



The chili was hot and cheap at the Grand Central Station Hotel.



The arrival of a train was one of the day's highlights in Dallas in the 1890's.

# Demolition Leveling Once-Noisy Deep Elm

By DOUG DOMEIER  
News Staff Writer

The chili and steak served at the Grand Central Station Hotel came hot and cheap in the 1890s. But the service sometimes suffered when a train pulled in across the street.

Customers probably understood — they knew the excitement of the growing Dallas railroad area near Pacific and Old Preston Road.

And they knew waitresses liked to see both the trains and the people who rode them.

Lizzie Mae Bass saw horses back away in fright when a locomotive pulled in at

the lively intersection linking the Houston & Texas Central with the Texas & Pacific.

But with other hotel waitresses she looked forward to the trains, in later years telling her daughter, Mrs. Evan McWhorter of Dallas, how family-style meals came to a sudden halt.

"You set down your cup of coffee and went out," Mrs. McWhorter described. The interruption was understood.

MISS BASS was a tiny woman: four feet, 10½ inches tall, weighing only 90 pounds. Before her death in 1960 at age 80, she returned to the hotel where she had worked as a girl.

She pointed out to her daughter the old vat used in the kitchen and she went upstairs and looked at the big holes in the wall, left gaping when stove pipes were removed.

If the former Miss Bass returned today she would be saddened to see the hotel a mass of near-rubble and the entire Pacific Street-Deep Elm area undergoing brutal change.

The demolition is to make way for a 4-level interchange and new, elevated portions of Central Expressway. Construction will cover the area from south of Thornton Freeway (between Good-Latimer and Oakland) north to near Pacific.

The area around the old railroad depot took on a different flavor after the locomotive whistles faded out. Shootings and fights enlivened the scene in the 1890s and trolleys for years found it hard to penetrate milling crowds.

UNDER THREAT of the wrecking ball, Deep Elm today is a conglomerate of gutted hotels and offices, but still-open pawn shops and cut-rate stores.

"It's too quiet," one pawnbroker noted recently. The "two-bit, walk-up" hotels have closed and the area's inhabitants, sometimes called "characters," took off elsewhere.

The Grand Central Station hotel was not "two-bit" in the 1890s and in fact Miss Bass was once shocked to see two female employees kicking their legs up in front of a ladies' room mirror.

The proprietries were observed and after Miss Bass served her future husband in the hotel dining room (his name was James Murrah), their dates were strictly chaperoned.

Murrah never said much in later years about the hotel—"except he met my mother there," Mrs. McWhorter says. And he quoted the prices (15c for a bowl of chili, 25c for steak).

The hotel's double doors fronted Pacific Street, between what is now Central Expressway and a parking lot owned by Home Furniture Co.

"The station was torn down around 1925," remembers Home building superintendent Roger Goodman, a Dallas resident for 51 years.

Called the H&TC East Dallas terminal, the 1-story brick building looked out on the H&TC tracks, running north and south, and the T&P, stretching east-west.

PASSENGERS RODE north to Sherman, south to Houston, east to Longview, west to El Paso. Schedules became especially busy during World War I.

"There was the Henry Miller cafe and Delmonico's Hotel," Goodman recalls, and the saloon with the long marble bar, run by Miss Bass' father.

"Mother was never allowed in, not even when it was closed," Mrs. McWhorter notes.

But Miss Bass was allowed to see who got on and off the trains and she stood outside the hotel in black skirt and white high-neck blouse.

Pacific Street was unpeaved and at the turn of the century only a few trains crossed it daily.

Mrs. McWhorter herself grew close to the area when she served as warehouse manager for Home Furniture from 1952 to 1963.

"The company had taken over the old hotel and 'I was in and out of it all the time.'"

BUT FEW HAVE BEEN in and out of the nearby Harlem Theater, once one of the area's most popular spots, since it closed six years ago.

The ceiling crumples in over the auditorium and rubble litters the abandoned

lobby, almost obscuring two left-over strips of celluloid film.

"In the Twenties it was a wonderful spot," recalls True Thompson, one of its owners during the halcyon days.

A theater for Negroes, the Harlem showed all the Hollywood films playing at downtown theaters and operated on a "grind" policy from 10:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The house survived Depression bingo nights and World War II, then eventually became a victim of competing television.

The decline in pawn shop business cannot be blamed on TV and customers were still plentiful after the war. One broker instead points to parking meters and one-way streets. The restrictions have hurt the many pawnshops in the area, he says.

"I miss the drunks and the has-beens," says another, Ruby Goldstein—more usually called Honest Joe—in his maze-like shop at 2524 Elm.

THE RESIDENTS of the now-closed hotels, "the people who spent all the money around here," pawned radios, tools, and watches, often to get cash for liquor.

Doing business on the street since 1929, Goldstein remembers the area's rough period in the Thirties when "it was dangerous to wear a coat and tie."

But police report incidents began tapering off around 1945 and Deep Elm is not noisy today.

When the new construction might interfere with traffic, operations in the area will be conducted between midnight and 5 a.m., perhaps enlivening the quiet streets.

Completion date is tentatively set for December, 1970, several eras removed from the gentle time when Miss Bass and her beau went on picnics and rode in surreys, and when James Murrah needed "a man of good standing" to vouch for him to her father.



Halloween party decoration dramatizes demise of Harlem Theater, once a most popular spot.