The 'Missing' Nixon Gifts

Valuable Items Given to Ex-First Family
May Be 'Lost' Through Record-Keeping

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On Aug. 11, 1974, two days after
President Nixon's resignation, his
wife, Patricia, notified the White
House gifts unit that she intended to
"retain" one particular gift presented
to her by the shah of Iran on his sec-
ond state visit to Washington in 1972.

The gift was described by the gift
unit as "a very fine hand-painted mini-
ture portrait of the President done
on ivory . . . 18-karat gold oval frame
on easel back surrounded with golden
leaves and branches, many "blossoms"
of single and clustered turquoise and
sapphire stones."

The miniature is one of a number of
valuable items which the State De-
partment has listed as "missing" from
the General Services Administration's
collection of the identifiable foreign
gifts presented to Nixon and his wife
and daughters by heads of state and
lesser foreign dignitaries during his
six years in office.

The "missing" gifts may be in the
GSA collection but lost because of
poor record-keeping. But in some
cases, State Department and GSA of-
ficials say, the gifts are believed to be
in the custody of the Nixons, which is
a violation of the law regulating the
gifts.

Those "missing" gifts are the pri-
mary reason that U.S. Chief of Proto-
col Evan S. Dobelle is scheduled to go
before U.S. District Court Judge Au-
brey E. Robinson here on Wednesday
and ask for the court's permission to
examine some 200 packing crates of
Nixon materials currently in storage
with the General Services Administra-
tion.

Under the Foreign Gifts and Deco-
rations Act of 1966, any gift worth
more than $50 belongs to the govern-
ment and is supposed to be turned
over to the chief of protocol for dispo-
sition as public property.

One of Dobelle's predecessors, Re-
publican Henry E. Catto Jr., in late
1974 compiled a list of "missing"
Nixon gifts and recommended in a re-
port that the Ford administration au-
dit the GSA collection and recover
whatever gifts are missing.

Catto and his legal advisers were
blocked from taking any action on the
gifts three years ago because the GSA
then took the position that the pack-
ing crates and all records pertaining
to them were impounded in the battle
over the Nixon tapes and documents
and other "presidential materials."

Dobelle took his action at the request
of The Washington Post, which pointed
out to him that no one knew exactly
what was in the packing crates.

There are at least a dozen Iranian
gifts in the "missing" category. In-
cluded is "a magnificent carpet from
Isfahan" (15 feet by 18 feet) given by
the shah in 1969.

Many other now-missing gifts came
from the current Iranian ambassador
to the United States, Ardestir Zahedi.
According to incomplete records now
in the possession of the State Depart-
ment, Zahedi always remembered the
Nixons at Christmas and New Year's,
on their birthdays and anniversaries
and with get-well gifts.

Missing, according to the State De-
See GIFTS, A3, Col. 1
GIFTS, From 1

dpartment, are “a magnificient clock,” a
beautiful inscribed tray,” “golden
tapestry-like material,” “an ornate
gold box,” “a gold Swiss vest watch”
and two matching “his-and-her’s”
watch sets into gold coins.

Missing also is a “pale green glass
art object” given to Mrs. Nixon in
1970 by Mme. Chiang Kal-tek of Tai-
wan. It is described as “entwined with
berry branch and a little bird perched
on its tiny lid.” This was found to
be “incomlete and inconsistent,” by
the young Foreign Service officer, told
Catto in a written report.

Nothing illustrates the problems of
locating and identifying the Nixon
foreign gifts more clearly than three
pieces of jewelry received from
Prince Sultan of Saudi Arabia on July 1, 
1972.

No one in the White House gift unit
had ever seen or heard of the jewelry
until March 29, 1974, when a reporter
made inquiries about it.

At that time, on the instructions of
White House legal counsel J. Fred
Buzhardt, Mrs. Nixon removed two
pieces of the jewelry from her bed-
room wall safe and sent them to the
gift unit to be photographed and
processed.

The gifts were a wide diamond
bracelet concealing a watch in the
clap, which had been given to Mrs.
Nixon, and a diamond-and-ruby pin,
which had been given to Julie.

Missing was a pin Mrs. Nixon told
the gift unit had been given to Tricia
at the same time. She had the pin
with her in New York, Mrs. Nixon
said. She described it as being
“identical to the one given Julie...”
ecept that it was sapphires and dia-
monds.

That was the description recorded
by the gift unit.

Fortunately that description was
changed.

When Mrs. Nixon departed for Cali-
ifornia, one item she left behind in her
bedroom wall safe was an emerald
and diamond pin. A piece of paper in
the velvet box identified it as a gift
from Prince Sultan.

The Nixon had visited Saudi Ara-
bia two months earlier. There was a
card in the gift unit for a pair of mag-
nificent gold-and-silver trimmed guns
given by Prince Sultan to the Presi-
dent. But there was no card for any
gift of any kind from Prince Sultan to
Mrs. Nixon on that trip.

Gift unit employees told protocol
officials that they had concluded at
first that the emerald-and-diamon
pin was another unrecorded Prince
Sultan gift to Mrs. Nixon.

But Mrs. Nixon, in a telephone con-
versation with gift unit employees,
said that the brooch was the one
Tricia had received from Prince Sultan
in 1972.

The pin is not sapphires and dia-
monds, and it does not in any way re-
semble the one given to Julie.