

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, May 6, 1964

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Today was certainly one of the biggest days I ^{ever} spent in this house, in this job so far. It was the annual luncheon that the first lady always gives for the Senate ladies Red Cross unit, ^{and} And how eagerly we wanted to make it different.

Bess had started out with the grand idea of having the twelve tables, ¹³⁰ that would seat the ~~1300~~ or-so guests, in the State Dining Room, set with china representing 18 different Presidential administrations in the White House, ranging from the George Washington china, the emblem of the Cincinnati on it, to the Eisenhower china, with the elaborate gold medallion. And in the center, there would also be a centerpiece from a different administration. Of course, not every one of the 36 Presidents has had a special china. When the supply gets low enough that you can't seat a State Dinner of 100 or more people, then its time for the administration currently in, to buy some more. And these were just place settings, the most extraordinary of which, by all odds, was the Rutherford B. Hayes china, with its exotic pattern of wild life, a stag, a wild turkey, extremely rococo and victorian it seems to me.

I had about an hour and a half's work with Mr. Ketchum, Mr. West, Liz, Bess, and Ashton, and then at 12 o'clock, ~~Will Anderson~~ went in to survey the State Dining Room. Tables overlaid with pale yellow organdy, exquisite flowers - Bess had done a wonderful job, the only change I made

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was to put Mrs. Mansfield on my right, and Mrs. K^{ch} on my left.

Otherwise, people would simply draw a number indicating tables one through twelve.

There were two tables set with the Lincoln china with the broad purple border. Even Mrs. Lincoln bought a lot of china, or else people ^{whose} ~~who's~~ hands its fallen into through the years, I have been excessively kind in returning it to the White House, I what they must have loved having themselves.

At one o'clock, I was in the Green Room, to receive the Senate ladies. Nine of the cabinet wives were on hand, Mrs. Rusk, Mrs. Dillon, Mrs. McNamara, Kennedy, Gronousky, Freeman, Hodges, Wirtz, Celebrezze; I had asked them all to help me be hostesses. They were dispersed around in several rooms, and also I had asked the officers of the club, Mrs. Lister Hill, the first Vice President; and Mrs. Frank Church, the third Vice President, to assist as hostesses.

As usual, there were many old-timers, [—] actually, I think, there were about 71 wives of sitting members, and about 31 wives of former members.

There were the wives of the old great - Mrs. Alben Barkley, Mrs. Tom Connally ^{Connally} ~~Conley~~, Mrs. Millard Tydings - and then the wife of one whose name only yesterday was on everybody's lips, Mrs. Estes Kefauver.

And then those that are just an echo from the past, and you have to remember hard - Mrs. Charles McNary of Oregon, Mrs. Gerald Nye of North Dakota, Mrs. Kenneth ^{Wherry} ~~Wemy~~ of Nebraska.

And then those without whom the R^{ed} Cross unit itself, could not get

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along - Mrs. Charles Tobey, its pillar and citadel; Mrs. Edward Burk², who had been in charge of sewing ever since time began; Mrs. William Bu~~g~~low.

Others that mean the most to us, personally and sentimentally, like Sarah Clements (Mrs. Earle Clements of Kentucky), whose husband was Lyndon's best captain; and Esther Fre^aer (Mrs. J. Allen Fre^aer of Delaware).

One of the happiest sights was to see Mrs. Danny Inou^e of Hawaii who's going to have a baby after having been married more than ten years, and everybody is simply delighted for her.

And then there was Mrs. Frances Parkinson Keyes, very formidable, in a wheel chair, back beyond the memory of man, her husband had been a Senator from - was it New York, or New Hampshire - but now we know her as the writer of many books, particularly about New Orleans and Louisiana.

Baroness Silvercruys, the lovely Rosemary with whom I occasionally get to play a game of bridge - and my good old Spanish lesson pals, Abigail McCarthy, Grace Dodd and Bethene Church.

Saddest perhaps of all, was Lou Eng^el, Mrs. Clare Eng^el of California, brave, strong, but what an ordeal she's gone through.

We had a delicious lunch, beginning with prosciutto and melon, but the main conversation piece was the china. And then we had the singing violins

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for just a moment, and then I said just a few words about the ^{first} ~~first~~ lady who had inhabited this house, and her impressions of it.

On November 20th, 1800, Abigail Adams, who had just arrived in Washington to become the first hostess at the White House, wrote her sister, "My dear sister: I arrived in this city on Sunday the 16th, having lost my way in the woods on Saturday and going from Baltimore, and took the road to Frederick and got nine miles out of our road. You find nothing but a forest and woods on the way, for 17 and 18 miles and not a village. As I expected to find it a new country, with houses scattered over a space of 10 miles, and trees and stumps in plenty --with a castle of a house, so I found it. The President's house is in a beautiful situation, in front of which is the Potomac, with a view of Alexandria. The country around is romantic but a wild, a wilderness at present. And so, after putting them back in time and place, ^{//} to 1800, I asked them if they would join us in the East Room, where we would see Miss Helen Hayes and her group in about a 30 minutes performance, ^{//} from A. E. Hotchner's new play, "The White House."

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This was the biggest triumph, the most fun I've had in any entertainment so far in the White House. There was a red velvet draped stage with a backdrop of the White House itself, against which George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison emerged to express their feelings on

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life in the White House. And Helen Hayes quickly changes from the decorous Martha Washington, to the mind-of-her-own, Abigail Adams, who advised her husband that he should interest himself in legislation, which would abolish slavery, put a high tax on liquor so that there would be an end to drunkenness, and give equal legal rights to women; and then changing again, the lively, dancing Dolly Madison. The playwright says, "These events are relevant and irrevelant, reverent and irreverent." And the language was entirely "from the White House tenants themselves."

The best moment of all being the advice of Thomas Jefferson to his grandson, one tenet of which is that we waste more time worrying about those things that never happen.

When it was over, Lynda Bird and I quickly made our way to the stage, and thanked Miss Hayes, and met all the cast. Truly, it was the best entertainment I've ever had here, and then Lyndon came in, spoke briefly, calling the Senate wives, "the jewels" of all the Senators to whom he still feels close, and said that he never has seen me happier, than when I am in their vicinity.

So ended the best of all the Senate luncheons here at the White House, that I have attended, which is almost 15, because I've been coming since 1949.

But the last guest had hardly departed, before the next most extraordinary event took place. I had heard, but had paid very little attention, to the fact, that Lyndon was having a press conference that afternoon. It turned out that he was having it on the south grounds at 4:30, with not only all the press

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invited, but all of their wives and children, diaper stage to college stage included!

The striped tents were still in place, ready to dispense punch, the service band playing merrily in front of the shell, and the whole south grounds teeming when I surveyed below from my window, and hurriedly went down to join Lyndon. He was already up on the shell, answering questions about the gross ^National product, about us in Viet-Nam and ~~now~~ ^{not} answering questions. ^I About Republican nominees. One little boy was crawling through the legs of a man standing in front of him. Another small child wandered off from his mama and was losing his diapers, somewhere down toward the fountain, and hundreds of alert, eager, interested, intelligent, fine looking young folks of an age to understand, were fixing a piercing eye on the man that their daddy dealt with, at news conferences.

I sat down by Doris ^J Gleason, until Lyndon reached the end of his statement and then joined him on the platform. When it was over, he said he would like to have his picture made with all of the youngsters. The Secret Service said they couldn't possibly all get onto the shell at once, without it collapsing, so we asked half of them to come up there. The cameras went clickity-clickity-click, then off they marched and the next battalion walked up the steps.

Camp meeting and Ringling Brothers Barnum-and-Bailey put together didn't have anything on this afternoon, and the letters it brought forth from the children and the newspaper stories, were hilarious indeed! The best

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by all odds, being Mary McGrory, writing as though she were a 12 year old boy, and making more fun of the reporters themselves, ~~and~~ ^{and} than of the President.

Maybe it was all summed up by one little reporter, aged 14, who said, "I will always remember this day. Now I feel that I've really known the President of the United States."

When the tumult and the shouting died, ^I at the press conference, ~~and~~ I went in to meet George Hertzog of the National Parks Services and Mr. West, and we had a final going over of the agenda for the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, which meets Thursday, May 7th, because Mr. Hertzog, as director of the Parks Services, is the Chairman of the Committee.

And then, ^I Alice Brown arrived, I got her settled in the Queen's Room, and we joined each other for a drink, and then a quiet, leisurely tour over the first floor, ^{and} the ground floor with Alice.

Meanwhile, Alice had opened up two pictures that she had brought, ^{one}, to my overwhelming amazement, a Winslow-Homer water color of "The Surf", at Prout's Neck, ^{"I"} and the other, ^I a portrait of George Washington, done by Sully, ^{after} ~~the~~ ^{same} Athenian portrait, which is one of the Pele's, I believe.

I had thought that maybe, perhaps, in the course of my time here before the last month expired, that I might acquire a Winslow Homer. [!] I never dreamed that one would come this quick and in this way. It's beautiful and I love it, and I'm almost sure that it will be the first important thing to come

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to the White House, through me.

Finally, we had dinner, just Alice and Lyndon and I, and then I went to bed thinking that this was enough of a day to have lasted a month! And just hoping that my guests at noon, did notice the Andrew Jackson urn from the Hermitage, and the Madison tureen, and the John Adams tureen, and perhaps they noticed on the Franklin Roosevelt china, there are three feathers and roses that are from the Roosevelt family coat of arms, Besides all of the usual Presidential insignia, such as seal... And Thomas Jefferson's chinese export porcelain tureen, has a heart-shaped escutchen bearing the letter "J".

Such a wealth of history and meaning, just in the table settings today!