

Stonewalling on monument at birthplace of Nixon

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YORBA LINDA — It hasn't been easy building a monument to Richard Nixon. Just ask Robert Farrell, a 45-year-old stone mason from Anaheim, who started on the project four years ago.

It was in 1972, a few months before President Nixon was re-elected, that the Nixon Birthplace Foundation came to Farrell and asked him to build a monument in the front yard of the white frame house in Yorba Linda where the 37th president was born in 1913.

Farrell decided to build it out of stones collected from all 50 states. Letters were drafted to governors, and for a while the

rocks rolled in like Republican votes in the 1972 election.

Then came Watergate. And suddenly there were no more stones.

"They just stopped coming," says Farrell. "One state even told us that it didn't have any rocks."

For two years, the Nixon monument remained just a motley collection of boulders and rocks scattered throughout Farrell's back yard.

Then about a year ago, after the Nixon Birthplace Foundation placed ads in several rock collecting magazines and embarked on a desperate letter writing campaign, stones from the uncooperative

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states began arriving, sent by individuals obviously more willing to forgive and forget than their state governments.

The rock from Illinois arrived about a year ago, Farrell says.

"It's the smallest one of all — it looks like a rock somebody went out and picked up in some farmer's field," he says.

The largest stone was a 600-pound boulder sent by Wyoming in a freight car.

The 50th and final stone arrived two weeks ago from Delaware, the first state of the Union.

"We originally asked each state to send us rocks 18 inches long, 12 inches wide, and 4 inches thick,"

Farrell says. "Now I've got 20 tons of rocks in my back yard and I have to redesign the whole thing."

Collecting the rocks, however, represents only one of the problems the monument has caused Farrell.

"I have a 27-year-old son who doesn't like it because I'm building this monument," says Farrell. "He says I'm out of my mind to do it. But I think the whole Watergate thing has been just about drained dry — it's time to forget about it."

Farrell says he will begin work on the monument in a week or two and will spend three days shaping the 50 rocks into a form 7 feet long

and 4 feet high. His charge? Nothing.

"I said four years ago when Nixon was still president that I'd do it for free if I and my whole family could meet the president," Farrell says. "Well, before the meeting could take place, Watergate hit and the monument was just sort of forgotten."

"Now I'll just settle for having the two trowels I'm going to use in building the monument autographed by Nixon so I can hang them in my den."

In the meantime, Farrell will spend his time puzzling over what to do with the largest and smallest stones in the 50-state rock collection.