

'Now Lady Guinevere

Thousands pay homage to Onassis

By Bruce Frankel
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Tall, silver-haired, almost Kennedyesque, John Galla led his wife and four daughters into the crowd clamoring outside the apartment building where Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis lived, and where her wake was held Sunday night.

"We remember Camelot. And now Lady Guinevere is gone. Ladies like Jackie Kennedy come once a century, and I wanted my girls to see this," said Galla, 46, explaining why they had driven 60 miles from Wading River, N.Y., to the vigil on Fifth Avenue.

But in a quest to share in history and join the mourning, many outdistanced him.

"She's the closest thing to royalty America has ever seen," said Harvey Mendelsohn, 55, a financial consultant, of Clearwater, Fla. who flew in for the day.

All day, spectators poked out of tour buses. Others perched on walls in Central Park and, beneath cloudless skies, combined mourning and sunbathing. And in a continuous stream, thousands came bearing flowers and video cameras; some teary-eyed, most not overly solemn.

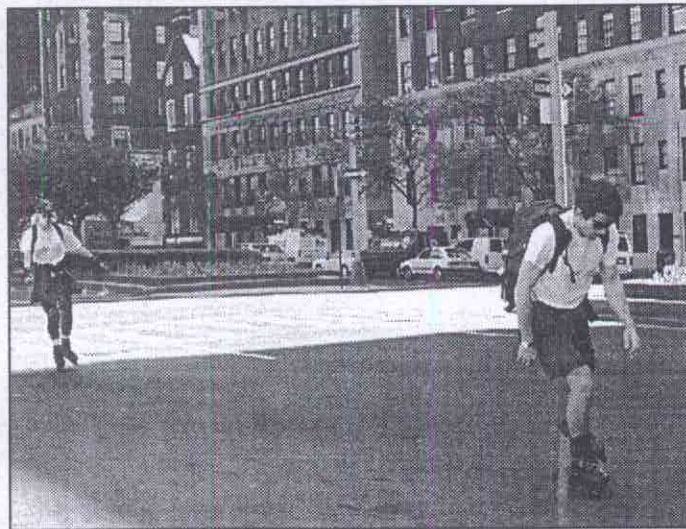
They placed bouquets next to the building's entrance and milled about — sometimes for hours — behind barricades.

For many, like Brooklyn social worker Sheila Trachtman, 50, this was the first time they had ever been drawn to join a mass vigil. She placed a single orchid at the door: "I feel like a part of my life is over."

Physician Sonia Lopez, brought a peony because she had heard the flower was a favorite of Mrs. Onassis. "There was something she gave to us that was very magical."



By Mike Segar, Reuters



By Mark Lennihan, AP

REFLECTIVE MOMENT: John F. Kennedy Jr. and Daryl Hannah skate past St. Ignatius Loyola Roman Catholic Church.

Most said they came to pay their respects to a woman they described with a mixture of affection, admiration and awe.

They came to pay homage to a woman they praised for her

insistence on privacy and to see the celebrities who arrived to mourn her.

When Onassis' children John F. Kennedy Jr. and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg arrived,

they were accosted by more than four dozen photographers and reporters.

Later celebrity watchers were rewarded when John Jr. appeared on the apartment's balcony to acknowledge the crowd with a vigorous wave. At the sight, some chanted "We love Jackie!" then spontaneously sang *God Bless America*.

Others arriving for the wake: Sen. Edward Kennedy; Maria Shriver and her husband Arnold Schwarzenegger; singer Carly Simon; Ethel Kennedy, William Kennedy Smith; Robert F. Kennedy Jr.; and designer Carolina Herrera.

Not all celebrities were among the invited. Sex-guru Ruth Westheimer came to join the crowd. Moved by the outpouring of average Americans for a woman who had lived a life remote from theirs, Westheimer said: "Only in America. Only in New York."

Elsewhere, people sought ways to pay homage to the former first lady.

is gone'



By Luc Novovitch, AP

SAYING GOODBYE: Sen. Edward Kennedy and wife Victoria Reggie, left, arrive for the wake at the Fifth Avenue apartment. Above, Sister Helen Theresa Winters recites the rosary.

► In Dallas, visitors poured into the Texas School Book Depository, where Lee Harvey Oswald is believed to have fired onto a motorcade, killing President Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963. Many left messages about Onassis in memory books at the historic exhibit.

► The John F. Kennedy museum in Boston will offer free admission today, to show respect for Onassis.

► At Grand Central Terminal in New York, people from around the world recorded their feelings in a memory book. Nearby, a plaque read: "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis led the fight to save this beautiful terminal."

But the memories for many who stood outside her apartment to bid her a final farewell, were far more personal.

Clutching newspaper photographs of Onassis, Delma Savinon, 45, a teacher, said: "I feel like I have known this lady. She is part of me, part of what I have lived."