

President's Million Dollar Estate: An Elegant Fortress

By Don Bacon

KEY BISCAYNE, (Fla.) — (NNS) — President Nixon, with government assistance has built an elegant, fortress-like vacation retreat here that he will likely enjoy — and perhaps profit from — after leaving public life.

A complex of low rambler-type houses, set on a few acres of precisely and expensively landscaped bay-front property, with its own helicopter pad and support buildings, make up Nixon's Florida "compound."

Although the White House does not disclose such figures, it is clear to an observer, given a rare opportunity to come inside the ground, that the formerly-plain Nixon house now is the center of a million-dollar estate.

Super Security

"The President," a White House spokesman said, "paid a portion of the refurbishing costs, including the non-security related landscaping."

The heavy security provided by the super-cautious Secret Service is a striking feature of the President's Florida home. Dark-suited protec-

tive agents seem to lurk behind every palm tree.

Walking down one of the blacktop drives or along the gravel paths, a visitor occasionally catches the glassy stare of a hidden TV lens that transmits to a Secret Service control station pictures of everything that moves outside.

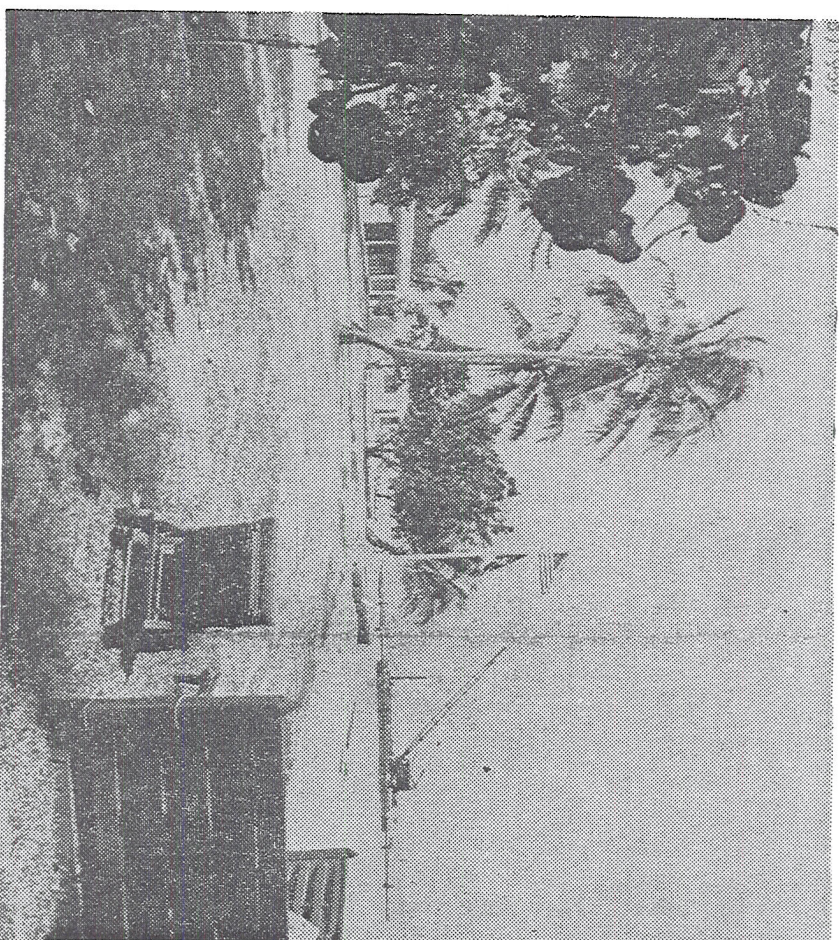
A heavy steel anti-shark net surrounds the small sandy beach where the first family swims.

Boats Patrol

Two Coast Guard patrol boats make lazy circles a few hundred yards off shore, ready to discourage water-borne sightseers and any others who venture too close to the compound. In an emergency, the boats could also evacuate the first family.

A permanent 150 square-foot helipad, built over the water by the General Services Administration at a cost of \$342,358, allows the President's shopper to land almost at his doorstep.

Nixon, shortly after his election, purchased two adjoining houses on fashionable Key Biscayne for \$252,800. On the right of the main Nixon



President Nixon's superguarded Key Biscayne home is worth millions

—AP Photo

on house lived the President's chopper-land-almost friend, C. G. "Bebe" Rebozo,

in a house worth about \$100,000. Sight for Skeptics
Aside from a spectacular view of Biscayne Bay's

greenish-blue waters and of the Miami skyline, about a mile in the distance, the Nixon-Rebozo properties were little different from several

hundred other beachfront homes on the key.

Many local residents thought Nixon paid too much for the two houses, one of which he bought from former Sen. George Smathers (D-Fla.).

Skeptics should see the place now.

Including Nixon's two houses and Rebozo's, the presidential compound now encompasses five houses and a two-story, architecturally compatible Secret Service facility.

The First Family lives in the largest house—a glistening white rambler with a huge picture window overlooking a lush, grassy yard and the bay beyond.

Office-Guest House

The second Nixon house has been converted into a combination office-guest house. The pine-paneled office is small by presidential standards, indicating that Nixon might spend more time doing his paper work on the sunny patio just outside his door.

Rebozo, a Key Biscayne businessman, continues to live in his house, making him, perhaps, the first friend of a President, having no of-

ficial responsibilities, to own property and reside inside a Government-run White House facility.

The two other houses in the compound — called "support houses" — are leased by the GSA, presumably for the duration of the Nixon tenure, and afterward will revert to their owners.

Ornate Fence

The entire complex is enclosed in a new iron fence that is higher and more ornate than the one surrounding the White House at Washington.

Tall, flowering hibiscus plants hide the grounds and partly obscure the fence, which runs for several hundred feet along Bay Lane.

In pre-Nixon days, Bay Lane was a public thoroughfare. With the growth of the compound, the President's protectors have closed it off to public traffic, placing ornamental concrete bunkers at one end and an electronically-operated gate at the other.

Only official cars and those belonging to the half-dozen remaining private residents of Bay Lane are allowed to pass.