

Building That Hid Oswald Hit by Fire

By WAYNE KING

Special to The New York Times

DALLAS, Aug. 23 — An intensely hot fire was methodically set by an arsonist this morning in the old Texas School Book Depository, from which the shots that killed President Kennedy were fired 21 years ago.

The fire, which destroyed some assassination memorabilia in the basement, sent dense billows of smoke and some flame into the first and second floors. On Nov. 22, 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald fired on the Kennedy motorcade from the sixth floor of the seven-story building.

The fire was started in at least two places in the basement, the arson investigators said today. They said the sprinkler system had been turned off for repairs. Damage was estimated at \$250,000.

A number of delegates and others attending the Republican National Convention this week have visited the building and the surrounding area on

tours jointly sponsored by the Dallas Welcoming Committee and the Republican Host Committee. The site attracts about 350,000 visitors a year.

Coming out of the burning building into a floodlighted street crowded with men and equipment shortly after 4 o'clock this morning, Assistant Fire Chief Steve Perry pulled a sleeve across his brow and shook his head.

"There's smoke you couldn't cut with a knife in there," he said.

93 Firefighters at Blaze

Ninety-three firefighters backed by nine pumpers, four aerial ladder trucks and rescue equipment fought the fire, which was raised in the first hour from two-alarm to five-alarm status.

A police helicopter beat the muggy air overhead, playing a spotlight on the burning building and on adjoining rooftops and alleyways.

Clouds of thick, gray-white smoke rolled out of double doors at both the rolled out of double doors at both the

front and back of the building. Aerial trucks raised ladders to second floor windows and firefighters wrestled hoses into the murky interior.

A sweating fireman who was one of the first inside the building, renamed the Dallas County Administration Building, said he could endure the heat and smoke for only a few minutes.

"I found fire on the first floor in the commissioner's court where the audience used to sit, but it was coming out of the duct vent," he said. "It was coming out of the wall; the fire was in the basement."

Arson Is Confirmed

One of the first on the scene was Capt. Lewis Eppes of the arson division. His preliminary inquiry suggested that the fire was out of the ordinary — said — and once inside, investigators determined the fire had been set.

"It is officially determined to be arson," the fire department spokesman, William Jernigan, said early today. "The principal reason for that determination is that there were multiple points of origin in the basement. There is no accidental basis for that pattern."

However, Mr. Jernigan said, it had not been determined how the fire was set, nor were there any immediate suspects. There was no indication of forced entry, he said. The Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is also investigating.

A city spokesman reported that the fire had damaged some memorabilia of the Kennedy assassination that had been stored in the building pending approval of a plan for a museum of the assassination.

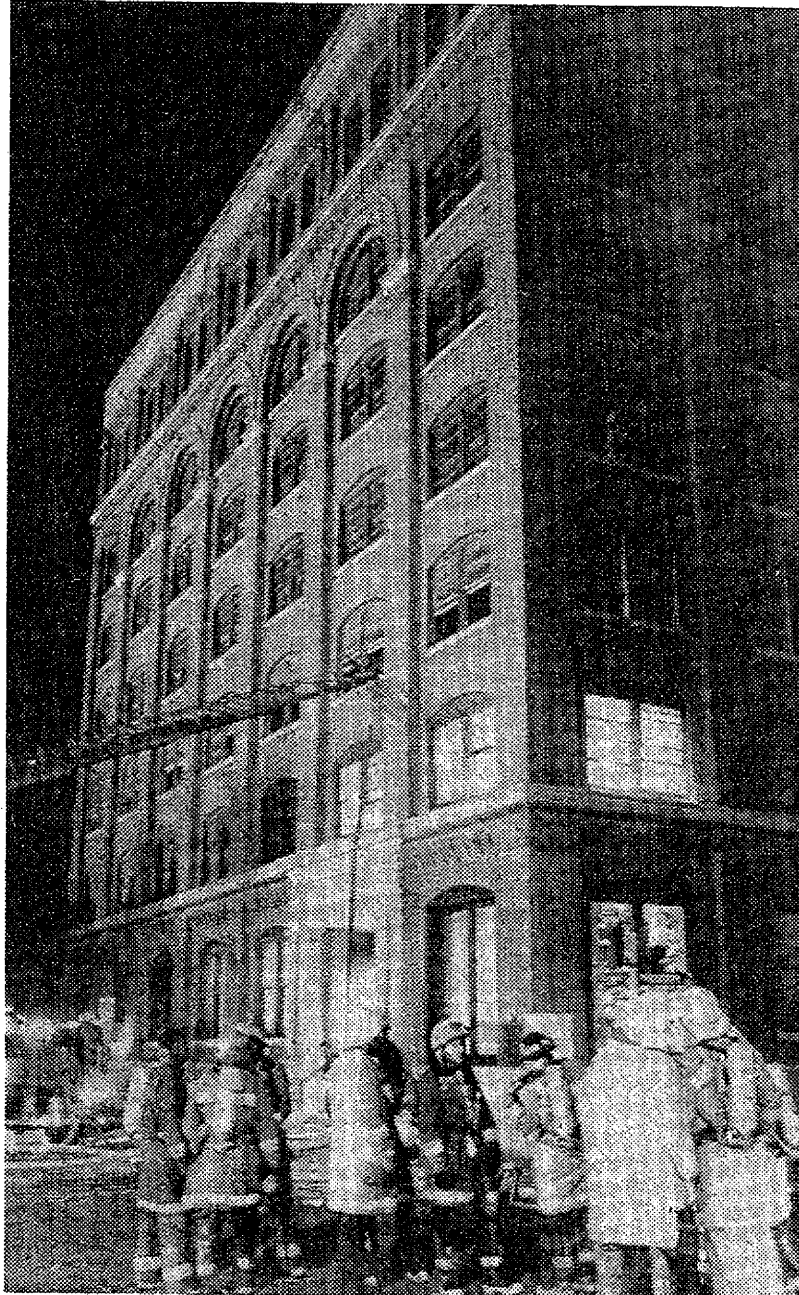
Nothing Irreplaceable Lost

However, a preliminary examination suggested that nothing irreplaceable had been destroyed or damaged. Most of the material was photographs of which copies exist, newspapers from the time of the assassination, some Kennedy books and parts of a car rental sign that was atop the building at the time of the killing.

However, the researchers had not inventoried the material, and there was no definite word on the seriousness of the loss. Some county records were also destroyed, the Fire Department spokesman said.

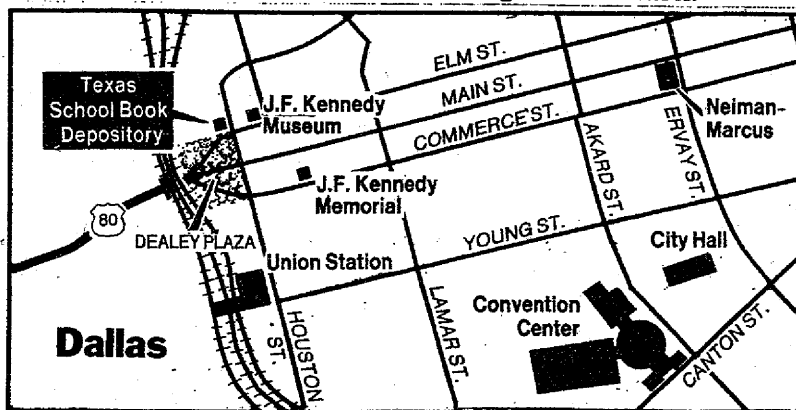
The arson at the historic School Book Depository and a disruptive march by demonstrators Wednesday ended local hopes that the Republican convention could be conducted in this city without incident.

Several hours before the fire, the police had arrested nearly 100 demonstrators who marched through downtown Dallas Wednesday afternoon defacing buildings and sidewalks with spray paint, burning a flag, disrupting business and finally plunging into the reflecting pool in front of City Hall.



Associated Press

Firefighters in Dallas outside the Texas School Book Depository early yesterday after a fire there was brought under control.



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Building overlooks the route taken by Kennedy's motorcade in 1963.