JACK ANDERSON:
JUSTICE FRANKFURTER PAPERS STOLEN

Chicago Daily News, Sept. 14, 1973

A light-fingered scholar has stolen papers of "incalculable value" from the collection of the late Justice Felix Frankfurter at the Library of Congress.

The theft of irreplaceable diaries, letters and memoranda - many hundreds of pages in all - has been kept secret for a year while FBI agents and the library's own scholars turned detectives searched feverishly for the papers.

The loss was discovered in September, 1972, after an alert Library of Congress official noticed that a Frankfurter folder was empty. It had contained conversations between Frankfurter and late Justice Louis Brandeis. A private researcher also reported a letter missing that he had seen among Frankfurter's papers earlier.

Alarmed, library officials turned loose a hush-hush team of scholars in the vast Frankfurter file. Within a few days, they had come up with a missing items list that horrified them. Gone were five years of Frankfurter's personal diaries, numerous notes on conversations with the mighty, memos, letters and personal jottings about the men in government Frankfurter had known so intimately.

"We realized we had been robbed blind," a senior library official told my associate Les Whitten. "There was a tremendous amount missing of incalculable value."

Once the loss was assessed, the library called in the FBI, which began discreetly interviewing scholars and researchers. To block further thefts, strict anti-thievery measures, previously dropped for budgetary reasons, were reinstituted. All this was done without alerting the general public to the intense search going on for the missing papers.

But now the quest has reached a dead end. Return of the documents, most library officials recognize, depands on the delicate questions of the scholar-thief's respect for the pricelessness of his historical heist. Whoever the renegade researcher is, the officials concede, he robbed with discrimination and intelligence, selecting the most historically valuable documents.

According to one theory, the scholar is laboring alone on a project and wants to make sure he is the only one able to pursue it. If this is the case, the officials pray the scholar will somehow arrange to get the papers or copies of them back to the library so that future historians can study the remarkable life and times of Frankfurter, who died in 1965 at age 82 after serving 26 years on the Supreme Court.

To aid the recovery, we have offered to act as an intermediary between the unknown scholar and the library. We will guarantee not to reveal his name or otherwise identify him if he will contact us.

Without being able to bind the Justice Department, we will try to persuade Atty. Gen. Elliot Richardson, himself a legal scholar, that the return of the Frankfurter papers is more than worth calling off the search for the mysterious thief.

* * * * *

In a recent column Anderson reported that most of the papers, with the notable exception of the diaries, had been anonymously mailed to his office.

The National Archives and Records Service is urging interested parties to become Associates of the National Archives. Designed to appeal to the general public, membership in the ANA includes a subscription to Prologue, discounts on publications, tours, workshops, a and social events. The basic membership is $20.00 a year. For details write The National Archives, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. 20408

Plans for the nation's bicentennial observance continue to sputter along. Philadelphia, site of the 1876 centenial celebration, rejected a one billion dollar exposition because many people did not want to spend that much money on a "dilly in Philly." The city has not even recovered from the 1876 production. They have asked the Bicentennial Commission for $80,000 "to restore a mountain of dusty records" left from the celebration a century before.