



THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEW Episode: *The White House 1600 Sessions* Podcast “History Revealed: The Kennedy Gravesite”

White House Historical Association President Explores Firsthand Account of President John F. Kennedy’s Burial and a Unique Memorial Sculpture with the Head of the Honor Guard at President Kennedy’s Funeral, Director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, and Head Volunteer at Oak Spring Garden Foundation

August 20, 2025 (Washington, D.C.) – The White House Historical Association today released a new episode of *The White House 1600 Sessions* podcast recalling President John F. Kennedy’s burial and a unique tale about a top-secret memorial sculpture created to honor his life and legacy. In the episode, Stewart McLaurin, president of the Association, is joined by the Head Honor Guard at President Kennedy’s funeral, U.S. Army Sgt. James L. Felder (Retired); Head Volunteer at Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Elinor Crane; and Director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, Alan Price.

Each guest’s story recounts a different moment of the unique sculpture’s timeline, from the point of inspiration and ideation, to creation, to preservation.

“It’s from studying history and learning about the presidents and their lives that we’ve gained so much context for those things and people who have gone before in White House history,” said McLaurin. “But there’s also some mystery in history as well.”

Sgt. James Felder had a front-row seat to history when, in his early 20s, he was assigned to perform funerals with the U.S. Army Honor Guard Ceremonial Unit at Arlington National Cemetery. When President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas in Nov. 1963, it was Felder’s turn to take the lead role - making him the first African American to head the Honor Guard Ceremonial Unit for a presidential funeral. From the moment the president’s body arrived in Washington, D.C. on Air Force One, Felder and his team were an integral part of ensuring Kennedy was laid to rest with honor – a service that earned him a personal call of thanks and token of remembrance from First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy.

Felder shared a particularly moving memory from the burial, recalling when members of the Honor Guard spontaneously tossed their uniform caps onto the gravesite as a sign of respect.

“It was not planned,” Felder said of the iconic moment. “We’re standing there, at the gravesite, and everybody else was scattered. Doug Mayfield from San Diego, Calif., took his hat off and threw it on the site. And the rest of us just did the same thing.”

The Kennedy Family was so moved by this gesture that they decided to pursue the creation of a sculpture to memorialize the heartfelt act. The idea was that maybe the sculpture could be placed around the eternal flame at President Kennedy's permanent stone gravesite at Arlington National Cemetery. Mrs. Kennedy asked her close friend Rachel "Bunny" Lambert Mellon, to work on the top-secret project. Mrs. Mellon collaborated with Jean Schlumberger, a jewelry designer from Tiffany & Co. Schlumberger sketched an idea for the memorial and asked Mrs. Mellon to show it to the former First Lady.

"Mrs. Mellon had the drawing and presented it to Jackie Kennedy, who looked at it for ages and said, 'It's beautiful,'" said Elinor Crane, of Oak Spring Garden Foundation, which is dedicated to sharing Mrs. Mellon's passions, including scholarship, public dialogue, and horticulture.

For reasons lost to history, the sculpture was never installed in Arlington National Cemetery. After discovering that Mrs. Mellon had collaborated on a memorial for the Kennedy gravesite, Crane and her colleagues set out to learn more. They found that Schlumberger worked with sculptor Louis Féron to bring the memorial to life. They also learned that once it became clear that the sculpture would not be installed at the gravesite, Féron was paid to crate up and ship the pieces to be stored for the new John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum which, at the time, was still being built.

Director Alan Price of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum showed McLaurin several pieces of the intricate bronze, silver, and tin sculpture at the museum in Boston, Mass. Price said the memorial is extremely heavy and reaches almost eight feet in diameter when the over two dozen pieces are assembled. Seeing these pieces that represent a poignant moment in history was a rare opportunity as the sculpture is not on public display.

"I'm glad it has a happy ending. Everybody knows exactly where it is, and it's well preserved for generations to come," said Price.

In addition to the podcast release, the Association published its August *White House History Quarterly* issue, titled "[Memorials, Cemeteries, and White House History](#)" that contains a passage from Stewart on this episode and the sculpture.

The White House 1600 Sessions podcast is available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

The full video of this podcast episode is also available on the White House Historical Association's YouTube channel [here](#).

For more information, please contact press@whha.org.

The White House 1600 Sessions

The White House Historical Association's President Stewart McLaurin is the host of *The White House 1600 Sessions*, the Association's official audio and video podcast devoted to exploring the history, cultural impact, untold stories, and personal accounts of America's most iconic residence and highest office.

About the White House Historical Association

The White House Historical Association was founded in 1961 by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy to support her vision to restore and preserve the Executive Mansion and its legacy for generations to

come. Mrs. Kennedy sought to inspire Americans, especially children, to explore and engage with American history and its presidents. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that has contributed more than \$115 million to the White House in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit WhiteHouseHistory.org.

###