

A Day of Rumors

Girls Testify at Kopechne Inquest

Times-Post Service

Edgartown, Mass.

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Five career girls began testifying at the inquest into Mary Jo Kopechne's death yesterday amid a comic-opera flurry of rumors and news leaks about the case.

Moving more slowly than expected, the inquiry was adjourned until this morning before their testimony was completed.

Called to the stand ahead of them were six men, all friends of Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Dem-Mass.), in

whose car Miss Kopechne died last July 18.

Most of the speculation, which was scotched by evening, centered on reports that District Attorney Edmund Dinis was thinking of pulling out of the inquest himself and leaving his aides to finish it up.

Dinis put an end to the talk with a surprise stop in a police car at the Edgartown Methodist Church, where newsmen are headquartered in a makeshift press room.

"I don't know what all the commotion is about," he said, "but it's all in error."

The witnesses at the Dukes county courthouse across the street included one surprise—a Providence businessman named Ross Richards who captained the winning yacht in the Edgartown regatta here the day of the tragedy.

A friend of the senator, Richards and his companions were among the Kennedy party that had gotten rooms for the weekend here in the Shitotown Inn.

According to a report in the London Sunday Times

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after the accident, the senator was said to have chatted with Richards on the morning of July 19—after the accident—without giving any indication of what had happened.

Richards subsequently said that the report was incorrect, but he refused to say whether he talked to the senator that morning. He did say that he did not learn of the accident until that afternoon while racing his yacht in another heat.

SECRECY

An executive of a wire and cable firm, Richards spent about 20 minutes on the witness stand under strict rules of secrecy laid down by the Massachusetts Supreme Court and bolstered by District Judge James A. Boyle, the presiding magistrate.

Others who testified during the day were former United States attorney Paul Markham; Kennedy's cousin, Joseph Gargan; John Crimmins, a family friend; Charles Tretter, one of the senator's sailing companions, and John McHugh, a chemist for the Massachusetts state police.

The girls — all veterans of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign — began testifying in midafternoon and proved the most uncommunicative of those called to the stand so far.

Reportedly, three of them took the stand, but they and their attorney, Paul Redmond, had "no comment" on whether any had been called at all, or whether they would be back in the morning.

Meanwhile, what the State Supreme Court had been told would happen if it ordered a secret inquest began to happen.

According to United Press International, Kennedy, who testified Monday, took issue with Deputy Sheriff Christopher Look's report that he saw Kennedy's car driving about the island more than an hour after the Senator said the accident happened.

Summarizing this and other points, UPI said the Senator professed to have had nothing to drink at the cook-out party beyond two rum-and-Cokes that he was said to have taken at dinner.

District Attorney Dinis denied that the "leak" came from him or his staff. Richard Drayne, Kennedy's press spokesman, refused even to talk about it.

WARNING

In pleading for an open inquest before the State Supreme Court last fall, Assistant Massachusetts Attorney General Joseph J. Hurley warned that a close-door inquiry would simply promote publication of fragmentary reports, rumors and inaccuracies.

The speculation about Dinis began yesterday afternoon with a chance encounter at the Dike bridge—where Miss Kopechne died—between Massachusetts State Police Captain Charles Harrington and several of his troopers on the one hand and on the other two Time, Inc., reporters and Kennedy aides James Kind and Richard Drayne.

According to several who were there, Harrington volunteered the prediction that Dinis was "folding" and would go back to New Bedford to sit out the rest of the inquest.

Drayne circulated word of the encounter to several newsmen while others, who heard the captain, added details. Dinis, meanwhile, had left the courthouse before the day's session was over.

His abrupt departure, apparently by a back door, fueled the talk until the DA drove up to the church, declaring that he hadn't left the island and didn't intend to leave.

The Witness



UPI Telephotos

Rosemary Keough, one of the girls who started testifying, left the courthouse after the session.