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In common usage “history” simply means the past. To historians it means to search for meaning either of the past or in the past. The word comes from an old Greek word, historien, which means “to inquire.” History then is inquiry into questions that have meaning for us, using past events as subject matter. It involves gathering information about those questions and attempting to formulate meaningful answers. “Why did Europeans come to North America?” “What was the origin and program of the Democratic Party?” These are good examples. Other disciplines are similar; biology, for example, is inquiry using the biological world as subject matter.

The findings of any inquiry will depend on the questions that are asked and the “research” method used. They will also depend on the perspective (or point of view) used by the investigator. For example try looking at the room you are in from opposite entrances - everything is now seen from a different angle and it looks different. That is analogous to using a viewpoint based on your nationality, sex or gender, economic status, or religious affiliation.

Inquiry, of any kind, will be shaped by the information available. There is so much information available to us that we cannot ever look at all of it, and yet there is too little (it may have been lost or never even recorded) so that we are always looking at a partial record of the past. We make choices - choices based on the amount of information, on whether we judge the information accurate or not, and the amount of time that we have to do research. History is based on facts known at the time of writing, it follows rules of logic and reason, but it is ultimately subjective, based on the perspectives and philosophy and values of the historian. Each person and each generation sees new and surprising meanings. Hence, all history is “revision.”

Saying that all history is revision is not only saying that we make choices, but also that we qualify what we were taught, especially in topics that we research ourselves and that our teachers have researched. We engage in “revision” of what we were given.

These thoughts give us an understanding of history that it is both objective (based on fact) but also subjective (based on perspective and limited information). Good history is not “opinion,” it is more accurately labeled “interpretation,” “conclusion,” “judgment,” or “evaluation.” “Opinion” implies a looseness of both fact and reasoning that the other terms do not. (hint: please don’t tell me your opinions, tell me your interpretations, etc.)

Part of historical interpretation is periodizing - identifying blocks of time by some common characteristics. For example the Colonial Period, from the beginnings (“beginnings” - that in itself is an interesting issue of definition) to 1763. Events happen every day, but we usually don’t see their importance until later when we have gained the perspective that time gives us - when we can see how widely separated events have influenced each other.
There are “root” questions that form the basis of historical study. Here are some of them, but there are many more.

- Why are things the way they are now? or, How did things get this way?
- What happened in the past? Why?
- What was it like to live then (during any time period)?
- What kinds of historical events are most significant? Why?
- How can I learn what happened in the past (sources, records)? How do I reconcile conflicting accounts?
- How can we best understand actions in the past?
- How does study of the past help me understand present situations and problems?
- To understand this present-day problem, what sort of historical background do I need, and how can I find and assess it?
- Is there progress? or, Do things get worse? Do they always stay the same?
- Do people shape their times or do the times shape people?

All of this addresses the issue of historical significance, which is one of the three primary goals of the study of history. Significance, or importance, in many ways is the same as “causes and consequences.” It is partly “pulling” events together to “show” the meaning of something, or what is symbolizes. For example the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 shows us the importance of transportation in the development of the US. Significance is also partly the results of something. Again, for example, the American Civil War is the result of the inability of Americans to solve the issue of slavery peacefully.

“Presentism” is the judging of the past in today’s terms. If the lesson of history is judgment which we learn that by what others have done and experienced in the past, then we have to guard against the natural tendency to write history in terms of what the issues of today are. Not really guard against, but to be careful that those issues do not distort how we evaluate the past (how we write/do “history”).

A course consists of three parts: the instructor, the textual material, and the student. Of those three the most important is the student. I am your guide, and the written material is the collection of facts and viewpoints. When you see their meaning you are “making” history.

As you read and reflect and write, when questions and confusion come up, ask me. Remember that the only dumb question is the one not asked. (that is a pun, you know)

Does History Repeat Itself?

Enough students and others have said to me over the years that history repeats itself, that I thought that I should address that concept. The idea comes from what seems to be a normal human desire to understand causation - why do things happen? It is also the misquotation of George Santayana (who really wrote): “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness …. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to fulfill it.” “Fulfill” is not same as “repeat.”

If history (or the past) truly repeated itself, then we would not be able to make any real decisions and hence have no responsibility for any of our actions. We would be mere automatons doing the same thing over and over. Circles.
In looking at the details of past events, I do not see any kind of events recurring exactly. What I do see is that certain types of situations are illustrated by humans acting in similar ways. This is probably because individual people tend to respond to similar situations in similar ways. We are after all, human and there is probably some consistency in “human nature.” Or perhaps in basic human psychology. We all want food and shelter and love. There things of which we are afraid. Such is the connection between psychology and history - see Freud, Maslow, and others.

The view that history repeats itself is not usable
Evaluating and Ranking US Presidents

William Morris, Ph.D.,  
Henry Chair of History, Midland College

Presidents are fun. Whether we are collecting trivia (“Do you know which presidents were married while in office?”) or whether we are evaluating them seriously (How do you compare Ronald Reagan and Franklin Roosevelt?), evaluating US Presidents is something in which both professional historians and lay persons can engage. After all, giving presidents a position on a hypothetical football team cannot be too serious even if the evaluation was written by an eminent historian such as Stephen Ambrose.1

Evaluating them is great fun, leading to lots of enjoyable conversation and argument. Part of the fun is to realize that no president had facial hair before Abraham Lincoln (who actually grew his beard after he got into office) and no president or presidential candidate after Charles Evans Hughes (in 1916) has had facial hair except for Thomas Dewey who was defeated in 1944 and 1948. And according to some, Richard Nixon lost the television debates, and the 1960 election, because he needed a shave.

Everyone has gotten into the debate, including psychologists, who classified all presidents and candidates according to personality tests.2

I have always been interested in our presidents. From my childhood I have looked at the group of men who have held the highest elective office in the United States as examples of those who have risen above the rest of us to assume national leadership and power.

To me “power” is the influence someone has over the actions and ideas of others. President Truman did not drop the atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, but he did issue the orders; others actually carried out the act of dropping the bombs. They could have refused, but did not. So obviously Truman “somehow” influenced them.

It is obvious to me that their years in office are a very direct way to study the history of the United States, so I ask my students to know some basic facts about our presidents.

Presidential Fact Sheet

In the US we have a presidential election every four years regardless of what is happening in the country - be it war or depression or scandal. Presidents reflect and influence the nation’s development. So ... presidential administrations are a good way to study US history. Here is a form that can be used for each president. This is for your own use it is not to be turned in. You do not need to do research beyond the assigned readings.

Name of president:  
Political Party:  
Dates in office: (remember that elections are in years divisible by four, but that the new president does not take office until the year following)  
How he gained the office of president:  
Vice President:  
Significant Cabinet members and other officials/advisors:  
Important events, trends, etc. during the president’s term in office:  
Evaluation: (be sure to have factual reasons)  
Ranking: (great, near great, average, below average, failure):
This is a study guide rather than an assignment to be filled out and turned in (although if students had to turn the forms in that might increase the number of those actually learning about them). From there it is a simple step for students to rank them. For years I kept statistics on student responses. From these rankings I gained the understanding that students expressed their individual opinions and prejudices and their own lifetimes. In other words, they tended to rate those presidents that had been in office during their lives higher than those in the more “remote” past. I also learned that, generally, most of us evaluate our leaders according to our own values; after all, even an objective look at accomplishments is ultimately judged according to what we consider to be “good” or “bad.” President Carter appointed more minorities and women to federal judgeships than did those who came before him or did his successors. But was that a positive action or a negative? Another example would be that in the PATCO case, President Reagan’s actions can be either applauded or criticized according to whether or not individuals consider disciplining the union to be good or bad. Evaluating George Washington depends on how his creation of the details of the presidency is viewed.

In 1977, in The Book of Lists, I found a public opinion survey that listed the Top Ten Presidents. Such surveys appear every election year and – seemingly - more often, with rankings and commentaries about presidents. Currently I am teaching a class for senior citizens on the American Presidents. I began several years ago with the Constitution and have worked my way, using videos and lectures, to Ronald Reagan.

This approach may be one dimensional, and an illustration of the “great man” theory of history of Lord Trevelyan, but it seems to me to be a true reflection of the times in which these men lived.

For example, the “gray men” of the late 19th century (they all had gray beards - they really didn’t, but it seems as if they did – or should have) were exactly what the voters of the time wanted – managers and caretakers rather than actors and initiators. This is the danger of what I called “presentism” in another place. Lewis Gould wrote a book on the subject of the modern American presidency in which he implied that Theodore Roosevelt was somehow correct in being more active than presidents before him and that earlier presidents were wrong in being more passive (with the possible exception of William McKinley). I’m not sure that I agree - “best” and “worst” is a question of the values of the time - and I’m not sure that Gould meant to criticize the presidents before 1900, but I am sure that many of his readers read it that way.

Most of the discussion of the US presidents is in Article II of the Constitution and other than a reference to “executive power” most of the space in that part of the Constitution is taken up with the qualifications for holding office and the method of election. There is a brief section on the “powers” of the president and a section telling what the president will do – from my view the most important being that he will be sure “that the laws be faithfully executed.” There is another brief mention of presidents in other amendments, again about the method of election and the term in office. These are not many specific references for an office that has become as powerful as this one. The scarcity of the constitutional references provides for both executive flexibility and the abuse of power.

The executive power is usually defined as enforcing the laws passed by the legislative branch and as interpreted by the US Supreme Court, but once a law has been passed or interpreted presidents may ignore it. For example, Andrew Jackson did not enforce the Court’s decision concerning the Cherokees. Modern presidents (at least most of them since 1900) are less passive and more active than those in the nineteenth century. The executive power came to have new meaning after Franklin Roosevelt who asserted a true presidential executive power.
The powers of government and of the president were written down to avoid the problem of monarchical interpretation that existed under the British constitution of the mid 1700s and to limit the power of our elected “king.”

Presidents fill other roles as well. Two are in the Constitution - first is chief of state – the symbolic representative of the nation; second is head of government, which is the executive power. Other roles have developed over the years out of implications in the Constitution – such roles as chief administrator, legislative leader, and director of the economy. Party leader (head of a political party) is a role that has grown out of the American political experience. In other words, the public’s expectations of the powers and duties of presidents change with different times.

All presidents are chosen for domestic reasons, but all of them have had to deal with foreign affairs. This role was understood for decades, but was clarified by the US Supreme Court in the Curtiss-Wright Cases of the 1930s.

Public opinion polls have given us the character traits that voters desire in presidents – honesty, concern for people, experience, leadership, and intelligence. In most polls, “honesty and integrity” are the most highly rated, but I have compiled a list of presidential abilities of my own, ignoring “honesty and integrity” for as one of my colleagues said, she did not care about Clinton’s sexual peccadillos, she cared about the value of her retirement fund.

• First is intelligence, the ability to master an enormous number of details about any subject;
• Second is to pick good staff people who can fill in the details of individuals and issues that the president does not know himself. President must ask themselves do my advisers see how all the pieces fit? Doris Kerns-Goodwin called it preparing a “mosaic” – leading to a policy of consensus. Such actions allow the public to identify with the president and to admire him. With this type of information, presidents can speak to individuals and to groups in specifics and not with vagueness, or in reference to abstract social classes;
• Third, presidents must have a national rather than a class viewpoint. He is, after all, the president of “all the people;”
• Fourth, is the ability to accomplish his agenda. Today “compromise” is a dirty word, but I do not think that it should be. Even so, I think that for the benefit of our nation, our goal, and the goal of any president, should be ideas, values, and principles rather than merely piece-meal benefits.

So, let’s talk about the rankings:
### The Best – the Top Ten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>'62 poll</th>
<th>'82 poll (49 historians)</th>
<th>'95 poll</th>
<th>'96 poll (168 historians)</th>
<th>'04 Wall Street Journal</th>
<th>MC history faculty</th>
<th>Morris (done before writing the article)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>Truman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>Truman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>Polk</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>LBJ</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>Truman</td>
<td>T Roosevelt</td>
<td>Truman</td>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Polk</td>
<td>Truman</td>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>Truman</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Truman</td>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Truman</td>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>John Adams</td>
<td>McKinley</td>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>John Adams</td>
<td>Polk</td>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>Nixon/LBJ (together they make one really good president) or Polk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Worst – the bottom five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>+4</th>
<th>Coolidge</th>
<th>A. Johnson</th>
<th>Pierce</th>
<th>A. Johnson</th>
<th>Filmore</th>
<th>Hoover</th>
<th>J. Q. Adams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+3</td>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>Nixon</td>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>A. Johnson</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>A. Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+2</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Harding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>A. Johnson</td>
<td>Hoover</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Coolidge</td>
<td>Pierce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottom</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Nixon</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>A. Johnson</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rest are lost in the great, gray middle – largely forgotten. Evaluation criteria (before writing this article):

- Integrity/honesty
- Leadership – established goals and achieved them, plus the quality of the goals – includes response to crisis (es)
- Responsible to the people – after all this is sort of a democracy

Not rated: WH Harrison, Garfield, or any since 1988 (too brief or too recent for me to evaluate “objectively.”)

To repeat myself, I really cannot consider a president as “great” unless he faced what Theodore Roosevelt called a “great moment” - a crisis - and faced it well.
George Washington faced the crisis of the beginnings and nature of the United States - would it survive as an independent nation or fall on the “ash-heap of history?” Washington established the ways presidents are addressed and act. He stayed above the arguments that led to the formation of the first political parties, but did establish the basic questions of our national existence and the philosophical basis of our public dialog.

Abraham Lincoln led part of the nation in the great war that, to use his words, “would determine whether or not a government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish from this earth.” With these words he spoke to the very survival of the US and democracy – a true crisis, because in 1863 the very survival of the United States was a close and unsure thing.

Franklin Roosevelt was president during the two greatest crises of the 20th century – the Depression of the 1930s and World War II in the early 1940s. Each crisis threatened to destroy the US – one by economic forces and the other by the military might of other nations. He faced them both, luckily not at the same time.

Each one of these men cast a long shadow that subsequent presidents either withdrew into or tried to get away from. “What would Washington (or Lincoln or FDR) do?”

Contrast those crises with those faced by the presidents called “near great:” Theodore Roosevelt who fought with Big Businesses over their behavior. Thomas Jefferson, who left the crisis with England to his successor – Jefferson wrote Great Words in the Declaration of Independence, but produced less than great actions as president (or so I see them). As sort of a footnote, Jefferson’s grave-stone has an epitaph that he wrote that does not even mention that he was president. Andrew Jackson had crises with the Senate and with the Supreme Court. Polk went to war with Mexico, but may have been able to avoid it. Woodrow Wilson’s stubbornness created a crisis with the Senate and the conditions for a future world war. Harry Truman may have contributed to the tensions with the Soviet Union. Reagan is beloved by some and hated by others.

Other presidents might have done better than Washington, Lincoln, or FDR … or as well … but they didn’t, the Greats did.

Then there were those who could not solve crises and left them for others. Buchanan, Nixon, Carter, and the second Bush come to mind. In 1962, Richard Nixon wrote about his Six Crises but in books after his resignation ignored his largest one, the constitutional crisis of Watergate.

Sometimes the man makes the events and sometimes the events make the man.

Saying that a president cannot be considered “great” without a crisis (what Theodore Roosevelt called “great moments”) is not original with me; I have several articles and newspaper stories that make this point with respect to presidents. For example I have an op-ed piece from Time magazine of February 1997, written by Hugh Sidney entitled “The Curse of Good Times” that compares Bill Clinton and Rutherford B. Hayes. Sidney’s conclusion was that regardless of Clinton’s accomplishments, he, like Hayes, would never be in the first rank of presidents because he was in office during “good” times (this was of course before Clinton’s impeachment).

Sometimes I think that we talk as if time should stop, that change should no longer occur. We seem to have the idea that what worked at one time should be true for all times; that what worked in the 1930s should work for ever; that any system that was set up in the past should work for ever. But the study of history should tell us that conditions and the desired characteristics of individuals change with time. So the characteristics that we use to evaluate presidents should change as well. What we see as the strong points of Washington, Lincoln, and FDR today may (should?) be different than they were when these men left office and in the years afterward. For this I refer you to the chart of evaluations that I earlier had passed
out. What I mean is that the ranking of individual presidents rise and fall with the times; look at each ranking and think about what was happening at the time the ranking was done.

Even so, there is a great similarity of rankings at all times and by both liberals and conservatives. A poll (complete with a mathematical ranking system) done by the Wall Street Journal and with an introduction to the book by William Bennett produced the same results as the others (which may have been more “liberal”), except for the inclusion of Ronald Reagan as a “near great.”

And evaluations done by individual historians change over time. For example Joan Hoff wrote an interesting reconsideration of Richard Nixon. She began her research from an anti-Nixon perspective, but ended with a more positive view, in fact reversing the usual praise for his foreign policy success, to praise for his domestic accomplishments – pushing desegregation of Southern schools, establishing goals for minority hiring by federal contractors, increasing budgets for civil rights agencies, money for women’s groups, bold attempts at welfare reform, and direct cash payments to low income workers. She did however remain critical of the invasion of Cambodia.

The great number of presidents never got the chance to be Great – they were Average. I don’t have the inclination to discuss them, and I don’t want to talk about the Failures – both because I don’t have enough space and time - but also because any one of these men is a better leader than I am. I think that it is better to praise than to criticize.

So what does all this mean? It means that professional historians can tell us the details of presidential executive actions, legislative proposals, and appointments. It means that professionals can evaluate the results of presidential actions in terms of success and failure, but whether or not the president was good or bad, great or whatever, is an answer that is more subjective and one that each citizen must answer for him or her self.

Notes:

1Times-Picayune (New Orleans) reported in Midland Reporter-Telegram,
4See the presidential portraits at the White House web site, www.whitehouse.gov.
Fifty Years After the Warren Commission: Re-Examining The Evidence

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Sara Peterson, Language Hub Coordinator, Midland College

One week after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, his successor Lyndon B. Johnson established The President’s Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy. This became more commonly known as the Warren Commission. “The first task of the Warren Commission was simply stated by President Johnson: to establish the actual facts of what happened in the seconds after the arrival of Mr. Kennedy’s entourage in the vicinity of the Texas Book Depository at the intersection of Elm and Houston streets in Dallas.”

The Warren Commission’s nine members handpicked by President Johnson were Chief Justice Earl Warren, Chairman; Senator Richard Russell; Senator John Sherman Cooper; Representative Hale Boggs; Representative Gerald R. Ford; Allen W. Dulles (former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency); and John J. McCloy (former President of the World Bank). These seven men were assisted by J. Lee Rankin, General Counsel, his assistants, and numerous staff members, including senior and junior staff attorneys.

Even in the short time between the assassination and President Johnson’s creation of the Warren Commission, other agencies were discussing the need for a thorough investigation into the murder of President Kennedy. Waggoner Carr, Attorney General of Texas, had already planned an investigation because the death had occurred in Texas. J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the FBI had suggested that an investigation be conducted by his agency. The Secret Service and the CIA were already gathering information for their organizations. Rather than have several different groups investigating the most infamous murder of the twentieth century, President Johnson decided that an independent investigation would be more practical. He stated, “We can’t just have House and Senate and FBI and other people going around testifying that Khrushchev or Castro killed him.” However, there are five reasons why the Warren Commission would be unable to reach an irrefutable conclusion as to who killed John F. Kennedy.

First, the Commissioners and their staff members did not have enough time to thoroughly investigate the evidence, the witnesses, and all of the events that occurred before, during, and after the assassination. “Since the Warren Commission had no investigative arm of its own, it had to rely perforce on Hoover’s FBI for all evidence and information on the case.” FBI investigators were responsible for compiling information from hundreds of witnesses. These included eyewitnesses, “ear-witnesses” and individuals connected to the assassination and to persons associated with that event. “They (staff members) worked under intense pressure to gather all the necessary information and write it up into a publishable report before the presidential election.” Consequently, they did not have all the information they needed to make an informed decision.

Waggoner Carr sent Assistant Texas Attorney General Robert T. Davis to represent him on the Warren Commission. Davis joined the hearings held in Dallas on March 24, 1964. Even though the American public assumed that the investigation into the President’s murder had begun immediately after the formation of the Commission on November 29, 1963, it did not begin its hearings until February 3, 1964. Davis realized that the Commission was waiting
for the end of the trial of Jack Ruby who had killed Kennedy’s accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. It became obvious that “Hoover adopted a strategy vis-à-vis the Warren Commission of manipulation and the selective withholding of evidence.” General Counsel J. Lee Rankin decided that the Warren Report should be completed by June 1, 1964. “Besides being under pressure to produce a report at a specified time for Lyndon Johnson, the Warren Commission had to contend with Hoover’s tactics which included stalling documents and other evidence and then as the deadline approached, deluging the materials at the last minute, knowing the staff wouldn’t have the time to adequately examine everything.”

Unknown to Davis and the rest of the Warren Commission, Assistant United States Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach had sent a memo on November 25, 1963 to President Johnson’s aide Bill Moyers stating, “The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who were still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial.” Even without this knowledge, Davis realized that the investigation was not a truly independent one. In a personal interview with the authors, he described observing depositions being taken by various attorneys. Depositions were taken in Dallas at the United States Postal Office and at Parkland Memorial Hospital. The investigation focused on only four areas: motive, Dallas Police Department activities, medical aspects, and activities of Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963. No other possible assassin or assassins were investigated. All the witnesses had already been questioned by the FBI. Therefore, “Most of the questions asked of these witnesses in Dallas stemmed from information contained in these FBI statements.”

Second, not all witnesses came forward at the time. Some were unaware of the importance of what they had seen and heard. Others were frightened, some were still in a state of shock, and there were those who were simply waiting to be contacted by the proper authorities. For example, Air Force Sgt. Robert G. Vinson was compelled to remain silent due to a secrecy agreement he and his wife signed. He was 34 years old on November 22, 1963 and trying to catch a flight from Andrews Air Force Base back home to his wife in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It was not uncommon for airmen in uniform with appropriate papers to catch free rides to their home bases, if military aircraft were flying that way. So Vinson arrived at Andrews Air Force Base and signed his name onto the check in sheet. At first he was told there were no flights at all leaving from Andrews that day. But soon a helpful airman pointed out a C-54 on the tarmac and told him he could fly on it because it was headed to Lowry Air Force Base in Denver. The plane was a familiar one to Vinson except for one important thing. “It carried no markings…except for an emblem on its tail that appeared to be a graphic of the earth, rust brown with white grid marks on it separating latitude and longitude.” Most planes had the “USAF” and serial numbers on their tails. This one had neither.

Oddly enough, Vinson was the only passenger. The pilot and copilot were two men dressed in coveralls. Neither spoke to him or asked him to sign the manifest, which is required by the Air Force. In midflight at about 12:30 a voice came over the loud speaker announcing the President had been shot at 12:29. The plane immediately made a 90 degree turn and flew southward. A little over three hours later Vinson realized the plane was over Dallas. “The plane made a very rough landing, and Vinson saw that they were on what looked like a big sand bar…Two men jumped from a jeep and ran to the airplane. They wore off white, beige coveralls such as those worn by repairmen who work on streets, highways or sewers.”
two boarded the airplane without saying a word and sat up front, away from Vinson. A couple of hours later the plane landed but not in Denver.

The pilot and co-pilot and the two passengers departed quickly, leaving Vinson sitting alone on the airplane. Realizing this was not where he had intended to be, Vinson grabbed his bag, exited the plane, and walked towards the only building that was lighted. Inside was an Air Policeman. When Vinson inquired as to where he was, the airman replied, “Roswell Air Force Base in Roswell, New Mexico.” Vinson explained he needed to get to Colorado Springs, but the airman stated firmly that the base was under full alert and that no one could enter or leave. The airman seemed unaware of the flight that had just landed. For over two hours Vinson waited at Roswell until the alert was lifted and he was able to catch a bus to Colorado Springs. There, his wife Bobbie shared with him the news that the President had died. Vinson shared with her the strange and incredible story of his trip home from Andrews Air Force Base, including the odd behavior of the pilots and his fellow passengers.

On Sunday November 24, while watching the transfer of Lee Harvey Oswald, Vinson startled his wife by announcing, “That guy, that guy looks just like the little guy on the airplane. I swear that is the little guy that got on the plane.” The “little guy” he referred to was Lee Harvey Oswald and it was not long afterwards that Oswald was dead. Both his wife and his brother advised Vinson to keep quiet about what he had experienced, and he did so for forty years. Not until 2003 in his book Flight From Dallas did he publicly speculate on the Oswald look alike and how he and the other passenger may have been involved in Kennedy’s assassination. In the meantime the CIA insisted he work for their agency even though he did not have the abilities nor the skills typically needed by the CIA. “Perhaps, as far as the CIA was concerned, Robert Vinson was bought and paid for,” by not telling his story for forty years.

Two of President Kennedy’s aides, who were riding directly behind the President in Dallas in a 1955 Cadillac convertible, did not tell of what they had actually observed until years later. In 1968 Tip O’Neill, future Speaker of the House of Representatives was told directly by Kenneth O’Donnell and David Powers that their testimony to the Warren Commission had not been totally factual due to pressure from the FBI. When questioned by O’Neill about the reason for this false testimony, O’Donnell commented, “I told the FBI what I had heard, but they said it couldn’t have happened that way and that I must have been imagining things. So I testified the way they wanted me to. I just did not want to stir up any more pain and trouble for the family.” Each of the two men had been deposed by the Warren Commission staff members on May 18, 1964. At that time, O’Donnell stated that the shots “came from the right rear.” That evening in 1968 with O’Neill, he admitted he was sure he heard two shots originate from the grassy knoll area. Powers agreed with O’Donnell that night about the direction of the shots and a close examination of his deposition testimony indicates that he tried to tell this to the Warren Commission. “My first impression was that the shots came from the right and overhead, but I also had a fleeting impression that the noise appeared to come from the front in the area of the triple overpass. This may have resulted from my feeling, when I looked forward toward the overpass, that we might have ridden into an ambush.”

In the spring of 1993, Mike Robinson, a previously unknown witness, shared his experiences for the first time with John M. Nagel who video-taped Robinson’s story. Because Robinson was friends with the son of a Dallas police officer, Captain Frank Martin, he was allowed to view the Presidential motorcade from the third floor of the Dallas police station. He recalled,
“I looked out the window and two blocks away I saw the flashing red and blue lights of the motorcade, then the black limousine’s flags on the hood, and a pink dress…Heading straight towards us down Harwood was the President of the United States and his wife…As the car made the turn I could see him clearly. He was smiling, looking towards the crowds standing on the southeast side of Main and Harwood…The car passed by so quickly and I was disappointed I could not watch him up close longer.”18 Robinson and his friend had the afternoon free, so they walked to the Majestic theatre to see a movie. It was there that they heard the news that the President had been shot. They headed back to the Dallas police station and arrived in time to witness Lee Harvey Oswald being brought into the police station.

There was suddenly an increase in security around the police station, so the two teenagers remained around Captain Martin’s office. Robinson overheard numerous comments that the man they had just brought in was suspected of killing a police officer (J.D. Tippit) and had killed the President. “I looked down the hall and saw Police Chief Jesse Curry holding a rifle high in the air trying to keep it above the crowd of reporters. He stopped at the end of the hall about four feet from me, turned back toward the reporters and said, ‘This is the gun we found inside the Texas Book Depository Building.’”19 When asked if the gun was the weapon that had killed the President, Robinson heard Curry reply, “We believe this is the weapon.”20 It wasn’t but a few minutes before he heard the suspect say that he had not killed anyone, that he was just a patsy. At about three in the afternoon, Robinson needed to go to the bathroom. Captain Martin had one of the detectives escort him down to the “lowest level of the building where the officers had their lockers and he was told that the restroom was just past the locker room.”21 “While in a toilet/stall, the enormity of the events hit Mike hard and he became emotional about them, now that he found himself literally alone with the knowledge that the President he had waved to just a few hours earlier was now in a coffin.”22

A few minutes later Robinson heard two men enter the bathroom and begin talking. Instinctively he lifted his feet and simply listened to the conversation. They were whispering, but in the quiet restroom, Robinson was able to hear what the two men were saying. “You didn’t get Oswald where you were supposed to, then you go and kill a cop…Now we are going to have to kill Oswald before he gets to Washington.”23 Through the crack, Robinson could see the blue trouser leg of a police officer with a gold stripe running down the side. Frozen with fear, the teenager waited a few minutes after the men had left before exiting the restroom. In the locker room he encountered a police officer who stared at him in a menacing way. Robinson could not help but wonder if that was the officer whom he had overheard in the restroom. The fact that he did not come forward with this story until 30 years later is an indication of how terrified Mike Robinson was. The information, however, would have been invaluable to the Warren Commission and might have altered its findings.

Another reason why the Commission was unable to uncover the whole truth about the assassination was because some witnesses and evidence were either hidden or simply not brought to its attention. Danny Peters, for example, was a high school student in Dallas who was in the wrong place at the wrong time; he can still recall the fear he felt when the “men in suits” accosted him and his five friends right after the assassination. The teenagers had been allowed to leave Woodrow Wilson High School early in order to see the President’s motorcade. Now a resident of West Texas, Peters vividly recalled that one of his friends had bought the group a six pack of beer which they had casually placed on the floor board of their car. They drove over to South Oak Cliff High School to taunt their arch rivals and then headed towards downtown Dallas to watch the Presidential motorcade. As they exited the freeway,
they observed a large, dark blue Lincoln fly past them with a man in a dark suit hanging onto the back of the car. The color red was noticeable throughout the car and caught their attention but Peters and his friends did not realize what a historic sight this was; they had no idea they had just witnessed the Presidential limousine on its way to the hospital or the significance of the red images.

“After the car went by, we parked and walked across the railroad trestle,” Peters explained, “where I heard later they thought Oswald had gone afterwards. There were a few people around but no one in particular. The railroad trestle came out behind the Texas School Book Depository building so we crossed behind there.”24 When asked if they had noticed anyone coming out of the building, acting oddly, or running, Peters shook his head and said they did not see anything unusual at all. “We walked around the building”, he continued, “and up to the corner, across Elm Street to the corner of the County Records Building. We did not notice people acting strange or anything, but suddenly five or six guys in black suits, at least dark suits, it seemed like one per kid, surrounded us. They had us pretty much spread eagled against the Elm Street side of the Record’s building wall. One of my friends smarted off something and one of the ‘officials’ pushed his face into the brick wall! All this time they were asking us questions like, ‘”Who are you, what are you doing here, let’s see your I.D.?’”25 Peters and his friends complied quickly and showed their I.D.’s to the unidentified officials, who never offered to show them any identification at all. Still unaware that the President had been shot, Peters and his friends explained that they were high school students. The main thing on their minds, he admitted, was the beer sitting on the floor board of their car. They did not know if the men questioning them were plainclothes detectives, secret service agents or FBI officials, but they did know that they would be in a great deal of trouble if their beer was discovered.

Peters paused a moment to think and said, “Once they realized we were probably who we said we were, they walked us back to the railroad switching yard. There was a tower there and they took us up inside so they could call our school to find out if we really went there.”26 The officials verified that Peters and his friends were actually high school students and turned them over to two Dallas police officers. Fortunately, these two officers seemed to think the incident was humorous and did not notice the beer in their car. It wasn’t until the six teenagers walked into the silent halls of their high school that they realized that something was terribly wrong. As Peters explained, the halls were always noisy and full of life. On the afternoon of November 22, 1963 they were as quiet as a tomb except for muffled cries coming from classrooms. Peters peered inside a classroom and asked, “Why’s everybody crying?” This is when he and his friends found out the President had been murdered.

Even then Peters expected some official to contact him and his friends about what they might have observed or did not observe behind the Texas School Book Depository building, but to his amazement, no one did. “After all, they knew our names, they knew where we went to school and they didn’t know whether we had seen anything important or not. They never asked.”27 The fact that he and his friends did not observe anything unusual behind the building from which the assassin supposedly shot should have been important to the investigators. Peters wonders if their lack of interest in the teenagers was because they looked so young, and yet, the accused assassin wasn’t much older than they were.

Eye witness Beverly Oliver filmed the assassination in Dealey Plaza and tried to tell two FBI agents that she felt sure the fatal shot had come not from the Depository building, but from
the grassy knoll area. From her location on the south side of Elm Street, she had a perfect view of the last moments of the President’s life. She was so traumatized by what she had seen that she went home and crawled into bed. She did not return to work until Monday night where she encountered two FBI agents waiting for her. They wanted the film from her prototype Kodak movie camera and assured her they would develop it and return it. Oliver has not seen the film since. Three years later Oliver married a professional poker player with connections to the mafia. One night Oliver overheard her husband and some of his friends discussing the Kennedy assassination. “She proceeded to reveal to everyone her shocking experience at Dealey Plaza and that she knew the fatal shot came from a gunman in front of the President from behind the fence. ‘Anyone thinking Oswald was the lone assassin is out of their ever-loving mind,’ Oliver commented. Everyone seemed engrossed by Oliver’s commentary and startled by her statement. ‘Jack (Ruby) introduced me to Oswald at his club shortly before the…” Oliver’s husband, George McGann pulled her out of her chair and forced her out of the room. “He grabbed her by both arms and shook her. ‘Don’t you dare talk about the assassination again! Do you understand…Never, ever, ever, again can you do what you did. The assassination cannot – under any circumstance – be discussed again, ever! You don’t know what kind of trouble you could bring. So help me if you do, I’ll kill you myself, I swear.”

Oliver took her husband’s warning seriously and did not mention the assassination again until after his death in 1970. At this time she met historical researcher Gary Shaw and finally shared her story with him and, eventually, with director Oliver Stone. It wasn’t until then that the public discovered that the woman appearing in photos and the Zapruder film, known as the Babushka Lady, was Beverly Oliver. However, her film has never surfaced, and the FBI has never admitted that two of its agents confiscated it. Oliver feels sure that from her vantage point, her movie film would have shown the grassy knoll area and possibly a shooter behind the fence. Even though she shared her story in her book, Nightmare In Dallas, she is still afraid to tell everything she witnessed and the Warren Commission never heard any of her evidence.

Another intriguing story that was never told to the Commission appeared in Larry Howard’s publication Dateline – Dallas in 1992. Margaret Hendley, a Dallas telephone operator, overheard a frightening conversation immediately after the assassination. She recorded this story for posterity in the form of a letter that was not to be opened until after her death. Hendley had just heard the news that the President had been shot. Returning from her lunch break, she assisted other telephone operators because, as she wrote,

“‘The switch board was lit up like a Christmas Tree’ due to the number of people calling about the shooting. I picked up an Irving signal near 2 p.m. A woman placed a call to North Richland Hills, which is a fringe of Fort Worth. I dialed the number on a direct Fort Worth circuit and asked for her number. She evidently did not hear me. The number in Fort Worth answered. Again, I asked for her number. The Irving customer said, ‘Just a minute’. I thought she was talking to me so I waited. When the Irving customer returned to the phone she blurted out, ‘Will Lee get the bonus loot?’ A man at the Fort Worth number said, ‘What are you calling me for, and don’t mention my name on the phone. Kennedy has to be dead for him to get the bonus.’ ‘He is dead,’ the Irving customer said. ‘They’ve just announced it on the radio.’”

Hendley reported this call to her supervisor who told her she might be questioned by the FBI. He also informed her that the information would be given to the telephone company
investigators for the FBI. Hendley made a record of the call she had taken and heard and sealed it in an envelope addressed to the FBI. She placed another copy in a sealed envelope and addressed it to her attorney in case of her death. She kept the envelopes locked up at the telephone company in case the FBI or other officials wanted to question her about them. “The telephone company, the FBI nor the Warren Commission have contacted me and I have kept this information inside of me.”

In 1965 Hendley returned from vacation to discover that her locker with the sealed letters had been cleaned out and no one knew what had happened to the letters. Hendley filed a grievance and received a letter stating that she was not responsible for these lost materials. Both of the men who had been her supervisors in 1963 had been transferred, but she contacted one of them and asked how to get duplicates of the material for the FBI. It was then that she discovered that, even though her report had been given to the telephone company’s attorneys, the FBI had expressed no interest in reading it. It was Mrs. Hendley’s attorney who suggested she write down the events in long hand and place the letter in a sealed envelope to be opened upon her death. This is exactly what Margaret Hendley did, and it was her son who brought her story to the attention of the public. Consequently, the Warren Commission had no idea that this suspicious telephone conversation had ever taken place.

Even an FBI agent, James Hosty, neglected to share evidence concerning the accused assassin with the Warren Commission. “In a more blatantly criminal act, FBI officials ordered the destruction of a written note left at their Dallas office two weeks before the assassination by a man they identified as Lee Harvey Oswald.” Special Agent James P. Hosty received a handwritten note from Oswald between November 6-8, 1963. It was threatening in nature, according to Nannie Lee Fenner, a receptionist for the Dallas FBI office. “Fenner could see the bottom part of a hand written message sticking out of the envelope – a virtual invitation to read the last two lines. She did. They said: ‘I will either blow up the Dallas Police Department or the FBI office.’” But according to Special Agent Hosty, Oswald simply wanted Hosty to stop going by the Paines’ home and questioning his wife. Ruth Paine’s house was where Oswald’s wife and daughters lived and where Oswald spent most of his weekends. “On the afternoon of Sunday, November 24, three hours after Oswald died of a gunshot wound, James Hosty was summoned to the office of Chief Dallas FBI Agent J. Gordon Shanklin.” Hosty entered Shanklin’s office and was told to get rid of the letter from Oswald. Hosty tore up the letter. “No, get it out of here,” Shanklin said, “I don’t even want it in this office. Get rid of it.” Hosty did testify in front of the Warren Commission, but he never even mentioned he had received a letter from Oswald much less that he had destroyed it. In 1975 he was called before the Sub Committee Hearings and Civil and Constitutional Rights, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fourth Congress. When asked by members of Congress about the Oswald note, he stated “he had been instructed by FBI officials in Washington and Dallas to answer only the questions put to him by the Warren Commission, with no elaboration.” Hosty believed he was following the FBI chain of command and apparently he was. Once again the commission was unaware of important evidence.

Another example of information that was not shared with the Warren Commission came from U.S. Marshall Robert Nash and his assistant Lt. J. Goode who were at the site of the assassination on November 22, 1963. In a personal interview Goode stated that both he and his commander immediately thought that at least one of the shots had originated from the southeast side of Dealey Plaza. At the time of the shooting Marshall Nash was standing at the top of the triple underpass. Lt. Goode was stationed below the triple underpass. Goode recalls
hearing four shots and seeing the Presidential limousine speed by him with the wounded President and Governor inside. He stated, “There was so much blood visible that we thought Jackie Kennedy had been shot also.”

The two officials ran directly to the southeast corner of the Plaza area and discovered a rifle casing. They continued searching the area while they proceeded to the Book Depository Building. There they helped the Dallas police department and the FBI search the building and were present when the other casings were found. Marshall Nash transferred the original casing they had found in the southeast area of the plaza to the FBI that afternoon. When asked why this casing was never mentioned by any other officials, Goode stated bluntly, “They had already found what they wanted and weren’t interested in it.” That also applied to the fact that the two men had heard four shots instead of three.

Some of the most intriguing information that the Warren Commission never knew about concerned the President’s autopsy. Each member of the autopsy team was sworn to secrecy by the Department of Defense and the Secretary of the Navy. This prevented them from sharing important information. James C. Jenkins, a corpsman and student at the Bethesda National Naval Medical School, was one of the corpsman on duty that evening in the autopsy lab. He and the other lab technician were sent to the lab at 3:30 pm to prepare the lab in case the President’s body was brought there for the autopsy. What Jenkins recalls is not a typical autopsy. The viewing gallery ran the length of the autopsy room and normally is filled by students. Instead, that evening it was filled with high ranking military personnel, FBI agents and Admiral George Burkley, the President’s personal physician.

The three primary doctors performing the autopsy were Dr. James Humes, Dr. Thornton Boswell, and Dr. Pierre Finck. In addition, there were two technicians, Paul O’Connor and James Jenkins, two FBI agents, James Sibert and Francis O’Neill, and commanding officer of the Naval Medical School, Admiral Calvin Galloway. In a small group interview in November of 2013, Jenkins announced, “What I am about to tell you is not speculation. This is what I saw and my interpretation. I will not speculate on what others saw.”

What Jenkins witnessed was that the President’s spinal cord had already been severed before the official autopsy began. He also described the President’s wounds. “I was sure the entrance wound was above the right ear and the large wound in the rear of the skull was an exit wound” (Nine months later that was not the conclusion the Warren Commission reached). Jenkins remembers Dr. Boswell examining the President’s skull and asking if any surgery had been performed on the head at Parkland. There seemed to be an incision in the skull and, oddly enough, there was no need for a “skull cap” to remove the brain. As Dr. Humes examined the head wound, Jenkins remembers Humes exclaiming, “The damn thing fell out in my hands,” referring to the right side of the President’s brain.

Part of Jenkins’ responsibility was to record the measurements, scars, weights, and wounds on the autopsy “face sheet”. Dr. Boswell dictated to Jenkins and Jenkins meticulously noted each figure. He was very careful to use military standards. For example, any mistakes were to be corrected with a single pencil line through them and the face sheet had to be signed by the attending doctors. It was not until after the publication of the Warren Commission Report that Jenkins saw a copy of the face sheet that he had supposedly completed on the evening on November 22-23, 1963. He was shocked to see that the handwriting was not his and several notations had been totally scratched out and replaced by new numbers...
military would never have allowed. And the most glaring error was the fact that Dr. Boswell’s signature did not even appear on the face sheet.

Based on what Jenkins saw at the official autopsy he stated bluntly, “I feel the President’s brain had been removed before this autopsy. It looked as if it had been simply stuffed back into his skull.”\textsuperscript{42} There is no question that an autopsy was not performed by the Dallas doctors at Parkland Hospital. So who cut the President’s spinal cord, removed the brain, and jammed it back into his skull, and why? Because the doctors and technicians were sworn to secrecy, they could never share what they knew about the condition of the President’s body with the Warren Commission or anyone else at that time.

The fourth reason the Warren commission was unsuccessful in finding all of the truth about the death of the President was that the Commission ignored certain types of evidence and testimony. The first witnesses to the actual wounds that President Kennedy suffered were the doctors at Parkland Hospital. Despite this, their findings were ignored and contradicted in the final Warren Report. Dr. Malcolm Perry walked into Trauma Room One and took charge of attempting to save the President. In the next day’s New York Times it was reported that Dr. Malcolm Perry, an attending surgeon and Dr. Kemp Clark, Chief of Neurosurgery at Parkland Hospital, had provided details about the President’s wounds. “Mr. Kennedy was hit by a bullet in the throat, just below the Adam’s apple, they said. This wound had the appearance of a bullet’s entry.”\textsuperscript{43} Another Parkland surgeon, Dr. Charles A. Crenshaw, agreed with this description. In his book Conspiracy of Silence, he wrote: ”At Parkland Hospital a small wound of entry is seen in the President’s throat just below his Adam’s apple and slightly enlarged to accommodate the tracheal tube.”\textsuperscript{44} Dr. Charles Carrico, the first doctor to see the President, described the throat wound as an entrance wound when he wrote “a small penetrating wound of interior neck in lower one third.”\textsuperscript{45}

However, some of the staff members of the Warren Commission seemed to ignore pertinent information that the doctors attempted to provide. For example, during the deposition of Dr. Charles J. Carrico, Arlen Spector asked him to describe the wound in the president’s neck. Carrico described it as a “4 – 7 mm wound…rather round and there were no jagged edges or ostellic lacerations.”\textsuperscript{46} Rather than having him elaborate about whether this was an entry or exit wound, Spector’s next question referred to the president’s back.

“Mr. Spector: You said you felt the President’s back?
Dr. Carrico: Yes.
Mr. Spector: Would you describe in more detail just what the feeling of the back involved at that time?”\textsuperscript{47}

For whatever reason Spector did not seem to want to discuss any further details about the throat wound, even though that was crucial in deciding whether there was more than one assassin.

Nelson Delgado was a witness that stated repeatedly that his testimony was changed by the Warren Commission. A United States Marine stationed with Lee Harvey Oswald, in Santa Ana, California, Delgado spoke fluent Spanish and gave Oswald Spanish lessons. He reported to the Commission that Oswald had a fair command of the language. The FBI wanted Delgado to testify that Oswald knew little Spanish. “Likewise, Delgado’s testimony to the FBI that he had seen Oswald make only one trip to Los Angeles (presumably to visit the Cuban consulate) did not please the agents. In this instance they did more than badger him to change
Delgado knew that Oswald’s proficiency with a rifle was minimal. He elaborated on Oswald’s marksmanship. “It was a pretty big joke, because he got a lot of ‘Maggie’s drawers’, you know, a lot of misses, but he didn’t give a darn.” FBI agents were not happy with Delgado’s testimony; they came back to him four different times trying to get him to change his testimony. It seems they wanted him to exaggerate how accurate Oswald was with his target shooting.

Even one of the most important characters involved in the events surrounding the assassination attempted to tell Chief Justice Earl Warren and future President Gerald Ford more information concerning the assassination than they wanted to hear. Jack Ruby became famous for murdering Lee Harvey Oswald which meant he could never be brought to trial. But from statements that he made, he knew there was more to the story of the Kennedy assassination than what the press and the government agencies were reporting. For six months after the assassination of Kennedy, Ruby made requests directly and personally to Chief Justice Earl Warren and Representative Gerald Ford. He claimed he did not feel safe in Dallas and he begged them to take him back to Washington D.C. with them. There he felt he could speak more openly and honestly about his role in the days before and after the assassination of Kennedy. “Ruby told Earl Warren that he would ‘come clean’ if he was moved from Dallas and allowed to testify in Washington D.C. He told Warren ‘My life is in danger here’ He added: ‘I want to tell the truth, and I can’t tell it here.’ Warren refused to have him moved and so Ruby refused to tell what he knew about the assassination of John F. Kennedy.”

Once again the Warren Commission missed an opportunity to discover all of the information dealing with the assassination.

The final reason why the Commission never discovered all of the facts concerning the assassination was the fact that technology in 1963 was not as sophisticated as it is today and therefore, could not determine the necessary forensic information. We have seen great advancements in cameras, video and film which would have provided better images of the assassination than the ones with which the investigators had to work. Although there were hundreds of still photographs taken that day in 1963, there were only a handful of people who had movie cameras. Among these were Abraham Zapruder, Orville Nix, Beverly Oliver, Robert Hughes, and Charles Bronson. These amateur photographers provided essential images of the assassination, but the quality of the cameras and the film do not compare to what would be available to bystanders today.

Zapruder, a camera enthusiast, “owned a Bell and Howell 8 millimeter, Zoomatic Director Series Model 414 PD movie camera. This was a top of the line camera at the time.” He was filming from the north side of Dealey Plaza and his movie is the most famous that was shot that day. Nix was using a Keystone 8 millimeter Auto-Zoom model K-810 and was standing on the south curb of Main Street inside Dealey Plaza. His angle was the reverse of Zapruder’s. Robert Hughes used a Bell and Howell Movie Camera to capture the presidential limousine and the Texas School Book Depository Building’s sixth floor in the same frame. One can see the sixth floor “sniper’s nest” window and the motorcade in this frame. Charles Bronson used his Leica Model III for still pictures and a Keystone Olympic K-35 for color movies.
Today photographers have digital movie cameras like the Nikon D-90, the first D-LSR which offers video and still image capture. Sound can also be captured in D video mode because of built-in or external microphones. High quality lenses with super telephoto capability would enhance the images tremendously. Some cameras today also have index marking for post-dash editing, which would make it easier to determine if frames have been altered or eliminated. (Some researchers have this concern about the Zapruder film). Today, most people have cell phones with photographic capability so that they can use them to take still photos as well as videos. If digital cameras had existed in 1963, the photos and movies would have displayed more detail and precise defined images. Currently photos can be enlarged so that the smallest details can be observed, which was not the case in 1963.

DNA testing was not available in 1963. This type of testing would have been particularly important because muddy foot prints and cigarette butts were found behind the picket fence area of the grassy knoll. Numerous witnesses described the sound of shots emanating from that area and some witnesses thought they saw suspicious movement back there. S M. Holland, a track and signal supervisor for the Union Terminal Railroad Company, was standing on top of the triple underpass observing the motorcade. He heard gunshots. “I looked over to where I thought the shots came from and I saw a puff of smoke still lingering under the trees in front of the wooden fence….I know where the third shot came from – behind the picket fence. There’s no doubt whatsoever in my mind.” He immediately ran behind the fence and observed a station wagon. He reported to the Warren Commission that there was “mud on the bumper in two spots. . . . as if someone had cleaned their foot, or stood up on the bumper to see over the fence. . . . Because, you couldn’t very well see over it standing down in the mud, or standing on the ground . . .”55 Union Terminal track supervisor Richard C. Dodd also reported that “there were tracks and cigarette butts laying where someone had been standing on the bumper looking over the fence.”56 Today DNA testing could have determined the owners of the cigarette butts and possibly the type of shoes worn by whoever was standing there, as well as the age of the footprints, or at least eliminated persons who might have been behind the fence.

It’s also important to note that if today’s emergency care had been available in 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald could have survived Jack Ruby’s attempt to kill him; he would have been brought into Parkland Hospital in a more stable condition. “All the damage caused by the bullet fired into his stomach by Ruby could have been repaired with every expectation of a full recovery. Had the ambulance that brought him to Parkland been furnished with equipment and emergency technicians to administer oxygen through an endotracheal tube and dispense Ringer’s lactate through IVs, resuscitation could have occurred at the scene of the shooting,” stated Dr. Charles Crenshaw who, ironically, worked on both President Kennedy and his accused assassin.57 Unfortunately, the medical knowledge and skills available to emergency technicians today were unavailable in 1963. “The surgeons were unable to save Oswald, not because of his damaged internal organs, but because of the chemical imbalances that occurred in his body due to hemorrhagic shock.”58 This would have meant Oswald would have stood trial and, perhaps, either confessed or told everything he knew.

Even the FBI did not use techniques in 1963 that we have currently come to expect. Special Agent Robert Frazier conducted a search of the Presidential limousine the day after the assassination. The automobile had been flown from Parkland Hospital to Washington, D.C. and stored in the White House garage under guard. According to Fraizer, “No one had specifically investigated the vehicle with the intent to study or examine the blood stains, as
that was not a technique the agency used at the time.”

This might explain why there is a photo taken at Parkland Hospital showing a bucket of what is presumably water and agents with cloths attempting to clean up the President’s limousine, which was the scene of the crime. Today’s crime scene investigators would have immediately declared the automobile as part of the crime scene and preserved the evidence.

A field of forensics that had not even been studied in 1963 is that of blood spatter. Investigators and medical personnel agreed the direction of the blood spatter from the President’s head was an important piece of evidence but they were not familiar with the expertise that accompanies the science. Sherry P. Fiester is a Certified Senior Crime Scene investigator and court-recognized expert in Crime Scene Reconstruction and Bloodstain Pattern Analysis. She is also an instructor in both of these areas. In 1995 she began using her forensic skills to study the Kennedy assassination. In her book, Enemy of the Truth she states, “Experimental research directed towards the examination of back spatter was first published in 1982.”

In 1963 the forensic investigators did not have the knowledge to completely understand the physics of blood spatter.

According to Fiester’s research there are two patterns of blood spatter - front and back. By differentiating between forward spatter and back spatter in shooting incidents, the identification of the direction of the origin of force is possible….Both provide specific pattern characteristics. Regardless of projectile velocity or blood volume, blood is dispersed back toward the shooter and propelled forward in the continued direction of travel of the projectile. This explains the cloud-like mist of blood that is seen above and in front of the President’s head after the fatal shot. Fiester analyzed films and photos of the fatal head shot with forensic techniques that were not available in 1963. Advancement in medical technology in recent years enabled her to better interpret the blood spatter that appears in photographic evidence.

Certain researchers have speculated that the blood in front of the President’s head was caused by two shots striking him almost simultaneously. But Fiester explained in an interview that “once a projectile penetrates a skull, blood and brain matter explode from every opening, thereby moving upward, backward, and forward.” Governor Connelly’s wife Nellie, who was sitting in front of Mrs. Kennedy, described the results of the fatal shot in a manner that correlates with Fiester’s explanation: “With John in my arms, and still trying to stay down, I did not see the third shot hit, but I felt something falling all over me. My sensation was of spent buckshot. My eyes saw bloody matter in tiny bits all over the car.”

Fiester’s research about blood spatter convinced her that the photos of the blood spatter that occurred after the fatal headshot are evidence that the shooter stood in front of the President, not behind. Enemy of the Truth shows that “the Warren Commission failed to complete a conventional trajectory analysis of Kennedy’s shooting injuries.” There have even been arguments made that the Zapruder film was edited and the explosive head shot and spray of blood was added. Fiester has proven this is untrue, not because it was impossible to edit film at that time but because, “the question is not one of whether the editing techniques were available, but rather, was the required knowledge of blood spatter available?” The answer is, it was not.
CONCLUSION

Why, after fifty years are people throughout the world still asking questions and demanding answers about the findings of the Warren Commission? Obviously, if the Warren Commission had truly established the actual facts of what happened in Dallas, Texas November 22, 1963, as it claimed in its foreword it would, there would be no questions left to be answered. How could this goal possibly be reached when organizations like the CIA and FBI controlled evidence? “Over the next year (1964) in the name of national security, the agency (C.I.A.) hid much of what it knew from the new president and the commission he created to investigate the killing. Its own internal investigation of the assassination collapsed in confusion and suspicion, casting shadows of doubt that still linger.”66 The FBI was also guilty of not sharing its information with the CIA. In a memo from Director Hoover dated 12/10/63 that was not released until the turn of the century, Hoover confessed that his agency was guilty of “gross incompetency.”67 The members of the Warren Commission were unaware of any of this. Robert T. Davis realized that this lack of thoroughness and incompetence was not atypical. In fact, he described the Warren Commission investigation as “lackadaisical.” His exact words to Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr, when he returned from Dallas in June of 1964 from serving on the Warren Commission Deposition Committee, were: “Waggoner, it’s the biggest whitewash I’ve ever seen!”68 Despite his own misgivings about the Warren Commission and its investigation, Carr officially supported its findings, much like many others did, according to Davis, “because he needed Lyndon Johnson’s political support in Texas.”69 Years later after Carr had retired from politics, he wrote a letter to Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen stating, “I strongly urge the Senate of the United States, through a proper committee such as the Senate Intelligence Committee, to conduct a thorough, independent and public investigation to determine the truth of (1) whether Oswald was connected in some way with the FBI or CIA, and (2) whether the FBI and/or CIA, and/or Secret Service had advance information that Oswald was a threat to the life of the President, yet, for whatever reasons, failed to protect the President from that known threat.”70

The Report of the Warren Commission On The Assassination of President Kennedy was a bestseller when it was released in 1964. However, the American public did not know a great many facts about the investigative process. For example, “Ninety-four of the 552 Commission witnesses were questioned in the presence of one or more Commissioners, while the remaining 458 submitted statements or were questioned by staff lawyers. An alarming number of those who had previously been interviewed by the FBI or Secret Service declared to the Commission that the report relating to them was in error. Even Secret Service agents interviewed by FBI agents protested the inaccuracy of the FBI reports.”71 An example of an irregular legal procedure was that at least one deposition was taken from a proxy for the original witness.72

Even time constraints cannot excuse errors in an investigative report as important as this one. If more time had been allotted for investigative purposes, more witnesses might have come forward with additional information and more time could have been spent locating these witnesses. But what excuses can be made for the witnesses that were simply ignored by the Commission? How can the American public and the world ever be truly satisfied that every question about John F. Kennedy’s death has been answered? It is now common knowledge that thousands of pages of investigative documents concerning the assassination are still sealed and will not be unsealed until 2039. How many witnesses will be alive then
to question the accuracy of those documents? “By withholding material, the CIA (and other governmental organizations) continues to encourage the public to believe they’re covering up something more sinister.” To reinterpret the memo that Nicholas Katzenbach sent three days after the assassination, the public must be satisfied that the truth about the actual assassin or assassins will be revealed, whether that proves to be Lee Harvey Oswald or proves to be someone else. That can only happen and will only happen if all information that has been kept hidden is made available to every American.

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Frank D. Welch, Architect: His Legacy in Midland, Texas

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Introduction:

First, this paper is a work in progress and hopefully the beginning of a much larger project. We began discussing the project in late October of 2013 while lamenting the demise of many of the fine old homes in Midland. With prosperity in the oil and gas business and the subsequent boom in the economy, Midland has grown very quickly and has experienced a rapid growth in its population. Coupled with the lack of housing and the availability of affordable housing, developments are springing up all over town and renovations are being made quickly. This has resulted in a haphazard hodgepodge of new and renovated housing. Many times the old homes are either razed to the ground or so completely renovated that the old architecture is destroyed. It was that discussion one evening that led to this project. The authors have a particular interest in contemporary architecture, so the original idea was to identify all the homes that we felt met that style, photograph them, and then learn as much as we could about those structures. We spent several weekend afternoons conducting “drive-bys” and photographing the homes that we considered contemporary from a cursory glance. This resulted in almost 100 homes being identified. Through a search of the tax appraisal records, we identified the current owners and the year that the homes were built. Through our research, we also learned that there were a number of prominent architects in Midland during that time including J.J. Black, Bill Babb, Charles Neuhardt, Alton Yowell, James Patterson, Homer Pace, Joe Bill Pierce, J. Ellsworth Powell, and Frank Welch.

Initial contacts were made with Roger Black, the son of J.J. Black, and Frank Welch, who is currently living in Dallas. Both indicated that we needed to talk with Mark Wellen, an architect working and designing in Midland. That resulted in several telephone conversations, emails, and finally a meeting with Mr. Wellen in his office. After showing him the work that we had done, he drove us around Midland for another drive-by. His knowledge of the houses and buildings of Midland is amazing, and he filled in many of the gaps. However, he also showed us that we had much more work to do. Our simple, little initial project mushroomed and we quickly decided that we would narrow the project for this paper. We decided that we would concentrate only on the work of Frank Welch. This led to a phone conference with Mr. Welch the early part of December and culminated with a visit with him in his office in late February.

The 1950’s in Midland:

When Frank Welch moved to the Permian Basin in 1959, Midland, Texas was 74 years old. While the oil and gas business in America was celebrating its 100th anniversary, exploration in the Permian Basin was celebrating its 36th anniversary. John H. Griffin was hired by the First National Bank of Midland to write a book on the history of Midland to
commemorate the construction of its new building and the importance of the oil business to the history of the city. He reported that in those short 36 years, the oil industry helped Midland’s population grow from 2,500 to over 60,000. More than 600 oil and oil-servicing firms had offices in the city, and it was one of the top five oil centers with office space of over 2,000,000 square feet. It contained 40 percent of the nation’s oil reserves with 1,992 producing fields.

No longer just a ranching town, new buildings, hotels, motels, hospitals and homes were built. Along with the new First National Bank, other buildings included the Midland National Bank, the Midland Tower, the Petroleum Building, the Wilco Building and the Commercial Bank & Trust Company. Gulf was in the process of building a new 15-story building. The skyline of Midland could be seen for miles. The airport was developed from the old bombardier training school, and Midland had over 20 flights a day with three airlines serving the town. The smaller airport served about 50 private planes.

The people of Midland have always been generous to their city. The Ninety-Nine Club and the Women’s Wednesday Club were instrumental in raising money for the first library. Over 500 people raised $200,000 for construction of the first community theatre, and the symphony operated in the black. During the 1950’s, Midland built ten new elementary schools and two junior high schools with plans for another high school. Plans were also underway for a petroleum museum and an expansion of the hospital. The new YMCA was under construction. Also, during this time, over $15,000,000 in bonds were passed by the voters with funds going to parks, a police building, fire stations, and street improvements. Of that amount, over $11,000,000 was dedicated to secure water for the city. (Griffin, 1959)

This is the Midland that drew Frank Welch to the area.

Background on Frank Welch:

Frank Welch was born in Sherman, Texas in 1927. His mother took him to Dallas frequently and he appreciated the town at an early age. While driving in the Highland Park district of Dallas, his parents talked about the houses so he became aware of architecture at an early age. He enrolled at Texas A&M in the summer of 1944 as a liberal arts major. After flunking algebra, he joined the Merchant Marines at the end of his first semester. He was sent to Catalina Island for training and made one cruise across the Pacific, an experience he loved. He had only been in the Merchant Marines for six months when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, ending the war. He resigned but was called up for Selective Service and served his remaining eighteen months in Williamsburg, Virginia. He returned to A&M and enrolled this time as an architecture student.

In those two short years that he was away, A&M had changed dramatically. The number of students had quadrupled, and it became an outpost for modernism in the school of architecture. Frank had changed as well. He had traveled to the east and west coasts. While in Williamsburg, he went to New York seeing Broadway plays and the Museum of Modern Art. He visited Washington, D.C. and went immediately to the National Gallery of Art. He visited the Christopher Wren Building at the College of William and Mary. When he came back to A&M, he did not realize that it was the first architecture school in the region to adopt modernism as it was developed at the Bauhaus in pre-war Weimar, Germany. (Texas Society of Architects) The Bauhaus was founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius where the vision of combining architecture, sculpture and painting into a single creative expression was
developed. It was later directed by Hannes Meyer and then by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, but was eventually closed in 1933 due to the war. Many of the key architects of the Bauhaus came to the United States, teaching at Harvard and Yale, and finally establishing the New Bauhaus in Chicago.

Mr. Welch discussed his time at A&M in the first chapter of his unpublished memoir (due out in the Fall of 2014) which was published in Texas Architect. The professors and students at A&M had a profound, lasting impression on him. He studied under Sam Zisman who introduced modernism to the school. He felt that a lot of his education was taking place off-campus as well. He remembers feeling lucky to have been included for enchilada dinners prepared by A&M architectural graduate Willie Pena for small groups of students. These dinners were accompanied by lots of beer and music by Stravinsky or Gershwin. He and fellow students made regular trips to Houston to see road company plays or go to the Esquire Lounge. They were influenced by The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand and The House and The Art of its Design by Robert Woods Kennedy. He studied under Jason Moore who taught him to think rationally, not subjectively, and drilled home the idea that buildings should be functional. He credits William Allen and William Caudill for bringing the International Style being taught at Harvard to A&M. One professor, Harry Ransom, took young Frank under his wing socially. It was Ransom who poured him his first martini and where he first witnessed the preparation of a tossed salad. But he also ventured outside the school of architecture. He took a one-hour course on Great Books taught by Dr. Thomas Mayo, although he admitted to feeling a little out of his league. He worked on the school newspaper, The Battalion, under the director, Roland Bing. Bing taught him the fundamentals of writing and how to express himself journalistically.

However, the turning point was his friendship with an upper-classman, Allison Peery, who eventually went to work for O’Neil Ford after graduation. Ford was considered the best-known architect in Texas. According to Mr. Welch, Ford was a controversial maverick, but it was Ford who established Texas modern regionalism and experimental, modern structures. Curious and uninformed about regionalism, Welch drove to San Antonio one weekend, hoping to see where Peery worked. The office was located on ten acres of land near the San Antonio River behind San Jose Mission called Willow Way. Ford’s mother-in-law had the structure built from the remnants of old buildings, and his office was a contemporary wing on the second floor. The remainder of the building was living space for Ford, his wife and family. It was a beautiful setting with large glass windows on the second floor where he could see drafting tables and lamps. Peacocks wandered around the property, and pigeons cooed in the background. He wanted to know more about this O’Neil Ford, and indeed he would.

Frank Welch finished his degree in 1951. His grades were good, and he won the American Institute of Architects student medal. He applied for and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in France through Southern Methodist University. During college, he also met his wife, Katherine (known as Bittie), and they sailed for Paris three days after the wedding. He was supposed to study at L’Ecole des Beaux Arts but was disappointed with the classes. He persuaded his Fulbright advisor to let him document the city on film instead. For the next twelve months, he took the subway to the isolated parts of Paris, and they lived an impoverished artists’ life. It is interesting to note that these photographs along with others taken at a later date were exhibited in galleries and museums across Texas and are now part of the permanent collection at the Dallas Museum of Art.
The couple returned to Texas following their year in Paris and moved to Houston where he took a job with Hamilton Brown and Thompson McCleary. In 1954, at an informal dinner party, Welch finally met O’Neil Ford. The dinner party had been given by two sisters who were artists in Houston, and after a dinner of tomatoes stuffed with rice and cheap wine, the women fell asleep on the floor while the two architects talked until late into the night. “I really turned a corner in architecture when I fell under his spell.” He was impressed with Ford’s unpretentious approach and shunning artistic showmanship. (Residential Architect, 2006) Ford offered him a job, and he spent the next five years working with him in Houston, Corpus Christi, and Richardson. “I was happy to be working for such a vital firm, but I saw Colley and Ford rarely. Perhaps that’s why Ford was such an influence: he was a conscience, the artist-architect who was there to encourage me, but I never worked at his elbow.” (Texas Architect, 1989) He admitted that he was still looking for heroes at that time and felt he had found one in Ford. “He was extremely inspirational as an architect, practicing from some sort of moral base about the use of materials, the honest expression of structure, the virtue of craft. He felt that all very deeply.” (Texas Homes, 1986)

In 1959, Mr. Welch had an opportunity to start his own practice. He received a commission for a Big Spring motel that was never built, then a commission for a house in Odessa, and a remodel for a house in Midland. With Ford’s blessing, he moved out west to accept his first solo commission.

Welch in Midland, 1950’s:

    The family first moved to Odessa, and Mr. Welch set up his practice in the basement of his brother-in-law’s clothing store in Odessa. While there, he drew up plans for Dr. and Mrs. Clayton Brantley in Odessa and the remodel plans for Mr. and Mrs. John Dorn of Midland. The Brantley house in Odessa was a very simple home and was the first house that he designed on his own. He recalled that Dr. Brantley was quite a character and rode a Harley. Dr. Brantley also referred to west Texas, and Odessa in particular, as the “land of blowing hamburger napkins.” More work developed in Midland, so he moved the family there in 1960. Asking about the move to Midland, Mr. Welch said that it had not been a problem to come to Midland as he loved its strangeness and cool evenings. At the age of 32, he said that youth will make you do interesting things. When he moved to Midland, he rented a one-room office across the street from the courthouse. The Dorns became important clients, but more importantly, very close friends. They were key from both a professional and social standing. He referred to them as really lively, wonderful friends, and the families became close and traveled together. The Dorn family was quite large resulting in a number of other commissions.

    Mr. Welch reflected on his early time in Midland, “The clients and friends and acquaintances in Midland were young, energetic, and cosmopolitan groups with no fear about the correct move – after all, they had settled themselves in this outback colony, hadn’t they? This was lucky for me. It meant they had no qualms about hiring an inexperienced architect to design many houses, along with a school, a planetarium, theatre sets, office buildings, townhouses, restaurants, and ranch houses – even a three-level dwelling for five cats for a Dallas lady who was being wooed by a local oilman.” (Texas Architect, 1992). According to Mr. Welch, Midland will always be in his bones and that there was “no place and no better group of people to have spent 25 years with.” In speaking with Mr. Welch, he said he was very, very grateful for his time in Midland and that he was happy to have been in Midland, not
Odessa! (Interview with Frank Welch, 2014)

Welch in Midland, 1960’s:

The discovery of cheap foreign oil caused problems for Midland in the 1960’s. Several major oil companies closed their offices and others reduced staff. There was an overall slump in the economy. According to Kennedy (2011), there were an estimated 3,000 vacant houses by the end of the 60’s. The dependence on the oil industry had produced a booming economy, but it had also produced several busts. Two studies were produced in the 1960’s – one by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and a local study, Objectives for Midland, both commissioned by the Midland Chamber of Commerce. The ULI report said Midland possessed a good climate, excellent air, high quality people, good housing, good transportation, outstanding public schools, and cultural activities. However, it also reported that Midland needed water, an institution of higher learning, and diversification. The local study also emphasized the need for diversification, water, and new schools. (Kennedy, 2011) By the end of the decade, in 1968 the Museum of the Southwest had moved into the Turner Mansion and Midland College began classes in 1969.

For Frank Welch, housing commissions continued to come his direction. We know that he built six houses in the Racquet Club addition. He built another five houses in what is considered “old Midland” including one for his family. When Frank and his wife Bittie first moved to Midland with their three children in 1960, they lived in a house on Ridglea. In 1969, he built their first house at 1504 North D St. The current owners bought the house from the Welchs and it remains pretty much the original house except for some remodeling of the bathrooms. One of the features of Mr. Welch’s design is the use of carports. In our conversations with him, he explained that the carports were just standard practice and not really any special design feature. For him, it was more of a convenience, and it did cut down on the costs in the building of the houses. Two of the houses, one originally built for Walter Davis and the other originally built for the Walne family, have doors that were designed by Lynn Ford, the brother of O’Neil Ford. He and O’Neil built homes together for a time, but Lynn eventually moved to San Antonio and opened his Willow Way shop where he continued to work on projects with his brother mostly designing decorative work for over 100 homes in Texas. (Texas State Historical Association) Another home in Racquet Club that was originally designed for the Lee family had an underground squash court, wine cellar and workout room. When the water table rose, the complete underground structure had to be filled in. (Interview with Mark Wellen, 2014) Another trademark of Mr. Welch’s was the use of galleries when entering a home and one of these homes has a beautiful example of this feature. In our conversations with him, he admitted that he has a “thing about natural light and avoiding dark rooms.” The use of the galleries and atriums contributed to that conviction.

Mr. Welch was commissioned to build Trinity School for the Episcopal Day School which was completed in 1963. The construction began in 1962 on twenty acres of land donated by William Blakemore II. The original Episcopal Day School was located in the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church for kindergarten and first grade. When Trinity School and the chapel opened in 1963, it offered kindergarten through the seventh grades. Mr. Welch also designed the new east wing at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity which opened in 1968.

Probably his most famous structure was built in 1965 for the Dorn family outside
Sterling City. It was not a house, but a place to stay overnight. And it truly was just a place to stay overnight with no electricity, but had running water from a water well located next to the structure. With just a couple of chairs and bedrolls, it was simple and unadorned. It was located on a remote stone bluff in Sterling County and was called Birthday. According to Mr. Dorn’s wife, B.Lee, they found shrine-like stone stacks that were built by Mexican sheepherders as monuments to birthdays when they first scouted the site. (Texas Architect, 1996) When Mr. Welch showed the plans to Mr. Dorn, he gave them the title Birthday. Composed of stone, steel and wood, it was a single room with a fireplace at one end. It was enclosed by two sliding-walls almost barnlike doors. These rolling 20-foot walls could be opened for a summer day or closed for the winter cold. Both rolling walls opened onto decks that gave a fabulous view of the barren landscape. Locally-sourced materials were used including oil rig timber from an abandoned lumberyard. Mr. Welch is known as the father of Texas Modernism, and this structure reflected that style. “My style is very restrained and on the simple side. I like simple vernacular; it’s the basis of my work. My client wanted to build a little structure on a hill with a fabulous view of the emptiness of West Texas. This little structure struck a nerve with architects because of its modesty and scale.” (Western Art and Architecture) In 1997, it won a Texas State Architecture 25-Year Award. As Mr. Welch said, it turned out to be a very popular structure, and professors admired it a lot. But for him, he was just happy that the Dorns were happy with it.

Welch in Midland, 1970’s:

The need for oil once again boosted the economy of Midland. The United States’ need for oil coupled with the OPEC (Oil Producing Exporting Countries) embargo brought exploration and drilling back to the Permian Basin. The housing surplus became a housing shortage. The cost of housing went up as did the need for additional housing with the influx of people. New construction of houses and office buildings took place during this time. In 1972, voters in Midland approved a bond for the construction of a permanent campus for Midland College. In 1973, a new federal center, district court and post office constructed and named after Congressman George Mahon. The Haley Library opened in 1974, and the Midland Community Theatre built a new facility in 1978. Professional baseball came to Midland in the 1970’s with the Midland Cubs, a farm team of the Chicago Cubs. Plans were underway for a convention center. (Kennedy, 2011 and Modisett, 1998)

The 1970’s were extremely busy for Mr. Welch. We know that he designed three houses in Saddle Club, two more homes in Racquet Club, two houses north of the loop, and another four homes in old Midland. In addition, he designed a row of six townhomes on Sinclair Avenue and the development known as Winchester Court. Besides homes, he designed the original structure for the Blakemore Planetarium, the new Midland Community Theatre, La Bodega restaurant, Plaza Oaks shopping center, three office buildings downtown including the one for Forest Oil, and his own office building at 1102 W. Texas.

One home in Saddle Club was originally designed for the Rogers family and reflects his use of sloping metal roofs, another Welch trademark. Both Mr. Welch and O’Neil Ford were admirers of the 19th-century stone structures built by German immigrants in the Texas hill country. Built of native stone and wood, many of the structures had sloping roofs and big breezy porches. “They were hardworking people, simple. When they wanted to build a house, they just built it. It’s pretty direct, nothing’s hidden.” (Dallas Morning News, 2012) One of the homes in Racquet Club was later featured in Texas Homes and was described as
“one oasis of a home in Midland.” Oasis is not usually a term that we hear in reference to west Texas. With modern stucco on the outside, the house blends with the landscape with lots of foliage climbing over walls. Mr. Welch explained, “The house looks as if it has been added onto over a period of time, and I like that. It’s broken up with gabled wings, because we didn’t want the size of the house to be apparent or appear oppressive in its massing.” (Texas Homes, 1982) There is a free standing fireplace with floor to ceiling glass panels behind and a patio became an atrium when the overhead trellis was enclosed with glass. Again, there is that focus on light. As a child in Sherman, Mr. Welch’s parents took him to a photographer every couple of years for his picture to be taken. The studio had a skylight and most of the pictures were taken beneath that skylight. He says that the skylight made an impression on him about the use of light and directionality. (Dallas Morning News, 2012) “Sitting there under that skylight was a great experience, and it affected me for life. I learned about balanced light and what light does to an interior.” (Residential Architech, 2006) Mr. Welch designed another home in Racquet Club on Greenwich Drive which was recognized statewide for the awards that it won.

One home that he designed in the 1970’s was the second home for his family at 1703 North I Street. It seems to have a hidden front door. He liked that entrances not be directly on the street, something that he mentioned was similar to Frank Lloyd Wright. This remained their home until they eventually left Midland. Just around the corner from his house on I Street was another home that he designed. Perhaps one of the most beautiful and classic designs by Mr. Welch is found on L Street with the sloping, metal roofs.

The stand alone townhomes on Sinclair were designed by Mr. Welch and built by Bill Hickey, a longtime builder in Midland who worked with Mr. Welch on many of his homes. One of the authors, Terry Gilmour, is also the owner of one of these townhomes. The townhomes are similar in style with a very large open great room having oversize glass windows and twenty foot ceilings. Light fills the room. Originally, all of the townhomes had courtyards in front. This is another feature of Mr. Welch’s, and again there is a practical reason. He explained that the courtyards were a response to the spring winds and tumbleweeds of Midland. It was not for cultural reasons like the Spanish, just practical. He also used a number of glass doors for the front doors. Mark Wellen recalled that the doors were simply referred to as “Welch” doors by builders. These doors create more light. Many of the homes also featured spiral staircases, a rather contemporary feature that led from a hallway to a single upstairs bedroom and bath.

Another small development designed by Mr. Welch known as Winchester Court is across from Midland College off Garfield. These are connecting townhomes with flat roofs and open garages. Many also had atriums in the center. Mr. Welch remembered that there had been a homeowner’s association at one time which required that homeowner’s needed permission to make changes, such as adding a garage door.

The Plaza Oaks shopping center was developed during the 1970’s. The first structure was actually built in 1962 and housed the Los Patios Garden Center where Venezia’s is now occupying. The owner of Swartz Framing recalled that his building and the Baskins Robbins are the only two remaining of the original tenants. The builder of the project was Bill Reeder. Mr. Reeder is now deceased, but in speaking with his wife Sally, she explained that the original development was just called The Plaza. The development along the alley and the two-story structure closer to Wadley were also developed. She explained that they wanted
it to look like a plaza in Mexico, so they gave it the name The Plaza. She also said that her husband wanted to work with Frank Welch, because he considered him to be the best.

A grant from the Blakemore Foundation allowed the Museum of the Southwest to construct a planetarium, and Mr. Welch was chosen for the design. It won the Texas Society of Architects’ Award for Excellence. When it was remodeled and expanded in 2009, Mark Wellen, a protégée of Mr. Welch’s, was the architect. In 1975, one of Midland’s most popular restaurants – then and now – opened on Big Spring street. La Bodega also won a number of awards for Mr. Welch. When visiting and sitting in the original building, one should look up and see the way the light plays into the room. In 1976, the bell tower at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church was designed by Mr. Welch and built in memory of his son, Baker Welch, who died much too young. Another jewel for Midland, the Midland Community Theatre opened in September of 1978 and was designed by Frank Welch. The large glass windows in the lobby overlooking the courtyard are now familiar trademarks by the architect.

In 1977, Mr. Welch designed his own office building at 1102 W. Texas Avenue. The space is now occupied by Rhotenberry Wellen Architects. Mark Wellen came to work for Frank Welch in 1977, and it is only fitting that his firm now occupies the building where Mark started his career as a young architect. And that firm continues in the renovations and remodeling of many of Mr. Welch’s projects. In our interview with Mr. Welch, he spoke about Mark Wellen. He said that they don’t hug, they bear hug. Mark asked Mr. Welch to write a reference for his Fellowship in the American Institute of Architects. Later, Mark had organized a conference for a group of architects in Austin and asked if the reception could be held at Mr. Welch’s daughters house which he has designed. He recalled how proud he felt at that gathering – all of those architects in his daughter’s house with the evening light coming in. It was there that Mark told Mr. Welch that he had gotten the Fellowship. He became very misty-eyed talking about that time, and it was evident that he was very proud of Mark and proud that he had played a role in his early years of becoming an architect.

Two buildings in downtown Midland were designed by Mr. Welch. The four story Cox building at 400 W. Wall Street was built in 1978, and the family of the original owner, John L. Cox, have continuously office out of the building since it was built. An interesting feature throughout the building are the over-sized tall doors leading into the building and into all of the offices. An employee explained that the tall doors were specific in the original design because of a close friend of Mr. Cox’s that was a little over 6’7” tall. The building across the street at 310 W. Wall Street, originally known as the Blanks Building, was also built in 1978. Today, the twelve story structure is home to and bears the name of First Capital Bank Building.

The best known and perhaps the best overall design of his office buildings is the one at 405 N. Marienfeld Street, originally built in 1972 for his friend John Dorn and his company, Forest Oil Company. Mr. Welch working with his associates James Patterson and Alton Yowell kept the design simple. The building has two stories of office space raised on columns above a reception area. The parking area is also located around the reception area. The client requested as much natural light as possible, and it was delivered with a “square hole” in the middle of the building that allows sunlight to reach all of the offices. In the original courtyard, there was natural foliage and a large running fountain from one side of the space to the other. Unfortunately, the courtyard is in a state of disrepair and needs renovation. Even the stairwells have skylights to let in natural light. This building also won awards and one
juror termed the outside of the building to be “delightfully simple.” (Texas Architect, 1975)

One final building in downtown was the design and construction of the Midland Center complex. Mr. Welch designed the Clock Tower in 1976 in celebration of the country’s birthday. It is a three sided, stone tower standing at the edge of the old Courthouse lawn and can be seen from the Courthouse, up and down Wall Street, and Centennial Plaza. It once had a very contemporary clock at the top, but now there is only a plaque. Midland Center opened in 1980. Sadly, its fate is uncertain pending the final outcome of a proposed skyscraper where the old Courthouse and Midland Center currently stand.

Welch in Midland, 1980’s:

Perhaps it was the 1980’s that most exemplify the boom and bust of the oil business. Midland would celebrate its centennial during this decade. It had the highest per capita income in the country and the unemployment rate was four percent. Eight of the 400 richest men in the United States lived in Midland, and there was even a Rolls Royce dealership. Claydesta Center opened with thousands of square feet of office space. Changes in the oil business worldwide in the mid-1980’s hit Texas and Midland especially hard. Nine of the ten largest banks in Texas failed, including the First National Bank Midland. Bankruptcies reached an all time high. Fortunately, the agriculture business helped to sustain Midland. By 1986, the petroleum business in the Permian Basin saw its largest decline since World War II. After the stock market crashed in 1987, large corporations began leaving Midland, downtown Midland looked like a ghost town, and housing prices fell. As always, Midlanders continued to persevere. (Kennedy, 2011)

Mr. Welch built three more houses in Saddle Club, and began the development of the first townhomes in that subdivision. He also designed the Crescent Place development next to the Midland Community Theatre and across from Plaza Oaks shopping center. Mr. Welch did the original design for Crescent Place, but turned it over to Jim Rhotenberry, and finally it was finished by Mark Wellen. By this time, Mr. Welch had made a name for himself and was getting more and more commissions around the state. By the late 1970’s, Mr. Welch was designing homes on Buffalo Bayou in Houston and Highland Park in Dallas for very wealthy clients. A crowning jewel was a house designed for the Sarofim’s of Houston in the mid-1980’s. The time had come to make the move to an urban setting, and Dallas was the right place. It was close to Sherman and it was back to his roots. Bittie remained in Midland for a while with Frank making many trips back to Midland on the weekends between 1983 and 1985. By the mid-1980’s, he was known as a Dallas architect.

The Eclectic Projects of Frank Welch:

In our interview with Mr. Welch, we asked about some of the more unusual commissions he had received. He certainly mentioned the three-story condo for cats, merely saying that the client had the money so he built it. He fondly remembers building a henhouse for clients in Dallas. As he recalled, they had beautiful imported hens and wanted a chicken coop so he created a very modern design from corrugated metal, stained cedar and industrial-strength fencing. (Dallas News, 2013) He has also built a stable for horses and houses for martins.

Perhaps the most interesting, eclectic project that he worked on was a gravesite on a family ranch in the foothills of the Davis Mountains. This was the wife of one of Mr. Welch’s
clients from San Antonio, and the family owned the ranch. One of the architects working for Mr. Welch at the time set to work on well proportioned, low, gray granite slabs which would contrast the red granite of the hill site and was quite pleased with the artful design. The family was not pleased and sent back a drawing of a lone star that would fit into a twelve-foot diameter circle! Somehow, Mr. Welch was able to talk them out of the lone star and they settled on a two foot by two foot rose-granite square for the headstone. Mr. Welch and his associate made several trips to the ranch in the course of designing the burial site. The husband would fly to Midland, pick them up, and then they would fly to the ranch. The ranch foreman was quite loyal to the family, especially to the deceased wife, and was grief-stricken over her death. He took it upon himself to dig the grave, or rather dynamite the hole. Then, one day after Mr. Welch had been talking to the husband on the phone, he told his associate that the husband had decided to bury the ashes of his late wife in a martini shaker which had been a gift from her to him. As recalled, it seemed to be too much for Mr. Welch who had been trying to finish the project with understanding and grace. The husband asked that they come out the day before the memorial service to place the remains in the ground and place the granite slab in place. When the two of them went out for the final burial, Mr. Welch asked the ranch foreman if he would like to place her remains in the ground, and he removed the martini shaker from a box. It was wrapped in brown packing material and when it was unwrapped, everyone was stunned. He said that the shaker was “startlingly and exquisitely beautiful, simple and unadorned and subtly shaped in a way that was feminine, and it was 24-carat gold. Much like a treasure from an Egyptian tomb.” (Design Observer, 2011) The foreman placed it in the ground tearfully. Then Mr. Welch brought out another brown wrapped container and explained that not all of her remains would fit in the shaker so the husband wanted him to take the rest of the ashes and scatter them over the ranch. As it was unwrapped, the rest of the ashes were packaged in a Dixie-cup! When visiting with Mr. Welch, he recalled having a great time in San Antonio working with the husband on the project and that there had been a big lunch and celebration at the ranch after the memorials, first for the wife and then later for the husband.

The Style and Legacy of Frank Welch:

Many consider Frank Welch to be the father of Texas Modernism. “When people talk about Texas Modernism they mean a style very simple in appearance. Not dumb, just very simple articulation – the openings, the fenestration, the massing are all very simple. I achieved that in 95 percent of what I did. I have designed over 100 houses, schools, office buildings and even a community theatre in Midland.” (Western Art & Architecture) Texas modernism is about the use of regional materials and draws back to the simple, honest houses that were built by immigrants that came to central Texas and the hill country. They used native timber, limestone and bricks that they made themselves. For Mr. Welch, it’s about the intimacy between the home and its setting. He believes that “homes should be easy to read. You have to understand where you are in a house so you don’t get lost.” (Dallas Morning News, 2012) The clarity comes from simple and direct design. He takes into consideration the regional and historical influences of the setting of the home or building in his design. His homes are straightforward and pragmatic, but they are not harsh or unwelcoming. Another Dallas architect, Max Levy described Mr. Welch’s work as very polite. “His floor plans and details are very polite. They are never just all about themselves. They don’t just turn creative somersaults for the architecture audience: they accommodate life in a very courtly and genteel way. People who don’t have a great affection for Modernism still respond warmly to this work. That’s very rare, but that is what he has accomplished.” (Residential Architect, 2006)
Throughout his career, Mr. Welch has maintained high standards. “Being a small-town architect, you accepted the tasks that were expected of you. But I always wanted the work we did to be important.” (Texas Architect, 1989) Although he has won many awards, there is the possibility that he would have won more if he hadn’t been so concerned with making the clients happy. “I’ve always felt that I would rather have a client deliriously happy, in love with me and their house, than an award-winning house in which the client feels uneasy.” (Texas Homes, 1986) There is a sense that after moving to Dallas he still wanted to make the clients happy, but he also wanted to make the design even better. One client in Highland Park reflected, “He (Welch) insisted on simplicity, no excess trim or molding. In the beginning we had some ideas about having an antique banister up the stairway and a leaded glass front door. When we told Frank, he said – Absolutely not. We must keep it pure and simple, merely a canvas for your color.” (Texas Homes, 1980)

While Mr. Welch does not have a particular philosophy about details, he believes that it is in the detailing that makes good architecture. “Detailing is articulating – making it clear to everyone what you’re doing. I hate confusion in buildings.” If there are too many details or the detailing is fussy, the building is sunk in his opinion. (Texas Architect, 1991) For him less is more. He has always been partial to right angles, high ceilings, and sloping metal roofs. He is also fond of keeping people guessing. “I like the unexpected and I try to incorporate it into my designs whenever possible. Everything shouldn’t be clear from the street or the front door. A good house needs an element of surprise.” (Texas Homes, 1979) As mentioned before, light is very important to him and he thinks of rooms with two identities one for the day and another for night. The rooms have to be flexible for the owners, switching a light on, switching a light off, mixing incandescent light with dimmers, having no lamps, using shutters or curtains. “If every space had the same kind of light, it would be very boring.” He almost always uses natural light in his design. Many of the homes have large windows, skylights, atriums, or gallery areas. “Candlelight is the bet light in the world. It’s the greatest for dinner, for drinking, for conversing, you name it. One night 16 or 17 years ago, I was at a party in Santa Fe. The house was full of folk art and had thick adobe walls. The host had lighted hundreds of votive candles, and that was the only light in the house. It was wonderful.” (Texas Homes 1979)

Shortly after Frank Welch moved to Dallas, he commented “I have no plans for retirement. I just want to keep on going; don’t want to stop. That means another 20 years, I hope. And I want these next 20 years to be full of good work – the best I have to offer.” (Texas Homes, 1986) That 20 years would have ended in 2006. Here we are, eight years later and he is still working. He is in the process of moving from his current office as the building has been sold but is planning to keep working. He is in the process of writing a memoir of his first 26 years which will be out in the fall of this year. Included in that book will be an appendix of approximately 160 projects that will also have a picture of the project, the owner and the builder. He has donated all of his papers to the University of Texas at Austin. When we seemed surprised, he said that Texas A&M did not have the space, and UT has done a beautiful job of assembling his collection. Failing eyesight requires a driver and walking requires a cane, but he is as sharp as ever. He admitted that he does not design as much, but his stamp of approval is on everything that goes out of his office. One of his associates commented, “He can be stubborn, but he truly listens. He understands how people live, and I think his houses are very livable. We all meet with the clients, and Frank does a concept sketch or gestural sketches…but I’m always surprised by how Frank just knows.” (Dallas News, 2012) And as Mr. Welch put it, “We want the buildings we do to be successful as art
without using the word art.” No doubt about it, he is an artist.

**Works Cited**


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A combination of an entrepreneurial spirit, skillful cowboys, exceptional livestock, and productive land created the successful 6666 Ranch and an even more successful Samuel Burk Burnett. In the recent volume containing photographs by famed nature photographer Wyman Meinzer entitled 6666: Portrait of a Texas Ranch, Red Steagall made a rapid appraisal of the history of the 6666 Ranch and identified the factors that created one of the most successful ranches in Texas. He highlighted quality leaders, favorable environmental factors, and an interest in the past as a “recipe for success.” He further highlighted the current goals of the 6666 Ranch: “develop and produce the best beef in the marketplace, raise the best horses a cowboy would want to ride, operate in harmony with the wildlife population, and be conscientious stewards of the land.” The ranch, as it exists today, is the perpetuation of the 6666 Ranch empire envisioned by Burnett. Ranch owner and great granddaughter of Burnett, Anne Marion, with General Manager, Mike Gibson, operate the ranch in much the same way Burnett had operated more than a century ago. The 6666 Ranch was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a model for a successful cattle enterprise. Its story is fairly well known. The story of Samuel Burk Burnett has remained less known, and, moreover, the known tidbits of his life and career that have been revealed are often misunderstood. The basic narrative of Burnett’s life is a story of a self-made cattleman who, by luck and hard work, emerged as one of Texas’ most influential “cattle kings.” There is a mythic quality about Burnett, a larger than life figure. At the same time, he was representative of those extra-ordinary western pioneers and entrepreneurs who succeeded in becoming very wealthy and very powerful. He provides an excellent example of the elasticity of the cowboy and cattleman’s image. Both the mythology and reality of western ranching exist in his story.

The Burnett family possessed a drive and perseverance that took them from Virginia to Missouri during the 1820s. The region had been the major focus of a growing debate over the expansion of the institution of slavery in the United States, and after two decades, the family moved farther west onto the Missouri frontier. On 1 January 1849, Samuel Burk Burnett was born. Following passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, young Burnett witnessed a series of violent acts. Antislavery Jayhawkers destroyed his home and looted his family’s possessions. With the loss of their home and almost all other assets, the Burnetts regrouped, and on the eve of the Civil War in 1859, they migrated to Texas.

With his family, Burnett followed a well established path to Texas. During the previous half century, Missourians had traveled to the state in large number and many settled in Denton County. The Missourians, including especially the Burnett family, helped to transplant an Anglo pastoral system of stock herding to north Texas. Burnett’s father Jerry was a frugal businessman. He strictly controlled stock and instilled in Burnett a spirit of efficiency. Burnett, like his family, was determined and resilient. He carried the traits of his family, especially those of his father, with him throughout his life. Burnett, however, was a complicated and often contradictory western character.

Shortly after the arrival of the Burnett family to Texas, secession and Civil War thrust Burnett into a position of greater responsibility. Burnett’s father, Jerry, who served with the Texas State Troops was absent from home during parts of the Civil War. The absence of his father allowed Burnett to acquire valuable experience in the infant cattle industry. As would be the case for most of his life, however, opportunities were often tempered by personal
tragedy. Burnett lost his mother, Nancy, in 1863. Her, combined with his father’s absence, death left the Burnett family under the guidance of young Burnett until the return of Jerry in 1865.

While political crises, the subsequent migration of the Burnett family to Texas, and the death of his mother had made a significant impact on Samuel Burk Burnett, the exposure to the Texas cattle trade following the Civil War forever altered his destiny. Following 1865, beef shortages caused by the war gave Burnett the opportunity to profit from the expanded industry in Texas. From South Texas, Burnett drove cattle north following the popular Chisholm Trail, which skirted Burnett property in Denton County. As a cowboy working herds in 1867, Burnett learned valuable lessons about the behavior of animals, weather, and challenges created by Plains Indians. Knowledge acquired on the trail enabled Burnett in 1868 to manage successfully his own team and herd of 1,700 cattle in 1868, and although he confronted a number of setbacks during the 1868 drive, he persevered. Even at the age of nineteen, Burnett thrived under pressure. Throughout his life, Burnett demonstrated a desire for greater responsibility, and he showed time and again his ability to handle the stresses of the cattle trade.

For Burnett, the transition from cowboy to cattleman began in 1870 and 1871. Events of that twelve month period marked the first major turning point in his life and career. The decline in buffalo populations, the new process for tanning cattle hides, the westward push of railroads, the growth of the Union Stockyards in Chicago, and the ability of the cattle market to absorb every Texas cow shipped north to railheads in Kansas and neighboring states enabled stock men like Burnett to secure greater profits. About the same time, Burnett married Ruth Loyd and entered into a business partnership with her father, Fort Worth financier and founder of the First National Bank of Fort Worth M. B. Loyd. Burnett witnessed the birth of his first child, Tom, and purchased in 1871 a herd of cattle bearing the 6666 brand from Denton County cow man, Frank Crowley. The acquisition of the 6666 brand neither made Burnett a cattleman nor defined his career in the industry. Both personally and professionally, Burnett’s life looked promising.

Within a short time, however, much of the North Texas rangeland had been fenced. By 1873, the open range era of the cattle industry ended in North Texas, but more devastating for Burnett, Texas cattlemen flooded the market for beef. Stock raisers shipped cattle north despite diminishing returns. Although the onset of national financial depression in 1873 devastated the cattle trade, Burnett found a way to profit. He drove a herd to Kansas when the full magnitude of the Panic of 1873 remained unknown. When he could not secure a fair price for his cattle, he determined to winter his herd on the Osage Reservation in Indian Territory. His perseverance paid off. Burnett learned a valuable lesson: fattened cattle sold for a more substantial sum.

With access to capital through the First National Bank of Fort Worth, and, as a result of the appearance of the Texas and Pacific Railroad and the construction of stockyards in Fort Worth, Burnett implemented a supply revolution. Facing a flooded cattle market, he determined to purchase, hold, and fatten cattle rather than risk significant loss while attempting to make quick profits. Burnett realized that fewer, higher quality, cattle shipped through Fort Worth would create a more efficient and profitable cattle operation. Additionally, Burnett invested in banks, railroads, stockyards, and land in an effort to diversify his holdings. By doing so, Burnett made an important contribution to the development of the economic infrastructure in North and Northwest Texas. Burnett, in part, set the trend for future ranching investment. In doing so, he emerged at the conclusion of the open range era that culminated in the 1880s as one of the most important leaders of the dwindling number of remaining large-scale cattlemen. The joint effort of Loyd and Burnett created fortunes for both.
The open range nurtured cattle efficiently, but the growing number of settlers in North and Northwest Texas was quickly consuming available land. As a result, Burnett had to buy land of his own. In order to fatten his herds in an environment similar to the open range, Burnett purchased 47,000 acres in Clay County (later Wichita County) in 1875. On his Buffalo Creek and Red River Ranches, Burnett grazed modest herds and modernized the practice of breeding and managing stock. Additionally, Burnett began to understand the damaging impact of cattle might have on land. To balance the damage done by cattle, he rotated pastures and burned fallow fields so as to restore nutrients to the soil. Due to the success of his enterprise, Burnett eventually leased and owned additional acreage in Indian Territory, as well as in Texas, in Denton, Wichita, King, Cottle, Carson, and Hutchinson counties.

Burnett completed the transition from cowboy to cattlemen while working on the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Indian reservation (KCA) in Indian Territory. A severe drought in 1881 had forced Texas cattlemen to look for more productive pastures outside of the state. Burnett and others found fertile land in Indian Territory. The proximity of KCA reservation to 6666 Ranch land in Wichita County and railheads in Texas made the pastures more important to Burnett than other Texas cattlemen. Burnett leased land on the KCA for twenty-five years. Burnett’s experiences negotiating and renegotiating leases proved to be one of the defining moments in his professional career. Time spent in Indian Territory exposed Burnett to the Comanche people, and he gained respect for the Quahadi leader, Quanah. Burnett formed an alliance with the powerful Comanche chief and by doing so enhanced his power and reputation as well as the standing of Quanah. Both men fought allotment. Burnett because he meant the loss of valuable grazing land, and Quanah because allotment would further erode the amount of land available to the Comanche people. As Burnett and Quanah lobbied to maintain leases, they postponed the loss of KCA land to allotment. The Comanche people and Burnett could not hold off allotment indefinitely, and Burnett abandoned his leases in 1906.

Following his departure from Indian Territory in 1906, Burnett began to lease and obtain rangeland in the Texas Panhandle and in Northwest Texas in King, Carson, and Hutchinson counties. The purchase marked the third important transition in Burnett’s life and career. King County, some 160,000 acres, became the epicenter of the 6666 Ranch. He modernized his operation and bought additional land as small producers went broke. Cunning and resourceful, Burnett made a fortune in a time of diminishing profits in the cattle industry. Burnett possessed a political savvy typically associated with industrial capitalists rather than agriculturalists. Like so many other influential entrepreneurs of his time, he manipulated the economic and political systems to his advantage. He skillfully influenced the political process. Frequently traveling to Wichita, Chicago, and Washington, D. C., Burnett forged alliances with some of the most important politicians and cattlemen of his era. In doing so, he solidified his position as one of the Texas’ most important and influential cattlemen. While in Indian Territory, he had built and maintained relationships with W. T. Waggoner, J. W. Bailey, Theodore Roosevelt, and Quanah. On the KCA, Burnett skillfully controlled deliberations over land leases and became the largest beneficiary of the grazing program. Additionally, as a founding member of cattlemen’s groups, such as the Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association and Cassidy Southwestern Commission Company, he served as a Washington lobbyist for agricultural affairs.

One of the leading voices in agricultural debates and an individual with an acute understanding of political affairs, Burnett had no interest in organized politics. A Democrat by affiliation, the politically conservative Burnett never publicly backed the party or Democratic candidates, although he maintained a close friendship with Joseph Weldon.
Bailey, a Democratic Senator for Texas. Following the departure of Bailey in 1919 from the Democratic Party, Burnett also, “quit them which most any sensible man would do now.” Burnett later admitted that he knew very little about broad national and international affairs. He adhered to the principles espoused by influential Republicans, such as William Howard Taft. Although he continued to be an astute political mind, Burnett got no great joy from politics.1

While he had been an impressive political force, Burnett’s everyday work as a cattleman made quite an impression on cattle buyers nationwide. W. P. Anderson of Amarillo remarked in 1912 that Burnett cattle impressed viewers of the Texas Exhibits at the International Live Stock Show at Chicago. He said, “Burnett cattle and fancy feeder steers were the greatest object lesson in the entire show,” and he further declared that the successful showing would not only be “valuable advertisement for King County and the Four Sixes, but for the entire cattle raising interests of Texas.” Burnett, through his diligence as a cattle breeder, had boosted the respectability of the 6666 Ranch, and by extension, the entire cattle industry in Texas.2

Burnett often spent extra money on stock he planned to exhibit at shows in Fort Worth and Chicago. He further accepted that animals would never sell for the amount he invested. Burnett viewed the success of his cattle in stock shows as good advertising, and Burnett was also one of the first cattlemen to advertise in local, state, and regional publications. As a result, the 6666 brand became more visible, and brands that had once been simple ownership marks became trademarks.

His early experiences as a trail boss, small landowner, and eventually leading cattleman in Indian Territory led Burnett to micromanage his business enterprise. The speculative nature of the cattle trade in the nineteenth century had demanded diligence, and Burnett refused to relinquish any control of his cattle operation. As it grew, Burnett’s business demanded more and more time. Burnett required his cowboys to give a similar degree of commitment. As a result, he surrounded himself with family members and trusted only a few men willing to work with the increasingly domineering Burnett.

The tendency to micromanage his business activities extended to Burnett’s personal affairs as well, and his personal life seemed had a similar boom and bust cycle of the cattle industry. A cautious businessman, Burnett, at times, proved to be impulsive and inconsistent in his personal affairs. Nowhere was that more apparent than in his failed personal relationships with his first wife Ruth, his son Tom, and second wife Mary. Burnett exhibited impatience with the people most supportive of his single-minded obsession to build his cattle empire. He insisted that his wives and children follow each of his directives and he was quick to write off those who refused. Although a persistent businessman, Burnett often dismiss individuals, including family members, after a single failure.

Burnett and his first wife, Ruth, had different expectations for their marriage. Burnett seemingly entered the union believing Ruth would follow him from dugout to dugout. Burnett enjoyed life alone on the Northwest Texas frontier and proved to be more at home on the range than in the board room. Burnett favored the campfire and the company of cowboys. He surrounded himself with men who had similar backgrounds, instead of members of polite society in Fort Worth. Ruth, however, never enjoyed the rough and tumble life on the range. She apparently felt that Burnett would make an effort to find time for personal matters. The marriage lasted more than fifteen years, largely because of the efforts of Ruth’s father, M. B. Loyd. Burnett and Ruth had three children. The marriage ended in 1888 when the couple divorced.

The relationship between Burnett and his son, Tom, did not fare much better. Burnett could not contain the free-spirited Tom, and the relationship between father and son never
blossomed. Even when Tom was a young boy, Burnett and Tom struggled to find common ground. The two personalities clashed frequently. Deeply divided by issues of family and business, Burnett and Tom led separate lives. Because Burnett lacked any kind of formal schooling, he had insisted that his children acquire the education that eluded him. Burnett hoped his son would make the most of his educational opportunities, but schools, including the Virginia Military Institute, did not suit Tom. Tom preferred to be on horseback working cattle. In addition, Tom sided with his mother in the ongoing dispute between Burnett and Ruth. Burnett regularly condemned Tom’s personal indiscretions, especially his divorce of Ollie Lake, whom Burnett considered his own daughter. He loved his son, but there is no evidence that Burnett expressed it in a way that Tom could understand. Both cattlemen in their own right, the relationship between the Burnett and Tom more closely resembled a business partnership than a familial or even personal relationship.

In spite of past his failed personal relationships, Burnett in 1893 married the widow, Mary Couts Barradel, who possessed many of the same qualities as Ruth. Tom seems to have resented Mary, and the marriage further deteriorated the relationship between father and son. Ruth had been immediately appealing to Burnett, but, like Ruth, she preferred polite society to the life on a cattle ranch. The couple had one child, a son, but there is little indication that they did more than endure one another. Instead of divorcing Mary, Burnett had her confined in 1911 as a result of mental instability. Burnett believed he was helping Mary. Additionally, he had confidence that he was protecting his enterprise. The couple’s only child did not protest. Mary was later released, and some speculate that Mary had been unjustly confined. She donated almost $4,000,000 to TCU, and after her death in 1924, Mary’s sisters charged that she had always been mentally unstable. The sisters sued TCU, and the large private university agreed to a settlement. The complicated string of events might suggest that in fact Mary suffered from paranoia, and TCU feared losing the money.

A similar impulsive behavior apparent in Burnett’s personal affairs resulted in Burnett twice killing a man in defense of his life and property. The first instance occurred in 1879 when Jack King, a noted thief, stole some 6666 cattle. Burnett reclaimed his stock and King retaliated by confronting Burnett. Burnett, faced with a verbal threat on his life, shot King above the left eye, killing him instantly. The second event, in 1912, resulted from similar circumstances. Farley Sayers, a small time rancher in King County owned land adjacent to Burnett, and 6666 cattle were frequently found on Sayers’ land. After years of conflict, Burnett confronted Sayers in the washroom of the Godwin Hotel in Paducah. Sayers made a suspicious move, and Burnett shot him in the stomach. Sayers died in a pool of blood, and as had been the case in the King killing, Burnett turned himself over to authorities. Both trials resulted in not guilty verdicts.

In both instances, Burnett emerged with his reputation intact. In fact, his reputation had been enhanced by the trials. To his contemporaries, Burnett represented the popularized myth of the western cowboy hero. As a regional celebrity, he had the backing of the local population, and Burnet skillfully manipulated the media to his advantage. His celebrity status granted Burnett a sizable amount of economic, political, and cultural power. Burnett’s reputation as a man of honesty and integrity served him well when disputed facts threatened his freedom in three courtroom dramas. During the two murder trials, Burnett skillfully utilized the media to mold public opinion in his favor. The reputation Burnett had built and protected provided a vast amount of security and wealth, and his celebrity status translated into an almost saintly image that insulated him from scrutiny during his lifetime. Ironically, the most controversial episodes in his life bolstered his status rather than resulting in close personal examination and media attacks.

Few people knew the paradoxical Burnett. While he was an autocratic man who focused
solely on his business enterprise, Burnett was far from a uncaring individual. He was very
generous to loyal employees and daughter-in-law, Ollie, and his granddaughter, Miss Anne.
Although he despised charity, Burnett quietly gave away a great deal of money. During his
own lifetime Burnett made generous donations to charities in an “unostentatious manner.”
The Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association survived as a result of the generosity
of Burnett, who personally bankrolled the organization in its formative years. Churches of all
denominations benefited from his charity, and Burnett donated the organ at the New Christian
Church in Fort Worth. He also donated funds for the construction of a new operating room in
the All Saints Hospital. Above all, Burnett loved to provide worthy individuals with aid. He
distributed funds anonymously to hundreds of men each year. His spirit of generosity lives
today in the Burnett Foundation.4

Even though he gave away a tremendous amount of money, Burnett was quite frugal. He
invested and saved money, and even as an ailing seventy-one-year-old-man in 1921 he walked
through the bitter Chicago cold in search of a cheap meal. Ironically, he also purchased the
finest transportation available. He initially purchased elaborate buggies, and later Pierce
Arrow automobiles and a splendid and expensive Pullman Palace Car. Additionally, Burnett
built one of the finest ranch headquarters in Texas.

While he indulged in his personal affairs and proved to be a ranching innovator, Burnett
rejected new technologies such as automobiles and other mechanized equipment on his 6666
Ranch. He protected the traditional flavor of cattle ranching by insisting that cowboys ride
the finest horses, eat at the chuck wagon, and sleep under the stars. Nonetheless, Burnett
professionalized his ranching operation by modernizing the structure of the 6666 Ranch and
implementing programs, such as scientific breeding. Mechanization came to the 6666 Ranch
near the end of Burnett’s life, but not as a result of the desire to improve efficiency, rather it
came as a result of Burnett’s failing health.

The death of two of his children, Anne Valliant Burnett and Samuel Burk Burnett, Jr.,
signaled a fourth important turning point in Burnett’s life. Prior to 1916, Burnett had been
single-mindedly focused on his business enterprise, but as he faced his own mortality, he
became a more caring and sincere patriarch of the family. Ollie and Miss Anne benefited the
most from Burnett’s new found desire to pamper his family. He also began to consider his
own legacy. In 1916, he asked his close friend, T. J. Powell, to write the story of his life and
the 6666 Ranch. Powell’s biography painted a simple picture of Burnett, without addressing
the fascinating elements of Burnett’s contradictory character.

The inconsistencies in Burnett’s character might be explained by the presence of a serious
undiagnosed medical condition. Typhoid had in 1900 nearly claimed his life and for the next
twenty years, Burnett experienced frequent episodes of sickness. His hectic professional
schedule and his tumultuous personal life had been both the cause and consequence of
increased stress levels and irritability. In Burnett, the ailment likely caused mood swings,
which were perceived as unwarranted outbursts of emotion. After Burnett reached the age
of sixty his symptoms became more acute, and he began to show the effects of the untreated
ailment. Stress undoubtedly created high blood pressure in the tightly wound Burnett, and
his age, weight loss, gallstones, near blindness, and final cause of death, arteriosclerosis,
collectively indicate that Burnett suffered from diabetes, almost certainly Adult Onset
Diabetes (Now referred to as Type Two Diabetes).

Ironically, when his health started to slow him down, Burnett began to make more
money through less work. The Burnett economic empire grew to include oil. Exploration
and discovery had moved slowly, but in 1921 they began to pay dividends. With the aid of
noted geologist, Charles Newton Gould, Burnett and the 6666 Ranch emerged as important
components to the oil industry in Texas. Unfortunately, Burnett never knew how much oil lay
buried under his 6666 Ranch in Wichita, King, Carson, and Hutchinson counties. He died prior to the realization of great profits.

Burnett died on 26 June 1922. Strangely, one of the best examples of his character was his will. Burnett condemned his son for past indiscretions and denied his wife, Mary, a share of his fortune. He generously gave money to faithful employees and he established the S. B. Burnett Estate to manage his assets. Under the leadership of cattlemen Burnett respected, the S. B. Burnett Estate managed the ranch and growing oil assets, and divided assets as prescribed by Burnett—one-third to Ollie, and two-thirds to Anne. The Estate functioned until the death of Miss Anne in 1980, when all assets came under the ownership of Burnett’s great granddaughter, Little Anne Marion.

The fascinating character of Samuel Burk Burnett has been matched by the equally captivating personality of the twentieth century 6666 Ranch. Interestingly, however, the growth of the 6666 Ranch was not the result of the work of one individual. Samuel Burk Burnett founded the ranch and he is responsible for establishing the firm foundation for ranching in Northwest Texas, but the work of many men and women perpetuated his successful ranching enterprise. Tom Burnett, Miss Anne Tandy, and Little Anne Marion as owners each played a crucial role in the continued success of the ranch, as have managers of the S. B. Burnett Estate and ranch foremen, Bud Arnett, George Humphreys, J. J. Gibson, and Mike Gibson.

Samuel Burk Burnett remains a quintessential western character, both in the real and mythic sense. More than a peripheral figure, he embodied the spirit of nineteenth century Texas cattlemen. Not only did he embody the classic elements of the myth of the West, but also he remained grounded in the greater narrative of Texas history. Although exaggerated and in some cases entirely untrue, many stories related to Burnett, especially the Fort Worth poker game and the charges of murder, illustrate the ways the American West of the nineteenth century existed in both fact and fancy.

An extremely talented individual, Burnett earned his reputation, not because of the stories about his wealth or various public exploits, but because of his knowledge of the cattle trade and his industry influence. W. W. Flood, Burnett’s personal attorney, remarked that Burnett “had the finest brain he ever knew,” and further his “judgment was unerring in its accuracy and his memory perfect even on the minutest details. Flood recalled that he could not think of a single example of Burnett losing money in a business deal.

Remembered as a man of few words, Burnett was both simple and sophisticated. As a cowboy and cattleman, Burnett looms every bit as large as Charles Goodnight, W. T. Waggoner, and C. C. Slaughter, but the story of Burnett is not simply the story of the 6666 Ranch. Burnett was, by choice, a rancher, but also a banker, real estate investor, railroad promoter, and oilman. His role in the economic development of Texas makes the 6666 Ranch as important as those of Charles Goodnight, W. T. Waggoner, C. C. Slaughter, and other cattlemen. In an era when most natural resources from Texas moved beyond the borders of the state to facilities owned and operated by eastern entrepreneurs, agriculture, including Burnett’s cattle, provided Texas with much needed capital. Timber and oil wealth, for example, two of the state’s most important resources, moved east. Agricultural fortunes stayed home and provided a solid base for economic development. Although often true, the common assumption that the West served as a colony of the East prior to World War II denies westerners, such as Samuel Burk Burnett, of the valuable role they played in America’s economic growth. As an infant industry in Texas after the Civil War, the cattle business brought technology and capital to a cash poor state. The wealth generated by the trade aided in the development of the state’s economic infrastructure. Additionally, some of the wealthiest ranchers used their wealth to construct many of the state’s most recognizable
institutions. Indeed, the revenue generated through ranching allowed the State of Texas, with land grants and tax incentives, to entice railroads to build across its western lands. In the process, Samuel Burk Burnett emerged as the western equivalent of the eastern, industrial, "captain of industry."

Notes:

1Samuel Burk Burnett to Anne V. Burnett, 25 March 1919, Burnett Company Archives.

2Anderson quoted in, History of the Cattlemen of Texas, 80.

3The State of Texas v. Mary C. Burnett, Lunatic, No. 298, Lunacy Records of the County Court, Tarrant County, Texas, Book 14.

4Powell, Samuel Burk Burnett, 32.