



THE SIXTH FLOOR MUSEUM
AT DEALEY PLAZA

JOHN F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL

As a tribute to an extraordinary man, John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza was dedicated on June 24, 1970. In the years since, it has become an integral part of the city's urban landscape and cultural heritage. It is located on Market Street between Main and Commerce, one block east of Dealey Plaza, on land donated by Dallas County.

The Monument

Renowned American architect Phillip Johnson's design is a cenotaph, or "open tomb," that symbolizes the freedom of John F. Kennedy's spirit. The memorial, a square, roofless room, 30 feet high and 50 by 50 feet wide, sits in the middle of the block with narrow openings facing north and south. The walls consist of 72 white pre-cast concrete columns, most of which seem to float with no visible support 29 inches above the earth.



Courtesy Nathan Shands

Eight columns extend to the ground, acting as legs that seem to hold up the monument. Each column ends in a light fixture. At night, the lights create the illusion that the light itself supports the structure. These vertical elements, rigorously separated from each other and individually poured, seem held together by an unseen, invisible force. The architect once called it a "magnetic force" and suggested a connection to the charisma of the living John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The corners and "doors" of this roofless room are decorated with rows of concrete circles, or medallions, each identical and perfectly aligned. These decorations introduce the circular shape into the square architecture of the Kennedy Memorial.

Visitors enter the room after a short walk up a slight concrete incline embossed with concrete squares. Inside, visitors confront a low-hewn granite square in which the name John Fitzgerald Kennedy is carved. The letters are painted gold to capture the light from the white floating column walls and the pale concrete floor. These words are the only verbal messages in the empty room.

While aesthetically simple, the intent of the Kennedy Memorial was often misunderstood. A thoughtful piece of art, originally it had no interpretive features. The space was intended for reflection and remembrance. Yet, as more visitors came to Kennedy Memorial Plaza and to nearby Dealey Plaza, it became clear that an exhibit was needed to explore the topic of the Kennedy assassination. Upon that realization, The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza had its beginnings.

To commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Kennedy Memorial, the Museum launched a full-scale restoration project to preserve the memorial and its history. Philip Johnson, the original architect for the monument, guided the restoration process implemented by Phoenix I Restoration and Construction, Ltd. Numerous local suppliers donated the labor, materials, and equipment required to return the memorial to its original beauty. The Kennedy Memorial was rededicated June 24, 2000.

In 2010, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Kennedy Memorial, the Museum hosted a program with Frank Welch, FAIA, award-winning architect and author of *Philip Johnson & Texas* and Dale Sellers of Phoenix I Restoration & Construction, Ltd. The program was presented in partnership with the American Institute of Architects of Dallas and the Dallas Architecture Forum and moderated by Veletta Forsythe Lill, Executive Director of the Dallas Arts District.

The Museum coordinates annual cleaning and refurbishment of the memorial in cooperation with Phoenix I Restoration and Construction, Ltd.