

BOOK WAS SOUGHT BY SIX MAGAZINES

First Step in Sale of Rights
Was Taken in Mid-July

By RICHARD WITKIN

Plans for publishing William Manchester's book on the assassination of President Kennedy began racing toward dangerous waters early last summer when efforts were initiated to have the account published in early 1967 instead of after November, 1968.

There are conflicting versions of what took place—versions that will figure in the lawsuit that has been brought by Mrs. John F. Kennedy.

But what resulted, in any case, was that Harper & Row, the publishers, began gearing to put out the book next spring, and moves were undertaken that resulted in sale of the magazine serial rights to Cowles Communications, Inc., the publisher of Look magazine.

The first installment has been planned for the Look issue that reaches newsstands on Jan. 10.

The first step in the sale of the magazine rights was taken in mid-July. Mr. Manchester's literary agent, Donald Congdon, sent the manuscript to six magazines that had expressed interest.

Magazines Named

In addition to Look they were: Life, The Saturday Evening Post, The Ladies Home Journal, McCall's and Good Housekeeping.

Mr. Congdon said yesterday that he had also offered the manuscript to The New Yorker and The New York Times, but that neither had cared to enter the competition.

Sources close to Mr. Manchester said yesterday that the author had felt free to go ahead with magazine negotiations because he had received verbal assurances from Senator Robert F. Kennedy that formal approval was on the way.

What was considered the "formal approval" was the telegram the Senator sent in which he said that "members of the Kennedy family will place no obstacle in the way of publication of his (Mr. Manchester's) book."

This telegram is generally regarded as one of the most critical elements in the case. It was sent on July 28. That was one day after the magazine representatives began their final round of negotiations with Mr. Congdon.

When the manuscripts were offered to the magazines, a great effort was made to see that they did not get into too many hands. It was evident that they contained much newsworthy material and it was feared that, if caution was not exercised, this material would prematurely find its way into print.

Accordingly, a request was made to the six magazines that the manuscripts be read only by top echelon editors, and that all the copies be returned promptly by all but the magazine that bought the rights.

On the afternoon of July 29, shortly before the deadline for bids originally set by Mr. Congdon, David Maness, articles editor of Life, submitted a bid for more than \$500,000 plus some added promotional benefits.

Shortly afterward, Mr. Congdon went into conference with William B. Arthur, Look editor, and Robert Meskill, a managing editor. Their offer was not so

high as the Life offer, and Mr. Congdon told them so.

The only other magazine that was ever really in the running, informants said, was The Saturday Evening Post.

The Look editors, concerned that the price might slip from their grasp, asked for a little time and were back early in the evening with what proved to be the winning offer. It was for \$665,000 and also provided that Mr. Manchester would receive a fee as a special consultant.

Now it was the turn of the negotiators for Life to learn that their bid was low. Unfortunately for them, the magazine's top editors had scattered for the weekend. It was Friday evening.

Mr. Congdon was asked to keep the matter open until Monday when the top editors would be back at their desks. But he and Mr. Manchester decided to accept the Look bid.

There had never been any stipulation that the highest bid would win. Another consideration was that it probably was best to accept a firm offer already in hand—a record offer, at that.

Finally, according to informed

sources, Look was amenable to having the author control not only the text, but headlines, pictures and the like, while Life wanted to retain such control.

Mr. Manchester was reported to have kept Senator Kennedy fully informed of what was going on. The Senator was at his home, in Hyannis Port on Cape Cod, and Mr. Manchester was reported to have spoken with him by phone twice on the day the deal was consummated with Look—once before and once after the agreement was made.

Why did the author want the publication speeded up rather than wait for the originally agreed-on date—which was to have been after November, 1968? This was the answer of one source familiar with his reasoning:

"The book had been submitted to Harper and Row three months before, and its content had been discussed with various people. Everyone realized it was a brilliant job and thought that it was certainly in shape to be published. So why hold it up?"

Mr. Kennedy, in an affidavit filed in connection with the lawsuit, said his telegram—the telegram saying no obstacles would be put in the way of publication—had been sent at the

urging of defendants Manchester and Harper."

"I was told by Harper's representatives," he said, "that Manchester was becoming ill from an obsession with the thought that the book might never be published."

The Senator stressed, however, that the "telegram makes no statement approving either text, or time, or mode of publication."

It was about this time that Mrs. Kennedy returned to New York from a vacation in Hawaii.

And many observers believe it was she who made the major objection to serialization—particularly to the manner in which magazine publication was planned.

An emotional meeting between the President's widow and Look's Gardner Cowles was reportedly held in Hyannis Port.

Negotiations Go On

Negotiations between all the parties went back and forth over the next weeks and months, with changes made here and there in the manuscript and other demands taken under consideration.

At one point during the tangled proceedings, Mr. Manchester went to Europe. Top executives at Harper's flew to London for critical conferences with him.

Time was flying by. And in December, time became critical for it was necessary for both Look and Harper and Row to

start worrying about production deadlines. Finally, time began running out and, when continuing negotiations failed to bring an accord, Mrs. Kennedy stepped in and sued. P. 11