



*John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library*

Columbia Point Boston, Massachusetts 02125

617-929-4539  
July 12, 1985

Mr. Stephen D. Yslas, President  
Los Angeles Police Commission  
Suite 144-150  
Parker Center  
150 N. Los Angeles Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Yslas:

I am writing in regard to the decision your commission must make about the disposition of the police files from the investigation of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. I am an archivist and historian and have been responsible for the Robert F. Kennedy Collection for nearly ten years. From my work I believe that the Los Angeles Police Department records of this investigation would have a significant research value and should be preserved in an appropriate archival institution if they no longer have administrative or investigative value to the Department.


Let me suggest some of the operating procedures of archival work that may have a bearing on this matter. Archivists do not necessarily keep all the materials they are given. They first make an evaluation of the materials to determine what has permanent historic value and then offer the rest back to the donor or dispose of it, for example by recycling in a paper mill. In making such evaluative judgement archivists might enlist the aid of subject experts. Nor do archivists necessarily open all materials they decide to keep at the same time. I would guess that a legitimate concern on your part might be to protect the confidentiality of informants or individuals' right to privacy. Archivists working with sensitive materials have guidelines and procedures for identifying and withdrawing items that it is too soon to open to public use. In our institution we deal with national security classified documents, Senate investigative files, and normal constituent mail of a personal nature in ways to protect national and individual rights and interests and yet to preserve the documents for legitimate research use. Finally, an appropriate archive should be able to handle the work necessary to process the files and to handle the anticipated reference demand including copying of documents. When an agency like the Police Department transfers files to a repository, a document like a deed is drawn up and encompasses the interests and concerns of the donor and the responsibilities of the recipient archives.

From my reference to the list of California archival institutions, two in particular seem to be likely candidates for your consideration, the California State Library in Sacramento and the University of California at Los Angeles Research Library. I am

enclosing copies of the description of each institution with its address and telephone number. You might consider calling the director of each prior to your July 31st meeting to ask any questions that occur to you. For records of this importance, I am sure that there are many institutions that would like to have them, and I am sure that there are procedures and agreements possible to meet all contingencies, interests, and rights.

I hope that these comments may be of some assistance in your deliberations on the future of the records. Though I shall be away until July 31st, I would be happy to assist in any way that might arise.

Sincerely,

  
Henry J. Gwiazda II, Ph.D.  
Archivist, Robert F. & Edward M.  
Kennedy Collections

cc: Dr. Philip Melanson