

Archive on slaying of RFK is

School gains files from LA police as probe of assassination continues

By Dana Fulham
Contributing Reporter

NORTH DARTMOUTH — In a small, red-carpeted room on the fourth floor of the Southeastern Massachusetts University library, the record is finally complete.

Every photograph, tape recording, police file and witness interview saved from Robert F. Kennedy's slaying is stored in what has recently become the only complete archive of the assassination in the world.

This June marks the twentieth anniversary of RFK's death, and interest has waned little in the slaying that ripped open the 1968 presidential election and capped a decade of political violence in this country.

On this sprawling, modern campus near New Bedford, there has been much interest in the archive, which has brought the usually unnoticed public school a measure of national recognition.

Amidst photographs of bullet holes and police reenactments, stacks of cassette tapes and boxes of documents, students regularly browse and study in the room to learn about political violence and how to do research using primary sources.

Student Deanna Perry — who has been working in the archive since last September — said she believes the assassination archives are important because questions remain surrounding the New York senator's death.

"It's something that should be

done, not just forgotten because it's 20 years old," said Perry, 22. "People should know what happened. Bobby Kennedy affected a lot of people's lives."

It was only last month that the Los Angeles Police Department bent to unrelenting pressure from historians and the media and released its 50,000-page file on the crime. The file completed SMU's collection.

"To understand the threats to a democratic order, we have to understand what kind of threats there are," said SMU archivist Philip Melanson, 43, who spearheaded the university's quest to assemble all available records on RFK's death.

Melanson teaches a course at SMU on the history of American political assassinations. He also testified numerous times before the Los Angeles Police Commission for the release of the records.

"Given the fact that the 1960s was the most violent decade in political history, I thought it was important to understand the nature of those events," Melanson said, explaining his devotion to the study of political violence in America.

In the meantime, Melanson said he's troubled by gaps in the Los Angeles Police Department record.

The often-asked question about the identity of a woman in a polka-dot dress who was reportedly seen with assassin Sirhan Sirhan is still not answered, Melan-

complete



Globe photo/Stephen Ro
Philip Melanson and Helen Koss maintain the Robert F. Kennedy collection in the library of Southeastern Massachusetts University in North Dartmouth.

son said. Neither is the question of the number of bullets fired at Kennedy, he said.

In one police photograph displayed at the archive, seven black marks that appear to be bullet holes dot the murder scene. However, Sirhan Sirhan's gun could hold only six bullets, Melanson said.

Much study of the documents is left to be done, said the professor, who is planning a news conference this week to announce his analysis of the newly released files.

"The fact that there are irresponsible people raising these

questions doesn't mean all the questions should be ignored," he said of his probe.

SMU began its assassination archive in 1984, when Californians Floyd Nelson and Lillia Castellano donated to the university their private collection of tapes and news clippings of the event.

After acquiring the private files, Melanson successfully petitioned the FBI by using the Freedom of Information Act for its records on the case.

Robert Kennedy's political papers are housed at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston.