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Profile

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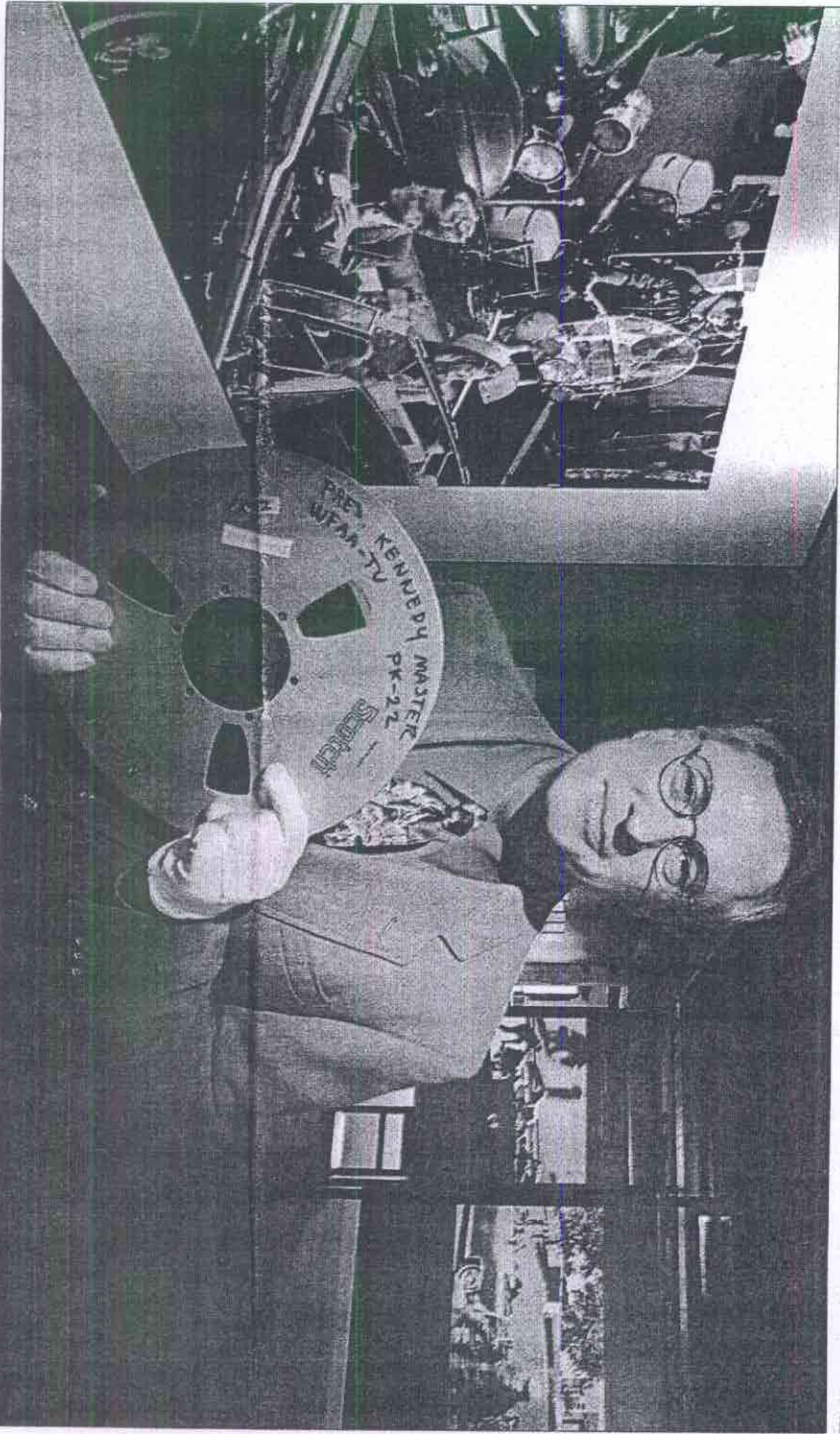
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Section E



Left: President John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, in the ill-fated motorcade with Gov. John Connally and his wife, Nellie.

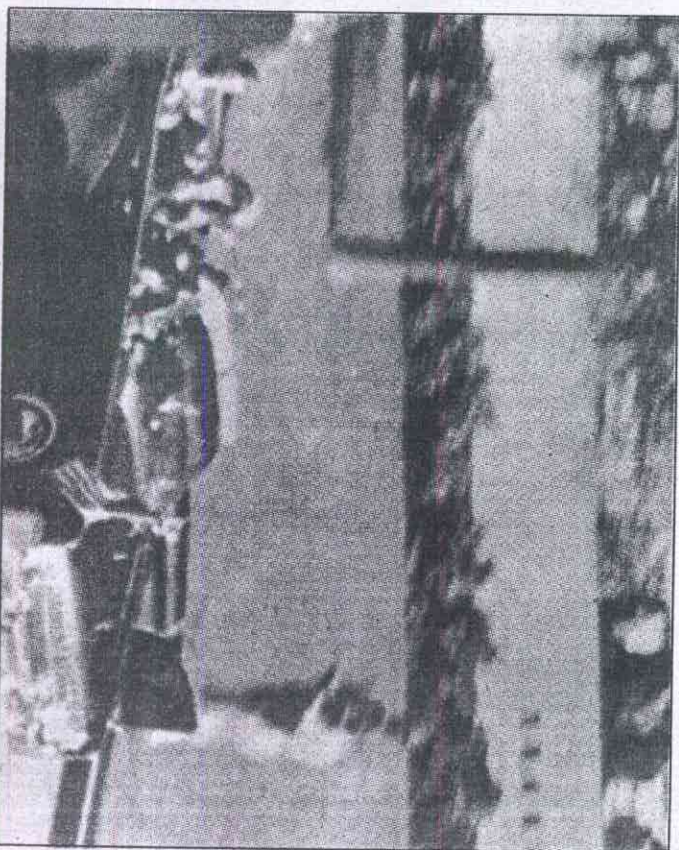
Below: Gary Mack stands near a display of photos from the day of JFK's assassination. He holds the master tape of assassination coverage from WFMA-TV (Channel 8).



The Dallas Morning News: Natalie Caudill

GARY MACK

Sorting out the
mystery of the
century from
The Sixth Floor



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The famous Zapruder film captures the assassination in progress.

BY MICHAEL GRANBERRY

"The year 2000 will see men still arguing about the president's death."

— Journalist Harrison Salisbury in 1964

Near the beginning of the movie *JFK*, a car careens wildly down a country road. A pair of hands hurls a woman from the speeding vehicle, just as Air Force One and John F. Kennedy are arriving in Texas.

Moments later, the woman is fighting for her life in a hospital emergency room. Dazed and hysterical, she's begging for doctors to intervene.

"They're gonna ... kill Kennedy," she says. "Call somebody. ... Stop them ... These are serious ..."

Killers, she's trying to say.

Despite the avalanche of criticism that followed Oliver Stone's hit movie — despite the flaws, the flat-out falsehoods and the naked bias — there is reason to believe the scene with the woman actually happened.

Or so says Gary Mack, archivist of The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, who in 1994 arrived at his job in the former Texas School Book Depository after a long career in radio and television.

The incident involving the woman and the runaway car is one of thousands Mr. Mack has chosen to study as his life's work. He managed to turn a hobby — which one family member calls "an obsession" — into a full-time calling, a passion that actually earns him an income.

This year, it also earned him an Emmy, which Mr. Mack won

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as a co-producer who borrowed liberally from the file footage of KDFW-TV (Channel 4) and pieced together what became a riveting special about the darkest chapter in Dallas history.

Since getting interested in the subject, Mr. Mack, 53, has accomplished what some consider miraculous: He appears to be equally respected by both sides in the ongoing debate over whether the president was killed by a lone gunman or by a carefully orchestrated conspiracy of unknown origin.

Monday marks the 36th anniversary of the event that made Dallas a permanent dateline and created what Mr. Mack calls "our longest-running national news story."

As Harrison Salisbury predicted so many years ago, the conversation hasn't stopped.

And the great divide remains.

■
"As conspiracy theorists like to say, you're either a lone-nutter," says Mr. Mack, a bespectacled, scholarly native of Oak Park, Ill., "or you're a CT — conspira-

cy theorist."

In his view, both sides have merit.

"You can make a convincing case that Oswald acted alone, but there's a lot of information out there that indicates there's a lot more to it than just Lee Harvey Oswald," Mr. Mack says. "The problem with the Kennedy case is, you can prove all sorts of stuff."

Some of that stuff is ridiculous to the point of farce, and some of the writers of this ongoing drama are, he concedes, "a bit goofy." So where does he stand?

He is much more of a CT than a lone-nutter, and he always has been. While it isn't the museum's job to investigate the assassination, part of his role involves keeping up with developments, and he has never been convinced that Oswald acted alone.

To those who say a conspiracy isn't possible because "that many people can't keep a secret that long," Mr. Mack likes to say, "Who was Deep Throat?"

The identity of the anonymous source behind Bob Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's investigation of Watergate in the *Washington Post* has never been revealed, which raises other questions.

What would Americans know about Watergate, Mr. Mack contends, were it not for Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein? Wasn't Watergate, with its Cuban burglars, high-stakes money laundering and "dirty tricks," as bizarre as some of the conspiracy theories that swirl like starlings through Dealey Plaza?

Even the Warren Commission failed to conclude there was no conspiracy.

"When you read the report, it doesn't say there wasn't a conspiracy," Mr. Mack says. "It just says they couldn't find one."

Conspiracy theorist

Being a CT hasn't damaged his reputation with those who believe Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing the president. Even the most ardent lone-nutters see Mr. Mack as someone with credibility and integrity.

"Gary's a friend of mine," says Hugh Aynesworth, the Southwest bureau chief for the *Washington Times*, who, as a reporter for *The Dallas Morning News* in 1963, holds the remarkable distinction of having witnessed the assassination; the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald at the Texas Theatre in Oak Cliff; and the murder of Oswald by strip-club owner Jack Ruby in the basement of the Dallas police station.

He believes adamantly that Oswald acted alone. So convinced was Mr. Mack of his pro-conspiracy position that, when he met Mr. Aynesworth, "he was afraid to be with me, for fear of having his buddies see us together," the reporter says,

with a chuckle.

"He was scared to death they would see him consorting with a villain from the enemy camp," Mr. Aynesworth adds, noting that the arc in Mr. Mack's development now includes "being open to all possibilities."

Mr. Mack admits as much.

"The best lesson I've learned about studying this subject is not to get locked into anything," the archivist says. "There were times when I was not as open-minded as I should have been."

G. Robert Blakey, the chief counsel and staff director of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, credits Mr. Mack with playing a key role in putting together evidence that, in 1979, prompted the committee to conclude with a "95 percent or greater" degree of probability that a conspiracy existed.

The finding had to do with recordings found in old Dallas police files. Mr. Mack came up with the theory that the assassination might have been recorded by Dallas police and brought it to Mr. Blakey's attention.

Although it remains controversial even now, a recording taken from a microphone strapped to an officer's motorcycle in Dealey Plaza and transferred to a Dictabelt machine at police headquarters indicated there were four shots fired at the president, according to an acoustic sound study conducted by the House committee.

That prompted the committee to conclude that, of the four shots fired, three came from behind and one from the grassy knoll — which missed. If four shots were fired, the committee rea-

sioned, there had to have been two gunmen.

The Warren Commission concluded that only three shots were fired and that all came from the \$12.95 Mannlicher-Carcano mail-order rifle owned by Oswald and found on the sixth floor of the School Book Depository, along with three shell casings presumed to be from the bullets he fired. (A fourth, unspent cartridge was found in the chamber.)

"While it's fair to say that Gary leans toward a conspiracy, I never thought he was paranoid about it or fixated on one theory to the exclusion of all others," says Mr. Blakey, now a law professor at the University of Notre Dame. "A lot of conspiracy theorists focus on one aspect and then exclude any consideration of any other aspect."

"They assimilate the evidence in light of their thesis, and any evidence inconsistent with that thesis is largely ignored. Gary has never been that way. He's tended to apply the same thesis

whether the evidence is consistent or inconsistent. He has the attitude of a scientist, and he's a superb person to put in charge" of The Sixth Floor Museum's archive collection.

Assassination obsession

Jeff West, the museum's executive director, says he hired Mr. Mack five years ago at a time when "we needed to aggressively go after the photographic, video and film collections" related to the president's visit. Because of his knowledge surrounding the event, Mr. Mack had worked as a consultant to the museum even before it opened in 1989.

"It's not that he's academically, archivally trained," Mr. West says, "it's just that his expertise is amazing. Somebody can bring in a shoe box of old photographs, and just by looking at them, he can tell you the time, the location and who the people are in the pictures. He has so much in his head, I'd like to figure out a way to download his head. Gary's knowledge of the subject is nothing short of encyclopedic."

No matter how innocuous they might appear to the people who own them, Mr. Mack says the photographs and 8-millimeter movie images taken during the president's visit hold a power that can never be duplicated. One of his goals is trying to secure every possible image not yet recovered by the museum.

"No one's invented a time machine," he says. "The only time machine we're ever gonna have are those images. So, if you have pictures, please bring them in."

But beyond the photographs and documents, the museum also hopes "to be the first stop for people making a serious effort at trying to figure out what really went on. . . . There's a lot of nonsense out there about the Kennedy assassination. Part of our job is to clear away some of that stuff and get some straight answers."

Born with questions

When he was born, Mr. Mack was named Lawrence Alan Dunkel. His parents called him Larry and still do. During his days as a disc jockey, he changed his name to Gary Mack at the request of a radio station program manager, who felt it would be more catchy.

When he had barely learned to walk, his family began moving, from Illinois to Ohio to Long Island to New Jersey. His father, Robert Farr Dunkel, was a salesman for Ohio Match Co., LaChoy Foods and Tasty Foods before he retired at age 50. He may have been miscast. Family members say Mr. Mack inherited from his dad a speaking voice worthy of an anchorman.

When Mr. Mack was 2, his mother,

Beverly Dunkel, gave birth to a baby named Charlie. Two years later, Charlie died of a rare lung disease called interstitial pneumonitis.

"It was very difficult to explain to Larry," Mrs. Dunkel says from her home in Las Vegas, Nev. "For a long time, it was like, 'Where has Charlie gone?'"

Mr. Mack's sister, Susan Coleman, who is seven years younger, says her mother told her a poignant story about the baby's headstone.

"Larry was panic-stricken," says Ms. Coleman, who also lives in Las Vegas. "Larry actually lost sleep wondering how Charlie could move the headstone and get out of the ground on his way to heaven."

While her brother has always seemed "even-keeled, middle of the road, Mr. Vanilla," his sister remembers him devoting numerous hours to a junior high school report on the sinking of the Titanic.

Mr. Mack concedes that, on an unconscious level, his brother's death might have had something to do with giving him a curiosity about why people die for unexplained reasons, but that's material more suited to a psychologist than an archivist.

"He's always been interested in catastrophic occurrences," says his sister, who remains one of his closest friends. "Why? Because he's possessed by demon gods."

And then she laughs. She says her brother "has a great sense of humor, as we all do," but almost from the moment it happened, he became increasingly curious about the death of the president.

"Believe me, this isn't a criticism — I think it's great Larry has a job where he

can get paid for researching a subject he finds so fascinating, but it got to the point several years ago where he walked, talked, slept and breathed the assassination," Ms. Coleman says. "Whatever work he was doing, it didn't matter. He was always thinking about the Kennedy thing. I don't want to say he was possessed — of course, I was kidding about that — but he was obsessed. We might be having a conversation, and I'd say, 'Wow, what a nice day we're having,' and he'd say, 'Gee, it was probably like this when Kennedy was shot.' I'm kidding, to a point, but believe me, the man was into it."

Where were you?

Moments after John F. Kennedy was gunned down, Mr. Mack was sitting in the lunch room of George Washington High School in Denver, eating his Friday favorite, cream of potato soup. The Dunkels had moved to Denver in the fall of 1959.

When an ashen-faced assistant principal walked in, Mr. Mack remembers that the man's lower lip was trembling. Just as millions of Americans remember where they were and what they were doing when the news was delivered, he remembers a trembling lip and potato soup.

"The president has been shot in Dallas," the man said.

At the time, Mr. Mack was 17 and far more interested in being a teenager. His fascination with mysteries was pretty much limited to the stories of Sherlock Holmes.

A year later, he began his college career at nearby Colorado College, thinking he might want to major in engineering or business. He was so unsure, however, that when a young woman he hoped to begin dating told him, "You have a great voice — you should be in radio," he chose to explore it.

"We had one date," he says with a laugh, "but she gave me my career."

He got a part-time job at a station in Colorado Springs, where he acquired the DJ name of Larry Dean. After his parents moved to Arizona, he transferred to Arizona State University, where he graduated in 1969.

A year later, he married fellow ASU student Ede Pannullo, with whom he has a son named Stephen, 26, now a master of the bass trombone at Mannes School of Music in New York City. Mr. Mack and his wife split up in 1991.

"We just grew apart," he says.

He acquired the name Gary Mack in 1972 at KRUX-AM in Phoenix. He doubled as a DJ and music director until 1973, when he moved to Wichita, Kan., after getting a job as a program director at

KLEO-AM. In 1976, he got a chance to be a program director in a major market by moving to KFJZ-FM (97.1), known then as Z-97 in Fort Worth.

Mounting evidence

In 1975, Mr. Mack's interest in the assassination accelerated sharply. He had gone to the ABC affiliate in Wichita to watch Geraldo Rivera's ABC talk show, *Good Night, America*, when Mr. Rivera introduced his guest, Warren Commission critic Robert Groden. (The station in Wichita declined to air the show.)

Mr. Groden, who today sells books on the grassy knoll, had managed to secure a first-generation copy of Abraham Zapruder's 8-millimeter home movie of the president's ill-fated passage down Elm Street. The result was the first public showing of Mr. Zapruder's film, about which people are still talking.

Like thousands of others who experienced the same sensation, Mr. Mack was shocked by the film's most arresting image: The president's head jerks back violently and all but explodes when the final shot is fired, directly in front of the grassy knoll.

Why would that happen, he reasoned, if the shots came from the rear, as the Warren Commission concluded they did?

"The Zapruder film is without question the most significant visual record of what went on," the archivist says. "He's the only one who caught the entire shooting. He got the whole thing in color, sharp and clear."

Almost overnight, the public showing of the film gave birth to a cottage industry. Mr. Mack was among those hooked.

"It's why most people believe there's a conspiracy," he says. "Physically, it doesn't make sense to people. We hear from hunters who say, during all the years they've hunted, they've never had an animal they've killed fall toward them," Mr. Mack says. "In every case, the animal falls away."

But as evidence of Mr. Mack's metamorphosis over the years, he now believes it's possible that the final shot came from the rear. He says that if you look at the film frame by frame, it appears as though the president's head dips forward before being snapped in the opposite direction.

"Animals are not always hit in the head, and their brains don't short-circuit the way a person's would," he says. "So . . . I just don't know."

Healthy skepticism

Within a year after seeing the film, Mr. Mack had bought all 26 volumes of the Warren Commission report and began to imbibe every conceivable de-

tail.

He found himself meeting other assassination researchers, such as Penn Jones, Mary Ferrell, Gary Shaw, Jack White, Jim Marrs and Mr. Groden, some of whom he's had to distance himself from, because he no longer accepts their theories.

Mr. White now believes there were two Lee Harvey Oswalds and two Marguerite Oswalds, referring to the suspect's mother.

Mr. Marrs, the author of *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy*, became a consultant to Mr. Stone's movie. He has since written a book, *Alien Agenda*, which suggests the president might have been killed because of what he knew of the government's knowledge of UFOs.

"Some of those guys hate Gary's guts because they feel like he's turned on 'em," Mr. Aynesworth says.

Assassination researcher Dave Perry, whom Mr. Mack calls his best friend, says that after he met the archivist in 1989, each began to benefit from the other's expertise.

"I made him much more skeptical about stuff," says Mr. Perry, who, as a former claims adjuster for an insurance company, seeks to investigate assassination matters as one would a fatal auto accident. "Gary taught me how to deal with the media, and I taught him how to treat it as a criminal investigation."

Theories multiply

By 1981, Mr. Mack had left the radio world and joined KXAS-TV (Channel 5) as a production assistant and announcer, a job he loved. He was also immersing himself even deeper in the Kennedy assassination.

In 1986, a British filmmaker named Nigel Turner called Mr. Mack, asking him to be part of a documentary titled *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*. It was being produced for a commercial network called Central Independent Television. It can still be seen periodically on the History Channel.

Mr. Turner was curious about a photograph Mr. Mack was rumored to have that assassination researchers had begun to talk about. It was taken by a woman named Mary Moorman, who was standing on the south side of Elm Street, across from the grassy knoll, as the president's motorcade passed by. She snapped the shutter of her primitive Polaroid just as the final shot was striking the president's head.

To this day, Mr. Mack contends that the so-called "badgeman" photo reveals a possible second gunman standing be-

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SELF-PORTRAIT



The Dallas Morning News: Natalie Caudill

Gary Mack

Date and place of birth: July 29, 1946, in Oak Park, Ill.

Occupation: Archivist.

Favorite movie: *King Kong* (1933 original).

My ideal vacation: Being warm and wet.

I drive a: Mazda 626.

My hero is: Anyone who stands up for what is right.

The best advice I could give a 20-year-old is: Never, ever give up your dreams.

My last meal would be: With my son and family.

My trademark cliché or expression: "It's just incredible."

My worst habit is: Procrastinating.

My best asset is: Honesty.

Behind my back, people say: Get a life.

Guests at my fantasy dinner party: Musician Benny Goodman, CNN anchor Lynne Russell, Lee Harvey Oswald (but only to ask, "Did you do it?").

I wish I could sing: On key.

If I had a different job I'd be:

Back in television production.

Favorite time of day: Mornings.

Favorite city outside Dallas: Fort Worth — really.

I'm happiest when: Opportunities

arise.

If I could change one thing about myself, it would be: To stop being shy.

I regret: It took so long for The Sixth Floor Museum to open.

Favorite assassination book: Still waiting for someone to write it.

Best anti-conspiracy book: The Warren Commission report.

Best pro-conspiracy book: *Not in Your Lifetime*, by Anthony Summers.

Most unusual thing about Lee Harvey Oswald: He's remembered for something he denied doing.

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hind the fence who identified himself as a Secret Service agent. Those who believe in the badgeman photo believe a shiny object visible in the bushes behind the fence may have been a badge.

But critics of the photo say the image is so faint, so indecipherable, that no one could possibly conclude that the shadowy figure resembles anything, much less a second gunman.

Mr. Mack thinks otherwise.

"It looks like a person in the position you would expect a person firing a rifle would be in," he says. "He appears to be dressed in a manner that's certainly consistent with a police uniform."

First, a bit of background that Mr. Mack deems significant:

A railroad attendant named Lee Bowers was standing in the watchtower behind the knoll at the time of the shooting. Mr. Bowers, who died in 1966, told the Warren Commission that he had seen two men standing behind the picket fence when the motorcade passed by and that "something caught my eye — a flash of light or a puff of smoke." He told investigators that one man appeared to be wearing dark clothing, while the other man was dressed in lighter clothing.

"There were people all over the place watching the parade," Mr. Mack says. "In that particular location, all a person had to do was walk around the end of the fence, 20 to 25 feet away, and you could almost touch the president's car. Why would two guys stay behind the fence, in a poor vantage point, and never come forward?"

A Dallas police officer named Joe Marshall Smith told the Warren Commission that, moments after the shooting, he had raced to the grassy knoll, thinking the shots came from there, even though he had been standing near the School Book Depository. He encountered a man in a suit who, the officer told investigators, showed him identification that indicated he was a Secret Service agent.

But the Secret Service told investigators its only agents were those riding in the motorcade and that none was stationed on the

ground at any time. Mr. Mack describes this as one of the Warren Commission's most egregious failings, the fact that "bells should have gone off . . . There was never a study done to find out who that person was. Those who criticize the investigation are on really firm ground with stories like that."

Years later, a witness named Gordon Arnold described having a confrontation with a man matching the description of "the phantom Secret Service agent" — Mr. Mack's term — and the dark-clothed man Mr. Bowers testified seeing. Mr. Arnold, who has since died, appears in *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*, in which he also describes hearing a bullet whiz past his head from his vantage point in front of the picket fence. His story was first given to *The Dallas Morning News* in an exclusive interview in 1978.

Years before the documentary, the badgeman photo had been enlarged several times its normal

size, and Mr. Mack is convinced it shows something. But Mr. Blakey, who believes a shot was fired from the grassy knoll, calls the badgeman photo "bull—," saying the acoustic evidence "proved" a shot was fired from the grassy knoll but that no one could have fired from the badgeman's location.

"Gary's a good guy, but that doesn't mean he gets it right every time," Mr. Blakey says. "On this, he's just wrong. If the badgeman theory is correct, the acoustics are wrong, and I believe the acoustics are far more convincing."

However, a panel of experts from the National Academy of Sciences later reviewed the acoustic evidence and strongly denounced it, saying it reveals not a single gunshot. But Mr. Mack remains skeptical.

Further studies "of all four noises may ultimately answer the question," he says, "of how many shots were fired that day."

At the very least, the badgeman theory and *The Men Who Killed Kennedy* established Mr. Mack as a serious assassination researcher and pro-conspiracy voice. But even as a senior consultant to Nigel Turner's documentary, he took issue with one portion in particu-

lar.

One of dozens of segments in the five-part series names three men who were part of an underworld French syndicate that allegedly killed the president. One of the men threatened to sue after telling the filmmakers he could prove he was serving in the French navy and nowhere near Dallas on the day in question. A settlement was reached, but the damage was done.

"Overall, it's an excellent collection of reasonable conspiracy theories that still linger," Mr. Mack says.

The plot thickens

Nine years ago, Mr. Mack gained national prominence for scoring one for the anti-conspiracy side. With the help of Mr. Perry, he was able to prove that a story naming a deceased Dallas police officer as the grassy knoll gunman was bogus.

A young man named Ricky White said he could prove that his late father, Roscoe White, had fired the final, fatal shot as part of a conspiracy acted out with Jack Ruby. Even Roscoe White's widow knew of the plot, said Mr. White, who, along with his mother, was negotiating a book deal. (Geneva White has since died.)

Mr. White said his mother had been forced to undergo electroshock therapy as a way of erasing her memory, particularly the part about Jack Ruby and Roscoe White plotting the killing. When asked if the doctor who administered the electroshock therapy was still alive, one of Mr. White's researchers told a press conference the man had been dead for years.

But Mr. Perry located and interviewed the doctor at the same Dallas office he had used for years. He labeled the story ridiculous. When Mr. Perry and Mr. Mack drove to East Texas to interview a man Ricky White had labeled a Mafia

hit man, the man turned out to be a blueberry farmer.

Mr. Aynesworth credits Mr. Mack and Mr. Perry with one of the more important put-downs in the history of assassination research, saying, "Dave and Gary disemboweled the Ricky White story."

Mr. Mack says that when he met Ricky White three weeks after his initial press conference, he told him, "We're convinced your father didn't do it — we have proof that he didn't." He was shocked, he was speechless. I waited for him to ask me, 'What is the evidence, what is the information?,' and he never asked. That's when I concluded the story was a hoax."

As conversations with Mr. Mack often go, one hour quickly becomes two, which soon become four.

No less than an hour is spent talking about Lee Harvey Oswald, whose background and behavior — peculiarly inconsistent with that of a killer, Mr. Mack contends — will undoubtedly keep people talking past the year 2000.

He's asked about an organization for young males to which Oswald once belonged called the Civil Air Patrol. And merely the mention of that subject lights a fire in the archivist's eye.

"Do you know who founded the Civil Air Patrol?" he asks, leaning forward in his chair. "D. Harold Byrd. And you know what he did? He was the owner of the Texas School Book Depository on the day Kennedy died and had been for 30 years."

As Mr. Mack is wont to do, he shakes his head and sighs. This is a crime for which the term "incidence of coincidence" might well have been coined.

"What a story," he says. "What a story . . . Has there ever been one like it, or will there ever be again?"