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**FURNISHING CAMELOT:
THE RESTORATION OF THE WHITE HOUSE INTERIORS 1961-1963, AND
THE ROLE OF H.F. DU PONT**

by
Elaine M. Rice

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of
Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

Fall 1993

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Most of the illustrations in this thesis were copied from either Jay Cantor's Winterthur (1985, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), John Sweeney's Treasure House of Early American Rooms (1963, Viking Press), or William Seale's The White House (1992, The American Institute of Architect's Press).

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This thesis is dedicated to Lorraine Pearce, who doubted her contribution to history.

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ABSTRACT

In 1961, First Lady Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy launched an extensive restoration of the White House interiors to reflect the period of the early nineteenth century. The Fine Arts Committee for the White House, under the chairmanship of H.F. du Pont, was established to locate appropriate furnishings, and supervise their installation.

Ostensibly, this body of museum professionals and collectors of Americana, monitored the project, approving the suitability and authenticity of objects placed in the White House. This image of the Restoration as an academic endeavor was largely promoted in the media, with H.F. du Pont heralded for his expertise and leadership. However, two forces soon began to operate within the Restoration--one led by du Pont and his advisors, including the newly appointed White House Curator; and the other driven by interior decorators brought into the project by Mrs. Kennedy, who were not committed to historical accuracy in their interpretation of the White House interiors.

H.F. du Pont's role in the White House restoration of 1961-1963 ultimately was that of a figurehead. However, his plans for the reinterpretation of the White House interiors reflect his growing attention to academic research in developing historical period rooms.

PROLOGUE

"...a golden age of poetry and power"

On February 14, 1962, CBS broadcast a televised tour of the newly redecorated Kennedy White House. According to network officials, "It was the greatest sight-seeing trip in history."¹ The network's pride in producing such an enormously popular program accounted for part of this enthusiasm--however, it was not unfounded. Over eighty million viewers watched this event. In following weeks, people from all over the country praised the program. The enthusiastic public demanded that it be rebroadcast at a time when parents and children could view it together. School children requested copies of the script in order to prepare school reports; parents and teachers lauded the program for its educational value; old and young alike were imbued with a sense of patriotism; and daily tourist attendance at the White House doubled. Terrence O'Flaherty,

¹ Columbia Broadcasting System, "It was an unprecedented seven days of television...February 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20." n.d. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 498A.

television critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, characterized this national fervor saying, "The American public has reason to be proud this week--proud of a First Lady who has revitalized an old house. Mrs. Kennedy's tour of the White House was a splendidly patriotic hour...I cannot recall when I have ever been so proud of anyone on television--man or woman."²

The appeal of this television tour of the White House was rooted in the public's fascination in the Kennedy Administration. Having come from a nationally recognized family, endowed with privilege and charisma, John F. Kennedy symbolized an American success story--rising from immigrant roots to the most powerful position in the nation. Since his inauguration in January, 1961, he had led what one author of the time called a "cultural renaissance in America."³ Beginning with his inauguration, when noted American poet Robert Frost delivered a dedication poem especially written for the event, President Kennedy surrounded himself with prestigiously educated, artistic, and cultivated personalities. Popular literature and newspapers made repeated references to his illustrious cabinet which featured sixteen Rhodes Scholars, as well as artists, art

² Ibid.

³ Douglas Cater, "The Kennedy Look in the Arts," Horizon Volume IV, Number 1 (September 1961): 5.

collectors, and authors.⁴ Beyond this acclaimed cabinet, a major influential force behind this "cultural renaissance" was the President's wife.

A model of good taste and aristocratic upbringing, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy quickly captured the imagination of the country with her beauty, grace, and intelligence. She was the most written about, talked about, and photographed woman of her day. "Much too sophisticated in her tastes to be typical," as one author put it, the First Lady nevertheless won the hearts of Americans from many walks of life.⁵ Department store mannequins assumed her likeness, ladies' heads across the country were coiffed with her characteristic short crop, and newspaper articles featured details of her wardrobe after every public appearance. Jacqueline Kennedy presented the picture of a dutiful wife and mother who could also maneuver politically and charm a Head of State.

With this youthful and energetic couple at the reins of power, Washington, D.C. took on an air of elegance and excitement hitherto unknown. Suddenly the White House was filled with Shakespearean actors, classical ballerinas, and world-class musicians. Lavish state dinners were held where movie-stars mingled with poets, and dancing followed with

⁴ Ibid., 10-13.

⁵ Ruth Montgomery, "She's zestful at work or play," Philadelphia Inquirer, 7 March 1962.

the President and First Lady leading the floor. "The New Frontier," being charted by the youngest President in this country's history, evoked images of a grand past. As Robert Frost characterized it during his inaugural dedication, the Kennedy administration promised to be, "...a next Augustan age...a golden age of poetry and power, of which this noonday's the beginning hour."⁶

The First Lady defined her role within this new American age by dedicating herself to a project that epitomized the 1950s and 60s traditional view of the woman's role in the home. This project provided a avenue through which to link the current administration with those of the enlightened founding fathers. Upon visiting the White House when she was eleven years old, Jacqueline Bouvier remembered feeling somewhat let-down. As she recalled for Life magazine, in 1961, "From the outside I remember the feeling of the place. But inside, all I remember is shuffling through. There wasn't even a booklet you could buy. Mount Vernon and the National Gallery of Art and the FBI make a far greater impression."⁷ She noted that tourists, once inside the White House see "practically nothing that dates before 1948." She told an interviewer that, "the minute I knew that Jack was going to run for

⁶ Robert Frost, as quoted in Cater, 5.

⁷ Hugh Sidey, "The First Lady brings history and beauty to the White House," Life (1 September 1961) 62.

President, I knew the White House would be one of my main projects if he won."⁸ Almost immediately after taking residence in the Executive Mansion, Jacqueline Kennedy set about enacting her plan to restore its interiors. In so doing she called upon the services of some of this country's most prolific and acclaimed collectors of American and European decorative arts, as well as museum administrators and curators.

At the head of this illustrious group she placed the most prestigious collector of Americana of his day, Henry Francis du Pont. H.F. du Pont amassed the largest collection of early American decorative arts at his home in Winterthur, Delaware, and in 1951 turned it into the foremost museum and research center for the exhibition and study of American material culture. With du Pont at the helm, the Fine Arts Committee for the White House supervised the selection and acquisition of furnishings that showcased the craftsmanship of early America and also reflected the occupancy of various presidential families. The activities of this committee constituted the most publicized restoration of an historic house up to that time--and perhaps to date. The story behind their mission, as one magazine of the period stated, "is a tale that encompasses scholarship, wrangling over prices, discreet pressure, petty

⁸ Jacqueline Kennedy as quoted in Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., ed., Life in Camelot (n.p. Time, Inc., 1988; Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1988) 205.

jealousies, and a cast of influential characters who keep well behind the velvet curtain Jackie has drawn around the inner workings of her program."⁹

This tale, so intriguing to its original audience, can be told to a fuller extent now with the benefit of thirty years of historical perspective. The evidence left in the written record, the personal accounts of participants, and period descriptions, raise many questions regarding the motivation and organization of this project. This paper does not attempt to document the entire White House restoration, rather it focuses on the organization and guiding principles behind it. In particular, this essay concentrates on the role played by H.F. du Pont and the Fine Arts Committee for the White House.

As the chairman of the Fine Arts Committee for the White House, du Pont led the group of individuals called upon to acquire appropriate furnishings and supervise their installation in the White House. While du Pont's origins in collecting were rooted in the Colonial Revival and antiquarianism, in the years prededing 1961 he had begun to style himself as an academically minded collector, reflected in more historically minded and research-based period rooms at Winterthur. This more discerning and restrictive approach came into conflict with the ideas of some of the

⁹ Cheshire, Maxine. "The First Lady and the White House." Newsweek, 17 September 1962, 72.

members of the committee, as well as with those of the First Lady. Into this mixture of connoisseurs and collectors were added professional decorators, brought into the project unofficially. They operated outside the loose jurisdiction of the committee, in a sense undermining efforts toward informed, supervised, interior restoration. The result of the project was a compromise, with both academic and romantic ideas about historical interiors represented in the White House. This conflict between an "academic" and a "romantic" approach to historic period restoration is central to the study of the White House Restoration of 1961-1963.

In The Shingle Style, Vincent Scully presents a useful paradigm for the study of architecture. Scully describes the assimilation of Queen Anne and colonial influences in American architecture by late nineteenth-century architects. During the closing years of the century two divergent approaches to architecture became apparent, one based on antiquarian and academic tendencies; the other based on free and creative ones.¹⁰ The same approaches are present in the White House restoration. On the one hand, H.F. du Pont and the Fine Arts Committee operated under the aegis of academia, basing their design decisions on historical research. On the other hand, Mrs. Kennedy and her privately

¹⁰ Vincent J. Scully, Jr., The Shingle Style (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 35.

solicited decorators designed interiors by selectively choosing historical elements and combining them in "period" settings--creating a pastiche of the past. The two strategies were not mutually exclusive. In accomplishing the common goal of creating an association with the past through the use of historical objects, both groups drew upon each of these traditions. The methods through which they attained that goal, though not completely unrelated, were often in opposition to each other. This created a catalyst for controversy in the media and among the participants themselves.

The tremendous effect that the White House restoration had on historic preservation in America, and in the memory of those Americans who experienced "Camelot" is not belittled by this study, and its overall value is not in question. As President Kennedy himself said in the closing moments of that now legendary hour of television, "Anything which dramatizes the great story of the United States as I think the White House does is worthy of the closest attention and respect by Americans who live here and who visit here and who are part of our citizenry..."¹¹ The restoration of the White House interiors during the Kennedy administration dramatized the power of personalities and the power of objects in defining societies both past and

¹¹ John F. Kennedy, as stated in A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy (CBS Television Network, 1962), Library of Congress Motion Picture Archives.

present--a drama which played out on the stage of the
ultimate historic American house.

Chapter 1
A GRAND HOUSE

Jacqueline Kennedy's televised tour did not provide the first public glimpse into the White House. Public access had been available, on a near regular basis, since Thomas Jefferson, in 1801, ordered the doors of the Executive Mansion open every day for inspection of the state rooms.¹ Nor was this the first time television cameras entered the President's house. Harry Truman hosted a similar tour in 1952 after the renovation of the interior structure of the building. However, the immense popularity of Jacqueline Kennedy, and her charming manner, combined with the pervasive medium of television, personalized the White House and rejuvenated public interest. Furthermore, this program catapulted the White House restoration project into living rooms all across America. Suddenly, newspapers and

¹ William Seale, The President's House: A History, Volume I (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1986) 96. Seale's comprehensive study of the history of the White House is the basis for much of the following discussion of tourism and restoration within that building. This two volume work contains a complete discussion of the history of tourism and public accessibility within the White House, as well as the decorating campaigns through the Truman Administration.

magazines featured stories chronicling the latest acquisitions and plans. Offers for donations of family heirlooms swamped the White House. And controversies over dubious items of "antique" furniture, became hard news for reporters anxious to stir up scandal about the project.

White House interiors began evolving with the earliest inhabitants, and gradual change continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Presidents and First Ladies long before Jacqueline Kennedy took an avid interest in creating a dignified and elegant atmosphere to reflect the power and prestige of the Office. Several redecoration campaigns took place, but none were of the depth and magnitude of Mrs. Kennedy's plan.

The majority of White House furnishing projects proceeded without any pretension of being "restorations" of an "historic" building. In most cases, modern reproductions of furniture used in the early years of White House occupation were installed to give the rooms a fresh appearance. In order to make room for these new items, worn out original pieces of furniture were frequently sold at auction. Numerous auctions of White House furnishings were held in the nineteenth century, including one in January 1860 which featured the sale of French furniture purchased for the Blue Room by James Monroe. Ironically, a few pieces of this group would eventually return to their original setting one hundred years later.

In the years following the Civil War, perhaps due to nationalistic fervor and veneration for the President who saved the Union, the White House took on the aura of an historical building. Visitors to Washington, D.C. placed it high upon their lists of sites to see and tourist guidebooks described its history.² The house gradually became more welcoming as more rooms were opened for public inspection. A redecoration during the administration of Benjamin Harrison in 1891 generated a great amount a public interest and media attention.³

However, the most significant redecoration of the White House prior to 1961 took place in 1924 during the Coolidge administration. In both aesthetics and methodology, this refurnishing anticipated the Kennedy restoration. Like Mrs. Kennedy, First Lady Grace Coolidge envisioned an historical redecoration, featuring "Colonial" American style. The opening, earlier that year, of the American Wing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art stimulated public interest in early American craftsmanship and design. To showcase this, the White House interiors were stripped of earlier

² See, for instance, Mrs. John A. Logan [Mary Simmerson Cunningham Logan]. Thirty Years in Washington (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Co., 1901) 135.

³ Scrapbook of E.S. Yergason, representative of William H. Post & Company, decorators to the White House during the Benjamin Harrison administration. Downs Manuscript Collection. The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. This new acquisition, probably compiled by Mrs. E.S. Yergason c. 1891, contains numerous articles chronicling the interior decoration of the White House and Yergason's participation.

architectural and decorative "improvements" made by previous administrations to make way for the simple designs and quaint motifs embraced by proponents of the Colonial Revival.

For the first time, a committee of advisors was established to solicit for donations and supervise the selection of objects. Mrs. Harriet Barnes Pratt, heiress of a Standard Oil fortune, headed the committee. Largely comprised of influential and wealthy patrons of the arts, the committee was nearly the same group which had supervised the installation of the American Wing. The group included an expert on American art to represent the Commission of Fine Arts in Washington, the body which governed architectural planning in the city. Two distinguished American antiques collectors, Luke Vincent Lockwood and R.T.H. Halsey, also participated.⁴

The Coolidge redecoration was further assisted by the first legal recognition that the White House functioned not only as a residence, but also as a museum. In February, 1925 a joint resolution of Congress permitted the White House to accept gifts of furniture and artwork. Congress

⁴ R.T.H. Halsey (1865-1942) was the chairman of the Committee on American Art at the Metropolitan Museum, and was largely responsible for the opening of the American Wing. Luke Vincent Lockwood (1872-1951), as a trustee of the Brooklyn Museum, established American period rooms there and authored Colonial Furniture in America, published in 1901. For further information on these men and other early collectors of Americana see Elizabeth Stillinger, The Antiquers. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1980.

also increased the annual redecoration appropriation from \$20,000 to \$50,000.⁵

The Coolidge advisory committee was the source of more controversy than assistance. The absence of guidelines and a mission statement, coupled with a severe lack of communication with the White House highlighted a power struggle for control of the redecoration. Ultimately, a public quarrel ensued between the committee members, the American Institute of Architects and the White House staff. Much of this controversy focused on the opposing views of antiquarians and architects--one group wanting to obliterate any reference to pre-World War I imperialism and restore the rooms to Colonial simplicity, and the other wanting to preserve the integrity of the Beaux arts interiors that had been installed at the turn of the century.

This bickering, promoted and exploited in the media, led to a halt in the redecoration of the state rooms, ordered by President Calvin Coolidge in 1925.⁶ Two years later, when the budget allowed, the committee reactivated, this time to redecorate the Green Room. However, disagreement among the members over what furniture was suitable caused considerable delays in implementing furnishing changes. Finally, in 1929, the room was completed. The compromise solution, which featured mainly

⁵ Seale, 864.

⁶ Seale, 869.

Hepplewhite style antiques, came only after intense struggles that weakened the role of the advisory committee.

The Coolidge redecoration, though not completed on the scale originally proposed, paved the way for future redecoration in the White House. In its redecoration of the Green Room, the Coolidge advisory committee established the principle of historical authenticity. Subsequent restorations would utilize this principle to return rooms to period settings. Secondly, the establishment of an advisory committee introduced an element of control over changes within the White House that might jeopardize its historical integrity. The committee's actions were eventually buttressed by congressional legislation preventing stylistic changes within the rooms.

In a letter to the director of parks and grounds for the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks in 1928, Harriet Pratt hints at a conflict among the members of the advisory committee. In proposing that a permanent committee be established by the Smithsonian Institution, she suggests, "that the personnel of the Smithsonian committee would exclude...Mr. Halsey, for obvious reasons."⁷ This reference to R.T. Haines Halsey suggests that the presence of this

⁷ Harriet Barnes Pratt to Lieutenant Colonel Ulysses Simpson Grant III, New York, December 22, 1928, as quoted in Seale, 882. Prior to being placed under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Service in 1933, the White House was administered through the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital. See Seale, 925.

antiquarian and contributor to the development of the American Wing proved a hindrance to the smooth operation of the committee. Seale suggests that Halsey, and fellow proponent of historic decorating, Luke Vincent Lockwood, joined the advisory committee with the intention of expanding the "simple domestic objectives" of the First Lady.⁸ The animosity toward Halsey stemmed from his tendency to make unauthorized announcements to the press regarding proposed changes to the White House interiors, confusing the public as to who was in charge and undermining the authority of the director of parks and grounds as well as that of the White House staff. This rift between amateur decorators and professional connoisseurs indicates a larger, more philosophical difference between the two groups and their ideas for restoration. Similar rifts would occur during the Kennedy restoration, but by then the White House had learned to contain such bickering and to present a united front to the public.

Several of Grace Coolidge's successors furthered the cause of historical authenticity in their furnishing plans. First Lady Lou Hoover sponsored the first serious research into the White House furnishings by attempting to document the history of each object. Previously undisplayed objects were dug out of warehouses and placed within the new "historic" interiors. "Period" rooms attempted to recreate

⁸ Seale, 865.

the interiors of the early Presidents, mixing reproductions with original furnishings when necessary.⁹ First Lady Mamie Eisenhower sponsored the redecoration of the Diplomatic Reception Room as a Federal-style parlor in the late 1950s.¹⁰

J.B. West, chief usher of the White House from 1941-1969 recalled that Mrs. Eisenhower wanted to refurnish the entire house with antiques but due to the recent renovation during the Truman administration, the furnishings appropriation from Congress had been revoked. Eventually, the First Lady settled on redecorating her own quarters, and learned to live in what one critic dubbed the "B. Altman White House," a reference to the predominance of department store reproductions in the house.¹¹

As this brief history illustrates, the rooms which Jacqueline Kennedy "inherited" upon her arrival at the White House in January 1961 were the result of over one hundred and fifty years of decorating, redecorating, renovation and restoration. The dissatisfaction with the interiors that

⁹ Seale, 911. The "Monroe Drawing Room" on the second floor is specifically discussed by Seale.

¹⁰ Seale, 1053.

¹¹ J.B. West, Upstairs at the White House: My Life with the First Ladies, (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1973), 139-142. West's memoir of his twenty-eight years of service in the White House is rather anecdotal in tone, however his intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the White House and its inhabitants is unobtainable in any other published source. His quotations of Mrs. Kennedy regarding her restoration project have been widely used by later authors and are used in this paper as well.

she experienced as a child on tour were reinforced when she began to prepare to live in the house as First Lady. West recalled Mamie Eisenhower's warning to him after she had escorted the First Lady-elect on a tour of her future home, "She's planning to redo every room in this house...you've got a quite a project ahead of you." Indeed, Mrs. Kennedy confirmed her plans with West on the day of John F. Kennedy's inauguration, saying, "We've got a lot of work ahead, Mr. West...I want to make this into a grand house!"¹²

Within days of moving into the White House Jacqueline Kennedy hired New York decorator Sister Parish (Mrs. Henry Parish II) to obliterate all of the "Mamie pink" and Grand Rapids furniture which dominated the upstairs family quarters, and create casually elegant surroundings for the Kennedy's personal collection of fine art and furnishings. President's Eisenhower's mother-in-law's room was converted into a private kitchen for the Kennedys' French chef and the third floor solarium became a kindergarden for Caroline and John, Jr. A private family dining room was also created, as Mrs. Kennedy was determined for her children "to be brought up in more personal surroundings, not in the State rooms." In two weeks time, the entire appropriation of \$50,000 for improvement to the White House had been spent on the family quarters alone. However, Jacqueline Kennedy

¹² West, pp. 194-197.

was undaunted in her zeal for refurnishing the rest of the house in the appropriate manner. To West she stated, "I know we're out of money...but never mind...We're going to find some way to get real antiques into this house."¹³

Jacqueline Kennedy's determination resulted in the formation of the Fine Arts Committee for the White House--and the commencement of the most ambitious redecoration that the house had ever undergone. The exact circumstances surrounding the initiation of the committee are unknown to this author; however, by the Kennedy's second month in the White House, a public announcement introduced the country to Mrs. Kennedy's project to be headed by H.F. du Pont.

There is evidence that Jacqueline Kennedy's initial intention for H.F. du Pont within this redecoration was as more of an auxiliary participant than a primary one. John Sweeney, former curator at the Winterthur Museum, recalls that Mrs. Kennedy inquired through a relative who served on the museum's board of trustees for the museum, about the possibility of Winterthur lending objects from its collection for use in the White House. The idea of Winterthur's lending museum objects for use in the White House was out of the question. Therefore, Charles Montgomery, director of the museum from 1954-1961, came up with the alternative solution of appointing H.F. du Pont

¹³ West, 198-200. Also see Patricia Linden, "I'm glad they elected you President, darling--but that wallpaper in the oval office has got to go," Town and Country (June 1992) 104.

as chairman of a committee of informed people to acquire authentic furnishings for the White House. The logic of this suggestion is simple: By having H.F. du Pont, and the reputation of Winterthur, at the forefront of the furnishings campaign, the project would immediately command respect, increasing the likelihood of important donations. Moreover, the appointment of H.F. du Pont as the supervisor of the redecoration placed the stamp of public approval on the project as a whole.¹⁴

Public veneration for H.F. du Pont stemmed from his long association with American antiques. When du Pont opened his house in Winterthur, Delaware, to the public as a museum in 1951, he had been collecting Americana for over twenty years. In the early 1930s he began incorporating his collection into period rooms, installing architectural woodwork from early American houses as a backdrop for furnishings and decorative arts of the same period.¹⁵ Du

¹⁴ John A.H. Sweeney to author, September 23, 1992. The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

¹⁵ For a complete description H.F. du Pont's history as a collector and the development of Winterthur Museum, several sources are invaluable. Jay E. Cantor's Winterthur (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985) is the largest and most comprehensive description of du Pont, his collections, and the Winterthur estate. Volume I of Winterthur Portfolio (Winterthur, DE: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Inc., 1964) contains several important essays by members of the Winterthur curatorial and education staffs. In particular, John A.H. Sweeney's "The Evolution of Winterthur Rooms" (pp.106-120) describes du Pont's development of the period rooms at Winterthur and his design aesthetic. Other important writings on these subjects by Sweeney are, "Henry Francis du Pont: The Growth of a Collector," Arts in Virginia, 19, No. 3 (Spring 1979), pp.18-31; The Treasure House of American Rooms (New York: Viking

Pont and his contemporaries utilized the period room as a way to display decorative arts in context, focusing on their use as utilitarian objects, as well as decorative items. The popularity of this display technique steadily increased after its first appearance in 1880, in the Memorial Hall Museum in Deerfield, Massachusetts.¹⁶

H.F. du Pont's roots as a collector grew from the Colonial Revival movement in America. A great deal of literature exists concerning the political and social impetuses for this historical phenomenon which began in the late nineteenth century and reached its most fluent expression in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷ Proponents of the

Press, 1963); and Winterthur Illustrated (Winterthur, DE: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1963).

¹⁶ Philip Zea, oral paper, "History and Houses: Refurnishing the Yankee Upland," presented at the 1993 Williamsburg Antiques Forum. This instance of period room display in America predates that of the Essex Institute, created by George Francis Dow in 1907, generally considered to be the earliest examples. Melinda Young Frye, in "The Beginnings of the Period Room in American Museums: Charles P. Wilcomb's Colonial Kitchens, 1896, 1906, 1910," in The Colonial Revival in America, makes a case that Sheldon's rooms were proto-period rooms, and did not encompass the artistic, ethnographic and educational goals of the true period room.

For further reading on period room development in America see Edward Alexander, "Artistic and Historical Period Rooms," Curator 7, no. 4 (1964) 263-281; E. McClung Fleming, "The Period Room as a Curatorial Publication," Museum News (June 1972) 39-43; Dianne H. Pilgrim, "Inherited From the Past: The American Period Room," American Art Journal, Vol. X, No. 1, (May 1978), 4-23.

¹⁷ For a more complete discussion of the Colonial Revival in America see, Alan Axelrod ed., The Colonial Revival in America, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985); Geoffrey L. Rossano, Creating a Dignified Past: Museums and the Colonial Revival Movement (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991); and Elizabeth Stillinger, The Antiquers, previously cited.

Colonial Revival movement celebrated America's early history through the incorporation of colonial design and decorative arts into architecture and interiors. Generally, this interpretation of the past through objects is based not on historical precedent but rather on a romantic idea of how early Americans lived. Common misinterpretative elements within Colonial Revival interiors include an abundance of furniture, a profusion of lighting devices, and the inaccurate display of furniture forms.¹⁸ Winterthur's period rooms reflect this idealized notion, often compromising historical accuracy in favor of aesthetic harmony.

H.F. du Pont's design aesthetic was based on balance and color harmony. Two major techniques for achieving balance are exhibited in du Pont's placement of furniture. One is the "mirroring" of furniture within the room, so that if a line is drawn down the middle, the furniture on each side has an exact counterpart on the other.¹⁹ A Winterthur room which effectively illustrates this technique is the Port Royal Parlor. (See Figure 1.) The other is the placing of seating furniture to flank other large forms, such as a high chest flanked by side chairs, exhibited in Winterthur's

¹⁸ An example of inaccurate display is a desk and bookcase filled with ceramics, rather than books. Another is the placement of a small case piece, intended for the top of a bureau or dressing table, on the floor.

¹⁹ Russell Bernabo, "Henry Francis du Pont's Interior Design Aesthetic and Winterthur's Flock Room" (Unpublished master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1989), 56.

Readbourne Stair Hall.²⁰ (See Figure 2) Du Pont also preferred a "conversational" placement of chairs, facing each other and at right angles to the wall; and the lining up of seating furniture against the wall. The latter technique reflects historical accuracy while also allowing for more furniture to fit in the room. At Winterthur, du Pont achieved color harmony through coordination of upholstery fabric with window hangings, floor coverings, and even wood tones. Du Pont's decorating philosophy is summed in his oft quoted phrase, that "if you go into a room, and right away see something, then you must realize that that shouldn't be in the room."²¹

As time went on, du Pont became increasingly conscious of accuracy in historical interpretation. His commitment to scholarship manifested itself in the establishment of the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture in 1952, and the launching of Winterthur Portfolio, a scholarly publication devoted to publishing research in material culture, in 1964. Winterthur became the foremost research institution for American decorative arts, and H.F. du Pont emerged not only as a collector, but also an educator. Within the Winterthur period rooms, du Pont strove to reflect this commitment to scholarship through more accurate

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Henry Francis du Pont to Harlan B. Phillips, typescript of interview, April 1962, "The Reminiscences of Henry F. du Pont." Winterthur Archives, Winterthur, Delaware, 8.

architectural installations and object display.²²

Thus, when H.F. du Pont was called upon by Jacqueline Kennedy to head her Fine Arts Committee for the White House, he was a seasoned professional in historic period decorating. He entered into the White House project with the same enthusiasm which inspired the rooms at Winterthur. However, the White House was strikingly different from Winterthur. While it was beginning to be recognized as a museum, it also functioned as a home, an office, and an entertainment complex. Objects within the White House, in contrast to the controlled museum environment of Winterthur, were exposed to constant use and abuse. Furthermore, the status of the building as a national shrine, and the belief that it belonged, (in theory at least), to all Americans, ensured that any changes within it were scrutinized closely in the press.

²² For an in-depth study of the installation of one of Winterthur's later rooms, see Bernabo's previously cited thesis. He investigates du Pont's increasing commitment to historical accuracy by analyzing the installation of interior woodwork in the Flock Room. In addition, Bernabo studies the percentage of furniture, and its placement, within the Winterthur rooms as a gauge for measuring change in du Pont's approach to developing period settings. His evidence shows that the rooms consistently misrepresented early American interiors by the inclusion of too many items of furniture. However, Bernabo states that du Pont paid increasing attention to accuracy in object selection and placement.

A room in Winterthur which blatantly illustrates du Pont's "new" sensitivity to architectural accuracy is the Williams Room. Unlike previous architectural installations, the original dimensions of this room, as it existed in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, are preserved. This is graphically illustrated by the space which exists between the wall of the room, and the wall of the museum building.

However, the most significant contrast between Winterthur and the White House, in relation to H.F. du Pont's interior decoration, was the presence of Jacqueline Kennedy. At Winterthur, du Pont was the supreme voice of authority in making design decisions. While in later years, as the museum grew, he had curators and administrators to advise him, he still maintained absolute control. At the White House du Pont could only serve as an advisor, having to share the stage with a host of other participants--all under the supervision of the First Lady. If this fact was not readily apparent to him in the early days of the restoration, it would become so as time wore on.

CHAPTER 2

A QUESTION OF SCHOLARSHIP

On February 23, 1961, the White House announced the launching of the project by Mrs. John F. Kennedy to locate and buy period furniture for use in the restoration of the interiors.¹ The White House announcement further stated that a twelve member committee was appointed to find these furnishings and to raise funds to buy accepted pieces as gifts to the White House. The public was assured that this committee would select only authentic and historically accurate objects by the appointment of Henry Francis du Pont as chairman. Thus, H.F. du Pont began his tenure as the leader of the Fine Arts Commission for the White House--and his reign as the figural head of the White House restoration.

Few other members of the Fine Arts Committee could match du Pont's academic credentials. Indeed several individuals were selected for non-academic reasons.² While some of the members of the committee were museum professionals, most were antiques enthusiasts without any

¹ Bess Furman, "Refurnishing Planned," New York Times, 23 February 1961.

² A complete listing of the committee members, as well as the advisory committee members, is compiled in Appendix I.

formal connoisseurship training. More important to the White House project than formal knowledge of decorative arts, however, were wealth and connections--and these qualities were abundant among the group. The theory behind the appointment of these twelve individuals was that through their network of affluent friends, donors of money and furnishings would be found, alleviating the need to petition Congress for more appropriations. Most of the committee were members of the same elite circle of wealthy arts enthusiasts to which Jacqueline Kennedy belonged. Jane Wrightsman, a personal friend of Mrs. Kennedy's, was a particularly active participant on the committee. She and her husband, oil magnate Charles B. Wrightsman, collected eighteenth-century French furniture, which was also favored by Jacqueline Kennedy. Wrightsman's affinity for the French style, and her familiarity with antiques dealers, permitted her to act effectively in acquiring furnishings for the White House. Other active members of the committee were Gerald Shea, who among other things, helped to assemble the Joseph P. Kennedys' antiques collection of in Hyannisport, and Jane Engelhard, New York socialite and member of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art.

Jacqueline Kennedy was keenly aware of the precautions necessary for smooth enactment of her plans. From the beginning she promoted her project as a "restoration" rather than a "redecorating." As she told Hugh Sidey for Life magazine in September, 1961:

Everything in the White House must have a reason for being there. It would be sacrilege merely to 'redecorate' it--a word I hate. It must be restored, and that has nothing to do with decoration. That is a question of scholarship.³

By promoting an historical, rather than an aesthetic endeavor, Jacqueline Kennedy sought to subdue any public criticism of the project. Already regarded as an arbiter of taste and fashion, she now adopted the role of historian.

In order to legitimize the restoration as an academic undertaking, a committee of advisors was appointed to assist the Fine Arts Committee in acquiring and arranging appropriate furnishings. This group operated as an auxiliary committee to the Fine Arts Committee, also under the auspices of H.F. du Pont.⁴ In a letter to Mrs. Kennedy listing his choices for advisors, H.F. du Pont outlined his priorities. He wanted his qualifications as follows:

First, to find those whose training and present positions equip them to supplement the knowledge and experience of the members of our committee; second, to assure nationwide representation; and third, to include those working in the following areas of research into our country's past--the fine arts, the decorative arts, and cultural history.⁵

Most of the advisors to the committee were museum professionals, or academicians. Beyond national representation, their geographic location was selected in

³ Jacqueline Kennedy, as quoted in Sidey, 57.

⁴ See Appendix I for a complete listing of the members of the Advisory Committee.

⁵ H.F. du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, March 9, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 75.WC.4/Box 1310, Folder "John Sweeney."

order to provide a regional representative to inspect items for acquisition that were inaccessible to the East Coast based commission. Of this group of advisors, John Sweeney, curator at the Winterthur Museum, and assistant to H.F. du Pont, was the most active participant.

In the aforementioned letter, du Pont declared his intentions for this advisory committee, and his philosophy for the restoration, stating:

It is my hope that our committee with these advisors to consult may achieve your desire of making the White House a symbol of cultural as well as political leadership...Believing as we do that an understanding of America's cultural past is a prerequisite to a real understanding our our country today, we shall strive to obtain those tangible evidences of the skill of the early craftsman and the taste of his patron which will make the White House, as a unit, an historic document of cultural life in the United States.⁶

In the first months of his appointment, du Pont asked several historical consultants to draft a statement of philosophy to guide the restoration. In April, 1961, two members of the advisory committee, Lyman Butterfield, Editor of the John Adams Papers, and Julian Boyd, Editor of the Thomas Jefferson Papers, submitted a joint treatise, "The White House As A Symbol," that outlined four controlling principles for the restoration.⁷ The first of these

⁶ Du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, March 9, 1961. Winterthur Archives.

⁷ This document, dated April 24, 1961, was circulated widely among members of the Fine Arts Committee for the White House. For the purposes of this paper, the author is referring to the copy

emphasized the evolving nature of the White House and the importance of not limiting its interpretation to a single period of occupancy by focusing on a solitary decorative style in the interiors. Secondly, in relation to this "living" character of the White House, the authors stressed the necessity of being "eclectic" in making furnishings choices in order to represent a variety of administrations. Thirdly, the authors specifically discussed the Library, and the importance of the books housed therein. "Better than most furnishings," they argued, "books can perform both functional and symbolic roles, and the mingling of books of different periods violates no canons of taste."⁸

Mrs. Kennedy adopted the Boyd and Butterfield paper as a blueprint for the restoration. She agreed wholeheartedly in the evolving character of the White House and was opposed to adoption of a single style period. She told one interviewer:

The public should have no fear, she told one interviewer, that we might restore the building to its earliest period, leaving out all that came after, or fill it with French furniture, or hang modern pictures all over it and paint it whatever color we like. The White House belongs to our past and no one who cares

housed in the Winterthur Archives. In a footnote, Butterfield and Boyd acknowledge that in preparing their paper, they consulted a memorandum submitted to Mr. du Pont by Mr. Richard Howland of the Smithsonian Institution, dated April 10, 1961, largely prepared by Margaret Brown Klapthor and titled "Remarks on a Philosophy of the Proposed Refurnishing of the White House."

⁸ Julian Boyd and Lyman Butterfield, "The White House as a Symbol," 24 April 1961, 3.

about our past would treat it this way.⁹

And so, guided by the academic standards put forth by Boyd and Butterfield, Mrs. Kennedy, H.F. du Pont, and the Fine Arts Committee commenced the restoration process.

The first official meeting of the Committee took place on February 21, 1961, in the Red Room of the White House. Eight members were present--however H.F. du Pont, who customarily spent the winter months at his residence in Boca Grande, Florida, did not attend, but arranged to have Jane Engelhard send him a confidential report on the deliberations.¹⁰

At this initial meeting, the committee decided to seek only articles of eighteenth or nineteenth century origin. Furthermore, only American made furnishings were to be placed in the official rooms--but in the President's private rooms upstairs, English and French furniture would be acceptable.

No specific list of White House rooms to be restored under the supervision of the Fine Arts Committee has been found by this author. The most prominently discussed areas are the State Rooms on the first floor, those being the East

⁹ Jaqueline Kennedy, as quoted in Sidey, 62.

¹⁰ The information presented here regarding the details of this meeting is taken from the confidential report sent to H.F. du Pont from Mrs. Charles Engelhard, one of the presiding members. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 451, Folder "Fine Arts Committee."

Room, Green Room, Blue Room, Red Room, and the State Dining Room. Other rooms furnished on the lower level are the Library, Vermeil Room, China Room, and the Diplomatic Reception Room. Some spaces not open to the public were also decorated by the Fine Arts Committee, including the Rose Guest Room, Lincoln Sitting Room, Lincoln Bedroom, Treaty Room, and the Yellow Oval room, all on the second floor. Donations for the redecoration of the private family quarters were not organized through the Fine Arts Committee, and were largely privately funded.

To expedite the process of acquisition, copies of a list of items most necessary for the White House, compiled by Mrs. Kennedy and Sister Parish, were distributed to committee members. Some of the items were replacements of unsuitable furniture presently in the house; others were various antiques desired to fill out the rooms. The procedure to be followed when a gift was offered was stated as follows:

A picture should be taken of the article and sent, together with at least one recognized expert's opinion of its authenticity, to Mrs. Parish at the New York office, 22 East 69th Street. If a gift is not acceptable, Mr. Finley, of the Fine Arts Commission, will refuse it in the name of our Committee, so as not to offend any friends.¹¹

¹¹ Jane Engelhard to H.F. du Pont, undated [February 1961], 2. David E. Finley was chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, a governmental body which supervised the activities of related organizations in Washington, D.C.

Interestingly, no mention of H.F. du Pont is made in relation to the approval of gifts. Rather, Sister Parish, an interior decorator with no significant background in historical research was placed in charge of the selection of suitable objects. Thus, from the very beginning there was ambiguity regarding who was actually in charge of the restoration--an ambiguity that would plague the project throughout its duration.

Du Pont's absence from the first meeting of the Fine Arts Committee was not an indication of his disinterest in the restoration. Just two weeks after this meeting, Jacqueline Kennedy met with du Pont at his residence in Florida to keep him abreast of developments in the program. In a letter to Commission members dated March 11, 1961, Mrs. Kennedy described this meeting held on March 6.¹² The agenda consisted of clarifying several administrative issues discussed at the Commission meeting, indicating that Mrs. Kennedy was making an effort to consult du Pont from the beginning. However, du Pont's importance as a liaison between the White House and the public is confirmed by Mrs. Kennedy's instruction in this letter that he will be the only person authorized to speak on behalf of the Committee.

¹² Jacqueline Kennedy to H.F. du Pont, March 11, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 451, Folder "Social Secretaries." This letter, signed "Letitia Baldrige for Mrs. Kennedy," is addressed to Mr. du Pont. However, the events described refer to Mr. du Pont in the third person, leading this author to believe that a copy of this letter was sent to all of the committee members.

Warning of the danger in speaking loosely to the press she adds that, "anything said now, before we have produced results, will only encourage criticism. It is best for all of us to work industriously and privately."¹³

Also at their meeting of March 6, Mrs. Kennedy and H.F. du Pont discussed the need for a permanent curator within the White House to research and organize the growing collection. Mrs. Kennedy preferred to have someone trained in the graduate program at Winterthur; therefore H.F. du Pont recommended someone he felt would be suitable for the job. That person was Lorraine Waxman Pearce, a 1958 graduate of the Winterthur Program who specialized in French influence on American decorative arts.¹⁴ The announcement of Mrs. Pearce's appointment as curator of the White House was made in late March. Popular literature emphasized that she was "on loan" from the Smithsonian, where she was employed. However, Lorraine Pearce states that she was not formally employed by the Smithsonian prior to her appointment as curator, and that the affiliation with the Smithsonian was a device for that institution to associate themselves with the restoration. "The Smithsonian paid my salary," Pearce recalls, "as a wedge with which to insert

¹³ Jacqueline Kennedy to du Pont, March 11, 1961. Winterthur Archives.

¹⁴ See Lorraine Waxman Pearce, "French Influence on American Decorative Arts of the Nineteenth Century---the Work of Charles Honore Lannuier," (Unpublished master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1958.)

themselves into the project."¹⁵ Other personnel within the Curator's office were Janet Felton, secretary for the Fine Arts Committee, and William (Bill) Elder, hired as registrar for the growing collection of furnishings.

By establishing Lorraine Pearce as curator, H.F. du Pont ensured that the academic approach to period decorating employed at Winterthur would also be applied to the White House. As a result of her training at Winterthur, Pearce regarded du Pont as a mentor, and naturally her loyalty and veneration for him influenced her performance as curator. "I acted as a liaison between Mr. du Pont and the White House," she remembers. Mr. du Pont frequently called Pearce's office to give instructions regarding new acquisitions and placement of furniture. She informed him of items being considered for acquisition and solicited his opinion on their suitability. Simultaneously, Pearce received instructions from Mrs. Kennedy that were not always in accord with the opinions of du Pont. Ultimately, this arrangement put Pearce in a difficult position between two eminent personalities-- and two philosophies toward "historical" decoration.

¹⁵ Lorraine Waxman Pearce to author, February 5, 1993. William Elder comments on the relationship of the Smithsonian Institution to the restoration in an interview in 1965 saying, "The Smithsonian in the very beginning had some connection---I would say the first six months of the restoration program--but after that they had no connection with it at all." William Voss Elder to Ronald J. Grele, December 15, 1965. Transcript of interview. William Voss Elder, personal papers, Baltimore Museum of Art.

Jacqueline Kennedy, like H.F. du Pont, grew up in opulent surroundings, and was accustomed to fine furniture.¹⁶ However, her interest in interior decoration was more aesthetic than historical. In her past residences, Mrs. Kennedy employed decorators to create fashionable interiors that utilized antiques to evoke a feeling of the past, without being confined by museum standards of historical accuracy. One exchange between the First Lady and H.F. du Pont highlights their different approaches to restoration. The object in question was a mirror of the Federal period, which featured an eagle. Ambivalent over whether or not this item of French manufacture should be displayed in the White House, du Pont inquired if Mrs. Kennedy felt it should be accepted. Mrs. Kennedy replied, "I think the mirror should be accepted if you like it. As long as it has the eagle, it doesn't matter if it's French."¹⁷ This statement illustrates Jacqueline Kennedy's priorities in selecting period furnishings--appearance over provenance. This is not to say that Jacqueline Kennedy was ignorant of history, but only that she exercised less

¹⁶ The information regarding Jacqueline Kennedy was gleaned from the following two sources: Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1961); and C. David Heymann, A Woman Named Jackie (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1989.)

¹⁷ Jacqueline Kennedy to H.F. du Pont, November 11, 1962. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 451, Folder "Mrs. Kennedy."

stringent criteria in furnishing historical settings than did du Pont in his later years. As a devotee of du Pont, Lorraine Pearce was not accustomed to Jacqueline Kennedy's lenient attitude toward historic restoration. The conflict between du Pont's growing appreciation for the academic approach, and Mrs. Kennedy's romanticized approach, created frustration for Pearce as the White House began to evolve from a house into museum.

The transition taking place within the White House was officially sanctioned by the government. Government recognition of the White House as a museum came on September 22, 1961, when Congress passed Public Law 87-286, which states:

Articles of furniture, fixtures, and decorative objects of the White House, when declared by the President to be of historic or artistic interest, together with such similar articles, fixtures, and objects as are acquired by the White House in the future when similarly so declared, shall thereafter be considered to be inalienable and the property of the White House. Any such article, fixture, or object when not in the use or on display in the White House shall be transferred by direction of the President as a loan to the Smithsonian Institution for its care, study, and storage or exhibition, and such articles, fixtures, and objects shall be returned to the White House from the Smithsonian Institution on notice by the President.¹⁸

The passage of this act allowed the Fine Arts Committee and the curator's office to assure potential donors that their gift to the White House would not end up at public auction

¹⁸ U.S. Congress. House. 1961. An act concerning the White House and providing for the care and preservation of its historic and artistic contents. 87th Congress, 1st Session, Serial 2422. August 15, 1961. Public Law 87-286, approved September 22, 1961.

or in the private possession of a future President. Furthermore, this act protected the historical integrity of the White House by guarding against the possibility of a future administration radically altering the interior decoration of the state rooms, stating:

In carrying out this Act primary attention shall be given to the preservation and interpretation of the museum character of the principal corridor on the ground floor and the principal public rooms on the first floor of the White House...¹⁹

With this legislation, the institutionalization of the White House was official--and the work of the Fine Arts Commission in creating period interiors was acknowledged as not only redecoration, but historic preservation.

Supported by this legislation, Mrs. Kennedy and Lorraine Pearce began to streamline the White House collection. Department store reproductions were tucked away and replaced by long forgotten treasures dug out of attics and warehouses. New "old" objects began to fill the house as the Fine Arts Committee put their plans into action.

There were several methods through which the Fine Arts Committee acquired objects. One way was through random offers for donation, or sale. Since the public announcement of a search for period antiques for the White House, letters from people across the country began pouring into the Curator's office offering objects for donation, or for sale. The majority of these letters were from people offering

¹⁹ Ibid.

their family heirlooms--heirlooms which often were only of personal value and were not historically significant or relevant to the White House. But occasionally a gem would descend from the attic of an unsuspecting owner.

A more lucrative method of acquiring furnishings was through solicitation for donations of objects already spotted by Mrs. Kennedy, or a member of the Fine Arts Committee. Prospective donors, usually wealthy acquaintances of committee members, were sent a form letter, explaining the restoration project and requesting gifts of furniture or funds.²⁰ Lists of desirable objects were sent along with the letter, including approximate prices in order to facilitate their purchase.²¹ Theoretically, a donor would offer to pay for a certain object; then that object was purchased by the Fine Arts Committee; the donor then paid the amount of the object to the committee and the object was listed as the donation of that person--perhaps without the donor ever having seen his or her "donation." Although some solely monetary donations were made, the majority of donors preferred to have their name associated with a tangible object for the White House collection.

As members of the committee were scurrying around antiques dealerships looking for appropriate items for the

²⁰ A copy of this form letter, sent as an example by Jacqueline Kennedy to H.F. du Pont is included in Appendix II.

²¹ A copy of one such list, dated July 20, 1962, is included in Appendix III.

White House, H.F. du Pont took an active role in guiding the restoration. His original recommendations of furnishings needed for the White House resulted from a walk-through of April 29, 1961. His printed comments regarding this survey are brief and somewhat cryptic. Under the name of each room follow suggestions for changes and items of furniture needed. The comments are balanced between aesthetic appeal and historical authenticity, as illustrated in his notations for the Red Room, a formal parlor between the State Dining Room and the Blue Room on the first floor:

It is a warm and inviting room. The pictures on the wall have a pleasing effect. The rug is suitable although fragile and in need of repair. The sofas and side chairs are appropriate in style, but the easy chair is too early. The crystal lights look well but are too early in style for the room. The damask is too early in pattern and should be replaced eventually.²²

Du Pont then went on to make specific notations on the proper placement of objects in the room.

With the marble fireplace as a key to the room, the furnishings should be in the American Empire style.

The curtains should be hung within the window moldings.

The eagle consoles might be moved to the Entrance Hall and put in place of the two benches on the south wall, but they should be replaced with

²² Report of Henry F. du Pont, Chairman to the Fine Arts Committee, May 3, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 451, Folder "Fine Arts Committee." The preface to this report states, "the suggested changes have developed from the discussions held on April 27 with Mrs. Kennedy, Miss Felton, Mrs. Wrightsman, Mr. Sweeney, and Mr. Walker, and they are advanced as preliminary recommendations to be used as a guide in formulating the furnishings program."

better examples eventually.

The two side chairs flanking the chest of drawers should be placed in the window recesses.

The chest of drawers, if it is a reproduction of a Monroe piece, might be put in the Monroe Room.

The gilt frames of the portraits are in need of cleaning and restoration.²³

These comments reveal du Pont's strategy in determining the decorative style for this room, and also illustrate his techniques in arranging furniture. The Empire style of the fireplace mantel, because it is a permanent fixture of the room's architecture, is adopted for the entire room. By placing the side chairs in the window recesses, on either side of the chest of drawers, balance is achieved.

Du Pont applied the same process to the Green Room, another drawing room, between the Blue Room and the East Room. His comments and suggested changes for this room are as follows:

The damask covering the wall is a pleasing color and is suitable in pattern. The armchairs in the window recesses are satisfactory in style but should be re-covered and upholstered properly if used here permanently. The drop-leaf table from the Red Room has been placed between the two armchairs and could be used here temporarily.

The room should be furnished with American Sheraton pieces.

The curtains should be hung within the window molding.

²³ Ibid.

The armchairs are modern in style and should be replaced.

The card tables flanking the doorway are, to the best of our knowledge, the only antique pieces in the room. They are in need of oiling, and a few pieces of veneer are missing.²⁴

In this case, the predominant decorative style suggested by du Pont, American Sheraton, is in accord with the Federal decoraton of the room which had existed since the Truman renovation.²⁵

From early observations such as these, H.F. du Pont began to plan a program of furnishings for the restoration. In addition to his desire for overall aesthetic harmony of the interiors through the arrangement of furnishings, (illustrated in the comments for the Red and Green Rooms), du Pont planned to incorporate historical research into the program. In a letter to Lorraine Pearce on May 5, 1961, John Sweeney asks to be informed of any research reports previously compiled on the White House for Mr. du Pont, "...as he is eager to begin outlining the program for furnishing the White House and wants it to be based firmly on the results of research."²⁶

The period rooms at Winterthur provided a model for the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lorraine Waxman Pearce, The White House: An Historic Guide (Washington, D.C.: The White House Historical Association, 1963), 91.

²⁶ John A.H. Sweeney to Lorraine Waxman Pearce, May 5, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 75.WC.4/Box 1310, Folder "Sweeney, John-White House."

restoration program. On May 8, 1961, H.F. du Pont invited Jacqueline Kennedy to his estate-turned-museum in Delaware to see firsthand the style of historical decorating which he was bringing to the White House. (See Figure 3.) After their visit, Jacqueline Kennedy lavished praise and admiration upon du Pont in a letter which indicates her admiration of his design aesthetic. Referring to du Pont's achievement in creating the Winterthur Museum, she expresses disbelief that

it was possible for anyone to ever do such a thing. Mr. du Pont you now have me in such a state of awe and reverence I may never be able to write you a letter again!²⁷

This profusion of flattery surely reinforced du Pont's confidence in his authoritative position within the restoration. However, if Jacqueline Kennedy's "state of awe" really did render her powerless in his presence, this deferential attitude eventually wore off as she assumed more and more control in the decision making.

At Winterthur, du Pont was also swamped with letters from all over the country from people offering items for sale, or donation, to the White House. Each letter was responded to with either a polite decline, a request for further information, or the titilating message that "your letter is being sent on to Mrs. Kennedy for her perusal." There are over two hundred letters to du Pont offering items

²⁷ Jacqueline Kennedy to H.F. du Pont, May 9, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3'Box 451/Folder "Mrs. Kennedy."

for the White House in the Winterthur Archives.²⁸ Like those sent to the White House, many of these letters describe family heirlooms, believed to be historically significant by a hopeful owner. The jittery Spencerian script of many of the letters often betrays the age of its writer. The following letter from Mrs. Jamie Baier of East Detroit, dated February 26, 1961, is typical of many of the inquiries du Pont received:

Dear Mrs.[sic] du Pont,

I read in the paper that you headed the committee to buy authentic furniture of the 1802 period for the White House. I am enclosing some pictures of the furniture I inherited from my great aunt. If you are interested I can find out more about it. About ten years ago my sister showed these pictures to the elder Mr. Stern, the New Orleans antique dealer, and he told her some of these pieces were made in France and some in New Orleans by a man whose work he knew. My great-grandfather was married in 1882 and used the living room set in his home. It has another armchair and an armless straight chair and also a very high backed lounge (?) chair with a footstool. The bedroom furniture is badly in need of refinishing but when done is really much nicer looking than the picture--The bed originally had a teaster (?) which was impractical for my aunt as she lived of a rice plantation in Western Louisiana. There is also a very handsome lavabo, much like the dresser in the picture. All the marble tops also need refinishing--they are very strained--The dining room set is a lovely golden color (we were told it is "Louisiana birch"). The serving table is a lovely piece of furniture--I have part of these pieces here in East Detroit and the rest at my mother's house in Louisiana. If you are not interested could you please

²⁸ Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Boxes 433,434,435,445,449/Folders "White House-A" through "White House Y." These letters, more than any other document relating to the Kennedy restoration, reveal the extent of public involvement in this project. Occasionally, an inquiry is veiled in financial need--but most are enthusiastic about Mrs. Kennedy's plans and hopeful that a personal object may be of value to the White House.

return the pictures to me?...²⁹

After considering Mrs. Baier's lengthy descriptions and photographs, du Pont sent her the following succinct reply on March 10:

Dear Mrs. Baier,

I have your letter of February 26 offering to sell the Committee of the Fine Arts Commission for the White House various pieces of your antique furniture and I am sorry to say we cannot use any of it, but I do appreciate your calling it to my attention. I am returning herewith your photographs...³⁰

In the event that an object was accepted the donor received a certificate of acknowledgement from the National Park Service, and their name recorded with the object in the catalog of the collection.

Obviously, H.F. du Pont could not monitor the daily activities of the Curator's office in the White House. His trips to Washington were not regular, although he sometimes sent John Sweeney or another colleague to survey the progress of the restoration and report back to him. During his personal visits, he was able to grant approval to items that had been sent to the White House for inspection. What may be a typical visit by du Pont to the White House is described by William Elder in a memorandum to Mrs. Kennedy on July 20, 1962, which contains the following:

²⁹ Jamie Baier to H.F. du Pont, February 26, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House-B."

³⁰ H.F. du Pont to Jamie Baier, March 10, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House-B."

Mr. du Pont came and spent the day here Wednesday and made his usual tour of the House. The chandelier for the library was brought down from New York that day, and it looks as if the A.I.D. [American Institute of Interior Designers] were going to put something over on us again. Mr. du Pont agreed with me that it did not seem to be a period chandelier, and suggested that we have an expert look at it...Janet [Felton] and I went to Philadelphia a few weeks ago and bought some needed furniture for the Third Floor bedroom, consisting mainly of four bureaus and some mirrors. Mr. du Pont saw them on his visit and approved all of them.³¹

During these visits, du Pont was prone to move furniture around the way he saw fit. Elder described another visit on November 29, saying:

Mr. du Pont came by for about an hour this morning and did a little furniture moving. He still wants to remove the comfortable sofa from the Queen's Room and replace it with an early nineteenth century one that we have not yet used anywhere. He also tried the small Duncan Phyfe sofa that was recently put in the Queen's Room in the Library in place of one of the armchairs by the fireplace, and wanted to put it there when the other sofa is put in the Queen's Room?³²

Elder recalls that after such visits, Mrs. Kennedy would have him go through the house replacing items of furniture to the positions they occupied before du Pont's arrival.³³ Elder's actions clearly indicate that Jacqueline Kennedy was willing to let H.F. du Pont believe that he was responsible for arranging the White House furnishings, when ultimately she had control of the final decisions.

³¹ William Voss Elder to Mrs. Kennedy, July 20, 1962. William Voss Elder, personal papers, Baltimore Museum of Art.

³² William Voss Elder to Mrs. Kennedy, November 29, 1962. William Voss Elder, personal papers, Baltimore Museum of Art.

³³ William Voss Elder to author, personal communication, March 12, 1993.

Beyond his aesthetic sense, du Pont based his design decisions on historical research into early nineteenth century interior decoration. That du Pont was not motivated strictly by aesthetic impulse, nor that he was averse to disagreeing with Mrs. Kennedy, is evinced in a letter to her, when in reference to the State Dining Room he advises that the room,

though not exactly to your taste, is an honest statement of a particular period in our history. It is the work of a distinguished American Architect, and the furniture designed for the room is in proper scale. I think it should be retained as is...³⁴

Further evidence of du Pont's commitment to historical authenticity is revealed in the same letter in reference to the first floor Library. In reference to himself and John Sweeney, du Pont states:

We [du Pont and Sweeney] spent quite a long while in the Library, and we decided that the woodwork in the Library was Georgian in design and that late Chippendale furniture might be suitable there. Now, to my horror, on looking at Richard Howland's letter of April 10th, at the bottom of page three, the four bottom lines, "Thou Shalt Nots", it seems quite certain that this house never had any furniture of the Chippendale period or earlier, Satinwood furniture, or French marquetry pieces...³⁵

The realization that originally the house did not feature

³⁴ H.F. du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, May 2, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 451, Folder "Mrs. Kennedy." The "distinguished American architect" referred to in this letter is Charles McKim, who's firm McKim, Mead & White designed the State Dining Room and its furnishings for the 1902 renovation under Theodore Roosevelt.

³⁵ Du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, May 2, 1961. Winterthur Archives. Richard Howland, an architectural historian, was associated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Chippendale period design came into conflict with du Pont's own preference for that style. His struggle in remaining faithful to historical authenticity is illustrated in the same letter which continues:

As a matter of fact, John and I thought it looked really quite nice with its natural woodwork, and it could well be furnished in late Chippendale period. Now shall I write Miss Conger [Cornelia] and tell her we need a later mantel for the room, that the old mantel should be taken out, and try to camouflage the Chippendale period by painting, etc? If the old woodwork is taken out, we must have permission from the Commission of Fine Arts to do so. What shall we do?³⁶

The controversy over the Library, and du Pont's suggestions for a solution, reveal the constraints placed upon his personal taste in attempting to authentically decorate the White House. His partiality for furniture of the Chippendale period over that of the later Empire period, (evident in the Winterthur collection), is shown by his inclination to adopt the style of the room's woodwork for its furnishings. However, upon realizing that the installation of Chippendale furniture in the house would be a false interpretation, du Pont reconsidered his suggestion, but seemed to waver between what he felt was aesthetically appropriate and what was historically accurate.

The issue of how to furnish the Library was further complicated by the fact that its woodwork was not original

³⁶ Du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, May 2, 1961. Winterthur Archives. In this letter, du Pont identifies Cornelia Conger as a member of the American Institute of Designers, the organization which sponsored the redecoration of the Library.

to the White House, but was the result of a previous renovation. Installed during the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, when the library was created, the Georgian style woodwork was incorporated by the architect to be reminiscent of early American design--a standard device of the Colonial Revival movement. Du Pont recognizes the significance of this detail, when in regard to this room he comments:

The style of the woodwork which could be considered to be mid-eighteenth century or slightly earlier is too early for the White House; however, its use is based upon sentiment and to alter the woodwork or to paint it would destroy the purpose for its being used in the first place...³⁷

The question of how to deal with this woodwork lingered until du Pont compromised his original position and offered another opinion:

I believe the best solution is to paint the Library which would disguise its period somewhat, and furnish it with the 19th Century furniture. Inasmuch as the Architect erred in designing a Chippendale room, I think it would be unwise for us to follow suit. No one objected to having the Dining Room painted, therefore there is no reason why we should not paint the Library woodwork.³⁸

Du Pont's commitment to historical accuracy thus won out over his own aesthetic preference. Ultimately, the Library

³⁷ Report of Henry F. du Pont, Chairman, to the Fine Arts Committee for the White House, May 3, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 451/Folder "Fine Arts Committee."

³⁸ H.F. du Pont to Cornelia Conger, May 8, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 75.WC.4/Box 1310/Folder "John Sweeney." In this letter to Conger, du Pont quotes this passage "from a letter I have written to Mrs. Kennedy..." Other documents related to the Library woodwork are found in the Winterthur Archives at the above reference.

was painted a pale yellow color, with the moldings accented in cream with some gilding, and a Federal period mantel was added.³⁹ (See Figure 4.)

As in the case of the Library, a majority of the "restorative" decisions within the White House rooms were based on precedent within the house itself. Du Pont consulted early photographs and descriptions of White House interiors in order to justify the selections and arrangements of the Fine Arts Committee. He refers to his design research in a letter to Mrs. Kennedy:

As I write, I am looking at Alfred Brennan's drawing of the west wall of the East Room in the book, Restoration of the White House. [1903] This same book shows a good photograph of the State Dining Room mantel, and The Department of the Interior National Park Service Book 1953, there is a much simpler one, which we could copy if necessary. After reading all these White House books, I feel we can do almost anything we want and stay in the right period.⁴⁰

This pictorial research, along with the consideration of each room's interior woodwork or fixed architectural elements, (illustrated in the earlier descriptions of the Red and Green Rooms) allowed du Pont to determine the

³⁹ White House Historical Association, The White House: An Historic Guide, 1963, 115.

⁴⁰ H.F. du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, May 29, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 75.WC.4/Box 1310, Folder "John Sweeney." The first book to which du Pont refers is in the Winterthur Library. Its full title and citations are as follows: Restoration of the White House: Message of the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Architects. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903. The drawing of the west wall of the East Room appears on page 29. The photograph of the State Dining Room mantel appears in the unnumbered pages of plates at the end of the book.

"right period" for each room. In a letter to Mrs. Kennedy, he expresses his opinion regarding the type of furniture to be used in the State Rooms, saying, "I thought that the Green Room should be Sheraton Hepplewhite and The Red Room Duncan Phyfe."⁴¹ Du Pont goes on to say, "I think we agreed that the Blue Room should stay as is..."⁴²

At Winterthur, du Pont enlisted the help of the curatorial staff in researching interior design for the period of interpretation within the White House. Charles Hummel, then assistant curator to John Sweeney, remembers conducting general research for Mr. du Pont's White House project involving period color schemes, fabrics, etc.⁴³ Like the rooms at Winterthur, du Pont's plans for the White House included the incorporation of color harmony throughout each room, achieved through complimenting furniture upholstery, floor coverings, and wall and window hangings.

Members of the Fine Arts Committee and the White House rarely worked together in obtaining furnishings--in fact the lack of communication between them sometimes interfered in the acquisition process. This is evident in the procurement of one the most celebrated, and controversial, items to come

⁴¹ H.F. du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, May 29, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 75.WC.4, Box 1310, Folder "John Sweeney."

⁴² Du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, May 29, 1961. Winterthur Archives.

⁴³ Charles F. Hummel to author, March 10, 1993. The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

into the White House during the Kennedy administration. In 1961, the White House was offered for purchase a set of nineteenth-century wallpaper which had been salvaged from a dilapidated home in Thurmont, Maryland. The paper was a rare survival printed in France by Zuber & Co., entitled "Scenic America," featuring scenes of American natural wonders. The purchase of this paper at \$12,500.00 was harshly criticized by the media; however, the money for it was provided by a donation from the National Society of Interior Designers, who hung it as the finishing touch in the Diplomatic Reception Room. Members of the Fine Arts Committee were involved in the purchase of another set of Zuber wallpaper, in the same pattern, but embellished with scenes of the Revolutionary War, which was desired for the Family Dining Room.

Fragments of the paper were donated by the firm of Ginsburg and Levy in New York, but more was available for sale from Stanley Pratt in London. H.F. du Pont, who encouraged the use of the panoramic paper as an historically significant addition to the White House interiors, asked John Sweeney, who was on vacation in England, to inspect, and possibly purchase the paper. In a letter upon his arrival, in June 1961, Sweeney recounts his dealings with Jayne Wrightsman, in Paris at the time, who had already inspected the paper and deemed it to be in unsatisfactory condition for acquisition. Wrightsman instructed Sweeney to

notify Pratt that the White House was no longer interested in purchasing. However, upon calling to convey this message, Sweeney was surprised to find out that Pratt had received a cable from the White House saying that the Fine Arts Committee wanted the paper. This left Sweeney in the awkward position of being contradicted by another representative of the Fine Arts Committee, possibly by Mrs. Kennedy herself. He relayed his frustration to du Pont saying, "If I may say so, there are too many people making decisions in this situation."⁴⁴ Ultimately, the paper was donated by Brooke Astor and hung in the Family Dining Room. (See Figure 5.)

Despite the instances of disorganization, by the beginning of 1962, the White House restoration program was in full gear. All sorts of antique furnishings, from chairs and tables to ceramics and lighting fixtures, came into the house, along with many other works of Fine Art.⁴⁵ Through the incorporation of these new acquisitions, gradually the rooms took on the appearance of historic period settings. By February 14, anyone who was not already aware of the restoration most likely became familiar with it as a result

⁴⁴ John A.H. Sweeney to H.F. du Pont, June 23, 1961. Winterthur Archives 75.WC.4/Box 1310/Folder "John Sweeney."

⁴⁵ Paintings, sculpture, prints, and other artworks were acquired through the Fine Arts Commission, along with a sub-committee for White House painting chaired by James W. Fosburgh.

of the television program, "A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy." Jacqueline Kennedy eloquently presented the restoration process as an organized exercise in historic preservation, under the supervision of a qualified group of advisors. But beyond the scope of the television cameras, the White House restoration was more complicated and controversial than this glamorous facade revealed. It was not long, however, before the media began to aim criticism at the restoration--and H.F. du Pont began to share the stage with other, less historically conscious players.

Chapter 3

BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

H.F. du Pont was not unaware that his authority within the White House was sometimes undermined by other participants in the restoration. Upon his visits to inspect progress he often noticed the displacement of furniture which he previously arranged. In a letter to Jacqueline Kennedy on October 7, 1961, he commented on one such rearrangement in the Family Dining Room on the first floor:

I noticed you moved the desk that was between the windows in the Family Dining Room to a similar spot in the Green Room, and I sincerely hope we can see the room together the way I planned it, and that you put back between the windows the little Baltimore Desk with Dr. Franklin's mirror above it. As I see it, the room is a charming, intimate little room, and everything should be kept in low scale and not have the eye drawn up by the secretary desk.¹

The deferential tone of du Pont's request implies that he was conscious of his secondary role to Mrs. Kennedy. As the restoration progressed his correspondence further indicates his awareness that the arrangement of the rooms was out of his hands. Just before the filming of the televised tour,

¹ H.F. du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, October 7, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 1310/Folder "John Sweeney."

on January 4, 1962, presumably in reference to the camera crew, he stated, "I hope and trust that they will leave the furniture more or less the way we placed it, but it is in the hands of God and yourself."²

Other advisors to Mrs. Kennedy intervened in the restoration as well. Stephan Boudin, a French decorator with the Parisian firm Jansen, Incorporated, was a favorite of francophile Jacqueline Kennedy. As the principal decorator for Jansen, he directed the restoration of the Grand Trianon at Versailles, and re-created Josephine's chateau at Malmaison. Initially, Boudin was brought into the White House to help decorate the Kennedy's private family quarters, but gradually he became involved with the restoration of the state rooms. His participation was a source of frustration for Lorraine Pearce who viewed Boudin as a threat to the historical accuracy of the rooms which she and du Pont were working to ensure. "After all our good work on that famous Tuesday," she wrote to du Pont shortly after the latter's visit in late 1961,

Mr. Boudin arrived fresh and vigorous the next day and promptly undid the Entrance Hall. The two French pier tables were moved around to the Cross Hall, Mrs. (Cornelia) Guest's settee slated for the entrance hall, Miss (Catherine) Bohlen's card table was removed entirely, as were the Lannuier tables, so that the hall is terribly barren and worse than ever... The hall is thus entirely empty of anything but the two pier tables which are out of sight of the entering visitor. I suppose we should keep this entre nous and see if we

² H.F. du Pont to Jacqueline Kennedy, January 4, 1962. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 1310/Folder "John Sweeney."

cannot improve things a bit on your next visit.³

Later published photographs of the Entrance Hall show that the furniture was never returned to the locations agreed upon by du Pont and Mrs. Kennedy. Boudin succeeded in undermining du Pont's plan for a fully furnished entryway to the White House.

Perhaps fearing a public uproar over a foreign decorator playing a major role in the White House restoration, the Kennedy administration concealed Boudin's contributions from the press. But they could not conceal his influence from du Pont, who remained critical of Boudin's approach. After meeting Boudin in New York late in 1961 and hearing his recommendation for specific acquisitions, du Pont summed up his dismay in a letter to Lorraine Pearce that concluded, "I shudder to think what Mr. Boudin would do with American furniture."⁴

Despite the efforts of the White House staff, Stephan Boudin was brought to public attention by Maxine Cheshire, in a series of eight articles on the White House restoration which appeared in The Washington Post from September 5-12,

³ Lorraine Waxman Pearce to H.F. du Pont, December 13, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House-Curators 1961."

⁴ H.F. du Pont to Lorraine Waxman Pearce, November 22, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 75.WC.4/Box 1310, Folder "John Sweeney."

1962.⁵ In an article featuring Boudin's contribution to the project, Cheshire contrasts his method of decorating to that of H.F. du Pont's. In describing the two men she states:

The octagenarian du Pont...insists on uncompromising accuracy, right down to getting a music stand and sheet music in the Red Room because it was originally a music room where Dolley Madison's pianoforte and guitar sounded forth for levees. Boudin...is an artist whose first concern is visual impact and the creation of an unforgettable architectural effect.⁶

Cheshire never interviewed H.F. du Pont in preparation for her article, therefore she dealt entirely in the realm of speculation when she concluded that, "...du Pont claims Boudin gets carried away."⁷

Boudin's intervention undermined Lorraine Pearce's authority as curator of the White House. Jacqueline Kennedy's increasing allegiance to Boudin's ideas led to conflict with Pearce, as the latter strived to apply professional museum standards to what had become, in some instances, an interior decorating project. Pearce

⁵ This series of articles, titled, "Circa 1962: Jacqueline Kennedy's White House," was very critical of the restoration program. Cheshire, according to William Elder, "was out to dig up information and she went to any length to get it." (William Voss Elder to Ronald H. Grele, December 15, 1965.) Among other issues discussed in the articles are the purchase of the Diplomatic Reception Room wallpaper, the acquisition of a "fake" Baltimore ladies desk, and the role of the Fine Arts Committee.

⁶ Cheshire, Maxine. "They never introduce M. Boudin." The Washington Post. September 9, 1962.

⁷ Ibid. Cheshire does not cite any communication with H.F. du Pont to verify this last assertion. This author found no public statement made by du Pont regarding his opinion of Boudin or his work.

recalls her frustration in attempting to administer the Curator's office professionally, saying (in reference to the restoration), "there was no structure, it was total confusion from one day to the next."⁸ In a letter to du Pont describing a recent disagreement between him and Mrs. Kennedy over an item of furniture, she expresses her confusion regarding her role as curator within the restoration, stating:

As usual, I find myself between Scylla and Charibedes [sic]! I have never quite known, since the beginning of this project here, where by ultimate authority lay, and I sometimes feel like a very bewildered captain surrounded by mighty generals.⁹

Some members of the Fine Arts Committee were aware of the difficult position in which Pearce found herself. A letter from Marvin Schwartz, a member of the advisory committee, to du Pont in June, 1961, after a visit to the White House, reveals not only his concern for Pearce, but also the ineffectual nature of the advisory committee. Referring to himself and James Biddle (another advisory committee member accompanying Schwartz on this visit) he states:

Lorraine's job, we both felt, is a most difficult one and we wished we could be of greater assistance. I wondered if some kind of system could be worked out whereby some of us as near as New York could help and actually sweat a little on the project. I wouldn't think it beneath me to fly down to Washington once a

⁸ Lorraine Waxman Pearce to the author, February 5, 1993.

⁹ Lorraine Waxman Pearce to H.F. du Pont, July 26, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 79.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House-Curators 1961."

month to catalog or do any other routine matter that would help speed up the project.¹⁰

James Biddle, in response to the same visit, wrote du Pont with concern regarding the latter's authority in approving all items considered for acquisition in the White House saying:

Everything that comes to my attention I forward on to you for your decision. Such, I gather, is not always the case...Lorraine feels and we [Biddle and Schwartz] agree that she must approach her work from the curatorial point of view and not merely serve as a coordinator of a variety of decorating whims.¹¹

Biddle's suspicion that not all objects coming into the White House were approved by du Pont was correct. The public image of the restoration as a professional project, under the control of a committee was a facade to gain public support. Gradually, Mrs. Kennedy, and certain members of the committee, took more liberty in determining which objects were accepted and where they were placed.

This breach of professionalism, and personal conflict, became too much for Lorraine Pearce, who resigned the Curator's office in August, 1962, after completing the text for the new White House guidebook.¹² In writing to du

¹⁰ Marvin D. Schwartz to H.F. du Pont, June 2, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House Fine Arts Committee."

¹¹ James Biddle to H.F. du Pont, June 2, 1961. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House-Fine Arts Committee."

¹² See The White House: An Historic Guide. Washington: The White House Historical Association, 1962. Pearce wrote the text for the first edition of the book in 1962. There have since been fourteen new editions. The White House Historical Association was

Pont immediately after her resignation, she expressed relief saying, (in reference to the White House), "personally I am immensely relieved to be free of the mysteries there. There was no longer anything to be gained by the struggle."¹³

Despite Lorraine Pearce's disillusionment, du Pont and William Elder, as the new Curator, persevered in their mission. Elder helped maintain the impression that a committee still approved all objects. But the committee rarely met. Bill Elder recalled that when an object came up for consideration, he and Janet Felton, Committee secretary, facetiously referred to themselves as "the committee" and they alone would vote to accept or decline the item.¹⁴ The only members to attend infrequent meetings were close friends of Jacqueline Kennedy's. However, H.F. du Pont, regardless of his realization that his power to supervise the development of the interiors was somewhat less than he expected, continued to make occasional visits to the White House, and also advised Elder and other participants on furnishings and arrangements.

It was not long before Elder too felt frustrated at trying to maintain museum standards against the forces of

established in 1961 for the publication of this guide book, and the sponsorship of public programs involving the White House.

¹³ Lorraine Waxman Pearce to H.F. du Pont, August 8, 1962. Winterthur Archives, 69.HF.3/Box 433/Folder "White House-Curators, 1961."

¹⁴ William Voss Elder to author, personal communication. March 12, 1993. Baltimore Museum of Art.

Jacqueline Kennedy and her decorator, Stephen Boudin. Writing to du Pont in January, 1963, he expressed his alarm:

Mr. Boudin was here for two days last week, and I have wanted to write to you ever since his visit. I feel that a lot of damage will be done to the White House unless you or someone else on the Committee speaks to Mrs. Kennedy. The Blue Room has been completed and whether it is authentic or successful cannot be remedied at the present time...¹⁵

The redecoration of the Blue Room, to which Elder refers, was a joint effort between the Fine Arts Committee and Boudin. Du Pont and the committee located and approved the furniture. They included many of President Monroe's furnishings for the room.¹⁶ These included a pier table and three chairs from the shop of French cabinetmaker Pierre Antoine Bellange. However, Boudin chose the wallcoverings and window treatment. Rather than retain the traditional blue wallpaper and valences he selected a white satin wallcovering (Figure 7). Although correct for the time period, there was no proof that such fabric had ever been used in the White House. The drastic change of the color of the walls, coupled with the admission that a foreign

¹⁵ William Voss Elder to H.F. du Pont, January 15, 1963. William Voss Elder, personal papers.

¹⁶ Personal interview with William Voss Elder by Ronald Grele, December 15, 1965, typescript, William Voss Elder, personal papers. Elder explains that in addition to the Monroe furniture, other items ordered by Monroe and replaced in the Blue Room included clocks and candlabras.

decorator was responsible, led to public criticism.¹⁷

Elder worried about other rooms that had fallen under Boudin's influence:

I think we could take some protective measures now for the Green Room. With the new color green some of the materials will have to be changed, but Boudin plans to scrap them all and replace them with ones of his own choosing.¹⁸

Elder's conflicts with Boudin caused him to question the purpose of the advisory committee itself:

I have tried to warn Mrs. Kennedy with little success and sometimes I wonder why I am even working here. However, I do feel the time has come to decide whether the Fine Arts Committee has any say in the White House or whether it should even exist. Mr. Boudin may be all right as a decorator but he has absolutely no knowledge or respect for American furniture or paintings...¹⁹

In response to Elder's disheartening report, du Pont acknowledged the difficulty of the situation. While recognizing that "conditions are infuriating", he urged Elder not to be discouraged.²⁰

These conditions stemmed from Jacqueline Kennedy's increasing allegiance to Stephan Boudin's purely aesthetic

¹⁷ See Maxine Cheshire, "They Never Introduce M. Boudin." The Washington Post, September 9, 1962, p. F1. This article featured the behind-the-scenes contribution of Stephan Boudin and the redecoration of the Blue Room.

¹⁸ Elder to du Pont, January 15, 1963. William Voss Elder, personal papers.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ H.F. du Pont to William Voss Elder, January 17, 1963. William Voss Elder, personal papers. Baltimore, Maryland.

approach to period decorating over du Pont's more restrictive academic one. "When you say Boudin work," she recalled in an interview in 1980, "you saw what no American decorator could do. In France you are trained as an interior architect, really. [His] eye for placement and proportion was absolutely right."²¹ H.F. du Pont was certainly not oblivious to placement and proportion in designing interiors. In fact, these elements constituted the foundation of his design aesthetic. But du Pont, despite his French heritage had built his collection at Winterthur by accumulating American objects, the vast majority of which were made in an English fashion. By contrast, Mrs. Kennedy had long been fond of French design and style. This preference explains her departure from the prescribed policies of the restoration, and a defiance of H.F. du Pont's authority as chairman of the Fine Arts Committee.

Gradually, Mrs. Kennedy's disregard for du Pont's advice led to an estrangement between the two. While there was never an open break, the First Lady repeatedly cancelled appointments or absented herself from meeting of the Fine Arts Committee. David Stockwell, a Wilmington Delaware antiques dealer, and colleague of H.F. du Pont, recalled Mrs. Kennedy's changing behavior. Stockwell frequently

²¹ Jacqueline Kennedy as quoted in Martin Filler, "A Clash of Tastes at the White House," New York Times Magazine 2 November 1980: 89.

accompanied du Pont on his trips to the White House in order to scrutinize prospective furniture acquisitions. Stockwell recalls that,

after a while she began to cancel appointments, sometimes calling just a day or two in advance. I remember, on one occasion, we got down there at nine, and she called down and said she was at the hair dresser's and would be late. We waited three quarters of an hour and she again called and said she'd be late. After another three quarters of an hour she called to say her next appointment had already arrived and so she wouldn't be able to meet with us. I think this really insulted Mr. du Pont.²²

Mrs. Kennedy's growing indifference combined with the knowledge that his professional advice was being sabotaged by an interior decorator, no doubt proved deeply disturbing to du Pont, lauded around the world as the premier authority on early American interiors decoration. Du Pont never spoke of his disappointment in a public forum nor did he grant inside interviews to reporters. He continued to consult with the White House curator and assist in the acquisition of objects. But he had come to realize the great difference between the historicism that had long guided his work at Winterthur and the fashionable trends that had taken hold at the White House. Perhaps he began to see his place in the restoration, as historians are also now beginning to see it, as an honorary leader of the project--having less actual influence within the White House than he,

²² Telephone communication, David Stockwell to author, March 18, 1993.

or the public, originally perceived.

Du Pont continued to act as the chairman of the Fine Arts Committee throughout the brief duration of the Kennedy administration. The State rooms were completed under President Johnson, but the Fine Arts Committee, already loosely organized, ceased to actively participate after 1963.

The formation of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House in 1964 served to carry on the work started by Jacqueline Kennedy. Both she and H.F. du Pont were appointed members, however by that time the quest to acquire period furnishings for the White House had subsided and the activity of this new committee was largely ceremonial. Du Pont continued to maintain a relationship with the White House as an advisor until his health began to fail in the later 1960s.

EPILOGUE

Defining H.F. du Pont's role within the White House restoration between the years 1961-1963 requires looking beyond the newspaper headlines and press releases. On the surface, du Pont fulfilled his role as an honorary leader for the project. By agreeing to serve he helped lay claim to historical authenticity as the goal of the restoration. In reality, the preferences of the First Lady, especially for French design, led to a redecoration of the Executive Mansion that placed fashion above accuracy.

Through the powerful medium of television, as well as in print through newspapers and magazines, Jacqueline Kennedy's efforts to restore the historical integrity of the White House interiors came into the home of nearly every American. More than any previous redecoration, the Kennedy restoration succeeded in creating the image of the White House as a museum, as well as a private home. Tourism dramatically increased from 800,000 annual visitors in 1960 to 1.5 million in 1962, and has remained steady ever since.¹

¹ Tourist figures courtesy of the Office of the Curator of the White House.

In addition to public enthusiasm, the Kennedy restoration spurred government recognition of the importance of the White House interiors. The passage of legislation to preserve the historical character of the rooms ensured that no later administration would be able to significantly alter the stylistic themes placed within the house by Mrs. Kennedy and the Fine Arts Committee. By establishing the furnishings within the White House as a permanent collection, under government protection, this law further guaranteed that never again would the President's furniture be carted off for public sale. Furthermore, it sealed forever the role of Jacqueline Kennedy as the patroness of historical integrity and elegance within the White House.

Lorraine Pearce's frustration in carving out the role of Curator for the White House was not in vain. In 1964 the Office of the Curator of the White House was permanently established. Today it employs over five people and continues to acquire new objects, while maintaining the collection gathered largely by Pearce and the Fine Arts Committee.

The participation of the Fine Arts Committee within the Kennedy restoration is difficult to assess. Quantitatively, the work of the committee is impressive. Their efforts yielded over 500 new acquisitions for the White House including 129 chairs, 82 tables, 50 lighting fixtures, and

seven mantels.² However, their most significant contribution fell in the realm of public perception. Their prestige and accomplishment created the impression that the White House restoration was guided by organization, and expertise. Like H.F. du Pont, their role was to generate support and approval and thereby appease critics.

H.F. du Pont's influence is equally difficult to analyze. Although he recommended acquisition and placement of scores of objects, constant relocation of interior furnishings obscured his specific contributions. Adding to this dilemma is that fact that later administrations altered the appearance of the Kennedy interiors, obliterating much of the French influence of Stephan Boudin. One author has even suggested that a conscious "de-Kennedyization" of the White House occurred during the Nixon administration to downplay the significance of Mrs. Kennedy's efforts.³ Du Pont's contribution is therefore more symbolic than tangible. Despite the constant struggle over aesthetics and design, he remained the principal academic participant in the Kennedy

² These figures were calculated by the author from The White House Collection, Preliminary Catalog of Furniture, Furnishings, Fine Arts and Documents, Acquired 1961-November 1964. Winterthur Archives, HF.3/ Box 433, Folder "White House." Other statistics include: nine beds, seven benches, twelve chests, seventeen desks, nineteen mirrors, seventeen settees and sofas, four sideboards, sixty-seven ceramic objects, twenty-six sets of fireplace tools, ten items of glassware, fifteen items of metalware, twenty textiles, and over 200 items of fine art including paintings, sculpture, and engravings.

³ See James Abbott, "Restoration: Twenty-Five Years of Interpretation" (Unpublished Senior Thesis, Vassar College, 1986).

restoration. This fact is ironic given that du Pont, like Jacqueline Kennedy and other members of the Fine Arts Committee, was not immune to sacrificing historical authenticity for aesthetic appeal. However, his participation in the White House restoration, more than the development of the later rooms at Winterthur, reflects his increasing dedication to academic standards in period decoration.

Although fraught with historical inaccuracies and surrounded by political infighting, the Kennedy White House restoration did promote historical consciousness. Like the period rooms at Winterthur, the White House interiors purported to serve the cause of historical accuracy. Certainly, no interpretation of the past, be it written or in the form of period interior decoration, is devoid of the contemporary influence of the society from which it comes. The political, personal, and historical circumstances which influenced the creation of the Kennedy interiors require further contemplation and interpretation. Through this, another layer of the story presented in this paper will come to light, adding deeper meaning, and raising more questions.

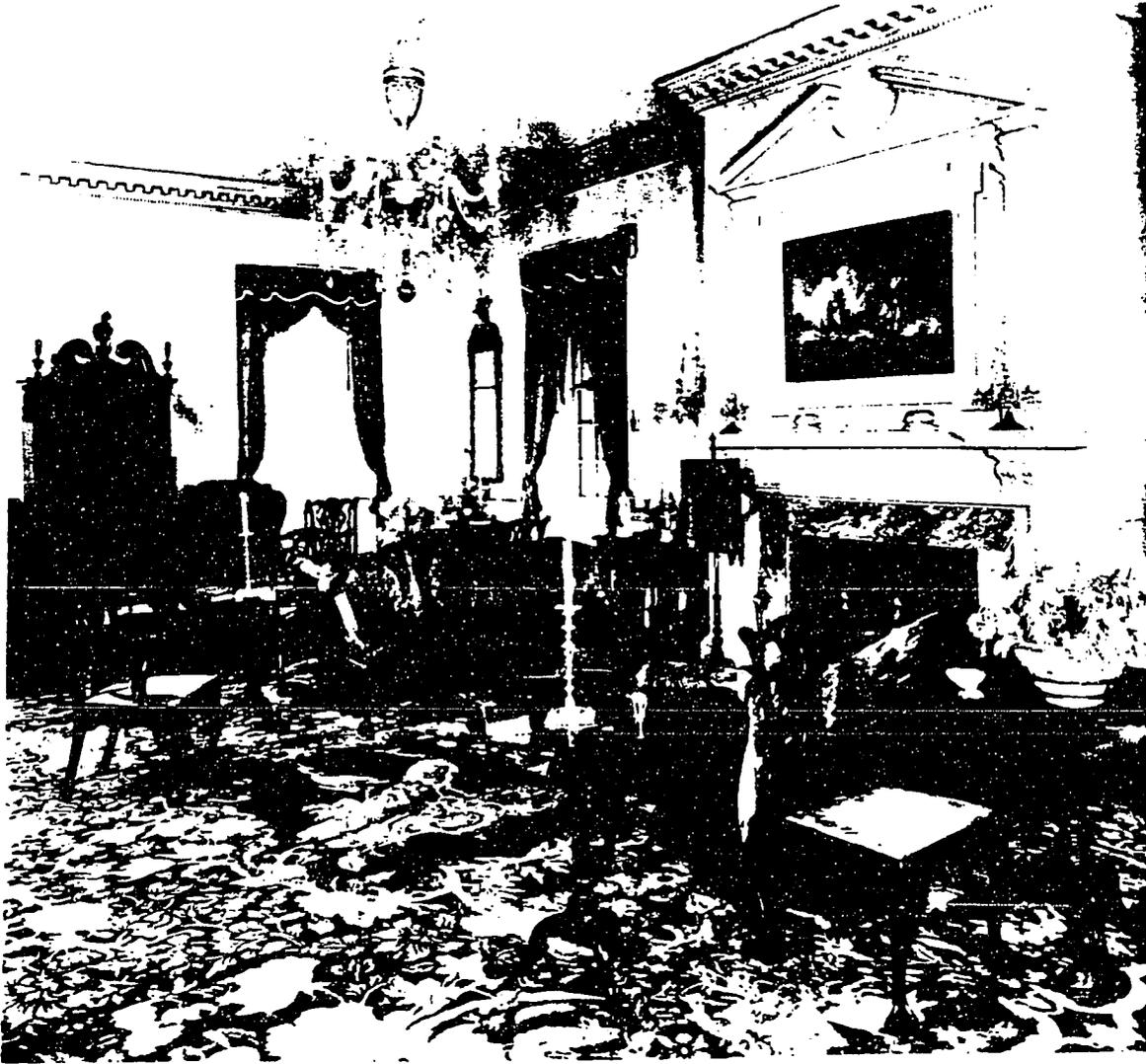


Figure 1 Port Royal Parlor, Winterthur Museum. From John A.H. Sweeney, The Treasure House of Early American Rooms. p. 65.

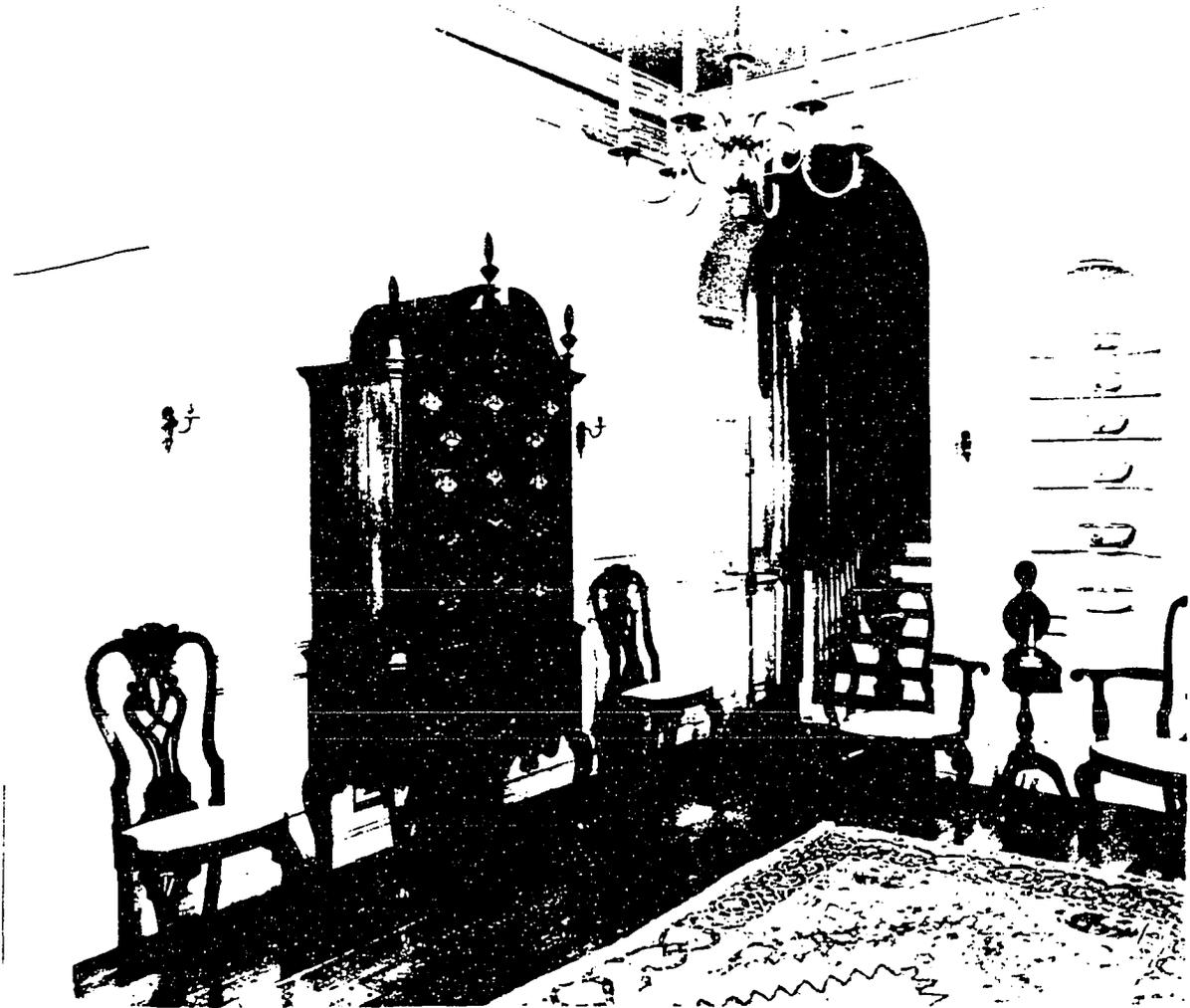


Figure 2 Readbourne Stair Hall, Winterthur Museum. From John A.H. Sweeney, The Treasure House of Early American Rooms. p. 46.



Figure 3 Library, The White House. From The White House: An Historic Guide (1963). p. 114.

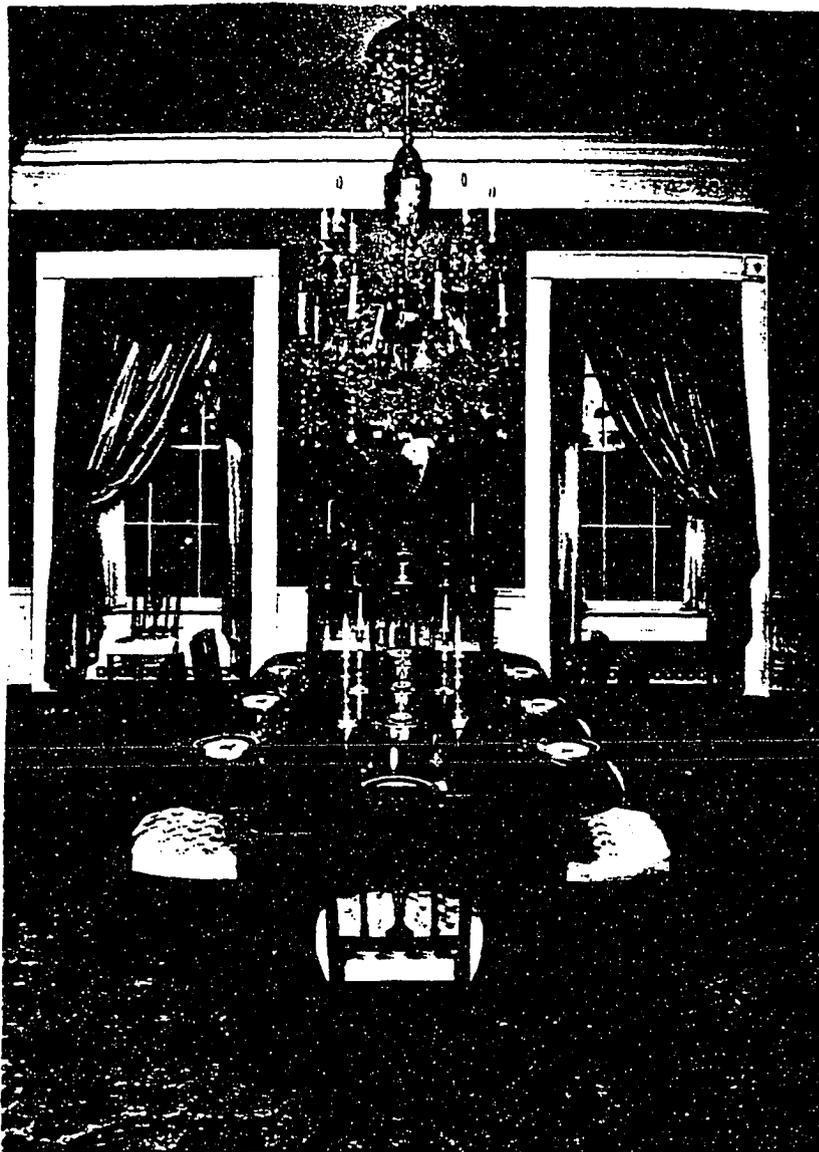


Figure 4 President's Dining Room, The White House, 1962, featuring "Scenic America" wallpaper by Zuber. From The White House: An Historic Guide (1963). p. 132.

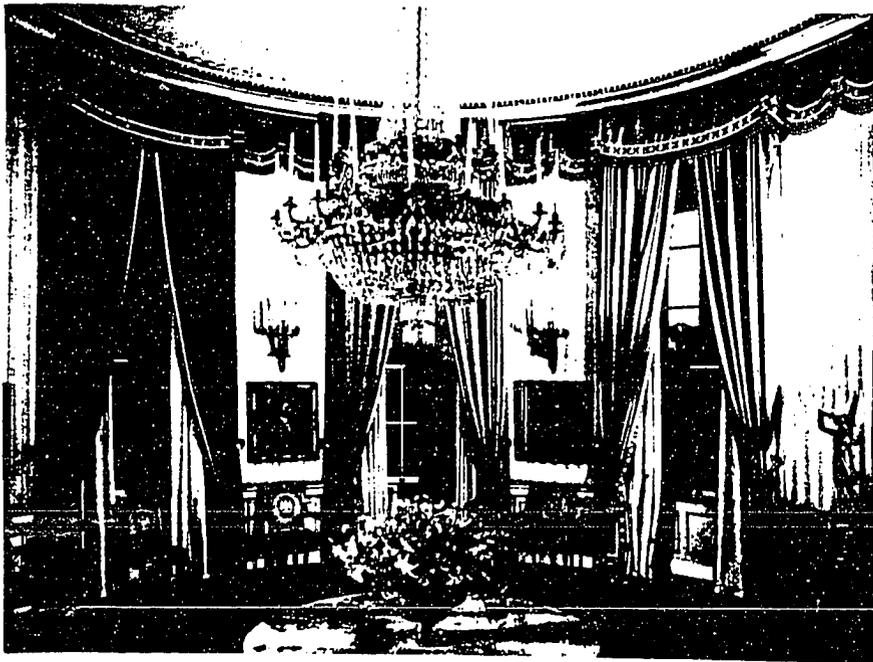


Figure 5 Blue Room, The White House, 1962, as decorated by Stephan Boudin. From William Seale, The White House: The History of an American Idea, p. 294.

APPENDIX A

List of the members of the Fine Arts Committee for the
White House

List of the members of the Advisory Committee to the Fine
Arts Committee for the White House

FINE ARTS COMMITTEE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

Chairman: Henry F. du Pont

Honorary Chairman: Mrs. John F. Kennedy

Mr. Charles Francis Adams

Mrs. C. Douglas Dillon

Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard (Jane)

Mr. David E. Finley

Mrs. Albert D. Lasker

Mr. John S. Loeb

Mrs. Paul Mellon

Mrs. Henry Parish II (Sister)

Mr. Gerald Shea

Mr. John Walker III

Mrs. George Henry Warren (Katherine)

Mrs. Charles B. Wrightsman (Jayne)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE*

Mr. James Biddle
Assistant Curator in Charge of the American Wing
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Dr. Julian P. Boyd
Editor, The Jefferson Papers
Princeton University

Dr. Lyman H. Butterfield
Editor, The Adams Papers
Massachusetts Historical Society

Dr. Richard E. Fuller
President and Director
The Seattle Art Museum

Mr. Gerald G. Gibson
Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts
The Henry Ford Museum

Mr. John M. Graham II
Director and Curator of Collections
Colonial Williamsburg

Mr. Calvin S. Hathaway
Director
The Cooper Union Museum

Miss Ima Hogg
Founder and Curator
The Bayou Bend Collections

Mr. Thomas C. Howe
Director
The California Palace of the Legion of Honor

Dr. Sherman E. Lee
Director
The Cleveland Museum of Art

Mr. Jack R. McGregor
Administrative Assistant
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Mr. Henry P. McIlhenny
Curator of Decorative Arts
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Mr. Charles Nagel
Director
The City Art Museum of St. Louis

Mr. Richard H. Randall, Jr.
Assistant Curator
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Dr. Edgar P. Richardson
Director
The Detroit Institute of Arts

Mr. Marvin D. Schwartz
Curator of Decorative Arts
The Brooklyn Museum

Mr. John A.H. Sweeney
Curator
The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum

Mr. C. Malcom Watkins
Curator, Division of Cultural History
Smithsonian Institution

*Professional affiliation of each member is that of the period of their appointment to the advisory committee.

APPENDIX B

Copy of form letter from H.F. du Pont
soliciting donations to the White House Restoration

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**Appendix B
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APPENDIX C

Copy of list compiled by Mrs. John F. Kennedy dated July 20, 1962
"Appropriate Furniture Found and Desired by Mrs. Kennedy for the White
House"

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