

LETTER FROM TEXAS

Quiet's Gone for Dallas Archivist

DALLAS

In her first 18 months as city archivist, Cindy Smolovik spent much of her time presiding in a quiet corner of City Hall over century-old City Council records, property deeds and old maps. Now she is among the must-see people and places on the assassination tour of Dallas.

Smolovik was catapulted to fame and doubled work shifts in January when the Dallas Police Department released its files on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As their sole custodian, she is the one to see for a look at the 11,046 documents.

"People are clamoring to see them," Smolovik said. Despite her increased workload, she sees some benefit to her increased popularity: "Before this, no one even knew we had an archives."

Ironically, Smolovik said, most of the files contain little not already reported publicly. "A lot of this is on file in the National Archives," she said, adding that copies were sent to the Warren Commission for its investigation into the shooting of Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963.

That has not stopped the crowds. Smolovik's time is booked as far as two months ahead, and she sees about eight people a day, more than came all last year. Visitors are allowed to bring only a pencil and paper, and Smolovik makes photocopies if asked.

The documents, collected by police after the assassination, include intelligence reports, photographs, the homicide report and telegrams sent to accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald with such short, simple messages as "You filthy tramp" and "You are a dead man."

There are photographs of witnesses, of the Texas School Book Depository building from which Oswald is believed to have shot Kennedy as the president's motorcade

passed, and of other places and people tied to the assassination.

Witness affidavits recount stories told many times in books, movies and television specials—Oswald's former landlady who saw him board the bus she was riding after the shooting, bystanders who said they saw Oswald shoot police officer J.D. Tippit after the assassination, motorcade watchers who saw the president shot.

Smolovik's visitors range from reporters to high school students

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working on term papers. Most viewers, though, are professional and amateur assassination researchers, she said, who have flocked here in abundance for years.

Last November, more than 400 aficionados converged here to trade and debate Kennedy assassination theories at a convention sponsored by the JFK Assassination Information Research Center here. Last spring, Oliver Stone's controversial movie, "JFK," was filmed here.

Although 75 percent of Dallas

residents did not live here in November 1963, the city still squirms uncomfortably in the infamy acquired with the death of the popular young president.

Last winter, planners of the International Special Olympics put the city atop their list of sites for the 1995 event. But increased attention to the assassination prompted the group to drop Dallas, with officials expressing concern that the location might prove uncomfortable for the group's founders, the Kennedy family.

Even longtime Dallasites who felt that they had found peace years after the tragedy were startled when Stone arrived to make his movie and redid the exterior of the School Book Depository. The building had stood empty and deteriorating before Dallas County bought and renovated it for office space in 1978.

Three years ago, the Dallas County Historical Foundation opened an exhibit, The Sixth Floor, in that area of the building, which had remained closed long after renovation. Stone's restoration, though short-lived, was for many Dallasites an eerie look back.

Smolovik is preparing for the long term. When she noticed that the JFK documents were deteriorating after only a few weeks of increased handling, she photocopied all 11,406 pages, and visitors must make a specific request to see an original.

Yet another related movie, "Ruby," has opened, members of Congress have called for release of all records pertaining to the assassination, and polls indicate that more Americans than ever—75 percent—do not believe that Oswald acted alone.

Many doubters think that the truth lies undetected in closed files. Smolovik said she expects no end soon to the increased interest.

—Elizabeth Hudson