

For First Time Since Civil War Era, Five

By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

When George Bush joined what his predecessor, Ronald Reagan, once called the "exclusive fraternity" of former presidents yesterday, he began to stretch the meaning of the phrase.

For the first time since the Civil War, five former presidents are joined at once in that nearly regal and costly—to the taxpayer—lifestyle that goes with being weaned off the even more grandiose perquisites of the White House.

The only other time there have been five former presidents alive was from March 4, 1861, to Jan. 18, 1862, when Martin Van Buren, John Tyler, Franklin Pierce, Millard Fillmore and James Buchanan enjoyed the fruits of retirement.

The only time five presidents have gathered at the same place was on Nov. 4, 1991, when President Bush, and ex-presidents Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Gerald R. Ford and

Richard M. Nixon celebrated the opening of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, Calif.

However, most of the 33 former presidents in U.S. history share a common condition: Whenever they have left the inaugural ceremonies on the Capitol steps and quietly slipped away while the city celebrated the fortunes of their successors, the demands on their time diminished sharply.

While there have been notable exceptions, including William Howard Taft, who became chief justice of the United States, and John Quincy Adams, who went from the White House to the House of Representatives, most former presidents seem to relish their relatively sedentary lives in retirement.

Of the last four presidents, Reagan probably has come closest to approximating the kind of leisurely retirement depicted in mutual fund advertising, although in the last month he has traveled to Oxford, England, to make a speech and to Washington to accept the Freedom Medal from Bush.

Cathy Goldberg, his spokeswoman in Los Angeles, said Reagan usually goes to his office from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., visits his ranch once a month for several days and occasionally meets heads of state and other dignitaries when they visit Los Angeles.

For his part, Ford has busied himself, well out of the limelight, amassing a personal fortune as a business adviser and member of corporate boards, while attending to his devotion to golf and occasionally making the rounds of the lecture circuit.

Carter is probably the most active and visible ex-president, and possibly the most widely respected because of his work in building housing for the poor, his mediation in crises in Africa and Central America and his role as a Middle East adviser to Clinton.

Also, last year he helped to launch the Atlanta Project, an ambitious plan to organize and uplift 400,000 people in the poorest neighborhoods of three Georgia counties.

Carter was the only former president to attend Clinton's inauguration.

Former Presidents Are Alive

Nixon, after leaving office in disgrace from the Watergate scandal, celebrated his 80th birthday quietly with his family at his house in Saddle River, N.J., earlier this month.

But, after initially becoming something of a recluse immediately after resigning the presidency in 1974, Nixon has edged back into public life, turning out books and articles designed to redeem his place in history and becoming an elder statesman and sought-after foreign policy pundit.

Last year, a federal appeals court ruled that the U.S. government must pay Nixon compensation—possibly as much as \$1 million—for seizing the Oval Office tape recordings that led to his downfall.

While Nixon's fortunes improve, Bush's could start to get complicated if independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh follows through on his plan to question the former president about his failure to disclose until last summer the existence of a diary that included notes on the Iran-contra scandal.

Apart from dealing with that investigation, Bush's plans reportedly include writing a memoir of his White House years, establishing a presidential library at Texas A&M University, overseeing the construction of his new house in Houston, spending summers in Kennebunkport, Maine, and devoting more time to his 12 grandchildren.

Like the other former presidents, Bush will receive an annual pension of about \$153,000, plus \$150,000 a year for the first 2½ years he is out of office for staff allowances. Also like his predecessors, Bush will receive other travel, office and personal benefits that are estimated to be worth \$500,000 to \$700,000 this year.

When the cost of providing round-the-clock Secret Service protection for Bush, Reagan, Ford, Carter and Lady Bird Johnson is added, the total annual taxpayers' bill for maintaining the five ex-presidents and the former first lady could be as much as \$20 million.