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IN MEMORY OF
BONNIE C. GARDNER,
1932-2003

John F. Kennedy's Glasses

William R. Rice, Jr., and Peter Klages

It started sometime in the fall of 1975. I was reading in my library and making notes for a book I hoped to write in some unknown year in the future. The telephone rang and I was very surprised to hear a fellow JFK collector, who I had known only a short time, on the other end. Dr. Gerald Steinberg of Chevy Chase Maryland had a dental practice and was able to show off his extensive JFK collection to his patients when they visited him for dental work. Dr. Steinberg informed me that he was retiring from his practice and had come across a couple of items I might be interested in for my collection.



He told me that a close friend of his had worked with the optometrist for the White House and the Kennedy Administration. After President Kennedy's death, this friend called Dr. Steinberg and asked him if he might want a pair of JFK's broken reading glasses for his Kennedy collection, and this friend of his also had a pair of Robert Kennedy's glasses. He (Dr. Steinberg) had acquired both pairs in 1970.

As our conversation progressed, I let Dr. Steinberg know that I would very much like to have President Kennedy's broken glasses but was not collecting RFK material at the time. I remember I sent a check for 100 dollars to Gerald and within a week I received the JFK glasses along with a silver medal that Dr. Steinberg and Aubrey Mayhew had created which would later be cataloged as K-63a-216, illustrated in my book *The Kennedy World in Medallion Art* on page 96.



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When the glasses arrived at my Orangevale California home, I examined my purchase and found indeed the frame side arm was broken and discolored; the glass on both lenses were scratched but in perfect 'well used' condition. As a wearer of eyeglasses most all my life, I was surprised that the glasses were much smaller than my own. The frame was very brittle and the aged 1940's plastic-like material was already deteriorating with many cracks; the original color was badly faded.

Shortly after receiving the JFK glasses I placed a telephone call to Evelyn Lincoln at her residence in Chevy Chase Maryland. Mrs. Lincoln and I had spoken before concerning a JFK West Coast Library Project. As that phone call progressed, I informed her that I had purchased a pair of broken eye glasses purported to have belonged to the President.

(Continued on page 2...)

A Different View



Three primary concerns of collectors are fakes, fantasies, and reproductions. In many cases experience is the best teacher of these. After a time you can recognize colors, fonts, and images that are not "of the period" or incorrect. You can also recognize if the manufacture is not of the correct time period.

All of this is an integral part of collecting. But there are exceptions. And the lead article of this issue is one of them: restoration.

The background story regarding John F. Kennedy's reading glasses tells the story of the restoration of a badly damaged pair of eyeglasses that were once owned and used by JFK.

Two Kennedy collectors—William Rice of Wilton, Maine and Peter Klages of Garching, Germany—cooperated to restore the JFK glasses that Rice had acquired years earlier, turning the original lenses into an attractive and accurate reconstruction of the original frames that Kennedy used.

There are "purists" who would not agree with this action, complaining that the glasses were no longer authentic originals. But in my mind, they are not reproductions or fantasy items either. The lenses are the originals that Kennedy looked through to read with. The frame, which had deteriorated over the years, was not itself repairable.

The replacement frame is as exact a look-alike of the original as was possible to create.

The important thing is that there was no intent to defraud or misinform. There is no claim that the glasses are "100% original". The intent was and still is to preserve the original Kennedy lenses from his glasses for posterity. And so they will.

Harvey

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