

WASHINGTON — The full story can now be told of assistant Attorney General Will Wilson's ties to a scandal-stained, \$100 million financial empire that his criminal division is investigating.

On March 12, we linked him to a Texas wheeler-dealer appropriately named Frank Sharp. We have now dug up more details about their financial transactions, which continued after Wilson came to the Justice Department.

Sharp was a cornpone, church-going Texan who exchanged his Stetson for a Homburg and became the slickest stock promoter since Billy Sol Estes. Sharp entangled a host of top Texas politicians, moon explorers and Jesuit Fathers, in hip get-rich-quick schemes. He bamboozed the Jesuit Fathers, for example, into making him the first Protestant patron of the ancient New Orleans province of The Society of Jesus, then he left the reverend gentlemen holding the bag for \$6 million.

The Securities and Exchange Commission also charged Sharp with a massive stock fraud scheme which, among other things, enabled some eminent Texans to make a fast fortune.

The "Scheme and Conspiracy," alleged the SEC, began in 1967 — while Wilson was Sharp's principal attorney. Testifying behind closed doors, Sharp claimed he relied upon Wilson for legal guidance. As late as 1969, after Wilson was sworn in as Assistant Attorney General, he borrowed \$25,000 from Sharp without putting up collateral.

The SEC named Texas' Gov. Preston Smith, House Speaker Gus Mutscher and former State Attorney General Waggoner Carr among the politicians whom Sharp showered with blessings. The only Republican partaker, apparently, was Will Wilson. Yet his name, charitably, was left out of the official proceedings.

As Chief of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Wilson is in charge of enforcing law - and - order. He has the power, for instance, to decide which criminal cases the government will prosecute.

We are satisfied, however, that he has completely disqualified himself from making decisions in the Sharp case and has kept scrupulously out of the investigation. Insiders say he has even resisted the temptation to peek at the investigators' reports that mention his name.

We can reveal, however, what these confidential reports say about Wilson:

— As a member of the Texas Banking Commission, Wilson voted to grant a charter to Sharp's Sharpstown State Bank. Shortly after he left the Commission, he was retained by Sharp at a beginning fee of \$1,000 a month. Wilson handled at least three lawsuits for the Sharpstown Bank and borrowed money from the bank to buy stock. He even opened a separate law office, rent free, in the bank building. Wilson told us he approved the Sharpstown Bank Charter strictly on its merits and later established a law office in the bank building for the bank's convenience. He closed it after a year, he said, because it was too unprofitable.

— Wilson's net worth shot up from \$680,000 to more than \$1.5 million during his five-year association with Sharp. SEC investigators implied that Wilson acquired most of his new wealth through Sharp. The anti-crime chief acknowledged that his earnings from Sharp were "substantial" but pointed out

that his law firm had dozens of other big-paying clients.

A confidential SEC memo details how Wilson acquired valuable property from Sharp supposedly without putting up a cent. In April, 1964, Sharp sold Wilson a five-acre industrial tract in Houston for a \$50,000 promissory note. On the same day, Wilson borrowed \$50,000 from Sharp without collateral and used it to purchase another 10-acre tract. Wilson continued to borrow money on his signature until he was \$200,000 in hock to Sharp. Then he consolidated the debts into a \$200,000 Sharpstown Bank loan, which he secured by offering the two tracts as collateral. Wilson told us he paid off the \$50,000 promissory note, at 4½ per cent interest, with legal services. In 1968, he borrowed \$200,000 from the Bank of Texas to pay off the Sharpstown Bank.

— Sharp used Wilson's brokerage account, on at least one occasion, to purchase stock for the wife of a federal bank examiner. The examiner, Ted Bristol, had been checking the books of the Sharpstown Bank. Wilson said that he had no inkling of Bristol's identity, that Sharp had asked to use his account to buy stock for a "friend." The transaction, of course, was against federal regulations.

— Wilson borrowed a final \$25,000 again without collateral, from Sharp after his arrival in Washington to take over the Criminal Division. "I wouldn't have borrowed the money," Wilson told us. "If I had known Sharp was in trouble with the SEC." The loan was paid off, he said, a few months ago.

We asked Wilson how he was able to borrow so much unsecured money from Sharp. "I was working for him, and he like me," shrugged Wilson. It should also be added, in fairness, that Wilson had a net worth over \$680,000 at the time of his first unsecured loan.

We tried to pin down whether Wilson had played a part, as legal advisor, in the alleged multi-million-dollar stock manipulations. Wilson refused to discuss the counsel he gave Sharp because of the lawyer-client relationship. From other competent sources, however, we learned that Wilson counseled against at least some of the schemes that got Sharp into trouble.

Wilson, meanwhile, shouldn't continue to direct criminal investigations for the Nixon Administration until he is free of suspicion himself. All the facts in the case should be laid out in the sunlight.

