

# The Third Decade, Volume 8, Issue 2,3

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THE OSWALD NOTE: INFORMATION OR DISINFORMATION?

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by

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Peter Whitmey\*

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In the fall of 1975, during a year filled with new revelations related to the assassination of President Kennedy, the public learned for the first time, as did members of the Warren Commission, that a note allegedly written by Lee Harvey Oswald and delivered to the Dallas FBI office prior to the assassination had been withheld by the FBI and, in fact, had been destroyed. As *Time* pointed out:

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"...The FBI is being badly shaken by the revelation that its former leaders withheld evidence from the Warren Commission...At issue is a threatening note that Assassin Lee Harvey Oswald delivered to the FBI's Dallas office about ten days before Kennedy was killed...Even though the note did not mention the President, FBI officials wanted to conceal the embarrassing fact that they had ignored the threat..."

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This startling information had come to the attention of Tom Johnson, publisher of the *Dallas Times Herald* (which recently went out of business), who had previously been the assistant press secretary for President Johnson.<sup>2</sup> The newspaper agreed to hold off on publishing this dramatic revelation until August 30, 1975 in order that the FBI itself could investigate the matter, given the possibility that it was a hoax. After Director Clarence Kelley confirmed the legitimacy of the report, Tom Johnson himself provided the reading public yet another reason to question the Warren Commission's findings. Clearly it was evident that "cover-up" was a real possibility, and that, in one way or another, witnesses and even investigators such as FBI agent James P. Hosty, Jr. could be coerced into co-operating with such an endeavor.

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At the time, reports on the Oswald note all made the assumption that the real Lee Harvey Oswald had, in fact, visited the FBI office in Dallas, although the content of the note remained in dispute. A subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives<sup>3</sup> was established and chaired by California Democrat Don Edwards (a former FBI agent) in October 1975 to thoroughly examine the FBI's behavior in the matter. One of those testifying before the subcommittee was Mrs. Nancy Lee Fenner, the receptionist at the Dallas FBI office, whose account is summarized in Gentry's 1991 book on Hoover and the FBI:

"...She noticed the man when he got off the elevator. 'From my desk I could see him clearly,' she recalled. 'My desk was right in the aisleway. He came to my desk and he said, 'S.A. Hosty, please. And he had a wild look in his eye, and he was awfully figgety, and he had a 3 x 5 envelope in his hand.' There was a piece of paper, folded like a letter, and 'during this time he kept taking the letter in and out of the envelope.'

Mrs. Fenner called downstairs and learned Hosty was out. When she informed the man of this, he took the paper out of the envelope 'and threw it like that (indicating) on my desk and he said, well, get this to him, and turned and walked back to the elevator.'

Mrs. Fenner read the note. It wasn't long, just two paragraphs, handwritten, in a rather childish scrawl. Later, she was unable to recall exactly how it stated, but it was to the effect that if Hosty didn't stop bothering his wife the writer would "either blow up the Dallas Police Department or the FBI office."

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Mrs. Fenner had been working for the FBI since 1942...she knew a threat when she saw one, and she took the note to ASAC Kyle Clark. Scanning its contents, Clark said, 'Forget it, give it to Hosty.' After Mrs. Fenner had returned to her desk, one of the girls from the steno pool, Helen May, walked by and 'wanted to know who the creep was in the hall.' Mrs. Fenner said, 'Well, according to this, it is Lee Harvey Oswald, because his name was signed on the letter. The name meant nothing to me.' She handed the letter to May, who also read it. 'Shortly thereafter,' she remembered, 'Mr. Hosty came to my desk and got the letter, and I have not seen it since.'

Hosty read the letter, deciding 'it didn't appear to be of any serious import.' He later elaborated, 'It appeared to be an innocuous type of complaint...I looked at it. It didn't seem to have any need for action at that time, so I put it in my workbox.' (In a footnote, Hosty recalled the note suggested he should not interview Mrs. Oswald without Lee's permission, and that if Hosty did not leave her alone, 'he would take action against the FBI.')<sup>5)</sup>

Based on the numerous descriptions of Oswald by his friends, fellow workers and family, compared to the comments made by Mrs. Fenner and Miss May, there is the possibility that the man who visited the FBI office was not Oswald, but an imposter, once again attempting to leave an incriminating trail of evidence related to Oswald's behaviour patterns leading up the assassination. First of all, neither Hosty nor his assistant, Kyle Clark, actually saw the man with the note. Second, the description given by Mrs. Fenner of a man with a "wild" look in his eyes who behaved in a nervous manner does not seem consistent with Oswald's low-key, pleasant demeanor. Third, the man with the note was described by Helen May as a "creep," which again is not the first impression that Oswald usually made. In addition, the man's handwriting was described as "childlike" and messy, in contrast to the reasonably smooth-looking penmanship of Oswald in his correspondence with various left-wing organizations. There is also Mrs. Fenner's recollection that Oswald signed the letter "Lee Harvey Oswald," when, in reality, he usually signed his name "Lee H. Oswald."

The most disputed aspect of the "Oswald note" pertained not to the man's identity, but in regard to the content of the letter. While Mrs. Fenner recalled that the man threatened to blow up either the Dallas police department or the offices of the FBI, James Hosty insisted that the note merely suggested Oswald might take some other kind of action. Given the fact that the name "Gandy" was written on the same page of Oswald's notebook as that of Hosty, it has been suggested to me by a prominent researcher that possibly "Oswald" threatened to contact J. Edgar Hoover himself through his personal secretary, Miss Helen Gandy. (It should be noted that Oswald had scratched out the name "Gandy" for some reason.)

The Oswald note has taken on a new life with the release of JFK, which includes a scene suggesting that possibly the note was a warning to Hosty by his "informer" that an attempt to kill the President was underway. Allegations had been made in January, 1964 by a Houston reporter, Alonzo Hudkins, discussed by the Warren Commission in secret session later that month, suggesting that Oswald might have been working undercover for the FBI, although Hoover adamantly denied the report, as did Hosty himself. As a result of the unsubstantiated suggestion made in the film by Oliver Stone, James Hosty has, in fact, retained a lawyer in this regard, which I learned in a recent telephone conversation.

It is very likely that Oswald indeed was the person who visited the FBI office, given his hostility towards the ongoing FBI surveillance of both himself and his wife. However, the comments of Mrs. Fenner certainly suggest an attempt years later to describe Oswald in as negative a light as possible, both in terms of his

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## The Third Decade, Volume 8, Issue 2,3

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disposition and the content of his letter. However, the possibility of someone else (such as the man who visited Sylvia Odio identified as "Leon Oswald") pretending to be Oswald cannot be entirely ruled out, given the information provided to the House subcommittee in 1975, as summarized in Gentry's excellent book. It is even possible that the FBI knew that an imposter was responsible for the note, and that Lee Harvey Oswald was a patsy after all.

\*A149-1909 Salton Rd., Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada V2S 5B6

## Notes

1. "FBI: Shaken by a Cover-Up That Failed," *Time*, November 3, 1975, p. 9. (Note: naturally *Time* made a point of referring to Oswald as the assassin, even capitalizing the word.)
2. "The Oswald Cover-Up," *Time*, September 15, 1975.
3. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee of the Judiciary House of Representatives on FBI Oversight, 94th Congress, 1st and 2nd sessions.
4. "FBI: Shaken by a Cover-Up", p. 9.
5. Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991).
6. Warren Commission Hearings and Exhibits, Commission Exhibit 1B.
7. On the other hand, Hosty suggested to me that "Gandy" may have been a Dallas policeman.
8. *The New Republic*, September 27, 1975, pp. 24-27.

## MY VISIT TO DEALEY PLAZA

by  
Greg Doyle\*

After attending Edgar Tatro's lecture on the JFK assassination when I was a sophomore at Bryant College in Smithfield, RI, my life has never quite been the same. Hardly a day has gone by that I haven't thought about the assassination since hearing Mr. Tatro's presentation that November day in 1987. I can vividly remember staying up late in the summer of 1988 reading *Best Evidence* and being more frightened than any Stephen King novel could ever scare me. I've read many books, articles, watched videos and discussed the assassination with virtually anyone who would listen since. Most people seemed not to understand my concern. They say, "I wasn't born until five years after, so what do I care about an event which happened a quarter of a century ago?" I have a hard time explaining it. It's just that I think it was the most important event in the history of this country and has had such far reaching implications. More than that, I feel lied to. When I was growing up and taking history classes, I was always told that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, shot and killed John F. Kennedy in Dallas. That was fine with me; and I accepted it as surely as I accepted that George Washington was our first President.

But, now, I've seen the lengths to which people will go to lie to you. I've learned this country is too great not to search for the truth. I'm not alone either. Four years have passed since I attended that lecture and I've now travelled down to Baton Rouge, LA to attend LSU Law School from my home in Boston. On the weekend of 11/10/91 I travelled to Dallas to visit some of my college "drinking buddies" who were in town. I hardly expected them to take a couple hours out of their day and vacation to visit Dealey Plaza. I figured I'd go by myself before driving home on Sunday. But, to my surprise, on Saturday morning they suggested we go. To hear them talk about the possibility that Oswald acted alone, they too have gotten the message. I hear that more than three-quarters of the American people believe something other

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than the "official version," including even the younger generation like me. That is encouraging.

That is why I am writing this essay: to say THANK YOU to all the people who have struggled so long for the truth: from researchers to witnesses to the homeless man who took pride in pointing out to me where the picket fence was that "the fatal shot came from." While the complete truth may never be known and it gets frustrating at times, I offer these words of encouragement. Your message has not been lost. People no longer blindly accept things and the message is clear that the American people will accept nothing short of the truth. You who have worked so hard deserve a lot of the credit. It has meant a lot to me and many others, so at least maybe something good came out of that tragic event. Again, thank you.

\*18 Longmeadow Dr., Canton, MA 02021.

## THE UP-STATE NEW YORK "MINI-CONFERENCE"

by  
Ulric Shannon\*

(Editor's note: this is a report on one of the many regional conferences being held around the U.S., Canada and in Europe, based on the substantial response---around 250 people so far---to the "interest survey" that I distributed to subscribers on January 1. Future issues of this journal will feature shorter reports from these regional meetings, based on reports sent the editor by the 31 "convenors" of these groups. If you have not yet hooked up with one of these groups and will let me know of your interest, I'll send you the current directory of participants and information about how you can make contact with the people in your area.)

On January 18, 1992, some twenty assassination researchers from the upper New York State area met at Fredonia, NY. This "mini-conference," organized by Buffalo's Nathan Sull, Third Decade publisher Jerry Rose and this researcher, had three important topics on its agenda: a review of last November's research symposium in Dallas, a review of Oliver Stone's movie "JFK," and a look ahead to the upcoming (let us hope) release of all presently classified documents, particularly those of the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

The twenty researchers are residents of three main regions of upper New York State---Rochester, Albany and Buffalo. Thus, three "representatives" were chosen to lead each area: Nathan Sull for Buffalo, Joseph Backes for Albany and Greg Quail for Rochester. The purpose of such structuring is to coordinate researchers' pressures on elected officials to bring about swift release of these documents---swift, because most researchers agree that once the controversy over "JFK" dies down, so will the public push for such releases.

But even at this early date, the outlook seems positive: important politicians such as Ted Kennedy, Arlen Specter, Richard Nixon and Louis Stokes, as well as most of the mass media (New York Times, ABC News, etc.) have called for public disclosure of these files. Reports are that Lee Hamilton and Henry Gonzales are ready to introduce a motion in Congress to release the files. Researcher John Long was even able to report early progress with his own elected representatives.

The main "pressure tactics" endorsed by Silver Creekers Jerry Rose and John Long are: first, getting commitments from local politicians to push for the release of the files; secondly, insuring follow-through by these politicians; and thirdly, gaining public support by calling for disclosure on TV, radio, and in the op-ed pages of newspapers.

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