



The DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN National Center *for* White House History *at* Decatur House

Decatur House, constructed in 1818 for naval hero Stephen Decatur, was the first residence built on Lafayette Square after the President's House and includes an extant c.1837 urban slave quarters and carriage house, extending along H Street. The White House Historical Association will preserve and adapt the Decatur House property into the David M. Rubenstein National Center for White House History. This facility will house a digital library to compile documentation and support historical research and will provide innovative education programs related to the study and history of the White House.

CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC FABRIC AND SPACES

The White House Historical Association seeks to celebrate and interpret the layered architectural and social history within beautifully conserved spaces at the Decatur House. Throughout the building and its dependencies, period historic finishes or fabric meticulously have been conserved. The story

of this remarkable conservation work by skilled craftsmen and artisans can be experienced in the historic entertaining spaces of Decatur House. New facilities and required upgrades and repairs to mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems have been made with minimal disruption of historic fabric.

WHAT'S AHEAD?

This lead gift launches the association on a capital and endowment campaign to enlist partners for the David M. Rubenstein National Center for White House History at Decatur House project. Contributions will fund conservation of the architecture, fine and decorative arts, and physical improvements to the property. The campaign dollars also will support educational, research and public programming. Planning for the National Center's operations are underway and will provide rehabilitated spaces for equipment and supporting technology for a digital research library, education workshops, student field trips and lecture programs, and a reinvented Carriage House to host public events and private rentals.



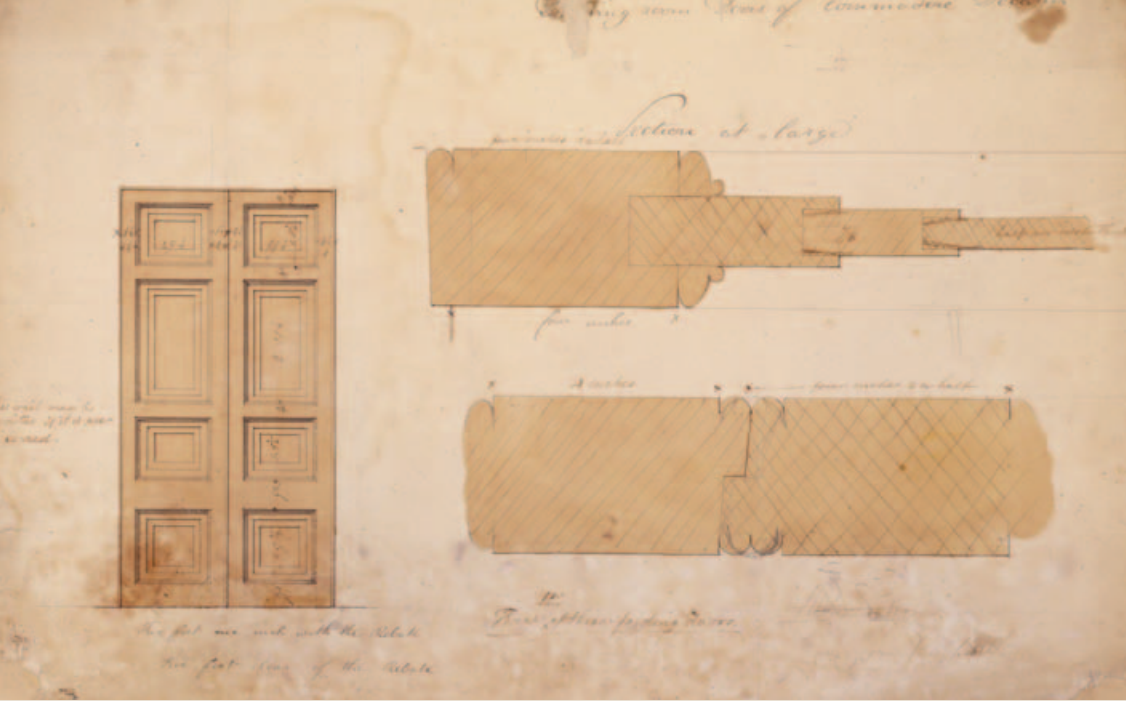
Exteriors of Decatur House and Slave Quarters

preserved

The conservation of the Decatur House property began with repairs to the exterior of Decatur House including roof slate and gutter replacement, conservation of the windows and raised panel soffit, re-installation of shutters on the north elevation, and re-opening of an original skylight over the service stairs.

The next phase of work focused on the exterior of the Slave Quarters, which remains relatively

unchanged from its appearance prior to the Civil War and is a rare, extant example of an urban slave quarters. Conservation of this building included replacement of the slate roof, preservation of the original wood shingle roof below the slate roof, replication and installation of snowboards, and re-establishing the original window jambs that had been obscured by modern stucco.



Historic Figured Maple *revealed*

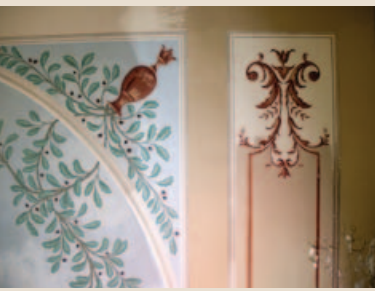
As construction began on Stephen Decatur's house in January 1818, he purchased curled and birds eye maple from a supplier in Boston, and this wood likely became the distinctive figured maple doors, shutters, and panels designed for the second floor of Decatur House by its architect, Benjamin H. Latrobe. A garnet lacquer was applied as the original finish on all the pieces; however, over the past two centuries, accumulations of dirt, soot, varnish, and paint obscured the beauty of the figured wood.

As part of the conservation of Decatur House undertaken by the White House Historical Association, the doors, shutters, and panels have been repaired and carefully cleaned to expose the original finish, which has deepened with age. On

the shutters, where the original finish had been destroyed by exposure to sunlight and moisture, it has been replicated to match the aged, original garnet lacquer. The original crystal knobs on both the doors and shutters have also been gently cleaned to recapture their original luminosity.

The fourth owner of Decatur House, Edward F. Beale, also added distinctive wood finishes to the building with the installation of patterned wood floors in the entertaining parlors. These floors include the marquetry Seal of California that served as an announcement of Beale's ties to the state where he had substantial business interests.

Top: Benjamin Latrobe's 1818 drawing for the Decatur House doors. Library of Congress.



Chandeliers, Mirrors and Murals *conserved*

Edward and Mary Beale commissioned the installation of the mirrors and chandeliers of these rooms in the 1870s. In 2011, the mirrors and chandeliers were removed, cleaned, conserved and re-installed. A maker's mark identified the fixtures as the work of Follett & Clarkson Osler of Birmingham, England, renowned manufacturers of precision cut chandeliers. The chandeliers (now adapted for electricity) are outstanding examples of the Osler "brilliant style" of the 1870s.

Commissioned by Marie Beale and directed by restoration architect Thomas T. Waterman, mural artists painted the naturalistic frescoes on the ceilings of the second floor of Decatur House in 1944. The murals, conserved to remove dirt and grime, repair cracks and water damage, and infill missing paint, depict an oak bearing acorns, symbolic of antiquity and strength, and grape vines, representing peace and tranquility, against a backdrop of fluffy clouds in a blue sky.



Japanese *Kakemono* Paintings to be *restored*

A series of six Japanese “kakemono,” scroll paintings by Kunitsura Utagama, 1872, depict the changing seasons. At some point in the late nineteenth century, Edward and Mary Beale papered the watercolor paintings to the walls of this room, bordered by patterned blue wallpaper, and early in the 20th century the family mounted them on panels framed with brocade. After years

of display, exposure to the environment darkened their appearance and severely weakened their stability. In 2011, research began in order to determine the history of the paintings, the Beales’ interest in Japanese art and culture, and how to best protect them for future display. Currently a conservation plan is underway to bring these paintings back to their original beauty.



Frances Bicknell Carpenter, *The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation*, 1864.



Paths to Freedom

Slavery, Emancipation, and the Power of the President

An educational field trip is currently available for classroom visits, grades 4-6. While participating in a costumed reenactment, students recreate the events surrounding the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The rooms in 19th-

century Decatur House are stage sets for the filming of the performance. Students imagine these spaces as the locations of historic moments in Abraham Lincoln's White House.