

Surplus CIA 'Safe House' Is Sold for \$550,000

By Eugene L. Meyer

Washington Post Staff Writer

A secluded Eastern Shore estate that formerly served as a CIA "safe house" used by the late U-2 spy pilot Francis Gary Powers was sold this week to a Georgia real estate firm for \$550,000.

A.G. Proctor Co., of Brunswick, Ga. submitted the highest of nine bids for the property purchased by the CIA in 1951 for \$68,000 and declared surplus three years ago. B.H. Barry, of Bartlesville, Okla., entered the lowest bid of \$8,100.

The 80-acre property known as Ashford Farm is located along 2,000 feet of Choptank River shoreline in plush Talbot County. It features a Tudor-style 25-room mansion and several outbuildings erected by a wealthy Pittsburgh family in the early 1930s.

"The first thing that struck me when I saw it," said Jack Burrows, a realty specialist with the General Services Administration, disposer of surplus government property, "was that it looked like something out of an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel."

Or it may have been the setting for a James Bond thriller, its history suggests. The property was used by the CIA to debrief U-2 pilot Powers after his release from a Soviet prison in 1962.

Whatever other secrets the house may hold are shrouded in the mystery engulfing the CIA, around which swirls legends of other "safe houses" harboring agents and defectors in obscure hideaways like Ashford Farm.

After publicity about the Powers affair blew the estate's cover, it became a conference facility. It has not been used for three years, but the government has paid \$23,564 a year to protect and maintain it.

"It's not a really old or historic property," said Norman Harrington, director of the Talbot County Historical Society. "Gene Tunney, the boxer, at one time lived next door in another estate before moving to California."

Harrington said heavy erosion along the shoreline led the county to waive its right to purchase the property. Construction bulkheads to stop the erosion would have cost too much, he said.

The state of Maryland also considered acquiring the land for a wildlife refuge but decided against it late last year, GSA's Burrows said. That cleared the way for the government to seek private bidders.

GSA's announcement that the property was up for grabs drew an initial 37 bids earlier this year, ranging from

\$100 ("We always get one of those," Burrows said) to \$1 million. The high bid, however, was basically a frivolous bid with no deposit," Burrows said. "We couldn't accept it."

GSA also rejected the next highest bid of \$417,500 from Bayview Associates, a Washington-based investment group. The government decided to try again last month.

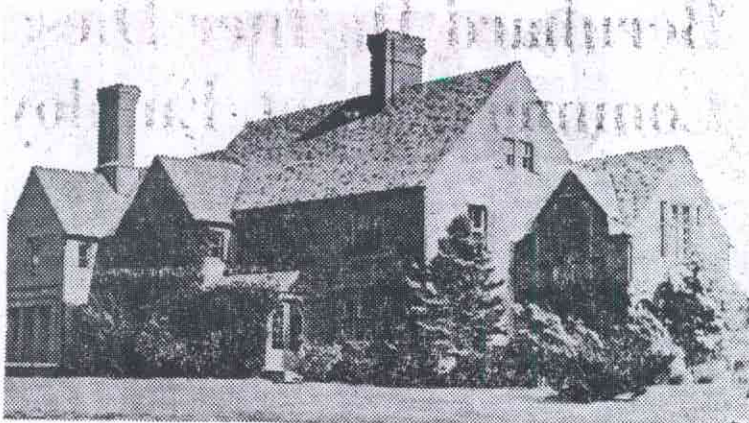
Bayview Associates tried again the second time, coming in second with \$363,050 to Proctor's bid of \$550,000. Proctor, president of the winning firm, could not be reached yesterday for information about his plans for the property. The land, however, is zoned for agricultural use, and part of it has been leased for farming, Harrington said.

Local business sources in Brunswick said Proctor owns a best Western Motel in the town 80 miles south of Savannah. He formerly acquired surplus military housing at Glyco Naval Base nearby, which he converted into a civilian subdivision, the GSA official said.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Friday, August 3, 1979

B 7



Associated Press

Ashford Farm, on the Eastern Shore, was bought by CIA for \$68,000 in 1951.