
Betty Beale: Washington

Buchen's White House power role

WASHINGTON — When you see him sitting across a room full of mingling, chattering, animated people he seems an island of repose. When you take a good look at the expression on the narrow head under the white receding hairline, you are very apt to comment, as so many others have done, "He has the finest face I've ever seen." There's wisdom, kindness and contentment in it, and much of the latter is due to his wife, Bunny Buchen.

Philip W. Buchen holds the same title at the White House as John Dean did in the Nixon administration, but there the similarity between the two counsels to the President ends. Dean was a 34-year-old lawyer, on the make politically, who devoted time to such noble objectives as how could the Nixon staff "use the available federal machinery to screw our political enemies." On the fringes only of power, he had an office in the EOB.

Buchen, 59, whose face is a mirror of his character, occupies one of the handsomer offices in the White House, is a former law partner and trusted friend of Gerald Ford, therefore decidedly influential, enjoys cabinet rank, and handles a mountain of important problems as they relate to the President, from the investigation of the CIA and the Nixon papers to 90 per cent of the bills that come to the President for his signature. He also handles all contacts with regulatory agencies, "a good bit of the President's correspondence" and clears all appointees.

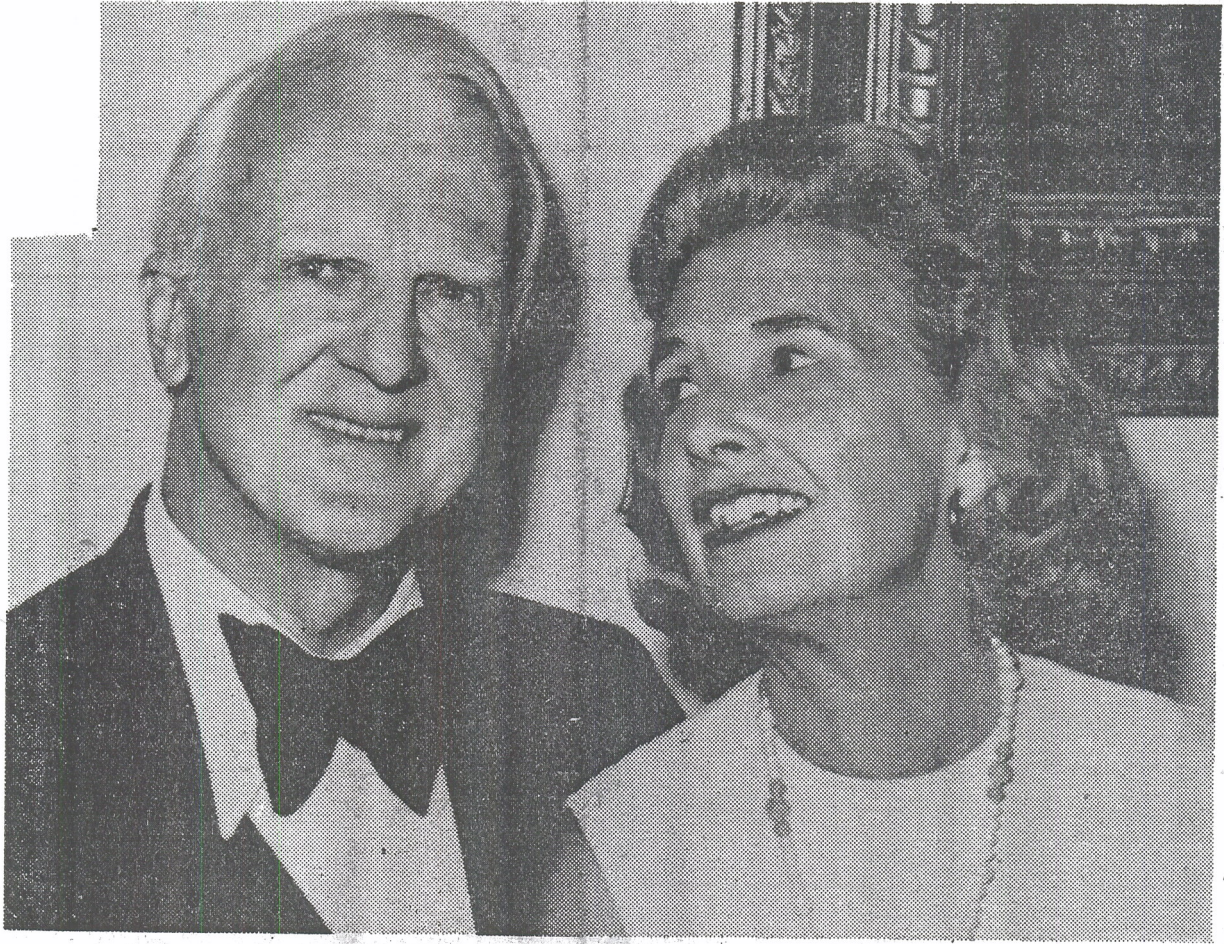
"To protect the President is my main job," he said, meaning to protect his interests in the avowed objectives while easing his burden. "This is where I give Don Rumsfeld and Jack Marsh the highest marks. They are looking after the President."

Buchen has a staff of seven lawyers to assist him but his own phone rings 40 to 50 times each 11-hour day, meaning 40 to 50 different problems a day, most of them requiring immediate answers.

But he wouldn't change it for anything despite the hours. He gets to the White House before 8 every morning and usually doesn't return to their one-bedroom apartment at the Jefferson Hotel until 7 or 8 o'clock or later.

It's this kind of pressure which has surprised him the most about working in the White House, Buchen said. But he likes "the excitement of it all and the chance to meet about 500 new people I would not have met otherwise." He doesn't call it Potomac Fever. "I have always liked this city, and even before I came here I thought it would be an ideal place for retirement because there is so much to do and it's such a fun place." For this native of Sheboygan, Wis., who was crippled in both legs by polio when he was a 16-year-old football player, "fun" is ballet, opera, concerts and good conversation.

So he doesn't think they will ever return to Grand Rapids to live though they have held onto



JOHN DEAN'S SUCCESSOR — Philip Buchen with his wife at a reception.

their house there. It's Mrs. Buchen who talks of going back because she has her doubts about life in Washington once you are out of the power circle.

Both make the most of every minute in the nation's capital which Bunny calls "a cultural feast." She has given up playing bridge "because there are too many other fascinating things to do in Washington," but she is still an avid tennis player with a good steady game and plays several times a week at the fashionable Chevy Chase Club.

Blond, outgoing Bunny (her real name is Beatrice) is ideally suited to Philip Buchen though he had to court her a year before she said yes. Each compliments the other and enriches the other's life. They met when they were both at the University of Michigan in 1938 and he admired her then "because she was always so full of pep and enthusiasm. She's very likable as well as lovable."

But they were not married until 1947. Before that he had a brief unhappy marriage and she had a

happy one which ended four years later when her husband was killed in an automobile accident. Her only child, Victoria, was adopted by Buchen and is now Mrs. J.C. Aler of Dallas. She had one child by Buchen, a son, Roderick, 27, who is married and lives in Rochester, N.Y., where he works for Xerox. Between the two offspring they have four grandchildren.

The former Bunny Loomis has the distinction of being the oldest friend of the President in this city. She has known Jerry Ford since she was eight years old. "Our mothers were very good friends and we grew up in the same neighborhood." She is one of the few people in the world today who in private still calls him Jerry.

Phil Buchen, who 25 years later was to supervise the Nixon papers, met Jerry Ford in New York when he was working for the same firm Richard Nixon joined 20 years later — Mudge, Stern, Williams and Tucker. Studying the year around, he had gone

through both college and law school at Michigan in five and a half years. An honor student, he was Phi Beta Kappa, member of Coif, doctor of laws and doctor of jurisprudence when he finished.

As he subsequently practiced law in a Grand Rapids partnership with Ford, he has known something about his capabilities for years and this is what he has to say about the President. "He has a prodigious memory and the ability to grasp quickly the facets of very complex problems. He is not an intellectual in the sense that he is quick to formulate new ideas or be very glib in announcements, but in terms of understanding problems he has a better grasp of what is really essential than the so-called experts do."

The investigation of the CIA has been Buchen's toughest job at the White House. "The extent of the investigation is just overwhelming," he said. "Sen. Church's committee has 119 people on its staff. They are moving in on so many areas and demanding so much information which all has to be screened and judged. Silence is golden in the intelligence business because if you don't have silence you don't have intelligence. Church doesn't like to be accused of having any political motivation, but after all he has political instincts and political ambitions and it's bound to show through. He's no different from any other Senator, and he does have some basic concerns.

"During the (CIA) covert operations in Chile a general was shot, but it was not a plot that was conceived here," he continued. "It wasn't a CIA plot. Church still wants to treat it in a context of an assassination because there was evidence that we were encouraging elements in Chile to pull a military coup, and when they tried to get the general out he pulled gun on them so they shot him. But it wasn't a CIA man who shot him and it wasn't conceived by our people. If you are against assassination, why study everything in the past? Why not concentrate on being sure it won't happen in the future?"

While most people would give an eyetooth to see the Nixon papers, Philip Buchen has no such morbid curiosity, nor the time to be curious. "There were 42 million separate papers," he said. "The only ones we have had to go through were those needed by the special prosecutor. Most of the papers are not indexed. There are a bunch of file titles but you know how unrevealing file titles are."

The counsel to the President hasn't heard any of the tapes the public doesn't already know about. There are 700 tapes and each takes five hours of listening, he said. Two of his staff Bill Casselman and Barry Roth, have heard some. "I told them I don't want to hear them." President Ford hasn't heard any of the others either. What did Casselman and Roth have to say about the tapes? "They were a little shaken," said Buchen.
