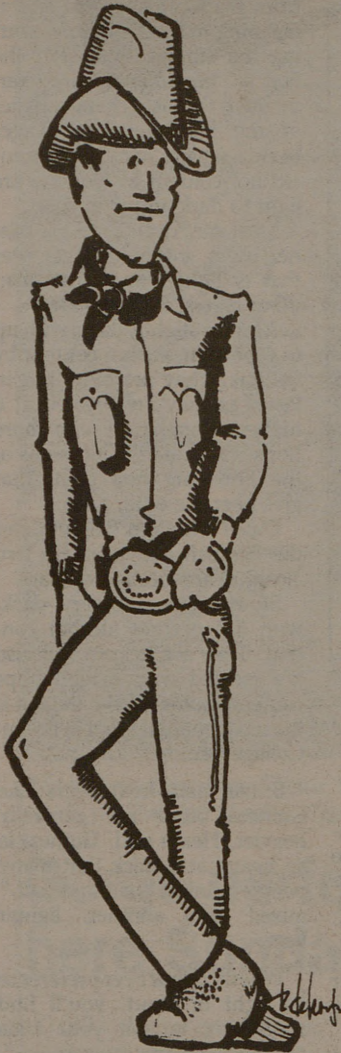


Lott, Texas: bargain duds ...

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Artwork by Richard De Leon, Jr.

Dallas has its Fashion Mart, L.A. has its Rodeo Drive, and Lott has its Western Fair.

Known to many Aggies for its bargain prices on western wear, The Western Fair is located in downtown Lott, population 1,287. Might seem like a small town, but everybody from in-state to out-of-the-country cowhands and city folk seek out the popular western store.

It's about 80 miles northwest of College Station, just right for a one-day shopping expedition.

Visitors can't miss it: The Western Fair occupies an entire block on the town's main street and looks like the set of "Gunsmoke" or "Bonanza." But the Fair is touting Tony Lamas, not rot-gut whiskey.

The atmosphere inside matches the exterior; piles of clothing and shoes are stacked in every corner in semi-orderly fashion. Portions of the store are dimly-lit and the floor is uneven in some spots.

Dressing room graffiti praises every football team from Snook to Canada, and the walls are covered with posters extolling the virtues of this and that brand of jeans.

Not your typical fashion boutique.

A family tradition

Bert Hailey, manager and buyer for the Western Fair, said his two great-grandfathers opened a general store in Lott more than 80 years ago. The Fair has been in the family ever since. His grandmother, Bobbye Hailey, owns it, and aunts, uncles and cousins are all involved in the operation.



The Fair expanded laterally from its original one-store size to cover nearly a city block in Lott.

The original store is now used as a warehouse, and the current selling area extends through eight rooms, covering about 20,000 square feet. It would be expensive to rent that much space, Hailey said, but the family owns all of the buildings it uses.

Low overhead and high volume mean discount prices at

the Fair, Hailey said. The store makes the least amount of profit possible on each item, and this creates a high turnover of inventory.

Roaming The Western Fair

The Western Fair has about 35 employees, who do everything from steaming and creasing cowboy hats to restocking the mountains of blue jeans in the back room.

And being an employee at The Fair can be hectic, especially

on weekends and during the Christmas rush.

Hailey said people from major Texas towns as well as states like Arkansas and Louisiana shop at The Fair. The store does some advertising, but publicity is "mostly word of mouth," he said.

Gloria Mena, an employee at The Fair, said she has seen shoppers ranging from students from China to a man from England who streaked between the stacks of blue jeans. (Maybe he couldn't find his size.)

Aggies are a common sight at The Fair and the store is a member of the Aggie Club.

Employee Pam Miller said, "We get more (customers) from A&M than from Baylor." Baylor is about 30 miles north of Lott. The weekend of the Texas A&M-Baylor game is always busy because of the traffic between the two schools.

Saturday is the busiest day at The Fair; a picture near the front of the store shows shoppers lined up down the block waiting just to get inside.

Hunting the discounts

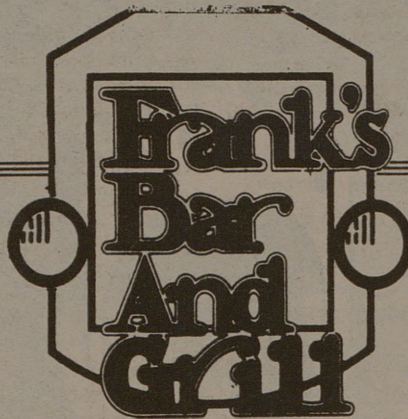
An overwhelming sight at the store is one room piled to the ceiling with thousands of pairs of men's jeans. Overpowering new-blue-jean smell assails the nostrils, and around the walls are other colors besides basic blue — browns, greens, plaids.

Veterans of Lott shopping trips can go straight through the stacks to within a few feet of their jeans, but a first-time shopper could spend hours deciding on brand, cut and size.

For example, Wrangler offers slim, regular and cowboy (full) cut jeans made to go over boots. Levis' offers boot jeans, bell bottoms and big bells. All cotton, all polyester or a mixture in your choice of sizes, pre-shrunk or shrink-to-fit.

Prices of mens' jeans are \$12.85 for basic Wranglers and \$13.85 for Lee and Levi's.

"There's no way of telling how many are back there,"



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