

WHITE
HOUSE
HISTORY
Quarterly

Turning Points
at the White House:
Great Expectations

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REFLECTIONS

Harmony Between Old & New

A Home for the White House Historical Association

STEWART D. McLAURIN
PRESIDENT, WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

IN 1818 COMMODORE STEPHEN DECATUR and his wife Susan began to build the most prominent private residence in the President's Neighborhood, having engaged the services of renowned English architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Using money he received for his heroism during the War of 1812, Commodore Decatur was able to acquire a large section of land just north of the White House on which to build his magnificent home. This residence was the closest freestanding home to the White House, positioned on the corner of what is now Jackson Place and H Street Northwest, in Washington. When Stephen Decatur and his wife, Susan, moved into their new home two hundred years ago, it was believed they would be long-standing residents of the neighborhood, and perhaps someday even occupy the only residence more prominent than their own—the White House—as president and first lady.

Unfortunately, the Decatur's time on Lafayette Square was cut short when Stephen Decatur was mortally wounded in a duel in 1820. In the next years, Decatur House continued as a private residence for many distinguished individuals, including Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren while they were secretaries of state. In addition to housing such prominent political figures, Decatur



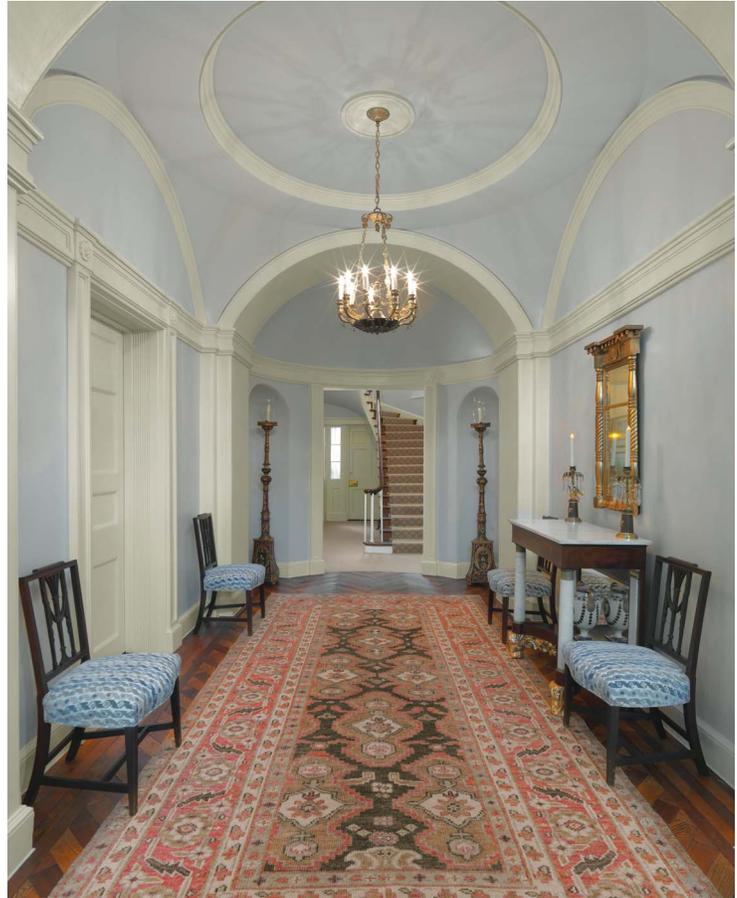
House was continuously occupied by numerous free and enslaved servants who are also a part of the Decatur House story. One was Charlotte Dupuy, who in 1829, while living in Decatur House, sued Henry Clay for her freedom and the freedom of her two children, based on a promise made to her by a previous owner. Her petition was denied, but her courage is testimony to the way enslaved persons used whatever resources were available to free themselves.

In 1956 Decatur House was acquired by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and in 2010 the White House Historical Association entered into a partnership with the National Trust to become the steward of Decatur House. Although the Association's primary mission is to

maintain the museum quality of the State Rooms in the White House and to educate the public about the history of the White House, we are also committed to telling the important story of Decatur House and to providing new resources for research on the role this house has played in the history of Washington.

In addition to providing free tours of the house and the enslaved persons' quarters, our campus hosts an annual symposium, a quarterly lecture series, the Association's teacher institute, and a myriad of other programs and activities all focusing on White House history. The campus also houses our main office space, where we produce our award-winning publications—both books and this quarterly journal—educational materials for classrooms across the country, resources for our digital library, and other wonderful content on the story of the President's Neighborhood.

On March 31, 2019, the White House Historical Association was honored to be recognized by the Institute of Classical Architecture and Art, Washington Mid-Atlantic Chapter, for the work of our good friends Franck and Lohsen Architects on the restoration of historic Decatur House. Receiving the John Russell Pope Award for Historic Preservation highlights our commitment to maintaining this great American treasure of a building.



Views of the renovated first floor of the historic Stephen Decatur House on Lafayette Square. As co-steward of this National Trust for Historic Preservation property, the White House Historical Association completed a renovation in 2018 in order to create spaces with a harmony between new and old that could be used for special receptions and meetings. Rather than creating a museum, the Association chose antique furnishings as well as original artifacts from the Decatur House collection to highlight the history of the house and to allow the home to be once again the center of important activities in the President's Neighborhood. Clockwise from top left: the entrance hall looking east toward Lafayette Park; a view of the grand stair from the entrance hall; and the formal parlors, once used by Commodore Stephen Decatur as his office.

