

January 2016

THE 43

FOR VOLUNTEERS | BY VOLUNTEERS

Our Year in Pictures...

Volunteers and interns of the George W. Bush Presidential Library travelled to the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, Texas on Wednesday, September 23, 2015. The group was greeted by Dr. Robert Holzweiss, Deputy Director, Sharon Merrell, Volunteer Program Coordinator, and a large group of the docents from Bush 41. It was a fun field day with colleagues and friends



In September of 2015, Linda Thiebaud was in Austin, Texas planning with the Bluebonnet Committee, a part of The Texas Library Association. She was helping to finalize next year's reading list for students in grades 3-6. This list was made public at The 20th Annual Texas Book Festival.



Left are the 2016-17 Texas Bluebonnet Award Nominees! Can you guess which ones made the list?

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On November 17, 2015 at 5:00 p.m. in the museum classroom, Col. John Antal, US Army (Ret.) told the patriotic true-story of America's first Christmas. Immediately following, there was a book signing for his latest book, *7 Leadership Lessons of the American Revolution: The Founding Fathers, Liberty, and the Struggle for Independence*, which includes the story of America's first Christmas.



DUBYA Stats...by the numbers

Tickets Sold:

May 2013 – Present

Approximately **904,500**

June 2015 – December

157,004



Don't know if you noticed the "special thank-you" note at the end of "ESPN's 30 for 30: First Pitch" screening Sunday, August 30, 2015 but Kristen O'Hare, the Presidential Library and Museum A/V volunteer, received an acknowledgement for her work on the project. Yay Kristen!

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NARA Notes...

By Patricia Allen

We are delighted to welcome our new Education Specialist, Sharon Brannon. As you will read, from her educational background, she is more than qualified.

She received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education K-9 with minors in Social Sciences and Natural Science Degree from Kansas State University. She followed that with a Master of Science Degree in Administration with emphasis in Public Administration from Central Michigan University. After that she received a Master of Arts Degree in Counseling Psychology with emphasis in LPC and LMFT from Webster University. She will be conferred with her Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology specializing in Research and Evaluation in February 2016 from Walden University. Sharon is also one of the most



unassuming ladies we have met. While she has certainly earned the title Doctor, she said she prefers be known only as "Sharon."

Sharon was born in Fayette, Alabama and raised in Salina, Kansas. While attending Kansas State University she met Anthony Brannon, her soulmate and husband of 25 years. She had the pleasure of traveling around the world with him for 21 years while he served in the United States Army. This opportunity allowed her to work in a variety of positions that pulled, pushed and pressed her to see the world through a broader lens. It also strengthened her belief, faith and hope in God and humanity.

Anthony retired from the military in October 2010 and is the Pastor of Rhema Word Baptist Church. He is also a computer consultant for church members. When asked about a funny experience she may have had, she recalled one time she had to introduce her husband at one of his preaching engagements and she forgot his name. Sharon and Anthony are also the proud parents of a 5-years old son, Phillip, who is now in kindergarten and, as Sharon says, "is the apple of my eye."

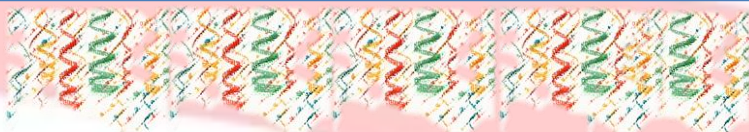
Sharon thoroughly enjoys her new position. She gets to apply all of her academic training and life experiences on one job. She loves people of all cultures and ages and has never met a stranger. As Education Specialist she not only gets to continuously learn, but has the awesome responsibility of creating opportunities for others to learn and gain knowledge.

Applause, Kudos, and Congratulations...



Regan, daughter of docent Susan Regan Donnefield, serves as a civil rights intern at the court house. President Bush was called in to serve jury duty and she got to meet him. Photo via Twitter

@staciwilliams8



Tom Carr and his wife Nancy Carr celebrated their "Golden" 50th wedding anniversary on December 23, 2015. They had a great celebration of the event with their family at their daughter's home in Jackson, Missouri.



Two paintings by President Bush are hanging near the 19th Hole at the Dallas Country Club. Photos courtesy of Doug Smith.



Docent Evan Clary was able to snap a selfie with President Bush at the Volunteer Christmas Party.

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The orange and green ribbons represent Leukemia and Lymphoma awareness.



The photograph above was taken in Times Square New York. Erin Ragsdale, daughter of Suzanne Blaney a docent at the Presidential Library and Museum, won the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's 2015 National Woman of the Year. Erin, the senior vice president of Allyn Media, raised \$469,158 during her campaign, the most ever of any Man & Woman of the Year candidate. Photo to the right courtesy of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

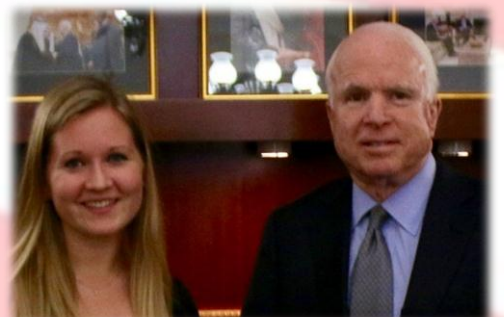


Nancy and Mark Wertz are very proud of the library! Mark is a docent at the Presidential Library and Museum and he and his wife wore their museum t-shirts in Pensacola, Florida.

Jan McDaniel's son and family visited the Reagan Library on June 30, 2015. Ellasyn and Caraline, granddaughters, of Jan McDaniel a docent of the Preisidential Library and Museum, were enjoying the visit.



Docent Doris Knappek and husband, Henry Knappek, at the Rolling Stones concert on June 6, 2015.



McKenzie Smith, former Presidential Library and Museum intern, now the Democracy and Human Rights intern for the McCain Institute in Washington, D.C.

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We all enjoy the wonderful treats that appear weekly in the volunteer lounge for special occasions! On Thursday, December 10, docents of the presidential library and museum participated in a holiday cookie exchange. Rod Franz and Nancy Giles pictured left.



Steve Scruggs, a docent of the Presidential Library and Museum, regularly brings in delicious treats prepared by his wife Marti! Check out the delicious flag cake his wife made on the 6th of July for the Monday Morning Mavens.



This lovely chocolate cake with peppermint was made by docent Shannon Shaffer for the Wednesday Afternoon W Team. It was delicious!



CONVERSATIONS WITH PRESIDENT BUSH DURING PRESIDENTIAL PHOTOS AT THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY

By Judith Banes

A yearly highlight for many of us is the opportunity to attend the annual Christmas Reception hosted by President and Mrs. Bush. In addition, we are always amazed at how attentive the presidential couple is during each of our photo sessions 1) disregarding the long line waiting for their photo opportunity and 2) acting like we are the only couple in the room! The following personal conversations were reported by some of the Docents:

Linda Frith: "As we approached, President Bush commented on my husband's Blue Star pin. As President Bush straightened the pin, he asked where our son was stationed. We shared that he

deployed to Afghanistan in October."

Judith Banes: "As we were leaving, I mentioned that I wish I had a dollar for every visitor who told me they wish he was still in office. President Bush smiled really big and said, 'you tell them you know him really well and that he is glad he is not there!'"

Carol Latshaw: "After introducing ourselves to them and a moment of conversation, the photo was taken; but before we stepped away President Bush added to my husband, 'Semper Fi Marine.' He had noticed the small Marine Corps tie tack on Bruce's tie. Of course, Bruce returned the meaningful sentiment and was so complimented!"

Donna Dee Floyd: "During the photo session, I mentioned how I had been drawn to his painting of 'The Lamb of God'. I went



on to say that I had wanted to touch it; and because other visitors had that same urge, the installation of a barrier had been added. I finished by saying that it was a 'spiritual' experience drawing me to the painting to which President Bush solemnly stated, "mission accomplished."

These personal, meaningful conversations confirm the principled characteristics of President Bush that we share with our visitors every week as docents in the Museum.

Dan Gutman, bestselling author of the *Baseball Card Adventure* series, which has sold more than 1.5 million copies around the world, one of which is *Honus and Me*. He just published a new book, *Rappy the Raptor*. His publishing company, HarperCollins, made a video and our very own docent Linda Thiebaud is in it!

Librarian's Rap



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The McDaniel family tradition on Thanksgiving morning is to help deliver meals for Mission Arlington. Mission Arlington fed over 25,000 on Thanksgiving Day! Jan, a docent of the Presidential Library and Museum, and her family are happy to be a part of Mission Arlington and thankful for the opportunity for their whole family to give back to the community.

Karl Rove and Steve Cotton, docent of the Presidential Library and Museum, go back to the days when Rove was doing direct mail for Governor Bill Clements and Cotton was with Will Garwood's—Texas Supreme Court Justice—campaign. This was long before Rove had a great new political history book out about William McKinley.



JoAnn Mueller, former docent at the Presidential Library and Museum, invited members of the Tuesday Morning Chargers to a luncheon in her home.

Julie Smith's family (left to right) Tate, McKenzie and Robbie – at McKenzie's graduation from William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia on May 16, 2015. Two weeks later Tate graduated from Highland Park High School. He is now a freshman at TCU. Julie Smith is an administrative volunteer of the Presidential Library and Museum.



To the left, is a picture of the Thursday Afternoon Thunderstorms celebrating the holidays at a team party.

Doug, a docent of the Presidential Library and Museum, and his wife Georgia hosted docents of the Blue Blazer Brigade at their home over the holidays for a beautiful and delicious evening. It was a great night!



Docents helped decorate the temporary exhibit space for the special Christmas exhibit, "A Season of Stories."





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Incredible Encounters...

INTERESTING VISITORS

By Judith Banes

As most of the docents are aware, one of the rewards in our volunteer experience at the Bush Museum is meeting amazing visitors. Here are some of the visitors we have met over the last six months:

Late June

- A friend of Grant Sturiale, the composer of the music for Freedom Hall, visited and was glad to share information on the composer. (Rumor has it that Grant has visited, too!) Grant lives in New York City and was the Music Director of Radio City Music Hall. One of his credits is composing the musical "Olympus on My Mind." He is, currently, the music director for Petula Clark. When composing the music for the photography in Freedom Hall, the photographer would send him segments of the video and he would compose music to go with it. They would send sections and ideas back and forth until the final product was finished.
- SMU was providing facilities for the field events and track events for the National Veterans' Wheelchair Games. Several of the officials came through the Museum. They reported

that there were over 700 Veterans participating in the Games. Participants came from across the United States including Puerto Rico and Britain. There were, also, some attendees from Korea as observers.

September

- An interesting couple from England visited. The wife is a Member of Parliament, starting her second term (terms are 5 years). Her husband is a 'legal advisor' and they are both active in the Labor Party. She said she never would have been in government in the States; because when they run for office in England, they do not have to raise money to run. There are 600+ in Parliament and each representative represents approximately 75,000 constituents. She said they don't have Town Hall meetings; rather she meets with her constituents one-on-one.
- We had a visitor from Burma who was here because he had escorted a refugee family to Dallas. He works for an international organization who relocates families. My first encounter with him was in the baseball exhibit and he wanted to know if we had an exhibit of 9/11 pictures because he remembered crying at home when 9/11 happened. At the end of my shift I went back

in to find him and see if he had enjoyed his visit. He was looking at the monitor in area six and taking pictures of the people on the screen. He pointed out one woman and said she was his best friend. He was taking the pictures of the people back to Burma to show that they were in the library. One of those people is running for a high office in Burma. He said he could not run for office or be political because of the organization that he worked for. He said, **"George Bush was the 'liberator of Burma'."**

October

- Page Austin came to the Museum with a group from Hillwood (Ross Perot's company for whom she now works). She worked with Laura Bush for over six years in the White House. During her visit in the Oval Office, she verified that George Bush required that anyone coming into the Oval office had to wear a jacket. She said that one day Jenna and Barbara came into the White House in jeans and he would not allow them in the Oval Office! (When I was working the day after the Presidential Center Dedication, one of the Bush-Cheney Alumni was gazing into the Oval Office from one of the roped openings. I invited him in, but he said, "No, I'm not dressed for it").

Docent Trivia...

Q. How many docents does it take to change a lightbulb?

A. Two. One to remove the old lightbulb and one to tell the story behind it.

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Volunteer Spotlight...

CYNDY STERRANTINO

By Pat Allen



Cyndy is a native Texan, born and raised in Dallas. She graduated from Bryan Adams High School, and majored in accounting at U.T. She set up her own tax accounting business under the name Williams Ripa (from the maiden names of her mother and her husband John's mother. When she was hired by Baylor Health Care System as Asst. Corporate Controller, she closed her tax business and her husband John and his partner kept the company name and set up their insurance company dealing with business workmen's compensation.

Cyndy continued working for Baylor for the next 25 years, retiring just as GWB Presidential Library was being constructed.

Cyndy and John have a large boat docked at Lake Texoma and love spending the weekends there riding their jet skis. They also love to travel and have spent considerable time in Europe, usually with John's partner and his wife. On one memorable trip while trying to connect trains from Rome to Venice, she and John's partner became separated from the others and ended up on the train without luggage, passport or money. When a passerby saw John's worried look he asked what was wrong. John said my wife just left on that train with my best friend. The stranger assured him, "don't worry, she will be back." They finally met up after waiting for

several trains to arrive with the rest of their belongings.

They have stopped traveling internationally now that the partner has cancer and are spending time touring within the US. They do have a cruise scheduled in a few weeks leaving from Galveston.

Cyndy developed an interest in politics many years ago while living in the Washington DC area. Leaving her passion for healthcare finance and moving into her passion of politics proved to be a perfect transition. She went through the Bush Library training prior to the Library opening and began volunteering as a docent the day it opened in May 2013. She is proud to continue as a docent at GWB Presidential Library every Tuesday morning!

JACKIE HALL

By Pat Allen



Jackie is a true Memphis Belle, born and raised in Memphis and attended Memphis schools including Memphis State. Her husband, Bill, a Texan, states that he "rescued her from Memphis and brought her to Texas where she belongs." That was 37 years ago. They each had two children from previous marriages, he had two boys and she had two girls. All of them are now married and have given Jackie and Bill 8 grandchildren (all boys) and a four great grandchildren (including two girls). Jackie enjoys reading, travel and needlework. She has made needlepoint Christmas stockings for each of her

grandchildren. She has traveled to 47 States and hopes to see the remaining three. Sadly, her travel has been curtailed since her husband became ill with Parkinson's disease and is now in assisted-living.

Jackie's career has been in Social Services. She was the Executive Director of the Assistance Center of Collin County for 26 years. The best part of the job was not only helping the needy, but meeting all the wonderful people who volunteered their time serving in so many aspects including those on the Board of Directors. However, the pace could be stressful, and she is happy now to be just a volunteer.

When Jackie first learned that the GWB Library was to be built in Dallas, she was visiting Bush 41's Library with her grandchildren. She said the docents there were so nice and helpful, that she knew she would

love to be a part of the new Presidential Library when it opened in Dallas. She contacted the GWB Library staff and began her training in February 2013 at the Highland Park Methodist Church. She was on board for the Library's opening and continues as a docent every Tuesday morning. She loves being a volunteer but said, not being a morning person, it is hard getting up early Tuesday mornings to leave home at 7:10 a.m. – but it is worth it! She loves her Tuesday morning group and they feel like family. Speaking of family, Jackie and her family have toured 9 of the 13 Presidential Libraries. During her years with the GWB Library, Jackie has had pictures taken of each grandchild sitting behind the *Resolute* Desk the Oval Office. What wonderful memories they will have as they look back at their childhood with a love of grandmother and a love of history!

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History matters...



Photo by Judith Banes

MAKING OF THE SEAL OF THE PRESIDENT MONUMENT:

A Conversation with the Sculptor

By Judith Banes

We are indebted to the Cousin's Company for the rescue of the unique Seal of the President Monument and their gracious donation to the George W. Bush Presidential Center. The history of the Seal of the President Monument, now located at the Admissions Desk, begins with Trammel Crow, a Dallas real estate developer. (The June, 2015 newsletter tells of his commissioning this work and the monument's history.) Trammel Crow was an admirer (and collector) of Miley Frost's work. During a visit to Miley's sculpture studio, Trammel Crow broached the subject of Miley doing a monument of the Presidential Seal for a building he was constructing where he was planning a 'mini-museum' of Presidential letters.

This was in 1981, prior to the internet, so Miley spent many hours in the library researching the Presidential Seal. In doing all of the 'footwork', she discovered that permission must be obtained from the Counsel to

the President in order to display the Seal of the President. Based on the presence of the collection of Presidential letters at the site, Miley received permission to create the Seal of the President Monument.

Trammel Crow and Miley studied the site where the monument would be placed. Miley recommended that it would be site specific, in-the-round, made of stainless steel and of monumental scale. The symbolic elements of the design would seem to 'float' as the viewer walked around it and/or observed it from above in the atrium lobby. The use of gleaming stainless steel would complement the surroundings and the architectural features of the building.

The monument is a combination of cast and fabricated stainless steel. Not every foundry can cast and fabricate stainless steel, but one was found in Loveland, Colorado. The process and assembly took one year. First, the seal was enlarged and the symbols were cut out and laid out to decide how to attach the pieces. Miley sculpted the eagle, one cloud and one star in three dimensions to be cast. The clouds and stars were used for multiple molds. A double mold process was used for the banner and letters. Rods were purchased for the rays, which served as the actual support. The internal concentric rings were cut from one large sheet of stainless steel. The rings were cut by laser and, because they barely touched, provided a connection point. A heavy thick sheet of stainless was purchased for the outer band which would frame and support the entire assembly. Not wanting it to be bulky, it was heated, rolled, and carefully welded and textured to create a satin finished, perfectly

round band. The other rings were highly polished.

The monument was, then, assembled. Between each addition, they would walk around the piece to check for overall symmetry. The base was a stainless saddle that was later covered in granite to match the floor of the building where it was to be displayed. (A beautiful new base was made when installed in its current location.) The largest band was attached to the base. The rods were arranged on a grid for symmetry before being attached to the outer band. The eagle was very heavy and was hung on belts until it was fastened. Welding the wings was the hardest part and an important part because they helped support the weight. It was, then, ready for the welding of the smaller parts. Thus, this one-of-a-kind, three-dimensional Seal of the President Monument was completed.

For President Reagan's second Inauguration, the Republican National Committee called and asked if they could borrow it for the Inauguration but, of course, that was impossible! It stayed in Trammel Crow's San Jacinto Tower until the building was sold, and the Presidential letters were returned to the family. The monument was in storage until the Cousins Co. (from Atlanta) purchased the building from the interim owner and donated the Seal to the Bush Foundation. Miley is grateful to the Cousins Co. for their generous donation and greatly honored to have this work of art in the George W. Bush Center.

The above information was gleaned from an interview with Miley Frost on June 8, 2015.



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THE OVAL OFFICE
REPRODUCTION

The Rest of the Story

By Ron Brackin



We all know about Eli Wilner & Company, the antique framers who created the reproduction of the *Resolute* Desk in our Oval Office replica. But what about the rest of the furniture? Photo

to the left courtesy of Kittinger Company.

Well, that came from snowy Buffalo, New York, from the master craftsmen at Kittinger Company (est. 1866). For more than four decades, Kittinger has furnished the White House, as well as the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and heads of state throughout the world.

After visiting Europe in 1969, for example, President Richard M. Nixon “realized that the White House looked quite shabby, compared to similar homes of European heads of state.” So he commissioned Kittinger to refurbish the West Wing. Among other things, Kittinger provided the 22.5 foot table in the Cabinet Room, along with 24 chairs, the President’s being 2.5 inches higher than the rest, of course (President Nixon paid for the table himself).¹

As for our Oval Office...

“It was a pretty challenging process,” said Kittinger president Raymond C. Bialkowski. “The bad news was we didn’t have the drawings.”

Nor did they have access to the real Oval Office. So they worked

off photographs they received from the George W. Bush Presidential Museum Oval Office team of Chandra Holloway, Rena Hardman, and Curator Amy Polley. From these, they used special software to create detailed design documents for each piece. “Our museum team worked closely with the Kittinger craftsmen for more than a year to ensure that the desk was exact to the smallest detail, including the intricate inlays and stain.”²

Kittinger, by the way, also provided Oval Office furniture for the award-winning motion picture *White House Down* (Columbia, 2013), starring Jamie Foxx.

Kittinger Furniture,
<http://kittingerfurniture.com>.

Robinson, David, “Kittinger meets challenge on Oval Office replicas, *The Buffalo News*, 26 April 2013.

FRAUD WARNING!

By Ron Brackin

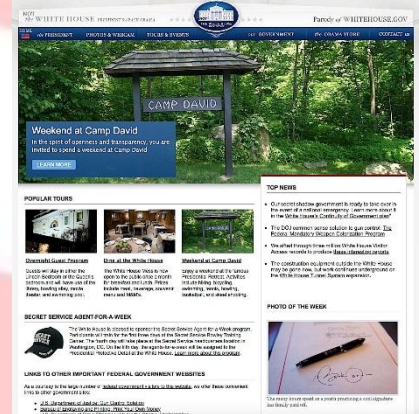


In addition to the Docent Manual, the next best source of “vetted” information that docents can use on the floor is www.georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov. The eight years of the Bush Administration are “frozen” on the White House website and overflowing with cool stuff we can use with visitors.

For example, for those of you who are looking forward to the upcoming temporary exhibit—Christmas at the White House 2003: A Season of Stories—this site gives you a sneak peek. There are lots and lots of photographs of the 18’ Blue Room Tree covered with storybook characters, as well as wonderful papier-mâché figures made by the resident White House staff. There’s even a press release (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031204-10.html>) that tells you everything from how many lights are on the Blue Room Tree (13,500) to a list of all the figurines, including everything from Harry Potter, Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory to Frog & Toad, The Cat in the Hat, and Tikki Tikki Tembo.

Okay, here’s the **WARNING** part: there is a phony White House site that has fooled even the most seasoned docents who weren’t paying close attention.

Beware of
www.whitehouse.gov1/info!



Oh, sure, the upper left hand corner has the word “NOT” above “the WHITE HOUSE”—easily missed—and “Parody of WHITEHOUSE.GOV” in the upper right hand corner (I swear I don’t remember seeing that before), and there’s a disclaimer

¹ Kittinger Furniture, <http://kittingerfurniture.com>.

² Robinson, David, “Kittinger meets challenge on Oval Office replicas, *The Buffalo News*, 26 April 2013.

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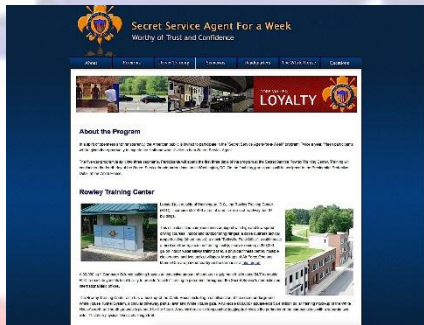
at the bottom in a gray font (who reads fine print, anyway? Seriously.)

But there’s more. The website also offers links to parodies of:

- U.S. Department of Justice
- Bureau of Engraving and Printing
- U.S. Department of State
- Social Security Administration
- National Security Agency
- U.S. Secret Service
- Raven Rock Mountain Complex

Beware of the fakes. That said, you might want to browse around there if you’re in need of a bagful of belly laughs.

Just do not take any of it seriously. And DO NOT repeat any of it in the Museum. Fair warning.



THE UNRESOLVED RESOLUTE

By Ron Brackin

Resolute desk photo courtesy of iCollector.com.



What would you say if a

visitor in the Oval Office pointed to the *Resolute* Desk and asked, “What’s it made of?”

Simple question, right?

Actually, we have no definitive answer, rather like, “Which World Trade Center tower did the beam come from?”

The obvious solution would be to just ask the White House. But that could result in a bit of confusion.

In “Ask the White House,” an online interactive forum, a response to Brad from Spring Hill, Tennessee, stated that *HMS Resolute* “was made from *oak* timbers from a British navy ship that had been trapped in Arctic ice...”³

Great! Except that a few months later, the response to a similar question from Maria from Tampa Bay, Florida, maintained that the *Resolute* Desk was “made from the wood of an English *warship*.”⁴ Actually, *HMS Resolute* was a 600-ton, square-rigged *merchant ship*, originally christened *Ptarmigan* and built for the East India trade.⁵ If “Ask the White House” got the ship wrong, was it right about the wood?

Naturally, we can always default to history.

“In the 19th century, [*HMS Resolute* was built about 1849] teak and iron increasingly replaced traditional English oak in shipbuilding, teak being more durable and water resistant than oak. The ships belonging to the British navy, built at Bombay,

are constructed of teak....”⁶

“The most advantageous disposition of the teak timber and of English oak timber in the construction of a ship is for the timbers to be of teak-wood and the planks and thick stuff to be of English oak.”⁷

Well and good, but nothing conclusive.

George McDougall was master of the *Resolute* and kept a detailed journal of its voyages and final abandonment.

He recorded that, at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, 26 June 1852, *Resolute* and the other ships in her squadron tied up to an icy land floe in the Arctic Ocean. At 11 p.m., a sea floe drifted in and caught the ships between the massive expanses of crushing ice, something British sailors, with typical understatement, refer to as a “nip,” and which McDougall noted “carried away the rudder. The pressure at times was so great as to cause the ship to careen over 35 degrees, at the same time imparting a quivering motion to the hull, which rang all the bells, a peal that was far from pleasant under existing circumstances. The stern of the vessel was raised seven feet above the surface...” The following day, at 3:30 a.m., “the heavy pressure ceased, the ship was consequently released and became upright. The rudder was now unshipped and hauled on the floe when we found that both woodwork and iron had been unable to withstand the powers of the ice. The main piece, formed of *oak*, was broken in two, whilst the back and filling

³ Allman, Bill, Curator of the White House, “Ask the White House,” June 5, 2003, www.georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov.

⁴ Ibid, September 26, 2003.

⁵ *The Sail & Steam Navy List: All the Ships of the Royal Navy 1815-1889*, by David Lyon & Rif Winfield © N2004, Chatham Publishing, Park House, 1 Russell Gardens, London NW11 9NN.

⁶ Knowles, John, Secretary to the Committee of Surveyors of His Majesty’s Navy, *British Navy, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time, particularly from that Species of Decay Now Denominated Dry-Rot*, London: Printed and Sold by Winchester and Varnham, 61, Strand. 1821, (footnote) pp. 40-41 [bracketed comment mine].

⁷ Blackburn, Isaac, ship-builder, Plymouth, *The British Navy: The Extraordinary Decay of the Men of War and On the Causes, Effects, and Prevention of the Dry Rot, Also, On the Growth and Management of Timber Trees; the Whole, with a View to Improve the Construction and Durability of Ships*, London: Printed for James Asperne, Bookseller, Cornhill, 1817, p. 171.



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piece of deal were crushed into splinters...”⁸

So we know that the rudder, at least, was made of oak. Not much, but it’s a start.

Fast forward to 1856.

The *Resolute* had been salvaged by James Buddington, captain of the American whaler *George Henry*. The United States had ceased diplomatic relations with England, due to what President Franklin Pierce saw as a violation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850.

Ship-owner and philanthropist Henry Grinnell fired off a letter to U.S. Secretary of State William Learned Marcy, suggesting that the government purchase and restore the *Resolute* and return it to Queen Victoria as a goodwill gesture. Grinnell was put in charge of the purchase. So he traveled to New London to inspect the ship and recommend a purchase price. And on 9 September 1856, he sent a handwritten letter to Secretary Marcy, noting on the third page that “the Bark is about Six hundred (600) tons burthen, built of *teak* wood, about 7 years old, and cost the British Government by an official report

about one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars.”⁹

Well, that would appear definitive. As a ship-owner, government expert, and broker of the purchase, it would be safe to assume that Mr. Grinnell was able to distinguish between teak and English oak.

Just to make sure, however, I checked with the New Bedford Whaling Museum, which houses the Grinnell desk in its collection. The Grinnell desk, you’ll recall, was one of the three desks carved from the timbers of the *Resolute*, along with the Hayes desk and a small writing desk used by Queen Elizabeth aboard *HMY Victoria and Albert II*, now residing in the Royal Naval Museum in Historic Portsmouth, England.

“Having not examined the other desks,” responded senior maritime historian Michael P. Dyer, “I cannot confirm the materials from which they were made. The Grinnell desk held here is made of English oak (*Quercus robur*). *HMS Resolute* as you know, was originally named the *Ptarmigan* and was one of two ships that were indeed built of teak, purchased by the Royal Navy and re-

named. When the *Resolute* was outfitted for Arctic service at Blackwall, she was probably sheathed and internally reinforced with thick, native oak planking and timbers. It would be worth examining the White House desk to see what wood was used to make it. Ours is not a particularly attractive object, oak furniture seldom is.”¹⁰

According to another historian, Sidney Withington, *HMS Resolute* was “built of teak with bows sheathed with iron.”¹¹

Of course, the question remains whether William Evenden carved all three desks from the same parts of the ship, i.e. could some be of oak and others of teak?

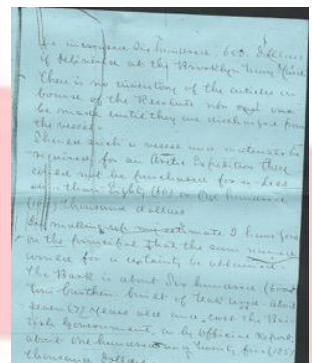
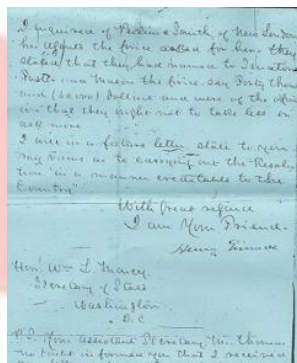
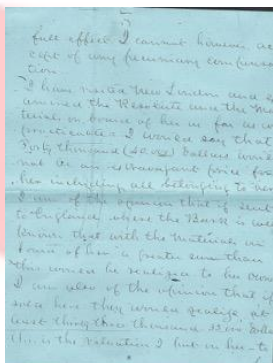
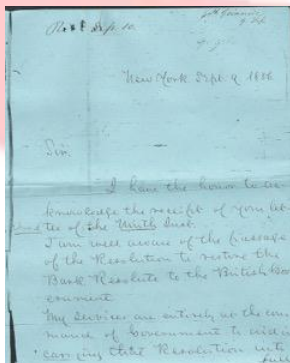
Sooooo....

We’re still pretty much “at sea” regarding the composition of the famous White House desk.

What we *can* say with certainty is that the replica *Resolute* Desk at the George W. Bush Presidential Museum was made by Eli Wilner & Company.

And it’s oak.

Below is a four-page letter by Henry Grinnell to U.S. Secretary of State William Learned Marcy, dated 9 September 1856.



⁸ The Eventful Voyage of H.M. Discovery Ship *Resolute* to the Arctic Regions, Ship’s Master George Frederick McDougall, *HMS Resolute*: his journal aboard up to the time of her abandonment in the ice on 15th May, 1854

⁹ Microfilm Publication M179: Miscellaneous Letters of the Department

of State, 1789-1906; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 50, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001.

¹⁰ Dyer, Michael P., Senior Maritime Historian, New Bedford Whaling Museum, 18 Johnny Cake Hill, New Bedford, MA

02740, email dated June 19, 2015 at 10:39 a.m.

¹¹ Withington, Sidney, “The George Henry and the Salvage and Restoration of H.M.S. *Resolute*,” *Two Dramatic Episodes of New England Whaling*, The Marine Historical Association, Inc., Mystic, Connecticut, July 1958.