

Other First Ladies accepted gifts, too

By Dorothy Marks
NANA

WASHINGTON — The revelation that Pat Nixon had received some valuable jewelry as gifts from King Faisal and his two half-brothers over the last five years sent shock waves through the nation's capital, but one had to wonder where everyone has been all these many years.

After all, it's happened before to other first ladies.

Jackie Kennedy, for instance, was a First Lady who knew and loved valuable jewels and spent a lot of her time selecting them.

In her book, "My Life with Jacqueline Kennedy," Mary Barelli Gallagher, her one-time secretary, recalls Jackie wanted to trade in some old jewelry for cash so she could buy an 18th-century sunburst diamond clip she had seen in London. The price was \$3,160.

A Washington jeweler, Charles Ernest, was called to the White House to appraise some jewelry, including a big aquamarine given her by the Brazilian government and a gold pin with an emerald given her during a visit to Greece.

Jackie negotiated with

the jeweler and got \$4,400 for these two pieces plus a diamond wedding clip she had been given by Joseph Kennedy and a ruby and diamond pin from her husband, Jack.

Then there was a diamond-encrusted sword given President Kennedy by Ibn Saud, then king of Saudi Arabia.

'Jackie wanted diamonds replaced by glass

In 1962, Mrs. Kennedy wanted to buy another piece of jewelry she had seen. She had Mrs. Gallagher call Tom Walsh, a New York appraiser, to the White House "in strictest confidence."

She wanted the diamonds removed from the sword and replaced with glass. She would then dispose of the diamonds for cash.

The project was aban-

doned when Walsh reported the diamonds would be too difficult to get out and the cost would be prohibitive.

"The most amusing part of the story . . . was the explanation to be given the artisan . . . that the sword was an old thing Ambassador Joseph Kennedy had," Mrs. Gallagher wrote.

President John Kennedy was unaware of her negotiations.

On the other hand, valuable gifts coming from foreign chiefs of state worried both Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird, says Bess Abell, social secretary to the former First Lady.

"Our policy as to head 'em off at the pass," she recalled in a telephone interview. "The President was very explicit. He told me and the State Department to inform an embassy whose chief of state was coming here not to go overboard on gifts and that Lady Bird was primarily interested in the handicrafts and artifacts of the country concerned.

"I'm not saying she never received a valuable piece of jewelry. She may have.

"And in the case of artifacts presented by coun-

tries like Italy, Greece or the Middle Eastern countries, many were antique and quite valuable. You can see most of them on display at the LBJ Library in Austin."

Mrs. Abell recalls the president of Brazil presented Lady Bird with "a lovely pin with an aquamarine set in gold which she wore."

"And for the first State Dinner after they got to the White House, the prime minister of Italy gave the Johnsons an antique sculpture of a child's head — a valuable piece — which Mrs. Johnson kept on the Octagon table in the West Hallway of the White House."

"LBJ was always keeping an eye out to see we didn't spend too much taxpayers' money on our state gifts," Mrs. Abell said. "We went in for personalized items, engraved things and replicas of historic objects like Thomas Jefferson's lap desk, copies of the candelabra by which George Washington wrote his Farewell Address, or copies of antique ballot boxes."

Bess Abell expressed shock and disgust that the Nixons had had appraised the matched set of emeralds and diamonds, the diamond and ruby earrings and a diamond bracelet given Pat Nixon by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and two half-brothers, Prince Fahd and Prince Sultan.

"Can you imagine that? How crude. That really sent me into orbit," Mrs. Abell said.

"Lynda and Luci Johnson got jewelry from time to time — mostly gold pins — but they weren't anything to rush off and have appraised, she added.

"Before their weddings, the diplomatic corps was told to give one gift on behalf of all missions in Washington."

Mrs. Johnson was often photographed wearing a set of Tiffany diamond earrings. "Her husband gave her those. Also half an angel's wing set in diamonds, a pin she wore a lot. When he gave her the angel's wing, he told her, 'If you're good, you'll get the other half,' but she never did."



FORMER First Ladies Jacqueline Kennedy (in painting) and Lady Bird Johnson accepted gifts of jewelry from visiting foreign dignitaries.