

'TED, WE LOVE YOU'

# Carnival Air at Kennedy

By Jeremy Campbell

EDGARTOWN (Mass.) — (LES) — Soon after the news came in from Boston that the inquest into the death of Mary Jo Kopechne had been thrust into the musty limbo of the Massachusetts appeal courts, a black convertible cruised slowly round the streets of Edgartown, blowing its horn in a continuous fanfare of celebration.

The roof of the car was down and it was decked out with bunting and gaily-colored streamers. Crudely inscribed on banners running along both sides was the jubilant message:

**Congratulations Kennedy. Ted, we love you.**

Some passers-by were astonished that bad taste could run to such extremes. A few impotently threatened to summon the police.

But most accepted it as the crowning vulgarity in a week that had provided enough material for a Ford Foundation thesis on extraordinary popular delusions and the madness of crowds.

## Now It's Show Biz

The Kennedy case long ago ceased to be a tragedy, has passed even beyond the phase of cheap melodrama and is now a department of show business, a traveling carnival which lends some credence to the claim of his lawyers that to appear in open court, facing nearly 200 members of the press and without the right to challenge testimony would be tantamount to self-destruction.

Morbidity in the last few days has known no limits. On Chappaquiddick Island holiday-makers bottle the gur-

gling green water of Poucha Pond and take it home as a memento.

A middle-aged lawyer came all the way from Philadelphia to pose for photographs at the spot where Mary Jo plunged to her death and sent copies home to all his clients.

## Tourist Flashed Knife

A tourist, stripping fragments from the hump-backed bridge, was challenged by an affronted hippie and drove him away with a knife.

Days before the inquest was scheduled to open, a lady visitor in yellow beach trousers walked giggling round the unattended courtroom, took a spin in the judge's high-backed leather chair, and then stepped up to the witness stand, raised her right hand and swore to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help her God.

Her husband recorded the performance for posterity with a Polaroid camera.

## Floodgates Open

The literary floodgates have already opened up. Across the street from the Edgartown courthouse a shop is hawking a paperback book called the Kennedy Curse — a purple synopsis of every sorrow and setback in the history of the family including Teddy's accident; his forged Spanish paper at Harvard and his arrest for reckless driving as a student at the University of Virginia in 1958.

That is the context in which the inquest was to have been held.

Worse still from the Kennedy party's point of view was the steamy atmosphere de-



**EDWARD KENNEDY**

Synopsis of sorrows

veloping inside the courthouse itself. Even court officials in Edgartown, relaxing off duty over a beer at the Navigation Inn, conceded that the inquest could not help but have a potent underlying flavor of politics.

## Grudge is Suspected

It is, for example, widely suspected that Edmund Dinis, the district attorney who insisted on an inquest in open court instead of a Grand Jury hearing behind closed doors, nurses a private grudge because Kennedy declined to support him in his unsuccessful race for a Senate seat last November.

Dinis strenuously denies that such a grudge exists, but the suspicion persists.

The Kennedy lawyers are known to be concerned about Judge Boyle, the dry and meticulous islander who was to preside with such broad pow-

## Inquest Site

ers over the inquest whose destiny is now so dubious.

It became clear that Boyle is very much master of his own courtroom, stays strictly within the letter of the law and began increasingly to resent the truculent manners of slick Boston lawyers reeking of after-shave and condescension.

### Goes by the Book

Boyle, a traditionalist who goes by the book, threw out the lawyers' requests for the right to cross-examine witnesses for immaculate legal reasons: The American coroner's inquest, a creaking relic of medieval England, is only a preliminary inquiry and nobody stands accused.

But those who watched Judge Boyle when he handed down his adverse ruling and told the nine smart lawyers from the mainland that he would listen to no further backchat, noticed a gleam in the old boy's eye.

Playing the role of coroner, Boyle would have had unlimited power to broaden the scope of the inquest, call other witnesses, direct the trend of questioning and permit inquiry not only into the cause of Mary Jo Kopechne's death but also into any negligence or duplicity which may have followed it.

### Two Intentions

"Boyle has two principal intentions," I was told. "One is to stamp out gossip and rumor by exposing every relevant fact about the accident on Chappaquiddick. The other is to get these city slickers off his island as soon as possible."

It is hardly surprising that in the circumstances, Kennedy's lawyers balked, for their

client would have had the worst of both worlds.

He would be legally entitled to take the Fifth Amendment and stay silent, but to do so would destroy his public credibility. At the same time he would be forced to let the wildest testimony go unchallenged.

### Diver's Evidence

Extremely damaging evidence, for example, is expected to come from John Farrar, the suntanned scuba diver who pulled Mary Jo out of the sunken car and believes that if help had come sooner her life could have been saved.

Unnamed sources close to Kennedy leaked word to the press, minutes after the news of the postponement came, that the senator had opposed the delay.

The statement came glibly, and it is a symptom of Teddy's abiding problem that almost nobody in Edgartown believes it.

Perhaps his lawyers hope that after a long delay in the slow machinery of appeals, the inquest can at last be held in a saner atmosphere, attended by less publicity and in front of a more sympathetic judge.

### Interest Mounting

If so, such a hope is madness. Public interest in the case of Mary Jo Kopechne is rising, not declining. It feeds on rumor, thrives on mystery and grows more cynical at every example of the law's delay.

One day Kennedy must appear in court and tell his story. If that day is postponed much longer nobody can answer for his chances of remaining in public life.