



THE WHITE HOUSE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## NEW BOOK

*To Live on Lafayette Square:  
Society and Politics in the White House Neighborhood*  
By William Seale

*Tales of Neighborhood Romances, Scandals, and Secrets Recounted in Stunning Detail*

**March 5, 2019** (Washington, D.C.) – The White House Historical Association has announced its forthcoming book, *To Live on Lafayette Square: Society and Politics in the White House Neighborhood*, by historian and author Dr. William Seale, out May 15, 2019. This publication details the lives of those who once lived in Lafayette Square, just across from Pennsylvania Avenue and the White House, when the fashionable neighborhood was a center of political power in Washington, D.C.

Presidents once strolled across the park in the middle of Lafayette Square to visit with their neighbors and to discuss politics. A talented narrator, Seale, recounts the lives of cabinet secretaries, members of Congress, and prominent residents, including: naval hero Stephen Decatur, First Lady Dolley Madison, Civil War General George McClellan, and South Sea explorer Charles Wilkes.

During this time in history, residents of the Square would also welcome prominent politicians and diplomats to parties in their homes. Seale documents the friendships, romances, secrets and scandals that arose from the row houses and mansions of Lafayette Square. Historian Henry Adams observed in 1868, “Lafayette Square was society...beyond the Square the country began.”

In one notable story, Seale recounts: “Into the Rodgers House in 1859, the corpse of the prominent attorney Philip Barton Key, shot to death outside by his lover’s congressman husband, was dragged even as crowds rummaged through the dead man’s pockets, taking his handkerchiefs, before the constable arrived. In an upper bedroom of this same house Lincoln’s secretary of state, William Seward, was viciously knifed the night Lincoln was assassinated. The house was demolished long after to build an opera house, which contributed its own half-century history to Lafayette Square.”

Seale also reflects on the changes that came to the Square beginning in the twentieth century. The historic old houses were transitioned to commercial and government use, and plans were made to ultimately demolish them in order to create a space for modern offices. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy prevailed with a plan to preserve the now historic homes of Lafayette Square. Mrs. Kennedy explained, “The wreckers haven’t started yet, and until they do the square can be saved.”

Today, Lafayette Square retains the feel of an old residential neighborhood in the heart of Washington, D.C., preserving its characteristic charm.

Seale’s book captures the fascinating history of this iconic neighborhood while also enriching the reader’s understanding of the nation’s social and political culture.

*For more information, or if you would like to schedule an interview with author William Seale, please contact [press@whha.org](mailto:press@whha.org)*

### **About William Seale**

William Seale is an American historian and author. He attended Southwestern University in Texas and completed his Ph.D. at Duke University in North Carolina. An independent scholar since 1975, he has written extensively on the White House and has participated in the restoration of many state capitols. His many books include *[A White House of Stone](#)* (2017); *Imperial Season* (2013); *[Blair House: The President’s Guest House](#)* (2016); and the two-volume *[The President’s House](#)* (1986 and 2008). He is founding editor of *White House History Quarterly*, the award-winning journal of the White House Historical Association.

### **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](http://www.whitehousehistory.org).

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