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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 25, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: DICK CHENEY

FROM: JERRY H. JONES 

Attached per your request is a report on the status  
of the Marjorie Merriweather Post estate in Florida.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

FEB 24 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR JERRY JONES

FROM: PAUL O'NEILL *15/ O'Neill*

SUBJECT: MARJORIE MERRIWEATHER POST ESTATE IN FLORIDA

Mar-A-Lago, the Marjorie Merriweather Post estate in Florida, was conveyed by deed to the United States on December 18, 1972. The deed was subject to the condition that, if in the opinion of the Secretary of the Interior there are not sufficient funds available to administer and maintain the property, and if authorized by Act of Congress, title to the property shall vest in the Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation of the District of Columbia.

P.L. 92-527 charged the National Park Service with the operation and administration of Mar-A-Lago as a national historic site. Operation and maintenance of the property would be funded by income from 100,000 shares of General Food stock and the rental or sale of adjacent property owned by the Post estate.

The annual income from the estate has turned out to be about \$130,000, whereas the annual operating costs are estimated at \$350,000. Currently, the estate is being maintained at the minimum necessary and is not open to the public. Park Service is anticipating spending no more than \$50,000 per year in addition to the \$130,000 to operate the estate in 1975 or in 1976. The Park Service is meeting the maintenance costs with appropriated funds, which was not intended in either the conveyance of the property or enactment of P.L. 92-527.

Various alternatives have been explored as to the future of Mar-A-Lago.

- (1) Contract with National Trust for Historic Preservation to operate estate. NTHP estimated annual costs in the \$350,000-\$450,000 range. This is too expensive an operation for them and they are not that interested.
- (2) Contract with West Palm Beach Historical Society for operation of the estate. Again, the cost is prohibitive.

- (3) Use estate as a guest house for visiting foreign dignitaries. This option was under active consideration during the Nixon Administration, when the President was spending a great deal of time at Key Biscayne. State and Secret Service looked into the possibility but interest quickly died when State vetoed the idea because of the proximity of Miami airport and the flight path over the house.
- (4) Divest the United States of ownership and turn over to the Post Foundation.

The Park Service is pursuing the possibility of divestiture of the property and would like to have legislation submitted to the 94th Congress which would accomplish the property transfer. However, no formal proposal has yet been received from the Department of the Interior.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 3, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: PAUL O'NEILL

FROM: JERRY H. JONES

Attached is a news clipping regarding Marjorie Merriweather Post's estate in Florida which she left to the Federal Government. Apparently, the money is not available to maintain the property and it may have to be given back to the Post estate. Would you please have a report put together on this and send your response to the Office of the Staff Secretary.

Thank you.

2/14 - Linda Putter  
Jon Cravill rm. 8202 NEOB

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 3, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: JERRY JONES

FROM: DICK CHENEY

Jerry, what's the status on the Marjorie Merriweather Post estate in Florida? I understand that she left it to the Federal Government, but we don't have any money to provide for maintenance.

Can you get me a report?

Attached is a news clip on the subject.

Attachment

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

WASHINGTON, D.C.

From the President:

To:

Don Rumsfeld

Date:

Time

a.m.

p.m.

What is story?

# A Gift Going Back?

HILLWOOD, From B1

nian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley. The bequest includes Mrs. Post's priceless collection of 15,000 18th and 19th-century Imperial Russian art objects.

The Post will not be expected to be settled until the end of next year. It is understood that the executors are hesitant to settle the estate by selling off stock in the present low market. So the trust funds—said to be \$1 million for Mar-a-Lago and \$10 million for Hillwood—have yet to be established.

Ames Wheeler, Smithsonian treasurer, said the Smithsonian wanted Hillwood and thought it would be a fine addition but "we can't take on the commitment without the funds to do so."

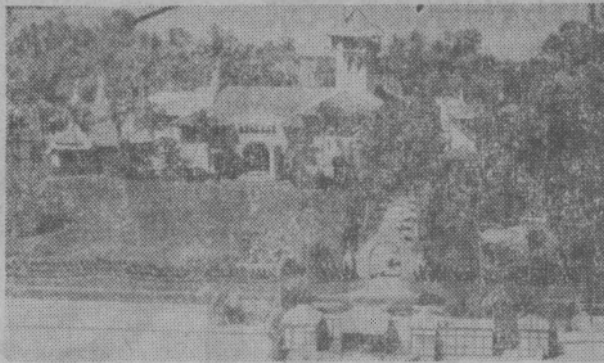
Wheeler said yesterday "We have been receiving money to maintain Hillwood on an interim basis until the trust fund is set up. But the amount is not enough at this time to open it as a museum." The Smithsonian had originally hoped to open Hillwood to the public last spring following Mrs. Post's death in September, 1973.

Carlson said he understood that the Park Service had already had to pay \$50,000 over and above the maintenance funds from the Post estate to keep up Mar-a-Lago.

"The legislation under which the property was accepted," Carlson said, "provided that no public monies were to be expended on the estate."

The return of the property would have to be approved by the White House, the Federal Office of Management and Budget as well as the Congress which authorized its acceptance.

A Park Service spokesman said he understood there is a disagreement between the Post foundation which would like to have the property back and the executors of the estate which prefers the property



Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla.



The Hillwood estate, which remains closed.

to be used by the government.

Henry Dudley, the administrator of Mrs. Post's estate, says "Mar-a-Lago is being beautifully maintained, just the way it was in Mrs. Post's lifetime. No one at the Park Service has said anything to me about wanting to give it back. I don't see how they could return it as long as we comply with our obligation for its maintenance."

Wheeler said Mrs. Post's will was immensely complicated. He said it remains to be seen if the trust for Hillwood can be refunded and if the income from the fund will be enough to run Hillwood according to the provisions of the will.

A third property, Camp Topridge, a 315 acre island, in the Adirondack Mountains of New York was left to the state of New York, but without a trust fund.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Tuesday, Dec. 10, 1974

## A Returned Gift?

By Sarah Booth Conroy

The National Park Service is "definitely considering" returning the palatial Palm Beach, Fla., estate, Mar-a-Lago, given to the United States by the late Marjorie Merriweather Post.

The estate was to have been used as a Florida White House and a guest house for foreign dignitaries. White House spokesman John Carlson said yesterday he understood the Park Service found the 17-acre estate too expensive to maintain and security officers thought it was too difficult to protect.

Charles Osolin of Cox Newspapers Washington bu-

reau reported yesterday that "So far, President Ford has expressed no interest in using the lavish estate — of any other warm weather retreat — and administration sources say the Park Service's decision to relinquish the property has received tentative White House approval."

Meanwhile, the public opening of Hillwood, Mrs. Post's Washington estate, willed to the Smithsonian Institution, has been "postponed indefinitely," according to Richard Howland, assistant to Smithso-

See HILLWOOD, B3, Col. 1