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Under This Roof: The White House And The Presidency - 21 Presidents, 21 Rooms, 21 Inside Stories

PAUL BRANDUS



Synopsis

In *Under This Roof*, award-winning White House journalist Paul Brandus weaves together stories of the presidents, their families, the events of their time, and an oft-ignored major character, the White House itself. From George Washington to the current occupant, Barack Obama - the story of the White House is the story of America itself, Brandus writes. You'll: Walk with John Adams through the still-unfinished mansion and watch Thomas Jefferson plot to buy the Louisiana Territory. Feel the fear and panic as British invaders approach the mansion in 1814 - and Dolley Madison frantically saves a painting of Washington. Be in the room as one president is secretly sworn in and another gambles away the White House china in a card game. Stand by the presidential bed as one First Lady - covering up her husband's illness from the nation-secretly makes decisions on his behalf. Learn how telephones, movies, radio, and TV changed the presidency - and the nation itself. Through triumph and tragedy, boom and bust, secrets and scandals, Brandus brings history to life in this riveting, highly entertaining inside look at the presidency and White House.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like many books before it, this work follows a familiar pattern. Stepping through the various US Presidential administrations, it devotes a few pages to each, and highlights some of the major successes or failures of each one. The big difference in this book, though, is the inclusion of the history of the physical White House. That turned out to be a fascinating topic.=== The Good Stuff ===* Paul Brandus writes well. He avoids the long paragraphs and obscure vocabulary of

and produces a fun-to-read and easily flowing text. And while I often find books written in this format to be somewhat fatiguing to read, this one was an exception. I ended up reading it in a single day, and it held my attention throughout.* The book is more an entertainment than a serious history. Brandus picks and chooses what Presidents he chooses to include and the criteria seems to be "Which ones are fun to read about". The author skips entire administrations, and there is no overriding thesis to the work.* While I am a bit of a history buff, quite a bit of the information was new to me. For example, I knew Warren Harding was a bit of a scoundrel, but his exploits make some more recent presidents look like poster-children for marital fidelity. Nor was I aware that Harding gambled away a set of White House china in a poker game. The book is full of these sorts of revelations. I never realized that after her husband suffered a stroke, Edith Wilson took over many of his duties.* Brandus concentrates about a quarter of the book on the White House itself, and this was the best and most interesting content. I was aware of numerous renovations to the White House, but never realized how close to collapse, or demolition, it had come.

How many times have you been in an old building and have said to yourself, "If only these walls could talk?" Well, apparently, day after day, the walls of the White House talked to one of its current residents, award-winning White House Press Corp reporter Paul Brandus. And Paul wrote it all down, added some tantalizing tidbits of behind-the-scenes American History that occurred between these walls, and published this "can't-put-it-down" inside story of one of America's greatest icons, The White House. Behind its solid facade, The White House has been one of America's greatest fixer-uppers. Right from day one and given a choice between affairs-of-state and home-repair, American Presidents have always chosen the former. Many Americans living today only know Jackie Kennedy's White House, a beautiful showcase to the grandeur and history of the American Presidency. But the White House walls told Paul a different story, of John Adams freezing and coughing in a smoke filled shell of an unfinished building that was heated by poorly ventilated fireplaces and located in an otherwise empty swamp, while his wife hung his underwear and the rest of the wash in the East Room to dry. Of Dolly Madison, home alone, escaping with as much as she and her staff could pack into wagons, as the White House burned during the War of 1812. It seems that her husband had decided that the British would not attack Washington and had left the White House undefended. And then there are Harry Truman's unsuspecting guests who were unaware that the upper floors of the White House could collapse on them at any moment.

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