

Remarks of Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson at a tea for members of the Fine Arts,
Painting and Advisory Committees on the Restoration of the White House,
May 7, 1964

Friends:

Welcome to this house to which, under the inspiration of Mrs. Kennedy, you have turned such loving hands!

I wish sometime that you could hear the remarks of your most ardent admirers -- the one million tourists who see your handiwork each year -- a number which is expected to top two million this year. One recent Saturday, there were 24,400 in one day!

You would feel rewarded indeed to hear the ohs and ahs 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 here from around the world were lavish in their praise.

Something that happened to me the other day points this up. I was receiving the wives of members of the National Academy of Sciences and a woman with a very foreign accent said, "Now, I feel like a citizen."

I asked her if she was just getting her citizenship papers and she replied, "No, I've had them for three years but being here today makes me feel like now I'm a real citizen."

Since January, I have been taking my own crash course in the history and furnishings of the White House and perhaps -- because you already have such a broad base of interest -- you would like to hear some of the small and amusing incidental information I've come upon.

I learned that no President has ever been immune from household worries. It didn't just start with Lyndon and the light bill! Dolly Madison ordered a "washing machine" for her first month in the White House.

It was Senator Thomas Hart Benton who wrote -- during the Van Buren Administration, "The house was so badly under-drained that in all long rains the floors of the kitchens and cellars were actually under water."

As the wooden floors rotted, they were saved with another with another layer of wood. By the time Mrs. Benjamin Harrison got around to replacing it, she found five successive layers of wood piled atop each other.

John Quincy Adams got in the "doghouse," if I may use the expression, when he spent \$84.50 of his own money to buy a billiard table and chess set. Congress attacked him for introducing gaming to the White House and called it "a corrupter of youth of the nation".

President Chester Arthur, a dapper widower, didn't like the furnishings. So he swept up 24 wagonloads and auctioned all the furniture from the East and Green rooms. Carpets, curtains, chandeliers, beds, sofas, chairs, pots and pans went 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 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

will never really be completed, I hope I can count on your continued interest and advice and I shall certainly call on you from time to time.

I have one more thing to tell you which I think will please you as much as it does me.

This morning, the Committee for the Preservation of the White House 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 as a "coffee urn". It bears the marking, J A A, for John and Abigail Adams.

This item has been thoroughly documented with the help of some of you who are here today and will be presented in an appropriate ceremony with descendants of the Adams family present.

I'm particularly delighted because this is the first important item to be given to the White House which belonged to the very first First Family to live here.

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