

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

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Thursday, May 7, 1964

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This is a day that I had regarded as an enormous sort of hurdle - something to tense my mental muscles for, and try to jump over successfully. And I think it was a success.

Early, I went to the beauty parlor, about 8 o'clock, but not earlier than Lyndon and Lynda began their day, because they left by chopper for Andrews, for a five state poverty tour, ^{that to} ~~it~~ was ~~the~~ last two days.

At 10:30, there was a meeting of the Preservation of the White House Committee, in the Yellow Oval Room. Of the public members that I had appointed, Alice Brown was there; and Bruce Catton, the historian; and Mr. Du Pont, the senior member as far as prestige; Mr. Fosberg, ⁴ who had been head of the Printing committee for Mrs. Kennedy.

And of the official members, Mr. Hartzog, head of the National Parks Services; Dr. S. D. Ripley, of the Smithsonian; Johnny Walker, of the National Gallery of Art; Bill Walton of the Fine Arts Commission; Mr. West, the chief usher, that most ~~an~~ indispensable man; Mr. Ketchum, the curator at the White House; and, there, just to hold my hand, Clark Clifford. ^a And also to explain to us, ² the financial situation of the White House Historical Association.

I had dreaded, and respected, this meeting very much, and had studied hard to try to learn about it and make it go well.

I began by thanking them all for serving. Told them that I had been out to visit Mrs. Kennedy and tell her how much it would mean to everybody if she could come and join us and guide us, and help us. But she had said

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that she could not return to the White House.

And then, Mr. Hartzog, as chairman, took over, explaining the executive order, a copy of which had been put in everyone's chair, that the meetings would be called by me. And then he asked Mr. duPont to explain something of the past achievements and future hopes for this house that belongs to all of us. And then he called on Mr. Fosberg^u to do the same, in regard to paintings.

There were two important things of the day, I think. One, was to show them the first panel of yellow and cream damask, ~~for~~^{from} which new draperies will be made for the East Room. They had been ordered by Mrs. Kennedy early last fall, a sketch drawn by Boudain^c, for the way they would be made, and I had taken them out to show Mrs. Kennedy when they came from the looms from Lyon, France, a week or so ago.

JAA.
And then the other, and to me the most important news of the day, was a new acquisition, a handsome silver coffee urn, which had belonged to the first President to occupy the White House, John Adams, engraved with the initials "J.J.A." for John and Abigail Adams, which had been offered to us by Mr. and Mrs. Mark ^{Bortman Co} ~~Bretman~~ of Massachusetts. It had been in the Adams family for over 100 years, and then had been sold to a dealer in New York, and from them the ^{Bortmans Co} ~~Bretman's~~ had acquired it. And it's a very significant moment for me, when I can say to the committee, that this is being offered to the White House.

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Mr. duPont read us a letter, which offered a rug for the State Dining Room, describing the one that lies there now, ^gin the most scathing terms. It's no doubt that the new rug is a beauty, according to Mr. duPont, the only trouble is that it's such an exquisite antique, ^gthat it would be worn out in two or three year's time with the traffic this house gets. And besides, it's only about half ^genough big for the dining room anyway.

And then we got on to the important questions of having some good copies made, ^gof the present rugs in the Green Room, Blue Room and Red Room, which are exquisite antiques, Savonnerie, I believe - perhaps one Aubusson. They are, naturally, rolled back when the tourists come through, but they are on the floor for all parties. And it would really make more sense to have some very good copies, ^gthat would be down nearly all the time, and then bring out of the basement, ^gthe rare antiques for State dinners and for a few very select groups.

So it was determined by the committee, ^gthat Mr. West should get estimates and evaluations of some good copies.

After about an hour and a half, including ^gvery importantly, ^ga discussion of the financial situation of the White House Historical Association, ^gby Clark, ^gEverybody had had his say about the business of the Committee, ^gAnd so the meeting came to an end, leaving me with a feeling of relative satisfaction, that Mr. duPont and Mr. Fosberg ^gwould feel fairly safe about their achievements of the last three years, and fairly hopeful and respectful of what might

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happen in the immediate future.

I showed Mr. Foster^{u h g}, the Winslow Homer and I think he was amazed as I am that it should have so precipitously dropped into our laps, so to speak. And though^h, I believe, he's a little disappointed that he's not going to get the one that he himself had found and chosen, ^hHe, is, I believe, quite respectful of the quality of this one - never mind that a bird in hand is worth two in the bush.

I had a quiet lunch with Alice, Liz and Ashton, and then spent a genuine hour or so ~~with~~ of study on a little speech for the tea this afternoon.

Why, when I'm not the least bit afraid of meeting the tycoons of business, or the titans of labor, or any other sort of people at home or abroad, should I look upon today's meetings with such trepidation?

Well, at any rate, at 4:00, I ~~aired~~^{aired} forth, in my simplest and best white dress, ^hto the Green Room, ^hto receive them, the people of the art world.

And I am gratefully gratified that so many of them ~~came~~, some 55, and from as far away as California, Michigan, Chicago, and St. Louis. And, of course, so many of them, their natural habitat is New York and Philadelphia. From Mrs. Kennedy's Fine Arts Committee, there was Mr. Charles Francis Adams, of the Adams family; Roy Davis; lovely Phyllis Dillon; my friend Jane Engelhard, on whom I lean considerably and who flew her plane down from New Jersey, bringing with her, ^hAnn Ford, formerly the wife of Henry Ford II.

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And handsome, terrifically urbane, ^{to}Mr. John Loeb, who had literally contributed in ~~to~~ the lovely oval room, the Yellow Room. And I think, maybe Mary Lasker came on the plane with her.

I think it was the ultimate compliment, that Mrs. Paul Mellon of the Fine Arts Committee could come, because teas are not her natural habitat, I gather. I think she's more at home, really, working in the garden, or talking seriously in a much smaller group than 55.

And there was Mrs. Henry Parish, who had been, for awhile before Boudin, the decorator; and gentle, gnome-like David Finley, formerly of the Fine Arts Commission. And Mr. Gerald ^{so}Shaw, who still owns, but is graciously lending to us, for, I hope, a very indefinite but long time, two lovely inlaid tables in the Green Room.

And from the paintings committee, there was Susan Ma^{ry} Alsop, I asked her to be sure and slip off upstairs to the third floor, to see how she liked the way the desk that she and Joe gave ^[was placed] And J. Cheever Cowdin, that I didn't have much time to talk to; Mr. Laurence Fleishman, of Detroit, who, I think, would be one of the most enthusiastic and can-do men if we were launched on a program of acquisitions; and Mr. Fosburgh and Mrs. Fosburgh, I'm very happy to say, stayed on for the meeting. Mr. Walter Hadley was there; and exquisite Mrs. Bill Paley, Mrs. Fosburgh's sister; and probably one of the most attractive men of the afternoon, Vincent Price,

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whom I had seen from the other side of the footlights so many times, and who now has the delightful job of collecting paintings for Sears and Roebuck, no less, that can be bought by any customer, ranging from \$25. to \$50,000., and the customer will have the assurance that ~~he~~ even those in the \$25. price range, have what is considered by a professional art merit. He was delightful and I hope I see him again.

And there was Joe Pulitzer of the newspaper family; and a very bright and attractive woman, Mrs. Suzette Morton Zercher.

The library committee, headed by Mr. James T. Babb, were their in goodly number, and I'm glad, because I wanted both a chance to thank them for what has been done, and to sort of recognize the fact that their mission is still in mid-stream, not yet accomplished.

The Advisory committee was there in great number, from Mr. James Biddle, curator of the American Wing of the Metropolitan; Mr. Julian Boyd, [the] with papers of Thomas Jefferson at Princeton; and Lyman Butterfield, of the Adams papers in Boston. I enjoyed talking to him about the silver urn that had been presented to the White House.

And then a whole bevy of museum curators and directors, ranging from the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mr. Gerald Gibson; to Mr. John Grimm, of ~~the~~ Colonial Williamsburg, director of collections there.

And there was the somewhat controversial Mrs. John Pierce, who had been curator at the White House when the project was first established, under Mrs. Kennedy.

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And though Mr. DuPont himself, had to leave and could not remain for the tea, the curator of one or two museums, Mr. John Sweeney, one of his chief assistants, was present.

After I had met everyone in the Green Room, they all filed into the Blue Room, where the gilt chairs were placed in a semi-circle, and in each seat, a list of the donations to the White House collection since December 1, 1962. I understand the last tea had been in November '62, so everything listed hereon was something presumably they may not have seen and may like to become acquainted with.

Last to enter, I came into the Blue Room, went to the little rostrum and said my small speech. "Welcome to this house, to which, under the inspiration of Mrs. Kennedy, you have turned such loving hands. I wish sometimes that you could hear the remarks of your most ardent admirers, the one million tourists who see your handiwork. ^a A number which is expected to top two million this year. One recent Saturday, there were 24,400 in this house in one day! You would feel rewarded indeed, to hear the oh's and ah's from the girl from Sioux Falls, who saved baby-sitting money all year to ride the school bus here. Or the approving remarks of the curator of the Louvre. Only the other day, museum directors ^{were here} ~~you hear~~ from all around the world, and they were lavish in their praise."

Then I told them the story of the wife of a National Academy of Science member, who had gone through and returned to me to say, "Now I feel like

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a citizen." And continued with something of my own situation, "Since January I have been taking my own crash course of the history and furnishings of the White House, and perhaps because you already have such a broad base of understanding, you would like to hear some of the small and amusing incidental information I've come upon." So I related a number of the little anecdotes about how Dolly Madison had ordered a washing machine her first month in the White House. And that during the Van Buren Administration, the house was so badly underdrained, that in long, long rains, the floors of the kitchen and cellars were actually under water. And that President Chester Arthur, who didn't like the furnishings, swept ^[off] 24 wagon loads, including much of the furniture for the East and Green Rooms, and auctioned it - carpets, curtains, chandeliers, beds, sofas, chairs, pots and pans all going under the hammer

In fact, the auction was so complete, that a newspaper reported the sale of a rat trap, that caught the rat, that ate the suit, that belonged to Mr. Lincoln.

"But that could never happen again. Through the years, many First Ladies have put their hearts into this house, and with the arrival of Mrs. Kennedy, came the devotion, and taste and the exceptional organizational ability, which brought you together and produced the present and permanent excellence of this house. It will never be lost again. Mrs. Kennedy asked

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me to give you her best wishes today, and I want you to know that the present occupants of the White House, ^{my} husband and I, who live with this beauty for the time being, appreciate and enjoy your great gifts of time and talent to it, as will those who follow after us, because it never really will be completed. I hope I can count on your continued interest and advice and I shall certainly call on you from time to time. //

And then I told them about how the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, ^{at} this morning, ^{had} accepted a distinguished new possession, a silver coffee urn, purchased in the late 18th Century by John Adams, in England, and described in his inventory for the year 1826.

And finished by saying to them, "And now I want to visit with all of you and perhaps you would like to take the list of gifts in your chair, and see for yourselves how much your efforts have meant to all of this house. Perhaps you would like to look for your own special love, the paintings, the Vermeil Room, the Library, or just wander with me from room to room and look at everything. //

I think the thing that interested them most was the Monet that was the gift of the Kennedy family, "Morning ^{on} the Seine," hanging in the Green Room. And next, perhaps the marble bust of Joel Barlow, by Houdon, and several of the members recommended that that should be moved downstairs where more people could see it. ^{Something} ^{that I} something, I think, ^{that I} must be seriously considered in the future.

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I walked from room to room, and from group to group, with as many words of personal thanks and appreciation that I could, to Mr. ^{Shea} ~~Shaw~~ for the tables; to Mr. Fosburgh for months of his life; ^{to} Jane Engelhard, with delight, about how much everybody had enjoyed seeing the china yesterday, actually on the tables, particularly her Harrison administration dinner plates, with a beautiful wheat design around the edge. ^R And how could I possibly say enough to Mrs. Mellon, to express how I feel about the portrait of Thomas Jefferson? Only, I guess, that whenever anybody asks me, I am always quick to say, ^{that} ~~that~~ the two paintings I like best, ^{are} the Thomas Jefferson and the Benjamin Franklin.

Every foot of the way, ^I I felt very much supported by Mary Lasker's smiling face; ^{by} by Alice Brown; ^{and} and in a different, but significant way, by Jane Engelhard.

About six all the guests drifted away and then Alice and I had a post mortem, a farewell drink, and she left, ^{with} with me ready for an early massage and an early bed, and remembering the advice of Thomas Jefferson to his grandson, that "we spend a lot of time worrying about the things that never happen, that never become problems." Of course, today has gone very successfully, I think.

But, yet, perhaps, it would not have gone so successfully if I hadn't worried about it and tried real hard on it.