

Story by Randy Mallory

Big D_{EAL}

Dealey Plaza, Fair Park, and Highland Park Village
put Dallas on the map.

Dallas came of age in the 1930s. Before the decade, it was a provincial cotton town. After, it possessed a self-confidence equal to its new nickname—Big D.

The change came, in part, from good luck: The 1930 East Texas Oil Boom made Dallas a petroleum powerhouse while other cities endured the Depression.

But more than luck, shrewd decisions brought growth, says Darwin Payne, journalism professor emeritus at Southern Methodist University and author of *Big D: Trials and Tribulations of an American Supercity in the 20th Century*.

First, the city rerouted the Trinity River, ending perennial downtown flooding. Then, leaders secured the 1936 Texas Centennial. As host for the Southwest's first world's fair, Dallas basked in the national limelight.

Three 1930s-era National Historic Landmarks embody the boldness and charm of the decade that put Big D on the map. Laurels for two of them rest on architectural prowess: Fair Park contains perhaps America's largest intact collection of Art Deco exposition buildings and art. And the Spanish Colonial

Revival-style Highland Park Village stands as a milepost in the evolution of the American shopping center.

The third landmark—Dealey Plaza—marks the final stage of the 1930s Trinity relocation project. But history books recall it for what happened there three decades later: the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a tragedy which thrust Dallas onto the world stage.

Dealey Plaza: Shrine to a President

When the news came on November 22, 1963, that Pres. Kennedy was shot, the world was galvanized in shock and loss for what might have been.

Those feelings rush back on a visit to the assassination site. People from around the globe pilgrimage to Dealey Plaza Historic District to relive that watershed event. Some come to see for themselves if Lee Harvey Oswald alone could have killed Kennedy? Most come to celebrate a fallen hero and his times.

Nearly a half-million visitors pay homage annually at the landmark's mecca, the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza. Opened in 1989, it has become the most-visited historic site in North Texas.

The 9,000-square-foot museum is on the same floor of the former Texas School Book Depository (now the Dallas County Administration Building) where Oswald fired shots. Eight detailed exhibits (400 historic photos and various artifacts) and several documentary films chronicle JFK's life, death, and legacy. Throughout the former warehouse, dramatic radio and television recordings retell the tragic events as visitors listen, hushed and respectful.

The floor's south-facing windows overlook the park-like plaza and the three streets which cross it: Commerce, Main, and Elm, the latter being the route of the presidential motorcade.

People linger by the windows, noting the triple underpass through which a wounded Kennedy raced down Elm toward Parkland Hospital. They gaze through protective glass at boxes stacked in the southeast corner, a re-creation of Oswald's "sniper's nest." A replica of the box on which he rested his rifle sits on the window ledge, concealing an Internet camera broadcasting live images from the notorious perch (www.earthcam.com/jfk).

Down at ground level, people stroll across the plaza's lawns and invariably point to the infamous grassy knoll, suspected site of a second assassin. Some stand where Abraham Zapruder shot his home movie, the only complete film record of the murder. (Zapruder's camera is displayed in the Sixth Floor Museum, as is the camera with which Orville Nix photographed the reverse angle from Zapruder's film, showing the grassy knoll).

Along Elm, near where Kennedy was hit, a 1993 plaque designates the place as a National Historic Landmark.

The landmark district encompasses a several-square-block area, little changed since 1963, centered around Dealey Plaza. Built in 1934-40 as the city's western vehicular gateway, the three-acre plaza was named for George B. Dealey, *Dallas Morning News* publisher and kingpin of the Trinity relocation crusade. A 12-foot bronze statue of Dealey stands alongside curved concrete Art Deco colonnades and twin reflecting pools. On the plaza's west side (where

the Trinity once flowed), the triple underpass and railroad bridge also bears streamlined Art Deco styling. So do two curved, arbor-like pergolas resting on the plaza's two grassy knolls.

Next to the plaza rise two historic buildings—the 1891 Richardsonian Romanesque "Old Red" County Courthouse (which houses a new Dallas visitors center) and the 1913 Renaissance Revival Dallas Criminal Courts Building. Around the corner, in County Historical Park, sits a replica of the log cabin which city founder John Neely Bryan built here in 1841.

Across from Bryan's cabin, the Kennedy Memorial stands in stark contrast. Built in 1970 with donations from Dallas citizens, the modernistic memorial was designed by New York architect Philip Johnson as a cenotaph or empty tomb. Thirty-foot-high concrete walls seem to float on air, surrounding a 50-by-50-foot open space. Inside rests only a dark granite slab with Kennedy's name engraved in gold.

Recently restored, the memorial was rededicated last year on its 30th anniversary. On the occasion, Johnson called his design "devoid of expression or moralizing, but monumental in its empty presence. It was essential to me that whatever I did, it would be left to the viewers to find their own meaning."

Finding meaning—that's the essence of a visit to Dealey Plaza Historic District.

Fair Park: Celebrating Texas History

During the 1930s, six U.S. cities hosted world's fairs. These international expositions exposed attendees to futuristic architecture and, through commercial exhibits, the latest in lifestyles.

America's great exposition grounds are gone ...save one. In Dallas, most major structures of the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition in Fair Park survive. During the past two decades, the city has—to the tune of \$150 million—restored much of the exposition's art and architecture.

Dallas wasn't the obvious choice to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Texas' independence from Mexico. But the city outbid more-historic competitors, Houston and San Antonio. It offered Fair Park (venue since 1886 of the state fair) and added nearly \$8 million of the fair's \$25 million cost. (Another contender, Fort Worth, held its own competing Frontier Centennial Exposition in 1936.)

Big D's investment paid off. Some six million people saw the exposition's exhibits and entertainment, affording Dallas priceless attention. The fair lasted six months, then reopened four months in 1937 as the Greater Texas and Pan American Exposition.

Chief Centennial architect, Dallasite George L. Dahl, directed the colossal project, coordinating the work of 130 architects, engineers, and artists. He redesigned existing Fair Park structures, blending them with new buildings into a unified style he called "Texanic." The bold, Art Deco look symbolized, as Dahl described it, "the color, romance and grandeur that had marked the development of Texas and the great Southwest."

An estimated seven million visitors sample that grandeur annually at eight museums and more than 100 events at the 277-acre entertainment and recreation complex. (See *When...Where...How* on page XX for details.)

Fair Park's pastoral portion offers shaded walkways around the Dallas Museum of Natural History and the Science Place & IMAX Theater, both facing a large fountained lagoon. Nearby, a planetarium, aquarium, and horticulture center occupy original exposition buildings within the shadow of the 212-foot *Texas Star*. This gigantic Ferris wheel, the continent's tallest, pinpoints the midway at Fair Park's biggest event, the annual State Fair of Texas (Sept. 28-Oct. 21, 2001).

A more formal section showcases Fair Park's three architectural icons (the Esplanade, Hall of State, and Tower Building), says Willis Winters, assistant director of the Dallas Park & Recreation Department. There, streamlined structures, colorful murals, and monumental statuary portray the history, wildlife, and development of the Lone Star State.

The Esplanade is a 700-foot-long promenade along a reflecting pool and fountains (filled during the State Fair and some major events). Beside the pool are low exhibition buildings from which jut two-story-tall heroic figures representing the six nations that ruled Texas.

At the head of the Esplanade lies the Hall of State, showpiece of the 1936 Centennial. Out front, framed by fluted columns and blue mosaic tiles, is the *Tejas Warrior*, a bronze and gold-leaf statue of a Native American and upraised bow without arrow, symbolizing peace.

Inside the Hall of State, dramatic art and architecture overwhelm you. Six bronze statues by Pompeo Coppini depict heroes of the Texas Revolution. Murals and frescos in four large rooms characterize the people and places of Texas' regions—north, south, east, and west. A four-story-tall space called The Great Hall features a hand-stenciled ceiling in Aztec motif. The marble floor sports mosaic tile wildlife. Wall-sized murals capture historical and cultural highlights. And at the end of the hall stands an immense gold-leaf medallion of the five-pointed Texas star.

Gold leaf also glistens next door on the recently-refurbished Tower Building. Gilded flutes and a gilded, stylized eagle decorate the 179-foot-high triangular tower. Bas-relief sculptures retell Texas history on the building below. At night, colored lights bathe the building and tower in changing colors, with 3,000 combinations possible from a computer-controlled lighting system.

As part of an ongoing effort, the city also refurbished the lighting system at Fair Park's band shell. During performances at the outdoor venue, colored lights turn the stage's semi-circular concrete arches into a multi-colored rainbow.

In 1986, appropriately the same year of the Texas Sesquicentennial, Fair Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and became a National Historic Landmark.

Highland Park Shopping Village: Swanky Shopping

Enveloped by Dallas' metroplex lies a "metro-posh," a tiny incorporated island of opulence known as Highland Park. The luxury lifestyle magazine, *Robb Report*, recently ranked this swank 2.3 square-mile city of 8,900 as Texas' most

affluent place (sixth nationwide). Apropos, Highland Park's homegrown shopping center, Highland Park Village, boasts international high-style heavyweights such as Calvin Klein, Prada, Polo/Ralph Lauren, Hermes, Escada, and Ultimo.

What's more, this vaunted village of vogue rates as one of America's first and most historically significant shopping centers.

Replete with red terra cotta roofs, white stucco walls, Plateresque and Churigueresque ornamentation, lush plantings, arched doors and windows, and overhanging balconies, the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture lends a distinctly European flair.

But looks aren't all that led the National Park Service last year to name Highland Park Village a National Historic Landmark.

Enclosing 10 acres almost as if a walled community, the center's shops face away from the street and onto a plaza-like interior with parking, sidewalks, and open-air sitting areas. Its off-street parking, unheard-of in the 1930s, served as a prototype for suburban shopping centers to come. Highland Park Village attracted early retail innovators—including Hunt Grocery, Skillern & Sons Drugs, and Sanger Brothers—and, by pulling business away from downtown, promoted the suburbanization of Dallas.

In 1907, decades before widespread suburbia, far-sighted entrepreneur John S. Armstrong opened an exclusive neighborhood called Highland Park. He and two sons-in-law, Hugh Prather and Edgar Flippen, hired Wilbur David Cook (who had designed Beverly Hills, California) to lay out their development.

By the mid-1920s, the developers wanted to add a unique shopping center, one that would serve as a town square. Prather hired Dallas architect James Cheek of Fooshee & Cheek to do the job. For architectural inspiration, Prather and Cheek traveled to Barcelona and Seville, Spain, as well as Mexico, California, and South Texas.

Built largely from 1931-1941, the center thrived, then faltered. In 1976, the current owner, Henry S. Miller Interests, bought the center and restored it to its original state. In fact, only one pre-World War II shopping complex in the nation (Market Square in Lake Forest, Illinois) rivals the Village's pristine, preserved condition, according to the National Park Service.

Then as now, Highland Park Village, with 80-plus tenants, serves as the chic shopping and social center of the community.

At daybreak, moms headed to work duck into Tom Thumb grocery for a few items, kids in tow dressed in smart private school uniforms. Stay-at-home moms push babies in fancy buggies. Thirty-somethings jog by in skintight spandex. At spacious Starbucks, impeccably dressed executives sweep through, cell phones at ready, for double-lattés to go. Over at the Village Barber Shop, a freshly-coiffed senior citizen backs his vintage Cadillac from a shady parking spot.

Lunch and dinner patrons pack upscale eateries—such as Café Pacifica, Patrizio, Mi Cocina, and Café Highland Park—some featuring Old World-style outdoor patios.

Get your nails done and buy a diamond ring. Try out a best-selling book and try on a custom-tailored suit. Enjoy an aromatherapy facial and examine an 18th-century Louis XVI chair. Repair your shoes and repair to trendy clothiers and accessory boutiques...all at Highland Park Village.

The village's visual focus remains the Village Theater, now operated by Regent Entertainment. A domed three-story stucco tower rises from the ornate structure, opened in 1935 as one of Texas' earliest suburban movie theaters. It continues to show first-run films and sports an Italian ice cream and sherbet shop, Paciugo, on the ground floor.

Fulfilling its role as town square, Highland Park Village hosts community events—including a charity wine and food festival (Sept. 29, 2001) and a Christmas Tree Lighting (Nov. 23, 2001).

As the 20th century recedes in our memories, we look for places and events that remain much as they were. In Dallas, three National Historic Landmarks—Dealey Plaza, Fair Park, and Highland Park Village—hold tenaciously to their historical moorings. As if tall trees or high peaks along a wilderness trail, these landmarks stay within sight. And by doing so, they serve as valuable reference points between where we've been and where we're going.