

Stage for Kennedy-Manchester Dispute Was Set

By RICHARD WITKIN

The stage began to be set early last summer for an early decision on the latent issue of whether the Kennedy family and their chosen author could agree without friction on all major details of his account of the Kennedy assassination.

It was at that time that efforts were initiated to have the story — author William Manchester's "The Death of a President"—published in early 1967 instead of after Nov. 22, 1968, as originally planned.

There are conflicting versions of what took place — versions that may figure in courtroom testimony if the lawsuit brought by Mrs. John F. Kennedy goes to trial instead of being settled in current private negotiations.

Sources on both sides of the controversy say the speed-up in publication was mutually agreed to at some point.

Magazine Rights Sold

What resulted, in any case, was that Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., the publishers, began gearing to put out the book in March or April. At the same time, moves were undertaken that resulted in sale of the magazine rights to Cowles Communications, Inc., the publisher of Look magazine.

Sources close to the Kennedy family said yesterday that Senator Robert F. Kennedy had agreed to the magazine sale, though without giving up manuscript-approval and other rights detailed in the original book contract.

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

The Look sale brought Mr. Manchester a record price of \$665,000. Under the payment clause of the agreement, he received \$365,000 on Aug. 11, 1966, the date of execution of the agreement.

The balance of \$300,000 is to be paid in five approximately equal installments, beginning Jan. 10, 1967, and then each Jan. 10 through 1971.

The original agreement called for beginning serialization on Oct. 18, 1966. But this was later changed.

The first step in the sale of the magazine rights was taken

in mid-July by Donald Congdon, Mr. Manchester's literary agent. He is an associate of Harold Matson, Inc., 30 Rockefeller Plaza, considered one of the leading agencies in the business. Among its other clients are Herman Wouk, Richard Bissell, Eric Severeid and the estate of C. S. Forester.

Mr. Congdon sent the Manchester manuscript to six magazines that had expressed an interest, after he got in touch with them, in submitting bids.

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 tele-

gram 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 before 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. Cong-

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Last Summer

don 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 prize 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.

Mr. Kennedy said in his affidavit submitted by the President's widow in her lawsuit that he had talked with Mr. Manchester on the phone that day.

The telegram sent the day before also suggests that magazine serialization was not in itself an issue, so far as the Senator was concerned.

It says, among other things, that "if Mr. Manchester's account is published in segments or excerpts, I would expect that incidents would not be taken out of context or summarized in any way which might distort the facts of or the events relating to President Kennedy's death."

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 & 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 & 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.

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