



September 6, 1977

Mr. G. Robert Blakey  
Chief Counsel and Director  
Select Committee on Assassinations  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Blakey:

On Wednesday, August 31, 1977, Donald A. Purdy, Jr., of your staff called me and asked me to obtain the answers to seven questions. In preparing the responses, I interviewed James B. Rhoads and Marion Johnson in person; James O'Neill and I interviewed Robert Bahmer by telephone; Marion Johnson searched records of the Civil Division, Legislative, Judicial, and Fiscal Branch, for relevant information; William W. Moss searched John F. Kennedy Library records on Robert F. Kennedy courtesy storage; and I searched records of the Office of Presidential Libraries for information on Robert F. Kennedy materials. The enclosed report reflects my compilation of this information, and James B. Rhoads and Marion Johnson have read the report and have found that it accurately reflects their statements.

Sincerely,

TRUDY H. PETERSON  
Assistant to the  
Deputy Archivist of the United States

Enclosures

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Response to Questions Submitted to the National Archives and Records Service by the Select Committee on Assassinations regarding John F. Kennedy Autopsy Material.

Q 1. At the time Burke Marshall transferred the autopsy material to the National Archives, did James B. Rhoads inventory the material? If he didn't, who did?

Answer: A number of persons, including James B. Rhoads, participated in the initial inventory. A memorandum detailing the receipt and examination of the material was prepared at the time, and a copy is attached as Appendix A.

Q 2. Who was personally involved in receiving the material at the time of transfer?

Answer: See Appendix A.

Q 3. What containers were the materials in at time of transfer and how were the containers labeled?

Answer: James B. Rhoads remembers only that they came in a metal footlocker and does not remember what, if any, labels were affixed. Marion Johnson states that the autopsy photographs were in the Kodak boxes in which they still remain and that the X-ray films and prints are also in the same envelope in which they were received. The day following the initial examination, a team of doctors from the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, who had been requested by the Department of Justice to examine, identify, and inventory the materials, put the transparencies and negatives in individual envelopes, in which they have remained ever since, according to Johnson. An unsigned draft report by this team of doctors is attached as Appendix B. A signed report relating to this and one subsequent examination is attached as Appendix C.

Q 4. Where was the autopsy material stored initially? Subsequently?

Answer: The autopsy materials were delivered by Admiral George Burkley to Evelyn Lincoln at the National Archives on April 26, 1965. At that time Mrs. Lincoln was occupying a suite of offices on the fourth floor of the National Archives Building. According to a story by Fred Graham in the New York Times of August 27, 1972, Evelyn Lincoln gave the "locked chest" of autopsy materials to Angie Novello, Robert F. Kennedy's secretary, a few days after Admiral Burkley delivered it to Mrs. Lincoln. A copy of that newspaper story is attached as Appendix D.

In the spring of 1966 stories about the autopsy materials appeared in the press, including stories critical of the Warren Commission's conclusions. At that time Robert Bahmer was Archivist of the United States, and he recalls being "badgered" by the press about the disposition of the autopsy materials. The Warren Commission records had been transferred to the National Archives by that time, so Bahmer remembers taking the initiative to contact Chief Justice Earl Warren and ask him about the autopsy materials. The two men lunched together, and Warren said that he had never seen the autopsy materials.

Next, Bahmer believes, he contacted Burke Marshall and asked him about the autopsy materials. Marshall said that he would try to find out where they were. Sometime after that Herman Kahn, who was the Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries, and who had many contacts with the Kennedy family in the course of developing the Kennedy Library, received word that Robert F. Kennedy had the autopsy materials. Bahmer does not recall whether Kahn heard this from Marshall or from Robert Kennedy, but Marion Johnson recalls overhearing Kahn tell Bahmer that he (Kahn) had been called by someone connected with the Kennedy family who said they wanted to transfer some materials here, and Johnson concluded that they were referring to the autopsy materials. Following this contact, Bahmer had several meetings with Marshall and one with Robert F. Kennedy on a possible donation of autopsy material to the National Archives.

Prior to the conclusion of the donation, however, the locked footlocker was brought to the National Archives Building. Bahmer believes that Kahn supervised the acceptance of the footlocker, along with several other boxes of RFK materials, for courtesy storage in Vault 6-W-3 (where other Robert F. Kennedy materials were at that time in courtesy storage). Bahmer says that he was not present at the time the delivery was made, and Marion Johnson says that he was not. Herman Kahn may have been the only Archives staff member present, and he is dead. (Marion Johnson recalls that the footlocker had been on the shelf near his desk for some time previous to October 31, but he cannot recall when he first noticed its presence.) We have found no record of the delivery.

With the details of the agreement completed, the letter of donation was signed on October 29, 1966, and on October 31 the National Archives took custody of the materials (see Appendix A). When the footlocker was opened, the materials were placed in a locked safe cabinet in the same vault, where they have remained.

Q 5. Who from the National Archives has had direct access to the autopsy materials since the date of transfer?

Answer: Access has been very limited. Initially the combination to the safe cabinet was held by James B. Rhoads, Herman Kahn, and Marion Johnson, according to Johnson. Subsequently Mike Simmons, Michael Leahy, and William Grover have had the combination. As Archivist of the United States at the time the materials were delivered, Bob Bahmer also had authority for direct access, but he did not have personal knowledge of the safe cabinet combination.

Q 6. What was Herman Kahn's role with regard to the autopsy materials and who worked with him in that role?

Answer: During 1964-68, Herman Kahn was the Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries. In that capacity he dealt with members and representatives of the Kennedy family on numerous issues, including the courtesy storage of Robert Kennedy materials. He was present when the transfer of autopsy materials was made, and according to Marion Johnson, he was one of the original holders of the combination to the safe cabinet in which the autopsy material was stored. See also answer 4, above. James B. Rhoads says that he cannot recall that Kahn had any significant role in handling the autopsy materials after the transfer.

Q 7. Was a search made in 1969 for "missing" autopsy materials? If so, who was involved, what conclusions were drawn, and what documentation of the search exists?

Answer: In January 1969, Harold Weisberg, a researcher, requested a copy of the memorandum transferring the autopsy materials to Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln. The question of releasability of the document was raised by James B. Rhoads with the General Services Administration's legal advisors. After that point it is difficult to trace events. Marion Johnson recalls that he was telephoned by Dudley H. Chapman of the Department of Justice, who asked what autopsy materials were in possession of the National Archives. The Archives was not involved in the 1969 search to whatever extent it was made, according to Rhoads.

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