

The Sixth Floor Museum photo

The Sixth Floor



AP photo

Museum in Dallas preserves the day history came apart

(2979)

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Tribune writer

Anyone with a memory of Nov. 22, 1963, knows how the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository figured into that fateful day in Dallas. It is here that investigators say Lee Harvey Oswald fired the shots that killed President John F. Kennedy.

The tragedy and mystery of the day that Kennedy was assassinated are preserved above Dallas' Dealey Plaza in a museum simply called The Sixth Floor.



Even 32 years later, visitors come to Dealey Plaza to see the site of the assassination of President Kennedy.

The museum includes nearly 400 photos and 40 minutes of documentary film. For those who remember the day, there is nothing particularly new or original about the exhibits, but the museum is in the right place — and the place attracts visitors.

The museum claims the assassination site is the most-visited spot in Dallas and that 400,000 visitors annually make their way to the museum.

Organizers say the museum was not created as a tourist attraction, but to serve people who come to the site even 32 years after the assassination. The visitors are a mix of middle-aged and older people who remember the day and younger people who only know about it from

stories and history books.

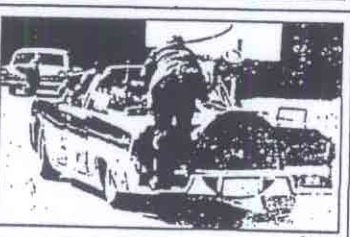
The eeriest part of the museum is the view from the windows to the street below where the presidential motorcade passed.

The museum's southeast corner is blocked off with glass. Book boxes are stacked as they might have been where authorities found a sniper's nest with three spent cartridges.

Still photographs taken from Abraham Zapruder's home movie film show what happened. A recording of a radio bulletin breaks the museum's silence with news that the president has been shot in Dallas.

A television tape shows a shaken Walter Cronkite delivering the first news of the president's death and Lyndon Johnson's first address to the nation as president.

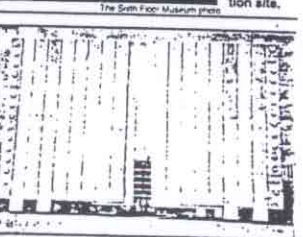
The museum retains the building's warehouse feeling with open space divided by exhibits. Wall bricks and ceiling beams are exposed. Carpeting is a



AP photo



The Sixth Floor Museum photo



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The former Texas School Book Depository houses The Sixth Floor a museum that preserves the time and place President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Above, Kennedy, was greeted on Nov. 22, 1963, at Dallas' Love Field. Below, the Kennedy Memorial is three blocks from the assassination site.

muted color.

Appropriate to the subject and its time, most of displays are black and white.

But the museum is not as grim as might be expected, perhaps because it begins with exhibits on the 1960 campaign and the Kennedy presidency and ends with the Kennedy legacy.

The administration's successes and failures are reviewed with exhibits about the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Berlin, the space race and the Kennedy style.

With controversy raging about civil rights legislation, the president's popularity had fallen to 59 percent before Kennedy made the trip to Texas to boost his re-election bid and help heal rifts among Texas Democrats.

Kennedy had visited San Antonio and Houston on the first day of the trip, then stayed overnight in Fort Worth before Air Force One took him to Love Field in Dallas.

Please see Kennedy / C13

The Sixth Floor John F. Kennedy and the memory of a nation

■ The Sixth Floor Museum is in Dallas' West End Historic District. It is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. A visitors center and museum shop are behind the building. Elevators take visitors to the sixth floor.

■ Admission is \$4, with discounts for students and senior citizens.

■ A 30-minute audio tour costs an additional \$2. The narration helps guide the visitor through the museum with voices of reporters, authorities and witnesses.

■ Including stops for video presentations, a visit to the museum will take about two hours.

Kennedy

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Despite receiving 400 death threats in the nine months leading up to the Texas trip, the bubble top was removed from the presidential limousine and newspapers published the motorcade's route.

About 250,000 people turned out to watch the motorcade from the airport to the Trade Mart where Kennedy was to attend a luncheon. Texas Gov. John Connolly, who was injured in the shooting, and his wife rode with the president and Jacqueline Kennedy. Vice President Johnson and his wife were in another car.

The museum covers the arrest of Oswald, who had worked as a clerk in the building. Two days later, Oswald's murder at Dallas Police Headquarters was witnessed by millions watching live television.

The media are credited with comforting and unifying a shocked nation after the assassination. It's said that broadcast news came of age with around-the-clock coverage of the events.

Videos show world reaction to the assassination and scenes from the state funeral that Mrs. Kennedy modeled after Abraham Lincoln's funeral.

Kennedy's murder was the fourth assassination of a U.S. president and the first since 1901 when President McKinley was killed.

Without drawing conclusions, the museum explores the range of assassination investigations from the Warren Commission, the national investigation that fixed the guilt on Oswald as the lone gunman, to conspiracy theories. A 10-foot by 10-foot model of Dealey Plaza prepared by the FBI for the Warren Commission is on display.

Kennedy's legacy is reviewed in a video narrated by Walter Cronkite, who notes that the assassination is "a moment frozen in time" for those old enough to remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news.

Exhibits show that Kennedy

arts, U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia and increasing concern for security of the nation's leaders.

Kennedy's memorials include the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and the Kennedy Library in Massachusetts, but his name also is attached to numerous schools, streets and bridges.

At the end of the museum tour, notebooks are available for visitors to record impressions and memories.

While the museum is handled with dignity, the scene on the street below borders on the bizarre. As city traffic swirls around the plaza, tourists retrace the motorcade route and explore the grassy knoll, where some investigators believe shots were fired.

Street hawkers sell pamphlets about the assassination. Nearby parking lots are designated with red, white and blue images of Kennedy.

The seven-story red brick building, built in 1901, is no longer the School Book Depository. The county bought the building in 1977 and it serves as a county office building.

The Dallas County Historical Foundation, a private non-profit group, organized the museum, which opened on Presidents Day in February 1989.

In October 1993, the building and plaza were designated as a Historic Landmark District.

The National Park Service's bronze plaque beside Elm Street near the spot where Kennedy was shot signifies the historic importance of the area without saying why. It reads: "This site possesses national significance in commemorating the history of the United States of America." The card on a bouquet reads "Friends of JFK".

About three blocks east of the museum, the John F. Kennedy Memorial dominates a park setting. The memorial represents an empty tomb with high concrete walls surrounding a slab of black marble with Kennedy's name in gold lettering.

The memorial was dedicated in 1970 with donations from Dallas County citizens.