NEW Podcast Episode: The 1600 Sessions

Exploring the Legacy of White House Architect James Hoban and Design Influences of Scottish Stonemasons

May 25, 2018 (Washington, D.C.) — The White House Historical Association today released the latest episode of The 1600 Sessions podcast. In this episode, White House Historical Association President Stewart McLaurin talks with historian Dr. Ed Lengel and architect Merlo Kelly, curators of a new volume of essays out in 2019 about James Hoban, the Irish architect who designed the White House. Stewart also speaks with Scottish stonemason Charles Jones, about the art of carving - and the early connections between Ireland and America that influenced the White House and other aspects of our arts, culture, and society.

Dr. Ed Lengel talks about how Hoban was chosen as White House architect: “Washington decided to institute an open competition for the design of the White House in collaboration with Thomas Jefferson. Hoban was specifically recruited to apply...which suggests that the competition was not intended to be entirely random. Unlike other architects such as Pierre L’Enfant and Benjamin Henry Latrobe, who tended to have more of a domineering attitude, Hoban was accommodating—his origins as a tradesman and the fact that he had worked as a mason gave him a certain flexibility of attitude. Really, his goal was to achieve Washington’s own personal vision of what the White House would represent in its original design.” Hoban’s design was less grandiose than other proposed designs, such as L’Enfant’s.

Merlo Kelly discusses the open competition for White House architect: “James Hoban wrote a letter to the commissioners of Washington outlining his experience, and in this letter he claimed that he worked on the Royal Exchange, the Newcomen Bank, and the Custom House, which are three key buildings that were emerging...” The design elements of those buildings were later incorporated into the White House, such as the oval offices found in the Newcomen Bank.

Stonemason Charles Jones describes the similarities between modern masonry and 18th-century masonry: “The tools are the same—today, there are more power tools involved so there’s pneumatics and compressed air, and pneumatic chisels, but the principle is still the same of using a chisel and a force to control that chisel, whether that force is a pneumatic gun or your hand. In shape and in form and in use, the tools haven’t changed that much, and they’ve been the same for a thousand-odd years.”
Earlier this month, architect Merlo Kelly visited the White House Historical Association to present her newest research on James Hoban with Dr. Lengel as part of a symposium celebrating U.S. relations with the United Kingdom and Ireland. Scottish Stonemason Charles Jones also visited for the symposium and demonstrated the art and technique of carving a Double Scottish Rose, a motif featured atop the White House’s stone pilasters.

The 1600 Sessions
In this podcast series, White House Historical Association President Stewart McLaurin interviews luminaries, historians, and eyewitnesses to history about America’s most famous residence and office—the White House. Each episode includes a prominent guest or guests to discuss varying facets of White House history, including insights from former staff and many other topical issues.

*The 1600 Sessions* is available on iTunes, GooglePlay, and Stitcher. To hear the full episode, visit The1600Sessions.org and learn more about White House History at WhiteHouseHistory.org

For media inquiries, please contact press@whha.org or Jessica Fredericks, Communications Director at JFredericks@whha.org.

About The White House Historical Association
First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion’s legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association’s mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than $47 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit www.whitehousehistory.org.

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For more information, visit [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org).

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The White House is a national historic site maintained by the National Park Service and managed by the White House Historical Association.