



VERNON AND ELSIE SHERMAN
They were tired of it

Talk at the General Store

By John Kifner
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Bath, N.H.

FOR A century and a half, tradition has it, the almost entirely Republican citizens of this small town have defeated local and national issues, as well as exchanging gossip, around the counters of the brick store. But until last week there was little mention of the Watergate affair.

"People were just getting bored with the whole damn thing," said Russell Armstrong, who runs the general store with his wife, Olga. "Most of them were getting disgusted with it. Get it over with, either he did or he didn't."

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THEY WERE snapping off the television news, people say, and tiring of reading their newspapers. Nearby, on the road to St. Johnsbury, Vt., a sign outside a tire store reflected the sentiment: "Our retreads are like Watergate — they go on and on and on."

But there is also a strong undercurrent of independence, a Yankee skepticism, a common sense view of the world that finds few avid supporters of Mr. Nixon. Here, where he received overwhelming support, the most common defense now is that the Democrats probably did the same thing.

The store at the center of town stocks a catalogue of permanent and changing New England: jackknives and fishing rods, kerosene lanterns, ax handles, rubber boots, newspaper and cold beer, fresh fruit and vegetables, frozen TV dinners and souvenirs. Customers draw their own gas from the Mobil pumps outside, then walk in to tell how much they owe and are greeted by name.

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AMONG THOSE who dropped by the general store one recent afternoon, a variety of views of Watergate was expressed, the most common denominator being that it had dragged on too long.

Farmer Vernon Sherman and his wife, Elsie, dropped by. He said was so sick of Watergate that he won't watch television, and she said that Mr. Nixon was "just dead honest, a good family man, a good husband."

Holman C. Whitney, 68, a semi-retired dairy farmer and mineral collector, said: "I don't see how anybody who read the testimony could think he's the kind of man that should be president. But who is? Certainly Johnson wasn't."

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BOTH OF the town's Republican party officials expressed disillusionment with Mr. Nixon.

Raymond Burton, the town Republican chairman, who also serves on the school board, said that "if this kind of snooper had gone on, God knows where we might have ended up, maybe in a dictatorship."

An earnest, friendly man who described himself as a "moderate-to-liberal Republican," Burton is a supervisor for shared teaching services to the small schools in the region, plays the organ in church and is a Mason. He says that Watergate grew out of "too much money and small minds," and adds that the controversy "maybe in the long run is a good thing. We haven't come all the way in this country to have it ruined by Richard Nixon."

Mrs. Bessie Reed, the Republican co-chairman said of Mr. Nixon: "I think he's guilty," adding with a sweeping gesture, "unequivocally yes."

This town cast 255 votes for Mr. Nixon in 1972 and only 38 for his Democratic opponent, Senator George S. McGovern of South Dakota.