

Crackdown on 'The Queer'

\$3 Coffee Mugs Busted

By Maitland Zane

The U.S. Secret Service announced yesterday the destruction of a large shipment of "queer" coffee mugs.

What made these mugs different from run-of-the-mill coffee holders was their decoration — an imaginary \$3 Federal Reserve Note with President Nixon's face on it.

The Secret Service, which calls funny money "the queer," said that earlier this month the mugs were being sold by a San Rafael wholesaler, the Giftwares Group of General Housewares, Inc.

Somebody must've ratted, because agents raced over to Marin, grabbed the mugs and destroyed them on the ground they violated Section 474 of Title 18 of the U.S. Code, the section banning reproduction of greenbacks.

"God knows how many of these reproduction cases we have every year," said Tim McIntyre, the number two man to Special Agent-in-Charge Horace (Harry) Gibbs. "Ashtrays, rugs, clothing. . ."

And now coffee mugs.

McIntyre estimated that "400 to 500" of the cups were

broken up — not because they had an unflattering picture of Mr. Nixon but because they had a "similitude" to legal tender.

"But we don't HAVE three-dollar bills in this country," a caller protested.

No, said McIntyre, it's the principle of the thing. Anything with a design of U.S. currency on it is illegal.

U.S. Attorney James L. Browning Jr., a man who is not easily rattled, declined to prosecute the case, saying, "This doesn't sound like the most serious violation I've ever heard of."

Back East, Gordon Erickson, the lawyer for the General Housewares, estimated there were about 2000 mugs seized.

He put his company's loss at "well under \$10,000," and said he wasn't going to take the Secret Service to court.

"I personally don't think we violated any law," he said. "But there are some things you can't fight . . . like the government."