

7 September 1965

Dr J C Rhoads
National Archives Building
Pennsylvania Ave and 7th St NW
Washington, D C

Dear Dr Rhoads,

Allow me to express my appreciation and gratitude for the courtesy extended to me by Messrs. Bridgers, Johnson, Swanson, and, through them, by yourself on the occasion of my visit last Thursday, September 2nd. Their cooperation helped materially to make my visit a profitable one. I regret that we did not meet and intend to repair that omission when the preparation of additional material on the assassination of President Kennedy is completed and that material is made available for examination and study.

I shall be even more deeply indebted for information to that effect at the appropriate time.

If you will not think me impertinent, I should like to call your attention to a number of points in connexion with the Zapruder, Nix, and Muchmore films, and the Zapruder slides, which seem to me to call for clarification from the point of view of accuracy. I did not ask to be shown slides from the Nix and Muchmore films and do not know whether they are available.

The three films are kept in containers identified with typewritten labels, reading: No. 904 C Copy of Abraham Zapruder film; No. 905, copy of Orville O. Nix film; No. 906, copy of ~~Mat~~ Muchmore film. In each instance the word "original" has been written in red crayon diagonally across the label. The intention, in all probability, was to amend the typewritten legend to bring it into conformity with the wording on page vi of volume XVIII of the Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy: Commission Exhibit No. 904, copy of original Zapruder film; 905, copy of original Nix film; 906, copy of original Muchmore film. But as the labels read, the words "copy" and "original" seem to be in contradiction. A simple carat in each case might obviate confusion.

The Zapruder slides begin with no. 171 and end with no. 343. The Zapruder film contains footage preceding frame no. 171 and continuing beyond frame no. 343. An explanation for the omission of frames before no. 171 and after no. 343 can be sought, of course, in the material deposited in the Archives and from those responsible for its original accumulation, arrangement, and prior custody. But would it not be of assistance to scholars and researchers to anticipate their individual discoveries of the omissions by directing their attention to this difference between film and slides?

Another omission which scholars will surely note is the absence of frames 208-211 inclusive. The missing material may prove to be of greater or lesser significance, or of none at all. But its importance for the researcher is undoubtedly increased by the knowledge that frame no. 210 is reproduced in black-and-white as Commission Exhibit 893 on page 89 of Volume XVIII of the Hearings. Should not the omission be noted by the National Archives? And if there is an explanation of the omission, should that not be noted also?

Still other points about which researchers ought to be alerted are the numbering of the frames and the renumbering or misnumbering of a number of frames. The source and authenticity of the numbering are not stated; nor are they apparent. What seems like an obvious instance of misnumbering pivots on frame no. 317, which follows the fatal shot seen in frame no. 313, and its aftermath in frames 314-316 inclusive, but which show President Kennedy in a position to be seen before frame no. 313 and without a head wound. Nor does frame no. 317 of the Zapruder color slides correspond with frame no. 317 as contained in black-and-white reproduction in Commission Exhibit 885 (on page 72 of Volume XVIII). If the color slide now numbered 317 is properly some number before 313, then, it seems clear, all the frames following it must be renumbered, including the decisive frame, 313. Should not the obvious discrepancy attending frame 317 be noted for the instruction and benefit of scholars?

Am I too forward in raising these points? Is it beyond the function and responsibility of the archivist to execute the suggestions implicit in the questions I have asked? I beg forgiveness if I have exceeded the bounds of propriety. I plead in extenuation devotion to the idea that truth must be served and belief that historical records and research should conduce to that end. I shall be most grateful for any comment you care to make.

Respectfully yours,

Thomas Stern

2705 Bainbridge Avenue
Bronx 58, New York City