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A Disputed Piece Of Camelot Collector Denies Ownership Of Kennedy Memorabilia by Amy Argetsinger
Washington Post Staff Writer Tuesday, February 24, 1998; Page C01 On a November day in 1959, Jacqueline Kennedy dashed off a conspiratorial note to her husband's secretary, penned in her long, looping hand. Dear Mrs. Lincoln -- Here are 2 bills which I have been dreading to show Jack for months -- Please try your best to slip them in without his noticing -- There will never be any more like them I promise! Thanks Jackie It is a charming glimpse into the home life of the future president and his young wife. But it's also Exhibit A in a simmering battle over the rightful ownership of hundreds of Kennedy artifacts that are to be auctioned in New York next month -- many of them collected by his secretary, the late Evelyn Lincoln. Kennedy family loyalists have questioned whether Lincoln was legally entitled to dozens of items that came into her possession, including the president's Hermes black leather briefcase and his handwritten journals from a 1951 trip to Eastern Europe, both of which are expected to draw bids of up to several hundred thousand dollars. Yesterday, the inheritor of hundreds of Lincoln's Kennedy treasures defended the secretary's right to these items -- and his right to sell them. Robert L. White said dozens of letters like this one -- which auction house officials expect to fetch about \$5,000 on the auction block -- and other documents prove that his friend Lincoln, who died in May 1995, was a cherished member of Kennedy's inner circle whom the family happily showered with White House memorabilia. "She was the consummate keeper of the secrets," said White, a noted Kennedyana collector from Catonsville, Md. Attorneys for the Kennedy Library Foundation contacted White to challenge his right to the items shortly after Guernsey's auction house announced plans for its March 18-19 sale of more than 500 items of Kennedy memorabilia. Though nearly 70 different collectors have consigned items to the show, about 300 articles come from White -- more than 200 of which he obtained from Lincoln, whom he first befriended as a teenage autograph-seeker in the early 1960s. White's attorney, Robert M. Adler, said Kennedy lawyers "implicitly threatened a lawsuit" and warned they could have "a chilling effect" on the auction. "We hope to resolve our differences," he said. Lawyers on the other side, including Kennedy Library Foundation Chairman Paul Kirk, could not be reached for comment yesterday. Late last year, Kirk said there were "serious questions .. regarding the provenance of those items." Arlan Ettinger, Guernsey's president, said he is dismayed by criticism of the auction. "We have maintained from the start that this would be a celebration of the life of John F. Kennedy and his career," he said. "We have steered clear of any material that might be viewed as scandalous or insensitive." Ettinger said he does not expect to see prices rise as high as those in the 1996 Sotheby's auction of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's estate, when items projected to fetch \$3 million brought a total

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