

Dear Mr. Marshall:

I am writing to raise an important issue with you concerning the autopsy photographs that are subject to the Kennedy Family Deed of Gift at the National Archives. The Board understands that the autopsy images are specifically excluded from the JFK Act and recognizes that you have consistently provided reasonable access to these images pursuant to the provisions of the deed of gift. These access provisions recognize a public interest in the content of these images and at the same time restricts access to ensure that only serious researchers with suitable qualifications are permitted to view them.

Consistent with the provisions of the deed of gift, the Review Board staff has examined the color and black and white images that were taken at the autopsy of President Kennedy. This examination has led to two interesting discoveries that I would like to bring to your attention:

(a) we have discovered three faint images that appear to be of the autopsy of President Kennedy on the roll of 120 film that has been described as “unexposed”; and

(b) we have noted that the black-and-white negatives and color transparencies contain significant information that is not available in the respective photographic prints that were made from them. Cropping and other darkroom techniques appear to have obscured information in the prints that is contained in the negative and positive transparencies.

We believe that it would be in the public interest to take necessary steps to scan and enhance the images described in (a) above and make new and uncropped prints from the positive and negative transparencies described in (b) above. The Kennedy family recognized the importance of preserving this material and making it available to serious researchers and government investigators. Making the best possible copies available is clearly within the spirit of their gift.

As you know, the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) subjected the autopsy images to various tests that took advantage of the most advanced technology of the day. The Review Board believes that examinations using the most advanced technology of our day would serve the public interest in several cases where the technological advances promise to clarify the record beyond what was possible in the late 1970's. As in 1978, the images would have to be removed from the archives and transported to the site of the testing (in this case to Kodak in Rochester, New York).