



—Dallas News Staff Photos by Jack Beers.

Oldest section of Deep Elm is framed by expressway pillars.

Dallascope:

'Deep Ellum' Fades Away

By ROY HAMRIC

Deep Elm Street was dead long before the dark shadow of an elevated freeway fell over its pawnshops, clothing stores, and other bizarre offerings.

Nobody knows exactly when the robust surge of life that was "Deep Ellum" left — or exactly why — but traces of what was once "The Street" still remain today.

And a few of the people who took part in that life still work there.

"It will take two or three years for foot traffic to pick up again," "Honest Joe" Goldstein said recently, refusing to acknowledge the message of the lonely sidewalks.

"Oh," he admitted ruefully, "you could stand out in the street any morning now, and shoot a 30-30 in any direction and not hit anyone."

Of course, Deep Elm wasn't always like that.

THE SOUNDS of Yiddish speaking shopkeepers used to mingle with the Southern drawls of their customers during the 20s and 30s — the heyday of "Deep Ellum," which was once called The Bowery of the South. Strains of chorus music could be heard from a Negro vaudeville theater in the area. You could buy an exotic perfume or magic love potion from any of several herb shops. Or, you could listen to a street preacher, standing on a corner, wailing "in tongues."

The area nurtured the birth of many folk songs, like the "Deep Ellum Blues:"

*When you go down on Deep Elm
Just to have a little fun
Have your fifteen dollars ready
When the policeman comes.*

It contributed many lyrics to songs written by the blues singers of the day — like Huddie (Lead Belly) Ledbetter, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Blind Lemon Jefferson.

IN IT WAS SPAWNED a special instrument of violence, a switch blade knife labeled the "Deep Ellum special," which

resembled the fabled Bowie knife, and often silenced many arguments forever.

"Killing was nothing here," confirmed "Honest Joe." "You'd go by and see a guy shot and lying in the street and it was nothing."

Goldstein recalls seeing five persons shot by a berserk woman in 1930, who thought her boyfriend was with another woman in a crowd. "She shot five times with an old "Owl Head" pistol and never hit her boyfriend or the girl, but I counted the bystanders laying on the ground after it was over."

TODAY, REAL DEEP ELM LIFE has dwindled to about two blocks, the 25-2600 blocks, where life is slow-paced, and a little dusty, rusty and down-at-the-heels.

Most of the older businesses are shoe repair stores, junk shops, and pawn shops. Their appearance is made even more forlorn by many of the newer buildings which line the north side of the street.

Many of the older structures are nothing but ghostly shells, padlocked against the day when they will be razed and reborn as modern buildings.

Knowledge of such a fate creates a comradeship along the street.

Stores there, like Spain and Son Shoe Store, go back as far as 65 years. Dark and cool inside, on smooth wooden floors and with hand tools and shoe lasts that were used by his father, C. A. Spain, in his late 70s, still works away.

HE RECALLS hanging hightop shoes by long poles in front of the store during the 20s, and a ploy used by unscrupulous shopkeepers: selling customers two left shoes.

A little further down is an even smaller shoe shop, a slight 6-feet wide, run by a German Jew known simply as "Max," who settled on Deep Elm after surviving a German concentration camp.

And there's Molly's Tool Shop, sister of "Honest Joe," where you can find any-



Pedestrian is almost lost in jungle of shop signs along street.

thing from a used washer to an antique flintlock rifle. And a lot of good talk.

Hugh Terry, 74, runs a cluttered used hub cap shop, easily the brightest place on the street, with the help of a dog which never leaves his side.

TERRY CONDUCTS all his transactions on the street, in plain daylight, because "I don't intend to get knocked on the head," and carries a deceptively small .32 caliber pistol in his shirt pocket.

And finally, there's Harper's Book Store, hardly noticeable but probably the largest second-hand book store in the state.

Along its dark aisles, books in every color imaginable line shelves which rise 15-20 feet. To the right of the front door, Harper can usually be found sitting in a tattered armchair, appearing a little awesome as he looks out from behind his gold-rimmed glasses.

Strange, when only three doors down, "Honest Joe" is trying to hawk a used wooden leg for \$5.

But then, Deep Elm has never been afraid to be a little different.



Hugh Terry in front of his used hubcap shop on Elm.