

AMON CARTER: THE FOUNDER OF MODERN FORT WORTH. 1930-1955

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From 1930 to 1955, Amon Carter, publisher of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, exerted his power to create modern Fort Worth. Carter used his stature as the publisher of the city's major newspaper to build a modern city out of this livestock center.

Between 1930 and 1955, Carter lobbied successfully for New Deal funds for Fort Worth, persuaded Consolidated Aircraft to build an airplane plant in the city, and convinced Burlington Railways to stay in the city. He also labored unsuccessfully to have the Trinity River Canal built and to secure a General Motors plant for Fort Worth. These efforts demonstrate that Carter was indeed the founder of modern Fort Worth.

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## CHAPTER 1

### FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS: THE EARLY YEARS OF AMON CARTER AND FORT WORTH

Numerous forces have shaped the city of Fort Worth since its inception as a military outpost in 1849. Wars, oil booms, livestock, and aviation have all left their indelible mark on this North Texas city. Though outside events such as the First and Second World Wars, high demand for beef, and oil discoveries in West Texas created an environment open to growth, Fort Worth has also been assisted by citizens who have actively sought to take the city into the twentieth century and beyond. Throughout its history, cattle barons, oilmen, financiers, and politicians worked together to make Fort Worth a city that was attractive enough to keep its citizens stable and happy and also bring in the people rapidly migrating to urban areas at the turn of the century.

For nearly fifty years, one man, Amon Carter worked tirelessly to promote Fort Worth's interests. Amon Giles Carter moved to Fort Worth in 1905 and stayed there until his death in 1955. Endowed with a sense of vision that drove him throughout his life, Carter persuaded both fellow Fort Worthians and national figures that the city was worth the investment in time and money he believed was necessary for the city's growth. His influence was felt from City Hall to the Oval Office and seemingly everywhere in between. It was from the years 1930 to 1955 that he accomplished the

most for Fort Worth and, by extension, West Texas. Time magazine called him “a civic monument, which unlike San Antonio’s Alamo, Houston’s Shamrock, and Dallas’ Cotton Bowl, can walk and talk at incredible speed.”<sup>1</sup> Due to Carter’s presence and power, Fort Worth was able to attract many major businesses and construction projects that attested not only to the dynamism of the city but also to the drive he possessed. As will be proved, Carter is to be credited more than any other person with the shape and status of modern Fort Worth. His political and commercial influence, felt beyond the city’s borders, left a legacy that remains visible years decades after his death.

Carter was concerned not with achieving goals that would boost his popularity and power, but rather with bringing to Fort Worth industries and structures that would enhance the city for decades. Carter’s legacy can be seen on the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, WBAP radio, American Airlines, the Will Rogers Memorial Center, and countless other structures and organizations around the city. While he was successful in many undertakings, it must not be assumed that Carter thrived at whatever he attempted. Friendship with politicians such as President Franklin Roosevelt and John Nance Garner was offset by clashes with Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and Congressman Jim Wright. Triumphs such as receiving federal funding for Fort Worth’s Frontier Centennial and his successful efforts to bring a Consolidated Aircraft bomber plant was countered by his failure to make the Trinity River navigable to Fort Worth.

One would think that Carter’s importance to the history of Fort Worth and much of Texas has already been the subject of a scholarly work. However, that is not the case. The only studies devoted to Carter are a master’s thesis written by Samuel Kinch

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<sup>1</sup> Time, 25 Feb. 1952, 45.

in 1965 and an anecdotal biography by longtime Star-Telegram writer Jerry Flemmons published in 1998. Kinch's thesis focuses on his influence at the Star-Telegram, therefore cannot truly be called a biography. Flemmons's book is full of quips and quotes by Carter and his acquaintances, but he does not cite his sources. It is assumed that he conducted his research at the Amon Carter Collection, which was at the Amon Carter Museum at that time, because some of the quotes he uses come from letters and wires found in the archives.

In order to understand Amon Carter in the years from 1930 until his death in 1955, it is necessary to explore the first half of his life and the early years of Fort Worth. Though Carter was already well known throughout the United States by 1930, his intimate connection with the city of Fort Worth was not as well established. By the time of his death, the name Amon Carter was synonymous with Fort Worth. His life until 1930 can be understood to be a dress rehearsal for the world stage for both Carter and Fort Worth, a time to prepare the boisterous Texan and "Cowtown" for entrance onto the national scene.

Carter was able to accomplish so much for a variety of reasons. His stellar rise from rickety log cabin to wealthy entrepreneur is a story worthy of Horatio Alger. Regardless of whatever high status he achieved, Carter never forgot what it was like to have nothing. Therefore, before he was wealthy and even after he was a millionaire, Carter was more than generous with his money. One cannot form a correct understanding of Carter's life without understanding his philanthropy. The combination of his personality with the vibrancy of a young city like Fort Worth enabled the two to collaborate in a partnership that would benefit both entities. His prolific correspondence

reveals a man driven more by a sense of civic pride and community spirit than by any schemes of self-aggrandizement. Carter believed that Fort Worth was the greatest city to rise from the face of the Earth, a fact he shared liberally with everyone he met.

Author Jerry Flemmons quotes an obscure Texas horse-racing newspaper as saying, "This boy Amon Carter lays awake all night thinkin' up things to help his town. I figger if th' world wus cumin' t' a end Amon wud hav' it cum t' a end in Fort Worth 'fore it reached Dallas."<sup>2</sup>

Carter's pride in Fort Worth and detest for Dallas motivated him to do many of the things that he did from 1930 until his death. When Dallas was chosen over Fort Worth as a site for the Texas Centennial celebration in 1936, Carter began his own celebration, called the Frontier Centennial, with help from the government. Dallas had the North American airplane plant by 1940, so Carter pressured for a Consolidated factory in Fort Worth. However, Carter was not above teamwork with Dallas if it benefited the whole state of Texas as shown with the Trinity Canal project.

On December 11, 1879, Giles Amon Carter was born in a log cabin near Crafton in Wise County, Texas, to William and Josephine Carter. Carter's life was uneventful until his mother died while giving birth to his only sibling, a sister named Addie, in 1892. Soon after, his father, a man for whom Carter had no great affection, married Ella Patterson. For reasons that he never explained to anyone, Carter did not get along with his stepmother and soon moved to the nearby town of Bowie. At the age of thirteen, he was without a loving family, and apparently without a future.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jerry Flemmons, Amon: The Texan Who Played Cowboy For America, (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 199.

<sup>3</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 39-40.

Young Carter had not moved to Bowie without any worldly experience. His parents moved to Nocona during the 1880s, and Carter quickly learned that he had the gift of entrepreneurship. He spent Sunday mornings in Nocona's wagon yards picking up empty flasks and selling them to saloonkeepers for twenty cents a dozen.<sup>4</sup> Once in Bowie, Carter lived at a boarding house owned by Millie Jarrett. In addition to room and board, he also received \$1.50 a week for doing janitorial work and various odd jobs for Ms. Jarrett. Carter was not content, however, to work only at the boarding house. To earn his way through grammar school, he worked for a doctor, peddled ice cream and soda, and carried buckets of drinking water to a local grocery store.<sup>5</sup>

Carter stopped going to school after completing the eighth grade and focused on his various business ventures. His most famous business was as a "chicken and bread" boy selling chicken sandwiches to passengers on the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad as they passed through Bowie. Short of money as he sometimes was, Carter was not above raiding local chicken coops; as one author observed, this practice "lowered his overhead considerably."<sup>6</sup> When no chicken was available either legally or illegally, Carter improvised and used rabbit meat instead.

By the time he was in his late teens, Carter believed he was ready to move on to the less reputable occupation of running a knifeboard concession. Along with a railroad brakeman named O.G. Hurdleston, he ran this scam inside of a Bowie saloon. The purpose of the knifeboard game was to toss rings around the handles of knives stuck into a whiskey corks; fifty-cent coins or five-dollar bills were glued to each knife.

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<sup>4</sup> Alva Johnston, "Colonel Carter of Cartersville," Saturday Evening Post, 26 Nov. 1938, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; Flemmons, Amon, 40.

<sup>6</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 41.



Unfortunately for the players, the rings would not fit around the handles guarding the coins, and the handles with the five-dollar bills were turned in a position that would prevent a ring from ever landing on them. Carter quickly learned that it would be more profitable to allow someone to win on occasion so as to garner more popularity.<sup>7</sup>

At the age of eighteen, Carter's yearning to travel took him north to Indian Territory near Norman, Oklahoma. He intended to join a circus and sell taffy with a newly purchased taffy-pulling machine but was persuaded to be a salesman by a representative of the American Copying Company of Chicago. Instead of traveling America with a circus, he worked as an independent seller of framed portraits. These portraits were made to fit only certain frames; coincidentally, only the American Copying Company sold the proper-sized frames. It did not take Carter long to become one of the company's top salesman, and he was soon transferred to San Francisco to be the company's general sales manager. However, Carter's sales talent took him to new employment with the Barnhart and Swasey Advertising Agency. West Coast life for Carter did not hold adventure like West Texas life, so he moved to Fort Worth in 1905.<sup>8</sup>

Fort Worth in 1905 had a much different character than it would when Carter died. The city was named for the fort that had been established on some high bluffs overlooking the West Fork of the Trinity River on June 6, 1849, by Major Ripley Arnold. It was named for his recently deceased commanding officer, Major General William Worth. Its original purpose was to protect the settlers of the nearby settlements of Dallas and Peters Colony from Comanche attacks. Civilians quickly moved to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

protection of the fort, but the fort was abandoned after four years as the settlement line moved westward.<sup>9</sup>

Fort Worth struggled afterwards, hanging on to survival only by stealing the county seat from the nearby community of Birdville with apparent voter fraud. Fortunately for Fort Worth, the post Civil War United States had a high demand for beef, and cowboys began driving thousands of cattle from South Texas to Kansas through Fort Worth, which had several good Trinity River crossings. Regardless of the business that the cattle brought to Fort Worth, however, the town still had a sleepy reputation only aggravated by a Dallas newspaper's accusation that once a panther was found asleep in the street. By 1876, however, the town fathers had persuaded the Texas and Pacific Railroads to build through Fort Worth.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1880s and 1890s, several more railroads such as the Fort Worth and Denver City, the Fort Worth and New Orleans, and the Rock Island either began in Fort Worth or passed through the town. Fort Worth capitalized on the railroad's presence by pressing for the construction of meatpacking plants in the town. After several failed attempts by various local businessmen to form a successful meatpacking company, both Armour and Swift had located in Fort Worth by 1902. By the time of Carter's arrival in 1905, both meatpacking plants were booming, the stockyards were bustling, and the frontier fort had become a city.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver Knight, Fort Worth: Outpost on the Trinity (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 82-86.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 123-127; J'Nell Pate, Livestock Legacy: The Fort Worth Stockyards 1887-1987 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 21,42.

By 1905, it was clear that Fort Worth was the gateway to West Texas and points north because of the presence of the livestock industry and railroads. A growing population needed urban amenities to keep them there, and Fort Worth modernized in response. Electrical companies wired the towns, and the discovery of natural gas in surrounding regions brought in gas plants. A commission form of city government was voted upon and approved, proper roads were funded and built, and city parks were created. The first decade of the twentieth century heralded great accomplishments for Fort Worth, and Amon Carter saw great potential in this former frontier outpost.<sup>12</sup>

Carter arrived in Fort Worth with a patented indexing telephone directory he had acquired in San Francisco. As a growing city, Fort Worth would provide the necessary capital that Carter needed to exploit this invention. He rented an office in the Fort Worth National Bank, rented a typewriter for fifty cents a month, and printed business cards with the name "Texas Advertising and Manufacturing Company." To supplement his patent work, Carter promoted advertising cards on local streetcars. However, he was soon distracted from his mission regarding the directory because of the financial opportunities Fort Worth provided. He encountered a man who told him of a method of creating fuel by combining crude oil with the cow manure abundant in the Fort Worth stockyards. His interest piqued, Carter went to the stockyards for a demonstration where he met two men, A.G. Record and D.C. McCaleb, who were interested in starting a newspaper. He traded his rights to the telephone directory for a peach orchard in

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<sup>12</sup> Knight, Fort Worth, 174-183.

Arlington, Texas, halfway between Fort Worth and Dallas, and joined the staff of the brand-new Fort Worth Star.<sup>13</sup>

The Fort Worth Star, with Carter at the head of the advertising department, set its sights on overtaking the largest newspaper in Fort Worth, the Telegram. The Star used the much smaller United Press wire services as opposed to the Associated Press wire used by the Telegram. This put the fledgling newspaper at a serious disadvantage. The Star was able to overcome this handicap in 1906, however, when the San Francisco earthquake occurred. While visiting a commodities office, Carter read over a business wire about the earthquake before news of the tragedy came over either the United Press or Associated Press wires. Carter remembered the map of San Francisco that he had placed in his wallet and used it to locate destroyed buildings for insertion in an extra edition of the Star. Before the Telegram was able to react, Carter had already sold numerous copies in Fort Worth and was headed to Dallas to sell even more. This scoop boosted the newspaper's circulation but was not enough to bring the publication out of the red.<sup>14</sup>

The primary funding for the newspaper came from Colonel Paul Waples, the head of the Star Publishing Company, but Carter's business expertise was needed to keep the Star afloat. Carter came on board with a negotiated salary of thirty-five dollars a week, but soon had to accept a cut by fifteen dollars per week. Facing a financial

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<sup>13</sup> Time, 45; Johnston, "Colonel Carter of Cartersville," 32.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel E. Kinch, "Amon Carter: Publisher/Salesman" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1965), 20-21.

crisis, Carter was forced to undertake an even more drastic measure: buying the rival Fort Worth Telegram.<sup>15</sup>

Purchasing the successful Telegram appeared to be a laughable solution in early 1908. Even at this early stage in life, Carter learned the value of exercising his network of acquaintances and friends. Working through his friend, O.P. Thomas, secretary of the Abilene Chamber of Commerce, Carter offered to buy the newspaper for \$100,000 with \$2,500 due at signing and the balance within ten days. To acquire the \$2,500, Carter left three diamond rings and a diamond and pearl scarf pin as collateral with the Fort Worth National Bank. With an offer from the advertising behemoth Barron Collier of New York waiting for him, Carter knew that if he failed to secure the balance within ten days, he would have to leave his newly adopted home of Fort Worth for greener pastures. With the help of Paul Waples's friendships with local businessmen W.G. Burton, H.C. Meacham, and W.C. Stripling, Carter obtained enough money to purchase the Telegram. Both newspapers shut down operations and emerged as the Fort Worth Star-Telegram as the new year of 1909 dawned. Amon Carter was well on his way to becoming one of the most successful newspaper magnates in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

It did not take long for Carter's entrepreneurial talent to emerge. By combining an engaging personality with his early success as a salesman, Carter was able to navigate the Star-Telegram through its early years with amazing success. With 40,000 subscribers just four years after its inception, the Star-Telegram had the fourth largest circulation in Texas. It was not the only newspaper in town, however, because the Fort Worth Record served the city as a morning edition newspaper. However, it was easily

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<sup>15</sup> Johnston, "Colonel Carter of Cartersville", 32; Knight, Fort Worth, 186-187.

<sup>16</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 46-48; Time, 45; Johnston, "Colonel Carter of Cartersville," 32.

crushed by the Star-Telegram and was absorbed by Carter in 1924 after a battle with the most powerful publisher in the United States, William Randolph Hearst.<sup>17</sup>

The Fort Worth Record ran a far second in circulation in Fort Worth to Carter's paper and had changed hands a couple times before Hearst purchased it in 1922. Apparently, Hearst had no other reason to purchase the Record other than getting rid of Carter. Since 1918, he had repeatedly offered Carter positions in his newspaper empire, including the New York American and the New York Herald-Tribune. Carter simply strung Hearst along, faking interest now and then. By 1922, Hearst tired of the game and purchased the Record with intent to drive Carter out of town. Unfortunately for Hearst, running a newspaper in Fort Worth entailed more than reporting national and international news. The Star-Telegram served as the news outlet not only for Fort Worth, but also for West Texas, while the Record under Hearst failed to cover topics of local interest.<sup>18</sup>

After two years in Fort Worth, Hearst was losing thousands of dollars monthly. He offered to buy the Star-Telegram from Carter but was rebuffed one last time. Wishing to get rid of the expensive venture, Hearst agreed to sell the Record to Carter. By 1924, Carter's newspaper was now the only worthy source of information in Fort Worth. From 1924 until 1955, he extended publishing hegemony over the city of Fort Worth, and he easily swept aside any competitors that challenged his hold. Despite the apparent rivalry between the two publishers, Carter and Hearst eventually became good friends.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 58-60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>19</sup> Kinch, "Publisher/Salesman," 43-45

One of Carter's greatest interests was the new technology of aviation. This obsession stayed with him from the time he first saw an airplane in 1909 until his death. In 1911, through the editorial page of the Star-Telegram, he persuaded Fort Worth to raise the money to bring to the city a group of French aviators called the International Aviators. Carter did not view these new contraptions as toys, but saw their potential in regards to transportation. With this new technology, Carter believed that he could reach an even wider audience in the vast expanses of West Texas with his newspaper. That same year, he was instrumental in having the first piece of airmail delivered to Fort Worth by airman Cal Rodgers. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Carter assisted the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce in lobbying the government to build airfields in the city to train pilots. As a result of his actions, several airfields were built, including Caruthers Field in Benbrook and Taliaferro Field on the northside of Fort Worth.<sup>20</sup>

Carter's interest in aviation soon extended outside of assisting the birth of aviation in Fort Worth. He wanted to enter the aviation business for his own benefit for flying had become one of his passions. In 1928, Carter joined the Texas Air Transport company, the same company which later purchased what was to be known as American Airlines. After persuading American Airlines to move its southwestern headquarters from Dallas to Fort Worth in 1934, Carter became one of the largest stockholders in the company.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond owning a large portion of American Airlines, Carter remained interested in aviation for its own sake. He flew on many Pan American Airways Clipper flights to

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<sup>20</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 148.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Amon, 149-150.

promote international flight especially to Latin American countries because he believed that it was necessary for economic reasons that the United States maintain good relations with its neighbors. This interest in aviation motivated his future involvement in attracting Consolidated Aircraft Corporation to Fort Worth and in his failed attempt to bring the new United States Air Force Academy to the shores of nearby Lake Grapevine. He was also committed to building a regional airport for Fort Worth, a dream that was fulfilled although not on the scale that he had hoped.

Carter was not a wealthy man until the 1930s when the Wasson Oil Field in West Texas was discovered on property he owned. The discovery of oil in the West Texas communities of Ranger, Desdemona, and Burkburnett during World War I proved to be a great boon to Fort Worth. Because Fort Worth was the nearest large city, oil operators set up business in hotels around the city. As the oil boom continued, oil companies such as Sinclair moved to Fort Worth. Oil's presence demanded refineries, and by 1922 nine operated in the city. In 1920, Carter believed that he was ready to join in on this fabulous boom that was benefiting Fort Worth and West Texas.

Although initial success as a "wildcatter," Carter soon sold off his initial investments for \$100,000 to pay off debts he had incurred. It was years before he was able to strike oil again. In 1935, Carter again succeeded, this time in New Mexico, after ninety dry holes. In 1937, he finally found the one that would make him a multi-millionaire. The Wasson Oil Field in Gaines and Yoakum counties was one of the most



productive in Texas and was often said to produce just a little less than the giant fields in East Texas. The Wasson Field allowed Carter to begin his philanthropy in earnest.<sup>22</sup>

Carter's philanthropy is well documented and was an integral part of his life. His first documented moves into philanthropy came as the head of the Star-Telegram with the founding of the Free Milk and Ice Fund and the Goodfellows Fund. Carter started these two charities in 1912 in an effort to boost the newspaper's standing in the community and because he had a profound sense of community. The Free Milk and Ice Fund began in the summer of 1912 and provided free milk and ice to Fort Worth's needy citizens. The Goodfellows Fund collected community donations to give gifts to poor children at Christmas.<sup>23</sup>

Before the Wasson Field discovery made him a wealthy man, Carter was forced to indulge his "fits of philanthropy" through the Star-Telegram. In addition to the Goodfellows and the Free Ice and Milk Fund, he lavished generous bonuses on his employees and often took care of them in emergency situations. Employees had life insurance after six months, and the Star-Telegram paid for hospital insurance. Though much of this generosity stemmed from his giving personality, Carter also believed that his paternal behavior would keep his employees from organizing unions. Star-Telegram employees were not the only recipients of Carter's philanthropy. He helped direct a fundraising campaign for the 1927 Mississippi Flood Relief fund and was also active in raising money to build a local Young Men's Christian Association. Much of this was accomplished through Carter's forceful personality because, as his secretary Katrine

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Kelley, Foundations of Texan Philanthropy (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>23</sup> Kinch, "Publisher/Salesman," 31.

Deakins said, “Amon Carter gave money away when he didn’t have it to give.” Though often unable to personally give millions to charitable causes, Carter used his newspaper and speaking ability to supplement his lack of personal wealth.<sup>24</sup>

Carter’s campaign to begin what is now known as Texas Tech University is another good example of his using the Star-Telegram for philanthropy. Beginning in the early 1920s, he recognized that West Texas needed a good state university. Carter himself was unable to finish school, and he wanted other West Texas children to have opportunities to continue their education. In the early 1920s, he began lobbying through the pages of the Star-Telegram for a college in West Texas. Largely because of the efforts of Carter and his newspaper, a new public university, Texas Technological College (to be popularly known as Texas Tech) was built in Lubbock. This successful campaign led to Carter being named to the first Texas Technological College board of directors by Governor Pat Neff. Incidentally, this would be the highest public office Carter ever held.<sup>25</sup>

The discovery of the Wasson Oil Field shifted Carter’s philanthropic efforts into a more organized approach. Access to millions of dollars enabled him to quit borrowing money to support his charitable endeavors. Some of his first donations went to a summer camp for a local Boy Scout troop, with the purchase of a light system for Amon Carter Riverside High School (a Fort Worth school named after him during the 1930s) and air conditioning for polio patients at John Peter Smith Hospital. Even though Carter was able to give larger gifts more frequently, it was not until 1945 that he formally organized his philanthropy with the founding of the Amon G. Carter Foundation.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 95, 108; Kelley, Texan Philanthropy, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Kinch, “Publisher/Salesman,” 42.

Carter, along with his wife Nenetta, formed the Carter Foundation on April 7, 1945 with an original endowment of over \$8,000,000. The purpose of this foundation was to support “benevolent, charitable, educational, or missionary undertakings.” The Foundation was formed as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization originally housed in the Star-Telegram building. According to Foundations of Texan Philanthropy author Mary Kelley, Carter had numerous reasons for creating a foundation for “large-scale, organized philanthropy after more than thirty years of individual giving”. He loved his community and wanted to promote its interests whenever possible. For this reason, the Carter Foundation’s grants were restricted to Texas with a focus on the Fort Worth region. It was also good business for the generous Carter to place much of his money in a sheltered foundation where no inheritance taxes could reach it, and in this way he was like other wealthy businessmen who wished to protect their finances. He also believed that it was his duty to share the wealth that he accrued in his lifetime, and by forming the foundation he would be able to continue his giving from the grave.<sup>26</sup>

Due to Carter’s extensive national reach, he wielded enormous political power in Fort Worth. All people who sought government offices subtly understood Carter’s hold on Fort Worth politics. Carter never held any office in the city. Rather, most of his influence was behind the scenes. He practiced most of this clout among the Fort Worth elite at the Fort Worth Club. Local businessmen founded the Fort Worth Club in 1885 as the Commercial Club. In 1906, they changed the name to the Fort Worth Club in order to show its affiliation with the community. Early members were Fort Worth luminaries such as B.B. Paddock, publisher of the Fort Worth Democrat, and Major K.M

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<sup>26</sup> Kelley, Foundations of Texan Philanthropy, 62-63.

Van Zandt, president of the Fort Worth National Bank. Carter joined the Fort Worth Club soon after he moved to Fort Worth and began to create the networks that served him throughout his life.<sup>27</sup>

At the Fort Worth Club, Carter mingled with the movers and shakers of the Fort Worth community. Little did he know that soon he would be the prime force in the Fort Worth Club and the Fort Worth community. In 1920, he was elected president of the Fort Worth Club, a position he would hold for the rest of his life. That same year it was clear to the club members that the Fort Worth Club needed a new building, for it was outgrowing its present home. However, not until 1924 was a decision made on location and size. The new Fort Worth Club was to be twelve stories tall and built at a cost of \$1,150,000. Carter led the effort in selling mortgage bonds and personally sold over \$600,000 of the bonds. Carter possessed a unique gift of salesmanship that would have enabled him to sell “iceboxes to Eskimos at the North Pole,” and he raised the money in a few weeks to everyone’s surprise. His sales pitch was simple: “Buying bonds in the Fort Worth Club is an investment, not in our club, but in our town.” In addition to selling numerous subscriptions, Carter was also responsible for leasing the bottom floors of the building to help cover other costs. He then persuaded the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad and Fakes Furniture Store to lease several stories for their use.<sup>28</sup>

By achieving this feat, Carter entrenched himself as a loyal citizen of the community and essentially president of the Fort Worth Club for life. The new club had ornate suites available for members, and Carter occupied one of the most opulent, 10G.

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<sup>27</sup> Irvin Farman, The Fort Worth Club (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Club, 1985), 21-23, 37.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

He entertained numerous celebrities in Suite 10G and had them sign his guest logbook that would soon hold the names of some of the most famous and powerful people in the world. For example, he used his boyhood friendship with boxing promoter Tex Rickard to bring him and Jack Dempsey to the Club to sign a contract that would allow Dempsey to defend his title against Gene Tunney. Will Rogers, the famous entertainer, was a close friend of Carter's and considered the Club a second home. The list of Carter's guests is full of household names: Bob Hope, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Edgar Bergen, Gene Autry, and Henry Wallace to name a few.<sup>29</sup>

Carter did not just use the Fort Worth Club for entertaining. He hosted many business banquets for numerous occasions. Oftentimes, the annual Trinity River Canal Association (TRCA) banquet was held at the Fort Worth Club. Whenever he was courting a company that was thinking of moving to Fort Worth, Carter would bring its officers to the club for a gala or a private meal. At a 1939 banquet held in Carter's honor, Fort Worth entrepreneur Ben E. Keith noted that Carter had struck many a deal at the club. It was there that Carter had called a dinner to work out the financing for a new football stadium for Texas Christian University. It was also at the first annual TRCA meeting at the Fort Worth Club that Carter raised \$40,000 toward the canal campaign from local businessmen.<sup>30</sup>

When Carter was not entertaining celebrities and politicians at the Fort Worth Club, he took them to his Shady Oaks Ranch on the shores of Eagle Mountain Lake on the outskirts of Fort Worth. At the Shady Oaks Ranch, Carter lived up to his reputation

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 117-125.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 148-150; TRCA Files, Box 41, Amon Carter Collection, Mary Couets Burnett Library, Texas Christian University. Cited hereinafter as Carter Collection.

as a stereotypical cowboy by hosting long parties that sometimes lasted for more than a day. Carter's guests hoped they might be rewarded with one of his signature Stetsons. A Stetson gift meant that one had either impressed Carter or was one of his close confidants. Carter's gift giving, at least outside of his philanthropy, was hierarchical. Stetsons were at the top, while other gifts like watermelons grown at Shady Oaks, pecans, and turkeys all ranked underneath. The famed Amon Carter Stetsons were renowned worldwide, as even British nobles were proud to be enshrined in Carter's pantheon of Stetson wearers.<sup>31</sup>

The Stetson was only a part of Carter's fondness for playing rambunctious cowboy. He was unable to participate in the settling of the frontier that intrigued him, considering that he was born only eleven years before the frontier was declared to be no more. He began to collect western art by celebrated artists Frederic Remington and Charles Russell. These paintings and sculptures would become the centerpiece of the Amon Carter Museum of Art which was built after his death. Little else about the arts or culture interested Carter. He was content to let the world think he was a slow-talking, smart-thinking Texan with no regard for social mores. When Davey O'Brien, the diminutive quarterback from Texas Christian University won the Heisman Trophy in 1938, Carter drove O'Brien down Wall Street in New York City in a stagecoach, whooping and hollering with cowboy abandon. Because Carter lived to bring Fort Worth to the attention of the rest of the nation, he was not ashamed proudly to declare his pride in the city. One of his favorite pastimes was to find a prominent place in some cosmopolitan city like New York or Washington, D.C., and loudly proclaim: "Hooray for

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<sup>31</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 112-122.

Fort Worth and West Texas!” Nothing piqued the interest of passersby or diners more than the sight of a man wearing Stetson, cowboy boots, and pearl-handled six shooters.<sup>32</sup>

Because he was consumed with the promotion of Fort Worth and West Texas, Carter found little time for family life. He was married three times and fathered three children. He married his childhood sweetheart, Zetta Thomas, in 1904 and was divorced in 1917. In 1918, Carter married Nenetta Burton, but divorced her in 1942. His first two marriages to Zetta and Nenetta failed due in part to his busy life. Nenetta summed up her feelings about married life with Carter when she said that being married to Carter was like being married to the chamber of commerce. She added that Carter was the “grandest father that ever lived and the worst husband.” His third marriage to Minnie Meacham lasted from 1946 until his death in 1955. It is possible that this marriage was helped by his decreasing activity in the latter years of his life.<sup>33</sup>

Of Carter’s three children, his only son, Amon Carter, Jr., remained his pride and joy. Born in 1920 to Carter’s second wife Nenetta, “Junior” attended Culver Military Academy in Indiana and then went on to join the United States Army when World War II began. Though Carter had close contacts with prominent politicians, he refused to let his son be treated any differently because of who he was. When Junior was captured in 1943 by Bedouins in North Africa and handed over to the Wehrmacht, Carter was devastated. He spent the next two years corresponding with his son, who was being held in Stalag Luft III. When the advancing Red Army got too close, the Germans evacuated “Junior” into Germany, where he was finally rescued by the United States

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<sup>32</sup> Kinch, “Publisher/Salesman,” 52-54; Flemmons, Amon, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>33</sup> Kinch, “Publisher/Salesman,” 50.

military. Carter was in Europe at the time touring concentration camps and POW camps as part of an entourage of newspaper publishers, so he was then reunited with his son in 1945 in Europe. Upon returning to Texas, Carter brought his son into business with him. In 1952, he made “Junior” the president of the Star-Telegram.<sup>34</sup>

Oil, philanthropy, publishing, and aviation: all these were a part of Amon Carter’s obsessions and interests, and they shaped his actions throughout his life. Despite his shortcomings as a family man, Carter never failed to devote himself to the cause of Fort Worth and West Texas. Never was this devotion so apparent as it was at the beginning of the Great Depression and the 1930s. His efforts to seek federal funding for the construction of the Trinity River Canal from the Gulf of Mexico to Fort Worth combined with his successful attempts to bring the New Deal to Fort Worth opened doors for Carter that would remain open for the rest of his life.

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<sup>34</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 275-273.



## CHAPTER 2

### “PORT” WORTH: AMON CARTER AND THE TRINITY RIVER CANAL PROJECT

For twenty-five years, visions of freighters docking in Fort Worth and transforming the city into an industrial powerhouse consumed Carter and drove him to push for the construction of a canal on the Trinity River from the Gulf of Mexico up to Fort Worth and Dallas. This was no one-man scheme, however; prestigious citizens of both cities joined the organization that worked tirelessly to create a canal that would create economic benefits for North Central Texas. Though the name of this organization changed a few times throughout Carter’s life, the goal remained the same. Whether it was called the Trinity River Navigation Association (TRNA), the Trinity River Canal Association (TRCA), or the Trinity Improvement Association (TIA), this group of businessmen lobbied the state and federal government to support the plan to make the Trinity navigable. At the front of this effort was Amon Carter, eternal optimist. Little did he know that his extensive efforts would fall short, leaving Fort Worth no closer to the Gulf than before he began his efforts.

Carter and his colleagues were not the first to foresee that a navigable Trinity River would benefit Texas. In a letter to Carter, Fort Worth oil operator George Hill wrote that he had stumbled upon Mexican correspondence in some Austin archives regarding making the Trinity navigable. A certain Francisco Madero, citizen of the Mexican province of Texas y Coahuila, petitioned that the Trinity River be “navigable to

steamboats, horse drawn vessels, sail boats, and boats propelled by oars from its mouth to Bull Hill.”<sup>35</sup> In a memo entitled “The Legislative History of the Trinity River,” TRCA Executive Vice President Roy Miller outlined the historical discussion regarding the navigation of the Trinity. In the River and Harbor Act of June 18, 1878, Congress called for the deepening of the channel at the mouth of the river for easier navigation and then appropriated \$10,000 for the project. Congress earmarked additional funds for the improvement of the Trinity throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. The 1899 River and Harbors Act provided money for a survey of the Trinity from its mouth to Dallas while simultaneously approximating the cost of adding locks and dams along the way. Congress appropriated hundreds of thousands of dollars until the project was abandoned in the River and Harbor Act of 1922. The only accomplishment of these various acts was the widening and deepening of the mouth of the Trinity. However, Trinity improvement was included in the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1930, thus opening the discussion once more.<sup>36</sup>

According to Miller, earlier projects were abandoned for two reasons: one, engineers doubted that the water supply would be sufficient enough to allow for consistent navigation; and, two, “the purely local character of the project, which limited its possible services to the area immediately contiguous to the river.” However, Miller did not believe that these reasons should halt any future Trinity projects. Reservoirs had been completed since the initial project came under scrutiny, and the completion of the Mississippi River System along with the Intracoastal Waterway in Louisiana and

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<sup>35</sup> George Hill, to Amon G. Carter, June 10, 1941, File 12, Box 41, Amon G. Carter Collection, (Mary Couets Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas).

<sup>36</sup> Roy Miller, “The Legislative History of the Trinity River,” File 7, Box 41, Carter Collection.

Texas changed the project from a local one to one of national importance. Proponents claimed that the canal would no longer serve as solely a connection to the Gulf of Mexico, but also as a connection to cities as distant as Sioux Falls, Pittsburgh, and Chicago.<sup>37</sup>

Carter's involvement with the canal did not begin until 1930 with the formation of the TRNA. At first he served the organization on the board of directors; in this position he held little power in the association. He was simply one of many Fort Worth businessmen, such as department store owner William Monnig or oilman Ed Landreth, who were granted positions. His first assignment was to find a suitable young lady in Fort Worth to break a bottle of Gulf of Mexico water at the dedication of a hydraulic dredge in Dallas. This hydraulic dredge was to begin digging in preparation for a turning basin in the Trinity River. Carter found a young woman for this ceremony and then prepared to give a speech at the ceremony entitled "Trinity River Navigation and Its Relation to the Development of the Southwest". In this speech, one of many given on this momentous day, Carter discussed how the building of a canal would benefit not only Fort Worth and Dallas, but also the vast stretches of West Texas with all its agriculture and oil. Dallas and Fort Worth would then become great industrial centers like Pittsburgh or Cleveland.<sup>38</sup>

It did not take long for Carter to begin exerting his power and influence over the association. The other members quickly recognized what an asset they had in Carter. His friendship with politicians in Texas and Washington, D.C., combined with having his own newspaper was very attractive to the association. At a midsummer 1930 meeting

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Dallas Journal, July 14, 1930.

of TRNA, Carter was named chair of a finance committee to raise \$62,000 a year for five years for an educational program to increase local awareness about the project. By August of the same year, TRNA changed its name to the TRCA, moved its offices from Dallas to Fort Worth (presumably at Carter's urging), and named Carter to the executive committee.<sup>39</sup>

The new TRCA added Roy Miller of Houston and Corpus Christi as the executive vice-president and selected Dallas Businessmen John Carpenter as president and John Fouts as the general manager. Miller was simultaneously involved in the planning of the Gulf Intracoastal Canal and was therefore valuable for his experience. Carpenter was a prominent Dallas businessman and president of Texas Power and Light who often took the lead in civic affairs in much the same manner as Carter. In correspondence with Carter, Fouts detailed the move to Fort Worth and Carter's future role. With Carter's name on the official letterhead, Fouts hoped to capitalize on his presence. After all, he wrote, earning Carter's cooperation "moves mountains and canalizes rivers."<sup>40</sup>

Fouts noted that there would be a struggle in gaining the federal government's cooperation in this project due to past accusations of the canal being a "pork barrel" measure. However, there were five things that ensured that this new undertaking would

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<sup>39</sup> Dallas Dispatch, July 14, 1930. The papers in the Carter Collection make no mention of the Trinity Canal until Carter was officially named to the board. However, the depth of Carter's correspondence makes it appear that Carter had thought through the possible benefits of the Canal before his involvement.

<sup>40</sup> John Fouts to Carter, August 22, 1930, File 7, Box 41, Carter Collection; Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Carpenter, John Williams," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/onlinearticles/view/CC/fca60.html> (accessed February 2, 2005); Lynn Alperin, History of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (Washington: Institute for Water Resources, 1983), 27. Carter's notorious hatred of Dallas was put aside whenever the whole state could benefit.

not be wasting the taxpayers' dollars. First, the economy in Texas and the Southwest had been thriving. Second, four reservoirs in Dallas and Fort Worth increased the water supply needed for a canal. Third, the Intracoastal Canal under construction would link the Trinity with the Mississippi River system, thus eliminating the criticism that the canal would be too local. Fourth, Congress had passed a bill in 1925 that allowed for the exchange of goods from a rail system to a waterway with fair revenue sharing. Finally, according to Fouts, Texas and the Southwest were going to be the new center of United States industry, just like the Northeast and Midwest before. Aviation, railways, and highways were expanding in the region, and the addition of waterways "would complete our transportation system and add immeasurably to the wealth and industrial development of an empire whose potential resources have scarcely been touched."<sup>41</sup>

Carter needed little persuasion to give himself wholeheartedly to the project. Any operation that would boost Fort Worth and West Texas in the eyes of the nation was a worthy undertaking, even if it meant cooperating with Dallas. Later in 1930, at a meeting of TRCA at the Fort Worth Club, Carter disclosed that he was already in talks with politicians regarding the Trinity. He invited Senator Morris Sheppard and Congressmen Fritz Lanham, Sam Rayburn, and Hatton Sumners to his Shady Oaks Ranch to discuss the possibilities of the canal. Having earned their cooperation, Carter realized that the canal could become a real possibility. Later, Carter confessed that he had been reluctant to cooperate with Dallas because he doubted that it would commit to the project with the same fervor as Fort Worth. However, he was satisfied by the move

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

of the offices to Fort Worth and the sincere cooperation of John Carpenter and John Fouts.<sup>42</sup>

As chair of the finance committee, Carter began sending letters to local businessmen so that money could be raised to fulfill Fort Worth's financial commitment. The TRCA planned to spend \$300,000 over five years in raising awareness, hosting meetings, and lobbying politicians. Dallas was going to raise \$30,000 annually, Fort Worth \$20,000, and the rest was supposed to be raised by other towns and cities along the Trinity.<sup>43</sup>

In a form letter sent to businesses such as Swift, Texas Electric, and Monnig's Department Store, Carter appealed to both their sense of pride in the community and their desire for a growing economy in the region. He claimed that Fort Worth's position at the head of the canal would not only bring business and industry, but would also mean increased savings in freight rates. Carter assured the business community that the project would be national, not local, by pointing out that the president of the Mississippi Valley Association had noted at recent meetings that the Trinity Canal was to be an integral part of the internal waterway system of the United States. Carter could not resist infusing these letters with the booster spirit for which he was so well known, saying that "Every sign points to success of the Trinity River project." To seal the deal, Carter pointed out a recent unnamed survey showing that the Trinity River shipping area had handled 450 million tons of freight; the survey had also calculated that the present ratio of river traffic to total traffic around the country revealed that the Trinity

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<sup>42</sup> Minutes from TRCA meeting, approximately November 1930, File 7a, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

proper might handle over 5 million tons of traffic. The Southwest would profit by over \$15 million annually; therefore, the approximate cost of construction to the federal government of \$50 million would be easily justified.<sup>44</sup>

Roy Miller's experience in working with the Intracoastal Canal on the Texas Gulf Coast was attractive to TRCA. He told Carter that one should not think of the canal only as access to the Gulf. For the Trinity Canal to be a success, it had to be connected to the Mississippi River System. Otherwise, Dallas and Fort Worth would be left behind while the cities along the waterway would grow. However, Miller trusted that Carter's leadership abilities would raise enough money to cover Fort Worth's subscription. Patience was a requirement if one was to be affiliated with the project, Miller advised, for it would take awhile to get Congress to act regarding the Trinity because "legislative processes...are slow, and scenes are constantly shifting."<sup>45</sup>

Carter believed that the easiest way to get fellow Fort Worthians on board with the idea was to focus on the impact of the canal on freight rates. In an article he wrote for a locally published book, Carter gave as an example the steel industry. Up to that point, he said, steel mills were unable to locate in the North Texas region because freight rates were too high to ship steel cost effectively. Water rates were much cheaper, and with the canal steel mills would be willing to build in North Texas. Carter believed that "canalization" (a word frequently used by proponents) was "the most far reaching proposition, in its ultimate benefits, that has been presented to the people of

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<sup>44</sup> Carter to L.P. Swift, Jr., Dec. 15, 1930, File 7a, Box 41, Carter Collection. To clarify, Carter defined the Trinity River area very loosely and included ports like Galveston and Houston, while the tonnage given for the Trinity itself is referring to what the river was capable of handling up to Dallas and Fort Worth.

<sup>45</sup> Miller to Carter, Dec. 30, 1930, File 7a, Box 41, Carter Collection.

Fort Worth and North Texas since the advent of the railroads.” Increased manufacturing would also mean larger population, more business, and more prosperity for the population as a whole, he claimed.<sup>46</sup>

Though freight rates were at the center of Carter’s argument, he did not want his stand to be mistaken for an attack on the railroads. Carter recognized that the railroads were Fort Worth’s lifeline. Building the canal would help, and not hurt, the railroads because the canal would mean increased railroad traffic as many new industries shipped their goods to the canal for further transportation. In Carter’s own words, “The canal will merely be a complementary form of transportation not a competitor of the railroads.”<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of Carter’s remarks, the railroads felt threatened by a new form of transportation in the region. Silliman Evans, executive secretary of TRCA, informed Carter that the railroads were mounting opposition to any legislation that supported the canalization of the Trinity River. According to Evans, railroad attorneys were pressuring lawmakers to defeat any canal bill while simultaneously urging them to hold up favored legislation of those who supported the canal. Determined leadership was needed to rally canal forces, and he believed that Carter was the man for that job.<sup>48</sup> With opposition to his dream mounting, Carter took action by phoning many legislators in Austin urging passage of the Trinity River Canal District Bill allowing the formation of a tax district for the canal. The bill passed in May with a 21-6 vote, and Carter received

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<sup>46</sup> Carter, manuscript, Jan. 12, 1931, File 8, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Evans to Carter, Feb. 23, 1931, File 8, Box 41, Carter Collection.



much of the credit. His incessant phone calls and the support of the Star-Telegram made passage of the bill much easier.<sup>49</sup>

TRCA faced more problems than railroad opposition. It was still debatable whether or not the Trinity's water levels could be maintained to allow navigation. In 1932, Colonel W. T. Hannum, a War Department engineer, reported that his preliminary survey of the Trinity disclosed that there was not enough water for year round navigation. However, this survey did not take into account two lakes under construction by the City of Fort Worth at the time. According to John Fouts, the amount of water impounded by these two lakes would be sufficient for both Fort Worth's needs and the needs of shipping on the Trinity. In response to Hannum's report, TRCA hired engineers and an attorney to study it and prepare a feasible solution to present to the Board of Engineers in Washington in the summer of 1932.<sup>50</sup>

TRCA was successful in convincing both the federal government and the State of Texas that a navigable Trinity was worth the research and investigation. The Texas legislature created the Trinity River Canal and Conservancy District to comply with any demands the federal government would make in order to prepare the area for improvement. In 1933, the Department of Commerce completed an economic survey to determine if a navigable Trinity was necessary for the continued development of Texas. Commerce was also interested in knowing if the canal would be worth spending tax dollars to construct. In the fall of 1933, the Department of Commerce determined that \$120 million could be spent on the project. Carter maintained, however, that it could be

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<sup>49</sup> Evans to Carter, May 8, 1931, File 8, Box 41. Carter Collection; Fouts to Carter, May 13, 1931, File 8, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>50</sup> Fouts to Carter, June 14, 1932, File 8, Box 41, Carter Collection.

built for only \$54 million and continued rallying local businessmen to the cause of a Trinity Canal. The canal would boost Fort Worth's population to a half-million in time, and despite all the continued enmity from the railroads, it could be completed. Carter believed that Fort Worth's future as a big city hinged on the construction and completion of the canal.<sup>51</sup>

The flurry of activity that accompanied the creation of TRNA and TRCA slowed down, however, as the effects of the Great Depression reached Fort Worth and Dallas. The years 1932 and 1933 were especially slow ones if the lack of correspondence between members signified anything. The Hoover Administration's lethargy in combating the Depression combined with a penchant for retrenchment meant fewer dollars for canal research. However, the arrival of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his promise of increased federal spending breathed new life into the efforts toward canalization of the Trinity. Carter and his fellow board members apparently recognized that an increase in public works spending by the federal government could mean more money for the construction of a canal. Workers would be needed to build a canal and the economic benefits created by the canal would be a credible weapon to combat the Great Depression.

Other people involved in the canal project recognized that Carter would be a great emissary to the New Dealers in Washington. Though he had been an avid supporter of John Nance Garner for the presidency, once Roosevelt came out on top in the Democratic primary, Carter threw all his support behind the New York governor. His early support for the New Deal combined with his friendships with Jesse Jones and Vice

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<sup>51</sup> Fouts to Carter, Jan. 18, 1933, File 8a, Box 41, Carter Collection; Carter to Morris Berney, Oct. 26, 1933, File 8a, Box 41, Carter Collection.

President Garner gave Carter great influence in Washington. In December 1933, Carl Mosig of the Dallas Morning News's Fort Worth branch notified Carter of \$250,000 in Public Works money given to the National Planning Board for regional planning projects. Both Dallas and Tarrant Counties filed applications for this money, to be used to hire a prominent engineer for preliminary planning. Mosig doubted that the money would be given to Dallas and Fort Worth unless Carter contacted federal relief administrators Harry Hopkins or Harold Ickes and persuaded them to divert the funds. Unfortunately for Carter, Hopkins and Ickes believed at the time that the money was better spent elsewhere.<sup>52</sup>

Carter's success elsewhere in life resulted partially because of his willingness either to annoy or charm people into giving him what he wanted. When it came to the federal government, annoyance was usually the key, especially during the height of the New Deal. John Carpenter, president of TRCA, appointed Carter the chair of a TRCA delegation traveling to Washington for the annual meeting of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress. While at the session, Carter revealed the broadening plans of TRCA that would allow for a greater water supply. Flood control in the upper Trinity would be added to the designs in order to reclaim more than one million acres of land. Surveys conducted by TRCA disputed claims made by railroad engineers, and Carter naturally took the side of the association. TRCA surveys showed that maintenance of the canal would cost approximately \$500,000 while the Texas Railway Association

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<sup>52</sup> Mosig to Carter, Dec. 14, 1933, File 8a, Box 41, Carter Collection. For more on Carter's reactions to and opinions of the New Deal, see Chapter Three of this manuscript.

stated it would cost in excess of \$26 million. This estimate, Carter argued, was larger than the annual maintenance of canals and rivers around the United States.<sup>53</sup>

Carter and the TRCA were not alone in struggling to attract the attention and approval of the federal government. Frank Reid, president of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress, informed all members of the organization that federal appropriations regarding canals, rivers, and harbors were in danger of ceasing. Competing interests, presumably railroads, opposed to river and harbors were organizing against federal money flowing toward their improvement. Moreover, Harold Ickes and his Public Works Administration were reluctant to allocate federal funds toward the improvement of rivers and harbors. The Emergency Appropriation Act of 1934 carried \$500 million for public works but very little of it designated for river improvement. This action, according to Reid, threatened to reverse any gains made by the country regarding rivers and harbors and set the country back twenty-five years. He called for all organizations involved with the National Rivers and Harbors Congress to mobilize to counteract any negative moves made by the federal government or other opponents.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these apparent setbacks to the Trinity plan, Carter and the other members of TRCA remained optimistic because of the constantly changing landscape of the New Deal. To prepare Carter for further discussions with members of the federal government, John Fouts wrote to him of the continued economic importance of the Trinity Canal. President Roosevelt had created a National Planning Committee

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<sup>53</sup> Fouts to Carter, April 14, 1934, File 9, Box 41, Carter Collection; "Trinity Canal Plan Includes Flood Control," Dallas Morning News, May 2, 1934.

<sup>54</sup> Reid to members of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress, Jul. 5, 1934, File 9, Box 41, Carter Collection. The National Rivers and Harbors Congress was a lobbying group dedicated to the improvement of waterways and harbors around the nation.

consisting of Harold Ickes, Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, and Secretary of War George Dern. Contrary to the fears of Frank Reid, the Roosevelt administration was not intent on halting river improvement. The National Planning Committee was developing a program for river improvement, and according to Fouts, if the Committee was well-informed about the economic boost that the canal would give to Texas and the Southwest, it would have no choice but to give its assent.<sup>55</sup>

The major thrust of Fouts's argument centered on the natural resources of the Trinity River Valley. He claimed that the area contained nearly 1,000,000 acres of timber, 200,000,000 tons of lignite coal, and, in what was a wild exaggeration, over 200,000,000 tons of iron ore. In addition to these resources, there was also much petroleum in East Texas and limitless amounts of potash in West Texas. Many of these resources had not been developed, and Fouts noted that an improved Trinity would allow for their exploitation. Again, the topic of freight rates weaved its way into the argument. According to Fouts, the Dallas/Fort Worth region freight rates were nearly double that of the average rates around the United States. A navigable Trinity would allow shipping rates almost half of the United States average, thus giving more incentive for greater exploitation of natural resources and greater agricultural productivity. Fouts hoped that arming Carter with all these facts would provide a firm foundation on which to present their case.<sup>56</sup>

The Roosevelt Administration had more pressing matters, however, than building a canal in Texas. It was well over a year before the federal government took specific

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<sup>55</sup> Fouts to Carter, Jul. 20, 1934, File 9, Box 34, Carter Collection.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

steps toward addressing the Trinity Canal. The thrust of the New Deal was not improving navigation but providing immediate relief to the unemployed, and though the canal project would provide jobs, it would not be immediate relief. The Public Works Administration and the already defunct Civil Works Administration did not provide funds for such massive projects. What Carter and his fellow TRCA members envisioned was a Tennessee Valley Authority style project for Texas, though they never explicitly mentioned TVA. One reason for this can be determined from Carter's beliefs regarding the role of the federal government. As will be demonstrated later, Carter was perfectly willing to spend New Deal money for Fort Worth and Texas, but any further government interference clashed with his sense of self-reliance and antipathy to federal regulations. In this way, Carter fit into the mold of the typical Texas New Deal Democrat--standing at the door of the White House with hand outstretched but unwilling to meet any further demands the New Deal might ask in return.

It was a year before the federal government saw fit to address the Trinity Canal. On August 7, 1935, the War Department's Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors held a hearing in Fort Worth regarding the Trinity waterway. At this hearing, Carter made the opening statement outlining his case and the case of TRCA to the federal government. This being the Board of Engineers, Carter did not center his argument on railroad rates and potash in West Texas, but on the feasibility of the Trinity project.

Carter opened his statements with three possible questions the federal government might have regarding the Trinity canal: What actions did Texas take to set up a cooperative agency with the government? What local steps had been taken by local governments to assist the government? How receptive were Texans and Fort

Worth to the project? The Trinity waterway was unlike any other, he claimed, if only for the reason that Texas had once been a sovereign country. Because Texas had retained the rights to its public lands, Carter argued that the federal government needed permission to make improvements and must obtain this with either the State of Texas or an agency of the State of Texas.<sup>57</sup>

As Fort Worth's most prominent booster, Carter responded to the second question first. Fort Worth had now completed two reservoirs that he believed held sufficient water for navigation. He stressed that previous surveys of the Trinity were made before the completion of these lakes; therefore, their statements that navigation was impossible should be ignored. Though the two lakes were constructed for a supply of drinking water and for flood control, only a fraction of the surface was necessary for these uses. Fort Worth was willing to spend \$6.5 million on reservoirs, so the city was not unwilling to spend money.<sup>58</sup>

The federal government would have to cooperate with the Trinity River Canal and Conservancy District with Amon Carter as the executive chairman. With the powers of the state bestowed upon it, the District would be able to guarantee the federal government the necessary improvements such as wharves, docks, and terminals. The District would also write a contract with the government for the construction of the canal that would only need the approval of the electors of the District.<sup>59</sup>

According to Carter, cooperation with the federal government would take three forms. First, the two entities needed to cooperate in the surveying and engineering of

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<sup>57</sup> "Opening Statement of Amon G. Carter, of Fort Worth, Texas, at the Hearing held in Fort Worth, Texas, on August 7, 1935," File 9, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

the canal. This would include negotiating rights-of-way and planning proper flood controls in certain areas. Second, rights-of-way would be granted to the federal government without any cost. The Canal District was created with powers normally given to the State of Texas, such as control over the bed and banks of the Trinity and one hundred feet on either side of the canal. The District would then grant this land to the federal government, thus saving the government the cost of buying. The third form of cooperation guaranteed that the proper steps would be taken to ensure the construction of necessary facilities. The District would provide the facilities by either granting a franchise to private investors or else the State find someone if no one stepped forward.<sup>60</sup>

The District would go through three phases: the pre-election board, the preliminary board, and the actual construction phase in which the people of the State of Texas would cooperate with the District by paying taxes. The pre-election board levied a tax on state and county valuations and was empowered to call an election before the end of 1935 to see if the electors approved the District or wanted to dissolve it. If approved, the District would continue the planning of the Canal. If Congress approved the construction of the Canal, an election was to be called to endorse the contract and decide on a permanent board of directors for the District. Any taxes the District levied were not allowed to be spent on construction, but would pay the employees of the District and pay for any other expenses involved in running the District.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 6-7; "Questions and Answers on the Establishment of the Trinity Conservancy District", File 9, Box 41, Carter Collection.



Unfortunately for Carter and his associates, the Texas Supreme Court voided the law that had allowed the District Board to levy a one-cent tax. The Court ruled that the law creating the District did not explicitly allow for a tax, while the District argued that the power to tax was implied. The one-cent tax was unpopular, and many taxpayers strongly protested. Not only did the Supreme Court void the tax, but it also forced the District to refund the taxpayers. In addition to these legal setbacks, the Chief of Engineers of the U.S. Army was expected to recommend against the Trinity Canal, claiming there was not a sufficient water supply to dig a canal. Despite these apparent setbacks, TRCA found some room for optimism. The Corps of Engineers agreed with TRCA that the building of the canal was feasible from an engineering standpoint, though it disagreed that it could be economically viable. Also, the federal government had rarely agreed to construct a waterway within the first few years of the initial proposal. Therefore, TRCA agreed to continue the struggle to make the Trinity navigable because the idea was “meritorious and sound,” and Fort Worth and Dallas could not continue their normal growth without the canal.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout 1936, Carter’s involvement with TRCA dropped off. This was the result of a combination of a massive setback to the project and the imminent Frontier Centennial in Fort Worth that Carter (along with PWA money) was backing. However, the arrival of 1937 brought renewed passion for the Trinity Canal. By January 1937, TRCA had hired eleven engineers to plan for the navigation of the Trinity. Also, a bill had been drawn up in the state legislature that would call for the cooperation of the State of Texas and the Department of Agriculture on a soil erosion project of the Trinity

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<sup>62</sup> Fouts to the Board of Directors, Jan. 30, 1936, File 9, Box 41, Carter Collection; Dallas Morning News, Jan. 30, 1936.

Watershed. TRCA viewed this bill as a necessary first step in the canalization of the Trinity River.<sup>63</sup>

TRCA appealed the 1936 decision made by the Board of Engineers and was granted a hearing in 1937. New efforts by TRCA engineers estimated the cost at \$30 million less than the government's plans. However, Texas A & M College, for reasons not stated, opposed the passage of the Trinity Watershed Bill that had been introduced in January. Carter led the charge in Fort Worth to raise the necessary funds to combat the opposition put forth in the legislature by A & M. Unfortunately for Carter, the efforts of TRCA to persuade the state legislature to pass the Trinity Watershed Bill.<sup>64</sup>

The government held numerous hearings throughout 1937 in which TRCA put forth the case for the Trinity Canal. Though each hearing was unsuccessful in persuading the government of the necessity of the Trinity Canal, TRCA obtained an outlet for its ideas. Carter worked to gain the endorsement of the West Texas Chamber of Commerce, hoping that its approval would bring more to TRCA's arguments. In an attempt to sway the Board of Engineers, Carter also wired George Pillsbury, the assistant chief of engineers, that TRCA now had the approval of 130 counties in West Texas proving that it was not only Fort Worth and Dallas that believed that canalization was necessary for Texas's economic well being.<sup>65</sup>

The year 1937 was yet another unsuccessful one for TRCA, though the situation was not as desperate as it appeared. The Board of Engineers had not yet given its full approval to the project, but neither had it struck the idea completely down. TRCA

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<sup>63</sup> Fouts to Carter, Jan. 16, 1937, File 10, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>64</sup> Fouts to Amon Carter, Feb. 24, 1937, File 10, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>65</sup> Carter to George Pillsbury, Jul. 17, 1937, File 10, Box 41, Carter Collection.

refused to let the issue die, for the organization truly believed that Fort Worth and Dallas needed the canal to continue growing. The late Will Rogers, an intimate friend of Carter's, commented that all Carter ever wanted to talk about was the Trinity. Once, Carter took Rogers along the banks of the Trinity and described how a canal there would transform the city. In response to Carter's elaborate plans, Rogers quipped, "I can see the sea gulls now."<sup>66</sup>

Throughout the New Deal, Carter had cultivated his friendship with President Roosevelt and was able to gain further audience through the president's son, Elliot, who lived in Fort Worth. In a 1938 visit at Elliot's house, Carter described his vision to the president. Carter apparently piqued Roosevelt's interest as the president asked for maps detailing the plan while suggesting the canal should be made a little deeper. In response to this interest, Carter sent President Roosevelt a letter containing a full outline of his ideas on the Trinity.<sup>67</sup>

The Trinity program that Carter now envisioned had seven parts: soil and water conservation, flood control, navigation, reclamation of flood lands, alleviation of stream pollution, conservation of wildlife, and storage of water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural uses. The canal had now evolved from a strictly economic project to a multi-dimensional program that touched on every aspect of Texas life. In this letter, Carter demonstrated his ability to temper his message toward the audience. President Roosevelt's actions had shown that he was more favorable to projects that demonstrated more than economics, and Carter hoped Roosevelt would be swayed by

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<sup>66</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 158.

<sup>67</sup> Carter to John Fouts, Jul. 18, 1938, File 10, Box 41, Carter Collection.

the transformation of the Trinity Canal project into a package that would affect Texas in a holistic manner.<sup>68</sup>

Carter wrote that there were three goals for TIA (the name had been changed in the previous year to reflect the whole nature of the program.) First, TIA was searching for a way to develop the Trinity in a way that would save the federal government money. Second, TIA wanted to spend tax dollars wisely. Finally, TIA wanted the people of the region to receive the majority of benefits from the Trinity improvement.<sup>69</sup>

Carter then outlined the details of three of the seven aspects of the Trinity program in great detail. If a good soil and water conservation program was installed, the massive erosion occurring in the watershed could be halted. The frequent flooding of the Trinity carried away much of the fertile soil along the river. A flood control program would reclaim the majority of the arable land that was difficult to cultivate due to the floods. The centerpiece of Carter's letter to the president was the canalization of the Trinity with a focus on the engineering feasibility, economic justification, and the public necessity of the canal.<sup>70</sup>

According to Carter, the engineering feasibility of the project was unassailable, and he cited the last couple of government hearings in which opposing railroads were unable to defend their criticism that the canal would cost too much money. In an appeal for economy, Carter referred to various surveys made by the Department of Commerce, the Corps of Engineers, and private engineers showing savings upwards of \$8 million annually to businesses and consumers. Texas was entitled to a canal because cities in

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<sup>68</sup> Carter to Roosevelt, Jul. 9, 1938, File 2b, Box 32, Carter Collection.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

other states now had access to the ocean because of the Intracoastal Canal. Carter then pointed to the recent approval of a dam on the Red River in Denison that would allow navigation up to Shreveport. This would move trade that geographically should go to the Texas Gulf Coast to New Orleans. Finally, Carter claimed that the continued success of Texas and the Southwest depended on the construction of the canal. He finished his argument by listing the numerous organizations that had endorsed the canal, such as the Democratic and Republican parties of Texas, many Texas newspapers, the cities of Houston and Galveston, and the National Rivers and Harbors Congress.<sup>71</sup>

President Roosevelt forwarded Carter's letter to the secretaries of Agriculture and War for further review. Harry Brown, acting Secretary of Agriculture, responded that he was pleased with the progress that had been made by TIA to further cooperation between federal and state organizations, especially in regards to soil conservation efforts. However, he cautioned, the State of Texas needed to pass a strong soil conservation law that would allow for increased agriculture in the Trinity Watershed. Though this was not a statement specifically endorsing the idea of a canal, Carter had to have been pleased to hear that some part of the canal idea was well received in the higher levels of the government.<sup>72</sup>

Carter followed up his first letter to President Roosevelt with another one that included engineers' maps, charts, and tables. One map compared the manufacturing and population growth in Texas to that of the United States; the theme of this map was potential growth because Texas still had a lower population density than the United

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Brown to Carter, Sept. 29, 1938, File 10, Box 41, Carter Collection.

States average, and there were still large amounts of natural resources still untapped. Therefore, growth was a given, and any federal investment in the Trinity region would be safe. Carter also pointed out the need for flood control along the Trinity because communities in the watershed had spent over \$30 million for reservoirs and levees. Federal help was necessary to coordinate and fund future projects for several more reservoirs that would complete the flood control program.

The second map highlighted the waterways that an improved Trinity would connect. Most of these waterways already had federal involvement; just a little more money, Carter pleaded, would connect all these waterways with the Southwest. Also, since the government had already invested in Texas ports, Carter reasoned that it would only make sense to connect these ports with the cities they were supposed to serve. The Intracoastal Canal currently under construction had been completed from the Mississippi River to Houston. Like the Trinity River Canal, the Corps of Engineers had initially rebuffed the Intracoastal Canal because it believed it would not make economic sense. Carter pointed out that that same Corps had a survey showing over one million tons of freight had moved over the completed section in 1937. If the Intracoastal Canal could work, then a Trinity River Canal would also be a success.<sup>73</sup>

Though Carter had the tacit support of President Roosevelt, this did not mean that he was going to get his canal. Carter wrote Congressman Sam Rayburn that the imminent passage of the Wheeler-Lea Transportation Bill would mean that “Congress would cease to improve rivers for practical navigation.” The Wheeler-Lea Transportation Act, introduced in 1939 by Montana Senator Benton Wheeler, would

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<sup>73</sup> Carter to Roosevelt, Oct. 4, 1938, File 10, Box 41, Carter Collection.

place inland water carriers under federal jurisdiction for the first time and create a temporary transportation board that would monitor their condition. Carter feared any government regulation, but he did not cite this reason for his opposition to the bill. There was little indication in the bill that the government was opposed to inland water transportation, but in Carter's case government regulation of an industry meant an attempt to restrict growth.<sup>74</sup>

He hoped that Rayburn would use his position to ensure that the Wheeler-Lea Bill would not hurt the Trinity program. When it became apparent that the bill would pass, Carter pressured Rayburn to seek a thirty-day period in which the public could peruse the bill. The bill was so intricate, Carter claimed, that only an expert could understand the complexities. In those thirty days, Carter evidently hoped that the legislators and the public would find some part of it distasteful and dispense with the bill. To Carter's chagrin, however, the Wheeler-Lea Transportation Bill passed, allowing for greater government regulation of transportation.<sup>75</sup>

The pending passage of the Wheeler-Lea Transportation Bill spurred TIA into action. At the annual TIA banquet held at the Hotel Adolphus in Dallas, Texas Senators Tom Connally and Morris Sheppard both spoke at the convention, giving their full support to the approval of a Trinity canal. Members from both the Departments of Agriculture and War were present as honorary guests; it was no coincidence that a report was soon due from Agriculture on flood control and conservation while the War

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<sup>74</sup> Carter to Rayburn, Sept. 18, 1939, File 10b, Box 41, Carter Collection; David Porter, "Representative Lindsay Warren; The Water Bloc and the Transportation Act of 1940," North Carolina Historical Review 50 (July 1973), 277.

<sup>75</sup> Carter to Rayburn, Sept. 18, 1939, File 10b, Box 41, Carter Collection; Carter to Rayburn, Oct. 24, 1939, File 10b, Box 41, Carter Collection.

Department was about to deliver its report on flood control and navigation. The Wheeler-Lea Bill was debated throughout most of 1940, and TIA continued to take advantage of the extra time it had before the end of debate approached. What concerned TIA about the present conditions of the bill was that inland waterway rates were going to be raised. Members of TIA, along with other waterway advocates, feared that this move would negate the advantages waterways had over railroads.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the passage of the Wheeler-Lea Bill in 1940, TIA did receive good news. The completed reports from the Departments of War and Agriculture were favorable and created a detailed plan for the proper use of water and soil resources in the watershed. Also, the War Department committed itself to spending money for the deepening of the Trinity Channel from Galveston up to Liberty, and money was diverted for the clearing of sand bars and snags to Romayor, thus making over one hundred miles of the Trinity navigable. The Department of Agriculture also began cooperating with the Texas Soil Conservation Board to halt soil erosion along the Trinity. In addition to actions by the government, railroads began reducing rates in the Southwest because they feared that Congress would approve the canal.<sup>77</sup>

Just as TIA was on the verge of overcoming a decade of obstacles, the Second World War captured the nation's attention. Though the United States was not yet at war, President Roosevelt committed to transforming the country into an "arsenal for democracy." The Trinity Canal, never a pressing matter for the federal government, was a topic that the country refused to debate. However, it was not as if Carter's

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<sup>76</sup> "Trinity River News"; Fouts to Roosevelt, Aug. 19, 1940, File 11, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Fouts to TIA, May 30, 1940, File 11, Box 41, Carter Collection.



influence in Washington was diminishing. While lobbying for the canal, Carter was simultaneously engaged in successfully pressuring the government for a Consolidated Aircraft plant.

Though the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor greatly diminished the debate over the canal, Carter still wanted to make sure that the issue remained in the hearts and minds of politicians. Ten days after Pearl Harbor, he asked Fort Worth City manager Sam Bothwell for continued assistance regarding the canal. As chair of the executive and finance committee of TIA, Carter “found it to be a tireless, hard, up-hill job” that cost the Star-Telegram money and aroused great opposition by the railroads. If Fort Worth wanted to continue attracting manufacturers, a canal would have to be built as railroad rates were still high. Carter claimed that General Motors and the Continental Can Company would have located in Fort Worth instead of Houston had it not been for a lack of access to water. If the City of Fort Worth continued to give its full support to the project, Carter believed that it might be possible to persuade the government of the necessity of the canal. Carter then tied the canal with the war effort. Fort Worth was now a national defense center, and its central location was very attractive to the government. If men like Carter could personally spend thousands promoting the canal and flood control, then the City of Fort Worth should have had the motivation to call more loudly for its own improvement.<sup>78</sup>

As the United States geared up for war, Carter and TIA’s efforts to persuade the government that the Trinity Canal would benefit the war effort continued. He specified to the other members that TIA from then on would only couch its requests for federal

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<sup>78</sup> Carter to Bothwell, Dec. 18, 1941, File 11, Box 41, Carter Collection.

funding within the context of national defense. This meant that TIA had to present any further suggestions to the Departments of War and Agriculture as well as to various United States defense agencies. Any changes that these defense agencies recommended would have to be made by TIA. In a further continuation of this theme of national defense, TIA General Manager John Fouts wrote to all the members of Congress defending the passage of the 1942 Rivers and Harbors Omnibus Bill. Responding to the Association of American Railroads lobbying Congress for continued support, Fouts accused the railroads of “disloyal and pernicious activities” because their “subversive tactics in wartime are imperiling the freedom of our Nation and aiding our country’s foes” by attempting to quash other forms of transportation such as inland waterways and highways. The bill passed, and the Axis powers were eventually defeated, but little progress was made on the Trinity. Evidently, comparing the railroads to Japan, Germany, and Italy was of no avail.<sup>79</sup>

Until 1945, the federal government did little work on the Trinity River. In February 1945, Fouts saw fit to detail what the government had done regarding the Trinity River. Congress had authorized the Trinity soil and water conservation program, begun work on flood control by assisting in the building of lakes, and begun reclaiming formerly uncultivated land along the river for agricultural use. Though these were definitely steps in the right direction, Fouts still urged Carter to continue pressuring politicians to begin making the Trinity navigable from Liberty to Fort Worth.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Carter to Carter, Jan. 7, 1942, File 13, Box 41, Carter Collection. Carter often sent out form letters to numerous local businesses and members of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. He would also send a letter to himself, presumably for his own benefit. Fouts to United States Congress, Feb. 26, 1942, File 13, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>80</sup> Fouts to Carter, Feb. 12, 1945, File 15, Box 41, Carter Collection.

By 1948, the Corps of Engineers began work on four reservoirs on the upper Trinity River. Carter's role in persuading the government of the necessity of the lakes earned him the right to preside over a couple of the groundbreaking ceremonies. Carter liked nothing more than to add to his silver spade collection from his numerous groundbreaking ceremonies, and to be able to assist in the opening of work that promised to make his dream a reality was to him a worthy reward. At the groundbreaking of Lake Benbrook, Carter described for the crowd the ample benefits that the lake would bring. Imagine, he told them, the "cool cottages...the bathers...the boats...and the black-mouthed bass." Beyond these recreational advantages, he claimed the lake would prevent flooding in Fort Worth, provide water during drought, and send industrial goods to the Gulf.<sup>81</sup>

At the fourth and final groundbreaking at Garza-Little Elm Reservoir, Carter rejoiced because this was the crowning reservoir for the upper Trinity. Now, he said, soil conservation and flood control could begin in earnest. Floods would no longer endanger cities and towns downstream, and farmers could begin cultivating previously unusable bottomland. Carter noted that in the near future, work was to begin on dredging the lower Trinity from the Houston Ship Channel to Liberty. All that was needed was Congress's approval to begin the canalization of the rest of the Trinity.<sup>82</sup>

Satisfied that the federal government appeared to be committed to the idea of a navigable Trinity River, Carter spent considerable time asking local businessmen to

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<sup>81</sup> "For Mr. Carter's use at Groundbreaking Ceremony," n.d., File 15, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>82</sup> "Remarks of Mr. Amon Carter, Chairman, Executive Committee Trinity Improvement Ass'n on the Occasion of the Groundbreaking Ceremonies at Garza-Little Elm Dam Site November 23, 1948," File 16, Box 41, Carter Collection.

continue giving to TIA. The sales gift that was honed in the chicken and bread business and the selling of picture frames continued to work as Fort Worth businesses responded positively to Carter's letters. Donating money, he touted, was a "most excellent business investment" that the region's "best citizens" would see as a wise move. Carter updated recipients of the status of the Trinity project, especially noting the millions of dollars the government was spending building reservoirs and working on soil conservation. Donors included national businesses like the local Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Southwestern Bell, and Gulf Oil. Strictly local businesses like Cox Dry Goods Company, Chickasaw Lumber, and Washer Brothers also contributed to the TIA. Contributions ranged from \$25 to \$1,000, depending on the size of the company and the amount of benefits it might receive from a navigable Trinity.<sup>83</sup>

Carter later noted that an improved Trinity would have probably saved Fort Worth from the devastating effects of the 1949 flood. Though construction on the reservoirs was underway in 1949, they were nowhere near complete, and the flood cost the city millions of dollars in damages and the loss of several lives. In addition to preventing future floods, the whole improvement program was an "efficient" and "democratic" development program. It was democratic because TIA had worked so long with Congress and finally earned that body's approval along with several other federal agencies; it was efficient because work was underway conserving the soil and preventing future flooding. These aspects combined with the government's imminent

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<sup>83</sup> Carter to Glenn Woodson, n.d., File 17, Box 41, Carter Collection; "Contribution received from Fort Worth as of March 15, 1950," n.d., File 17, Box 41, Carter Collection; Carter to Carter, Mar. 26, 1951, File 18, Box 41, Carter Collection.

work on making the Trinity navigable from Liberty to Fort Worth made contributing to the TIA a worthy investment.<sup>84</sup>

Sadly for Amon Carter, however, his death came before he witnessed any future work on the Trinity Canal. Even if he had continued living well past the 1950s, it is doubtful that his efforts would have succeeded. The government began to view the project with alarm as millions of dollars were being spent with few results. Though the project did not die with Carter, the Trinity Improvement Association lost its most avid advocate. Carter had worked incessantly so that Fort Worth and the surrounding regions would one day reap great benefits from a navigable Trinity.<sup>85</sup>

It is inevitable that the question will arise as to why this topic, failure that it appears to have been, is worth discussion. What relevance does it have to Carter's achievements if there never was a Trinity Canal? First, though the Canal never became a reality, Carter's work resulted in some benefits for Fort Worth and Texas. The Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex now had several lakes such as Lake Benbrook, Lake Lewisville, and Lake Grapevine to serve as recreational and flood control facilities. Also, a serious soil conservation program was begun in which farmers along the Trinity learned ways to prevent erosion while simultaneously being able to reclaim fertile bottom land. Finally, this project demonstrates the passionate devotion of Carter to his adopted city and to his state. Nowhere in the correspondence of TIA did Carter appear to be chasing visions of grandeur for himself, though he was certainly guilty of perceiving his city as a kind of Valhalla where cowboys and entrepreneurs were

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<sup>84</sup> Carter to Carter, Mar. 3, 1952, File 18, Box 41, Carter Collection.

<sup>85</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Trinity River Navigation Projects," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/TT/ett1.html> (accessed January 19, 2005).

glorified. The idea of a navigable Trinity was never his idea, but once he was introduced to it, he saw a way to bring Texas into the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 3

### ONE MAN RULE: AMON CARTER, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND FORT WORTH

On November 1, 1935, the Chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), Jesse Jones, wired Amon Carter, "Your cowshed has been approved." Cryptic as it may appear, this telegram verified that the influence of the Texas publisher reached beyond the wide borders of his home state. Not only was Carter able to sway local public opinion through his newspaper, but also he was also able to curry favor from the men in power in Washington, D.C., all the way up to President Roosevelt. At the height of the New Deal, Carter found ways to deliver government money for Fort Worth despite the fact that he held no elected office and was an entrepreneur of the same class that often hated Roosevelt's far-reaching New Deal programs.<sup>86</sup>

Even when the priorities of the Second World War usurped the New Deal, Carter continued to remain politically involved. Through the 1940s and 1950s, he corresponded with congressmen and presidents, some of whom relied on his support and the support of the Star-Telegram. By maintaining his political connections, Carter was able to keep some measure of influence in Washington. This was necessary not only because of his efforts regarding the Trinity Canal, but also because he wanted to ensure that Fort Worth and Texas received proper representation.

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<sup>86</sup>Jones to Carter, 1 Nov. 1935, Box 34, File 7, Carter Collection.

With the advent of the New Deal, Carter saw new ways for government money to flow to Fort Worth. Never one to dream small, he did not just focus on the Canal, but he expanded his vision to include funding for the Frontier Centennial, Fort Worth's answer to the Texas Centennial, and the Will Roger Memorial Center. But did his willingness to stretch out his hand for New Deal dollars mean he was an avid supporter of the New Deal or did he merely use New Deal programs to achieve greater prominence for himself and, ultimately, Fort Worth? The evidence suggests that though he saw the "100 Days" legislation as essential to the economic recovery of the United States, he did not support the overarching goals of the New Deal. For Carter, the New Deal was another way for a shrewd businessman to forge new relationships and garner greater prosperity for himself and his city.

Though the Great Depression was a disaster for much of the United States, some communities actually benefited in different ways from the economic turmoil. A city with a civic leader like Amon Carter could turn the catastrophe to its advantage by persuading the federal government to fund relief efforts in the city. Carter's optimistic personality gave him the ability to see through the gloominess that was pervading the United States. This optimism surely was boosted by the lack of long lines at soup kitchens and catastrophic unemployment that plagued the industrial cities of the North.

This is not to say that Fort Worth emerged from the Great Depression unscathed. Fort Worth, like the rest of Texas, experienced significant unemployment. However, the lack of industrialization in Fort Worth resulted in fewer layoffs than in heavily industrialized cities. Amon Carter did not have a monopoly on optimism regarding the Depression. Historian Lionel Patenaude observed, "From the start, there was a feeling



that the Depression had not affected Texas as badly as the rest of the country.” Texas farmers were already in a state of perpetual poverty, so the Depression appeared to be a slightly downward turn that shredded whatever hopes they might have had about becoming prosperous.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the seeming strength and security of Fort Worth, the Depression first showed signs of its appearing on February 18, 1930 with the bank run at First National Bank, one of Fort Worth’s largest and most prestigious financial institutions.<sup>88</sup> The run on First National Bank appears to have been nothing more than a panic based on unfounded rumors; however, by three o’clock on February 18, 1930, the lobby of the bank was full of depositors desperate to withdraw their money from the allegedly failing bank. The Fort Worth elite appeared to calm the milling crowds clamoring for their money. Oilman W.T. Waggoner, a First National Bank board member, told the people, “I hereby pledge to you every cent that I own or possess in this world that you shall not lose a single dollar in this bank. I will sell every cow and every oil well if necessary to pay for any money you lose here.”<sup>89</sup>

Amon Carter, despite having told northern businessmen that the Depression would not come to Fort Worth, chose to confront the bank run. He spent that evening at the bank urging depositors to leave their money in the bank pointing out that Fort Worth would weather any financial crisis to become a great city. An orchestra was brought in, and Carter fed the crowd cheese sandwiches and hot dogs. Satisfied that their money

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<sup>87</sup> Lionel Patenaude, Texans, Politics, and the New Deal (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 1-7.

<sup>88</sup> Knight, Fort Worth: Outpost on the Trinity, 199.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Mason, The First: The Story of Fort Worth’s Oldest National Bank (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1977), 8.

was safe and comforted by the sight of Federal Reserve men bringing \$2,500,000 from Dallas, the crowd began depositing their recently withdrawn money.<sup>90</sup>

The next day, Carter addressed the bank run in the Fort Worth Record-Telegram, the morning edition of the Star-Telegram. He condemned the run as a demonstration of what “idle gossip, unfounded rumors and a state of hysterical [sic] upon the part of merely a few hundred people can do.” According to Carter, the bank was financially stable and supported by some of the wealthiest men and companies in West Texas and Fort Worth, such as Waggoner, the Samuel Burk Burnett estate, and his very own Star-Telegram. If the bank was so unstable, these Texas luminaries would not keep their money there. He finished his front-page editorial admonishing “sober-minded people” to “stop, look and listen” before jumping to any conclusions about the status of reputable Fort Worth banks.<sup>91</sup>

However much Carter supposed the Depression to be limited to the Northeast, reality soon dismantled this assertion. By 1932, Fort Worth operated a soup kitchen and had men raking leaves in city parks. When 1933 rolled around, the Fort Worth city council ordered city manager George Fairtrace not to make any improvements in the city unless they were necessary. As the New Deal got under way in 1933, the city council asked for federal funds to build and improve various streets and bridges in the city. By the end of the New Deal, Fort Worth would have more than improved streets and bridges for which to thank the federal government.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 168-170.

<sup>91</sup> Fort Worth Record Telegram, 19 Feb. 1930.

<sup>92</sup> Knight, Fort Worth: Outpost on the Trinity, 211.

The Civil Works Administration (CWA) headed by Harry Hopkins was the first major federal program initiated in Fort Worth. This temporary program, funded by the Public Works Administration, served as a successor to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) because FERA had spent the \$500 million allocated to it. Unlike FERA, the CWA served not merely as relief but as work relief. It took men from the unemployed ranks and the relief rolls. Projects centered on roads, schools, parks, and sewer lines. The CWA's success was demonstrated by the 4.2 million people nationwide put to work at its height in 1934.<sup>93</sup>

Through the city council's efforts, Fort Worth received \$1.5 million in CWA funds and used the money to beautify parks and build golf courses, build and improve schools, and improve lighting at the local airport. All levels of labor were used, from the unskilled to craftsmen, and an average of 6,400 people were employed at rates ranging from forty cents an hour to \$1.12 for skilled laborers. Thus Fort Worth quickly made use of the federal money available for municipal projects. However, the efforts and connections of Amon Carter would boost the amount spent by the federal government in Fort Worth beyond what the CWA spent in its short lifetime.<sup>94</sup>

Carter's relationship with the New Deal stemmed from his close friendship with Speaker of the House John Nance Garner of Uvalde, Texas. In 1932, Garner campaigned for the Democratic nomination for president and became the main obstacle to Franklin Roosevelt's quest. Garner had defeated Roosevelt in the California primary and had the backing of publisher William Randolph Hearst and William McAdoo, the

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<sup>93</sup> David Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 175-176.

<sup>94</sup> H.J. Adams, "Fort Worth's \$1,500,000 CWA Program," American City (April 1934), 73-74.

contender for the Democratic nomination in 1924. As Roosevelt built a commanding lead in Chicago, Garner ordered his forces to defect to Roosevelt's camp to break the deadlock, thus allowing Roosevelt to capture the party's nomination. Roosevelt then rewarded him with the vice-presidential position.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout the campaign, Carter supported Garner because he was a native son of Texas. He bestowed his support in the form of a Stetson with the phrase, "Hooray for John Garner and West Texas," a deliberate play on Carter's trademark yell of "Hooray for Fort Worth and West Texas." When it became apparent that Garner was going to relinquish his delegates to Roosevelt, Carter, who was a delegate at the Democratic convention, strongly opposed this move. While Garner's Texas delegates convened to discuss this option, heated arguments arose among them. Senators Cordell Hull of Tennessee, soon to be Roosevelt's Secretary of State, pleaded with the Texas delegates to cast their votes for Roosevelt. When Texas Senator Tom Connally refused to do so, Congressman Sam Rayburn took his gavel, handed it to Chairman Amon Carter, and left the room without a word. This left Carter temporarily in charge of the Texas delegation, and he continued to oppose any motion to cast Texas's vote for Roosevelt. After a couple hours of arguing, Roosevelt's supporters succeeded in giving the Texas votes to Roosevelt.<sup>96</sup>

Carter did not see Garner just as a fellow Texan to be vaulted into prominence, but also as a person who could stop allegedly liberal schemes. In a telegram to Texas senators Morris Sheppard and Tom Connally, Carter worried that Congress was

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<sup>95</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 6-8.

<sup>96</sup> Carter to Garner, 29 Feb. 1932, Box 18, File 13, Carter Collection; Patenaude, Texans, Politics, and the New Deal, 21-22.

focused on taxing the rich, which, he claimed, would slow down business even more. His suggestion was a national sales tax because he believed that this would broaden the tax base. Besides, he remarked, there were very few rich left to tax. Higher taxes on business and the wealthy would end up costing workers their jobs, and the economy would continue spiraling. However, he was troubled that with these approaches to new fiscal policy, the country was “headed from a Democratic country to Socialism and from there into Communism.” Such statements indicated that Carter, though he believed in some government action to alleviate the affects of the Depression, was squarely in the corner of business conservatives.<sup>97</sup>

Despite his widespread support in Texas and California, John Nance Garner did little campaigning in 1932. When Roosevelt offered him the vice-presidency, Garner grudgingly took the position although he favored the more active Speaker of the House post.<sup>98</sup> Despite his initial opposition to Roosevelt, in the name of party loyalty, Carter easily overlooked any shortcomings he believed Roosevelt possessed. In fact, Carter began his friendly correspondence with Roosevelt as early as March 1933 when Texas oil companies were selling oil at below market price resulting in the loss of royalties and state revenue. Carter’s answer to the problem was to have the government restrict oil output to conserve for the future and save the independent oilmen from being driven from business. He wrote:

This is one major industry you can bring out of chaos and with practically no outlay and expense on the part of the Government and in so doing bring prosperity to the third largest industry in this country and incidentally a great measure of economic improvement throughout the nation.

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<sup>97</sup> Carter to Garner, 28 May 1932, Box 18, File 13, Carter Collection.

<sup>98</sup> Bascom N. Timmons, Garner of Texas: A Personal History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 168.

From this letter it is clear that Amon Carter had no qualms about some government intervention, especially if it benefited Texas.<sup>99</sup>

Carter continued to support Roosevelt throughout the first years of the New Deal. During the Christmas 1933 season Carter sent another telegram to Roosevelt, this time describing FDR's presidency in glowing terms. Roosevelt, he said, was the nation's "Santa Claus" because through his "inspiring leadership" and "constructive and humanitarian policies" the country was able to face the future with a fervor not seen in years. Throughout Roosevelt's tenure, Carter kept his warm, cordial tone. Even when he disagreed with the Roosevelt administration, his relationship with Roosevelt remained strong. This closeness with Roosevelt did not mean that Carter was a New Dealer, but anytime Carter could gain access to the seat of power, he took advantage of the opportunity.<sup>100</sup>

The crowning achievement of Carter's efforts to obtain New Deal largesse lay in the acquisition of funds for Fort Worth's Will Rogers Complex in 1935. An active federal government, at least one active in giving money instead of taxing or regulating large businesses, was definitely a boon for Carter, a man who allegedly wanted "the whole Government to be run for the exclusive benefit of Fort Worth."<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Carter seized this opportunity in 1935 as Texas and Fort Worth were gearing up for the Texas Centennial. To Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, Carter outlined his plan for a Public Works Administration (PWA) grant to be given to the city to build a coliseum for the annual Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show in Fort Worth and an adjacent

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<sup>99</sup> Carter to Roosevelt, 30 Mar. 1933, Box 32, File 2, Carter Collection.

<sup>100</sup> Carter to Roosevelt, 24 Dec. 1933, Box 32, File 2, Carter Collection.

<sup>101</sup> Johnston, "Colonel Carter of Cartersville," 8.

auditorium for practical use year round. Fort Worth had recently applied for a \$300,000 grant from the Texas Centennial Commission; therefore, Carter wanted a \$700,000 loan to complete the funding for what he estimated to be a \$1 million project. In addition to this, Carter hoped to receive funding for his proposed Frontier Centennial, a Fort Worth exclusive celebration.<sup>102</sup>

Ickes thought this grant required further scrutiny in order to determine if such a construction project would serve in the public interest and whether the PWA had the power to administer such a loan after the initial expiration of the National Industrial Recovery Act on June 16, 1935. Furthermore, similar loan applications had been made in the past and had all been rejected. Nevertheless, as vice-president of the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show, Carter and his fellow committee members submitted a formal application to John Nance Garner who was chair of the United States Centennial Commission for Texas. By this time Fort Worth had received \$250,000 from the state's Centennial fund and planned a \$1,250,000 bond election. Therefore, the committee asked for a \$250,000 allocation from the federal government to cover the remaining cost, which had been adjusted to \$1.5 million.<sup>103</sup>

Despite couching this proposal in terms of future benefit to Fort Worth and Texas, Carter was unable to win the approval of Ickes. Earlier, Ickes had claimed that prior approved projects in Fort Worth, consisting of a school and a sanitarium, were much more important for social welfare than livestock buildings. However, he declared, "If Fort Worth wants the livestock pavilion rather than the projects we have designated,

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<sup>102</sup> Carter to Ickes, 9 May 1935, Box 34, File 7, Carter Collection.

<sup>103</sup> Application of Fort Worth for Federal Appropriations for a Livestock Centennial, n.d., Box 34, File 7, Carter Collection.

we will make the shift.”<sup>104</sup> Carter then decided to travel to Washington in order to visit Postmaster General Jim Farley and President Roosevelt to discuss the need for “Amon’s Cowsheds,” as the politicians derisively labeled the buildings. After this visit and one more official application resubmission, Carter received word from Jesse Jones that “your cowshed has been approved”; Carter promptly wired President Roosevelt that “the cowshed has arrived.”<sup>105</sup>

By using his contacts in Washington, Carter was able to gather federal money for the Will Rogers Complex. It is doubtful that without his involvement Fort Worth would have been granted such generous amounts of money to construct the buildings. It is also worth noting that in the first formal application for federal funds, there was no mention of alleviating unemployment due to the construction of this Complex. Rather, the focus was on the benefits that Fort Worth and the local livestock industry would receive from this publicity. However, the Fort Worth Press noted the addition of 1,500 jobs due to the construction of the Complex. Fittingly, in his letters regarding the applications, Carter failed to note the immediate benefits that could be reaped by the city by putting more than a thousand people back to work. At the front of his mind was the bolstering of Fort Worth’s status as a city of great reknown.<sup>106</sup>

Carter was not done attempting to acquire federal funds for Fort Worth. In 1936, Texas celebrated its centennial, and many cities around the state celebrated it in different ways. Carter’s rivalry with nearby Dallas flared up as the city was awarded the site for the official Texas Centennial celebration. Jealous of Dallas’s continued

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<sup>104</sup> Ickes to Carter, 27 Sept. 1935, Box 34, File 7, Carter Collection.

<sup>105</sup> Jones to Carter, 1 Nov. 1935, Box 34, File 7, Carter Collection; Flemmons, Amon, 173. This last wire from Carter does not appear in the Carter papers.

<sup>106</sup> Jan Jones, Billy Rose Presents...Casa Manana (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1999), 27.



dominance, Carter decided to back a new celebration in Fort Worth. The Frontier Centennial would focus on entertainment instead of educational and industrial exhibits. In order to attract visitors who would be in the region at the Texas Centennial in Dallas, Carter positioned a neon sign on a highway outside of Dallas that beckoned: “Dallas for education, Fort Worth for entertainment.”

He decided that the Centennial would use the newly constructed Will Rogers Complex (named after his close friend Will Rogers, who had recently died in a plane crash in 1935). Funds for the Centennial began shrinking as the original \$250,000 grant from the Texas Centennial Commission was spent and the local bond sales were slower than expected. By mid-summer 1936, the cost of opening the Centennial had soared to over \$1 million, well over the projected amount of \$911,000. Thus, Carter turned to his friend Jesse Jones of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to loan additional money.<sup>107</sup>

President Herbert Hoover had originally formed the RFC in 1932 to give loans to banks, railroads, and agricultural stabilization corporations.<sup>108</sup> Now Carter wanted it to breathe new life into the Frontier Centennial. He implored Jones that the money was needed quickly because of the shortage of funds and expressed confidence that Jones would “be fully justified” in waiving any restrictions on loaning the money.<sup>109</sup> Carter believed that the inevitable success of the Centennial should clear Jones’s mind of any lingering doubts. Fortunately for Carter, President Roosevelt’s son Elliott was a close friend. Through this friendship he was able to exert more pressure on Jones to grant

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<sup>107</sup> Jones, Billy Rose Presents, 53.

<sup>108</sup> Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 84.

<sup>109</sup> Carter to Jones, 8 Jul. 1936, Box 17, File 10a, Carter Collection.

the loan.<sup>110</sup> Finally, Jones informed Carter that the RFC would cooperate in the \$300,000 loan already given by local banks, and would underwrite half of another \$200,000 loan. Therefore, the RFC would commit \$200,000 to the Frontier Centennial.<sup>111</sup>

Despite the pressure exerted by Elliott Roosevelt to extend an extra \$75,000, the RFC would not be able to take on any more than that amount.<sup>112</sup> Despite succeeding in getting \$200,000, Carter was not quite satisfied with the amount. Jones told him, “Unlike thousands of others during the past few years, you want the Directors of the RFC to make a loan on terms which you prescribe, and a loan the eligibility of which is not clear, and the security not very tangible.” It is clear that Jones was unsure of the practicality of the loan in the first place but approved it due to his friendship with Carter and Elliott Roosevelt.<sup>113</sup>

As shown in the previous accounts, Carter was for government funds if it they helped business. However, he did not subscribe to the philosophy espoused by most New Dealers. He believed that business had certain ethical standards to follow and that sometimes the federal government should be involved if a whole industry’s livelihood was at stake as in the previously mentioned case of the independent oilmen in West Texas. On the other hand, he had made known his opposition regarding taxation and federal regulations to Garner and Connelly; redistribution of wealth was none of his concern.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Jones, Billy Rose Presents, 55.

<sup>111</sup> Jones to Carter, 10 Jul. 1936, Box 17, File 10a, Carter Collection.

<sup>112</sup> Jones to Elliott Roosevelt, 12 Jul. 1936, Box 17, File 10a, Carter Collection.

<sup>113</sup> Jones to Carter, 16 Jul. 1936, Box 23, File 5, Carter Collection.

<sup>114</sup> Carter to Garner, 28 May 1932, Box 18, File 13, Carter Collection

One of Carter's first actions against the New Deal came in 1933 regarding the publishing codes of the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The NRA was part of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) on June 20, 1933. The goal of the NRA was to create industrial codes that regulated production, prices, and labor.<sup>115</sup> The problem lay in how to form and enforce these codes without incurring the wrath of business. To avoid any confrontation, NRA placed businessmen on the committees drawing up the codes. General Hugh Johnson, formerly of the War Industries Board, from the First World War, headed the NRA. Knowing that the constitutionality of the codes would be tested, he decided to rely on bargaining with business in order to avoid acrimony. The publishing industry formed a committee to establish an NRA code; one of the members was Amon Carter.<sup>116</sup>

Washington Attorney Elisha Hanson served as counsel to the Federal Laws Committee made up of Amon Carter, Howard Davis of New York, and John Stewart Bryan of Richmond. Paul Y. Anderson, a friend of General Johnson, complained in The Nation that Hanson was probably not the best choice because he had successfully pushed for tax refunds for the wealthy under former Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, and he sarcastically called Carter and his publishing cohorts the "vaunted guardians of our liberty." The committee's job was to formulate codes that were palatable to General Johnson, but naturally the men also wanted to retain some semblance of control over their industry. Through Hanson, Carter and the other committee members worked to

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<sup>115</sup> Roger Biles, A New Deal for the American People (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 78.

<sup>116</sup> Schlesinger, Coming of the New Deal, 108-109.

ensure that the newspaper publishing companies did not relegate too much control to the federal government.<sup>117</sup>

The committee's main concerns were hours worked, wage levels, and how to decide labor disputes. The publishers would accept no less than forty hours as the standard workweek; this clashed with the proposed thirty-two hours written into the temporary code. The president of the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Association, J. F. Young, complained to Carter that the existing code clause that called for a return to the 1929 prevailing wage would mean bankruptcy for many publishers. He believed that radical labor leaders were collaborating with the administration "in the hope of driving us to relinquish our clause on freedom of the press."<sup>118</sup> The clause he referred to stated that the publishers would only submit to the rules contained in the code and would not follow any rules imposed that might restrain their freedom of speech. It did not help General Johnson's case that the newspaper publishing industry was notoriously anti-labor; Section 7a of the NIRA guaranteed workers the right to organize and bargain collectively, and newspaper publishers would have none of that.<sup>119</sup>

The code committee wished to keep the discussion limited to wages and hours, thus addressing the explicit requests of President Roosevelt to assist with the employment situation. However, General Johnson pressed for the newspaper publishers to discuss fair competition. Elisha Hanson expressed discontent with this

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<sup>117</sup> Paul Y. Anderson, "Johnson and the Freedom of the Press," The Nation, 30 Aug. 1933, 234.

<sup>118</sup> Young to Carter, 30 Nov. 1933, Box 26, File 14, Carter Collection.

<sup>119</sup> John Kennedy Ohl, Hugh S. Johnson and the New Deal (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), 116.

request and proposed to Johnson that the “code was so drafted that its provisions deal exclusively with the problem of wages, hours and working conditions.”<sup>120</sup>

Johnson believed that the freedom of the press clause the newspaper publishers insisted on was merely their way of avoiding labor standards and Section 7A. In the end, he appeased the publishers; President Roosevelt approved the newspaper code in February 1934.<sup>121</sup> The NRA lasted for a little over one year longer until the Supreme Court struck it down as unconstitutional in 1935 in the case *A.L.A. Schechter v. United States* because it violated the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution by giving the President power to interfere in intrastate business.<sup>122</sup>

Though Amon Carter did not take an extremely active position on the committee, his presence indicated his agreement with its actions. By being on the committee and supporting Hanson in pushing for a freedom of speech clause, Carter took his first step in reacting against the legislation of the New Deal. Supporting a newspaper publishing code that pushed for more government regulation did not to his thinking further his goals of greater prominence for Texas, Fort Worth, or himself.

Carter also criticized the rash of sit-down strikes that occurred on the mid-1930s. Though Roosevelt gave no encouragement to the strikers, his administration was an unabashed supporter of labor. In a confidential letter to Garner, Carter called a recent April 1937 sit-down strike in Michigan “un-American,” and he condemned Governor Frank Murphy for not enforcing the law.<sup>123</sup> In March 1937, the United Automobile

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<sup>120</sup> Hanson to Davis, 22 Nov 1933, Box 26, File 14, Carter Collection.

<sup>121</sup> Ohi, Hugh S. Johnson and the New Deal, 150.

<sup>122</sup> Ronald Edsforth, The New Deal: America’s Response to the Great Depression (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 186.

<sup>123</sup> Carter to Garner, 7 Apr. 1937, Box 18, File 13a, Carter Collection.

Workers (UAW), heady from a recent victory over General Motors, informed the Chrysler Corporation that it would be the sole bargaining representative. Chrysler executives were willing to negotiate with the UAW, but not on these terms. The UAW responded with a sit-down strike in nine Chrysler plants.<sup>124</sup>

In thinly veiled terms, Carter asked whether the administration was afraid of John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers because it made no efforts to halt the wave of strikes currently sweeping across the country. Also, he brought up a recent statement by the CIO that the President wanted everybody to join the CIO. Did the president really say this, and, if not, why was no denial made? Carter used his position as president and publisher of the Star-Telegram to clarify his feelings on labor and the sit-down strike. He congratulated Texas Governor James Allred for banning sit-down strikes in Texas. If Michigan Governor Murphy had reacted similarly to Allred, Carter claimed, business would not have been interrupted, and the country's recovery would remain on track. Carter insisted that he was pro-labor, but the sit-down strike smacked of radical law breaking that undermined the very goals of organized labor.<sup>125</sup>

By Roosevelt's second term, Carter began to disapprove of more and more of the New Deal's goals. He was displeased with the proposed Child Labor Amendment, recently ratified by Texas, which would have given Congress regulatory power over children under the age of 18. He informed President Roosevelt of his displeasure in a cordial tone, and espoused the idea that this issue was best left for the states to tackle. Congress should not meddle in how children should be raised. He then reminded FDR

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<sup>124</sup> Irving Bernstein, Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker 1933-1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 553-554.

<sup>125</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 7 Apr. 1937.

how he had begun work when he was eleven and then put his own son to work at about the same age. Without “child labor,” Carter claimed he would not have been able to become the self-made man that he was. Carter informed the president that his opinion on the Child Labor Amendment stemmed from his “boyhood experiences,” just as Roosevelt’s opinion sprang from his “great humanitarian spirit.”<sup>126</sup>

Carter noted that the term “child labor” was generally used in a negative connotation, but he believed a child should have the opportunity to work if the desire or necessity arose. “After all,” he said, “idleness has been the cause of many youngsters falling by the wayside.” On the other hand, Carter recognized the danger of sweatshops in which children were overworked and underpaid. However, he argued that even these problems did not require Congress to resolve them. Solving the child labor problem, he thought, “...should be purely a state matter” because “the raising of our children should not be left within the province of the whims of some particular Congress.”<sup>127</sup> Despite Carter’s worries, the Child Labor Amendment stalled when only twenty-eight states ratifying the law.<sup>128</sup>

Carter continued to oppose massive government spending unless it benefited Fort Worth and Texas. He candidly expressed these sentiments to Garner on several occasions, particularly concerning the “Roosevelt Recession” of 1937. Though possibly nothing more than a normal downturn in the economy, the 1937 recession gave many conservative critics of the New Deal ample opportunity to criticize Roosevelt’s allegedly

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<sup>126</sup> Carter to Roosevelt, 31 Jan. 1937, Box 32, File 2a, Carter Collection; “Proposed Amendments Not Ratified By the States,” GPO website; available from <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/pdf/con002.pdf>, accessed 9 Mar. 2005.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> See Jeremy P. Felt, “The Child Labor Provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act,” Labor History, 11 (Fall 1970): 467-481.

anti-business policies. Carter charged that such heavy government spending would lead to higher taxes, which would then lead to laying burdens on the shoulders of business and industry. Carter disagreed with any Keynesian philosophies of deficit spending. In a 1937 Star-Telegram editorial, Carter somewhat hypocritically chastised local governments for begging the federal government for money to spend on sidewalks, streets, and sewers. Projects like these, he claimed, should be financed by the state and local governments, not Washington. If this spending were to continue without raising taxes, the situation would be even worse by damaging the government's credit. Carter suggested that the recovery effort should be shifted to private enterprise; for that to happen, Congress should remove what he perceived as anti-business legislation that was passed in Congress's last session.<sup>129</sup>

Carter perceived the tax on undivided profits as an obstacle to recovery because it "penalizes the sound practice of plowing profits back into business, a practice which has made American business management effective." Proposed by Roosevelt in 1936 and passed in the same year, the undivided profits tax was a way for the federal government to prevent the wealthy from leaving large sums in their corporate accounts, therefore avoiding any taxation on that income. In addition to this, the tax also sought to prevent corporations from retaining earnings for capital instead of relying on the money market. Carter believed that not only was this law a bad idea, but that it also hindered recovery. Carter cited a personal case in which the Star-Telegram was unable to expand its building because under this tax it would have been required to pay an additional 10 to 25 percent of the amount paid back of the borrowed money. Carter also

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<sup>129</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 16 Apr. 1937; Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 351.



informed Garner that the government had attempted to solve the nation's problems all at once, and that reform, as admirable a goal as it was, should be replaced by recovery as it was a much more pressing need.<sup>130</sup>

By 1937, with the financing for the Frontier Centennial and the Will Rogers Complex complete, Carter increased his opposition to the New Deal. The year 1937 also witnessed the Roosevelt administration pushing its agenda of reform while the country was slipping into another recession. Garner was also becoming disillusioned with the New Deal despite his support for earlier legislation. His disenchantment became evident in 1936 when Roosevelt refused to take any action regarding another outbreak of sit-down strikes. The split between Garner and Roosevelt was widened further due to Garner's opposition to Roosevelt's court reform plan of 1937, or the "court packing" plan as the president's opponents called the legislation. To make matters worse, Garner vehemently opposed Roosevelt's request for further spending in 1937.<sup>131</sup>

Knowing that he had a sympathetic ear to turn to in Washington, Carter continued to complain to Garner. He asserted once more that the Roosevelt administration was meddling with the economy with its reformist tendencies, leading business and industry to be unsure of what to expect. The current recession would then spiral into another depression of which the blame would have to be shouldered by Roosevelt. Carter advised that the government should revert back to April 1933 when the focus was on recovery, not on reform like Roosevelt's second administration was doing. This idea was not his own, but stemmed from his initial beliefs as to what the

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<sup>130</sup> Carter to Garner, 29 Nov. 1937, Box 18, File 13a, Carter Collection; Arthur Schlesinger, The Politics of Upheaval (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 505-506.

<sup>131</sup> Patenaude, Texans, Politics, and the New Deal, 43-48.

government should do to alleviate the pain of the Depression. As early as April 1933, Carter told Garner what legislation the Roosevelt administration should focus on passing: the currency measure, the banking bill, the security bill, the relief bill, the public works bill, and the farm credit bill. If legislation like this passed, the American people would then be “provided with the tools with which to work their way out.” Essentially, Carter wanted the government to give “...business and industry a chance to devote its industries to recovery and let reform take care of itself for awhile.”<sup>132</sup>

As the New Deal slowly gave way to the massive militarization of American industry, Carter became embroiled in a war of words with Ickes that would capture the nations’ attention. It began in March 1940 when the Star-Telegram published an editorial criticizing a movement in Texas supporting a third term for Roosevelt at the expense of Garner. As friendly as Carter was with Roosevelt, Garner was a favorite son of Texas, and for Carter state ties were stronger than friendship. A third Roosevelt administration, he claimed, would ensure the continuation of a reform agenda, while Garner was assuredly a more conservative option. Carter previously had been one of the most avid supporters of Garner for Democratic candidate for president in 1932. At a time when several conferences supporting Roosevelt were being held in the state, Ickes appeared in East Texas to visit new oil fields after an invitation had been extended to him in his capacity as secretary of the interior. The editorial viewed Ickes’s trip to the state with suspicion because of the timing and the secretary’s reputation as an ardent supporter for a Roosevelt third term.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Carter to Garner, 30 Nov. 1937, Box 18, File 13a, Carter Collection.

<sup>133</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 27 Mar. 1940.

The Star-Telegram editorial accused Ickes of wanting to “take production control out of the hands of the State into those of his own department” while simultaneously calling him a “hatchet man.” However, the bulk of the editorial castigated Roosevelt supporters, mainly those who were traveling to Texas from other states. These people were “carpetbaggers” just the same as those Texans who refused to support Garner.<sup>134</sup>

Ickes responded to this editorial with an even more scathing letter that he made public. Though Ickes was only mentioned once in the long editorial, he took umbrage at the “carpetbagger” term. He accused Carter of sending his own “carpetbaggers” to Wisconsin and Illinois to skew the Democratic primaries in Garner’s favor. Illinois politics, Ickes argued, were generally clean and open when compared to Texas, plus they had no “disfranchising poll tax.” Carter’s opposition to federal regulation of the oil industry reminded Ickes of “a boy in short pants, playing with tin soldiers, and pretending that he is Napoleon.” Despite these shortcomings on Carter’s part, Ickes admitted that Carter was “a pretty good fellow” when he allowed himself to “function as a normal human being” and did not print editorials “which reflect the Ku Klux spirit.”<sup>135</sup>

Thus began the Carter-Ickes tiff, an argument between two very strong and very vocal personalities. Carter promptly fired back at Ickes by publishing another editorial entitled “Mr. Ickes Irritates Easily and Quickly” while also printing another long letter that he had written the secretary. Carter defended his actions and denied that he was even officially involved in the “Garner for President” campaign. On Ickes’s comment that

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ickes to Carter, 18 Apr. 1940, Box 107, File 13b, Carter Collection.

Carter's previous editorial was illogical, he quipped, "That is pretty phraseology, but, fortunately, you are not the sole arbiter of whether they make sense or not."<sup>136</sup>

Word of this petty argument soon spread. The New York Herald Tribune reported that Ickes showed some naiveté in engaging the "hell-for-leather old frontiersman" publisher from Fort Worth. The paper observed that Carter did not possess a reputation for backing down, and it was also unwise for Ickes to become involved in any manner in Texas politics because "Texans may make fools of themselves...but they insist upon doing it their own way." Dwight Marvin, editor of the Troy Record in Troy, New York, congratulated Carter for debating Ickes, and Joseph P. Cowan a resident of Lubbock, defended Carter as the nominal leader of West Texas and claimed that Ickes had "figuratively evacuated" in his "mess kit." The Carter-Ickes controversy screeched to a halt after Carter published all the correspondence between himself and Ickes, and Carter seemingly emerged from the wordy brawl unscathed.<sup>137</sup>

As the New Deal gave way to the pressures of World War II, Carter continued to monitor the political scene through his Washington connections. Though he was never intrigued by the idea of running for public office, Carter maintained some semblance of power in Washington. Senator Tom Connally was given the moniker "Amon Carter's rubber stamp" though this reputation arose more from his friendship and frequent correspondence with Carter than from any influence Carter held over him. Nevertheless, Connally was usually the man Carter turned to whenever he thought it necessary for Washington to remedy a problem. As noted earlier, Carter wrote

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<sup>136</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 29 Apr. 1940.

<sup>137</sup> New York Herald Tribune, 29 Apr. 1940; Marvin to Carter, 4 May, 1940, Box 107, File 13b, Carter Collection; Cowan to Ickes, 29 Apr. 1940, Box 107, File 13b, Carter Collection.

Connally throughout the New Deal, offering solutions and asking for greater representation for Fort Worth. Connally recognized the political power the Star-Telegram wielded because of Carter as evidenced by his appeal for continual support from the newspaper of what would become the Smith-Connally strike bill. Connally had been asked by Roosevelt to draft legislation that would prevent strikes in wartime sensitive industries such as coal mining and defense plants. Connally's bill accomplished this by allowing the government to commandeer plants where strikes were occurring during wartime. A vociferous supporter of entry into the Second World War, Carter had no problem supporting legislation that prevented workers from hurting the United States's defensive capabilities.<sup>138</sup>

Carter turned to Connally even for minute problems. In 1944, after his son had been a POW for some time, Carter asked Connally to add his support to legislation that called for the promotion of captured officers. He reasoned that the officers had suffered such great hardships at the hands of the Germans that they should get automatic promotions. Carter stressed that he was not doing this solely because of his son, but because he wanted the officers rewarded for their perseverance. In an attempt to make this an issue Connally would be willing to support, Carter added that as of May 1944, 10 percent of the American officers in German POW camp *Oflag* LXIV were Texans. Connally contacted Secretary of War Henry Stimson regarding the issue, but Stimson refused to support the idea, observing that whatever the hardships the officers endured,

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<sup>138</sup> Carter to Connally, 18 Nov. 1941, Box 12, File 12, Carter Collection; Connally to Carter, 18 Nov. 1941, Box 12, File 12, Carter Collection; Tom Connally, My Name Is Tom Connally (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1954), 253; James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 337; Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 643-44.

“none of those circumstances can be justified as the basis for promotion under sound military policy.”<sup>139</sup>

The relationship between Carter and Connally can best be described as a symbiotic one in which both men required something from one another. Carter provided the positive press while Connally gave a political voice to Carter’s various whims and desires regarding Fort Worth. Despite their prolific correspondence, both political and personal, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of Carter in Connally’s memoirs. It is hard to say whether this was the result of careless neglect or the willful oversight of a man who did not want to reveal how close he was to the influential publisher.

Roosevelt’s death in April 1945 forced Carter to forge relationships with new presidents. Carter was not able to curry the same favor with Presidents Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower as he was with Roosevelt, though he still attempted to maintain personal relationships with both men. His friendship with Truman soon soured as it became clear that the president favored federal ownership of the Tidelands, an issue dear to Carter’s heart. In 1946, Truman had vetoed a bill that would have given states ownership of offshore oil, and Carter continued to rail against Truman on the issue until the president left office. In 1952, Carter endorsed Eisenhower, the result of a combination of friendship and Democrat Adlai Stevenson’s support of federal ownership of the Tidelands. Carter had met Eisenhower during his trip to war-torn Europe in 1945, and the two had become good friends. In his biography of Carter, Jerry Flemmons speculates that Carter and oil magnate Sid Richardson possibly talked

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<sup>139</sup> Carter to Connally, 16 Aug. 1944, Box 12, File 13, Carter Collection;

Eisenhower into running for president while sailing on Carter's yacht on Eagle Mountain Lake in late 1951 or early 1952; whether or not this true is a matter of conjecture.

Regardless, Carter did write frequently to Ike during the postwar years on matters both personal and political.<sup>140</sup>

The final political showdown of Carter's career came in the twilight of his life. Jim Wright, the 31-year-old "boy mayor" of Weatherford, Texas, dared to challenge incumbent Representative Wingate Lucas of the 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in the Democratic Primary in 1954. Lucas was not a formidable politician on his own, but he had the backing of Carter. Elected to Congress in 1946, Lucas became another one of Carter's "rubber stamps" in Washington. He did not only have Carter's backing, but he required it. Once, when an obscure tax bill came up for a vote in the House, Lucas voted against the wishes of Carter. What the tax bill was or whether Lucas supported it is not known, but his vote angered Carter. Lucas wrote a letter of apology to Carter apologizing for not having consulted with him first. After all, he wrote, "the only purely political action" he had ever taken "was done after consulting" Carter. A contrite Lucas sought to soothe Carter's displeasure by assuring him that he had never "consciously done anything as Congressman from our District that I thought you would disapprove" and that he would continue to seek Carter's approval.<sup>141</sup>

A race against Lucas meant a race against Carter, and Wright determined to enter the fray. On July 22, 1954, the Star-Telegram published a front-page editorial entitled "The Voters Know Lucas' Record, But Where Does Wright Stand?" Up to this

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<sup>140</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 296-7, 320.

<sup>141</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 24 Jul. 2004; Lucas to Carter, 20 Mar. 1954, Box 24, File 24, Carter Collection.

point, Carter and the Star-Telegram had ignored Wright's candidacy, but an apparent groundswell of support for the man attempting to overthrow the reigning figure in Fort Worth caused Carter to make a pre-emptive strike. The editorial accused Wright of refusing to voice his opinion on issues such as foreign aid and scoffed that "he is for avoiding atomic war...Who Isn't?" According to the editorial, Lucas had greater political experience and had always "voted with sturdy independence for what he thought was best for the state and nation." Carter's lackey evidently had been transformed into a man of great conviction.<sup>142</sup>

Wright swiftly responded to this editorial with an "Open Letter to Mr. Amon G. Carter and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram" and spent \$974.40 of his own money to take out a large ad in the Star-Telegram. When the newspaper's advertising manager asked Carter if the ad should be run, Carter simply asked if Wright's check was good; the check was good, and the ad was run. Wright told Carter, "You have at last met a man... who will not bow his knee to you and come running like a simpering pup at your beck and call." He added, "It is unhealthy for ANYONE to become TOO powerful...TOO influential...TOO dominating. It is not good for Democracy. The people are tired of "One-Man Rule." Wright's main complaint against Carter was his refusal to cover Wright's campaign fairly and objectively. According to Wright, he had spoken out on many political issues with clarity and depth, something Carter's "private errand boy Congressman" had never done. Wright pointed to a recent rally for his campaign with nearly 1,000 people in attendance that the Star-Telegram had covered. Carter had the

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<sup>142</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 22 Jul. 1954.



story buried and reportedly “gave it less space than an obituary of some Chinese laundryman who once passed through Fort Worth.”<sup>143</sup>

In his younger years, Carter might have taken these affronts much more seriously, but he had grown more generous in his old age. An editorial countering Wright’s remark was printed on the opposite page, and Carter also wrote an open letter to Wright. The Star-Telegram defended itself by saying that the paper had fairly treated Wright. His rally was not covered because it was a paid event; if it had been advertised as a campaign-opening rally, he would have received the proper coverage. The editorial claimed that Wright had been asked for specific ideas regarding Eisenhower’s farm program, yet he had been not been able to come up with any solutions to the problems he perceived. Regarding Wright’s statements accusing Carter of having a stranglehold on what Fort Worthians could read, the editorial responded that the Star-Telegram would not be so successful if it had a history of covering up the truth.<sup>144</sup>

Amon Carter’s personal letter was more conciliatory than the editorial. Writing after Wright’s victory in the primary, Carter was full of congratulations and good wishes. However, he did respond to the allegations that he had his own personal congressman. According to Carter, he had only phoned Lucas three times and had never written him. A couple of the phone calls addressed funding for the Benbrook Dam and one call came amid rumors of layoffs at the Consolidated-Vultee Plant. Research shows that Carter either suffered from memory loss or had a very selective memory. The aforementioned letter from Lucas to Carter implies that there were frequent conversations between Lucas and Carter mainly consisting of Carter giving Lucas advice. The bill to which

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<sup>143</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 23 Jul. 1954.

<sup>144</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 23 Jul. 1954.

Lucas referred, though not specifically named, clearly did not refer to Benbrook Dam or Consolidated-Vultee. Also, there is at least one existing wire from Carter to Lucas asking him to push H.R. 2319 pertaining to the unification of the armed forces. Evidence shows that Carter was much more involved in the legislative duties of Lucas than he cared to admit.<sup>145</sup>

Wright's victory was the death knell for Carter's supremacy in local politics. Apparently, voters had grown tired of sending men whom they perceived as Carter's lackeys to Congress. However, it was inevitable that Carter lose his grip; his health had been failing for the few years prior to the election, and he had become less involved in the day-to-day workings of local politics. Also, Carter had no successor to the empire he had forged out of publishing ink and oil. Jim Wright's defiance had ushered in a new era of Fort Worth politics.

It is clear from his writings and actions that Carter was a conservative Democrat whose philosophy espoused pro-business measures for recovery and not a liberal New Deal state. Though he clearly backed the initial New Deal programs calling for recovery, he refused to support those aimed at reforming the economic system at the expense of business. However, he did not want to alienate himself from those in power who believed differently. To do so would mean the cessation of federal funds to Fort Worth and the loss of some of his prestige. Carter recognized that the federal government had to be involved with economic recovery and chose to attach himself to this new era in federal policy because he understood the repercussions of being close to the seat of power. The monument and buildings built in Fort Worth dedicated to

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<sup>145</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 25 Jul. 1954.

Carter's dear friend Will Rogers verify Carter's influence. By boosting Fort Worth, a city he had chosen as his own, Carter simultaneously catapulted himself into the upper echelon of American businessmen. Perhaps Carter can best be described as an opportunist, an entrepreneur's entrepreneur. Someone who began his career by scamming people in the knifeboard concession could certainly be successful in selling himself and his region to the federal government without wholly subscribing to its philosophy.

Though he persuaded Washington that spending money in Fort Worth was a reasonable idea, Carter pursued other means of bringing outside investment into Fort Worth. The federal government could only bring limited funding into Fort Worth while the private sector provided a vast pool of seemingly limitless resources that came with fewer strings attached. Through Carter's tireless efforts, the groundwork was laid for General Motors to build a plant near Fort Worth, and Consolidated constructed a bomber plant in west Fort Worth. The jobs they provided were as great a legacy for Fort Worth as the soaring monument to Will Rogers.

## CHAPTER 4

### SELLING FORT WORTH: AMON CARTER AND THE BUSINESS OF DIPLOMACY

Despite the continued depression throughout the 1930s, Carter hoped to attract companies that would bring jobs and growth to Fort Worth. Though he constantly pleaded with the federal government for money to fund his pet projects, Carter believed that permanent, sustainable growth would have to come at the hands of the private sector. Carter was the driving force behind the building of a Consolidated plant in Fort Worth and he persuaded the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad ( a subsidiary of Burlington) to keep its offices in Fort Worth instead of moving them to Denver. Though Arlington Mayor Tom Vandergriff led the final push for a General Motors plant, Carter began laying the groundwork in 1935 with his first invitation for General Motors to build in Fort Worth.

Bringing companies to Fort Worth was not a new pursuit for Carter. As shown in earlier chapters, one of his major goals in life was the promotion of Fort Worth. Carter recognized early on that selling Fort Worth as a reasonable location for national businesses was a relatively successful quest. When West Texas underwent an oil boom during the 1910s and 1920s, Fort Worth became a gathering point for many wildcatters and independent oil operators. While visiting E.W. Sinclair of Sinclair Oil, Carter observed a map on the wall with pins marking locations of Sinclair's regional

offices. Struck by the fact that Dallas had a pin, Carter moved it slightly to the west where Fort Worth was located. Sinclair complied and moved the regional offices to Fort Worth. When asked what drove him to spearhead the bringing of businesses to Fort Worth, Carter replied that it was “merely my enthusiasm for Texas, more particularly West Texas, its great opportunities, and pride in Fort Worth.”<sup>146</sup>

Carter began luring General Motors to Fort Worth in 1935 in the middle of his campaign to canalize the Trinity River and secure PWA funding for Fort Worth. From time to time, Carter discussed with W.S. Knudsen, the executive Vice-President of General Motors, the possibilities of reopening a defunct Chevrolet plant on Camp Bowie Boulevard in West Fort Worth. Coincidentally, Carter mentioned, Camp Bowie became Bankhead Highway, Fort Worth’s link to West Texas, El Paso, and California. Dallas had its benefits with its perceived eastward oriented culture, but Fort Worth had access to the markets of West Texas and beyond.<sup>147</sup>

The old Chevrolet plant was mostly vacant except for a portion that Frigidaire rented as a distribution center. Carter proposed two methods for General Motors to maximize their benefits from the building. General Motors could either use it as an assembly plant or as a distribution center. The City of Fort Worth recently had presented the latter option to General Motors but the corporation declined, citing “unfavorable sentiment on the part of the citizenship of Dallas.” Carter wrote, “This feature...was greatly exaggerated.” A move from Dallas would actually be beneficial for General Motors and Carter pointed to the Frigidaire Corporation as evidence. Frigidaire had been using the Fort Worth location for seventeen years, the most recent two as the

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<sup>146</sup> Knight, Fort Worth, 222-223.

<sup>147</sup> Carter to Knudsen, 15 Feb. 1935, Box 18, File 23, Carter Collection.

distribution headquarters for Northern Arkansas, North Texas, and Eastern New Mexico.<sup>148</sup>

In case Knudsen and General Motors were concerned about freight rates, Carter sought to diminish whatever fears they might have had. He cited a recent study by the Traffic Department of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce showing an advantage by Fort Worth to twice as many points when compared to San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston. Because Fort Worth was the “railroad and transportation center of the Southwest,” the city could afford to be in this advantageous system. In case Knudsen was unaware of the transportation statistics, Carter provided them for him. Fort Worth had nine trunk line railroads, nineteen rail outlets, and twenty-five motor freight lines. In addition to this, American Airlines had recently moved its Southwestern headquarters to Fort Worth from Dallas. Also, Tarrant County, of which Fort Worth was the county seat, had a modern highway system that was well connected to nearby federal highways. From Carter’s point of view, it was clearly beneficial for General Motors to reopen in Fort Worth especially from a transportation perspective.<sup>149</sup>

As the owner of Carter Publications, Carter knew what appealed to large corporations when considering a move. Cutting costs was appealing, but many corporations were also interested in the quality of life in the new location. Carter loved enhancing Fort Worth’s reputation and he took advantage of a long letter to continue this practice. Fort Worth had a burgeoning population, was an oil center, had a large meatpacking presence, and a business friendly, businessman run city-government. In

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

addition to these physical positives, Fort Worth was a healthful city with one of the lowest death rates among Texas cities.<sup>150</sup>

Carter then moved to items directly related to General Motors by writing that it would not affect General Motors's sales because they had moved to Fort Worth. He maintained that people bought General Motors because of the name, not because they were located close by. Carter cited a recent traffic count conducted by Fort Worth near the proposed location pointing out that nearly twenty thousand cars had passed in the space of one day with probably double that number of people in the automobiles. A General Motors presence would be great advertising for the company and would also be a central location for car dealers. Having presented Knudsen with an apparently invincible argument, Carter asked him if he was

Going to continue carrying the meal in one end of the sack and the rock in the other merely because it has been a habit in the past? Or, will you go with the tide and move to Fort Worth, thereby taking advantage of the large investment you have here and, at the same time, be closer to the territory in Texas which is showing the greatest growth and development?"<sup>151</sup>

Having thrown down the gauntlet, Carter waited for a response. Unfortunately for Carter and Fort Worth, General Motors did not feel a pressing need to uproot their headquarters in Dallas and move to Fort Worth. This did not stop Carter from continuously corresponding with General Motors employees. The next year, 1936, witnessed Carter scrambling for funds to pay for Fort Worth's Frontier Centennial, the Carter driven response to the Texas Centennial in Dallas. In April of the same year, Carter wrote Knudson again, and R. H. Grant, general sales manager for General Motors, about possibly advertising and setting up an exhibit at the Frontier Centennial.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

In case General Motors was concerned that the Frontier Centennial was to compete with Dallas, Carter assured them that it was not. This Centennial celebration was entertainment only with no educational or scientific exhibits.<sup>152</sup>

Carter knew that General Motors had already committed to the Texas Centennial in Dallas, and he felt it would only be fair for General Motors to share some of their wealth with Fort Worth. Since the spirit and theme of the Frontier Centennial was the pioneer spirit that conquered the West, Carter believed that it would be highly appropriate for the pioneering company of General Motors to play some part in the proceedings. He proposed that General Motors construct their own building, provide their own exhibits, and put on whatever entertainment they saw fit. Whatever the cost of the exhibit was, General Motors would profit from being present at the Centennial.<sup>153</sup>

Carter proposed to furnish the land for the building if General Motors purchased \$50,000 in 4% bonds that the City of Fort Worth was selling. Their main expense would be the construction and entertainment costs. The possibility of the bonds not being paid was slim because it was assumed that the Billy Rose spectacle would pay for the whole \$750,000 in bonds. Carter was confident that attendance would be sufficient to cover everyone's costs; the Dallas show was estimated to attract over ten million people and Fort Worth could expect to get at least half of those people. Finally, Carter told of one last advantage for General Motors. As there would few if any exhibits to compete with, the General Motors exhibit would easily become the must-see building.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Carter to R.H. Grant, 13 Apr. 1936, Box 18, File 23a, Carter Collection.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.



General Motors declined to be as involved in the Frontier Centennial to the extent that Carter had hoped. Grant believed that there would be too much overlap between the Fort Worth and Dallas celebrations and the amount of money General Motors would have to spend would be too extravagant. However, General Motors did agree to be a major sponsor of the Centennial and also sponsored radio broadcasts of various events at the Frontier Centennial. Businessman that he was, Carter accepted this decision by General Motors and was happy to have them agree to sponsor a small part of the festivities. However, one wonders whether or not Carter believed that his proposal was feasible. Clearly he must have known what General Motors's response would be considering their present position in Dallas. It is possible that Carter never expected General Motors to mull over his proposition but hoped to get some smaller amount from them. If that was the case, he was very successful.<sup>155</sup>

Amon Carter neglected to woo General Motors for the next nine years as he pursued other interests that he deemed more important. His quest to canalize the Trinity River increasingly took his time, as did his involvement with the movement to create a national park in the Big Bend region of West Texas. When war erupted in Europe in 1939 and the United States began providing arms to Great Britain, Carter took advantage of the mobilization of the American economy by persuading Consolidate Aircraft to build a plant in Fort Worth. No sooner was this accomplished that the Germans in North Africa captured his son, thus distracting him from other pursuits.

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<sup>155</sup> Grant to Carter, 23 Apr. 1936, Box 18, File 23a, Carter Collection; Carter to Grant, 22 Jul. 1936, Box 18, File 23a, Carter Collection; Grant to Carter, 23 Jul. 1936, Box 18, File 23a, Carter Collection.

Once the initial shock of the news wore off, Carter resumed his normal activities of bringing greater economic benefits to Fort Worth.

In 1944, Carter contacted Alfred Sloan, CEO of General Motors, and John Thomas Smith, Vice-President of General Motors, and renewed his efforts to bring the company back to Fort Worth. His reasoning was that the economic status of Fort Worth had improved considerably in the last nine years. Again he was rebuffed, though General Motors did consider the offer a little more carefully this time. Instead, the company opted to build a plant for Buicks, Oldsmobiles, and Pontiacs in Kansas City. However, General Motors stated that future operations in Fort Worth might be a possibility depending on the growth the Southwest underwent.<sup>156</sup>

Carter restrained himself from pursuing General Motors for an automobile plant for three years. In 1947, Carter wrote Paul Garrett of General Motors of a “railroad friend” who reported that General Motors was looking to build another assembly plant. Whether this was true or if Carter was just seeking a way of bringing the topic up once more is up for debate, but the method worked. Carter told Garrett that Sloan had offered to build a plant in Fort Worth if freight rates would allow General Motors to ship as cheaply from Fort Worth as they could from St. Louis or Atlanta. Carter promised that if General Motors built a factory in Fort Worth, the city would arrange for friendlier freight rates.<sup>157</sup>

It would be another three years before General Motors made any more overtures to Fort Worth. Apparently Carter’s attempt at bringing rumors to life had failed.

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<sup>156</sup> Carter to Smith, 26 Jun. 1944, Box 18, File 24, Carter Collection; C.E. Wilson, letter to Carter, 19 Oct. 1944, Box 18, File 24, Carter Collection.

<sup>157</sup> Carter to Garrett, 15 Apr. 1947, Box 18, File 24, Carter Collection.

However, by 1950, General Motors was serious about opening a plant in Fort Worth and Carter began discussions with local railroads about freight rates which were the stumbling block to previous endeavors to bring General Motors to the city. D.V. Fraser, president of Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Company, wrote Carter concerning a conversation regarding General Motors they had at a prior banquet. Fraser informed Carter that the railroad was offering rates at a price that would make Fort Worth an attractive site for General Motors. Not only that, but Fraser promised Carter that he would “help fulfill your ambition to locate the General Motors plant in Fort Worth.” F.G. Gurley, president of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway System reported to Carter that he was discussing freight rates with the proper people in his company. He added that his was the last major railway upon which General Motors had failed to place a plant. This would make the negotiations with General Motors much easier as they would want to solidify their position by being located on all major American railways.<sup>158</sup>

Armed with these affirmations of railway assistance, Carter contacted Alfred Sloan, chairman of General Motors, one more time. Though he had invited general Motors in 1935 and 1944, Carter believed that this invitation would not slip by unheeded. His reasoning was Fort Worth had grown considerably since his last push for a General Motors plant. Automobile registration in the Southwest region was booming, Fort Worth’s labor force was increasing, and there were over five times as many manufacturing employees as there were in 1940. More importantly, Carter claimed there were over 200,000 General Motors cars sold in the Fort Worth area in

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<sup>158</sup> D.V. Fraser to Carter, 14 Aug. 1950, Box 18, File 26, Carter Collection; F.G. Gurley to Carter, 11 Sept. 1950, Box 18, File 26, Carter Collection.

1949. In addition to these facts, Carter presented Fort Worth as a large city with the heart of a small town always ready to “run out the welcome mat for General Motors.”<sup>159</sup>

During the fall of 1950, Carter instructed the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce to draw up a report for General Motors with details about Fort Worth and reasons why it would be a good decision for them to build a plant in Fort Worth. Included in the brief were two suggested locations that were along the Santa Fe Railroad. Carter also asked Gurley, president of Santa Fe Railroad, to contact Charles Wilson, president of General Motors with positive information regarding Santa Fe and freight rates. In December 1950 Amon Carter along with William Holden, executive vice-president and former mayor of Fort Worth, traveled to Detroit to present the brief to General Motors. After the introduction of this latest report, General Motors began seriously considering the possibility of building a factory in Fort Worth.<sup>160</sup>

Carter continued exerting pressure on General Motors officials hoping that this would persuade them that Fort Worth was a worthy site for an assembly plant. He was no longer concerned that they use their former property located on Camp Bowie Boulevard because he was now touting a 2,000-acre tract south of Fort Worth that he happened to own. In a token of goodwill, Carter informed Garrett, vice-president of General Motors, that he would be willing to sell the land at cost. However, Carter was

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<sup>159</sup> Carter to Sloan, 20 Nov. 1950, Box 18, File 26, Carter Collection; It must be noted here that Carter’s definition of the Fort Worth region fluctuated. It varied in size from Tarrant County to all of West Texas. Carter conveniently left out his definition here.

<sup>160</sup> Carter to Gurley, 1 Dec. 1950, Box 18, File 26, Carter Collection; Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 14 May 1952.

open to the idea of the factory being located elsewhere, specifically along either the Rock Island Railroad or the Santa Fe Railroad.<sup>161</sup>

After months of investigation and due to pressure from Mayor Vandergriff, General Motors purchased a 255 site in Arlington, Texas, halfway between Fort Worth and Dallas. The land was located along US Highway 80, a well-traveled road upon which the plant would have high visibility. Not only was it not located on any land Carter owned, but also it was also located along the Texas and Pacific Railroad Line which went against Carter's previous suggestions. The site was purchased by the Buick-Oldsmobile-Pontiac Assembly Division though "future plans for use of the property depend upon availability of materials for construction." Once it was clear that General Motors was moving to Arlington, Carter began decreasing his involvement with the project. In addition to this, his health had been deteriorating and he was spending time in and out of hospitals.<sup>162</sup>

Though Vandergriff succeeded in his efforts to bring General Motors to Arlington, Carter received much of the credit from other city leaders for bringing General Motors to Tarrant County. William Holden, the executive vice-president of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, invited E.C. Klotzburger, the future plant manager with General Motors, to Fort Worth for discussions on the relationship between the city and the corporation. In his letter, Holden praised Carter for his extensive efforts to bring General Motors to the area. Because of his patience and perseverance, 6,000 North Texans would owe their employment to Carter. When ground was broken on May 27,

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<sup>161</sup> Carter to Garrett, 4 Jan. 1951, Box 18, File 27, Carter Collection.

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Groehn to Carter, 2 Aug. 1951, Box 18, File 27, Carter Collection.

1952, Carter was rewarded with turning the first shovel of dirt, an honor he had performed numerous times at other ceremonies.<sup>163</sup>

An analysis of correspondence between Carter and General Motors officials reveals few if any different methods of approach by Carter. Though no mention of his canal plans appear, it is possible that its proposed benefits entered his mind at some point. General Motors blamed their unwillingness to build in Fort Worth on high freight rates, something Carter was trying to reverse with the Trinity Canal. Though it took sixteen years to be successful, Carter was determined to bring General Motors to Fort Worth. This resolve marked Carter's approach to projects and demonstrates that he was endowed with either a highly optimistic worldview or sheer stubbornness.

In between his efforts to secure a General Motors plant for Fort Worth, Amon Carter turned his attention toward the mobilization of the American economy. President Roosevelt was determined to transform the United States into the "arsenal for democracy"; this meant building tanks instead of cars, transports instead of yachts, and bombers instead of passenger planes. In 1940, Roosevelt began a national defense program that would allow for greater coordination between business and government for the purpose of helping the war effort. Carter and other prominent Fort Worth citizens believed this would be one more way for Fort Worth to become an industrialized city. Carter took on the most important role in attracting Consolidated by using his acquaintance with Reuben Fleet, president of Consolidated, to Fort Worth's advantage.

Bringing Consolidated to Fort Worth proved to be one of the most remarkable feats in Amon Carter's life solely because of the impact Consolidated had on the Fort

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<sup>163</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 14 May 1952; Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 23 May 1952.

Worth economy. In 1941 alone, Consolidated added 6,000 jobs to the Fort Worth economy; to put that number in context, there were fewer than 10,000 manufacturing employees in Fort Worth in 1939. Consolidated not only added jobs but also payroll dollars into Fort Worth, increasing from \$10 million in 1942 to \$60 million in 1944. The end of the war did not halt production at Consolidated as the United States remained militarily on alert throughout the Cold War. Consolidated underwent a few name changes and buyouts beginning with Convair, then General Dynamics, and finally Lockheed.<sup>164</sup>

Amon Carter and Ruben Fleet began discussing some form of cooperation between Consolidated and Fort Worth in 1940. Fleet contacted Carter stating his interest in expanding his company's operations outside San Diego. In phone conversations and in writing, Fleet outlined what he was searching for in possible locations for a new plant: "wage scales, union activities, labor disturbances, labor supply...state, county, and local taxations" among other things. He also was wise enough to explicitly mention that Consolidated was interested in other sites around the Southern United States.<sup>165</sup>

Consolidated soon had a new proposition for Amon Carter and Fort Worth. Fort Worth officials and Carter were working on preparing the city for Consolidated's possible presence when the company's chief test pilot requested a favor from Carter and Fort Worth. Consolidated was in the process of building PBY seaplanes for Great Britain, and these planes needed a place to land on their way from San Diego. Since these flights were to begin in the winter, the planes needed a warmer climate so as to

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Fleet to Carter, 27 May 1940, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection.

avoid frozen water surfaces. Consolidated officials explicitly asked to land at Lake Worth and asked Carter to mediate between them and the city of Fort Worth.<sup>166</sup>

By December 1940, Consolidated's seaplanes were landing at Lake Worth on their way to Great Britain. Meanwhile, Carter urged local politicians to pressure the United States Army to allow Consolidated to locate in Fort Worth. Carter believed Fort Worth to be the ideal spot because it offered water for Navy planes and plenty of land for the Army. If Consolidated was to build in Tulsa or Oklahoma City as had been suggested, the plant would be forced to only build Army planes at the plant. Armed with this reasoning and confident of his sales abilities, Carter considered the deal to be done with Consolidated to be done; all that was needed was the Army's consent.<sup>167</sup>

Officials on both sides of the negotiations were confident that Consolidated would choose to locate in Fort Worth. Carter and the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce were willing to give Consolidated anything they needed to build a functioning plant. William Holden, executive vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce, listed what Fort Worth would grant Consolidated if they chose Fort Worth: 1200 acres along Lake Worth, two runways with taxi strips, a water supply system with a sewer main and sewage disposal plant, necessary utility and railroads trunk lines (these at no cost), highways, and housing. Holden also stated that the three bodies of the Fort Worth City Council, Tarrant County officials, and Chamber of Commerce representatives were united in

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<sup>166</sup> Wheatley to Carter, 22 Nov. 1940, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection; Edgar Gott to Carter, 26 Nov. 1940, Box 12, File 18 Carter Collection.

<sup>167</sup> Carter to Gott, 7 Dec. 1940, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection.



their efforts to bring Consolidated to Fort Worth. Amon Carter would not be alone in this project.<sup>168</sup>

Once Carter had established a solid partnership with Fleet and Consolidated, he turned his attention to politicians and government officials. Carter again used his connection with Elliott Roosevelt to influence various people in the government such as General E. M. Watson, secretary to President Roosevelt and of course, the President himself. He also contacted Texas Senator Morris Sheppard, Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee, urging him to lean on Assistant Secretary of War Patterson and President Roosevelt. In order to assist Sheppard in his duties, Carter sent him a brief detailing what Fort Worth had to offer. W.S. Knudsen of the National Defense Advisory Committee was next on Carter's list. The National Defense Advisory Committee recommended building four bomber plants, the third of which was to be built in Tulsa by Consolidated. However, Carter told Knudsen that Consolidated believed Fort Worth to be the better site; Tulsa could receive the fourth bomber plant to be run by some other aviation company.<sup>169</sup>

The federal government continued to press for a Consolidated plant in Tulsa, even though Consolidated officials had stated that Fort Worth would be a better location. However, the government insisted that factories should be given to states that had not already benefited from defense dollars. Texas already had a sizable military presence, and the Dallas-Fort Worth area had acquired a North American airplane plant in Grand Prairie. Fleet remained adamant that Fort Worth should be selected and

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<sup>168</sup> Holden to Fleet, 19 Dec. 1940, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection.

<sup>169</sup> Carter to Sheppard, 22 Dec. 1940, Box 12, File 18 Carter Collection; Carter to Van Dusen, 22 Dec. 1940, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection; Carter to Knudsen, 22 Dec. 1940, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection.

continued to urge Carter and Fort Worth officials to mount a last offensive against the War Department. Carter capped this flurry of activity with a wire to President Roosevelt stating what both Fleet and he had been saying all along. Fort Worth offered numerous advantages over Tulsa: better climate, more railroads, and a position along American Airlines transcontinental route. Also, Consolidated was still using Lake Worth as a stop for flying boats. If the War Department deemed it necessary to build bombers and flying boats, Fort Worth would be the ideal site for a plant. Carter offered Roosevelt a solution. He suggested Tulsa be granted a plant and that Consolidated be allowed to come to Fort Worth.<sup>170</sup>

On January 3, 1941, government announced that Fort Worth would be awarded the Consolidated plant along with Tulsa. Fort Worth officials were ecstatic and congratulations poured into Carter for his effort throughout the whole ordeal. Two local businessmen lauded Carter for his “untiring efforts” noting, “All Fort Worth will rejoice in your achievement.” Lt. Colonel A.B. McDaniel, an officer serving in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, was apparently well informed of Carter’s history of getting his way in regards to the government as he wrote, “you ‘did your stuff’ as usual.” Carter fired off a telegram to President Roosevelt thanking him for his help and apparent influence over the situation.<sup>171</sup>

The existing correspondence indicates that those involved in the Consolidated efforts viewed Carter’s role not only as important but also indispensable. Without his

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<sup>170</sup> Kathryn Pinckney, “From Stockyards to Defense Plants, the Transformation of a City: Fort Worth, Texas, and World War II” (Ph. D. Diss., University of North Texas, 2004), 87-88; Carter to Van Dusen, 30 Dec. 1940, Carter Collection.

<sup>171</sup> Leon Gross and Raymond Meyer to Carter, 3 Jan. 1941, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection; McDaniel to Carter, 6 Jan. 1941, Box 12, File 18, Carter Collection; Carter to Roosevelt, 6 Jan. 1941, Carter Collection.

presence, it is likely that Fort Worth would never have received the Consolidated plant. Reuben Fleet was no friend of the New Deal as evidenced by his numerous appearances before Congressional Committees denouncing high taxation, the plowing under of cotton, and the “super-intelligent, wonderful, brainy people, who have never themselves made a success of business.” William Holden did not possess the presence or political connections of Carter and would not have received the same respect from Washington politicians. It was Carter who urged Senators Connally and Sheppard to speak on his behalf and he also took it upon himself to write to Roosevelt about the controversy. His flurry of activity at the end of December 1940 was the decisive factor in the War Department’s decision to build a Consolidated plant in Fort Worth.<sup>172</sup>

The year 1940 was a busy one for Carter. He wooed Consolidated, fought a verbal battle with Harold Ickes, and successfully concluded a campaign to keep the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad in Fort Worth. The struggle began in 1939 when Burlington line announced that it was going to lease out the Fort Worth and Denver Line from Dallas to Texline in the Texas Panhandle and save thousands in the process. More importantly, from Carter’s view, the move would also eliminate nearly 200 jobs by moving the Fort Worth and Denver offices to Fort Worth and closing the maintenance plant in Childress, Texas. Carter called this proposed action the “Burlington Blitzkrieg Against Texas”, an obvious comparison to the quick strikes of Hitler’s armies across Europe.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> William Wagner, Reuben A. Fleet and the Story of Consolidated Aircraft (Aero Publishers: Fallbrook, California, 1976), 302.

<sup>173</sup> Flemmons, Amon, 245-246.

When Burlington went public with the proposal, Carter instantly went into action using the two tools he had available: his newspaper and correspondence. In his first wire to Ralph Budd, president of Burlington Lines, Carter called the action “shortsighted and uneconomical.” The Burlington system had many railways under its umbrella, one of them being the Colorado Southern. Carter argued that it would make more business sense for Burlington to stop supporting additional lines in the Colorado Southern because they were forcing Burlington to lose money. The money saved could then go to the Fort Worth and Denver to bolster the railroads already strong presence in the region. If Burlington still wanted to consolidate its operations, Carter claimed that Fort Worth would be the logical choice because most of the Fort Worth and Denver’s mileage was in Texas. Regarding the layoffs of 189 workers, Carter warned the railroad what they would “lose in good will and public support” would offset the savings.<sup>174</sup>

Budd claimed that Burlington would save at least \$300,000 by closing its Fort Worth offices, but Carter argued that this savings would be offset by a federal law mandating employers pay two-thirds wages to fifteen-year employees who had been laid off. This would cut the estimated savings to \$100,000, and Carter believed that such a paltry amount would cause Burlington to waver in its commitment. However, in a latter to Carter, Budd stated that this would not be the case; as a matter of fact, Burlington would save \$350,000 annually. Burlington would have to pay the wages of a few laid off workers, but not as many as Carter claimed. There were not too many who had been with the Fort Worth and Denver for fifteen years, and some of those who had

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<sup>174</sup> “Burlington Blitzkrieg Against Texas,” pamphlet, n.d., Box 25, File 22a, Carter Collection. This pamphlet is a collection of telegrams and editorials Carter compiled regarding the Burlington case.

were being transferred to other positions in the company. Budd also argued that, contrary to Carter's belief, this transfer would actually improve rail service in Fort Worth and the surrounding region by eliminating duplicate roles around the country. Burlington officials agreed that the wisest move would be to have the Fort Worth and Denver lines operated from Denver because most of the iron ore transported by the line came from Wyoming and the bulk of this important shipment went to Pueblo, Colorado to an iron company.<sup>175</sup>

Carter refused to accept Budd's answer and fired off a reply. He argued that Burlington's citation of a \$300,000 savings was false and that they had admitted so in front of the International Commerce Commission (ICC) at a recent hearing in Fort Worth. Carter was irked by Burlington's new focus on its Colorado and Southern subsidiary and claimed that the Fort Worth and Denver had been forced to give up some of its profits to keep it afloat. Not only was business better on the Texas half of the line, but Colorado's state income tax made it more economical to be based in Texas. In case Budd felt too smugly about the seeming inevitability of the move, Carter warned that he and his supporters would not back down and that this exchange of letters would be published in the Star-Telegram.<sup>176</sup>

Whatever setback Carter's cause had received, it was soon overshadowed by the ICC examiners approval of the proposition. Carter dismissed this as a small obstacle to overcome because the ICC had not yet formally approved the consolidation. He then slammed the examiner's report as being full of omissions and oversights. The report had focused on the benefits to Colorado and had ignored the loss of jobs and

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<sup>175</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Nov. 5, 1939.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

productivity in Texas. He criticized the report for ignoring the fact that the Fort Worth and Denver was consistently stronger than the Colorado and Southern. More important for Burlington was the tax rate in Colorado. With nearly 400 miles fewer in Colorado than in Texas, the Colorado and Southern's state tax bill was \$400,000 more than the Fort Worth and Denver's bill in Texas. Carter trusted that the ICC would see these numbers and rule that Burlington would only be hurting itself if it went through with the consolidation because, "The ICC is charged with the duty of protecting railroads against their own mistakes of management and policy as well as against unprofitable rates." Carter closed with the wish that Budd would recognize that taking the railroad from Texas would be a monumental mistake. If Budd went through with it, then, "the inevitable diversion of traffic to other roads will be something that will have to be set down as offset to the savings by the Burlington from firing Texans now employed by the road."<sup>177</sup>

In May 1940, Carter traveled To Washington, D.C. to testify in front of the ICC regarding Burlington. In a long speech peppered with Texas tales and country aphorisms, Carter spoke of the disaster that would befall Texas, Fort Worth, and Burlington if the deal was approved. He called Burlington's proposition "cold blooded" and "unthinkable" for supposed good people to do. He described Burlington's betrayal of Fort Worth's trust by not even telling of the plan until the application was filed with the ICC. Not only had they betrayed the city that had been so accommodating, but they

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<sup>177</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Feb. 28, 1940.

were going to fire 189 people with “without any ceremony” and transfer headquarters to Denver where they were “losing their shirt.”<sup>178</sup>

Carter proceeded to tell of the public relations debacle that Burlington would experience if the ICC approved the proposition. By treating its good friends in this manner, Burlington was wasting whatever “good will” they had, and good will was hard to build up after it had been ruined. Carter added, “It is a long ways from corn bread to caviar but it’s just a short ways back;” in his eyes, Burlington was about find what it was like to go from “cornbread to caviar.”<sup>179</sup>

Carter deliberately stayed away from statistics and figures because, “You can prove most anything by figures and disprove it by another set of figures.” His strategy was to appeal to the humanity of the ICC by speaking of the railroad as if it were a wayward lover. Texans would see how badly they had been treated by the railroad and proceed to spurn it for Texans were, “Deeply resentful of anybody that mistreats them no matter what it is.” Carter reached back into his childhood and told the commission how some of his first memories were of the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad that ran near his home. He had sold chicken and bread sandwiches, fraternized with the brakemen and conductors, and ridden on nearly every spot on the train. If Burlington was allowed to do this, not only his affection would be lost, but also that of Fort Worth and Childress, and Burlington would discover that it, too, had lost something in the transaction.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> “Argument of Mr. Carter,” transcript of ICC hearing, 8 May 1940, Box 25, File 22, Carter Collection.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

Carter also used his influence in the West Texas Chamber of Commerce (WTCC) to put pressure on Burlington. At a meeting in Big Spring, Texas, Carter presented a resolution that opposed the removal of the railroad's headquarters from Fort Worth and the closing of the maintenance shop in Childress. One of the members, Jay Taylor of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, pointed to a case twelve years prior in which Santa Fe Railroad had threatened to move offices from Amarillo to Lawrence, Kansas. After the WTCC led a protest against the action, Santa Fe relented, moved the Lawrence headquarters to Amarillo, and built a 12-story office building there. Under Carter's leadership, the WTCC drew up a six point resolution detailing why the members protested against Burlington's actions. The six points were nothing new; they called the move unjustified, citing the loss of jobs, and the removal of what was considered a Texas railway to another state. The resolution was then sent to Budd.<sup>181</sup>

The fight see-sawed back and forth between Carter and Budd until Carter won another chance in front of the ICC through various appeals. At his final appearance before the ICC, Carter ignored the possible loss of jobs and based his arguments around economics and the feasibility of the move. Regardless of how one looked at the situation, Carter argued, Burlington was in error for the evidence was stacked against the company. Taxes would be higher if the company moved, and the majority of its business was in Texas. Carter's final appearance was the clincher, and the ICC struck down the Burlington merger.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 18 May 1940.

<sup>182</sup> "Oral Arguments of Amon Carter," 5 Feb. 1941, Box 26, File 23, Carter Collection; Flemmons, Amon, 246.



Carter's fight against Burlington did more than save nearly two hundred jobs. It also revealed Carter's stubborn tendencies and aptitude for grudges. At the end of the fight, when it was clear that Carter had won his battle, he told Budd that he was training his son to take his place at the Star-Telegram. In the papers that would be handed down to his son, he was going to ask that they all be discretionary except for those that had to do with what he called "The Burlington Blitzkrieg Against Texas." He wrote, "I have asked that he never relent in keeping the good folks of Texas continuously informed...of just How Mean the Burlington has treated us country folks." Years later, Budd apologized to Carter and confessed that, during the booming war years, maintenance shops were needed in both Childress and Denver. Carter accepted the apology and then reportedly told an employee, "I still don't like that man." During the height of the clash, Carter accused Budd of practicing tactics that reeked of "Hitlerism" because of the employees that would lose their jobs. Thus the "Burlington Blitzkrieg Against Texas" shed light onto an aspect of Carter's character that was less than savory.<sup>183</sup>

This episode in Carter's life leads one to wonder why he undertook this crusade against Burlington. Though he knew some of the Fort Worth and Denver's employees, he was not particularly close to any of them. It is possible that civic pride played a small role in his actions, but he rarely couched his arguments in that guise. He was extremely busy at the time working with the government and Consolidated to bring the bomber plant so it is odd that he took the time to worry about 200 jobs when there were thousands in the wings. Another odd aspect is that he turned to the ICC for assistance,

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<sup>183</sup> Carter to Budd, 8 Aug. 1940, Box 25, File 22, Carter Collection; Flemmons, Amon, 246.

a government organization that he would have detested if it had meddled with his business. Whatever his motivation, his tactics were the driving force behind the striking down of the Burlington merger.

Consolidated, and the Fort Worth and Denver owed their existence (or continued existence) in Fort Worth to Carter, while he also brought General Motors' attention to the Fort Worth region. It is no coincidence that the height of his efforts came at the heels of the Great Depressions as he sought new ways to keep his city thriving. Though not successful until the 1950s, his work to bring General Motors to Fort Worth began during the Great Depression. As the world began to immerse itself in war, Carter understood that Fort Worth could capitalize on this catastrophe. Yet his actions during the proposed Burlington merger showed that he was not only concerned with large corporations that employed thousands of people. Whatever his motivations, he fought just as hard to keep the jobs of 200 people as he did to win the jobs of 6,000 people. And though two of these corporations underwent future mergers and consolidation, their impact on the Fort Worth economy did not weaken even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CONCLUSION

Careful perusal of Fort Worth and its history reveals the creative hand of one man, Amon Carter, in its transformation into a modern city. This study has argued that no other person in the city's past wielded the same amount of power in such a beneficial manner. As the "enlightened despot" of Fort Worth, Carter reached the zenith of his influence in the last twenty-five years of his life. Under his unofficial guidance and leadership, modern Fort Worth emerged in the years 1930-1955.

The Great Depression and New Deal enabled Carter to realize his vision of transforming Fort Worth into a vibrant city that could possibly rival Dallas for regional dominance. Though unsuccessful in gaining federal support for the Trinity River Canal, the networks that he forged with political figures gave him the necessary influence to make the New Deal a positive force for Fort Worth. Because of Carter's newly found political power, Fort Worth received a large complex consisting of an auditorium, an arena, and numerous exhibit halls, or "cowsheds" as New Dealers christened the buildings. Though originally used as the centerpiece of Carter's Frontier Centennial in 1936, the complex soon housed the city's annual stock show.

When World War II began Carter was able to persuade the federal government to allow Consolidated to build a bomber plant in Fort Worth. Not only did this give Fort Worth thousands of jobs at the onset, but the plant remained open in Fort Worth after the war despite several ownership changes. Much of Carter's influence in Washington was through Texas congressmen such as Wingate Lucas and Tom Connally. In

addition to these political relationships, two prominent men in the Roosevelt administration, John Nance Garner and Jesse Jones, were Texans. It was because of his frequent contact with these men on behalf of his numerous schemes and ideas that it was said Carter wanted the federal government run for the benefit of Fort Worth.

In addition to successfully influencing politicians, Carter had numerous commercial contacts that assisted him in his goal of modernizing Fort Worth. Though he ultimately had to pressure federal officials to get the Consolidated plant, his earlier contact with the company's management made Fort Worth one of their its options. Tom Vandergriff received much of the immediate credit for bringing a General Motors plant to Tarrant County, but it was Carter's initial efforts that laid the proper foundation.

It is clear from the evidence presented herein that Carter had more to do with the shaping of modern Fort Worth than any other person throughout its history. Because of his tireless endeavors, Fort Worth was ensured that it would enter the second half of the twentieth century as a modern city, not just as a haven for wildcatters and cowboys.

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