

Fla. rights leader's papers found
Daughter says discovery points to '50s conspiracy

By Laurin Sellers

Orlando Sentinel

Published on: 02/05/07

Mims, Fla. — A briefcase belonging to slain civil rights leader Harry Moore, missing for more than a half-century, has been found in an abandoned Brevard County, Fla., barn and will be returned to his daughter today. The leather case, filled with newspaper clippings and letters urging officials to investigate the mistreatment of blacks, was discovered about a half-mile from where a bomb destroyed the family's home on Christmas night 1951, mortally wounding Moore and his wife, Harriette. It was the first killing of a prominent civil rights leader, and a spark that helped ignite the civil rights movement.

Moore, the first president of the Florida NAACP, had denounced lynchings, organized black citrus workers and fought for voting rights. He and his wife had just returned from celebrating their 25th anniversary when the bomb exploded under their bedroom. A member of the North Brevard Historical Society, scouring the area for artifacts, stumbled on the satchel, which should have been stored in an evidence property room at the county courthouse. "Nobody knows, or at least nobody is saying, how it ended up in that barn," said Moore's daughter Evangeline, who was expected to arrive from Maryland today to retrieve the briefcase. "When they called and told me they had found his briefcase in a cow barn, I can tell you it was the eeriest feeling I've ever had," said Moore, 76, who pushed for years to have her parents' unsolved case reopened.

Moore said she thinks the briefcase's discovery proves local law enforcement were either involved in her parents' killings or wanted to make sure no one was arrested. She said her father's briefcase was turned over to then-Brevard County Sheriff Bill Williams the night of the bombing. "Now I have concrete evidence of just how involved local officials were," she said. "It was not supposed to be anywhere but the courthouse, and obviously somebody gave it to somebody so it would never be discovered. It was a conspiracy, and I've known that for 55 years." Last year, former Attorney General Charlie Crist, now Florida's governor, named four now dead Ku Klux Klan members as the killers. In doing so, he said, he was closing the file on one of the biggest remaining mysteries from America's tumultuous civil-rights era. Now some close to the case aren't convinced Crist found the real culprits.