Behind the Scenes: Covering the JFK Assassination by Darwin Payne (review)

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snapshots fit closely within the chronicle. Others feature the projects the DeVitt sisters' largesse brought to Lubbock and other parts of the South Plains through their CH Foundation and The Helen Jones Foundation, Inc.

Despite the book's "coffee table" feel, Sosebee's account proves captivating and "has everything television or movie producers and directors might want" (p. 221). The story often takes on a gossipy, soap-opera feel in describing and dissecting the often-dysfunctional family and company dynamics that unfolded over a century. There is the long-distance relationship that David and Florence DeVitt carried on throughout most of their marriage, the tragic deaths of the couple's two sons, Christine's indecision and obstinance, and there is Helen's colon. Readers may find much to dislike about the DeVitt family, but they will see much to admire, too, not the least of which are the gifts for which they are responsible. While acknowledging Christine's sometimes abrasive personality, at her death many remembered her quiet help and generosity to Mallet hands and to nurses and others who looked after her in later years. At this book's core is a celebration of "one of the most notable philanthropic funds in Texas history" (p. 107).

Christine chartered the CH Foundation in 1969. Her generosity might have been partially motivated by her hatred for paying taxes. By 1950, primarily from oil revenue, DeVitt wealth had grown to heights the sisters never imagined. By 1969, Christine had already donated millions to Lubbock's Methodist Hospital and to Texas Tech University. Too numerous to mention here are the many other beneficiaries of the DeVitt fortune. Since 1984, the sisters' foundations have given more than $360 million to colleges and universities, public and private schools, museums, libraries, and human and health services groups – mostly in Texas. While Sosebee's narrative is ostensibly a ranch history, the true power of this book is in publicizing the legacy left by the DeVitt sisters through the continuing impact of their philanthropic efforts.

The Colony, TX Michael M. Miller

Behind the Scenes: Covering the JFK Assassination. By Darwin Payne. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2023. Pp. 311. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

There's more to this Dallas historian's recent book than its subtitle suggests. Sure, it is a working newsman's recounting of what he observed and wrote during the momentous weekend of November 22–25, 1963, in Dallas, an account based on his reporting notes at the time and a thirty-year-old unpublished manuscript of his involvement in the events. But there's more.

Behind the Scenes—Covering the JFK Assassination is what author Darwin Payne calls a "memoir/history" (p. vii) in the preface. He describes that fateful assassination weekend in Dallas as he lived it, writing with a who-what-when-where-why-how matter-of-factness. Threaded throughout is the story of his own family journey

to the Dallas of 1963. Payne also aims to give readers "new perspectives" (p. ix) on Pres. John F. Kennedy's assassination. He places the killing into a historical context of demographic, social, and political changes in Dallas.

Behind the Scenes opens with a description of the five presidential visits to Dallas prior to Kennedy's. Sizeable crowds greeted each of the eminent visitors, and Dallas was at its welcoming best until the final wave goodbye, a far cry from the sixth presidential visit in 1963.

Payne's road to journalism wound through the University of Texas, the *Fort Worth Press*, and, by early 1963, to the *Dallas Times Herald*. He name-checks a few of his illustrious colleagues of the time while providing some anecdotes illustrating the unrelenting pressures of meeting multi-edition deadlines every day. He arrived in a Dallas that was earning the moniker of "City of Hate."

In a chilling chapter that calls to mind the acrid atmosphere of 2024, Payne describes Dallas's political and social environment in the months preceding November 1963. A particularly virulent strain of "Ultra-Republican Conservatism was becoming dominant in Dallas at the time," Payne observes (p. 47). Billboards calling for the impeachment of the Supreme Court chief justice overlooked the busiest Dallas streets; ultra-right crusader Gen. Edwin A. Walker made his home in the city and recruited for the John Birch Society. Dan Smoot, a proto-Alex Jones, broadcast daily from there, while oil millionaire H. L. Hunt flooded the mails with conservative political tracts. Prominent Dallas clergymen and educators echoed the calls for rooting alleged communists out of government, ending internationalism, removing works by socialist artists from public display, dismantling the United Nations, segregating public schools, and banning fluoridation of drinking water.

The extremism spurred violence. Vice President and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson were mobbed and spat upon as they left a luncheon meeting at the Adolphus Hotel. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson was struck by signs outside Dallas Memorial Auditorium following a speech. Law enforcement could not (or would not) deter such incidents. President Kennedy—hated by the extremists for his liberalism, Catholicism, and internationalism—arrived in Dallas just a month after the Stevenson incident.

New to the *Times Herald*, Payne did not draw a prime reporting assignment on the day of Kennedy's visit. However, he managed to be in locations that have received less attention from other authors. He worked his way onto the sixth floor of the Texas Schoolbook Depository shortly after Lee Harvey Oswald vacated the building. Payne sat in Abraham Zapruder's office as the weeping businessman tried to process what he had just seen through the viewfinder of his movie camera. Soon after Oswald's arrest, the reporter raced to the assassin's rooming house in Oak Cliff, where he interviewed other boarders there. Payne drew late-night shifts at Dallas police headquarters and the crowded hallways outside the Homicide Division, a scene he refers to as "jungle journalism" (p. 155).

"Dallas's previously positive image had virtually disappeared" in the wake

of the assassination, Payne writes in his final chapter (p. 250). Prominent individuals denied there was something abroad in the city that brought about the killing of a president. But most people knew differently. Piecemeal changes were implemented in the following years, but the assassination still haunts. Payne expresses a hope that readers of *Behind the Scenes* will gain new perspectives on that horrifying weekend, the months that preceded it, and the years that followed. They will.

Dallas, TX Rusty Williams

Brackenridge: San Antonio's Acclaimed Urban Park. By Lewis F. Fisher. (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, Maverick Books, 2022. Pp. 208. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

Brackenridge Park as an urban cultural landmark began with the donation of 200 acres to the city of San Antonio by George W. Brackenridge in 1899, but those who look closely can see the evidence of many centuries of human interaction with the site. Author Lewis W. Fisher loves San Antonio, and his similar affection for Brackenridge Park is evident and well deserved. A series of park commissioners have left their legacies, adding to the experiences modern visitors enjoy, including a zoo and a Japanese tea garden, and Fisher discusses all of these. Water first lured humans to the place, with voluminous springs creating the San Antonio River, and it remains a central feature of the park. Despite this unifying feature, however, Brackenridge Park is a patchwork quilt of landscapes with ill-defined borders. Some San Antonians have grumbled about this, but Fisher sees it as reflective of the city's borderland blend of many cultures, creating a hybrid personality that matches the park's quirky character.

The first people to enjoy the springs at what would become Brackenridge Park arrived about 12,000 years ago. Modern excavations have also uncovered evidence of everything from Spanish *acequias* to a Civil-war-era tannery, an early nursery that was one of the largest in the state, two military camps from the Spanish-American War, a track for racing horses, and many other relics of human activity. Little of that is evident to those who wander the beautiful trails today, or enjoy the zoo and tea garden, but Fisher tells all the tales in impressing upon readers how important this site was in the development of the city. After all, the first public golf course in Texas was laid out within Brackenridge Park, and later one of the finest art museums in the state, the Witte, stood on park lands. The story is not without conflict—the Japanese Tea Garden became Chinese during World War II, when the family that had helped develop it lost their home. But there is also triumph, as Gutzon Borglum created several works in the studio he occupied in the old pump house at Brackenridge Park, including the Texas Trail Drivers Monument at the Witte Memorial Museum and early models for Mount Rushmore. Other artists of note whose work stands in Brackenridge Park are Pompeo Coppini and Dionicio Rodriguez.