

The Fords' Memoirs: A \$1-Million Package

By Christopher Dickey

Publishing executives and Hollywood agents gathered in the Palm Springs home of former President Gerald Ford yesterday to make an announcement and celebrate; the President's memoirs and those of his wife, Betty, will be published jointly by Harper and Row and Reader's Digest.

The announcement was the culmination of months of planning and negotiation in which Norman Brokaw and Owen Laster of Hollywood's William Morris Agency worked to put the President's memoirs in a package that would generate the highest possible amount of money for their client. The publishing rights that were sold yesterday reportedly brought \$1 million.

Former President Nixon's memoirs

were bought by Warner Books for over \$2 million in 1974, and Henry Kissinger's as yet unwritten memoir is expected to garner about \$5 million.

It was decided soon after the Ford family agreed to have the William Morris company represent them that the former President's and his wife's books would be offered together to publishers.

At least five major publishers expressed interest in such an arrangement, and the bidding began.

There was also the question of who would help the Fords write their books. Authors Trevor Armbrister and Chris Chase, both William Morris clients, were flown to Palm Springs to meet with the Fords in January.

Ford had read Armbrister's book,

See FORD, B10, Col. 1

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FORD, From B1

"Oh Congress," which was coauthored with Sen. Donald W. Riegle Jr., (then a representative), and was familiar with "Act of Vengeance," about the Yablonski slayings.

After a meeting that lasted several hours, Ford agreed to work with Armbrister on a book that would concentrate on Ford's 29 months in the White House—"a personal and historical" account, according to yesterday's announcement, that will contain "hitherto unpublished material about many of the personalities and events of this period of history."

Mrs. Ford, who had read Chase's "How to Be a Movie Star," agreed to work with her on a book that will probably deal with Mrs. Ford's experiences with Martha Graham as well as her life as First Lady and her fight against cancer. According to the announcement it will be "the personal story of Betty Ford's efforts to balance sometimes conflicting obligations . . . as an individual, a wife, a mother and as a private person and a public figure."

Both Ambrister and Chase will reportedly receive \$100,000 each—without royalties.

In recent weeks, the bidding for the

memoirs finally narrowed down to three publishers, according to industry sources, each of them offering about \$1 million for various combinations of hardcover, paperback, foreign and serialization rights.

Finally, the Fords and their agents decided to accept the offer submitted by Harper and Row and Reader's Digest, who will publish the books under a combined imprint. A statement by the Fords noted that "Harper and Row has long been noted for its memoirs of public figures" and Reader's Digest "has a record of distinguished publishing in public affairs."

President Ford's long-time friend and adviser, former Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, is the senior counselor of national and international affairs in Florida and was vacationing in Florida and was unavailable for comment.

Mrs. Ford's memoirs are tentatively scheduled for publication in the fall of 1978, though there is no detailed outline for them yet. The former President's book is scheduled for the summer of 1979.

According to agent Owen Laster, final sales of paperback, magazine, and world publication rights have not yet been made.