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House where Oswald stayed before JFK shooting is now a museum

By Bekah Wright
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The Ruth Paine House Museum in Irving opens Wednesday. (Photo: Rex C. Curry/Associated Press)

As a little girl growing up in Irving, Texas, Shirley Smith walked past the Ruth Paine House every weekday on her way to school. "I always knew the house's story," she told Yahoo Travel.

Now, Smith's had the opportunity to make the home come alive as part of the team behind Wednesday's opening of the Ruth Paine House Museum. It's where Lee Harvey Oswald stayed the night before President Kennedy was killed this month 50 years ago. Of the endeavor, Smith says, "The purpose of the museum is to show that out of an act of kindness -- Ruth Paine opening her home to someone -- in the blink of an eye, her entire life changed."

Paine opened her home to Oswald and his wife, Marina. In February 1963, Ruth and Michael Paine were invited to a party thrown by a Russian friend. That's where the Paines met the Oswalds and Ruth, who spoke Russian, befriended Marina. As the Oswalds were struggling financially and the Paines had since amicably separated, Ruth opened her home to Marina and the Oswald's two young children, while Lee stayed in a Dallas boarding house and visited on weekends.

An unexpected, overnight visit from Lee happened November 21. As he was departing for work at the Texas School Book Depository the next morning, Lee retrieved a package from the Paines' garage. Later the next day, while watching news unfold in the aftermath of JFK's assassination, Ruth and Marina heard a knock at the door. Outside were the police, alerting them that the package from the garage had contained the 6.5-millimeter Carcano rifle used to shoot the president. The marksman, they said, was Lee.

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Visitors tour the home's two bedrooms, living room, bath, kitchen/dining area and the garage where Lee hid the rifle. Serving as guides of sorts are the Paine House's 1963 occupants via projection technology created for the museum by Toxey-McMillan Designs Associates. "They used a technique called Pepper's Ghost," says Smith. "A sort of hologram projected on glass screens where local actors portraying the Paines and Oswalds tell their stories of what was going on in the house the day of assassination."



A projection of an actor portraying Lee Harvey Oswald in the Paine Museum garage. (Photo: Rex C. Curry)

Among these vignettes – a scene with a police officer asking Paine whether Lee Harvey Oswald had a gun. Replying no, Paine then translates the question for Marina, who replies in the affirmative, much to Ruth's shock.

Marina, along with Lee's mother, Marguerite, stayed with Ruth until Marina was taken into custody by the Secret Service. Ruth remained in the home until 1966.

The 1,250-square-foot house changed hands several times until the City of Irving purchased it in 2009. "A few years ago members of Heritage Society suggested the city buy the Ruth Paine House to preserve its historical integrity," Kevin Kendro, archives coordinator for the city of Irving, which runs the museum, told Yahoo Travel.

Restoring and transforming the home into a museum began in 2011. Says Kendro, "The goal was for people in coming years to be able to step in where historical events took place and get a feel for what life was like at that time."



Ruth Paine, right, gives history of her tragic connection to history in her former home, which is now a museum. ...

Tours of the Paine House, which last an hour and 45 minutes, begin on the third floor of the Irving Central Library. Inside The Paine House Visitors' Center, a bank of vintage televisions plays broadcasts from cartoons to breaking news from 1963. On a larger screen, further background comes by way of Paine, who talks about living with the Oswalds and life after JFK's assassination.

From the library, tour patrons (limited to 12 per tour) board a van for the suburban

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Paine home, now transformed into a *multimedia museum*. What the team hopes to evoke for visitors stepping through the door – that time stood still on Nov. 22, 1963. Says Smith, “A lot of people say they feel like they walked into their grandmother or great aunt’s house.”

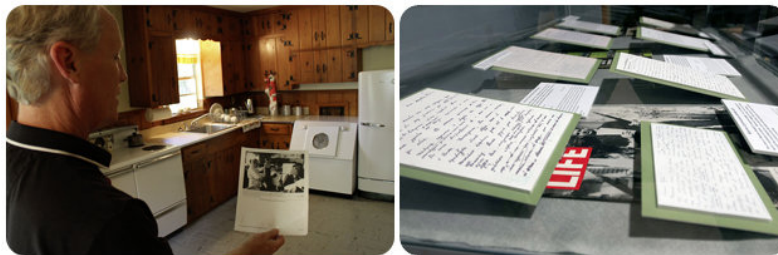
Using personal photos from Paine, Life magazine and the Warren Commission, the restoration team scoured eBay, Craigslist, estate sales and antique stores to find authentic furniture and décor. A primary focus: “For Ruth and Marina, life was all about raising children,” says Smith of the household’s four children. “So baby beds, diapers and toys needed to be everywhere.”

Smith said the museum’s website went live last week, with many tours already booked. Kendro, who says it wasn’t uncommon to have drop-in tourists while working on the house, “There’s an enduring interest in the JFK assassination story that drives people to visit involved sites in Dallas and surrounding areas. The Paine House has always been among them.”

As for visitor reactions, Smith said she received the ultimate compliment when 81-year-old Ruth Paine, currently a California resident, visited the museum during pre-opening festivities. Paine’s reaction – “Shirley, the house is right.”

Tour reservations for the Ruth Paine House Museum can be made online at <http://cityofirving.org/museums/paine-house.asp>. Tours are offered Tuesday-Saturday at 10 a.m., noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Adults, \$12; free for ages 11 and younger.

[Click here for a gallery of the house.](#)



A gallery of the Paine House.

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