

Visits by Haldeman and Ehrlichman?

The Usher's Logbook Will Never Tell

By Maxine Cheshire

One morning several months ago, a report circulated among the housekeeping staff at the White House that former presidential assistants H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John Ehrlichman had visited President Nixon in the family quarters the night before.

The report is impossible to check at this point because President and Mrs. Nixon have quietly done away with the traditional usher's logbook, a record that for nearly 90 years has been used to keep track of all private callers at the Executive Mansion.

The logbooks, which have been maintained for all First Families since the days of Grover Cleveland, show who they saw and how long they stayed.

If callers remained for dinner, the record shows what they ate, and where. If they stayed overnight, the record showed which guest room they occupied.

White House spokesmen declined to say this week when the Nixons had decided to dispense with the logbook, except to confirm that the action has been "within the last few months."

According to Mrs. Nixon's press secretary, Helen Smith, the Nixons decided, after five years, that the logbook was "too personal—what time they get up, what they eat for breakfast, the names of all their friends coming in."

However, another source on President Nixon's side of the White House says that the practice of keeping an usher's logbook was abolished after the most recent one was "subpoenaed and details leaked to the press."

According to investigators for the Senate Watergate Committee and the Special Prosecutor's office, the log-

book kept by the usher's office on the mansion side of the White House and another kept in the West Wing office are the best records available on presidential movements.

The logbooks, begun by the first White House usher, Ike Hoover, in the 1880s, are not public documents. It belongs to the First Family and is traditionally presented to the First Lady to take with her when she leaves.

The logbook maintained for the Lyndon B. Johnsons, for example, is regarded by the curators of the LBJ Library in Austin, Tex., as part of the late President's most "confidential" papers and is sealed. It will not be made available to historians and scholars until some date in the future.

Reporters have not been allowed to look at the logbooks in any administration, but press office employees could always consult it in the past to answer reporter's questions.

Now, with no written record, it is impossible to check such visits as that reportedly made by Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

"I don't think they stayed overnight," said a White House employee. "All I know is that I heard it when I got to work the next morning—that they'd been here in the house to see President Nixon. I assume it was for dinner, but I don't know."

Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned April 30, 1973, but remained at the White House for several weeks after that. Although reporters have had reason to believe that President Nixon may have been in touch with his former aides by telephone since they left the White House, there has been nothing to indicate that they may have called on him in person until now.