

Onassis' Longtime Companion Was Considered Family

By SUSAN BAER
THE BALTIMORE SUN

WASHINGTON—Friends said they were like an old married couple, comfortable and serene as they strolled through snowy Central Park or lolled by the shores of Martha's Vineyard on long summer weekends.

In fact, when Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died Thursday of cancer, the official statement named three family members who were by her bedside: her two children—Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg and John F. Kennedy Jr.—and Maurice Tempelsman, the man who had been like a husband to her for the last decade and a half in all but name.

Tempelsman, a 65-year-old financier and diamond importer, was one of the people closest to the former First Lady in the last years of her life.

Although Tempelsman, a reserved, urbane, mild-mannered millionaire, was generally described, in the scant newspaper references to him through the years, as Mrs. Onassis' "longtime friend" or "frequent escort," he

was, in fact, much more.

A man who covets his privacy perhaps as much as Mrs. Onassis did hers, he was a companion and protector. He fended off the paparazzi who relentlessly hounded the two-time widow, helped manage her finances, accompanied her to dinners and concerts, and eventually shared her 15-room 5th Avenue apartment.

Mrs. Onassis knew Tempelsman, a family friend since the late '50s, longer than she knew either President Kennedy or her second husband, Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis, whose death in 1975 ended their seven-year marriage.

At first glance, Mrs. Onassis, a woman often defined by the men in her life, and Tempelsman made a profoundly unlikely couple. She was the glamorous and stately living legend, a Roman Catholic who grew up amid debutante balls and the exclusive social swirl of the Hamptons on Long Island; he is a portly, balding, self-made man born in Antwerp, Belgium, into an Orthodox Jewish family that fled from the Nazis in 1940.

Tempelsman never obtained a divorce from his wife of more than

40 years, Lily, a deeply religious Orthodox Jew, whose father was also in the diamond business. They have three grown children.

Despite their differences in background, Mrs. Onassis and Tempelsman had much in common. Tempelsman advised U.S. presidents as well as leaders in Africa, where he does much business. He is a figure in Jewish philanthropic and national Democratic circles and shared an interest in the arts, antiques, foreign languages and history with the former First Lady.

Five years ago, lawyer Samuel Pizar, a friend of Mrs. Onassis, told a reporter, "This thoughtful, unlikely Jewish gentleman has put an aura of tranquillity around [Mrs. Onassis]. Maurice doesn't show her off like [Aristotle] Onassis, who considered Jackie another jewel in his crown. Maurice, the diamond merchant, knows better; he protects her, understands her position and respects her privacy."

She first met Maurice Tempelsman in the late '50s when he arranged for John F. Kennedy, then a U.S. senator from Massachusetts, to meet a South African

diamond magnate. Tempelsman was already making himself a player in liberal Democratic circles.

Few look note of the deep friendship that started developing between the Kennedy widow and the diamond importer in the late '70s. But by the early '80s, after Mrs. Onassis had been linked in gossip columns with such men as architect I.M. Pei, CBS founder William Paley and Prince Rainier of Monaco, friends and society watchers noted that the former First Lady was turning up more and more on the arm of Tempelsman.

In 1982, he moved out of his apartment and into a hotel suite and, later, into Mrs. Onassis apartment overlooking Central Park.

Although they were not social hoppers, they were not secretive about the relationship, either, giving dinner parties together, holding hands at the ballet, and appearing together at the wedding of Caroline and Edwin Schlossberg.

In the summers, they would fly by chartered plane to Mrs. Onassis' sprawling vacation estate on Martha's Vineyard.