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## Review of *A Texas Journey: The Centennial Photographs of Polly Smith* By Evelyn Barker

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*Dallas Public Library*

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*A Texas Journey: The Centennial Photographs of Polly Smith.* By Evelyn Barker. Dallas, TX: Dallas Historical Society, 2008. 216 pp. Photographs, appendix, bibliography, index. \$49.95.

Polly Smith showed her love for Texas through the lens of her Graflex camera. The photographs Smith made to publicize the state for the 1936 Centennial Exposition portray a positive image of Texas's business and industry, everyday life, and natural scenes. Although she began her work in late 1935, about the same time the Farm Security Administration photographers started to document the United States during the Great Depression, Smith's photographs sought to entice people to come to Texas, not to document the plight of those suffering from the economic disaster or benefiting from Roosevelt's government programs. Yet, even though they were essentially "advertising" images, the photographs Smith took have transcended their original purpose and today are a valuable portrait of the state during the mid-1930s.

Evelyn Barker first came to know and love Polly Smith's photographs when she served as

a curator at the Dallas Historical Society and worked with the images that were part of a collection of Texas Centennial records. Little specific information about Smith was available at the time, so Barker sought out family members and other historical collections that shed light on Smith's life. This book is the result of that research, combining the story of Polly Smith's photographic career and the efforts to publicize the Centennial in its first third with handsomely reproduced images in the remaining portion.

Although Smith photographed throughout the state, the majority of the images reproduced here show San Antonio, Houston, Austin, East Texas (especially the oil industry), and agriculture in the Rio Grande Valley. Native Americans are represented by the Alabama Coushattas in East Texas and the Tigua and Ysleta Pueblos near El Paso. Sadly, there is only one ranching scene from West Texas as most of this work was lost many years ago. Smith's photographs are artistic, balanced compositions that tend towards soft focus, reflecting her study at the Clarence H. White School of Photography in New York. Her work also shows a strong interest in pattern and form—from the crisscross of oil derricks to clusters of grapefruit.

Barker's book does a fine job of bringing Polly Smith's work out of the storage cabinets and tempting us to learn more about it. It is particularly significant to have this broad body of work by a female photographer brought to light, since there were relatively few women photographers working in Texas at this time—and certainly not making the range of images that Smith did. I would have liked to have seen the photographs indexed along with the text, but this is a relatively minor quibble in terms of the book's overall value.

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