

commentary

from other pens...

Photographer had 'talent for detail'

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — As the White House moved into the 20th century, a young female photographer opened her slow-speed lens on fast-moving times.

Frances Benjamin Johnston portrayed Theodore Roosevelt in his new Army uniform, talked her way into the private ceremony that ended the Spanish-American War and captured President William McKinley on a glass-plate negative 15 minutes before his 1901 assassination.

A woman of cheerful charm, extensive social connections and unusual persistence, she documented the White House as it moved from the overstuffed Gilded Age to the classic simplicity favored by Roosevelt when he took over the presidency.

"Her photographs represent the last look at the Victorian White House and the first look at the image of the White House as we know it today," says William B. Bushong, historian on the staff of the White House Historical Association and a student of Johnston's work.

In 1893, still at the beginning of what would turn out to be a 60-year free-lance photographic career, Johnston placed an ad in a Washington newspaper: "White House For Sale — One Dollar."

It was a come-on for a souvenir booklet of her photographs. She later sold hundreds of her prints to magazines.

"The woman who makes photography profitable must have good common sense, unlimited patience to carry through her failures, equally unlimited tact, good taste, a quick eye, a talent for detail and a genius for hard work," Johnston wrote in an 1897 magazine article.

A "talent for detail" became her hallmark. But she said she approached the technical side of her profession mainly by instinct.

"I wore out one camera after another and never had any of those fancy gadgets; always judged exposure by guess," she said years later.

But quality was important. "I would never publish a photograph which fell below the standard I have set for myself," she said.

Johnston's White House portraits begin with her 1888 shot of her distant cousin, first lady Frances Cleveland, looking up from a book with the light from an arched White House window on her face.

In one, Alice Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's daughter, coolly gazes into the lens standing against a jungle of foliage in the conservatory.

The younger Roosevelt children were favorite subjects. Johnston aimed her lens as they rode their pony across the grounds or added themselves to a row of White House policemen reporting for duty.

"She was helped enormously in securing access by the fact many of the people she portrayed said her photographs were the best images they had ever seen of themselves," Bushong says.

Her impulses extended behind the pillars and chandeliers. She photographed Dolly Johnson, the Clevelands' cook, in the basement kitchen where she prepared the foods the president liked. Jerry Smith, a footman, posed for her in the white "duster" he used to protect his livery.

Johnston shot McKinley's map-lined, telegraph-equipped war room during the 1898 war with Spain. She documented the new West Wing in 1902 after Roosevelt moved the president's offices there.

Outside the White House, her portraits included Mark Twain, in a white summer suit; black leaders Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver; and Susan B. Anthony, the suffrage crusader.

A self-portrait shows her with skirts daringly raised above the ankle, cigarette in one hand and a beer stein in another.

After photographing American leaders for 15 years, she moved to New York and shifted to garden and architectural photography.

By the time she died in New Orleans in 1952 she might have chuckled once more at a party toast offered by Washington friends a half-century earlier: "Long may she wave and entertain — and often snap the shutter."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for more than 30 years.



Foreign joint ventures pay no taxes

Should the collector of Indian Rocks (Treasury Secretary) cut taxes on the nuclear corporations? If he did would they stop building sweat shops in China?

Not likely they don't pay any taxes now. In this free trade for some it is far more appropriate that they receive a tax rebate from Importers. This protective tariff in reverse is older than Ozzie and Harriet.

Once upon a time tariffs used to be money to the U.S. treasury, but now it goes to the same corporate dinosaurs of the last century.

You could call it an earned income tax credit for the Most Favored Domestic Consortiums.

If that doesn't chap you then how about this. It is a World Trade Organization sanctioned law that is as isolationist as Herbert Hoover. The United States Foreign Sales Corporation collects money that goes to more than 6,000 U.S. companies who have off shore subsidiaries.

If IBM Atlantic Richfield Co., Philips Petroleum Co., Motorola, or General Motors Corp. ever had to pay their taxes they would join their pal Jiang and their tax havens in the Bahamas.



wayne gattshall

• wayne's world

You know China is catching on to this American capitalism thing. Just make friends with American nuclear corporations, and the Peoples Republic of China can do anything it wants to.

The Chinese Air Force owns China United Airline and is one of nearly 2,000 Peoples Republic army-owned companies doing business in America.

Furthermore we have been competing with foreign joint ventures and state owned enterprises like IBM China, Great Wall Computer Shenzhen Co. Ltd. and Shenzhen Kaifa Technology Co. Ltd.

Everywhere you look there are joint ventured companies like Atlantic Richfield Co. and Philips Petroleum Co., Motorola Inc. and Lucent Technologies Inc. Even the "what is good for General Motors is good for America" car maker is in cahoots

with Jiang. Now it's "what is good for China is good for the makers of those gas guzzling pickup trucks and sports utility vehicles" and they get a tax break doing it.

Well, the Indian rock collector in the it takes a village Washington, is right it's time for tax reform so how about a value added tax?

Americans work six months to pay their taxes and some fancy guy thinks it is unfair these money bags corporations should pay any taxes at all.

So congratulation take a vacation in the Bahamas. With or without a tax cut it's too easy to sit on the beach with Jiang Zemin and open up secret banks accounts. No filing IRS 1099 for them. No government telling them you better pay your taxes.

It's just the manifestations of Yankee capitalism, don't you know.

So the tax paying voters might as well take a swig of soy milk. These consortiums that have no national flags conspire to fix their prices might as well take that tax holiday in the Caribbean.

You know that's better than \$5.00 wheat!

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The political geography of Jim Jeffords

Jim Jeffords is the latest American politician to feel the local pressure of this country's divisive geography.

This Vermont Yankee's discomfort with the Republican party of his roots is typical of what's happening nationwide.

If you're from the Northeast or West, your neighbors are secular in their politics, pro-choice on abortion, and tolerant-to-liberal in their social values. If you're from the heartland that binds the Bible Belt to the Rocky Mountains, your world is pro-gun, pro-life and Christian conservative.

As a Republican, Jeffords is the odd man out — not just in New England, but in the Northeast generally. His Green Mountain State gets greener every year with new arrivals from New York. Bernard Sanders, a Brooklyn native, went to live there in the late 1960s. Today, he's the only self-proclaimed socialist in the U.S. Congress.

Vermonters have shown their liberal tilt on a wide range of matters. The legislature passed a Clean Air bill that slaps a special tax on cars getting less than 20 miles per gallon. It was the only state to reject the flag-burning amendment to the Constitution. It recognized civil unions between partners of the same sex.

Here's how the Almanac of American Politics



chris matthews

• commentary

sizes up Jefford's constituency:

"Vermont, proclaiming its desire to preserve the environment and the past, has attracted left-leaning migrants from New York and elsewhere, willing to pay higher taxes and higher prices for the privilege of living in a seemingly pristine setting where the governor tries to confine Wal-Marts to the existing tiny downtowns."

This explains why Jeffords has gained in home state polls since distancing himself from the Texas-based presidency of George W. Bush. It explains why a Yankee would split from a party that no longer represents his moderate, tolerant, conservationist roots.

Jeffords' discomfort with the Grand Old party is endemic of a country that is realigning itself along geographic, rather than historic, divides. Once the Democrats' "solid South," the former states of the Confederacy are now the strongest

Republican region in the country. Once the political base of Abraham Lincoln, the North is now the domain of Ted Kennedy, Joe Lieberman and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The Pacific Coast has seen the same dramatic shift. Not too many years ago, moderate Republicans practically owned the California governorship. There were lawmakers named Earl Warren, Pete McCloskey and Pete Wilson. Today, such figures are a vanished breed. Of the six senators from the Pacific states, just one is Republican.

This is the same red-vs.-blue map that narrowly elected Bush. If Jim Jeffords feels he is a bad fit with the Bible Belted, pro-oil party of George W. Bush, he has many sympathizers in the Northeast and West. More and more, this country's politics are being balkanized into two very different countries that have little use for the homeboy who no longer thinks like his neighbors.

The Jim Jeffords story is not about backroom Washington politics. It's about a country that is slowly but steadily coming apart.

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