



THE SIXTH FLOOR MUSEUM  
AT DEALEY PLAZA

**HISTORY OF 411 ELM  
THE TEXAS SCHOOL BOOK DEPOSITORY  
AND THE SIXTH FLOOR MUSEUM AT DEALEY PLAZA**

The building known as the former Texas School Book Depository dates back to 1898 when the land it stands on was sold to the Southern Rock Island Plow Company. That company built a five-story warehouse building that was destroyed by fire within a year of being completed. In 1901 the company re-built on the same site, constructing the seven-story building that still stands today.



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When city engineers moved the Trinity River away from downtown Dallas in 1928, the area in front of the Book Depository was open for development. With assistance from the Texas Highway Department and federal government under the Depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA), a park was created that would become known as the “Front Door of Dallas.” Completed in 1941, the park was named for George Bannerman Dealey, a prominent civic leader and publisher of *The Dallas Morning News*.

The building at 411 Elm Street bordered this new city park and was occupied by several commercial entities.

### The 1960s

In 1962, the building was leased to the Texas School Book Depository Company, a private firm that distributed textbooks to public schools in Texas. The company leased the first four floors to regional offices of publishers and used the fifth, sixth and seventh floors as warehouse space.



William Allen/Dallas Times Herald Collection,  
The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza

On November 22, 1963, the Texas School Book Depository became the primary crime scene in the investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Three spent shells, a sniper’s nest and a rifle were found on the sixth floor of the building. All official investigations concluded the shots that struck and killed President Kennedy and wounded Governor John Connally came from the building at 411 Elm Street known as the Texas School Book Depository.

Lee Harvey Oswald was an employee of the company when he was accused of shooting President John F. Kennedy from the southeast corner window of the sixth floor on that fateful day.

### The 1970s

The Texas School Book Depository Company remained at 411 Elm Street until 1970, when the company moved to a newer, bigger location in north Dallas. Unable to find tenants, the building was put up for sale. Nashville music promoter Aubrey Mayhew bought the building with plans to open a museum as a memorial to President Kennedy. Mayhew briefly ran a public information center in the lobby, but didn’t find financial support to make the museum possible.



Courtesy Aubrey Mayhew

On July 20, 1972, arson caused \$5,000 worth of damage to the building. Bank officials foreclosed on Mayhew and the building was again offered for sale. Despite calls to tear down the structure, the city of Dallas refused to issue a demolition permit.

In 1977, Dallas County voters approved a \$1.8 million bond package that included \$400,000 to purchase and restore the building to its 1901 appearance. County officials converted the building, except the sixth and seventh floors, into county office space. The sixth floor was closed to the public. Today, county administrative offices continue to occupy the five lower floors of the building, including the County Commissioners Courtroom on the ground floor.

### **The Beginning of a Museum**

In 1978, the Dallas County Commissioners Court consulted with the Dallas County Historical Commission and the Texas Historical Commission about the future of the sixth floor. The National Endowment for Humanities recommended that a cultural exhibit examining the assassination and legacy of President Kennedy be created on the sixth floor. In 1983, the private, non-profit Dallas County Historical Foundation was created to raise funds for a museum on the sixth floor and to oversee its operations.



In 1987, Dallas County Commissioners appropriated \$2.2 million to construct a Visitors Center and exterior elevators for public access. The Foundation raised the remaining \$1.3 million from private corporations, foundations and citizens, and on Presidents Day 1989, The Sixth Floor opened to the public.

By 1991, the Museum was drawing visitors from around the world. It quickly became apparent that the grief this country experienced at the tragic loss of President Kennedy was a response shared by many others.

The 1991 release of the controversial Oliver Stone film, *JFK*, introduced the Kennedy assassination to a new generation and dramatically increased Museum attendance.



Ron Rice/The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza

The Dallas County Administration Building is a registered Texas Historic Landmark and is included on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the West End Historical District. On November 22, 1993, the building and surrounding areas were designated by the National Park Service as the Dealey Plaza National Historic Landmark District.

### **The Museum's Collections**

The Sixth Floor did not begin as a collecting institution. Over the years, however, visitors to the Museum brought their own personal memories and collections and donated them to the Museum. Significant early donations included photographic negatives from the *Dallas Times Herald* newspaper and from photographer Tom Dillard of *The Dallas Morning News*, as well as documents from Parkland Memorial Hospital.

Today, the Museum's diverse, actively growing collection of approximately 40,000 items is one of the world's most important sources of artifacts, images, documents, audio and visual recordings,

and other documentation of the assassination of President Kennedy and the cultural legacy of that event. It is supplemented by collections focused on the social history of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Dallas both before and after the assassination, and on the history of Dealey Plaza, the Texas School

Book Depository, and Dallas' John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza. An Interpretation team handles curatorial, educational and preservation duties.

Another important part of the Museum's collection is the Oral History Project, which explores the history and culture of Dallas and the 1960s, and preserves personal recollections regarding the life and death of President John F. Kennedy. These candid, informal interviews offer insight into the Kennedy legacy and the local—and global—impact of his assassination.

Over 1,100 interviews have been added to the Oral History Collection since 1989. This diverse archive of firsthand accounts—from individuals of all ages and from all over the world—includes the recollections of assassination eyewitnesses, law enforcement officials, community leaders, White House officials, social rights activists, filmmakers and researchers, Kennedy family acquaintances, 1960s schoolchildren, Parkland Memorial Hospital personnel, Museum founders, and more than 100 members of the local, national and international news media. These unique, conversational recordings preserve valuable information that might otherwise be lost and provide future generations with a tangible link to the past.

### **The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza Today**

The Museum's Visitors Center was first renovated in 1997, doubling its original space to accommodate a Museum Store and provide a more comfortable environment for visitors. The space was again refurbished in summer 2013 featuring new ticketing and information service desks, an expanded main entry and queuing area, exterior canopy and group entrance, and enhanced guest amenities.

In 2002, the Museum transformed the seventh floor from under-utilized warehouse storage to a dynamic interpretive space. Evoking its original warehouse appearance, the seventh floor highlights architectural components of the 1901 building, such as vintage brick, glass, ceiling rafters and structural columns. The seventh floor gallery provides 5,500 square feet of flexible space for innovative installations, exhibitions, performances, educational activities, special events and public discourse.



In July 2010, the Museum opened the Reading Room—a reflective environment for anyone seeking information and understanding about the assassination and legacy of President John F. Kennedy. The Reading Room directly overlooks Dealey Plaza and provides researchers, educators and students with access to an extensive library which includes books, magazines and newspapers and covers topics ranging from Kennedy's life and legacy to conspiracy theories and

1960s pop culture. The Museum's media resources and collection of more than 1,100 oral history interviews are also accessible in the Reading Room. Items from the Museum's historical collection of approximately 45,000 documents and artifacts are available for viewing and research by advance request. Available by appointment and staffed by a librarian, the Reading Room offers unprecedented access to the one of the world's largest repositories of original photographs,

film and video footage, documents and artifacts related to the assassination of President Kennedy. Adjacent to the Reading Room and also available by appointment, the Media Room is specially equipped for audiovisual recordings, media interviews and other activities. The space contains acoustical blackout curtains and tailored lighting to accommodate most production requirements.



Also in July 2010, the Museum Store + Café opened across the street from the Museum in the historic 501 Elm building. Overlooking Dealey Plaza, the Store + Café gives visitors a more complete site experience to the National Historic Landmark and The Sixth Floor Museum exhibits. A selection of freshly brewed coffees and teas, smoothies, frozen yogurt, sandwiches and snacks can be found in the Café. Special gift items include newly published books and documentaries, jewelry, accessories, stationery, children's

items and distinctive pop culture products inspired by the 1960s. The Museum Store + Café is proud to showcase items created by innovative local artisans including Brad Oldham that honor the history of the buildings, Dealey Plaza and the spirit of Dallas and its people. All proceeds from the Museum Store + Café and from the store at 411 Elm Street support the preservation and educational goals of the Museum, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.



**Mission:** The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza chronicles the assassination and legacy of President John F. Kennedy; interprets the Dealey Plaza National Historic Landmark District and the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza; and presents contemporary culture within the context of presidential history.

**Vision:** To be an impartial, multi-generational destination and forum for exploring the memory and effects of the events surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy, through sharing his legacy and its impact on an ever-changing global society.

The Museum is open daily except Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. A general admission fee is charged. Audio guides of the permanent exhibition are included with admission and are available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, French and a family version (English only).

For more information, call 214.747.6660 or toll-free 1.888.485.4854 or visit [www.jfk.org](http://www.jfk.org).