1985 - A Weekend in Dallas



In June 1985 I had a work visit to the U.S.A. which included a visit to IBM in Dallas, Texas. I had a clear weekend. And what an interesting weekend it was.

A Hotel in Las Colinas .....

The hotel booking had been made for me – at the “Mandalay Four Seasons” at Las Colinas, part of the City of Irving in the north-west outskirts of Dallas, now well within the Dallas-Fort Worth conurbation. I did not realise that I would see the realisation of a dream – the dream of Ben Carpenter assisted by his brother-in-law Dan Williams!

Only 10 years earlier the area had been a working ranch, the 5000 acre Hackberry Creek Ranch, owned by the Carpenters. There had already been aggressive pressure to develop this land including an attempt by the City of Irving to annex the land. But the Carpenters’ ambition was to create something of lasting value – an urban development of real quality - " An Eden of Capitalism and Free Enterprise" ! And that ambition was partly realised – only to be paused by the real estate crash of 1983 - and effectively ended in 1986 by the poor health of the visionary Ben Carpenter.



Ben Carpenter’s visions were strongly influenced by his own travels. He had served in Burma. So Ben's huge new hotel completed in 1983 was the ‘Mandalay Hotel’, extravagantly styled accordingly. After arriving there, I soon went out on foot to explore. “Williams Square” was only a block away. This is a 2-acre paved plaza surrounded by four towering office buildings and decorated by the “Mustangs of Las Colinas”, huge bronzes completed in 1984. Not far away is Lake Carolyn and the Mandalay Canal, artificial waterways created as a Texan Venice with water-taxis and gondolas. But there was very little human activity. This was a Disney-World for the affluent, and the affluent had their gated communities for shelter.

Ben's master-plan had included unmanned people-movers running on elevated guideways. And in 1985 the concrete guideways had been largely built but abandoned - sad structures leading nowhere. And 50 years later this has not changed; the Las Colinas Area Personal Transit System (APT) ran in a limited way for a while but closed indefinitely in 2021.

..... And a Visit to Fort Worth - and the Chisolm Trail Roundup

Fort Worth was only 20 miles away. Today Dallas-Fort Worth is a vast Metroplex with a population of 8 million. But in 1985 Fort Worth was still a separate city, "Cowtown".

Large scale cattle ranching in Texas goes back 200 years. Ranchers needed to get their beef to market and 'trails' were established along which cowboys herded thousands of cattle at a time north to Oklahoma and Kansas. Fort Worth became a stopping point where the cattle were held in stockyards and the cowboys paused for rest and 'entertainment'. in the rough-and-tumble frontier town. This was the home of real people such as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and many more subjects of cowboy films. When the railroads came, the trails fell into disuse - but the Fort Worth Stockyards flourished; in 1944 they handled 5 million heads of cattle.

But road transport took over and the stockyards declined; it was all over by about 1985 and the area had become a National Historic District.



My visit coincided with the annual "Chisolm Trail Roundup" weekend - and this was to be the last one held in Fort Worth.

There were rodeo events of course. But I also remember the curiosities; here is a 'breakaway-roping' dummy. The 'calf' has just been forcefully projected from beneath the 'horse' and the rider is attempting to lasso it.

