

Auction to Sell Kennedy Mementos

By GLENN COLLINS

Think Camelot, the bright side of Camelot.

Imagine Flash II, the single-masted, 22-foot-long racing sloop owned by John F. Kennedy from age 17 to 25. Envision the antique writing desk that he used to sign documents in the Oval Office. Picture the black Persian-lamb pill-box hat that Jacqueline Kennedy wore to the baptism of her son, John F. Kennedy Jr.

These are some of the 600 items of Kennedy-era memorabilia that will go on the auction block at the Park Avenue Armory on March 18 and 19. Guernsey's, the small auction house that is to announce the sale today, is billing the auction of Kennedy artifacts as second only to that of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis estate sale at Sotheby's in April 1996, when frenzied bidding for 1,200 lots fetched an unexpected \$34.4 million.

The president of Guernsey's, Arlan Ettinger, said yesterday that the sloop, the desk and the hat were the real thing, and that more than half the lots to go on sale in March were amassed by President Kennedy's longtime personal secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, who died in 1995 at age 85.

Some of the auction's contents are to be displayed today at a preview in the atrium of Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue, a space large enough to accommodate the Kennedy sloop's 35-foot-high mast. Mr. Ettinger estimated that the auction would bring in about \$3 million — roughly the same prediction made by Sotheby's in 1996 before the house was staggered by wildly escalating bidding.

If the auction is but another round of collectible madness, it seems certain to raise more questions about the authenticity of Kennedy artifacts, following the recent tempest over the authenticity of some 300 documents purportedly in the former President's handwriting.

Theodore C. Sorensen, a longtime confidant of President Kennedy, expressed skepticism and dismay when he was told of the auction. "It's a little tawdry to be poring over the personal effects, or alleged personal effects, of the President's wife, sister and mother," he said.

Mr. Sorensen also said that the provenance of the items in the



Ollie Atkins/Saturday Evening Post, 1961

Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's secretary, amassed many of the items to be sold.

Sotheby's sale "was indisputable" because they came from the Kennedy family. But "through the years," he said, "so many phony items have been attributed to Kennedy without proper confirmation that I'd say let the buyer beware."

The items to be auctioned at Guernsey's derive from 10 collectors, Mr. Ettinger said. More than 350 of the auction lots, he said, were archived by Mrs. Lincoln.

Mr. Ettinger said the authenticity of some items to be auctioned has been established publicly. Sherry Marx, the administrator of the Museum of Yachting in Newport, R.I., said Kennedy's sloop had been on display there since August and "it's well known that it was his." As for other, newly surfaced items, Mr. Ettinger said, "They come with an abundance of evidence tracing their lineage directly to the White House or the Kennedy family."

Among the items to be auctioned are two diaries, covered in black leather, that contain Kennedy's 1951 handwritten account of a fact-finding mission in Eastern Europe when he was a United States Representative, and a 1945 typewritten diary with handwritten notations, which Mr. Ettinger said was Kennedy's record of a

visit with European leaders.

Other items, Mr. Ettinger said, include two cane rocking chairs; a family photograph album from the 1940's filled with black-and-white snapshots and newspaper clippings; ceremonial pens; diaries handwritten by Kennedy's sister, Kathleen, and his mother, Rose, and a variety of White House papers, including letters, telegrams, memos, drafts of speeches, doodles and invitations.

About 50 items, including the 1945 diary, come from Deirdre Henderson, who was a researcher in Kennedy's Boston office in 1959 and 1960, when he was a Senator. Miss Henderson said Kennedy told her to keep whatever documents she did not throw away. "We were worried that otherwise things might have been discarded because no one else knew what they were," she said.

As for the Evelyn Lincoln materials, Mr. Ettinger said that most of the items were left to Robert White, a Baltimore collector who owns more than 100,000 items of Kennedy memorabilia, in Mrs. Lincoln's will.

Mr. White said, "I have letters from Mrs. Lincoln describing these objects, as well as photographs and other documentation."

William Johnson, the chief archivist at the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Boston, termed Mr. White's collection "impressive" and said he had examined the 1951 diaries. Together, the two diaries are "a significant historical document," he said.

Mr. Johnson said that both the Kennedy Library and Mr. White had inherited materials from Mrs. Lincoln. "The material she had is likely to be authentic," he said.

Mr. White was briefly drawn into the controversy over Kennedy's purportedly handwritten papers last fall, when he was shown some of the documents and initially said the handwriting looked like Kennedy's. But in a report about the papers on the television news program "60 Minutes," Mr. White repudiated them.

"I'm a collector, not a handwriting expert, and I was shown only Xeroxes," he said. "I said they looked like Kennedy's handwriting. But when I finally was shown an original by '60 Minutes,' I didn't like what I saw."

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Nancy Siesel/The New York Times

Family photos that hung in the White House are among Kennedy memorabilia to be sold at auction.