

commentary

from other pens...

Queen Victoria's Oval Office desk

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — When George W. Bush placed his broad-brimmed Texas hat on the Oval Office desk in January he laid claim to 1,300 pounds of antique oak that has become a presidential emblem.

The White House has two centuries of stories. The tale of the desk made from the timbers a 19th century British warship, is among the best.

The story's elements include a lost explorer, a botched rescue mission, a ship frozen in the ice and a monarch's gratitude. It continues with more than a century of American presidents conducting their business across a desk that commemorates a gesture of international friendship.

On Nov. 23, 1880, when the carved partners desk arrived as a gift from Queen Victoria, President Rutherford B. Hayes learned from its small plaque that it was constructed from the oak beams of the Arctic exploring ship HMS Resolute.

The Resolute desk remained in the president's office for the rest of the 19th century. It then moved to the presidential study, where it stayed through 1948. Four presidents have used it since in the Oval Office.

But the Resolute desk was deemed a rediscovery in 1961 when Jacqueline Kennedy found it, relatively neglected, in the broadcast room on the ground floor. She installed it in her husband's Oval Office.

The desk became lodged in the national memory when John F. Kennedy Jr. was photographed peering from behind the central panel as his father worked above.

But its story began far from Pennsylvania Avenue.

In 1845, Sir John Franklin, sailed from England for icy northern waters in one more attempt to find a Northwest Passage across the top of North America. Franklin cruised up the coast of Greenland, and disappeared. The British navy sent out relief expeditions.

The search mounted in 1852 was a squadron commanded by Sir Edmund Belcher. Within months, all five ships were icebound. In the spring, Belcher ordered four abandoned, including HMS Resolute.

J. Raymond Edinger Jr., a Rochester, N.Y., student of the history of Arctic exploration, takes up the story in a recent issue of *Mercator's World*. Belcher packed the crews into a single ship and sailed for home. He barely survived a court-martial for losing four seaworthy ships.

The story then veers into the unexpected.

While Belcher was on trial in England, the abandoned Resolute broke free from the ice. It drifted more than 1,000 miles, then was gripped by another ice pack.

The next year, the American whaling ship George Henry spotted an unknown and apparently unmanned ship. Seeing an opportunity, Capt. James Buddington claimed the Resolute as salvage, sailed her south and docked in New London, Conn., on Christmas Eve 1855.

New York merchant Henry Grinnell, persuaded Congress to buy and refit the Resolute and return her to the British navy. The Resolute reached Portsmouth in December 1856, more than a decade after it sailed in Franklin's squadron. The queen came aboard to voice her thanks.

The remains of the Franklin expedition were discovered not long afterward by a private expedition mounted by the explorer's widow. There were no survivors.

The Resolute quietly served the Royal Navy for two decades. By the time she was ordered broken up memories of the incident had faded. But Queen Victoria remained grateful.

The Resolute desk remains unchanged except for a central panel. President Franklin Roosevelt ordered it in 1945 to conceal his leg braces. By the time President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 the desk was so well known it became a museum piece.

President Carter ordered it returned to the Oval Office in 1977.

Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and now George W. Bush have used it there.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for more than 30 years.



Don't say espionage, say Keystone cops!

It's a long way from milking cows to a computer geek. Remember every ones grandpa Walter Krontke? Can anyone forget Richard Nixon?

It was an American president's visit to China that introduced this kiss them to death foreign policy, and it is as old as the Berlin Wall. Forget it, China doesn't like Americans, and it's time we realize that it never will.

Chinese agents do less time than cop killers. They can do anything and never pay. You would think the Communist party and the People's Liberation Army of China had taken over America.

China accounts for 22 percent of the world's people but the United States has 22 percent of the trade. China's best trading partner is those hated American devils. It accounts for 80 percent of their Gross Domestic Product. It also accounts for 25 percent of our current accounts deficit, (trade deficit), too.

Put another way China exports \$100 billion to that bunch of white guys but imports a pathetic \$16 billion from the United States. Isn't this cyberspace economy great?

Don't believe all this blather about Chinese agriculture, either. It has 1.3 billion people but only 7 percent of the world's arable land.

With its huge population China easily is potentially the world's largest consumer of agricultural products. In fact this nation — that was the origin of soybeans — needs all the soybeans the great



wayne gattshall

• wayne's world

American farm belt can produce. China is even more dependent on food imports than the former Soviet Union.

The average Chinese farm is around one 15th of a hectare, or about one sixth of an acre, and they have surplus corn to export? That sounds like a Department of Agriculture crop report.

However, these very impressive farm operations would please the eco-terrorists. They smash insects by hand (two bricks and a bamboo basket).

But do they steal America's grain reserves like the Soviet Union did in 1972? No they want U.S. nuclear secrets from the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico — bad enough to steal them.

When the perpetrator was found out it was don't say spy, don't say espionage. And don't you dare sever U.S.-Chinese military exchange. But you can say KEYSTONE COPS! Even after a signed confession the perpetrator got out of jail. Bet these fancy guys shredded records faster than Oliver North. Well, Americans remember Oliver North

and the People's Liberation Army of China is no Oliver North.

All of this checking with Jiang Zemin first is harder to swallow than a cow's cud. You would think that the home of the Manhattan Project, at the Los Alamos nuclear lab, was the Wal-Mart, of the world. It was the most radical change in economic policy ever made without a military coup.

It seems public policy was to make it the nuclear Disneyland of the world. So yes, sell it before someone steals it!

One employee at the Los Alamos nuclear lab was found downloading nuclear data into unsecured computers. Unsecured computers wonder what that meant? Maybe it was an Easter egg hunt on the White Teepee, lawn!

Then what was it when a computer hard drive was found at a city dump? Well the fancy guy didn't say, but he did say no sweat by that time the information had been declassified.

Wonder what would have happened if an American was caught downloading the nuclear secrets of the Peoples Liberation Army of China?

Well the United States has become the world's idiot. Good ole uncle Jiang Zemin wouldn't be bargaining the signed confession of the perpetrator. He would be tortured and-killed by mainland police.

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How to access and check your credit report

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I understand the importance of good credit and have always strived to maintain my excellent credit rating. I recently needed to purchase a car and was not concerned about the financing. I went to my bank to apply for a loan and imagine my surprise when it was denied! The bank gave me a copy of my credit report. Listed were a bunch of medical bills that had been written off as uncollectible/bad debts.

Because I am in excellent health and have not had a reason to visit the hospital other than to visit with family members who have just had babies, I know that these debts are not mine. Attorney General Stovall, how can I clear up my credit report and restore my good name?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) is a federal law which my Consumer Protection Division has been authorized to enforce. Under the Act, a consumer may dispute information appearing on his or her credit reports by sending a letter of dispute to the credit reporting agency which maintains the file(s) that contain the inaccurate information. Once received, the credit reporting agency has 30 to 45 days during which it must reinvestigate the information reported and either update or delete the item(s). Within five days of the completion of the reinvestigation, the credit reporting agency must provide the consumer with the results of the completed investigation and certain notices as to the consumer's rights.



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

When my Consumer Protection Division contacted the credit reporting agency concerning your complaint, we learned that the medical bill information did, indeed, belong to someone else and had been reported incorrectly. Because the credit reporting agency could not verify that your identity was the same as the identity of the person incurring the bills, the agency deleted the information from your credit report, as required by the FCRA, and apologized for any inconvenience you suffered as a result.

Additionally, under the FCRA, a credit reporting agency may charge up to \$8 for a copy of one's credit report. There are circumstances in which the agency must provide a copy free-of-charge, one being if there is reason to believe that something has been erroneously reported. Therefore, the charge you incurred for the initial copy of your credit report has been refunded.

It is important to know your rights concerning fair credit reporting. The three major national credit reporting agencies are:

Equifax, P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374-0241; (800) 685-1111;

Experian (formerly TRW), P.O. Box 949, Allen, TX 75013; (888) 397-3742; and

Trans Union, 760 West Sprout Road, P.O. Box 390, Springfield, PA 19064-0390; (800)916-8800.

It is a good idea to request a copy of your credit report periodically to check for erroneous information. While there are companies that offer this service for a fee, you have the right to access this information directly. Do not be taken in by scare tactics that accessing your own credit report will lower your credit rating. This is simply not true.

In addition, you may request a copy of the brochure summarizing consumers' rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act from my office at 1-800-432-2310, or by contacting the Federal Trade Commission, toll-free at 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357).

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and an agent will return your call promptly.

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