

Elusive Vesco, Indicted With Mitchell, Is a

He Was Seldom Seen at His New Jersey Country Estate

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BOONTON TOWNSHIP, N. J., May 13—For the six years that Robert L. Vesco has lived in this small rural town, he had remained as elusive to his neighbors as he has been to Federal investigators over the last six months.

Mr. Vesco, a 37-year-old financier, was indicted Thursday with former Attorney General John H. Mitchell and former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans in connection with his secret \$200,000 cash contribution to President Nixon's re-election campaign.

Mr. Vesco is now believed to be in the Bahamas or in Costa Rica.

However, his wife, Patricia, their four children and apparently Mr. Vesco's parents are still living in the spacious brick ranch home here on Old Denville Road.

An associate of Mr. Vesco said that the financier spent virtually all his free time with the children.

It was not unusual, he said, for Mr. Vesco to fly home from Beirut or Geneva to watch his two older sons play in the local Little League baseball games. Mr. Vesco also played golf (he never broke 100) and bowled with the children.

Acquired More Land

Mr. Vesco purchased his home, on one acre, from Luigi Scerbo, a local liquor store owner, for \$52,000. Old Denville Road is a narrow curving street, heavily lined with trees and bushes that winds through an affluent suburban neighborhood where homes sell for \$60,000 to \$75,000.

Since 1970 Mr. Vesco has spent \$500,000 to \$1-million in acquiring adjoining property and homes and in building additions to the estate.

Today he owns 80 acres and

at least three homes, which are used for guests and employees.

During all the time the acquisitions occurred, his neighbors rarely or never saw Mr. Vesco.

"In his years here I have never seen the man face to face, but we always knew when he was home, we all heard the helicopter buzzing in for a landing," said Kurt Mehner, who lives across the road from the Vescos.

Three years ago, before he began receiving national attention about his financial and political dealings, Mr. Vesco created a local controversy with his helicopter.

Most of the neighbors opposed Mr. Vesco's application to the local zoning board for a variance to build a helicopter pad. But there was no ordinance prohibiting such pads and the board reluctantly granted the variance.

Shortly thereafter, Mayor Frank Spender recalled, the

town fathers adopted an anti-helicopter ordinance.

Boonton Township, which is 30 miles west of New York, has a population of 3,000. It is a 15-minute drive to the Fairfield headquarters of International Controls Corporation, of which Mr. Vesco was formerly chairman of the board.

Mayor Spender recalled that during the two hearings before the zoning board, Mr. Vesco did not appear but was represented by a lawyer. Like Mr. Mehner and other Vesco neighbors, the Mayor has never seen Mr. Vesco.

Harold Hughes, a retired business executive who sold his 10-room colonial house and 32 acres to Mr. Vesco in 1970 for \$150,000, never saw the financier during the negotiations.

In fact, Mr. Vesco never saw the inside of the Hughes home, except for the kitchen, and that was one year before the purchase.

Mystery to Neighbors

"One Sunday morning Mr. Vesco and his two older boys just dropped over and he asked about buying some of the land for tennis courts," Mr. Hughes recalled. "We weren't in the market at the time and we had a cup of coffee. They left after a short pleasant chat."

In 1970 the Hugheses were approached by Harry L. Sears, Mr. Vesco's attorney, and the negotiations began. Mr. Sears, who has a law office in Boonton, the shopping area for Boonton Township, was also indicted Thursday with Mr. Vesco.

Additions Made

In the negotiations, which lasted several weeks, Mr. and Mrs. Hughes received two letters from Mr. Vesco, but they never talked with him, not even on the telephone, and no one from the Vesco family inspected the Hughes home, which is next door.

"It was all very peculiar," Mrs. Hughes said.

Mr. Vesco subsequently purchased two other adjoining properties, one of which included a split-level home. Some neighbors believe that there is a fourth house somewhere in the rear of the Vesco estate.

In addition to the purchases, Mr. Vesco has made substantial additions to the estate. He built a pool, converted an old canal basin into a one-acre man-made pond and built what is known in the neighborhood as "the barn."

The barn, which is nearly the length of a football field, is a horse stable with 18 stalls and two riding rings. It cost approximately \$75,000 and has a full time manager.

Mr. Vesco's 12-year-old daughter, Dawn, is an avid horse rider.

The neighbors said that the four Vesco children, — three boys and a girl — were well mannered and played with other neighborhood youngsters.

Although Mr. Vesco is rarely

seen, the neighbors often see Mrs. Vesco in her yellow station wagon on her way to local stores.

"Pat would always wave and sometimes we would make small talk," said one woman.

Last year Mrs. Vesco hosted several teas and luncheons in her home to raise funds for the nearby Riverside Hospital. Mr. Vesco reportedly has made several substantial donations to the hospital, as well as to the Morris County United Fund and the Wilson School, a private school attended by the three younger Vesco children. The oldest child, an 18-year-old son, attends Lehigh University.

Two months ago there was a noticeable change at the Vesco estate.

Numerous no-trespassing signs were posted along the property and a private uniformed guard patrolled the area in a jeep. Other security men were also believed to have been hired.



Donald Vesco, Robert L. Vesco's father, walking yesterday outside the Vesco home on Old Denville Road in Boonton Township, N. J.

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