

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Friday, February 28, 1964 WHD

This day found us returning, red eyed and weary, about 8:30 am from Florida, stumbling into the house and getting into bed, with piled up all around me, the Art file that is everything having to do with the society of the preservation of the White House and the Fine Arts Committee, the Painting Committee, Mrs. Kennedy's letter to me, the whole history of it, that I've been concerned with since the last of November. The reason is that I wanted to brief myself before I went to see Mrs. Kennedy at 11 o'clock.

Armed with some, and not enough knowledge, but a pretty sure intent of what I wanted, I set out a few minutes before eleven and arrived at her Georgetown house, which is a mellow, pretty pink brick, to find outside, three or four, I think, policemen in uniform and a few interested neighbors congregated on the sidewalk -- I guess there will always be people around her house, waiting to see the coming and going. She greeted me sweetly on the inside, there were no children around, we went into the big drawing room in which there was a small fire, it was really quite cold, it lacks a long way yet of being complete. Even she, who knows so much, and does so much, can't bring a house to perfection of warmth and finish in a few weeks time. We had a cup of coffee and I told her that I'd had so many conferences with Clark Clifford about how best we could preserve and carry on, and make permanent, the wonderful work that she and her committee had done at the White House. And that what we had decided

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was the essence of his best thinking, after having been run past one or two of my friends, and that we had decided on the society ^{for} the Preservation of the White House, which would have the following regular members: the head of the Smithsonian, who is now Mr. Ripley since Carmichael's gone; the head of the Park Services, Mr. H²artzog; the head of the Fine Arts Commission, Bill Walton; the director of the National Gallery of Art, John Walker; and here, within the White House itself, ^gthe curator, who is at present Mr. Ketchum; and that, ^gmost important man of all, the usher, Mr. J. B. West. Then, and this is where she, ^gmost importantly came in, there would be public members. I'm not sure whether I mentioned the number of public members, but I told her that Clark had said that she had agreed to be one of the public members and that would be the most important thing that could happen to this committee. And I was so happy that she had, but I wanted to hear it from her rather than go ahead and make the announcement and rely on Clark's word. That is the way I would want somebody to do me - I would like them to come to see me, myself, about it. She said yes, she would, and I told her that I intended to follow her suggestion, ^gto ask Mr. DuPont, the chairman of her Fine Arts Committee, ^gand Mr. Fossb^{ugh}, the chairman of her Paintings Committee, and what two finer ones could there possibly be and I do so hope that they will serve. And then I was going to have a Texas woman and then I was going to look around among my friends and find a few others.

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She was very agreeable, very sweet, rather vague, I had the odd feeling that I was doing more of the talking than she was, and somehow that wasn't entirely reassuring. I said, what is very true, that any committee is only as good as the most knowledgeable and determined, vigorous person on it. There must be somebody that is the flame, who furnishes the inspiration - and really, I think, that she would be the natural one to do this - and I want her to, and I hope she will. I also told her, remembering very well what Clark had said to me, that he had quite a "spirited visit and discussion" with her about the complete cutting-off of her own Fine Arts Committee. ~~That~~ I did hope to continue, in addition, an advisory committee, and pick up from it, ^gsome of the people that had been on her Fine Arts Committee and Painting Committee, because I did not want to lose that reservoir of talent and knowledge and good will and contribution -- I didn't want to lose it to the future of the White House, and I didn't want to lose it for my husband's Administration, and even if the job was 90% done, history will keep on moving, other people will come and live in ^{an} part here and, if we can do anything to keep it on even keel and to perpetuate what she has done, that is my great ambition.

I thought it was a successful enough meeting and after a couple of cups of coffee and presenting her with the four coins, the first of the four to be minted in the Philadelphia mint, ^gwith the head of President Kennedy on them - one for herself, one for each of the two children, and one which I said I hoped ^gI thought perhaps she might like ^gto send on

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to Mrs. Rose Kennedy, I said goodbye and came away.

The rest of the day was spent in signing mail, making decisions, handling a lot of tedious things, realizing that the arrival dates on some of the letters was so many days, or even weeks ago, that I cringed to think about it. And then a little rest, but it's almost impossible for me to go to sleep in the middle of the day, and I found, suddenly, to my delight, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, that there were John and Nellie out in the outside hall! They had only been there a few minutes but nobody had told me. So I immediately wrapped my robe around me and went out to sit with them until Lyndon could join us. He'd asked them to come over for a cup of coffee.

It was snowing just blindly, and it was beautiful to look at out the window, which I was so glad I had/washed a day or two before, and the snow was just falling softly. It's a wonderland to look at!

John and Nellie said they had to leave in about an hour to catch the plane, so we decided they better call and see whether a plane was going to fly in that weather. It proved that it wasn't going to - Lyndon and I insisted that they spend the night. We said that .. "We will put you in the Queen's Room and we will put Bill Stinson upstairs, and we'll ask the Walter Jenkins to come over and have dinner with us - and there will be just us, and it'll be such fun!"

It looked like there was no possibility for them to get out until the next morning, and so they did spend the night. And I had

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that same sort of delightful feeling that one gets at the Ranch when the ~~R~~^River rises, and you cannot get across, and the only thing to do is to sit there and relax. And if you're spending the time with people that you care very much about, then what could be better, it's like being lost on a desert island.

I got Mr. Ketchum up and he and Nellie and I walked around and he told us a lot about the furniture and the paintings, especially in the Oval Room. And then when he left, Nellie and I cuddled up on the sofa, and she reminisced about the day of November 22nd and her feelings about the four people that rode in the car that day. But those were her memories, and not mine.

John had gone over to meet with Lyndon at the office; the Walter Jenkins had said they'd come; we re-hashed the private lives of a lot of our friends, and it was just like old times!

And she told me about the house that they're building in Floresville. On that trip to Europe, they had picked up a vast number of things to put in it. And then she talked about how ~~she~~^{there} ought to be at least a small miniature, just some little remembrance, of each of the first ladies, who had been in the White House. And I was reminded of that morning when Mrs. Kennedy had said that there were not more than portraits of five first ladies in the White House and how she did

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not see any reason for there being one of the first ladies. And I told her that above all, there certainly should be one of herself.

Walter Jenkins raised the question with John, that he had tried to get him to run against our Republican Senator when the time rolled around, but that John had declined. And John said, "Yes, if I feel like I do now, I certainly don't want to. No need to try to keep on settling people's problems, or trying to, when they don't want you to and when they don't like the solutions." There was a certain weariness, even a certain, ^gslightly acid quality in his opinion of politics at the moment, but it will be a great disappointment to me, ^gif John doesn't stay in there, at least, ^gthrough two terms as Governor and then make a try for Tower's seat in the Senate when the time comes. And I bet he will.

But, the most important thing of all, to me, was to feel that I enjoyed them and they enjoyed us, just as much as any of us ever had. And, of course, when Lynda Bird came in, she's just one short jump from being in love with John, as are so many women - and she just ooh'd and aah'd over him.

While we were sitting there, ^gan odd thing happened. We heard a loud thump, almost a crash, and we began going in the direction of the noise, ^git was in the Yellow Room ^gand a picture to the right of the mantle, ^gthe one of Boston harbor, had fallen to the floor, with no damage to the

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picture, but considerable damage to the frame, pieces of which were lying around, in fist-size chunks, on the floor! Ah, tomorrow morning it will be a job to get cleaned up and some replacement put up before the hordes of the Houston Symphony come invading us.

All in all, the day has been one of those unexpected gifts from the Gods.