

A KENNEDY FRIEND DENIES HOSTILITY

Says Widow Is Appreciative
of Johnson's Behavior

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

A close associate of Senator Robert F. Kennedy said yesterday that any criticism of President Johnson in William Manchester's book, "The Death of a President," came not from Mrs. John F. Kennedy, but from other sources.

"There is not one word of criticism of the President by her in the manuscript or in anything she said to the author because she is not critical and, in fact, is warmly appreciative of his behavior," the associate said.

The intimate friend of the Democratic Senator from New York said that Mrs. Kennedy had written to Mr. Johnson after the assassination of President Kennedy "thanking him for his considerate and thoughtful behavior to her during the entire period."

The denial of criticism on the part of Mrs. Kennedy followed published reports that the Kennedy family had objected to some actions by President Johnson immediately after the assassination.

In another development, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the historian and former assistant to President Kennedy, disclosed yesterday that he had approved Mrs. Kennedy's taped interviews with Mr. Manchester. The interviews lasted 10 hours.

Those conversations and Mr. Manchester's inclusion of them in his manuscript, which is scheduled to be published next April by Harper & Row, led to the filing of a complaint in State Supreme Court by Mrs. Kennedy. She asserted they were too personal to be disclosed.

Speaking to a large gathering at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association at the New York Hilton, Mr. Schlesinger criticized the author for having included the personal material in his book.

"If the Harper & Row contention were upheld," he said, "if the proposition were established that a person confiding his oral historical recollections to the electronic tape loses to the interviewer all future rights over the interview, the oral history program which promises so much to the historian of the future would be dead."

Meantime, the legal aspects in the dispute over the book were explored yesterday as attorneys for Harper & Row, the Kennedy family and Mr. Manchester met privately with State Supreme Court Justice Saul S. Streit.

Second Meeting Planned

After the meeting, Justice Streit said he would meet again with the lawyers on Jan. 5

if no settlement were reached by then and set a date for a trial on a request for a permanent injunction that would prevent Harper & Row from publishing the book.

On Tuesday the publishers and Mrs. Kennedy issued a joint statement saying that both sides had agreed to forgo any legal action until mid-January so they could continue negotiations on any revising of the manuscript.

Because Harper & Row agreed voluntarily not to publish the book until either an agreement is reached or a trial held for all practical purposes the temporary injunction sought by Mrs. Kennedy is now in force.

In issuing the denial of any criticism of President Johnson by Mrs. Kennedy, the associate of Senator Kennedy said that in addition to the letter of appreciation, "Mrs. Kennedy still maintains a friendly correspondence with him."

The associate said that any critical material in the Manchester manuscript had come from sources outside the Kennedy family and that some material represented "the critical judgments of the author himself."

He maintained, for example, that Mr. Manchester assailed the President in the book for riding back to Washington from Dallas on Air Force One, the plane carrying President Kennedy's body.

"Mrs. Kennedy never felt that it was wrong for Mr. Johnson to ride on Air Force One," the associate said. "To the contrary, she felt that it would be wrong to leave Mr. Johnson behind."

Comment from the Kennedy family followed an article by Peter Lisagor in The Chicago Daily News. Also printed in The New York Post, the article said that Mr. Johnson had several handwritten letters on file from Mrs. Kennedy that thanked him for his "thoughtfulness and kindness."

'Oral History' Planned

In Austin, Tex., George Christian, the White House news secretary, was asked about Mr. Lisagor's article. He repeated what he told newsmen earlier in the week—that the President had instructed his aides not to talk about anything related to the controversy over the book.

It was learned independently, however, that President Johnson does in fact have such letters in his files.

Mr. Schlesinger, in his speech to the historians, said that after the assassination the "family and associates of President Kennedy initiated a massive 'oral history', undertaking to interview leading participants in the Kennedy years and thereby to rescue and preserve their recollections for the historians of the future."

"It fell to me to conduct the oral history interviews with Mrs. Kennedy concerning events up to the Texas trip," he continued.

Mr. Schlesinger said it would have been "cruel" to subject Mrs. Kennedy to two separate

interviews, so it was decided that Mr. Manchester should conduct the interview since he "would have to talk to Mrs. Kennedy anyway."

"I remember saying to Mrs. Kennedy that this was the only time she would have to go through this experience, that she should hold nothing back, and that, in talking with Mr. Manchester, as in talking with me, she was making a deposition for the historian of the 21st century," Mr. Schlesinger said.

He said the contention that an oral history interview becomes the private property of the interviewer "runs contrary to the whole spirit of the oral history enterprise."

"I must say," he went on, "that it never occurred to me that the tapes and transcripts resulting from my interviews with Mrs. Kennedy were mine, to be used at my discretion; and without questioning Mr. Manchester's honesty of intent, I do not see how his situation differed except that, in addition to the restraints inherent in the oral history relationship, he had the explicit restraint of a written contract."

Distinction Is Made

Later, in discussing the drawbacks and advantages of working on contemporary history, Mr. Schlesinger said that the basic distinction to be made is between "writing about a public official in his public capacity, on the one hand, and writing about a private person in his (or her) personal life on the other."

"It would not have been either appropriate or honorable to write about Mrs. Lincoln three years after her husband's assassination what, say, Carl Sandburg could rightly feel free to write three-quarters of a century later," he said.

He said the "relationship of a wife to her husband, even if he should have been President, and to their children is a private matter, of concern to the ultimate historian — as Mrs. Kennedy recognized by undergoing the terrible ordeal of recording her memories of those tragic days — but it is not necessary to the historian writing in her lifetime."

The historian attacked some sections of the press for "seeing the matter exactly in reverse terms."

He said that 15 months ago he was denounced by the press for having disclosed in his book, "A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House," that President Kennedy had decided to replace Secretary of State Dean Rusk after the 1964 election.

"The historical truth of the comment," he said, "was not at issue; but historical truth was then brusquely dismissed in the interest, apparently, of loftier considerations of public policy."

Recently, he continued, "the press with almost equal unanimity has suddenly unfurled the standard of the full historical truth as an absolute, to be pursued at any cost, in order to rebuke the widow of a murdered President for guarding her own privacy against a writer who — surely with the best intentions

—had used her confidences without permission."

Meantime, it was learned that legal discussions between Harper & Row and the Kennedy family continued yesterday, although talks on the revised manuscript had bogged down because of Mr. Manchester's absence from negotiations.

The author is in a hospital in Middletown, Conn., with a mild case of pneumonia. He was said to be resting comfortably and is expected to remain in the hospital for the rest of the week.