

By GARY CARTWRIGHT

DALLAS—Whenever I approach this city from the west and reach the point where the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike spills into the Stemmons Freeway, my eyes automatically fasten on a seven-story red brick warehouse with a clock advertising Hertz rental cars on top. It is a building so ordinary that its near replica can be found alongside the railroad yard of any major city. This one has scarcely changed at all over the half century during which it served as a warehouse first for groceries, then farm machinery and later school books.

It is the infamous Texas School Book Depository. In my mind, whenever I pass it, the Hertz clock flashes 12:30, the minute that Lee Harvey Oswald squeezed off his first shot. That was eight years ago tomorrow. In the weeks and months and years since that fateful moment, a steady procession of visitors has been drawn to the building and the area that surrounds it—official and unofficial investigators, historians, Boy Scout troops, witch hunters, pilgrims and, for the most part, ordinary Americans.

They keep coming—often whole families traveling hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles from other states or nations to view for themselves the site of the most shocking single event of our time, the murder of President John F. Kennedy. Invariably they point to the sixth-floor window where Oswald stood and inevitably they take snapshots of a tersely worded bronze memorial plaque set in an ornamental wall in Dealey Plaza, across the street from the Depository.

On occasions like the anniversary of the murder, visitors place dozens of wreaths near the plaque in solemn private ceremonies. (A small sign indicates that fresh flowers will be removed when they wilt and that plastic flowers will be taken away after two weeks.)

Occasionally some of the visitors pray, singly or in groups, kneeling or standing self-consciously with their eyes cast down, and those who are easily moved to tears shed them for a lost leader—or for something his memory evokes. Of course, different people weep for different reasons. A friend of mine, a Dallas banker, made daily lunch-hour visits to the assassination site for months after publication of the Warren Report (he read all 27 volumes), checking measurements and preparing private calculations which led nowhere but made him feel better for the effort. Sometimes his secretary went with him. One day he noticed her crying, something he hadn't seen before. He asked her why. "Because I'm hungry," she sobbed.

Though there is no official count, a business woman

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The Site Of the Most Shocking Single Event Of Our Time

in the neighborhood estimates that as many as 500 people a day visit the assassination point. A spokesman for the Dallas Police Department was unable to give figures on how many actually stop to read the plaque or meditate, but said, "There are always people there, especially on weekends and during the summer. A very conservative guess would be at least 50 a day."

The Texas State Travel and Information Bureau says that approximately two million people visit Dallas every year, but it does not know how many make a point of passing the plaza and looking across to the

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plaque shows the route of the Presidential motorcade. Kennedy was headed for the Trade Mart, where a luncheon crowd had gathered to hear him speak. The motorcade was traveling westward along Main through the central business district and toward the Stemmons Freeway. Since there is no access from Main to the freeway, the motorcade had to turn right on Houston in front of the plaza, then left a block later on Elm below the Depository. Another 500 feet and the motorcade would have made a right turn onto the freeway. From there it is a three-minute drive to the Trade Mart, but the President never made it.

As you move away from the map and plaque and head northward toward the Depository, you spot the window from which Oswald fired. It is on the sixth floor at the righthand (southeast) corner, to the right of and one row above a window marked with a red circle. (The circle designates a fire lane—an upper entrance that must be kept free of obstructions to allow the Fire Department to enter; similar circles can be found on buildings all over Dallas.)

Notice that Elm Street curves gradually to the right as it approaches the underpass and the entrance to the freeway. Cross the street and walk along the Elm Street curb in front of the Depository. You will notice that your view of the window is blocked by the top limbs and leaves of an oak tree. You then realize how suddenly it happened, how suddenly it had to happen, how little time Oswald had for an unobstructed shot.

Finding the Spot

Continue walking until you can see the window clearly above the tree—just past a green lamppost with a "No Standing Anytime" sign. That is where the limousine was when the first bullet struck. A second and third shot followed at approximately two-second intervals. And then the limousine sped up the freeway toward Parkland Hospital.

According to the Warren Report, only three shots were fired. The report concluded that the first bullet passed through Kennedy's neck (you will recall pictures of the stricken President raising a hand to his throat), then hit Connally, who sat on a jump seat directly in front of the President. To this day Connally maintains that he was struck by the second shot, but the Warren

Commission concluded that although the bullet glanced off his ribs and passed through his thigh and wrist what the Governor experienced was "a delayed reaction"—that the impact caused him to turn as though to say something to Kennedy behind him at which time he heard the second shot, the shot that shattered the President's head. The third shot, if there was one, missed the Presidential limousine. By that time Kennedy was dead and Connally unconscious.

Witnesses watching the motorcade from the top of the Triple Underpass saw one bullet — or a bullet fragment — hit near a manhole cover where Elm enters the underpass. Another bullet fragment chipped off a piece of curb nearly 100 feet away on Main. There were witnesses who contended that at least one shot came from the railroad yard immediately to the right of the underpass, though the credibility of this report has faded with time and accumulated evidence.

Museum Planned

The public has not been allowed inside the Depository (signs warn that unauthorized entry will be considered a criminal act), but this may change shortly. After both the city and state refused to preserve the building as a historical site, Aubrey Mayhew, a Nashville businessman, bought it at auction for \$650,000 and said he planned to convert it to a museum for a collection of Kennedy relics, among them one of the two PT boats that Kennedy commanded during World War II. Earlier this year Mayhew announced that he would open the sixth floor as a tourist attraction, charging visitors to peer through the window from which Oswald fired his shots. No date was set, and efforts to reach Mayhew in recent weeks to ask when the building would be opened were unsuccessful.

Mayhew's announcement revived interest in a plan to have an existing state agency, the John F. Kennedy Memorial Commission of Texas, acquire the building and operate it as a museum and memorial. The Texas Legislature refused to grant the commission such authority

in 1969, but the matter could be reconsidered if a special legislative session is called after the first of the year.

Recently, while Depository workers were vacating the building's stock of textbooks, I talked with manager Roy Truly, the man who hired Oswald. Truly is completely convinced that Oswald acted alone, with a minimum of preparation. Oswald had worked in the Depository for several weeks before the motorcade route was determined, much less published. Less than two minutes after the first shot, Truly and a Dallas policeman confronted Oswald in the second-floor lunchroom. "He was coming down as we were going up," Truly said. "The officer asked if Oswald worked here and I said he did. Oswald never said a word. He was calm as could be."

If Oswald had remained in the building as the other employes did—and if he had found a way to dispose of the rifle—it is possible that he would never have been accused. But Oswald did leave the building.

Less than three minutes after Kennedy was hit, he walked out the front door of the Depository and up Elm, toward the heart of town. At Elm and Murphy, seven blocks from the assassination site, he boarded a bus headed back in the direction he had come, but he left the bus after two blocks and walked south on Lamar Street to the Greyhound Bus Station at Lamar and Commerce.

A visitor retracing Oswald's escape route passes within a few blocks of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Plaza, where the official Kennedy Memorial, a stone cenotaph, was erected, after much delay, by the city fathers of Dallas. The plaza is bounded by Main, Record, Market and Commerce Streets. If the memorial seems esthetically spare, even forbidding, that is how it was conceived by its designer, architect Philip Johnson, who was a friend of the slain President.

In my own recent reviewing and retracing of the events of that day eight years ago, I came to believe (probably for the first time) that Oswald acted alone. There is, however, one thing that continues to puzzle me. At the bus sta-

tion Oswald took a six-minute cab ride out the Houston Street viaduct (which passes beside the Dallas Morning News building) to his rooming house at 1026 North Beckley Avenue. Oswald was there only long enough to change clothes, but the housekeeper testified that while he was in his room a police car drove slowly by the rooming house, stopped and honked several times. No one has ever found or otherwise explained that police car the housekeeper is so sure she saw.

Arrested at Theater

Oswald was next seen about nine-tenths of a mile from the rooming house, at the southeast corner of 10th Street and Patton Avenue, where, 45 minutes after shooting Kennedy, he shot and killed Patrolman J. D. Tippit in front of a number of witnesses. Muttering "poor damn cop" (or "poor dumb cop"), Oswald reloaded his pistol and ran off. Behind a service station on Jefferson Boulevard, he squirmed out of his jacket, which was found later in the station's parking lot, and then he walked six blocks (or eight blocks from the scene of the Tippit shooting) to the Texas Theater, where after a struggle he was arrested.

The theater and other landmarks are still present, though I found no one along the route who remembered what happened. The assistant manager of the theater, who was on duty the afternoon Oswald was captured, said, "That's been a long time." But surely, I said, surely anyone that close to the action could recall something of that day, if only because he had told the story so many times. It seemed inconceivable to me that any American over the age of 15 could not remember where he was and what he did on Nov. 22, 1963. "No," the assistant manager insisted, "that's been a long time."

In the blessed way the human mind has of blotting out shame, Dallas has tended to forget. Even now, on the anniversary of the assassination, local newspapers take care to treat the story in the bloodless style you might expect for the opening of a shopping center or the

dollars-and-cents recollection of some ancient tornado, as though the forces of nature, and nothing more, conspired to soil the name of a great city. When the Kennedy Memorial was finally dedicated six years after the assassination, County Judge Lew Sterrett managed to get through his entire dedication speech without one mention of the name John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Here and there, for their various reasons, some citizens of Dallas remember John Kennedy. For example, at 3802 Oaklawn Avenue, in an old section of town inhabited now mostly by hippies, there is the John F. Kennedy Living Center for Exceptional Youth. And on the fringe of downtown in the 2200 block of Cedar Springs Road, there is a private museum dedicated to Kennedy. It looks something like a Chinese theater from the outside and features antique dolls and Oriental art. It is called the Miramar Shrine, but it is dedicated to Kennedy because about 10 minutes before

his death the President passed by and supposedly followed it with his eyes. The day of his assassination was to have seen the grand opening of the museum, but the opening was postponed two weeks out of respect for the martyred President. Dr. Cosette Faust Newton, Miramar founder-director, a world traveler and author of eight books, wrote a poem which appears on the front door: "ALIVE AND WELL . . . he motored by: (Ten minutes later, he had to die.)"

I mention the Miramar Museum because I had passed it many times but did not think to go inside until recently. The museum is a few minutes from downtown and about a block from one of my favorite restaurants, Casa Dominguez, which features what Mexican-food enthusiasts call "Austin-style" dishes. The museum is difficult to describe but there is a dusty never-neverland quality to the place.

There is one last ghoulish attraction

which a visitor may find difficult to avoid—it is called the Kennedy Museum and it is situated at 501 Elm Street in a red brick building across Houston from the Depository. The "museum" is essentially a souvenir shop peddling American flags, J.F.K. medallions and blow-ups of old newspaper headlines. But for \$1.50 (75 cents for children) one can enter a darkened theater where colored slides and cold damp voices recreate Nov. 22, 1963. It is not the slides, though, and not the voices that capture the visitor. On a sloping table beneath the screen is a detailed miniature of the city of Dallas just as it looked that day; while the slides and voices change, you watch a motorcade, represented by a snake of lights, travel from the beginning of its route at Love Field along Cedar Springs, down Main, right on Houston, left on Elm beneath a perfect replica of the Depository. The Hertz clock says 12:30. Then three shots ring out—and they turn on the lights.

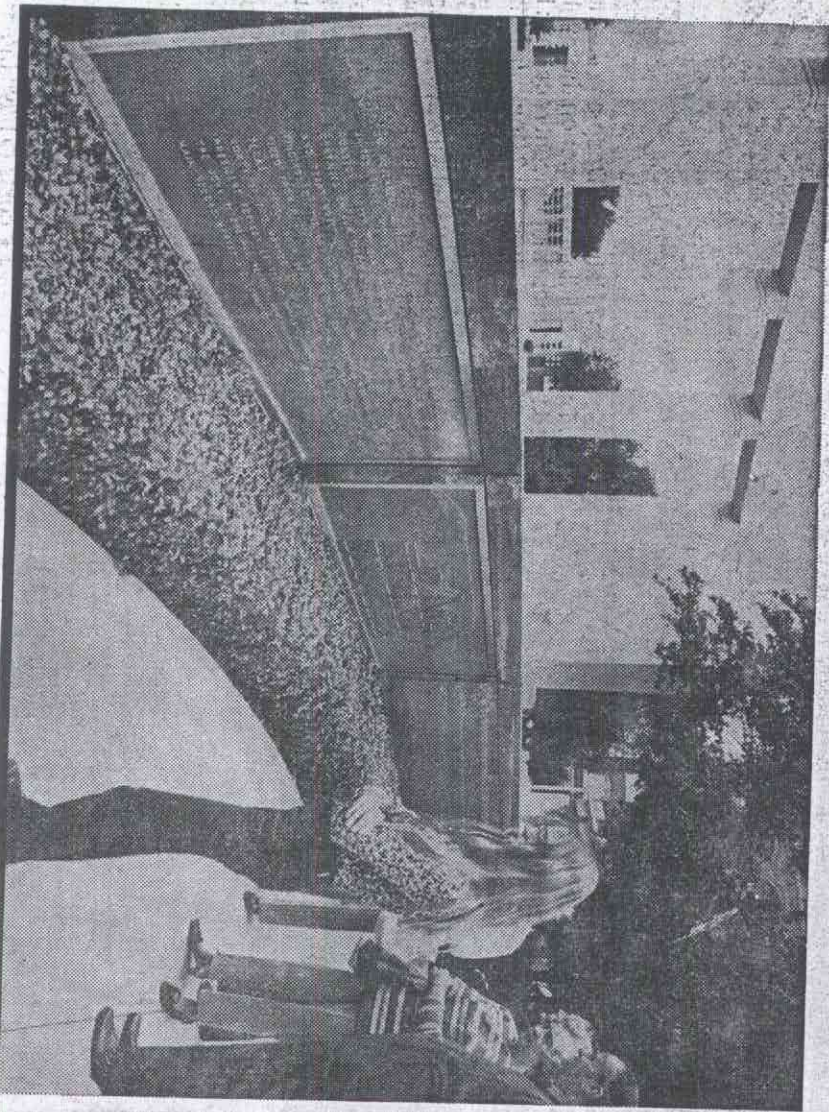


JOHN F. KENNEDY MUSEUMS SHRINE



Miramar Shrine (left) features Oriental art but is dedicated to Kennedy because he passed by just before his death. At another museum (above) J.F.K. souvenirs are sold.

Photographs by Shelly Katz/Camera 5



Almost every visitor to Dallas makes a point of passing Dealey Plaza to read the tersely worded bronze plaque and point out the window from which Lee Harvey Oswald fired.

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