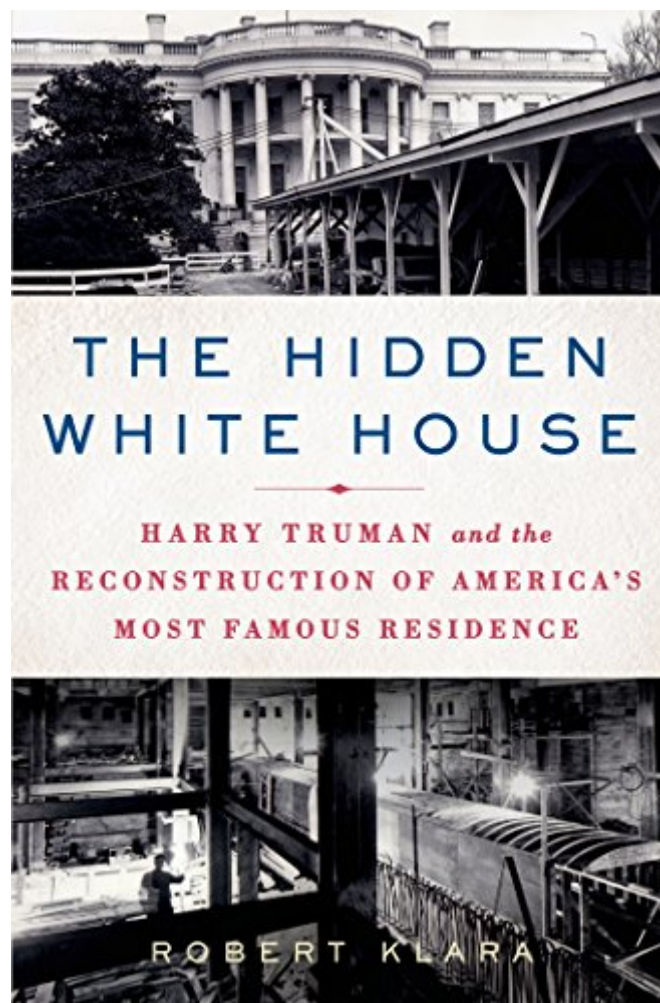




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# The Hidden White House: Harry Truman And The Reconstruction Of America's Most Famous Residence



## Synopsis

Now including an excerpt from THE DEVIL'S MERCEDES: The Bizarre and Disturbing Adventures of Hitler's Limousine in America by Robert Klara. Coming March 2017. Critically acclaimed author Robert Klara leads readers through an unmatched tale of political ambition and technical skill: the Truman administration's controversial rebuilding of the White House. In 1948, President Harry Truman, enjoying a bath on the White House's second floor, almost plunged through the ceiling of the Blue Room into a tea party for the Daughters of the American Revolution. A handpicked team of the country's top architects conducted a secret inspection of the troubled mansion and, after discovering it was in imminent danger of collapse, insisted that the First Family be evicted immediately. What followed would be the most historically significant and politically complex home-improvement job in American history. While the Trumans camped across the street at Blair House, Congress debated whether to bulldoze the White House completely, and the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb, starting the Cold War. Indefatigable researcher Robert Klara reveals what has, until now, been little understood about this episode: America's most famous historic home was basically demolished, giving birth to today's White House. Leaving only the mansion's facade untouched, workmen gutted everything within, replacing it with a steel frame and a complex labyrinth deep below ground that soon came to include a top-secret nuclear fallout shelter. The story of Truman's rebuilding of the White House is a snapshot of postwar America and its first Cold War leader, undertaking a job that changed the centerpiece of the country's national heritage. The job was by no means perfect, but it was remarkable – and, until now, all but forgotten.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a highly recommended read if you ( and who doesn't ) like Harry Truman. Having recently finished David McCoullough's "Truman", and that's a major accomplishment ("Truman" is thousand pages, 800 would have been enough, Tuchman would said it all in 700) you would think you know Harry Truman. Would like to find time to elaborate on my thoughts on Klara's "Hidden White House",but for now, the beauty of this effort is that you get to know the real Harry Truman. So, if you are keenly interested in this vital period in US history get to know the real Harry Truman.This short, very readable book is a must supplement to "Truman", and learn some fascinating bits of history about our White House.OK. One more aside, when the job was finally finished Harry Truman anguish about the cost and construction delay. Truman said had he been in charge he you accomplished the job at half the cost in half the time. The author mocked Truman for saying this. But if you really know this complex man would really know that Harry Truman would have done it (despite every effort from a disfunction congress or government in general to drive up the cost and cause delays).

This would really be a 4.5 star review if allowed half stars.It's one of those little known facts about America's most famous residence: There have really been two White Houses; the one designed by James Hoban and built between 1792 and 1800, and the one designed by President Truman (along with White House Architect Lorenzo Winslow and the Commission on the Renovation of the Executive Mansion) that was built by John McShain between 1949 and 1952. The two structures really only share a general layout and the same four outer walls.This bit of historical trivia has always fascinated me, the construction of a modern building within a centuries-old facade, and I had been eager for a while to learn more about it.Robert Klara weaves his exhaustive research into a peppy narrative that moves along at brisk, engaging pace. He does a terrific job of exploring the scope of the problem and is quite successful at capturing the distinct voices and personalities of the

various players involved in solving it. In addition to learning a lot about the White House, I learned a lot about Truman the president and Truman the man. Klara is not awestruck by his subject matter, and his book is as attuned to flaws and shortcomings as it is to triumphs. His citations are staggeringly comprehensive, and provide a great road map for the reader that wants to dig even deeper into any given aspect of the particular historic project. I only have two real complaints: 1) Sometimes, in his attempts to spice up the storytelling of what could have easily been a dry treatise, he's a bit too bold about putting himself into the heads of the participants, declaratively presenting private thoughts that can only be assumptions based on educated conclusions. He also dwells overlong at times on irrelevant bits of color, particularly Lorenzo Winslow's fascination with séances and the occult. 2) The book only includes sixteen pages of photographs in a glossy insert near the center. The photos that we do get are excellent, but the book would have benefited from even more of Abbie Rowe's incredible black and white photography, scattered throughout in context within the narrative.

It is hard to comprehend what this entailed even with the amazing amounts of research and photos. For anyone connected with either politics or construction it is a must read. Of course, history buffs have to be included, too. I'll never quite fathom how any government really works. This book helps understand it.

Robert Klara is a gifted and skilled author. His research and attention to detail are impeccable. He has the unique ability to seek out, research, and tell the obscure and fascinating stories that history has often overlooked. I was so enthralled by his stories and historical detail, that during a visit to Washington DC I actually sought out locations that he wrote about in his book. His depictions are so authentic, vivid, and descriptive, that thanks to Robert Klara I was able to close my eyes and vision what had happened there 67 years earlier. Robert Klara's "FDR's Funeral Train" and his "The Hidden White House" are two of the finest and most compelling historical based books I have ever read. Robert Klara is one of America's great story tellers. He has gained my utmost respect as a writer and conveyor of history. If he writes it, I will be sure to read it.

This book is splendid! Mr. Klara entertains us from cover to cover. He crafts an excellent and very readable yarn against the backdrop of the Truman administration. He tells us of the neglect that had

been visited on the WH by previous presidents, and explains clearly how the mansion was ... well ... sinking ... and tearing itself apart in the process. Quite literally. Klara also gives us a marvelously insightful view of the Truman's basic humanity. The First Lady, for example, insists on vacuuming the living quarters herself. I wonder if that is still the case? Also included, are insightful vignettes about the history of the times - including the 1948 election, the Soviets getting the A-bomb, the Korean war, and the attempted assassination of Truman. But these important world events are woven into the story in a way that does not detract from it. Enough detail to show their impact on the reconstruction of the WH, but not so much that they become a distraction. Most historical books I read today give the reader just TOO MUCH detail. Not so, here. Finally, I want to say that Klara spins his well-researched yarn in a very engaging manner. Quite simply, he makes the reader smile. He tells us (p. 206) about how HST was addressing a group of school children that had been bussed to the WH, and after he finished, he asked if there were any questions. "Silence ensued. Then one small hand rose over the sea of heads. It was a little girl clutching a box camera. 'Grin, will ya?' she asked. Truman grinned and the girl snapped his picture." "First rate."

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