

# A Sterling Order From

By Maxine Cheshire

More than \$100,000 worth of sterling silver flatware — which a spokesman says the White House bought for a "bargain" \$21,600 — has been lying around unused for the past six months.

The 130 place settings, totaling 3,434 pieces, were ordered last May by former First Lady Pat Nixon. The tableware was delivered in September, but no one told her successor, Betty Ford, despite the fact that the bill was paid in November out of her inflation-pinched Executive Residence Appropriation for fiscal 1975.

All arrangements for purchasing and paying for the silver were made by two holdover Nixon staffers, White House curator Clem Conger and head usher Rex Scouten.

Mrs. Ford was unaware of the silver's purchase or existence and the bite it had taken out of her budget, until last week, although she had been First Lady for at least a month before it was delivered.

Although she was not asked if she wanted the project continued or canceled, she has now chosen to honor Mrs. Nixon's commitment.

According to Mrs. Ford's press secretary, Sheila Weidenfeld, no effort will be made at this late date to send the silver back.

The silver, a copy of an 18th-century "English Kings" design, was ordered from the Gorham Silver Co. in Providence, R.I.

It was to be used in place of silver originally bought by Mrs. Calvin Coolidge. Used by eight First Families, that

## the Nixon Years

VIP

pattern is "Minuet" and is still available through the International Silver Co.

According to Mrs. Weidenfeld, there is only enough "Minuet" at the White House now to serve 90 people.

Conger said he felt that the White House should be able to serve at least 130 at luncheons and other less formal occasions when silver is used instead of the gold-washed vermeil that is traditional at State Dinners.

Instead of ordering additional place settings of "Minuet," Conger decided that the White House "needed a new pattern . . . a prestigious service historically correct to the period of the house."

He went to Gorham, which is bringing out the "English Kings" design under the pattern name of "King

Charles" as one of the Historic Charleston Foundation's Bicentennial projects.

The amount of silver Conger ordered would retail for more than \$100,000 and wholesales for \$58,700.

According to Mrs. Weidenfeld, Conger has assured her that the White House paid only \$21,600.

Conger told The Washington Post earlier that the silver had been "a gift" from Gorham "to the American people" and that they were planning "to take the \$100,000 off their income tax."

When Gorham's vice president, Raymond Artabasy, contradicted this, Conger conceded that the silver might end

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up costing the government "a few thousand" if he could not come up with a private donor willing to underwrite the purchase.

Asked if Mrs. Ford was aware that the bill had already been paid out of her budget, Conger said: "I don't know if she does or not. I haven't asked her."

According to Artabasy, Conger has been hoping to arrange a formal presentation ceremony with press coverage. The "King Charles" pattern is already available in stores around the country and Gorham and Historic Charleston have been "holding in

abeyance" any promotion until after the White House publicity.

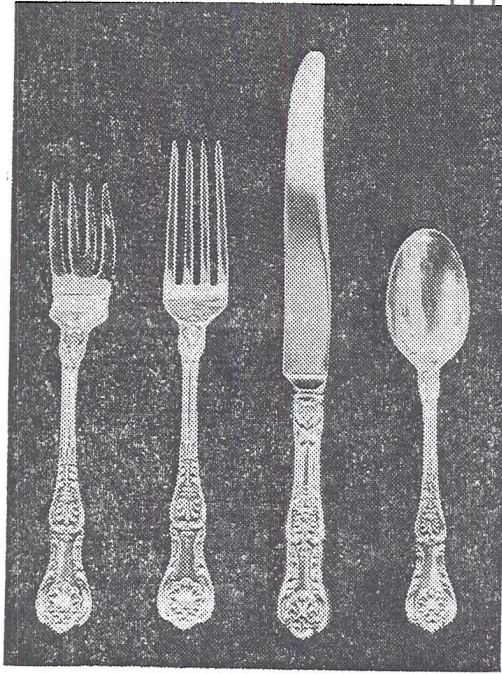
Although Mrs. Ford appears reluctant to disagree publicly with Conger, their views on how the White House should operate during an economic crunch have conflicted on more than one occasion.

One Scalandre silk sample he showed her recently costs \$170 a yard, and she rejected it outright.

Mrs. Ford has been running the mansion on such a tight budget that she purchased the bedspread for the Fords' king-size bed at the January White Sale at Walpole's.

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*The Gorham Silver  
Co. copy of an  
18th-century  
"English Kings"  
design. Pat Nixon  
ordered 130  
place settings when  
she was First  
Lady. They were  
recovered after  
Betty Ford  
assumed that title.*



See also WXPost 4 Mar 75, this file,  
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