

Selling Our Official Family Jewels

By Maxine Cheshire

There was nothing about the diamond-and-ruby-studded necklace and ring to indicate that they had been given by a foreign head of state to a high-ranking United States official.

The jewels were being sold at auction in San Francisco, which is about as far away from Washington as the General Services Administration could get unless it wanted to hold the sale in Honolulu or Alaska.

The sale, on April 2 of this year, was the first of its kind the GSA has ever conducted. It was an experiment by officials attempting to develop suitable procedures for disposal of surplus United States property which has been piling up as the result of the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966.

Under that law, no American official or member of his family is allowed to keep gifts of more than \$50 minimal value given to them by any "king, prince or foreign state."

All such gifts become the property of the United States. They must ultimately be deposited in a museum or some other public repository or else turned over to the GSA for sale.

The GSA has been reluctant, until now, to hold such a sale, for fear of offending the countries which originally gave the gifts.

To try and keep word from getting back to embassies in Washington, circulars were mailed out to 3,424 persons on a list of those who have asked to be notified routinely when surplus property of any kind is being sold by Uncle Sam.

The items to be sold were deposited in the vault of a Wells Fargo bank in San Francisco and prospective bidders were invited to inspect them there.

Besides the set of diamonds and rubies, there was a set of amber and a lot of five diamond-studded Swiss watches. None of the donors was disclosed.

A wealthy Yuma, Ariz., farmer, Edward Wavers, flew a representative the round-trip of 1,400 miles to buy the watches for \$6,033. He recognized the maker, Vacheron & Constantine, he said, and knew they were worth at least twice what he paid for them. Vacheron & Constantine watches sell for as high as \$3,000.

Waver, reached by phone this week, said he tried in vain to get someone in the GSA to tell him something

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION		PROPERTY MANAGEMENT AND DISPOSAL SERVICE	
SALE OF GOVERNMENT PERSONAL PROPERTY			
(No Deposit Required)			
		1. DATE	2. REGION
		March 18, 1974	9
		3. INVITATION FOR BIDS NO.	
		9FWS (SF) 74-94	

Dear Sir:

This office is offering for sale the following property, "as - is, where - is" on a competitive bid basis. This offering is subject to the General Sale Terms and Conditions (Standard Form 114C, January 1970 Edition), and Special Sealed Bid Conditions (Standard Form 114C-1, January 1970 Edition), which are incorporated herein by reference, and such other special terms and conditions as may be contained herein. A copy of Standard Form 114C and Standard Form 114C-1 are on file and will be made available upon request. GSA employees are prohibited from purchasing.

4. ITEM NO.	5. DESCRIPTION	6. QUANTITY
1.	PENDANT SET, Amber, including chain, earrings and ring.	1 set
2.	WATCH, Man's, yellow gold, decorated with diamonds, Vacheron & Constantin.	1 each
3.	WATCH, Man's, white gold and diamonds, Vacheron & Constantin, #446732.	1 each
4.	WATCH, Woman's white gold and diamonds, Jaeger Le Coultre, #1216482.	1 each
5.	WATCH, Man's, with diamonds, Vacheron & Constantin, #451120.	1 each
6.	WATCH, Woman's, white gold with diamonds, Plaget, #192627.	1 each
7.	NECKLACE AND RING SET, studded with diamonds and Burma rubies.	1 set

A copy of the GSA circular sent to 3,424 persons listing the jewels that were auctioned in San Francisco.

about the history of his watches, but "they kept it a big dark secret."

The amber went for a bargain \$150. The diamonds and rubies brought \$6,612.12 from a surplus broker in Grove City, Pa., R. O. Murphy Jr.

Murphy, who buys and sells government surplus regu-

larly in vast quantities, says that he was assured by the GSA that "there would be more merchandise of this type coming on the market soon."

A GSA spokesman here in Washington said only that no more sales "are contemplated at this time."