

The Assassination Records Review Board: Progress Continues

by John R. Tunheim

Chair

Assassination Records Review Board

February 2., 1995

Since the last time I communicated with the research community through Open Secrets, there have been many more positive developments for the Assassination Records Review Board. I would like to take this opportunity to describe the Board's recent activities and give you a sense of what the Board will be doing in the coming months.

At the time of my last message to you, we were planning our second public hearing in Dallas, Texas. The Review Board conducted the hearing on November 18, 1994. We heard testimony from 19 witnesses who provided us with a broad range of information related to the existence and location of assassination records. Several people who were in Dallas for the ASK conference attended the hearing, as well as many representatives from the local and national media. Because it is the Board's job under the law to ensure that there is as complete a record of the assassination as possible, the most useful information that the Board received in Dallas was specific information on records that are known to be held by federal agencies, as well as specific leads on the possible existence and location of other assassination records.

While in Dallas, the members of the Review Board took the opportunity to visit Dealey Plaza and tour the Sixth Floor museum, located

at the site of the former Texas School Book Depository. All of the Board members found the visit exciting and a worthwhile use of our time.

The Review Board has subsequently conducted two additional public meetings in Washington, D.C., on December 14, 1994 and March 7, 1995.

During our early March visit to Washington, the Review Board also met with representative from the CIA, NSA, and the Secret Service to discuss their obligations under The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act. We intend to meet with representatives from all of the relevant federal agencies to ensure compliance with the Act.

The Review Board has scheduled a public meeting for March 24, 1995 in Boston, Massachusetts. Several historians and members of the research community have been asked to testify on the identification and location of assassination records, discuss finalizing our proposed definition guidance on "assassination records," and receive an update from the National Archives on the JFK Assassination Records Collection. While in Boston, the Review Board is scheduled to visit The John F. Kennedy Library on Thursday, March 23rd, to meet with Library representatives. Discussions are to focus on what records at the Library should be included in the collection of assassination records. The public meeting will be an opportunity for the Board to conduct official business outside of Washington and to hear from experts who reside in the greater Boston area. Details of the March 24th public meeting have been provided to members of the research community and the media in advance of the trip to Boston.

In addition to the five members of the Board, private citizens representing the legal, historical, and archival professions, serving in a part-time capacity, we are currently supported by a senior staff consisting of an executive director, a general counsel, a chief of review and analysis, an administrative officer, and a press and public affairs officer. In addition to the senior staff, the Board currently employs eight analysts, two administrative support personnel, and a part-time computer specialist. The Board has either made offers to or plans to hire the following additional personnel: three investigators, two additional administrative support personnel, and ten additional analysts.

The Board is pleased to announce that the staff has moved out its temporary quarters and into the permanent offices. The address remains the same, Assassination Records Review Board; 600 E Street, NW; Second Floor; Washington, D.C. 20530), as does the telephone number, (202) 724-0088.

I would like to leave you with one final thought on the importance of the Review Board's work. The disturbing phenomenon of public mistrust in our government began to increase considerably after the assassination of President Kennedy and the widely held perception that the government has kept important facts from the American people about the motives and actions of its institutions and personnel. A poll in late 1994 showed the percentage of Americans who "trust the government in Washington" has dropped from 76 percent in 1964, shortly after the death of President Kennedy, to 19 percent today. We believe that the Assassination Records Review Board has the opportunity not only to make publicly available records that may clarify the facts surrounding the assassination, but also, along the way, the opportunity to reverse this trend of mistrust and to redefine the meaning of, and the need for, secrecy in government.

As always, we encourage members of the research community to contact the Review Board if have information regarding the location or existence of assassination records. We will continue to make every effort to keep you apprised of the Board's activities.