

San Clemente Concerned For Safety of Nixon Bust

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Feb. 12 —The safety of an \$8,000 bronze bust of San Clemente's leading citizen, Richard M. Nixon, has become a matter of growing concern, and considerable bickering, among some of the President's West Coast neighbors and fellow townsmen.

City officials and civic leaders are divided over what, if anything, should be done to protect that life-size bronze—given to Mrs. Nixon nearly two years ago as a gift of the 20,000 people of San Clemente—against possible vandalism incited by the White House scandals and talk of Presidential impeachment.

Although the town has long been a stronghold of Orange County Republicanism, much of it to the right of Mr. Nixon, a strong undercurrent of disillusionment and anti-Nixon feeling is evident here.

The "neglected Nixon bust," as The San Clemente Daily Sun-Post refers to it, still occupies what was intended to be only a temporary location in a corner of the City Hall lobby, awaiting a permanent home.

The hope was, when the 250-pound likeness of her husband was presented to Mrs. Nixon at a civic celebration April 7, 1972, that it would end up in the Nixon library planned by the Richard Nixon Foundation.

Library Project Delayed

Events, however, have brought the library project almost to a standstill. No site has been selected, and the foundation's officers acknowledge that "this obviously is not the time" to launch a public appeal for funds to build a Nixon memorial.

Pushed up against a counter where its graven, slightly quizzical smile is fixed on town residents brushing past it to pay their water bills, the Presidential countenance is generally ignored.

Now and then someone asks clerk Helen Calvit, "Who's that?" and she sometimes overhears comments that she will only say are "interesting and frequently quite astounding."

City Clerk Max Berg worries about the safety of the Nixon bust. Among other things, he fears that, without protective rope or railing around its walnut pedestal, it would be "the easiest thing in the world for some nut to deface it."

Last year, a brass plate at the base of the bronze casting identifying it as "Richard M. Nixon, 37th President of the United States" was found on the floor.

Mr. Berg tossed the plate into a drawer of his desk, where it remained for several months. Finally, after a number of complaints and several unsuccessful attempts to re-affix the plate, the sculptor, Judith Bland of nearby Corona del Mar, was summoned and restored it firmly in place.



Associated Press

The bust of the President
in San Clemente, Calif.

have as yet evoked no response. City Manager Ken Carr, although he does not fully share Mr. Berg's concern for the bust's safety, said he would be "more than willing" to send it to the Western White House, for display either in the lobby there or the President's reception room.

But those who organized the three-month fund-raising campaign and staged the presentation to Mrs. Nixon insist that the best and safest place for it—the work of art, at least for the time being, is at City Hall.

This, emphatically, is the opinion of the man chiefly responsible for selecting and promoting the city's gift—Paul Presley, manager of the San Clemente Inn, which serves as a home away from home for White House staff members who accompany the President on his visits here.

"It's ridiculous," he said of the concern over possible vandalism to the Presidential bust. "Where could it be safer? The police department is in the same building and open 24 hours a day. I'm sure I could call up the Western White House this minute and get them to take it, but who would see it there except members of the staff and a few official visitors?"

Mrs. Nixon's Property

He emphasized that the bust was the property of Mrs. Nixon, and that she had enthusiastically endorsed his idea of placing it temporarily in City Hall, on public display where all the people of San Clemente could see and enjoy it.

At the time the Nixon memorial project was being set up, frequent anti-Nixon demonstrations were taking place outside the gates of the Nixon estate and Western White House.

Some were young marchers protesting the war in Vietnam, others were dissident Republicans including adherents of the John Birch Society voicing their anger over Mr. Nixon's trips to Moscow and Peking.

One of the right-wing Republicans taking part in those demonstrations was David C. Fales, who in 1968, as Republican chairman for the precinct that has since become the Nixons' legal residence, worked tirelessly for Mr. Nixon's Casa Pacifica estate, Nixon's election.

Even if it was agreed that the bronze should be moved, there might be trouble finding someone to assume custody of it, inclusive of Mrs. Nixon, to whom it actually belongs, and the President himself, who is believed never to have seen it. Scattered suggestions that the bust be removed for safer keeping to the Western White House here, adjoining the Nixon's Casa Pacifica estate,