passed a pond where cattle stood knee-deep in water lilies, while the opening petals of evening primrose reflected the blue haze of distant hills. I durned near hit a telephone pole gawking.

In West Texas, cacti were flowering and cows were munching like crazy on exotic nosegays. The maguey—century plant to youse Eastern dudes—was throwing up stalks which would shortly burst into towers of bloom. Mexicans use maguey sap to make a fermented refreshment called *pulque*, and distill it into fiery *mescal*, but a gallon of it couldn't exaggerate the majesty of those lofty white desert candles marching across the infinite *Llano Estacado*, the Staked Plains, where the highways follow lonely trails once marked by sun-bleached buffalo skulls on mesquite posts.

At Tyler, I found flowers a \$25,000,000 business. From this Rose Capital of America are shipped some 20,000,000 field-grown bushes annually, two thirds of the nation's production. I bought two dozen long-stemmed beauties for 50 cents, but most of the buds are snipped and thrown away to strengthen the plants. Tyler's October Rose Festival has parades, 35 bands, 500,000 blossoms on display, and a luscious Rose Queen.

lo **Texas Has Everything**



Kilgore, Texas

SPEAKING of capitals, you can hardly think of anything that Texas hasn't a capital of. Kilgore, the Oil Capital, is so pincushioned with derricks that they had to pass a law prohibiting firing a pistol downtown for fear of hurting an oil well. At Crystal City I found a statue of Pop-eye dominating Popeye Park; that's because Popeye is a spinach hound and Crystal City is the Spinach Capital of the Universe. Cuero is the Turkey Capital; the festive Turkey Trot each fall attracts hordes who keep hoping for a high wind while the Sultana is parading in her turkey-feather costume. The Nut Capital of America—but, nuts, this could go on forever. However, don't overlook Gainesville, the Circus Capital; it has a really professional circus in which every performer is a local amateur.

For the most entertainment in a commutable range, my vote goes to the Kerrville neighborhood. There, much more than in any other locality I found, tourists are made welcome. Most Texans are too busy to bother with 'em. Within sight-seeing distance are San Marcos, with a jungly river, glass-bottomed boats, and a "kissing oak," where old Sam Houston reputedly kissed every gal in town before marching off to hassle with the Mexicans; Fredericksburg, a German town with an Old World beer garden and a church built to resemble a coffee grinder; Enchanted Mountain, the easiest peak on earth to climb, where the Texas Rangers whomped the Comanches; New Braunfels, beside a big spring—one of 14,000 Texas springs—which flows 200,000,000 gallons a day and makes the world's shortest river, two miles long; Old Camp Verde, headquarters for an army camel brigade, until it was disbanded because the camels couldn't take the beating, proving that Texas is tougher than the Sahara Desert. After the camels were turned loose, they scared many a buckaroo into signing a pledge. The last camel wandered to Arizona, where it died.

A few miles south of Kerrville in the Hill Country I came one day to a sign marking the frontier of The Free State of Bandera. Above the sign rippled the national flag—a pair of cowboy jeans 10 feet long. This turned out to be Texas' Dude Capital and one of the state's brightest spots.

SEEMS that these hill folks were suspicious of furriners until, 20 years ago, Eb Buck weakened and permitted a few of them to pay him \$9 a week for bed and board. To his amazement, he liked 'em. Next year, the John Bruces and the Dee Crowells took in a few. Now there are 10

Texas Has Everything

dude ranches, ranging from little ones where you can help with the dishes to big ones like the Flying L, which has an airport. There are also good hotels and a flock of excellent tourist courts.

They all pull together to show dudes a big time. Their Stompede each May is a hoot-and-holler jubilee with a Cow Belle queen. But the thing I admire is their independent spirit. A few years ago they petitioned President Truman to declare a National Cowboy Week to honor the pioneers. Mr. Truman didn't answer—one of the few opportunities he has passed up to write a letter. The folks held an indignation meeting, seceded from the Union, proclaimed The Free State of Bandera, passed laws forever outlawing railroads, smokestacks, carbon monoxide, and ulcers, and elected a character named Zeke as commander-in-chief of their army, navy, and horse marines. This year, just to spite Mr. Truman, they are running Zeke for President. Looks like a landslide. . . .

Characters are what you never get away from in Texas—characters, independence, and history. Any Texan can tell you all about the founding fathers: Moses Austin, the St. Louis banker who started this first American colony on Mexican soil; Stephen Austin, his peace-loving son, who carried on the colonization in times when "Texas was a heaven for men and dogs, but hell for women and oxen"; Sam Houston, that strange, austere man who came from Tennessee, formed a volunteer army, told his men to "Trust in God and fear not!"—and won Texas independence from Mexico.

In the state capitol and the splendid state museum at Austin you may find, as I found, the records of many other characters who laid the groundwork for Texas' greatness, among them the men who guided it during its 10 years as an independent republic on American soil. There is great drama in these faded documents.



Pablo Duro Canyon

In the biggest and bestest department, West Texas takes the marbles. The deepest hole in the ground is Palo Duro Canyon in the Panhandle, rivaling the Grand Canyon in majesty. From a comfortable lodge on the rim I motored down to the bottom—yep, there's a road—to consider how Charles Goodnight must have felt when he drove cattle into that fearsome place in the Indian days, founded the first ranch, and remained to become rich and famous. He can have it; it's too spooky for me.

The wildest pioneer town was Tascosa, 100 miles northwest, rendezvous for high-

Texas Has Everything

waymen, rustlers, and renegades. The only laws it ever had were knife and gun. Every man in the cemetery died with his boots on. The population was eventually whittled down to one old woman. When she died, citizens of Amarillo adopted the old town, and today it is riotous again with the shouts of healthy, happy kids. It is headquarters of Boys' Ranch, an Amarillo project to help underprivileged youngsters. One of the boys showed me the oldest trail in Texas—a ford across the quicksandy Canadian River used by prehistoric men and beasts during the Ice Age and still used by wandering cowhands.

The richest modern boom town, Snyder, is 250 miles south—just a step in Texas. I got there by wedging the hearse into a 49-mile-long parade of oil trucks. Snyder was too poor to pay a preacher when a gusher roared in at the edge of town four years ago, opening a tremendous field. Now every citizen who owned a foot of land is rolling lettuce, and the church, smack over the field, is probably one of the world's richest. I wanted to stay at Snyder overnight, but there wasn't a pallet to be had; population has quadrupled. So I got out of there by grinding 49 miles back to Big Spring between the oil trucks. Even then I had to drive 60 miles to find an empty bed.

Texas' most beautiful cave, one of a dozen, is Longhorn Caverns near Burnet. It is in one of the 44 state parks. It has spectacular indirect lighting, no ups or downs, but it's six miles long. That's too long for guys like me who are allergic to calisthenics, so I went over and ogled the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River, which I could enjoy sitting down. It isn't the biggest or best of anything, but it's real purty.



SANTA GERTRUDES, HOME AND HEADQUARTERS OF KING RANCH, KINGSVILLE, TEXAS

AMERICA's biggest farm, the King Ranch, south of Corpus Christi, is a century-old, 1,000,000-acre feudal empire swallowing parts of three counties and several good-sized towns. Until quite recently it administered its own justice, but lately has made some concessions to the sovereignty of Texas. Armed guards still patrol its hundreds of miles of fences, but today they don't shoot first and ask questions afterward; they just arrest you for trespassing and give you a fair trial before a judge. Both the judge and the cowboy guards, of course, are employees of the ranch. This is the last stand of baronial grandeur in America.

A good highway (U. S. 77) slices through the ranch, and it takes hours to pass the fences. You can't see the main house from the highway, and that's a pity, because it is quite a shanty—a stone palace with 18 rooms and an elevator.

Texas Has Everything

The handful of people who live there must have an awful time deciding where to sleep. From the highway, however, you can see the massive hump-necked zebu—Brahman—cattle imported from India; they revolutionized the beef business in our Southern states. Grazing in green pastures also are herds of heavy-bodied Santa Gertrudis cattle, the only breed developed in the United States; they originated on the King. The biggest agricultural machines make huff and puff on distant horizons, and if you're lucky you may catch glimpses of thoroughbred horses grazing in miles-wide fields, for this is the home of Assault and many other champions of the turf.

The biggest winter vegetable garden in America—with apologies to Florida and California—lies 100 miles south in the Brownsville neighborhood called the Rio Grande Valley, and here I bumped smack into another monument to a Texan's gumption. Today, the valley is a tropical oasis burbling with palm-lined canals and fields fringed with flowers. Thousands of Northerners winter there, picking sweet grapefruit with ruby-colored pulp, papayas which are supposed to make you feel like a colt, mangoes, dates, bananas, and munching vegetables of enormous size. From this tiny region come trainloads of fresh fruit and vegetables for which stay-at-home Yankees pay premium prices in the dead of winter. Just across the Rio Grande is Matamoros, a lively Mexican border town, and southward excellent highways stretch into the heart of Mexico.



I FOUND the oldest town in America a good day's drive westward—Presidio, on the border, where human beings have lived for 10,000 years. I was even more intrigued by Ojinaga, just across the Rio Grande, a Mexican town almost unspoiled by tourists. The first Texans, by the way, were cave men who drew pictures on cliffs. Half a mile of ancient pictographs are visible near Paint Rock, south of Ballinger, and there is almost an acre of prehistoric carvings in stone near Shumla, not too far from Del Rio. It is amazing that no effort is made to preserve most of these relics. Unless you can cuddle up to the ranchers who own the land, you can't even get near most of them.

The oldest hole in the ground was made by a giant meteor which fell near

Texas Has Everything

Odessa; anthropologists think it may be the origin of the Indian legend of the Thunderbird. Some of the finest Indian mounds, filled with artifacts, were at Nacogdoches. When I tried to find them I learned they had been leveled off to build the high school. The oldest living animals, however, can be seen and petted at the Kurt Apelt ranch near Comfort; they're armadillos, armored anteaters unchanged since prehistoric times, and cute as kittens. A baby armadillo costs \$5. All I need in my overloaded jalopy is a baby armadillo.

The biggest ghosts in Texas are the scary Chisos Mountains in 700,000-acre Big Bend National Park. Chisos means ghosts. Enormous rock formations look like hooded spooks about to pounce, and I got to them by skirting the Devil's Backbone and Hell's Half Acre. Wow! This park is loaded with wild bears, ferocious wild boars called peccaries, and mountain lions, among other playful fauna. Rangers killed 10 lions east of there during my visit. They were probably looking for me.



THE tallest mountain east of the Rockies is 8,751-foot Guadalupe Peak on the New Mexico line 112 miles east of El Paso and 55 miles from Carlsbad Caverns. Guadalupe and its neighbor, El Capitan, only 750 feet shorter, are among 83 Texas mountains more than a mile high. In a canyon at their base is the marked grave of a guide killed by Indians in 1855. There's a place on the highway where you can park and see those infinite spaces where men fought to tame the wilderness, and it really does things to you.

But, of all Texas' high country, I found nothing to compare with the Davis Mountains southeast of Guadalupe. At Balmorhea, I swam in the world's largest walled pool, fed by a spring flowing 26,000,000 gallons a day. At the foot of Mount Bloys, I stood in a natural amphitheater where an old-style cowboys' camp meeting is held each year. And along the highway from Pecos to Balmorhea one midnight I saw the most theatrical sight of my life—an electrical storm southward over Mexico, continuous streamers of lightning like neon serpentine lashing the sky to the limit of vision and slicing through soaring billows of cloud. But it never rained a drop. . . .

The hardest thing about writing a report on the wonders of Texas is finding a place to stop. This thing could go on indefinitely. I haven't told you about the dinosaur tracks in the Paluxy River bed near Glen Rose; or the prehistoric 33-room pueblo on Saddleback Mountain south of Old Tascosa; or the rootin' tootin' rodeo put on annually by prisoners in the penitentiary at Huntsville; or the old-time cowboy reunions at Stamford and Anson.

I haven't told you about Jefferson, the town called "The Mother of Texas,"

Texas Has Everything

which all but died because it refused to let the railroad come in, and is now welcoming tourists to explore its venerable mansions; or about towns I found named Point Blank, Circle Back, Gunsight, Loco, Pancake, and Grand Saline, which is built on top of a mountain of salt a mile wide. I haven't even told you about the Onion Fiesta at Raymondville—which, natch, is the Onion Capital of Creation and the weepinest place under the sun.

All I can say is, if you want it, Texas has got it. And next time you hear a Texan making big talk about his native state, don't be too quick to snicker. He is probably a danged liar. But also, dog-gone it, he's probably right.



American
MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1952: p. 37

OldMagazineArticles.com