

Bohemian Grove Where Big Shots Go to Camp

By LARRY KRAMER

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MONTE RIO, Calif.—When Gerald R. Ford, Henry A. Kissinger and A. W. Clausen joined 2,000 of the richest and most powerful men in the country at the annual ritual known as the "Summer Encampment" at Bohemian Grove near this sleepy hamlet of 997 last month, did they make decisions that will shape America's destiny, or was it merely "the greatest men's party on earth?"

No one's saying for the record—the camp, 65 miles north of San Francisco operates very much in the tradition of Mark Twain's blood brothers on the Mississippi or a college secret society. But two insistently anonymous sources have disclosed that:

William Buckley played Bach on an outdoor piano while a New York cocktail pianist, George Feyer, played a Mendelssohn concerto instead of "Puttin' on the Ritz."

The best of the traditional post-prandial "lakeside talks" was given by former California Gov. Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, who spoke on the history of the state water problems and the creation of such programs as the Central Valley Project.

Former President Ford "told us what he would do to save the country." How? "To be quite frank," replied the Bohemian Club member who had disclosed that Mr. Ford had spoken, "he put me to sleep."

John McCosker of San Francisco's Steinhart Aquarium gave a popular talk about certain species of fish found off the Galapagos Islands that can change their sex in order to survive.

Mr. Kissinger surprised everyone—he did not speak, although he did spend time chatting with the members and their 200 guests (the number is strictly limited) about all manner of topics.

"I never liked Kissinger when he was in office," said one guest. "But he was perfectly charming, and we talked about music and the Kennedy Center for a long time."

If it all sounds eclectic, it is. For three weekends every summer—this was the 99th—the club's nearly 2,000 members and their guests, most of them business and political leaders, join educators, scientists, artists and entertainers at this retreat in a redwood grove on the winding Russian River.

They come by limousine through the woods or by corporate jet to the tiny Sonoma Airport, where they are met by waiting cars. The club motto, "Weaving spiders, come not here!" is a warning to leave talk of business and world affairs at home and turn one's mind to matters of art and leisure.

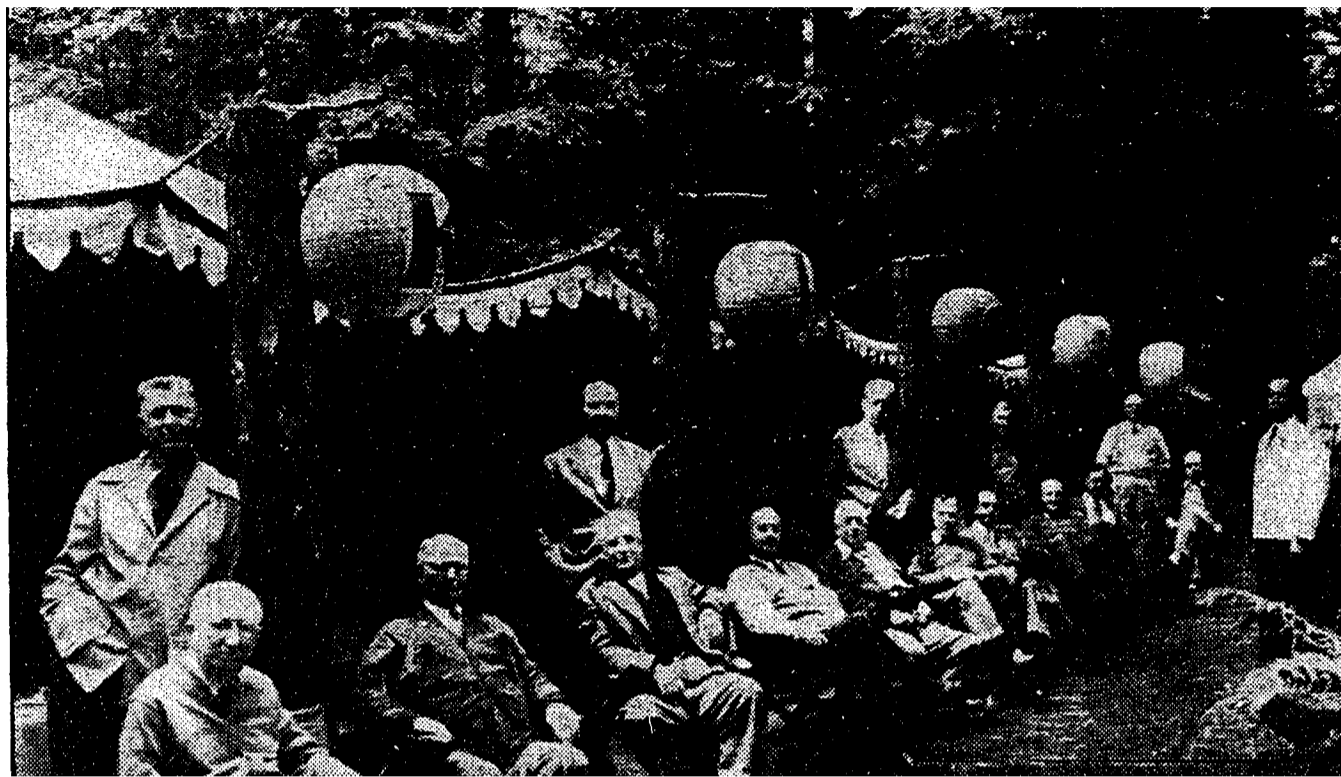
This summer, for example, attendees saw several plays. In one, "The Eldorado," if viewers looked closely, they could see that two of the bit actors appearing as dock workers were Casper Weinberger, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare who is now chief counsel for the Bechtel Corporation, and Mr. Clausen, president and chief executive officer of the Bank of America.

The play, about greedy gold miners who came to California during the middle 1800's and kicked the Spaniards off their land, was written by Lou Felder, a Bohemian Club member who plays a fraudulent consumer advocate on the new TV show "Fernwood 2-Night."

Those who attended included Art Linkletter, who was master of ceremonies for one of the shows, Bing Crosby and Phil Harris, among the entertainers; A. Robert Abboud; John Diebold, the consultant; Edgar F. Kaiser Sr. of Kaiser Industries; Richard Cooley, former president of Wells Fargo Bank; Allan Sproul, former head of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York; Emmet Solomon, former president of the Crocker-Citizens National Bank, and Louis B. Lundborg, retired chairman of the Bank of America.

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was invited this summer and, according to club officials, had planned to attend, but he canceled.

Participants drank 4,000 bottles of wine, carefully chosen, and almost as much liquor—despite the special Bohemian Club labels, the bourbon was really Jim Beam and the gin really Beefeaters. They played golf, swam and went skeet shooting. And they all sat around the lavish "dinner circle" feasting on lamb, salmon, steaks and assorted delicacies each night.



Photograph courtesy of Lowell Bergman

William Randolph Hearst, fourth from left, seated, was among those attending the 1941 Summer Encampment at Bohemian Grove near Monte Rio, Calif.

Most of the visitors to this year's encampment stayed only one or two of the three weekends, although a few stayed the entire two weeks.

In years past speakers at the lakeside chats have included Dwight D. Eisenhower, before he was President; Robert F. Kennedy, when he was Attorney General; Arnold Palmer, the golfer; Nelson A. Rockefeller; former Chief Justice Earl Warren; David Sarnoff, former chairman of RCA; Herman Wouk, the writer; Dr. Wernher von Braun of the space program; Neil Armstrong, an astronaut; Richard M. Nixon, who is a club member, and Mr. Kissinger. One of the speakers this year was Defense Secretary Harold Brown.

Mr. Nixon was scheduled to give a second talk in 1971, which would have made him the first President to have spoken while in office, but he canceled when the White House Press Corps insisted on following him into the strictly guarded campsite.

In sending his regrets by telegram, Mr. Nixon reportedly told the president of the club to continue to lead the people into the woods, while he, Mr. Nixon, would continue to lead the rest of the people out of the woods. Mr. Nixon also noted that while anyone could aspire to be President of the United States, only a select few could aspire to be president of Bohemian Grove.

The grove is divided into 127 camps, each with its own members. All have a main cabin with kitchen, dining room, shower, bathroom and bar, but the sleeping facilities vary from camp to camp, ranging from tents to elaborate dormitories. The size also varies—only 10 to 15 persons can be accommodated at some, while others range up to 150.

Writers and servants are brought up from San Francisco for the sessions, but many members insist on bringing their own servants and in some cases cooks.

Although golf, skeet shooting and canoeing are available, merely relaxing in the physical splendor of the 2,700 acres of redwood trees and the camaraderie of the fraternity are sufficient entertainment for most of the grove's campers. No radios or television sets are allowed. Only one telephone line goes into the grove, and telegram is the main form of communication in or out. The participants seem to enjoy the isolation and the opportunity to let

their hair down in some way.

As Oscar Wilde once remarked after a visit there, "I've never seen so many well-dressed, (although dress ranges from casual wear and athletic gear to suits and ties) well-fed, business-looking Bohemians in the whole course of my life."

Who are the members, and how do they join the club whose reason for being is the Summer Encampment?

There is at least one officer or director from 40 of the 50 largest industrial corporations in the country, and an officer or director of 20 of the top 25 banks in the country, according to G. William Domhoff, author of "The Bohemian Grove: A Study in the Ruling Class Cohesiveness."

And they are leaders in communications, academic and art worlds. Senator Charles Percy, Republican of Illinois, William Buckley, Bing Crosby, Phil Harris and William Randolph Hearst Jr. belong, as do the presidents of the

Wells Fargo Banks, the First National Bank of Chicago, the Southern Pacific Railway, the Los Angeles Times, Pacific Gas and Electric, Levi Strauss, Stanford University and the University of California, among others.

And they do talk to each other—sometimes ignoring the injunctive to leave business behind. It was at the grove that Gov. Ronald Reagan reportedly met with Mr. Nixon in 1967 and agreed to stay out of the Presidential race unless Mr. Nixon faltered.

The guest list can be revealing as well. Then Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel was negotiating reparations for the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill when he attended the 1970 encampment as the guest of Fred L. Hart-

ley, president of Union Oil, the company responsible for the spill. In the same year Secretary of the Treasury David M. Kennedy visited Rudolph A. Peterson, then president of the Bank of America; and Edwin Pauley, an oilman, had Paul Rand Dixon of the Federal Trade Commission as a guest.

Membership in the Bohemian Club is by invitation only, and no women are allowed, either as members or guests, except for an occasional picnic for club wives. After being nominated by two sponsors, a prospective member must fill out an application form that puts F.B.I. checks to shame. He must include the names of business or professional connections, wife's maiden name, and "musical, oratorical, literary, artistic or histrionic talents."

If nine of the 11 men on the membership committee favor a candidate, he may be admitted, upon payment of a \$2,500 initiation fee and monthly dues of \$41. If he fails, he must wait three years to try again. More than 1,500 people are on the waiting list, and one man waited 10 years before becoming a member.

The talent section is no doubt in

acted in and staged each year by club members. Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Ford 2d, Robert Trent Jones, the golf course architect, and former California Lieutenant Governor Ed Reinecke have all been stage hands, and actors have included Bing Crosby, David Niven, Ray Bolger, Edgar Bergen, Phil Harris and Dan Rowan.

The productions, involving hundreds altogether, are estimated to cost upwards of \$30,000 each. There are less elaborate stagings by the individual camps, which really exist as separate societies with members of each paying for their facilities.

One camp, called Aviary, is composed entirely of members who were, or are, singers. Tunerville has all the members of the camp orchestra, Monkey Block many of the artists, and Sons of Toil the university faculty members.

The most elite of the camps is Mandalay. A visitor once said of it: "You don't just walk in there—you are summoned."

Mr. Ford and Mr. Kissinger this year were guests of Mandalay, whose members include Stephen Bechtel Sr., Stephen Bechtel Jr., Leonard Case Firestone and Edgar F. Kaiser, among the industrialists; former C.I.A. director John McCone, and Lucius D. Clay, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Following closely in Mandalay's footsteps is Cave Man Camp. Its members have included Herbert Hoover, a dedicated Bohemian who was known to fellow campers as "the Chief"; Mr. Nixon; Lowell Thomas; Eddie Rickenbacker, and Eugene Pulliam, an Indianapolis newspaper publisher.

Another camp is aptly called Lost Angels, for it is made up of members from southern California, including Norman Chandler, publisher of The Los Angeles Times, and Andy Devine, an actor.

But if publishers are allowed in, reporters are kept out—an irony considering the club's antecedents. It was born in the newsroom of the old San Francisco Examiner in 1872, when James F. Bowman, an editorial writer for the rival Chronicle, proposed it to some friends at the Examiner, including prominent journalist Ambrose Bierce.

Started for "the promotion of good fellowship among journalists and the elevation of journalism to that place in the popular estimation to which it is entitled," the club initially banned membership to publishers.

Holding meetings in the back room of a San Francisco Barbary Coast bar called "The Jolly Corks," the club later extended membership to artists of all kinds, but the club symbol, to this day, is an owl, typifying the night-working journalists, as well as wisdom.

As time went on, however, the club became too elite for its own founders. By the time of the first encampment, in 1878, many of the San Francisco high social class were members.

Larry Kramer is a reporter for The San Francisco Examiner.

BOHEMIAN GROVE

PRIVATE PROPERTY

Only Members and their Guests admitted.

The New York Times/Larry Kramer