

The 'Missing' Nixon Gifts

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

By Maxine Cheshire
Washington Post Staff Writer

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 second state visit to Washington in 1972.

The gift was described by the gift unit as "a very fine hand-painted miniature 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 Department 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 officials 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 primary reason that U.S. Chief of Protocol Evan S. Dobelle is scheduled to go before U.S. District Court Judge Aubrey 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 Administration.

Under the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966, any gift worth more than \$50 belongs to the government and is supposed to be turned over to the chief of protocol for disposition as public property.

One of Dobelle's predecessors, Republican Henry E. Catto Jr., in late 1974 compiled a list of "missing" Nixon gifts and recommended in a report that the Ford administration audit 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 packing 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. Included 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, Ardeshir Zahedi. According to incomplete records now in the possession of the State Department, 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-

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partment, are "a magnificent clock," a "beautiful inscribed tray," "golden tapestry-like material," "an ornate gold box," "a gold Swiss vest watch" and two matching "his-and-hers" watches set into gold coins.

Missing also is a "pale green glass art object" given to Mrs. Nixon in 1970 by Mme. Chiang Kai-shek of Taiwan. It is described as "entwined with berry branch and a little bird perched on its tiny lid" and displayed on a "carved black stand."

According to a White House gift unit notation, the gift from Mme. Chiang was turned over to Mrs. Nixon on Jan. 26, 1971.

Other gifts which the State Department describes as "not currently deposited with the GSA or not shown (on any records) as being deposited" include:

- An oil painting given to Nixon by the Soviet Minister of Culture, Yekaterina Furtseva. Entitled "Russian Winter" and painted by Boris Shcherbakov, the painting is listed as having been taken to San Clemente on March 3, 1973.

- An Indian silver box with overall floral *repousse* given to Mrs. Nixon by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India.

- A gold necklace and bracelet from Dr. Kofi A. Busia, a Ghanaian teacher and politician.

- An undescribed bracelet from the mayor of Tehran which gift unit records show as having been "returned to Mrs. Nixon at her request" in 1972.

- A large gold cigarette box given to Mrs. Nixon by Giuseppe Saragat, an Italian Social Democrat leader, in 1969. A notation reads: "Mrs. Nixon remembers it being in the President's EOB office but a search there produced nothing."

- A gold pin for Mrs. Nixon by Nicaragua President Anastasio Somoza.

- A royal Irish silver strawberry bowl given to the President and First Lady by Irish diplomat William War-nock.

- A 22-karat gold filigree bracelet, one of a pair given to the Nixon daughters, Julie and Tricia, by Indonesian resident T. N. J. Suharto. The other bracelet is listed as being stored with GSA in Crate No. 117.

- A "beautiful bracelet," one of a pair presented to the Nixon daughters by Mrs. Salvadora Somoza, a relative of Nicaragua's president, in 1969. The other bracelet is listed as being stored with GSA in Crate 117.

- Two gold basket-weave compacts with diamond clasps given to the Nixon daughters by former West German Chancellor Kurt Georg Kies-inger.

According to GSA records, there

would appear to be some 2,000 Nixon foreign gifts worth an estimated \$2 million in the GSA collection stored at the National Archives.

But those records, according to a Catto staffer who worked on them, are "a shambles." They were found to be "incomplete and inconsistent," 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 gifts unit had ever seen or heard of the jewelry until March 28, 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 bedroom wall safe and sent them to the gifts unit to be photographed and processed.

The gifts were a wide diamond bracelet concealing a watch in the clasp, 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 gifts 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 . . . except that it was sapphires and diamonds."

That was the description recorded by the gift unit.

Eventually that description was changed.

When Mrs. Nixon departed for California, 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 Nixonx had visited Saudia Arabia two months earlier. There was a card in the gift unit for a pair of magnificent gold-and-silver trimmed guns given by Prince Sultan to the President. 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-diamond pin was another unrecorded Prince Sultan gift to Mrs. Nixon.

But Mrs. Nixon, in a telephone conversation 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 diamonds, and it does not in any way resemble the one given to Julie. The

emeralds and diamonds are larger and costlier-looking than Julie's ruby and diamond pin. Nevertheless, Mrs. Nixon insisted that the gifts unit staff alter Prince Sultan's card for 1972 and change it to read "a brooch of diamonds and emeralds for Tricia."

That was not the only record which State Department officials found had been changed. Other records were missing altogether. There is no mention, for instance, of a gold box given to the Nixons by the late Ethiopian leader Haile Selassie and photographed at San Clemente by Architectural Digest in 1970.

An 8-inch gold elephant found by packers in one of Nixon's offices was finally, after much research, identified as having been given to him by El Hadji Ahmadou, President of Cameroon, who visited in October, 1969. But if there was ever a gifts unit card for the elephant, the card is missing now.

The State Department is lucky to have any records at all. The Nixons had tried to take the gift unit files—the only records in existence—to San Clemente with them when they departed the White House.

The files, on instructions from White House counsel Buzhardt and Nixon secretary Rose Mary Woods, were packed the night before Nixon's resignation and put aboard a truck bound for Andrews Air Force Base. The truck was halted and impounded because Ford aides mistakenly suspected that the Watergate tapes might be aboard.

President Ford's legal counsel, Philip Buchen, subsequently directed that the gift records be turned over to the chief of protocol's office at State. He also instructed the GSA that the Nixons' foreign gifts—which were being repacked for immediate shipment to San Clemente—could not leave Washington.

The gifts and their records have remained in legal limbo ever since.

Both Catto and Dobeles found themselves blocked by court orders obtained by Nixon's lawyers when they made one simple request. They want to inspect Box 118-C, which the GSA has in storage. The GSA inventory says the box contains "two brown folders containing photographs of 'Heads of State Gifts' and 'selected items' taken in the gifts unit as a visual record dating back to March 4, 1969."

This may be the only complete record the government will ever find to help locate and recover what is, under law, government property.