

Archivist claims Kennedy files 'gap'

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

NORTH DARTMOUTH — The head of the Robert F. Kennedy Assassination Archives says that a "yawning gap" of significant evidence exists in the police materials recently forwarded to the archive at Southeastern Massachusetts University.

That gap, he said, is especially disturbing because it involves taped interviews with people whose testimony might support theories of a conspiracy or the involvement of more than one person in the Kennedy shooting.



MELANSON

Philip H. Melanson, 43, professor of political science and an expert on political violence, said at a press conference in the university library that a wide discrepancy exists between the amount of material his research led him to believe was in the files held secret for almost 20 years

by the Los Angeles Police Department and what arrived at the university last month.

Kennedy was shot June 5, 1968, while campaigning in Los Angeles for the Democratic presidential nomination. He died within hours and a Jordanian immigrant, Sirhan Sirhan, was convicted of the crime and is currently serving a life sentence in California.

"Our survey of the files since they arrived April 21 has discovered what I regard as a yawning gap in the case record," Melanson said. "There is a major shortfall of tape recordings of interviews."

Instead of the 3,000 hours of taped materials he had been told existed, only about 300 to 400 hours were sent to the archive. He said he believes the taped interviews did exist, but have since disappeared. He said the material could be "stashed in the corner of someone's garage . . . things have disappeared before from security areas of police departments."

Melanson said it was known before the files were released through efforts under the Freedom of Information Act that about 10 other significant items of evidence had disappeared, including 2,400 photos that were burned as "duplicates" and a door frame with bullet holes from the crime scene.

"People should understand that perhaps it wasn't the complete record and the good job of compiling and preserving the police claimed it was," Melanson said. "Hopefully, we won't find a nine-tenths shortfall in the other categories of materials."

Melanson said there were no taped interviews of 51 important and-or controversial witnesses, including 29 whose testimony could be construed to indicate that Kennedy had been a victim of a conspiracy.

"This is disturbing," Melanson said, "because the LAPD had said they would not have 'another Dallas.' In other words, their investigation would be thorough and complete. It was the lack of this that led to so many conspiracy theories about the assassination (of President John F. Kennedy in 1963) in Dallas."

In Los Angeles, the chief police spokesman, Cmdr. William Booth, said the department would "not deal with what somebody else calls a discrepancy."

"Everything that we had in file with regards to that case had been turned over to the (state) archives," he said. "In terms of individuals coming up with their own theories . . . and being critical as to whether they find what they're looking for or not . . . the records have to speak for themselves."

Robert Houghton, who as chief of detectives headed the police investigation into the assassination, said it was difficult to argue the finer points of a 20-year-old crime, but rejected suggestions of a coverup.

"I don't know anything about destroying any tapes at all," Houghton, 74, said from his home in North Ridge, Calif. "Certain things I understand have been blocked out, but that was to protect a lot of people who were interviewed. I don't know what was taken out, if anything."

Melanson began compiling a collection on Kennedy's killing in 1984, when the library at Southeastern Massachusetts University accepted material gathered by the Robert F. Kennedy Truth Committee, a group that believes more than one person was involved in the shooting.

The Los Angeles police concluded in 1969 that Sirhan Sirhan was solely responsible.

Conspiracy theorists suggested that a second gunman fired at Kennedy from behind, while Sirhan stood in front of him.

CAPE COD TIMES
May 12, 1985, p. 3