

# Secrecy surrounds Western White House

JERRY GOLDBERG

A secret land trust account and polite bureaucratic evasion conceals all data surrounding a potentially strange financial arrangement involving President Richard Nixon's Western White House.

A numbered land trust account is similar to the famous Swiss numbered bank account which conceals the name of the owner. It is a tool often used by slum land owners in eastern cities to conceal the real ownership of land and the potential financial gain of the owner.

Secrecy has surrounded the Nixon Estate since Victoria L. Cotton signed a consent to sell document for her family's historic Orange County old Spanish land grant ranch on June 30, 1969.

Orange County Records reveal three parcels of land were transferred to Title Insurance & Trust Co., 433 S. Spring St. Los Angeles 90054 account (CR) TR No. PR 17327/77761.7 on July 15, 1969.

The Orange County Assessor has placed a value of \$228,360, \$97,360, \$96,836 on the three parcels recorded as 060160-06, 06-160-26, and 06-160-24 within Section 15, Township 9 and Range 7. The firm of Latham and Watkins of 615 So. Flower St., Los Angeles (ATTN: Charles E. Horning Jr.) is the only other identifying information concerning the Nixon estate.

Nixon himself has placed a \$346,000 value on the land in a recent statement of his net worth. The statement claims improvements on the land come from his annual salary of \$200,000 and expenses of \$50,000 a year.

Some real estate experts have estimated the land is worth between a half a million and a million dollars. None of several government figures have been willing to admit or deny persistent rumor indicating a rental agreement exists between "Citizen" Nixon and the Federal government

(please turn to page 3)

(continued from page 1)

for the use of the estate to house the "President of the United States," Nixon; members of the Secret Service and others involved with the President's frequent West Coast trips.

Last year Harry Crown, a Republican, long time leader in the homeowners property tax fight, and major figure filing the successful suit which raised the property taxes on Governor Ronald Reagan's Malibu land, said he has been told the president was paying about \$100,000 a year in payments on the estate and receiving about \$200,000 a year in rent from the General Services Administration (GSA), which is custodian of certain Federal lands.

Crown sent a letter to GSA three months ago requesting information about the San Clemente property. He cited the public information law which requires mandatory information be given the public on most governmental expenditures. He has still not received an answer.

A clerk in the Los Angeles GSA office referred this reporter to another clerk who then pointed to a supervisor when questioned about the land belonging to Nixon. The supervisor allowed the matter was not under his control and recommended calling E. A. Saylor Jr. of the Western States GSA office in San Francisco.

Saylor said he didn't know a thing about the land in question. Then he said, "You know, Ernie Garbarino is the property manager of the Western White House. You should call him and I guarantee you he can tell you all you want to know about that land."

Garbarino was out but Sher Gaylord said Garbarino wouldn't be the man to give out the information. She decided secret service agent Ken Acovoni was the man with the facts. His number was disconnected.

Miss Gaylord finally went some distance away and brought Acovoni to the phone. Acovoni was asked, "Can you tell me something about this land which is supposed to be

leased between \$100,000 a year and \$200,000 a year? He said, "I can't talk for GSA. Why don't you call them?" When told GSA had indicated the Secret Service, Navy Department or somebody else would know, he said, "Why don't you call the White House press staff?" Then he decided no one would be in the press staff office because the president was coming to California.

The privately operated Title and Trust Co. operated with as much buck passing as the governmental staff. A lady in the Index section said talk to Miss Delma Hodson. Miss Hodson said talk to William Bell. He hadn't been at work yet on a first call at 10 a.m. and then was out to lunch on a second call.

A terse voiced "Mr. Britton" finally returned the query to Title and Trust. He admitted the land was a "private" trust account and corrected a misspelled name on one of the legal documents but refused to give any information about who owned the land or why it was kept a secret.

It was impossible to reach members of the White House staff at press time.

This is not the first time Nixon's financial arrangements have been questioned. He first had a financial scandal shadow hanging over his head in 1952 when running for Vice President. This was the famous Checkers case. It was then revealed the President had a secret fund to finance his Washington living expenses. The reporter who worked on that story revealed to this reporter today the list of those donating to that fund as made public by Nixon were different from his list because the published list failed to list at least six individuals who had alleged financial gain.

Later Texas financier Clint Murchison financed Nixon's \$150,000 home in the Trousdale Estates with a loan from the Teamsters Union just after Nixon lost to Edmund G. "Pat" Brown in an election contest for California governor. In still another real estate deal, Howard Hughes is known to have given Nixon a helping hand.