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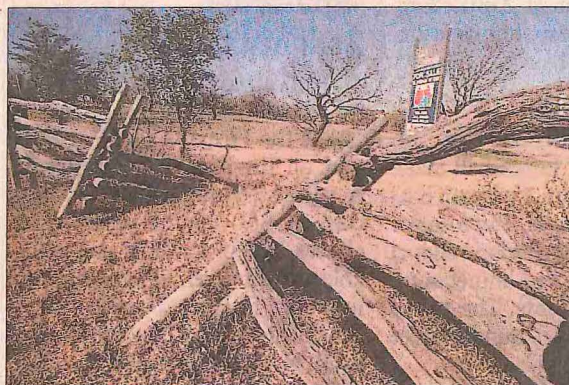
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PAST AND PRESENT

Ranch to riches: A city's tale



Las Colinas stands on land owned by the Carpenter family. Ben Carpenter, the city's mastermind, eventually sold the land.

RON BASELICE/Staff Photographer

Las Colinas' growth marked by foresight, careful planning

Last of a five-part series

By LEE POWELL

Staff Writer

It is a saga as sprawling as the state where it happened.

The family ranch — the most Texan of icons — becomes threat-

ened by rising taxes and developers nipping at the edges.

Selling it off in 100-acre parcels to the delight of developers bearing strip malls and cookie-cutter subdivisions would have been the easy way out.

Ben Carpenter chose a different way.

Blessed by land — lots of land at eventually 12,000 acres — and a location neatly between an under-construction airport and the city of Dallas, Mr. Carpenter went

about transforming the family's Hackberry Creek Ranch into a city in the mid-1970s.

Hayfields became lakes and canals ringed by streets with granite curbs. Office towers rose, and corporate campuses sprouted where scrubby mesquite once stood and cattle roamed.

The master-planned development took the name Las Colinas, meaning "the hills," after a family

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Las Colinas the result of one ranching family's vision

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name for the ranch, El Ranchito de Las Colinas.

It did more than transform the Carpenter family's ranch: the presence of such corporate giants as Exxon Mobil and Nokia added to Irving's tax base.

"It propelled the tax base of Irving beyond belief," said David Brune, a lawyer who worked as Mr. Carpenter's second-in-command in Las Colinas and later was president of the entity that built much of the development's infrastructure. "It enabled Irving to do things that never could have been done without Las Colinas."

The land north of Irving had been in the Carpenter family since 1928, when John W. Carpenter, father of Ben, established a ranch there.

The elder Carpenter helped manage a range of companies, including electric utilities and an insurance company he founded that later became Southland Life, one of the nation's largest at the time.

Ben Carpenter took over as Southland's chairman in the 1950s when his father died.

The family homestead became a rambling house at the top of a hill off Hidden Ridge Drive near MacArthur Boulevard.

On weekends, the Carpenters would travel from Highland Park to the ranch to rodeo, recalled cattleman Gilbert Colwell in a newspaper interview in 1987.

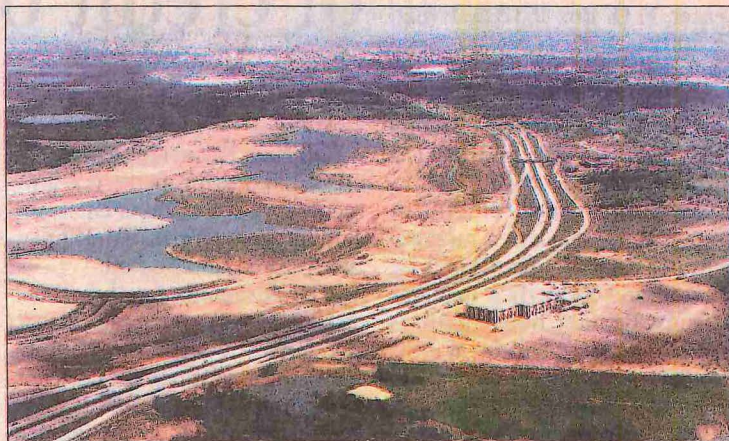
"I remember [Dwight] Eisenhower came out one Saturday. And [Douglas] MacArthur came out one time," he said in the interview. "At night, we'd sleep in the hay barn. It was a big time."

Mr. Colwell was born on his family's ranch, later bought by the Carpenter family, near Royal Lane and Colwell Boulevard, which is his namesake. He attended the Hackberry School, a one-room schoolhouse for grades one through seven.

The cattleman recalled only ranchland where Lake Carolyn, the Mandalay Canal, and Williams Square now sit.

"They've got boats and everything out there," he said. "And I used to chop hay right there on that very land."

Little remains of the Carpenter homestead: Ben Carpenter lived in the house on the hill from 1948 to 1997, when the last 56 acres of



What is now an urban development replete with artificial lakes and canals was once ranchland, recalled cattleman Gilbert Colwell in 1987. "They've got boats and everything out there," he said. "And I used to chop hay right there on that very land."

the ranch were sold to GTE Corp. The telecommunications firm, since renamed Verizon, had its headquarters across the street.

The 28,000-square-foot ranch house and most of the other structures on the compound have since been demolished.

Real estate broker Phil Baker handled the sale of the rest of Hackberry Creek Ranch. He also worked for Mr. Carpenter for 14 years managing aspects of the Las Colinas development.

Mr. Baker recalls asking Mr. Carpenter whether he had any remorse for selling the family's

humbled many an architect."

No detail was overlooked.

Take cobblestones. During a trip to Hong Kong, Mr. Carpenter saw some of a pre-cast kind going in at the entrance of a hotel under construction.

"And so I tracked that down to the supplier in Italy," he said in an interview last year for Irving's library archives. "And we used those cobblestones at the entrance to the Mandalay Hotel out there and also along the canal."

Worldwide inspirations

The idea for the sculpture of mustangs galloping through water came from a sculpture Mr. Carpenter saw in Johannesburg, South Africa.

He went to Brazil where the capital city, Brasilia, was being built in the middle of a rainforest.

The sameness of the architecture there, Mr. Carpenter said in the archives interview, prompted standards to be written for Las Colinas dictating quality but not necessarily uniformity in design.

Indeed, in a memo to employees in 1974, Mr. Carpenter said the goal was for Las Colinas to not merely be a first-class development but a superior one.

"Our objective is that Las Colinas be the finest, most functional, and the most attractive real estate development ever created as well as being economically successful," he wrote. "I am convinced this goal can be achieved."

That meant designs that didn't have to be the most expensive but did have to be classy.

"We are willing to pay for quality where the result achieved has real meaning and permanence," Mr. Carpenter wrote in the memo. "However, in every instance we wish to avoid paying for flamboyance, gaudiness, and garishness."

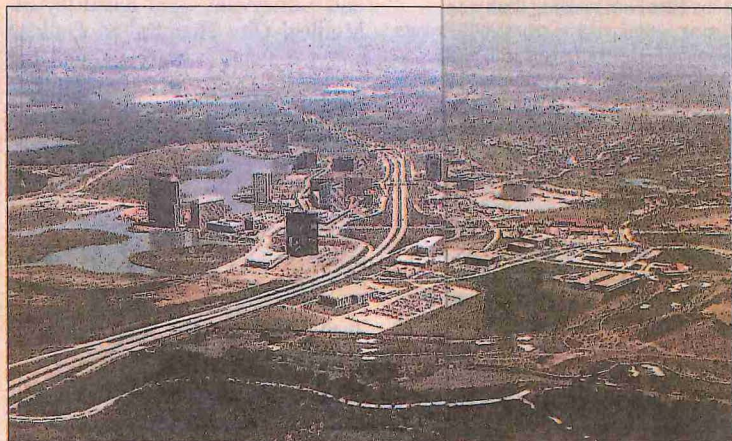
Water taxis came from Venice, Italy. And the lakes and canals they plied added an Old World touch but also helped control flooding.

"He made it a point to do it in a very involved and intellectual way," said Mr. Baker, now an executive director of real estate firm Insignia/ESG's Dallas office. "He wanted to create a sense of place, which was his comment."

For city officials and nearby residents, the Las Colinas development was treated with enthusiasm — tinged by skepticism.

Some dubbed the project "Ben's Folly."

Residents living near Northgate Drive, where the city stopped, had a stronger reaction. They were hoping for estates of 5 to 10 acres, recalls former Mayor Robert Pow-



Las Colinas Corp.

er, an attorney who represented Mr. Carpenter and still does on behalf of the partnership that owns Las Colinas.

"I remember when I presented my first zoning case people were backed out into the parking lot at City Hall," he said.

But Mr. Carpenter and his associates fed Las Colinas to City Council members in spoonfuls to win the necessary approvals, said former mayor and council member Dan Matkin.

"It was such a detailed and awing sort of plan, it was sort of hard to share his vision at the time," Mr. Matkin said.

Carpenter family involvement in Las Colinas ended years ago. A series of business machinations led to much of the development ending up in the hands of New York-based Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association.

A property management firm, Cousins Properties, oversees development prospects. Assessments of homeowners and businesses support a nonprofit association that maintains building standards and sees after landscaping and a 24-hour security patrol.

Dark days

Las Colinas was hit hard by the real estate slump of the 1980s, which stalled development and created a crushing tax rate brought on by debt incurred by building canals, lakes, granite curbs, and an elevated people-mover system.

Buildings were never built.

Shops along the Mandalay Canal closed, and the foot traffic they brought vanished. The people-mover system even stopped running for a time.

Developers and city officials are counting on a package of financial incentives to lower the debt rate and jump-start new construction in the Las Colinas urban

center.

Big plans

The dreams are a convention center and mall of shops, offices, and homes built around a Dallas Area light-rail line.

Those goals are a vision for the future. Ben Carpenter grabbed Ben Carpenter 30 years ago: a woman made into a corporation.

But done with class.

"Remember the of others will make their home [both personal] will follow," Carpenter said in his 1987 interview. "They look back at the fine effort made by its custodians during its development stage."

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RON BASELICE/Staff Photographer

The gate to the Carpenters' ranch is one of the few structures from the ranch still standing.

homestead.

"Mr. Carpenter is not an emotional sort of guy, but he made the comment there was some emotion attached to it but said this is the right thing to do," Mr. Baker said.

Development of the ranch started at its southern edge in the 1950s and 1960s with subdivisions and a country club.

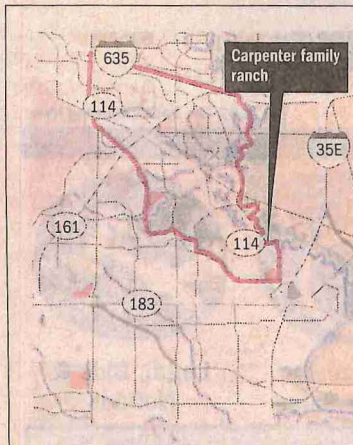
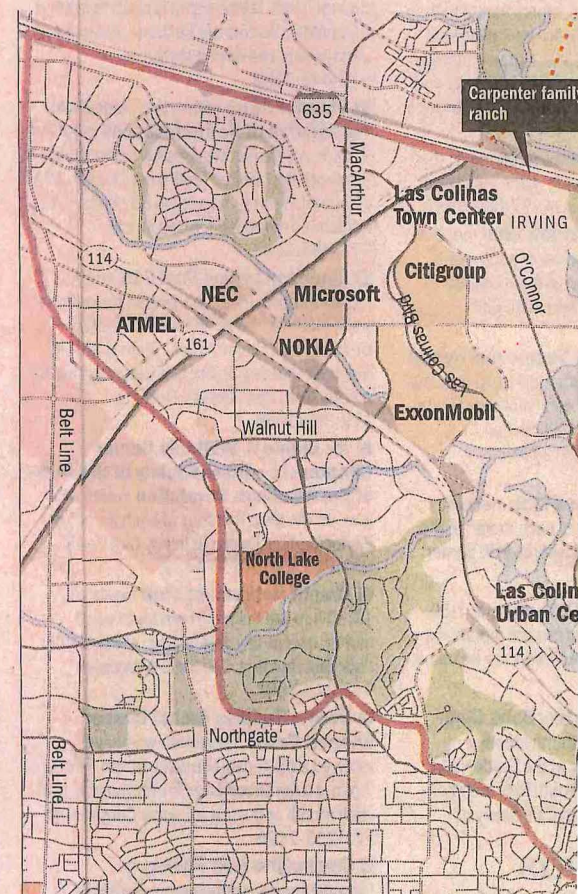
The first campuslike settings for corporations opened in the mid-1970s, playing off the proximity to the just-opened Dallas/Fort Worth Regional Airport.

Mr. Carpenter drew on his study of architecture and what he'd seen in his travels in putting together Las Colinas.

"He knew architecture about as good as any architect," said Mr. Brune, his former associate. "He could eat up a set of plans. When he got through going over them he

ABOUT THE SERIES

Irving was founded in 1903. Nearly 100 years later, the city has grown in area and population. "Past and Present" is a series of stories on five areas of Irving that have seen dramatic change since their inception. Some began in the mid-1850s, others much later. The series examines the neighborhoods of Kit, Sowers, Bear Creek, and Union Bower, and the Carpenter family ranch — what they were like and what they have become.



's vision

center.

Big plans ahead

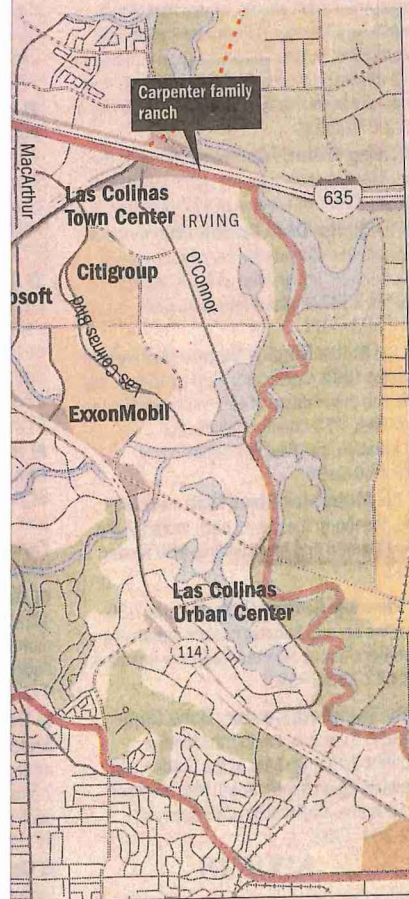
The dreams are still big: a convention center and hotel, a transit mall of shops, offices, and brownstones built around an extension of a Dallas Area Rapid Transit light-rail line.

Those goals are not unlike the vision for the family ranch that grabbed Ben Carpenter more than 30 years ago: a working ranch remade into a corporate address.

But done with class. Always with class.

"Remember that generations of others will make Las Colinas their home [both business and personal] will follow us," Mr. Carpenter said in his 1974 memo. "Let them look back and reflect on the fine effort made by those who were its custodians during the development stage."

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