

'New Life' Described for Figure in King Probe

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— Staff Photo

JAMES WOLF
Attorney for House Assassinations Committee.

Grace E. Walden, a 62-year-old woman who claims to have seen the slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. run from a boarding house 10 years ago, has been given \$8,000 in medical care in California to help her begin "her new life," one of her guardians said in Probate Court.

Author-lawyer Mark Lane, Mrs. Walden's co-guardian with Memphis attorney Duncan Ragsdale, claimed in a hearing yesterday that federal and state statutes do not give Probate Court Judge Joseph Evans the authority to release Mrs. Walden's medical records from Western Mental Health Institute to the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

"Monumental harm could be brought to Grace Walden in her new life" if the medical records are released to the committee and later leaked to the news media for publication or broadcast, Lane argued.

James Wolf, counsel for the Assassinations Committee which is investigating the deaths of King and President John F. Kennedy, sought a court order yesterday for release of Mrs. Walden's records.

But Evans said he would take the request under advisement pending receipt of an opinion from the attorney general on the state law which forbids release of confidential medical records except under certain circumstances.

Mrs. Walden in April, 1968, was a resident of a boarding house from which investigators later determined the bullet was fired which killed King. She claimed later that the man she saw running from the boarding house did not resemble James Earl Ray, the confessed slayer of King.

Ray, who is seeking a new trial, is now represented by Lane.

Shortly after King's murder, Mrs. Walden was committed to Western Mental Health Institute at Bolivar, Tenn., under a probate court ruling that she was mentally incompetent.

In a written application for an order disclosing Mrs. Walden's medical records, Wolf said: "The committee (on Assassinations) believes that a court order is not necessary when a duly authorized and issued Congressional Subpoena is served upon the custodian of the records. The committee, however, is willing to obtain such an order since it was requested by Dr. Morris Cohen, superintendent of Western Mental Health Institute."

Mrs. Walden already has been interviewed by various investigators, including persons from the Assassinations Committee, as a possible witness to the escape of King's assassin from her rooming house at 422½ S. Main.

Wolf claimed that "it is in the public interest that the committee have full and complete access to the medical records of Mrs. Walden to determine whether or not her commitment was in any way connected with the assassination of Dr. King."

Lane has claimed that Mrs. Walden's commitment was a plot to suppress her testimony regarding the man she saw flee her boarding house after King was shot.

Near the end of the hearing Evans granted a temporary restraining order requested by Ragsdale which prohibits Western Mental Health Institute from disclosing Mrs. Walden's medical records pending the judge's ruling on the matter.