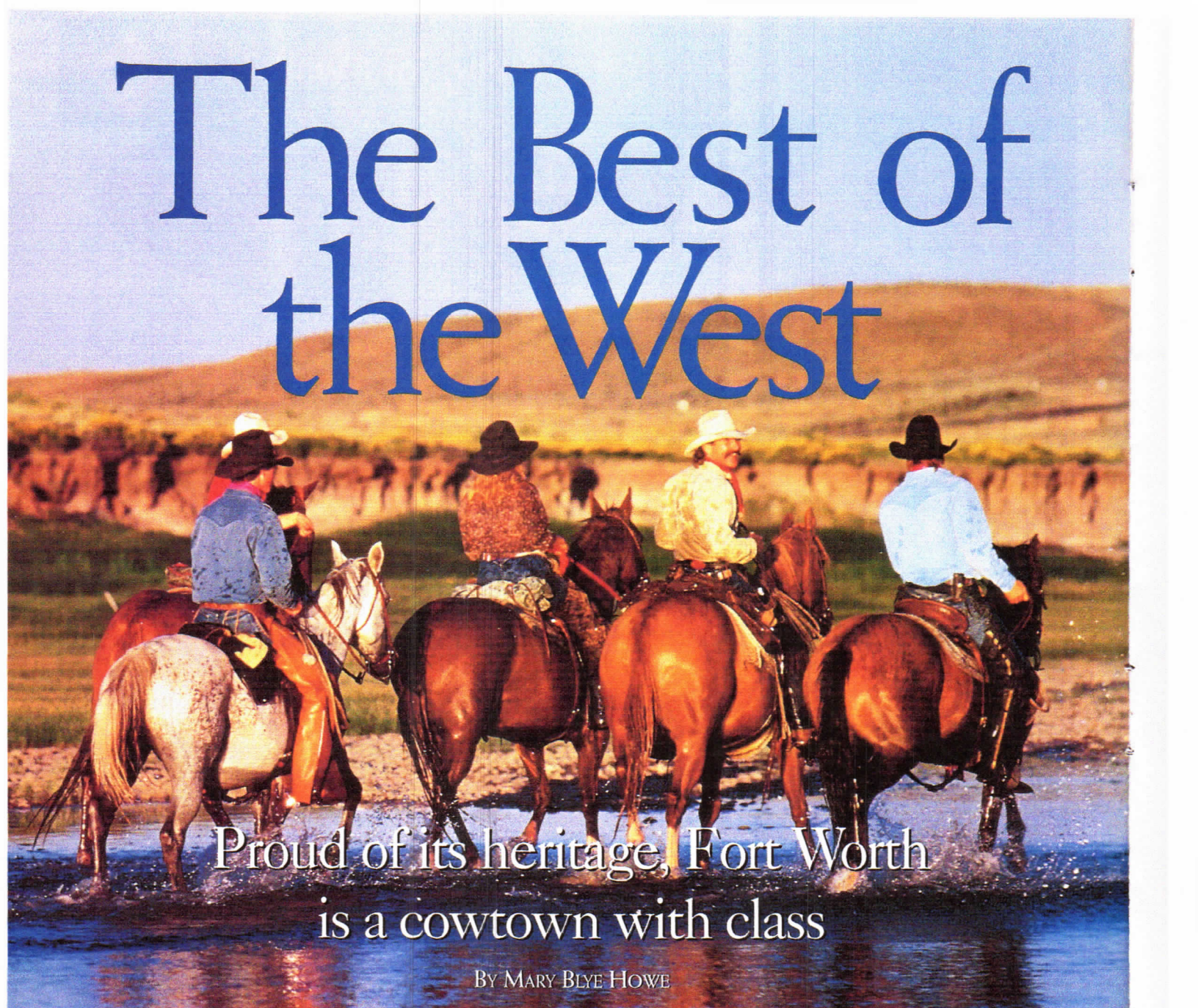


The Best of the West

A photograph of four cowboys on horseback wading through a river. The cowboys are wearing hats and western attire. The horses are splashing water. The background shows a grassy bluff under a blue sky.

Proud of its heritage, Fort Worth
is a cowtown with class

BY MARY BLYE HOWE

Established in 1849 on the grassy bluffs of the Trinity River, Fort Worth, then known as Camp Worth, began as a temporary garrison for Civil War soldiers. When the camp was eventually abandoned by the army, settlers moved into the empty log buildings and began calling their new home Fort Worth. As a generous supply of saloons, dance halls and rooming houses sprang up,

the town became known as Hell's Half Acre, the last stopover for cowboys and outlaws on the Chisholm Trail.

Today Fort Worth, part of a sprawling metroplex located 40 minutes from Dallas and home to nearly half a million people, is a vibrant blend of Old West simplicity and modern growth — a cowtown with class. The western heritage is alive and well here — and not just for the

TONY STONE IMAGES, RICHARD KAYLIN

benefit of tourists — it's simply what Fort Worth, in many ways, still is. As someone said of the doormen at the world-renowned honky-tonk, Billy Bob's Texas, "They don't chomp huge wads of tobacco and wear cowboy hats as a gimmick, that's just the way they are."

To experience the essence of Fort Worth, you should spend time in each of the city's three main sections — the Stockyards National Historic District on the north end of town; the Cultural District to the west; and in downtown Fort Worth.



FORT WORTH CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

THE STOCKYARDS

In 1873, cattle were transported via rail from the Fort Worth stockyards to the Kansas meat-packing plants. By 1902, the country's two largest packing companies, Swift and Armour, opened their own facilities in Fort Worth, making it the second-largest stockyard in the country. Cowtown became boomtown.

The buildings that still stand along Exchange Street today are landmarks. Cowtown Coliseum (817/625-1025), built in 1908, was the site of the world's first indoor rodeo. Professional rodeo competitions are still held here, year round, with Wild West shows added to the bill during the summer months.

Next door is the Livestock Exchange Building, once considered the "Wall Street of the West." This was where livestock traders made their deals and built their fortunes. Today the spanish-style building, constructed in 1904, provides office space for a number of businesses

and is also home to the North Fort Worth Historical Society and Museum (817/625-5082).

Stockyard Station, a renovated hog and sheep barn, now houses more than 30 stores and restaurants. This is a great place to shop for Western wear as well as a taste of the Lone Star State. Many of the stores specialize in a variety of Texas hot sauces, guaran-



MONET AT THE KIMBELL

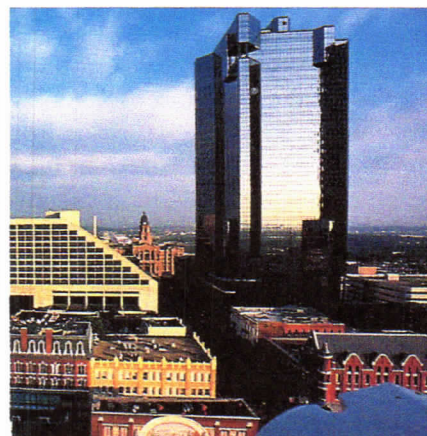
A collection of paintings by French impressionist Claude Monet is on exhibit at Fort Worth's Kimbell Art Museum through Sept. 7, 1997. *Monet and the Mediterranean* includes more than 70 paintings by the artist completed during three trips to the coasts of France and Italy between 1884 and 1908. The exhibit makes only one other U.S. stop — to New York's Brooklyn Museum of Art, Oct. 10, 1997-Jan. 4, 1998.

Tickets are \$10 for general admission, \$8 for students and seniors, and \$6 for children age 6-11. All tickets are half price on Tuesdays. For more information about the exhibit, call 817/332-8451.

teed to curl your hair and your toes. The station also serves as the depot for the Tarantula Train (817/625-RAIL), a vintage 1896 steam engine that makes the 42-mile round-trip excursion between nearby Grapevine and the Stockyards daily.

No trip to the Stockyards is com-

plete without visiting Billy Bob's Texas (817/624-7117), the largest honky-tonk in the world. Nightly performances featuring top country music stars and professional indoor bull riding every weekend provide visitors with plenty of entertainment. The real treat, though, is watching the skillful footwork of the Texas two-steppers, hundreds of people maneuvering themselves across Billy Bob's 13,000-square-foot dance floor.



FORT WORTH CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

CULTURAL DISTRICT

The city's Cultural District is just two and a half miles from the Stockyards National Historic District. With four museums all within walking distance of each other, there's a good chunk of culture to be found in Cowtown.

The Kimbell Art Museum (817/332-8451) is widely recognized as one of America's best small museums. It is currently hosting the *Monet and the Mediterranean* exhibit through Sept. 7 (see sidebar). Just down the street is the Amon Carter Museum (817/738-1933), with an impressive collection of oil paintings and bronze sculptures by classic Western artists Charles Russell and Frederick Remington.

A favorite for families is the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History (817/732-1631), with numerous interactive exhibits for visitors of all ages, and the popular Omni Theater. Kids thoroughly enjoy the genuine dinosaur fossil-hunting area, DinoDig. This popular spot resembles a gigantic sandbox

and is filled with authentic fossils. Tool-toting tykes are encouraged to join in the dig.

Super Speedway is a brand-new film at the Omni Theater. Narrated by actor and racer Paul Newman, the movie takes viewers behind the scenes of open-wheel racing. Audiences share the open cockpit of a high performance Indy-type car, driven by racing legend Mario Andretti, as it thunders down a speedway with some of the best drivers in the world. Call the museum for viewing times.

The Cultural District is also home to the oldest museum in Texas — the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth — which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1992. The museum's permanent collection includes impressive works by Picasso, Mark Rothko and David Hockney.

Just outside the Cultural District are two more attractions worth a visit. The 109-acre Botanic Garden (817/871-7686) features 21 specialty gardens, including the spectacular Oval and Lower Rose Gardens with more than 2,500 roses. The Fort Worth Zoo (817/871-7050), home to nearly 5,000 exotic animals, including

Previous page (left to right): A visit to the Stockyards is like returning to the days of the Old West. One of the Monet paintings currently at the Kimbell Museum. The city's skyline. (Below) The Water Gardens in the downtown area. (Right) the famous Chisholm Trail Mural in Sundance Square.



cheetahs, rhinos and a world-famous reptile collection, was selected as one of the "Top Five Zoos in America" in 1995.

DOWNTOWN

If time allows, reserve a day for some fun in Downtown Fort Worth. Sundance Square, the city's entertainment and shopping district, is a renovated 14-block area lined with boutiques, art galleries, restaurants and theaters. With its red-brick streets and courtyards, it has been nationally recognized as a model for urban revitalization. This area was once a hang-out for outlaws, cattlemen, cowboys and other "legends" of the Old West. In fact, it takes its name from one rather infamous visitor — Harry Longabaugh, better known as the Sundance Kid.

The striking three-story-tall



Chisholm Trail Mural, a Fort Worth landmark and lasting tribute to the days of the cattle drives, is on the Jett Building at Third and Maine St.

And don't miss the Water Gardens at 15th St. and Commerce, adjacent to the south side of the Fort Worth Convention Center. Designed by architect Philip Johnson, the gardens feature a spectacular complex of sculptures and fountains where

GETTING THERE



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- If you fly to Fort Worth, call the toll-free 24-Hour Reservation Service, **800/833-9966**, select option 3, for the guaranteed lowest airfare.

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visitors stand 38 feet below ground level while experiencing 1,000 gallons of water rushing down a 700-foot wall each minute.

Fort Worth is a city with a colorful past and a vibrant future — and it knows how to be true to both. You might even call it the best of the West.

Mary Blye Howe is a freelance writer from Duncanville, Texas.

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