

3 | Early-Twentieth-Century Urbanization, 1900–1945

The period between 1900 and 1945 represented a dramatic shift in Fort Worth’s urbanization in terms of population growth, land use, transportation, industrial and commercial development, and cultural and social depth (fig. 3-1). Between the census of 1900 and the census of 1950, Fort Worth’s population increased more than 13 times over – from 26,688 to 361,258. (See table 3-1.) Although the early 1900s were a time of intense immigration nationwide, in Fort Worth the bulk of population growth resulted from the migration of native-born Euro Americans within the United States (tables 3-2 and 3-3). As the population of Fort Worth grew, the City incorporated new land in surrounding areas (fig. 3-2).

Transportation innovations like streetcars and automobiles, alongside the construction of new roads and bridges, facilitated suburban development patterns. As a result, although Fort Worth’s population grew, density declined (table 3-1).¹ The city’s sprawling layout also related to the growth of industries like railroad distribution, meat packing plants, petroleum processing, and aircraft manufacture (fig. 3-3). From 1909 until 1947, the city’s “value added by manufacture” increased by over 3,900 percent, the largest out of any city in Texas at the time (fig. 3-4).² Industrial facilities required the large plots of land and connections with railroad lines and highways that suburban locations outside the city offered.

Another major component in Fort Worth’s growth in this era was military development, which needed ample land and transportation access as well. As residential suburbs and industrial and military facilities moved outward, Fort Worth’s central core transitioned into a central business district and cultural hub. This district was enriched with a diverse array of shops, professional offices, churches, philanthropic organizations, and outdoor recreation facilities, as well as facilities for one of Fort Worth’s signature cultural events: the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo.

National Register Eligibility of Resources

Various themes associated with this period in Fort Worth’s history include: the Meatpacking Boom, Enhanced Transportation Connections, Industrial and Economic Growth, Military Development, Business and Commerce, Urban Growth, and Cultural and Social History. Many of these themes can be broken down further into subthemes, such as Improved Rail Networks, the Garment Industry, and Suburbanization. These themes played out simultaneously during the period, and each played a role in Fort Worth’s growth in the first half of the twentieth century. Many extant resources constructed between 1900 and 1945 are located throughout Fort Worth. Among the many property types associated with these themes, examples include: stockyards, railroad depots and rail infrastructure, roadside motels, gas stations, warehouses, manufacturing facilities, grain mills, airfields, commercial buildings, single- and multi-family housing, public housing, churches, and parks. Historic districts associated with this period include residential neighborhoods, industrial nodes, and commercial nodes. Resources from this period may be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A under the following Areas of Significance: Commerce, Community Planning and Development, Education, Entertainment/Recreation, Ethnic Heritage, Industry, Landscape Architecture, Military, Politics/Government, Religion, Social History, and Transportation. Extant resources may also have significance under Criterion C in the Area of Architecture.

See the one-page sample statements of significance throughout this section for examples of how extant resources meet, or may meet, designation criteria under certain themes.



Figure 3-1. Panoramic photo of Fort Worth in 1920. Source: Homer T. Harden [Copyright Claimant], Fort Worth, Texas [Photo], (n.p., Fort Worth, ca. 1920), from the Library of Congress (LOC), <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007661577/>.

Table 3-1. Census of population, Fort Worth, 1900 to 1950.³

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Total population	26,688	73,312	106,482	174,575	207,677	361,258
Percent increase		175%	45%	64%	19%	74%
Location						
In central city	-	-	-	163,447	177,662	278,778
Percent of total	-	-	-	94%	86%	77%
Outside central city	-	-	-	11,128	30,015	82,475
Percent of total	-	-	-	7%	17%	30%

Table 3-2. Percentages of country of birth among Fort Worth's residents, 1900-1910 (approximate).⁴

Country of Birth	1900	1910
United States	93.28%	94.16%
Hungary	0.00%	0.97%
France	0.00%	0.70%
Austria	0.08%	0.56%
Netherlands (Holland) or Belgium	0.03%	0.50%
Turkey	0.00%	0.40%
England, Scotland, and Wales	0.00%	0.29%
Norway, Sweden, and Denmark	0.05%	0.26%
Ireland	0.61%	0.11%
Russia and Finland	0.00%	0.06%
Germany	0.00%	0.06%
Canada (French and English)	0.28%	0.04%
Italy	0.22%	0.03%
Asia	0.02%	0.00%
Australia	0.01%	0.00%
Mexico	0.09%	0.00%
Poland (Russian and unknown)	0.05%	0.00%
All other countries	5.27%	1.86%

Table 3-3. Census categories by number and percent, for race, Fort Worth, 1900-1950.⁵

	1900		1910		1920		1930		1940		1950	
Total population	26,688		73,312		106,482		174,575		207,677		361,244	
White (including "Mexican"*)	22,447	84%	59,960	82%	90,468	85%	152,280	87%	182,360	88%	321,355	89%
Nonwhite	4,241	16%	13,352	18%	16,014	15%	22,295	13%	25,317	12%	39,889	11%
"Negro"	4,219	16%	13,280	18%	15,896	15%	22,234	13%	25,254	12%		
"Indian," "Chinese," "Japanese," and "Other"	22	0%	72	0%	118	0%	61	0%	63	0%		
*Counts of specifically "Mexican" distinguished in 1930 census only							3,955	2%				

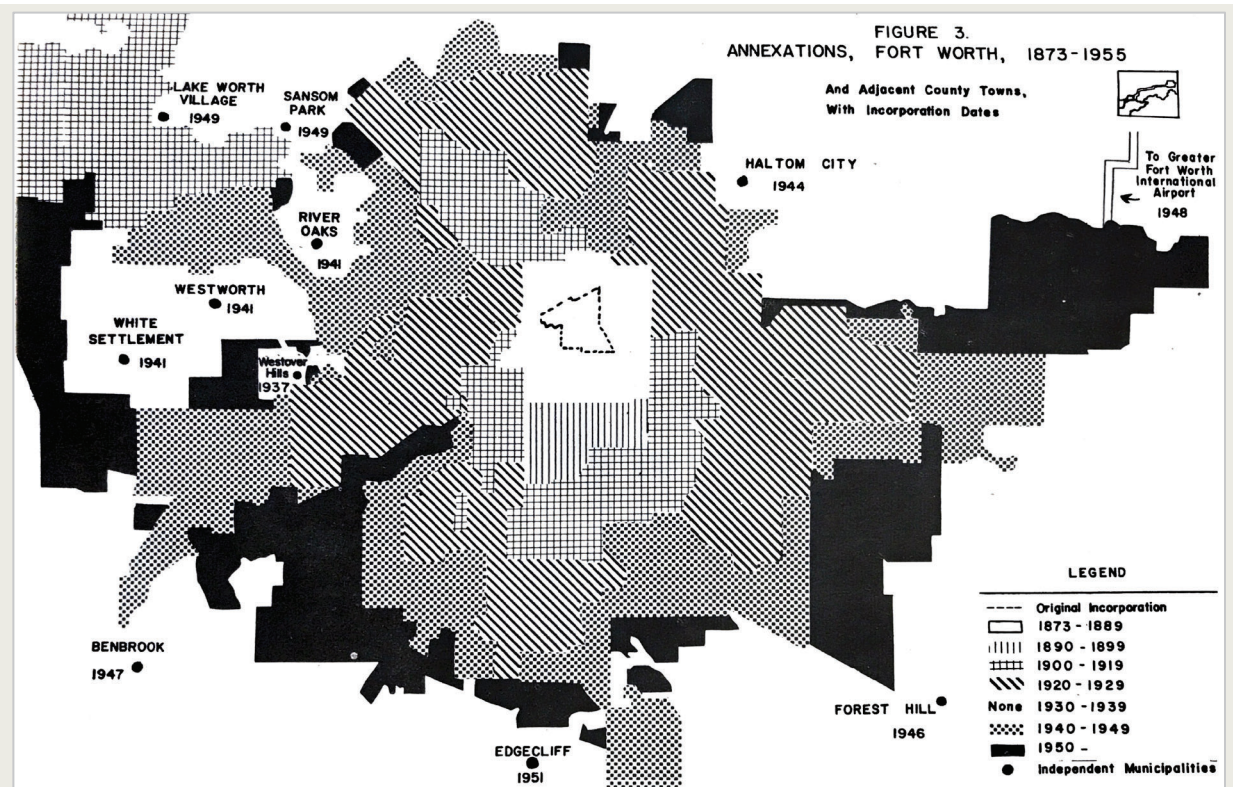


Figure 3-2. Map depicting the phases of Fort Worth’s expansion between 1873 and 1955. Source: Talbert, *Cowtown-Metropolis*, 19.

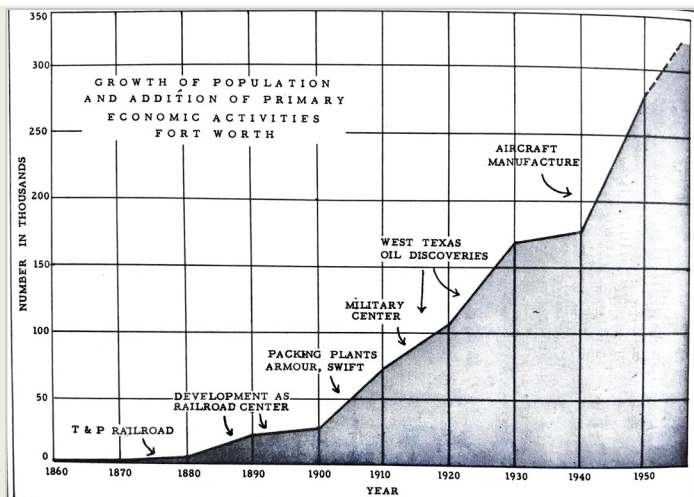


Figure 3-3. (Above) This graph shows the relationship between Fort Worth’s swelling population during the first half of the twentieth century as it relates to the dramatic increase in economic activity. Source: Talbert, *Cowtown-Metropolis*, 116.

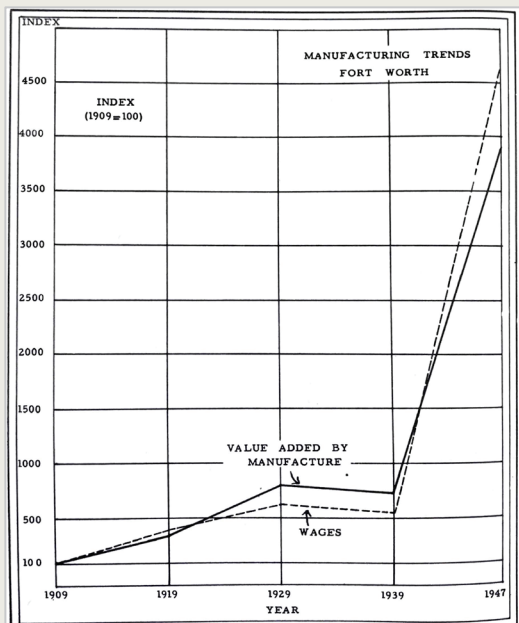


Figure 3-4. (Above) This graph charts the indices of growth manufacturing in Fort Worth from 1909–1947. Source: US Bureau of the Census, as depicted in Talbert, *Cowtown-Metropolis*, 6.

THE MEATPACKING BOOM

Fort Worth’s most rapid growth occurred in the decade between 1900 and 1910, fueled in large part by the arrival of the meatpacking industry. The existing railroad infrastructure helped make Fort Worth an attractive location, and the population swelled 175 percent, from 26,688 to 73,312 (table 3-1). Since ranchers had been driving cattle to the railheads in Fort Worth since the 1870s, the city already contained stockyards for holding and exchanging cattle. Small slaughterhouses and meatpacking facilities had emerged in the 1880s, yet a large percentage of the cattle traveling through Fort Worth rode further north for slaughter. By the early 1900s, rail lines converged at Fort Worth from every direction (figs. 3-5, 3-6, and 3-7), and the City actively began seeking meatpacking investors to seize this opportunity. As described in the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Fort Worth Stockyards Historic District:

By 1900 the Fort Worth Board of Trade began trying to encourage one of the major U.S. packing companies to locate in the city. As a bonus Fort Worth offered to subscribe \$100,000 to the firm that established at the stockyards. After [packing investor L.V.] Niles had assumed management of the stockyards company, J. Ogden Armour, son of the founder of Armour Packing Company in Chicago, visited the yards several times and began to negotiate with the Fort Worth Stockyards Company. But a second firm, Swift and Company soon learned of the agreement and requested to participate in the venture. When Armour vetoed the plan, Swift threatened to build a competing stockyards in Dallas. Finally Armour agreed to admit Swift into the project. Niles then negotiated a contract between the Stockyards Company and the Armour and Swift firms. As the city promised, each company received a bonus of \$100,000, and the companies began building their packing plants in 1902. Railroad tracks were built to the packing house site and the plants finally opened for business in 1903 [located north of downtown Fort Worth; figs. 3-8, 3-9, and 3-10].

The volume of trade increased so much in the first month that the yards and pens had to be immediately enlarged. A new exchange building was built in 1902-03 [fig. 3-11] and in 1907-08 a Coliseum was built to house livestock shows and indoor rodeos [fig. 3-12]. The small industrial community. . . , a one-mile square area containing the stockyards and packing activity, quickly became a financial giant and was known at one time as the richest per capita city in the nation. Surrounding the industrial activity, a commercial community developed which provided businesses, entertainment and lodging for those trading and working in the area. The heyday of cattle barons swelled the local economy with millions of dollars and neighboring Fort Worth benefited from the increased commercial activity. To escape Fort Worth jurisdiction, Niles City incorporated in 1911, but by 1922 Fort Worth was finally able to annex the community.⁶



Figure 3-5. This detail of a 1900 map of Texas railroads shows the numerous lines connecting Fort Worth and Dallas to the greater rail network. Source: Rand McNally and Company, *Texas Railroads [Map Detail]* (Chicago, 1900), from the LOC, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98688561/>.

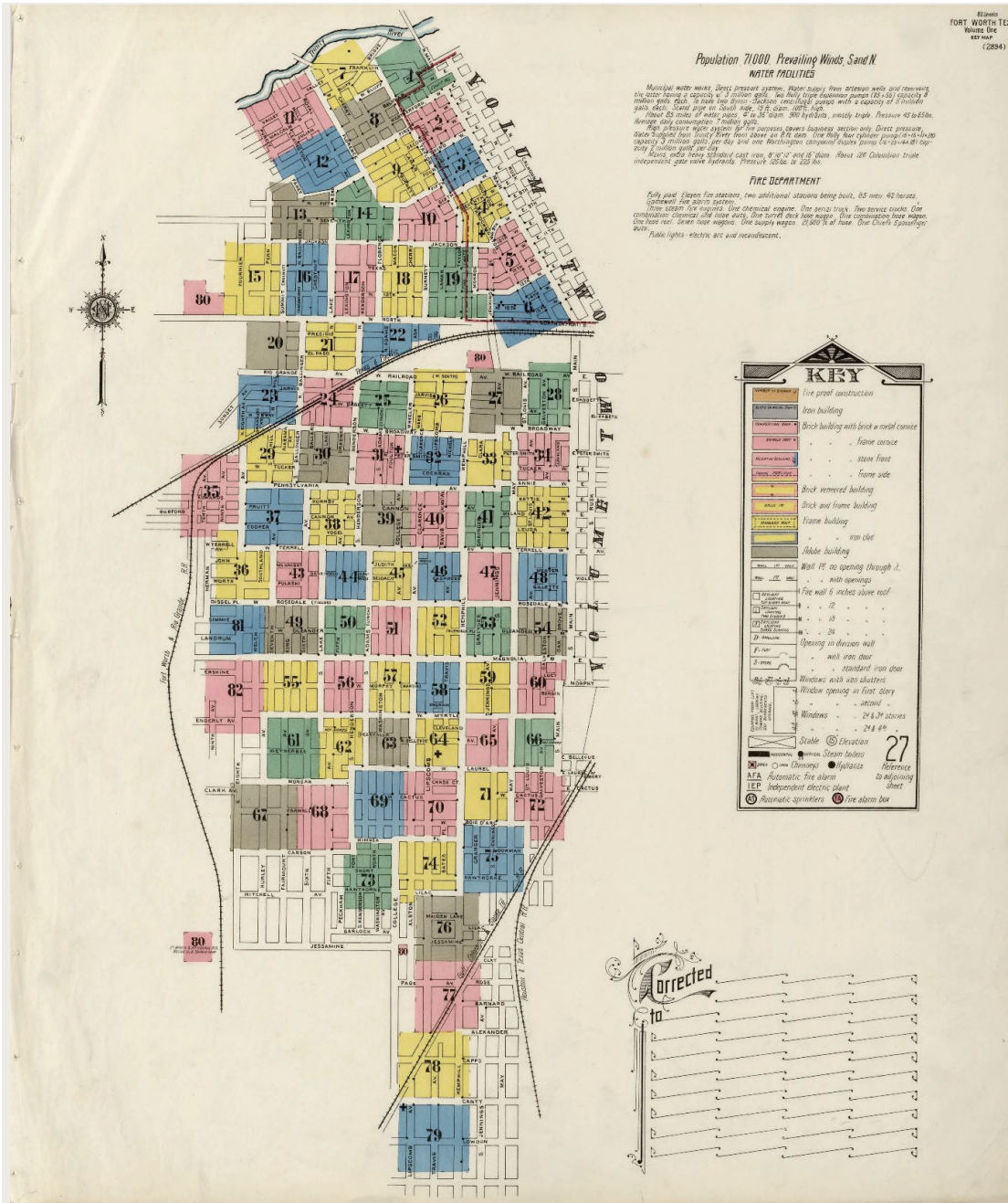


Figure 3-6. Key map from the 1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps of Fort Worth. Note that masonry construction is designated with pink, while remaining frame construction is designated with yellow. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Fort Worth, 1910, volume 1, key map, from the University of Texas at Austin, http://leg.acy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-1/txu-sanborn-fort_worth-1910-1k.jpg.

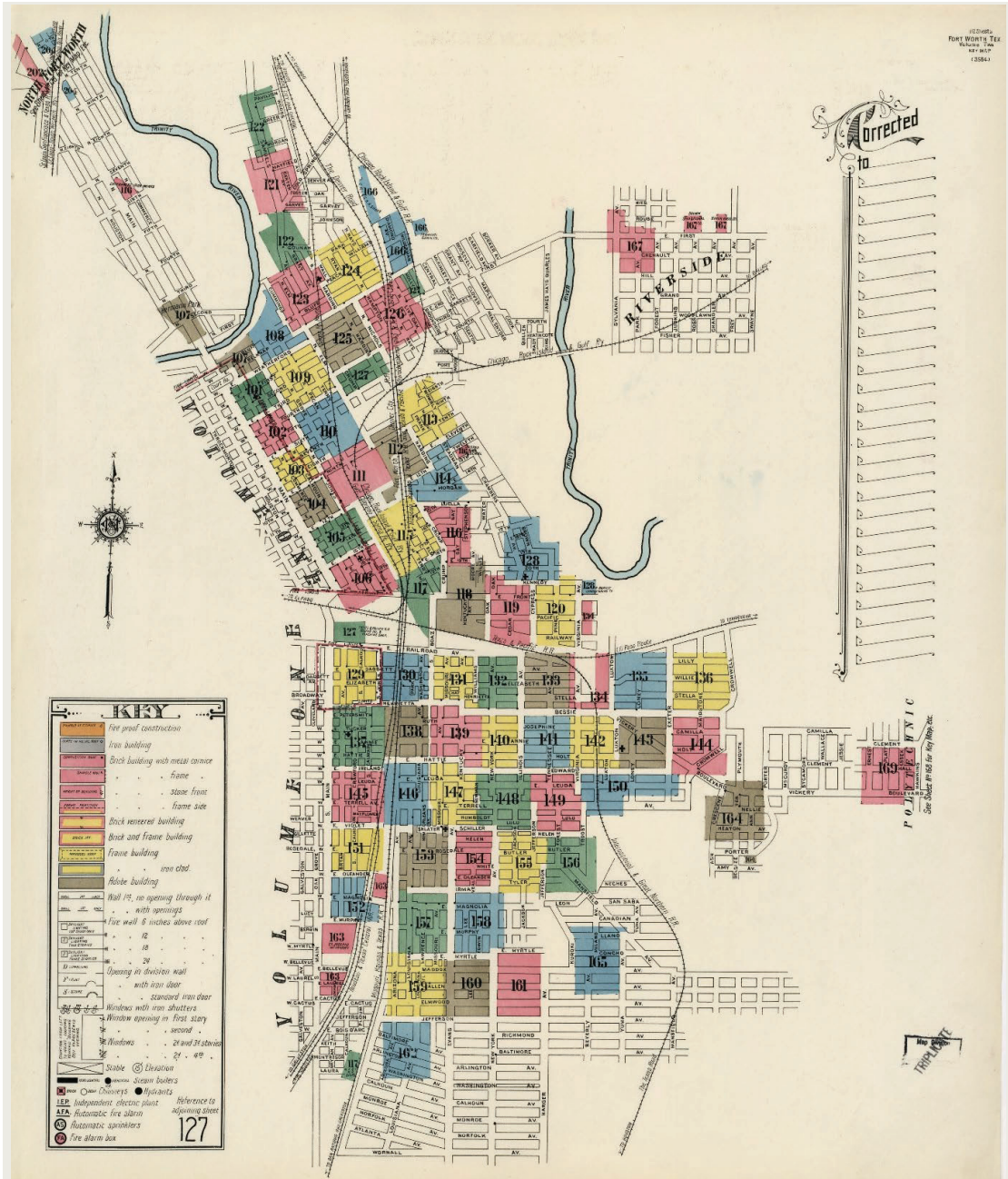


Figure 3-7. Key map from the 1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps of Fort Worth. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Fort Worth, 1910, volume 2, key map, from the University of Texas at Austin, http://eqacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-fort_worth-1911-101k.jpg.

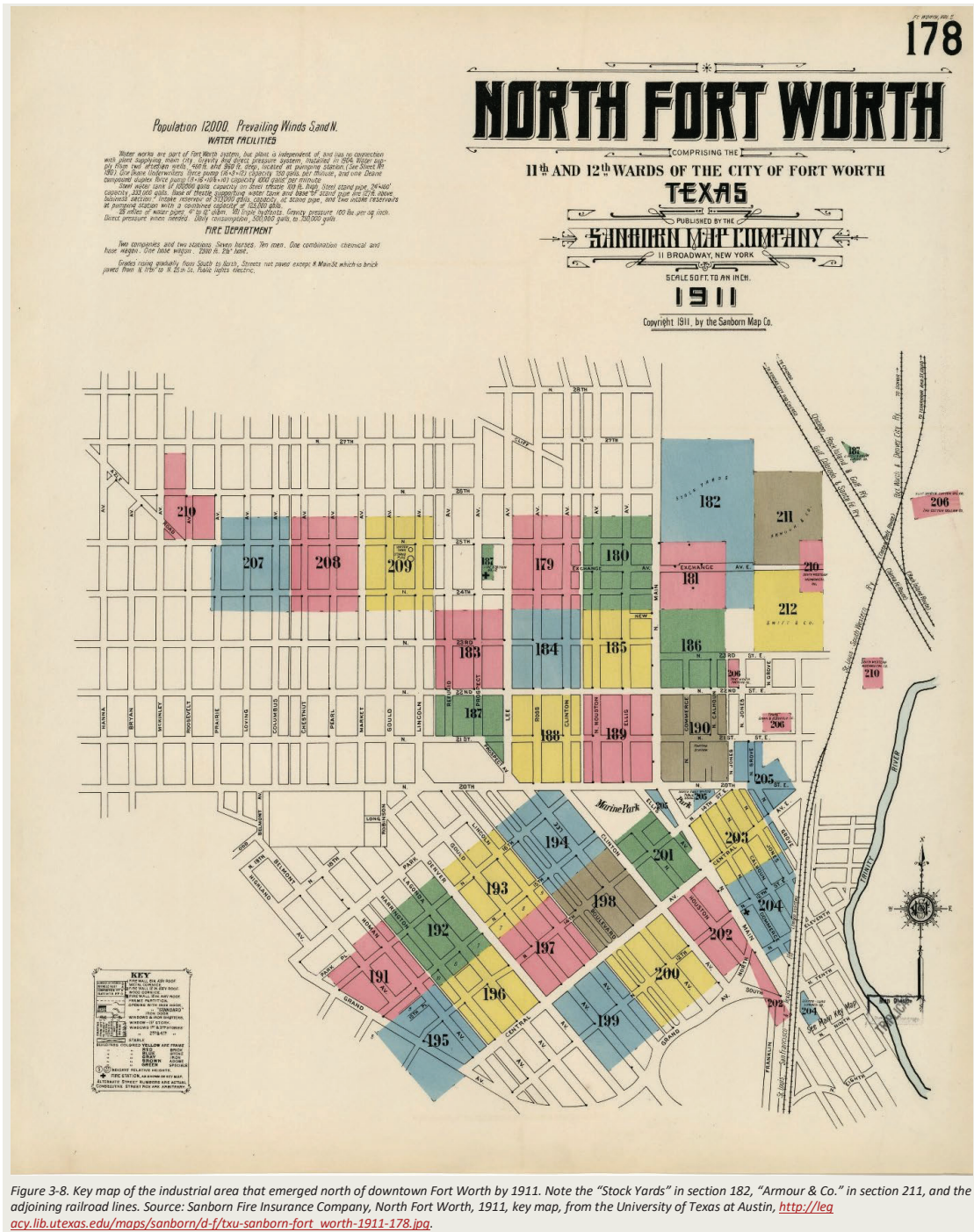


Figure 3-8. Key map of the industrial area that emerged north of downtown Fort Worth by 1911. Note the "Stock Yards" in section 182, "Armour & Co." in section 211, and the adjoining railroad lines. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, North Fort Worth, 1911, key map, from the University of Texas at Austin, http://leg.acy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-fort_worth-1911-178.jpg.

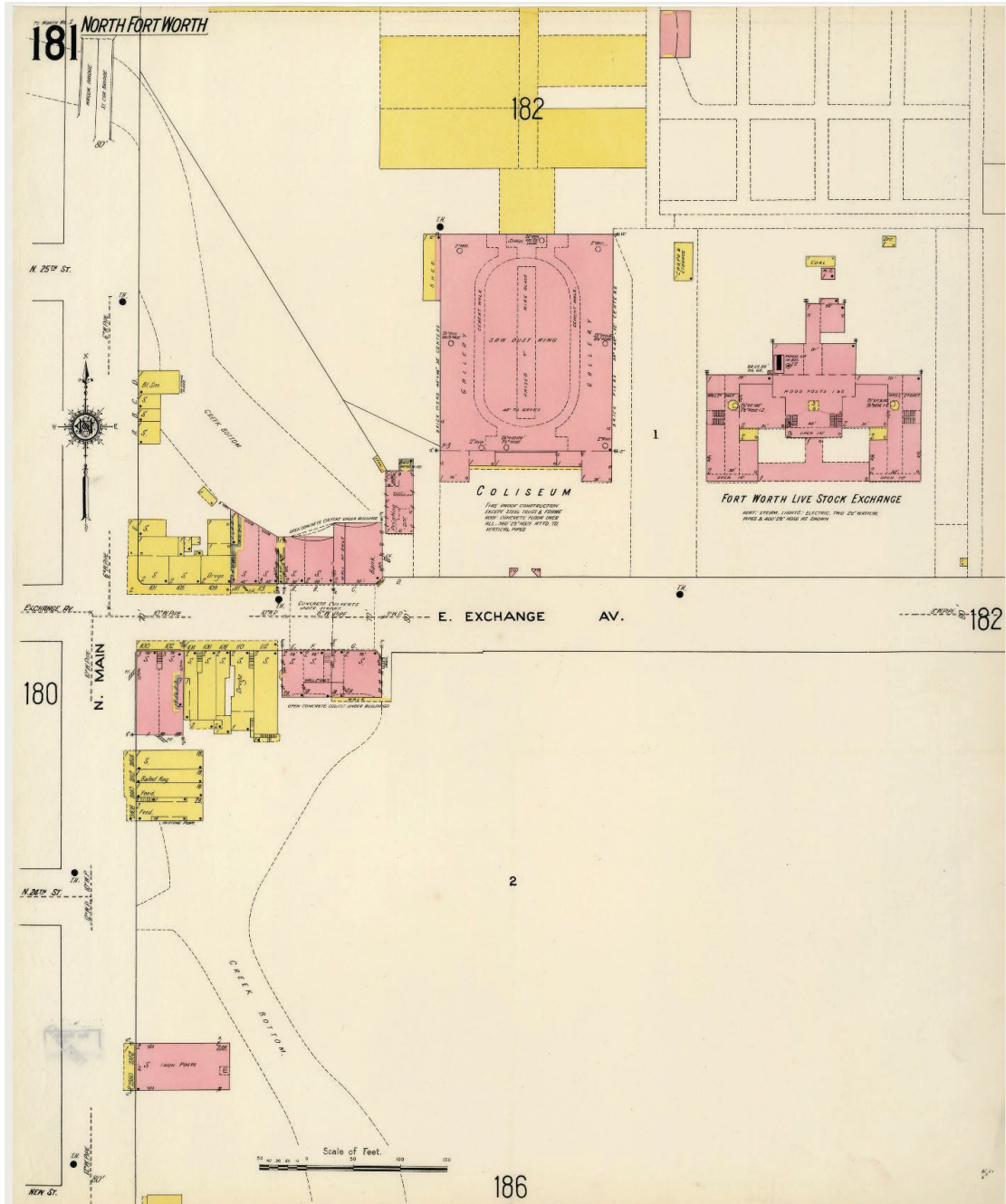


Figure 3-9. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1911, showing the livestock exchange and stockyards. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, North Fort Worth, 1911, sheet 182, from the University of Texas at Austin, http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-fort_worth-1911-181.jpg.

Figure 3-11. Stereographic photo looking toward the livestock exchange, ca. 1928. The building is extant and contributes to the local and NR-listed Fort Worth Stockyards Historic District. Source: Keystone View Company, Livestock exchange Building, Fort Worth, Texas [Photograph] (Meadville, Pa.: Keystone View Company, ca. 1928), from the LOC, <https://www.loc.gov/item/93517290/>.



Figure 3-12. Photo of the coliseum, 1908. The Coliseum is extant and contributes to the local and NR-listed Fort Worth Stockyards Historic District. Source: The North Side Coliseum located in the Fort Worth Stockyards [Photograph], 1908, from the Jack White Photograph Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, UTA Libraries Digital Gallery, <https://library.uta.edu/digitalgallery-beta/img/10004783>.



When the Coliseum was completed in 1908, it became the home of the Texas Fat Stock Show, shortly thereafter renamed the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show. The first Texas Fat Stock Show had been held at the close of the previous century in 1896, when early stockmen showed their cattle along Marine Creek in North Fort Worth. The event grew quickly, as local cattle ranchers used the opportunity to bolster the city’s thriving cattle industry. By the time Samuel Burk Burnett stepped down as the president of the stock show, it was a greatly expanded event attended by ranchers from adjacent states, and featured livestock including sheep, horses, and hogs, in addition to cattle.

Fort Worth’s livestock exchange was the largest in the southwest from approximately 1900 through 1945. Some peaks and valleys characterized the business – such as the boom in the cattle market around 1920 and again in the 1930s, the decline in the hog market around 1930, the bust in the horse and mule market around 1935, and the peak in the sheep market around 1937.⁷ Despite these market fluctuations, the thriving livestock business served as a catalyst that encouraged expanded transportation networks and other industries to invest in Fort Worth.

ENHANCED TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS

Improved Rail Networks

At the start of the twentieth century, Fort Worth boasted a robust network of railroad connections (table 3-4). As described above, these connections played a major role in attracting the livestock exchange and the meatpacking industries, which in turn spurred further development of the rail