

Discover 'Texas version of shopping Utopia'

By DONNA BOWMAN BRATTON

I'm one of those nuts who loves garage sales for the sheer challenge of the hunt. In fact, I'm a coupon-clipping, clearance-shopping, ain't-gonna-pay-full-price-if-I-don't-have-to kind of gal. So, when I was invited to join four friends on a quick, ladies-only jaunt to Canton's world famous First Monday Trade Days, I jumped at the chance. I would soon discover the meaning behind the phrase "What happens in Canton, stays in Canton."

We cleared out two SUVs and made the 220-mile trek to Canton, which sits 60 miles east of Dallas and 35 miles west of Tyler on Interstate 20. The Texas version of shopping Utopia.

The city of Canton is a relatively small town, encompassing approximately 3-1/2 square miles, more than 300 acres of which are dedicated to the country's largest flea market. Don't be fooled by the name. The event no longer includes a Monday. But the Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday before the first Monday of every month, an estimated 100,000 visitors converge on this small community.

With a population less than 4,000, Canton residents make the best of the anticipated influx and enjoy the benefit of the resulting sales tax revenue. Canton homeowners pay no city property tax. But the true charm of the city just might be the story behind the story. The history of First Monday Trade Days is steeped in the culture of small town Texas.

First Monday Trade Days accidentally put this small town on the map nearly 150 years ago. Long before they had a permanent courthouse, the telephone and the automobile, the traveling circuit court judge came to Canton on the first Monday of every month to hold court and preside over hangings. Both events became a source of entertainment for families across the county. It was also the perfect opportunity to stock up on staples, visit friends, catch up on the news and attend the monthly horse auction.

Most of Van Zandt County was open range at that time and a state

law required that all stray horses be rounded up and brought to Canton for auction. For a long while, the first Monday of each month was known as "Horse Monday," which earned the town a reputation as the best place to buy a good "bronc." Naturally, people brought their own crops, handiworks and livestock to trade and sell, creating an unofficial, monthly Trades Day around the town square.

The noise, clutter and filth created by growing crowds eventually irritated the townspeople, who pushed for change. However, by the time a city ordinance was passed to prohibit trade in the streets, the custom was already too engrained in the community and the crowds were too great to enforce it. City officials hoped the idea of a trades day would simply "play out." They were wrong. One by one, residents realized a profit potential by renting space in their front yards to merchants and farmers, and even the use of their bathrooms on this one day each month.

When dependence on the horse declined in the 1930s, with the arrival of the tractor, people were afraid "Horse Monday" would vanish until hog trading grabbed the attention of buyers all across Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Trade Days became known for the finest,

cleanest, cholera-free pigs anywhere. Dogs, too, were a hot commodity, eventually overshadowing the pigs. Farmers brought strays and unwanted offspring, hunters and breeders introduced their pedigreed breeds, enticing buyers from great distances to travel to Canton. The town square was filled to overflowing.

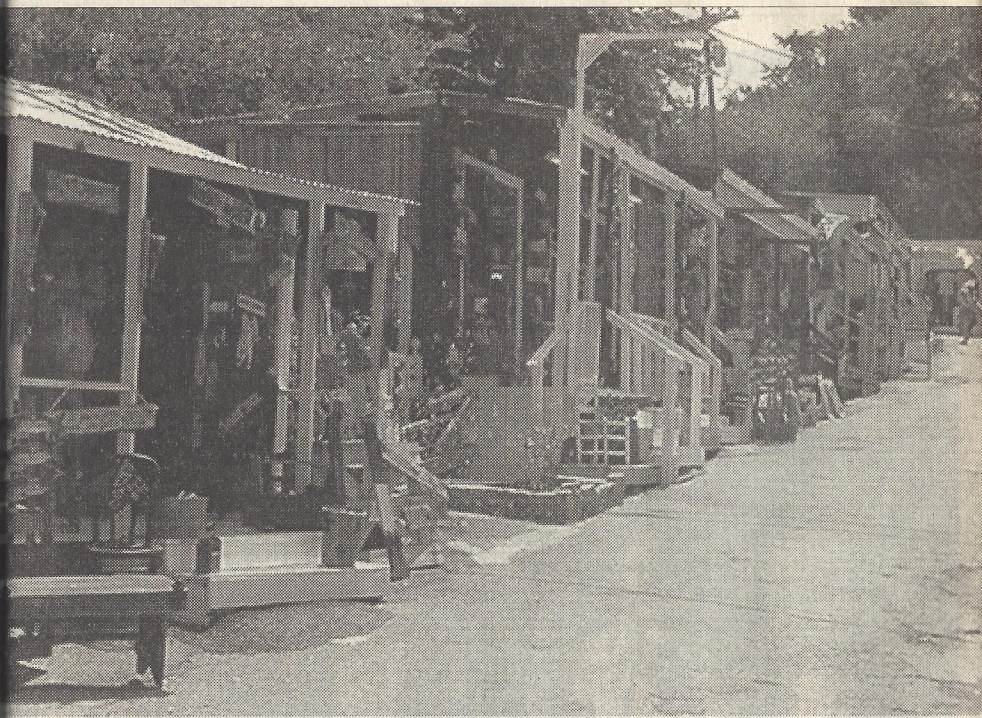
In 1965, Canton purchased six acres of land, two blocks from downtown to be used for Trade Days. However, the space was almost immediately inadequate. Today, the 300-acre First Monday Trade Days grounds consist of at least seven distinct sections, experiencing continual growth and modernization. Seemingly endless miles of walking trails front the booths and shops of 7,000 to 15,000 merchants. Even Canton's 34,000-square-foot Civic Center becomes an antique shop during Trade Days.

Great pavilions and arbors offer shopping out of extreme temperatures, but haggling might be more successful with the vendors set up on the exteriors. If you want the quaint experience of porch-front shopping, visit the Village at Old Mill. Send the men to Sportsman Pavilion but be sure to meet up at The Mountain at Old Mill

Turn to CANTON, Page 14B



Donna Bratton (center) and fellow shoppers Merrie Seiler and Kim Moushon visit with Texas Clem, a potter selling his wares in Canton.



Donna Bratton

age in Canton is a replicated Old West town inhabited by merchants dressed in period clothing. gunfight shows every two hours on weekends.

CANTON

Evening shopping and entertainment

Continued from Page 1B

Marketplace for entertainment. This replicated Old West town is inhabited by many merchants dressed in period clothing. You'll enjoy the gunfight show every two hours on Saturdays and Sundays.

Merchants at the Mountain often stay open until 11 p.m. for late shopping, drawing crowds to the restaurants, an 8-foot video karaoke screen, and Saturday night musical showcases. Bed and Breakfasts are also available here.

Dog Alley, as it is now called, remains a popular destination for the purchase of all kinds of animals from dogs and cats, to farm animals, and exotics. They also offer animals

for adoption from the local humane society. Every kind of pet product can also be found. If you're not inclined to melt into a puddle, it's worth going by to see visit this virtual petting zoo.

Don't think this is a typical flea market. You'll find everything under the sun including upscale, new and antique items. First Monday Trade Days is the ultimate scavenger hunt and shopping trip wrapped in a county fair atmosphere.

As it turns out, what happens in Canton only stays in Canton, if it's a bargain that doesn't fit in my SUV.

Canton Shopping Tips

- Electric scooters for the handicapped are available for rent by the hour.
- RV hookups are available next to the Trades grounds.
- Wear your most comfortable walking shoes.
- Bring a wagon or buy or rent a cart at the grounds. You want to avoid unnecessary trips to the car.
- Check out the coupons on-line at

www.cantontradedays.o
 . ■ First Monday Trade
 ly occurs on the Thu
 Saturday, and Sunday
 first Monday of every m
 shine.

■ Free trolley service

For more informatio
 mondaycanton.com

www.cantontradedays

www.cantontex.com

www.chambercanton

www.cantonmountain

L	A	T	H	M	A	R	C	H
A	L	O	E	A	M	A	R	A
S	A	R	A	N	A	N	A	S
H	I	T	T	H	E	H	I	G
				H	U	T	S	E
				T	E	R	M	S
				W	H	E		
S	A	L	O	P	E	R	O	S
T	H	E	W	H	O	L	E	S
E	R	N		V	A	S	T	
P	S	I		S	E	N	T	W
				A	I	R		S
S	H	O	O	T	F	R	O	M
H	E	N	S		L	I	C	I
A	B	E	T		O	V	A	T
H	E	R	A		W	E	S	E

COPL