

JFK library opening in sight at last

By MARY T. WAGNER

WALTHAM, Mass. — It's taken 15 years to bring the project this far, to the point where Dave Powers, friend and aide to the late President John F. Kennedy, can speak about opening the library in the fall of 1979.

The library, which will also serve as a museum, has been in the planning stages since shortly after Kennedy's assassination in November, 1963. The nine story building will be located on Columbia Point in Dorchester, Mass.

"It's too long of a story to write," said Powers, the museum's curator. "It was going to be built down at Harvard originally, but it ran into difficulties . . . then there were environmental impact studies to be done (for other possible locations)."

Powers said that an estimated one million people per year will visit the completed library, generating local traffic unwanted by many.

Although a permanent display of Kennedy memorabilia has not been established yet, Powers toured the US and Europe with a traveling exhibit soon after the assassination.

"In 1964, when we were traveling around the country, we were saying 'in two more years . . . Had he lived, we would not have had this difficulty. Johnson, Truman and Hoover were all alive for their museums,'" Powers said.

The contents of the library are now kept and catalogued in storerooms of the General Services Administration building in Waltham, Mass., where Powers also has his office.

Oil paintings, pastels, original political cartoons and photographs of Kennedy and members of his family vie for space on the cluttered walls, while rows upon rows of tall metal cabinets provide shelf space for busts, books and ceramics. Cardboard boxes provide more storage area also.

A set of pale pink brocade armchairs from Nikita Khrushchev rest under plastic dust covers, in company in the storeroom with a wooden canoe from the people of Tanzania, a playhouse sent to Caroline Kennedy by Madame Charles de Gaulle and the mounted sailfish that used to hang in JFK's office.

Powers said the museum would be divided into five themes — JFK's "roots," his formative years through college, his experiences in World War II, his political beginnings and the presidential years. The museum will also feature a film on the Kennedy years.

"We want to tell the story of the man. The museum will show every aspect of his life, from his birth to his death," Powers said.

Powers, 66, had worked with Kennedy since 1946, when JFK asked for his help in his first political campaign, a race for a vacant seat in Boston's 11th Congressional District.

Powers explained how his involvement in the library grew from a relatively small beginning.

"Well, we had the traveling exhibit. Then Jacqueline and Bobby Kennedy asked me if I'd start establishing a catalog and writing a little history about the gifts he received, and so one thing led to another, and I've been here for 15 years. I've been working on the library for 14."

"It became a labor of love, and I owe him this much. He was the greatest man I ever met and the best friend I ever had. It makes me proud that I'm able to do a little something for a man who did so much for me."

Powers still fondly remembers and recounts Kennedy's words on politics and the presidency.

"He once said, 'Politics to me is far more rewarding than any other profession because it has so many personal and public compensations. It gives you a chance to use all your faculties, mental, physical and emotional, in a way no other profession does.'"

The walls of Powers' office are covered with framed pictures of JFK and the rest of the Kennedy family. One of his favorite items is a certificate from the late president praising Powers' late night physical fitness campaign of walking to the refrigerator and drinking most of the president's beer.

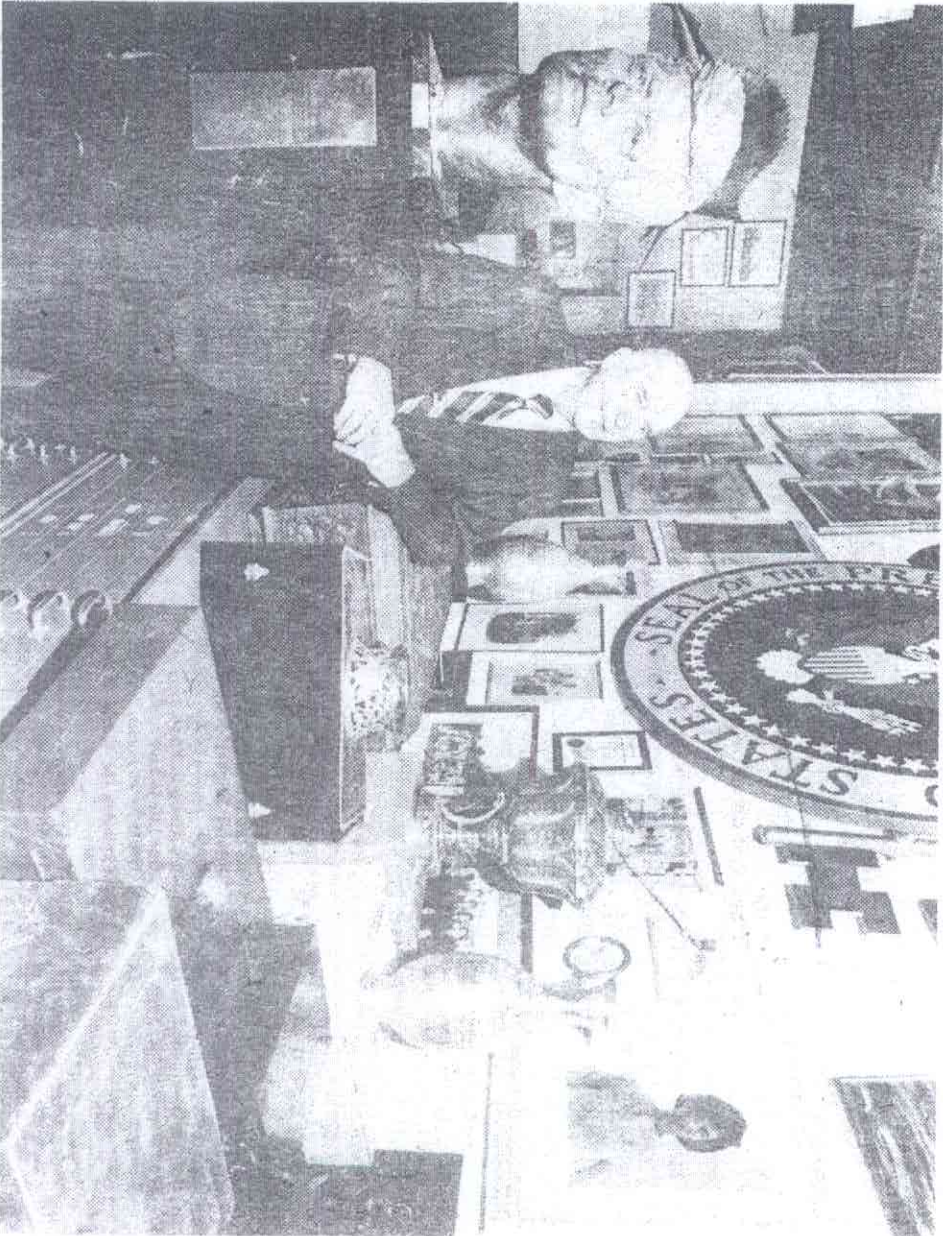
"You could see a laugh coming into his eyes before you could hear it from his lips — that's why we all loved being with him," he said.

Good Morning!

MILWAUKEE SENTINEL

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Dave Powers amid some the memorabilia that will fill the JFK library and museum