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SF Sunday Examiner & Chronicle

Misc III -
Assassination site

Kennedy Museum Proposal

Dallas in Arms Over

DALLAS — (NFS) — Eight years ago tomorrow, a sick young self-styled Marxist named Lee Harvey Oswald sneaked up to the sixth floor of a drab, red brick building in downtown Dallas. There he waited until 11:30 a.m., when he fired the three rifle shots that rang 'round the world and took the life of President John F. Kennedy.

In the years since that awful moment, there have been countless controversies about the assassination. Most of them have by now faded away — all, that is, except one.

Now the city of Dallas is up in arms again — not about the tragedy itself — but about what should happen to the Texas School Book Depository, the building from which Oswald fired his shots.

Tourist Spot

Until last year, there was no reason to assume that the building would ever again be the focus of any uproar. Granted, it had become one of the world's most photographed structures with 3000 to 4000 tourists a day snapping shots from every conceivable exterior angle. But the Depository's principal owner, oilman D. Harold Byrd, kept it open and ran it quietly as it had always been run — as a storehouse for school books and an office for several book publishers.

Then in April of 1970, Byrd put the building on the auction block and it was snapped up — for the bargain price of \$650,000 — by a colorful Nashville, Tenn., record

company executive and ardent Kennedy buff named Aubrey Mayhew.

Mayhew quickly shut the building down and barred all visitors. But even before he could utter a word about his own plans for the Depository, citizens' groups and state legislators suddenly became very concerned.

Citizen Worries

Some wanted to tear it down; others envisioned a museum. But everyone was worried that Mayhew, who is known to have a collection of

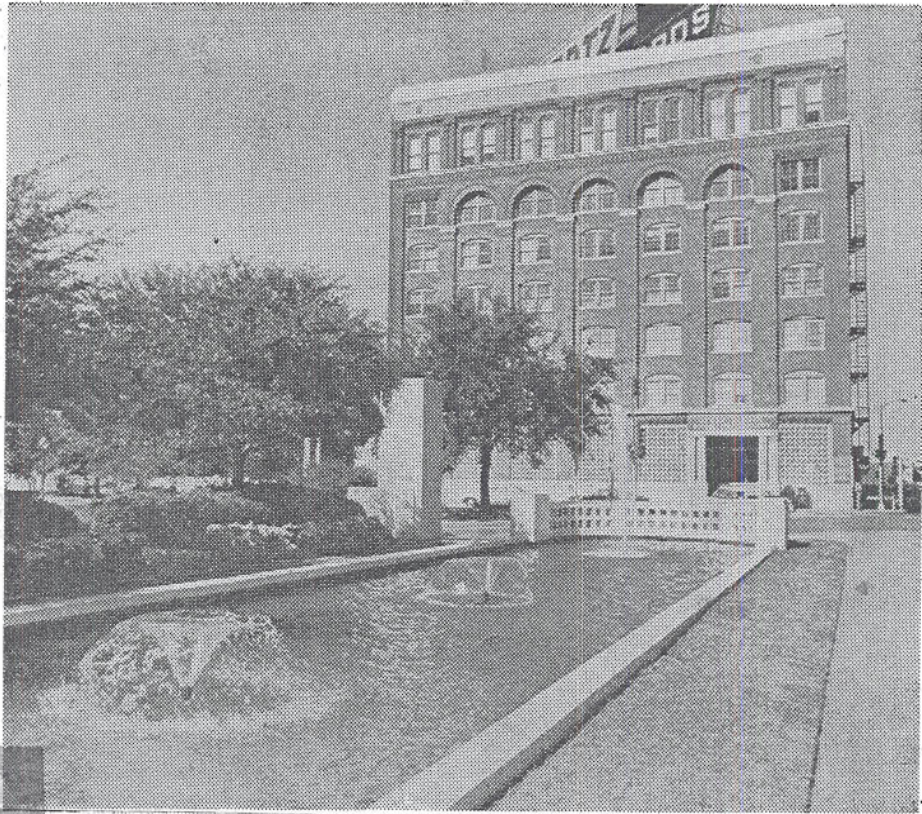
some 20,000 items of Kennedyana, would turn the building into a honky-tonk tourist trap.

There is precedent for such fears. Dallas does have one tasteful Kennedy memorial, a cenotaph some 200 yards from the Depository designed by architect Phillip Johnson. A more popular attraction, though, is a tacky pseudo-museum nearby where for \$1.50 tourists can see a sound - and - light-and-movie show about the assassination, including a crashing sound of shots and a voice that hol-

lers, "My God, they're going to kill us all!"

Turned Down

And as soon as the Depository changed hands, Mayhew did receive several bizarre offers. One contractor offered him \$1 million for the bricks in the building. A wax museum proposed a long-term lease that would have netted Mayhew about \$1 million. And a tragedy museum offered him \$100,000 just for the casings from the sixth-floor window through which Oswald poked his rifle.



BOOK DEPOSITORY LOOKS MUCH AS IT DID EIGHT YEARS AGO

Some bidders have even offered to buy sash from fateful window



Book Depository

But Mayhew turned down all the propositions and he bristles at any suggestion that he is a fast-buck operator.

"What I want," he says, "is a tasteful, meaningful museum and library." Some sections would contain his items of memorabilia. Others would store microfilms, books and newspapers about the assassination, providing facilities for what Mayhew calls "a continuing study of what happened here that day."

But Mayhew's plans do not impress State Sen. Mike McKool, who has been trying to get the state legislature to appropriate funds to reclaim the building from Mayhew.

Historical Value

"I approach it from the standpoint that this is of such tremendous historical value," says McKool, "that it ought to belong to the people of Texas. They can show more respect, more dignity, more good taste in owning the site, and they could do many things with it. [They could have one of the great museums of the world.]"

McKool's vision of the "great museum" doesn't differ markedly from Mayhew's, except that he says "people and organizations would be willing to make gifts to the State of Texas whereas they wouldn't to a private organization or one for profit. [The U.S. government has many items, such as the death weapons, that they would probably be willing to give to the state because this is the proper place for them.]"

Still another approach has been suggested by Raymond Nasher, the respected Dallas developer and cultural leader who heads the nine-member state commission set up to recommend how best the state could memorialize President Kennedy. At the moment, Nasher seems to favor tearing down the building.

Difficult Problem

"It is a very, very difficult problem to remodel property," he says. "It isn't in very good condition. What you'd have to do, basically, is gut the thing and keep the exterior as it is. My personal feeling is that the site is important, a national landmark.

["But if you could create something on the site which would be a working, living type of operation that was helping the state sociologically — in the name of the President — it would be much more meaningful than just keeping that red brick building as a landmark."]

Mayhew, meanwhile, is moving ahead with his own plans. He has hired a Dallas architectural firm to remodel the Depository and he is courting potential backers to help him move his Kennedy collection and set it up in the building. And in all likelihood, his museum will be a fact of life before his opponents can muster the political and legal muscle to stop him.

"They'll take it over my dead body," Mayhew says flatly. "I'll fight it with everything I have and I'll fight it all the way to the Supreme Court."

Kennedy Museum Plan

Dallas Upset Over Book

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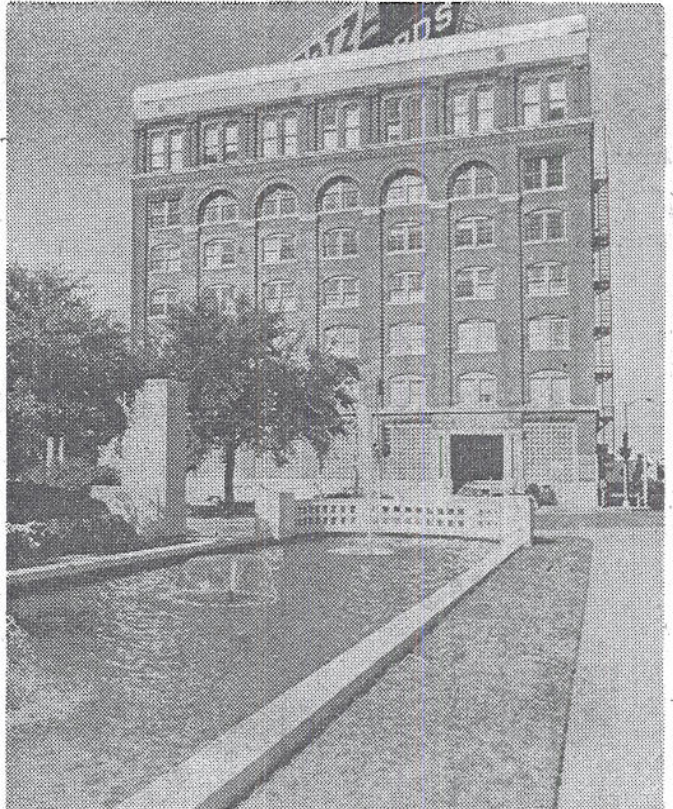
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LOOKS MUCH AS IT DID EIGHT YEARS AGO
Dallas book depository center of citywide controversy

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