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Democrats Move

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The Democrats locked the door on a piece of American political history yesterday, saying goodbye to their party headquarters at the Watergate, a name made famous by political bugging.

At noon, Mary Lou Burg, deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee, turned the key in the front door of the sixth floor suite whose burglary last June 17 has rocked the Nixon administration.

It was a symbolic lockout. Workers spent the rest of the day, as they will this weekend, moving the committee's remaining property to the new headquarters in the Air Line Pilots Association building at 1625 Massachusetts Ave. NW. The Democrats will start doing business there Monday morning.

Unlike the June 17 episode, in which five men entered through the front door under cover of darkness, yesterday's scene was bathed in television floodlights. Mrs. Burg turned the key back and forth as cameras snapped.

Inside, staff aides wandered through the rooms of cardboard cartons and empty desks, taking a last look at the quarters where Democratic fortunes rose and fell — mostly fell — since June, 1967.

"Very truthfully, I feel very nostalgic about it," said Martha Sampson, an aide in
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the Young Democrats' office. "I feel that this is history and we'll never be here again."

One of the several staffers who made use of the phone that was tapped in the Watergate case, she sat at the desk where the tapped phone had been and made calls on its replacement while cameramen took her picture. The original phone was turned over to the prosecutor in the trial that convicted the Watergate burglars.

Over her shoulder one could see the balcony of the room at the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge from which the Watergate was bugged. Over there, it was business as usual, and the manager declined to take a moment to reflect on what they were calling "a moment in history" across the street at the DNC.

The decision to move the party headquarters elsewhere was accepted with mixed feelings by Democratic workers. Some said the party was foolish to leave, because its presence there would be a constant reminder of the Republicans' foul deed.

But Mrs. Burg disagreed. "I don't think our presence is necessary here for that," she said. "The word Watergate and the word Democrat will be remembered without us here."

In the end, the usual motivations led to the move. According to Joseph Carter, director of communications for the DNC, by taking 2,000 square feet less space at the new location, the party will save \$16,000 a year.

Mrs. Burg said there will be better utilization of space at the new offices. The Watergate management—which has been using the bugging incident as an advertisement—wanted the Democrats to stay, she said. Carter also said the party wanted to avoid "the Watergate syndrome"—the associ-

ation with wealthy Republicans who live there—but Mrs. Burg said that was not a motive.

Although the break-in occurred 10 months ago, the Watergate offices have continued to be a subject of scrutiny in the case. On April 6, Carter said, an FBI team came in and electronically swept all phones on suspicion that some might still be tapped. "They told us they found nothing," Carter said.

Staff members of the Senate Select Committee looking into the Watergate case also paid a visit before the shutdown. "they just eyeballed the place, took notes and asked a lot of questions," Carter said.

Those who eyeballed the place yesterday would have seen few signs they were anywhere other than in a standard political headquarters. A picture of 1972 presidential candidate George McGovern looked out desertedly from one wall. Bumper stickers that said things like "Nixon's Had ITT" and "Free Martha Mitchell" told of the battle. And everywhere on desktops were this week's newspapers with the word "Watergate" leaping off page one.

On one rear metal door, there was this hand-printed sign: "Please keep this door closed. Remember, only you can prevent the Watergate Five!" The "Five!" was

stricken out and replaced by "Six!" in another handwriting, and that in turn by "Seven!"—the number of conspirators finally convicted.

And in a long empty room at the front, a massive telephone switchboard—reportedly ordered by then President Lyndon B. Johnson, one of the great phone-callers of the modern era—stood mute.

"The last memorial to Lyndon Johnson is being dismantled," said Rick Stearns, McGovern's delegate-counter in 1972. And in the lobby, bell captain George Cruz put the historic event into perspective. "We're going to miss a lot of pretty girls," he said.