

Coast Town, Undeterred by Watergate, Pushes for Shrine at Nixon Birthplace

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YORBA LINDA, Calif., May 6 —The residents of this agricultural community where Richard M. Nixon was born seem reluctant to talk about the Watergate scandal. But they are showing an eagerness to demonstrate their faith in the President.

Instead of engaging in any emotional dialogue, the people, who voted nearly 5 to 1 for Mr. Nixon last November, are engaged in a community effort to erect a permanent monument affirming their faith in his integrity and leadership.

With the President's personal blessing, they are about to start a public appeal for funds to acquire the green-and-white, five-room cottage where he was born on Jan. 9, 1913, and convert it into a national shrine.

"It will be something that will inspire generations of Americans and remind them of this man's greatness and humble beginnings," said Hurless Barton, chairman of the Nixon Birthplace Foundation.

"It will be a memorial to his devotion to this country's finest ideals that will endure long after Watergate and its flashy headlines have been forgotten," he added.

More Funds Come In

Rather than putting a crimp in the fund-raising for the birthplace shrine, he added, Watergate has actually given it new impetus.

Two out-of-town offers of substantial donations have been received by the foundation since Mr. Nixon's Watergate speech to the nation last Monday, according to Mr. Barton, who is 77 years old and one of a rapidly diminishing number of Yorba Lindans who remember when the Nixon family lived out on the edge of town from 1911 to 1922, across a gully from the Santa Fe Railroad tracks.

Mr. Barton is vaguely related to the President, his mother having been a first cousin of Mr. Nixon's maternal grandmother.

His statement that "many people around here are getting pretty disgusted with the way the news media are handling this thing and casting reflections on the President's hon-

esty," was borne out in encounters along Main Street.

In interviews, many of the town's 16,000 residents seemed concerned about Watergate, some were distressed and a few such as Yorba Linda's energetic woman Mayor, Mrs. Caroline Ewing, conceded they were "ashamed" of the activities brought to light involving some of Mr. Nixon's close White House associates.

But a majority of the people seem to have decided that open speculation about the affair might be regarded as a reflection on the town's loyalty to its most illustrious son.

No Mention in Paper

The Yorba Linda Weekly Star has yet to carry any mention of Watergate, either in its news columns or editorially, because as Miss Dorothy Parsons of its news staff explained, "We print only news of particular interest to our readers."

At the Village Cafe on Main Street, where many of the town's businessmen are found at lunchtime, a stranger who asked about Watergate and Mr. Nixon in the same sentence found himself the object of sullen suspicion.

Harlan Anderson, whose bread delivery truck was parked outside, replied curtly that "All this is mostly a lot of baloney for you guys to sell newspapers."

A motorist waiting at the Texaco station said:

"Well, the President is cleaning it up, isn't he?"

Mayor Blames Aides

Down the street in Nixon Park, where the Chamber of Commerce recently spent \$32,000 to beautify the place and erect a large sign "Birthplace of President Nixon," two old-timers soaking up the May sunshine were equally uncommunicative.

At City Hall, Arthur Simonian, a newcomer to town who took over 18 months ago as city administrator, said, "You never hear Watergate mentioned around here by the town's leaders or the politicians. If they talk about it, they do it privately."

Most outspoken was Mayor Ewing, wife of a physician, who said rather ruefully that "what

started out as a joke has become very serious and I and some other Republicans are ashamed."

"Most of us feel that Mr. Nixon's friends, in trying to protect the office of the President, kept things from him that he should have known about," she explained. "He was double-crossed by men whom he trusted and I'm glad he has started cleaning up the mess in a forthright manner."

Mr. Barton had a simple explanation for the basis of his faith in the President's personal honesty.

"He was a fine boy around here, never got in with bad companions and was raised in a devout churchgoing family," he said. "He could always be relied upon to do the right thing and that's why I'm not going to believe that he condoned any criminal activities."

Mr. Barton was invited to Washington in January for the President's second-term inaugural. They reminisced about the President's youthful days in Yorba Linda—how he shared a loft bedroom in the cottage with Ollie Burdig, the Nixon's hired man who "snored like a walrus"—and about the plans to acquire the Nixon home, restore it to its original appearance and turn it over to the Department of Interior as a national shrine.

Foundation for Aid

The President told Mr. Barton that no Federal money should be sought for the project under any condition and if the birthplace foundation needed funds it should get in touch with Harvey F. Firestone, the tire manufacturer who is chairman of the Nixon Foundation.

The foundation was set up by a group of wealthy Californians including, among others, Herbert W. Kalmbach, who until this week enjoyed the President's confidence as his chief West Coast money-raiser and personal attorney.

"Mr. Firestone met with us here just a few days ago and promised to help us raise the money we need," said Mr. Barton. "All in all, we may need close to a million dollars to acquire and restore the property before we are through."

The birthplace foundation has less than \$10,000 in the bank and has spent close to that amount repainting and repairing the cottage, which is on the grounds of the Yorba Linda elementary school. The school owns the cottage and rents it to the school janitor, Vincent Ellingsen, for \$80 a month. A memorial plaque and flagpole have already been erected on the lawn.

"We're still arguing with the school board but haven't yet agreed on a price," Mr. Barton said. "The school board wants us to provide them with a new school building, which would cost us about \$700,000."

Meanwhile, the foundation's members are collecting original articles of furniture from the house. The white iron bed in which Mr. Nixon was born in the small ground-floor bedroom was found in the attic of a family friend in Whittier, about 35 miles north of here where the family moved in 1922.

Mrs. Clara Jane Nixon of Newport Beach, wife of the President's brother, Donald, and the only nonresident of Yorba Linda on the foundation's seven-member board, has been principally responsible for collecting more than 100 family artifacts, which are stored in an Anaheim warehouse. They include the piano that Anna Nixon purchased and taught her son Richard to play. The piano was found at the farm home of a distant Nixon cousin in Pennsylvania.



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Commemorative plaque on lawn of the cottage.

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The five-room cottage in Yorba Linda, Calif., where President Nixon was born

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