

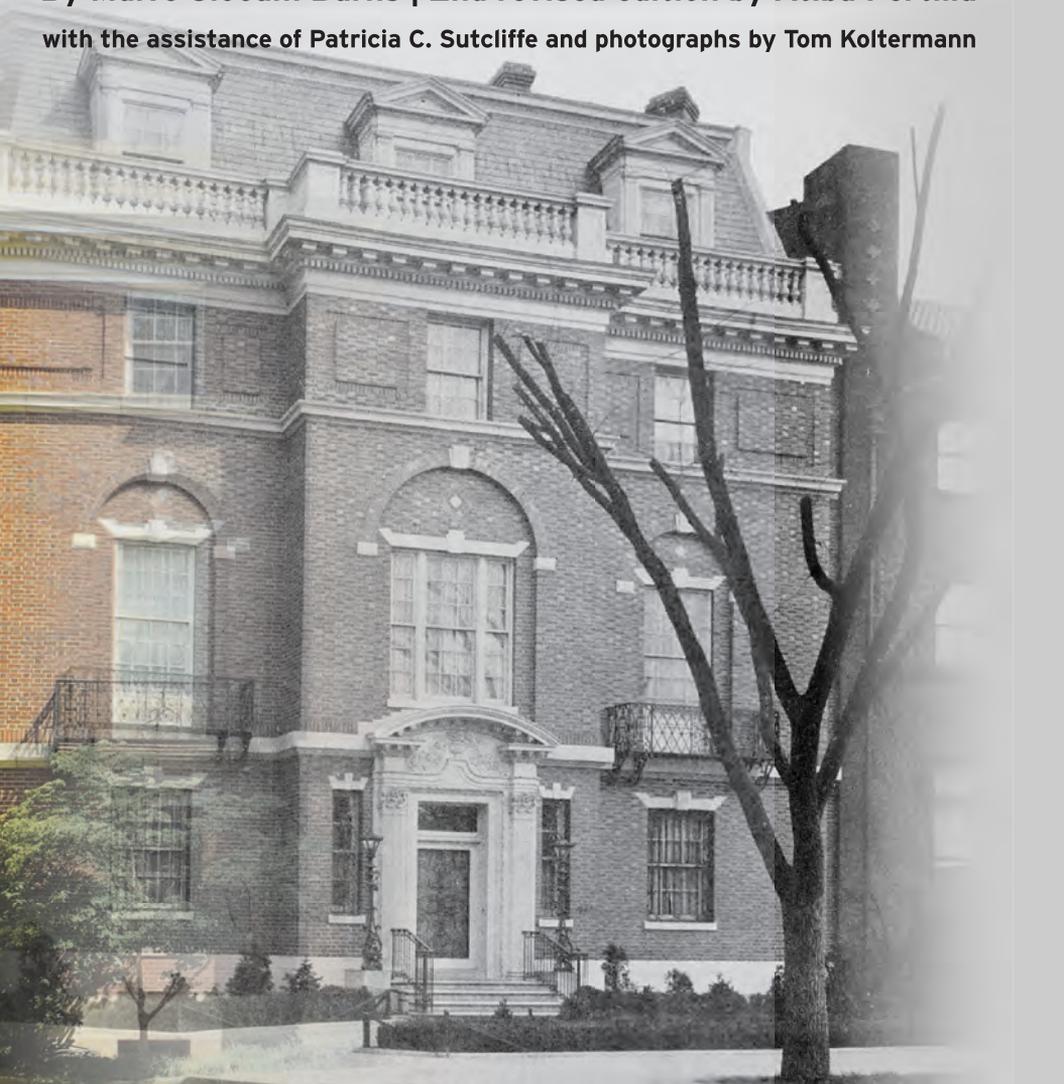
Washington's Second Blair House

1607 New Hampshire Ave NW

An Illustrated History

By Malve Slocum Burns | 2nd revised edition by Atiba Pertilla

with the assistance of Patricia C. Sutcliffe and photographs by Tom Koltermann



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PREFACE

Shortly after it was founded in 1987, the German Historical Institute of Washington, DC, needed larger quarters for its growing staff and library. The search of its founding director Hartmut Lehmann centered on the Dupont Circle area, which is home to embassies, think tanks, office buildings, and the Washington branch of Johns Hopkins University, but is also residential. Its attractive mix of large mansions of the Gilded Age on the avenues and smaller townhouses on the side streets makes for a grand yet intimate neighborhood.

The search ended in the fall of 1988 with a decision in favor of 1607 New Hampshire Avenue NW, a building now owned and graciously leased to the GHI by the Volkswagen Foundation. The elegant brick mansion, erected in 1911, offered a ballroom that could serve as a lecture hall along with smaller spaces—the former living and servants’ quarters—for quiet research and office work. The building had been divided into numerous small offices, but there were still strong traces of its original grandeur. Painstaking renovation reopened the mansion’s free-flowing spaces, and on April 1, 1990, the institute moved into its splendid new quarters.

For whom had the mansion been built? Who had designed it?

A decade after the German Historical Institute moved to its home on New Hampshire Avenue, then-director Christof Mauch asked Dr. Malve Slocum Burns to research and write the building's history in order to satisfy the curiosity of the institute's staff and visitors about the building's past. The first edition of *Washington's Second Blair House* was the result. Dr. Burns set the story of a family and a house within a larger social and political context. The Blairs were among Washington's most prominent families in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Dr. Burns brought their world to life. The book also traced the career of architect Jules Henri de Sibour, the designer of the institute's current home, and offered readers a verbal tour of Sibour's masterful landmark.

With the 30th anniversary of the German Historical Institute approaching, we at the GHI decided that the time had come to revise the history in light of the latest scholarship and to include further research into the history of Washington, the Blair family, and especially of the lives of the household employees who shared 1607 New Hampshire Avenue with its original owners, Woodbury and Emily Blair. With the kind permission of Dr. Burns, we have added additional information throughout the book to deepen insight into the building and the era whence it emerged.

Some thanks are in order. I would first like to thank the Volkswagen Foundation for making it possible for the German Historical Institute to be housed in such a remarkable building. I would also like to express my appreciation to Atiba Pertilla and Patricia C. Sut-

cliffe for their new research and dedicated work on revising and expanding *Washington's Second Blair House*. Their efforts have given the German Historical Institute all the more reason to be house-proud.

Prof. Dr. Simone Lässig

Director, German Historical Institute

September 2017

INTRODUCTION TO WASHINGTON'S SECOND BLAIR HOUSE



Figure 1: The Second Blair House, c. 1923.

A house is a period piece, reflecting the spirit of its age and place. It preserves in brick and stone impulses of its time—some of its defin-

ing features—together with the aspirations of its architect and commissioning owner. Once it has taken form and stands alone, it makes time stand still.

1607 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington's Second Blair House, one of the finest and best-preserved Beaux Arts buildings in the city of Washington, is such a time capsule. It speaks of America's exuberance in the early twentieth century during a period of exploding growth for the city and its neighborhood, Dupont Circle. It expresses the sensitivities of its Paris-trained architect, Jules Henri de Sibour, and its owner, Woodbury Blair.

Both men, the architect and the owner of the Second Blair House, are distinctly American, in very different ways. Woodbury belonged to one of America's leading political families: his father Montgomery served as Abraham Lincoln's Postmaster General, his uncle as a Union general and senator from Missouri, and his grandfather, Francis Preston Blair, as trusted advisor to three presidents—Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and Abraham Lincoln. His maternal grandfather, Levi Woodbury, had served as a governor, cabinet secretary, and Supreme Court justice. He grew up across from the White House, where he played with Lincoln's children, and spent his entire career in Washington. Today, we would call him the quintessential insider.¹

De Sibour, for his part, was a figure who was able to embody both the appealing prestige of European aristocracy and a newly emerging American prosperity. On his father's side, he was descended from a noble family that had largely lost its wealth in the aftermath of the French Revolution; de Sibour's mother, on the other hand, was a

member of a Maine family that made a fortune in New England railroads. Born in France but raised in the United States, educated at Yale but also in Paris, in his early career, he shuttled between two cities: New York, where his professional life began, and Washington, where it reached its zenith. He left an important mark on Washington, especially in the Dupont Circle area, through the variety of residential, civic, and commercial buildings he designed. De Sibour benefited from the need and desire of wealthy Americans to build homes that invoked the grand French and English historical styles. The achievements of Europe's past elite were now imported for America's leaders. Woodbury was a member of that elite, and de Sibour the perfect mediator between the old and new world establishment.

The life and family history of Woodbury link Washington's Second Blair House to the city and nation's history. Its location just a block and a half from fashionable Dupont Circle places it near the homes of senators, presidential widows, newspaper barons, and mining moguls who built opulent mansions in the open fields at the northwestern edge of the city during a particularly brilliant period in the history of the District of Columbia. The Second Blair House's restrained splendor, its blending of traditional and contemporary, is quintessentially American, though its elegant façade could grace a Haussmann boulevard in Paris.

Built in 1911, it reflects an elite that was sure of its place in the world as well as the Blairs' interest in projecting a sense of accomplishment, grace, and refinement. To better understand what makes 1607 New Hampshire Avenue NW distinct and in what ways it reflects

the history of the Blair family and Woodbury's own aspirations, we shall look first at Woodbury within the context of his prominent family, then follow the course of his life as reflected in family letters and accounts, with an emphasis on his own letters. In a third section, we shall discuss some of the Dupont Circle neighbors, the lives of Woodbury Blair and his wife Emily Blair, and the experiences of the domestic servants whose labor helped make their daily lives comfortable. In part four, we shall outline the life and contributions of Jules Henri de Sibour, the architect of Washington's Second Blair House. Part five provides a glimpse of the house as it might have looked during a party in 1914 and also includes a prose tour of the house, the home of the German Historical Institute since 1990.

WOODBURY BLAIR, SCION OF A POLITICAL CLAN

Woodbury Blair built his Dupont Circle residence at the peak of his career, in his late fifties.

He did not really need a new home; together with his siblings, he owned a substantial Federal Era house on 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, inherited from his father Montgomery. He had lived in this house all his life and would return to it every week for Sunday lunch, even after he had moved into his new residence on New Hampshire Avenue. Woodbury's first home is now known as Blair House, the President's Guest House. In the late 1940s, Blair House even became the home of President Harry Truman and his wife, Bess, while the White House was being renovated. Back in 1911, however, Woodbury, his brother Gist, and sister Minn—their youngest brother, Montgomery, lived at their country estate—simply referred to their Washington home as “1651.”²

Family correspondence indicates that both a change in his fortunes and family difficulties may have prompted Woodbury to build the second Blair house. After spending his entire life living in the home where he was born, at the age of 54, in 1907, Woodbury married Emily Wallach, age 44, who descended from another elite Washington family. Two years later, in 1909, Woodbury's aunt Ellen Woodbury died. Her estate included a variety of parcels of real estate scattered throughout Washington, DC, including two lots at the corner of New Hampshire Avenue and Corcoran Street. Woodbury bought out the other heirs and made arrangements to build his own home on the site.³

Given the Blairs' ages, the house was probably not designed with the expectation of raising a family there. But together with his architect, Jules Henri de Sibour, Woodbury undertook to build a home that reflected his wealth and refinement and offered an attractive venue for social gatherings—dress balls, formal dinners, and high teas.⁴ Woodbury and his wife Emily lived in grand style at 1607, attended by 12 servants. When they motored off to their summer home in Newport, Rhode Island, to escape Washington's summer heat each year—after having stored their silver and covered the furniture—they did so in two chauffeur-driven cars.⁵

The Blairs had not always traveled in luxury. Woodbury's grandfather Francis Preston Blair, a plucky lawyer of sharp intellect, had left Kentucky in a covered wagon when he was called to serve President Jackson, his clothes and household goods covered in dust. Washington had also received him with dust. It was not yet the dynamic capital

of Woodbury's time that attracted the nation's rich and powerful, but rather still very much a rural town. To be sure, the grandiose Capitol Building rose above the White House, but one could also stand at its doorway and see shackled men, women, and children being marched to the city's slave market.⁶

Francis Preston Blair, the son of a Kentucky attorney general, launched his involvement in politics as a backer of his home state's New Court Party, a faction which sought to win debt relief for the state's poor farmers in the wake of the Panic of 1819. His skill as a writer of speeches and author of pamphlets drew the attention of the ambitious Andrew Jackson, who turned to Blair and other like-minded newspaper editors to back his populist presidential campaign in 1828. Four years later, Jackson encouraged Blair to move to Washington in order to establish a new newspaper, the *Washington Globe*, to serve as his administration's mouthpiece. During the furor that followed Jackson's decision to veto the rechartering of the Bank of the United States, for example, newspapers throughout the country took their cues on how to explain Jackson's point of view from Blair's editorials. Blair's work was vindicated when Jackson won the 1832 election by an even wider margin than he had enjoyed four years earlier.⁷

Blair's alliance with Andrew Jackson led to a rapid improvement in the family's fortunes. Blair received lucrative public printing contracts wrested away from publishers hostile to the Jackson administration.⁸ His wife, Eliza Gist Blair, supported his political career by helping with the writing and editing of his speeches, running the business during his absences from Washington, and maintaining their home as

a gathering place for social events.⁹ By 1837, Francis Preston Blair was able to buy the spacious brick building on what was then President's Square—the later Blair House—that would also become Woodbury's home. Living just a stone's throw from the White House, Francis Preston left a bucket of fresh milk by the president's door every morning. Increasingly estranged from his cabinet appointees, Jackson would frequently step over to the Blairs' home for meetings with a group of his unofficial advisors—giving rise to the derogatory expression “Kitchen Cabinet.”¹⁰

Direct access to the White House continued for Francis Preston under President Martin Van Buren—the two would remain life-long friends—but became frayed under subsequent administrations. Blair was pushed out of the *Globe* by incoming president James Polk in 1845, but was able to sell his interest for a large profit. By his own estimate he was worth \$100,000 (or approximately \$3.2 million in 2015 dollars).¹¹ He used a portion of his windfall to build a country home just beyond the borders of the District of Columbia that he called Silver Spring after a small local stream. The house's name would eventually be adopted to refer to the entire surrounding community. Meanwhile, his oldest son Montgomery built a mansion nearby called Falkland, and his second son James built another mansion nearby called The Moorings. The compound of three estates made it easy for the Blair families to spend time together. Francis Preston Blair loved to have his grandchildren about him and did everything possible to keep them entertained.¹²

The country estate would also function as a command center for planning political strategies. From the 1850s onward, the Blairs would gather here to write letters and telegrams to party leaders, like-minded friends, and newspaper editors as they watched with dismay how one administration after another “pandered” to Southern interests; they would set off from there to the Northern and Western states. But this did not happen until after Francis Preston’s son Montgomery arrived in Washington.

At first, Montgomery had stayed behind in Kentucky when his parents answered Andrew Jackson’s call. The 17-year-old wanted to finish his schooling, while his sister Lizzie and brother Frank moved to President’s Square and enjoyed the run of the White House under President Jackson’s affectionate eye. After graduation from Transylvania College, Montgomery enrolled at West Point in obedience to entreaties from both his father and President Jackson. Studious and bright, he had no liking for the military. But he was a dutiful son and would remain so throughout his life. Francis Preston expected great things from his sons and harbored presidential ambitions for both Montgomery and Frank. While Montgomery acquitted himself well, after a brief stint in the Seminole War, he settled on the study of law, which would remain his life’s vocation.¹³

With the help of his maternal grandparents, Montgomery established himself in St. Louis, where he served as mayor from 1842 to 1843 and then as a judge. Specializing in land and corporate law, as well as the up-and-coming railroad business, he became a wealthy

and influential man. His first wife, Caroline Buckner, died in childbirth in 1844, leaving a two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth (Betty), who was adopted by Francis and Eliza Blair. Two years later, he married Mary Elizabeth (Minna) Woodbury, a daughter of Levi Woodbury, a New Hampshire politician. Over the course of his lengthy career, Levi Woodbury served as a governor and senator from New Hampshire, a cabinet secretary in both the Jackson and Van Buren administrations, and finally as an associate justice of the Supreme Court (from 1845 until his death in 1851). Levi Woodbury's political career had been made possible in part by the wealth of his father-in-law, a Portland merchant named Asa Clapp; in turn, Minna Woodbury Blair, who was one of three sisters, eventually received an inheritance that helped her children enjoy a comfortable living.¹⁴

By all accounts, Minna and Montgomery had a harmonious marriage, producing five children, four of whom lived into adulthood.¹⁵ The Blair and Woodbury families had been on cordial terms for years, and from the first the two grandfathers harbored hopes that one of Montgomery and Minna's sons might one day become president. Mary Elizabeth—known as Minn or Minna—their oldest child, was born in 1850; Woodbury, the couple's first son, was born two years later and named Levi Woodbury Blair, after his grandfather, but through his whole life only used his middle name, Woodbury. Another daughter, Mary, was born in 1854 and died in 1862; a second son, Gist, was born in 1860, and finally a third son, Montgomery, was born in 1865.

Levi Woodbury Blair was born in St. Louis on September 1, 1852. The year of Woodbury's birth witnessed one of the most contested

Democratic conventions ever, exhibiting the deep rifts in the nation. Those rifts would eventually induce the Blairs—until then staunch Democrats—to move away from their beloved party and help lay the foundation for the Republican Party. Montgomery's father urged him to return to Washington in hopes that he would be invited to join the cabinet of the newly inaugurated Democratic president, Franklin Pierce. While the appointment failed to materialize, Montgomery established a law practice and expanded Blair House by adding first a new wing and then another story.¹⁶

In the 1830s, Francis Preston Blair's *Washington Globe* and other Jacksonian newspapers had attacked abolitionists for stirring up sectionalism and purportedly preparing the way for the "restoration of plutocracy."¹⁷ In the years that followed, however, Francis Preston and his sons—intelligent, focused Montgomery and dashing, restless Frank—became passionately opposed to the extension of slavery into the new territories, the most contentious political issue of the 1840s and 1850s. They accepted slavery where it existed and were themselves slave owners, yet also believed slavery in the United States was an unsustainable system that would—and should—eventually die of its own accord. Like some fellow politicians, they proposed to hasten its end in the United States by advocating the resettlement—or colonization—of freed slaves in Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.¹⁸

Even if the moral issue of slavery troubled them, they did not accept African Americans as equal—as Lincoln eventually would—but instead mourned the inequality that slavery created for *white* men. In

their eyes, the availability of slave labor deprived hard-working white workers and artisans of opportunities for jobs and income. This, in turn, eroded incentives to educate the populace or develop technology. Thus, the Blairs fought not only for the freedom of African Americans—as long as African Americans would then settle elsewhere—but for greater opportunities and living standards for white men.¹⁹ Frank Blair, who had joined his brother in St. Louis upon graduation from Princeton, fought for the rights of Free-Soilers in Missouri where he had permanently settled—“free” men, not slaves, were to till the soil in the new territories—while Montgomery and his father advised him from Washington.²⁰

Just before his brother Frank arrived in Washington from St. Louis, Montgomery had taken on the case of Dred Scott, an enslaved St. Louis resident who was petitioning to have his and his wife’s enslavement declared invalid because they had previously lived in a free state. After a long chain of litigation in Missouri courts, the case had eventually fallen under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Supreme Court, and it was a colleague of Blair’s from the St. Louis bar who urged him to argue the case before the court in Washington.²¹ Montgomery’s involvement likely intertwined both a genuine revulsion for slavery and a pragmatic calculation of his family’s political ambitions: his brother Frank had begun serving in the Missouri House of Representatives in 1852 and in 1856 was elected to Congress as an ardent advocate for “Free Soil” politics and the abolition of slavery—a fraught issue in a border slave state like Missouri.

It is extraordinary that Montgomery, who did not advocate equal rights for African Americans, would take on this case. His principled and courageous act, buttressed by his belief that Dred Scott had a valid legal claim, sheds light on the highly charged issue of relations between black and white men in American society and the contradictory responses it evoked. Montgomery was perfectly willing to put his personal, financial, and professional resources—even his safety—at the disposal of a black man, but he could never picture himself and his family living side by side and on equal terms with that same man.

If logic and precedent had ruled the day, Montgomery would have won his case. But Chief Justice Roger Taney notoriously ruled against Dred Scott, claiming that African Americans “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” The 1857 decision, intended to cement the “old order,” so enraged people that it helped fuel the fires of a war that would do away with the old order in far more radical ways than the conservative judge could have foreseen.

Woodbury was born into groundbreaking times, and not only on the ideological front. Railroads were opening up the Great Plains and the prairies for homesteaders and prospectors, creating access to new territory for farming and ranching while also decimating American Indian cultures. The discovery of gold in California spawned a gold rush and mass migration to the West. Some of those who made their fortunes from gold mines and railroading would become Woodbury’s Dupont Circle neighbors, such as silver magnate Thomas F. Walsh and railroad heirs Richard and Mary Townsend.

Taking his first steps at President's Square in the early 1850s, Woodbury—or "Wood" as the family called him—would have had no notion of Dupont Circle. In those days, it existed only on the design drawn up by Washington's original planner, Pierre L'Enfant, who had defined it as one of several important points where multiple avenues converged. This part of Washington would not be developed until the mid-1870s and early 1880s.

But the child Woodbury would have been familiar with the downtown area around the White House—Lafayette Square, President's Square and, after Lincoln moved into the White House in 1861, the president's home itself. Although they originally lived in Francis Preston's home, Wood's family soon moved into the house next door—freeing the house at 1651 for use by the Blair family at large. Meanwhile Montgomery's sister Lizzie and her husband Samuel Phillips Lee had built an adjacent house of their own. (All three homes are now part of the Blair House guest complex.)²² Wood's home and that of his grandfather became a meeting place for progressive Democrats, Free-Soilers, and before long, members of the newly formed Republican Party. The older Blairs often rode into town from Silver Spring since Montgomery and his father kept close counsel, and the active man needed to be as close to the center of power as possible. The volumes of correspondence between Francis Preston, Montgomery, and Frank attest to an extraordinary family closeness.²³ Only brother James, the second son of Francis Preston, seems to have been somewhat more on the periphery due to his travels in the South Sea and other distant regions.²⁴

In 1856, when Wood was four years old, his Uncle Frank was elected to the House of Representatives, where he would serve intermittently until 1864; during his lengthy absences, he fought in the Union Army, rising to the rank of Major General. Frank was a firebrand and was involved in many controversies. Wherever he went, he made waves and was in the news. By all accounts, he loved a good drink, fine smoke, and congenial company, and must have livened up Woodbury's home. Wood's father, Montgomery, by contrast, seems to have been a serious, strait-laced man, though everyone attested to his kindness. He was an avowed Christian and did his best to awaken religious feelings—or rather a firm commitment to Christ—in his rational father and swashbuckling brother. When he had traveled to California in late 1853 to sort out the affairs of brother James who had unexpectedly died there, he wrote a touching letter to his wife Minna. He asked her to rear the children—should anything happen to him—to be “honest and devout [rather] than distinguished” and encouraged her to “fill their minds with the love of God.”²⁵

Montgomery, an intelligent advisor to his father and brother as well as a busy lawyer, worked tirelessly first for the Free-Soilers and then later for the Republican Party. All three Blairs attended the Republican convention of 1860 that nominated Lincoln. Frank immediately resigned his seat in Congress and was among the small delegation that traveled to Springfield to bring Lincoln the news of his nomination. From this point forward, the three Blairs worked with total dedication for Lincoln's election: Frank in Missouri where he enlisted the help of the freedom-loving Germans, while Montgomery

and his father labored in Maryland, a tobacco-growing, slave-holding state where the Blairs could not make much headway. But their early, energetic, and intelligent support for Lincoln would eventually bring political gain.²⁶

What would the impact of all this feverish activity have been on a young boy such as Woodbury? He was three when his father became embroiled in the Dred Scott case, and not yet in school when his Uncle Frank came to Washington as a congressman, polarizing the capital; he was seven when his family devoted all its energy to the election of Abraham Lincoln. He must have heard of the bloody clashes in Kansas and of legislators attacking each other up on Capitol Hill. He must have shared in the immense joy and jubilation when Lincoln was elected—perhaps his father or his grandfather lit bonfires at their country homes to celebrate the victory. He must have witnessed the intense jockeying and lobbying for a share of the political spoils that ended with his father's nomination as Postmaster General in the new president's cabinet. His uncle, G. V. Fox—who had married his mother's sister—was named Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and Samuel Phillips Lee—the husband of his father's sister Lizzie—was named commander of a Navy vessel.²⁷

Woodbury was nine when his grandfather invited Robert E. Lee, a cousin of his uncle by marriage, to 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue in the spring of 1861. His grandfather offered Lee the command of the Union Army on behalf of President Lincoln. Lee declined and instead resigned his commission two weeks later after thirty years in the military to take up arms against the United States.²⁸

After the first battle between Union and Confederate soldiers—later called the Battle of Bull Run—many citizens of Washington feared that the Confederates would drive them and the president out of town. At least the Blairs could take refuge at Silver Spring or Falkland, but the president had no country estate. Lincoln was popular with the Blair children, not in the least because he played ball with them. Years later, Woodbury recalled Lincoln's lanky arms and legs flying and coat tails flapping as he raced about the lawn.²⁹ Since the Confederates did not march into Washington, Woodbury, his father, and grandfather continued to walk in and out of the White House almost as if it were their own home, and everyone who couldn't do so thought this to be a great privilege.

WOODBURY BLAIR IN HIS LETTERS

Up to now, the story of Woodbury Blair and that of his extraordinary family has been told from the outside. Now we will allow Woodbury to “speak for himself,” at least intermittently, through his letters. Woodbury rarely commented on his own times directly—in stark contrast to his father, uncle, and grandfather who incessantly reflected on the greater affairs of the day—but he did occasionally talk about himself in ways that shed light on his times.

More than 200 of Woodbury’s handwritten letters have survived from his boarding school days, his first year at Harvard Law School, and the first twenty years of his life as a Washington attorney. Few letters survive for the years after his marriage to Emily Neville Wallach in 1907, leaving us with very few first-hand accounts of the last 25 years of his life.

The overwhelming part of his boyhood letters were written to his mother Minna in Washington, usually addressed to “Mrs. M. E. Blair, Care of Hon. M. Blair, Washington, D.C.” No street address needed to be given. He only wrote his father in critical times, when he was in trouble. The later letters from Washington, almost all penned at his law office, were almost exclusively addressed to his younger brother Gist, first in Princeton and then in St. Louis where Gist practiced law for more than twenty years. There are a few letters to his youngest brother Montgomery, twelve years his junior, while Montgomery was a student at Princeton. Although his older sister Minna and her husband Stephen Olin Richey are frequently mentioned in Wood’s letters to Gist, there is no correspondence directly addressed to her.

The two years before Woodbury was sent off to private school, 1861 to 1863, were banner years in the life of his father and grandfather. As close advisors to President Lincoln—Montgomery in an official capacity and Francis Preston in a private one—both men enjoyed the president’s confidence and the prestige and satisfaction of helping shape national policy. Montgomery and his father are credited with strengthening Lincoln’s resolve to re-enforce Fort Sumter and helping to ensure that the administration took a tough stance against the seceding Southern states.³⁰

The Blairs and Lincoln saw eye to eye on most major issues; both were opposed to the spread of slavery into the new territories and both favored resettlement of slaves. But slowly and imperceptibly, the issue of slavery that had brought them together would pry them apart—a

process hastened by a series of impetuous actions on the part of Frank Blair, many of them involving the renowned explorer-turned-politician-turned-general John Fremont.

Fremont had first come to prominence in the early 1840s when he produced the first American maps of the intermountain West. His marriage to Jessie Benton, the daughter of the powerful Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, helped draw him into politics. An ardent abolitionist, in 1856 he became the first presidential candidate of the Republican Party. Due to the Blairs' interests in St. Louis, the Benton and Blair families had become close both there and in Washington; Jessie Fremont would often speak of Francis Preston as "Father Blair" and was a frequent visitor at Blair House. Yet the fact that Frank Blair used Missouri as the base for his political career eventually led to a confrontation between the two families.

At the onset of the Civil War, the question of whether or not pro-secessionists would seize control of Missouri's state government was one of the first crises the Lincoln administration faced. In the summer of 1861, Fremont was made a major general and given control over military affairs in the West, including Missouri. Soon after arriving there, he decided to issue an order emancipating all slaves within Missouri. Frank Blair, a more tepid antislavery advocate, was concerned that Fremont's unilateral action would alienate Missouri slaveholders who wanted to remain loyal to the Union. Passing on information to his brother in Washington, he helped to ensure Lincoln soon revoked Fremont's proclamation. After weeks of intrigue

involving both the Blair brothers and Jessie Fremont, who attempted to intercede with Lincoln in Washington, Fremont was relieved of his command in November 1861.³¹

The question of slavery took on new dimensions as the war progressed. Freed slaves were eager to fight for the Union, and Southern slaves were eager to run away and join them. Lincoln had to consider their value to the war effort, but he also discussed their concerns directly with them, rather than deciding on policy towards them without their consultation. Lincoln was the first American president to invite African Americans, including Frederick Douglass, to the White House. As a result, Lincoln abandoned the resettlement idea and gave serious thought to the emancipation of slaves. In 1863, he began work on the Emancipation Declaration—initially opposed by Montgomery and Seward. After the Battle of Antietam, he presented it to his cabinet and subsequently to the nation, garnering praise from progressive Republicans.

As political life became more difficult for the Blairs, war touched them personally. In the summer of 1864, Confederate general Jubal Early and his troops marched through Maryland and burned down Montgomery's house, Falkland. Silver Spring was spared. Francis Preston Blair had organized a hunting trip to Pennsylvania for Woodbury and another grandson, his son Montgomery, and himself. No members of the family were home. Montgomery's friends wanted to seek financial help from the government for his loss, but he wouldn't hear of it.³² Only a year earlier, he and Minna had lost their younger daughter Mary to a fever epidemic that had left him "heart broken" and per-

haps had helped to produce his stoic attitude in the face of material loss.³³

The fall of 1864 saw the end of Montgomery's time in the Lincoln cabinet as Postmaster General. As the presidential election approached, Lincoln grew determined to head off the possibility that Fremont—who had won wide approval among “Radical” Republicans for the Missouri emancipation—might successfully challenge him for the presidency. Lincoln eventually concluded that the way to win over Fremont's supporters to his side was to visibly jettison his known enemy—Montgomery Blair. Lincoln was advised, as he had been before, that holding on to Montgomery would cost him tens of thousands of votes. On September 23, 1864, Lincoln wrote to Montgomery, “You have generously said to me more than once that, whenever your resignation could be a relief to me, it was at my disposal. That time has come.” Lincoln did not act from political power motives alone but must have understood that Montgomery, and indeed all the Blairs, could not follow where he was leading. Montgomery resigned gracefully, ending his letter to Lincoln with, “I cannot take leave of you without renewing the expression of my gratitude for the uniform kindness which has marked your course toward me.”³⁴

Blair's term as Postmaster General had seen the implementation of a variety of policies intended to further the war effort while also improving the efficiency and propriety of the postal system. He produced modernized postal route maps, commissioned national surveys, and barred postmasters from the privilege of franking their own letters to cut down on abuse of the system. He also introduced indelible

ink (cutting down on mountains of “dead letters”), set up Army post offices, and encouraged the mail trains (“traveling post offices”) to run at night. Meanwhile, he also abolished the Pony Express. One of his foremost achievements was the introduction of postal money orders, which are still in existence today. The efficient and speedy delivery of mail became an important part of the war effort, just as later it would be an indispensable component for building the infrastructure of business and commerce during Reconstruction.³⁵

The war, the death of their child, and an increasingly beleaguered position in the president’s cabinet must have produced tensions in the Blair home. It was at this time that the Blairs sent Woodbury off to private school.

The voice in Woodbury’s letters from school was assertive, the voice of a boy who knew his worth. Only the first few letters give an indication of homesickness. In 1863, he wrote to his mother Minna, “I never think of home now at all for I have got use (sic) to be away,” but continued somewhat wistfully, “a fellow lent me his watch today and I wore it to church it reminded me how you used to lend me your watch” (1863). Strikingly, not one of his letters ever says “I miss you” or “I love you.”

Already in 1864, there were signs of his later entrepreneurial inclinations. He wrote of operating a hen house with two other boys yielding “at least 4 eggs a day.” He and the boys acquired the hens from a man for 75 cents and 2 “opossums” and a rabbit.³⁶ Woodbury would later become a successful lawyer and businessman, leaving behind a considerable fortune. There were many references to money;

everything Wood purchased was chronicled to the penny, and he also frequently requested money. Practical initiative and money consciousness characterized young Woodbury Blair from the start.

Also characteristic was a well-developed sense of self-worth. In June of 1865, he wrote from Burlington, Vermont, "Do you think that the teachers have any right to make the boys go without their meals if they do not know their lessons?" making it perfectly clear how he himself viewed the matter. "I do not care if [the teachers] send me away I will have my meals or leave the school." And: "You pay for my board as well as my schooling, so I think that I have a right to eat as much as I want."³⁷

Woodbury seemed to dislike school and the restrictions it imposed, earning his share of demerits while in Vermont. In his eyes, the demerits were usually not his own fault. Thus, he reported to his mother in October of 1865, "I did not speak a word all day today in the study and Mr. Gibson gave me those demerits out of spite." Reviewing his protestations of innocence (at times accusing teachers, other times classmates or circumstances of doing him wrong), one is left with the distinct impression that this boy was always up for adventure and resented anyone who stood in his way. One finds little evidence in the correspondence that he felt much enthusiasm for books or learning, not even in his later letters.³⁸

Montgomery Blair did not write many letters to his son. Communication with the children was Minna's domain. But he did step in when Wood was suspended from school as a sophomore, a fate that had befallen his Uncle Frank thirty years earlier. There is reference

to this particular event in family correspondence. Although the exact nature of the trouble remains unknown, money did play a part.³⁹

We have, however, a revealing *mea culpa* letter from Woodbury. Interestingly, the few letters to his father admit to his own failings much more readily than do the letters to his mother. Wood's letter to Montgomery begins:

Your letters were received in due season and they caused me to reflect very seriously upon the subjects which I am sorry to say have not been regarded by me in light of sufficient importance, but I assure you I now fully realize the extent of my heedlessness and shall endeavor for the future to do everything in my power to atone if possible in some degree for the anxiety which I have caused you and my mother. That my expenses have been enormous this year, I know only too well, but I am now living as economical (*sic*) as possible, spending only what is absolutely necessary and as [of] next year will have no old bills to pay.

Although Wood clearly expressed his willingness to “atone,” the language of his apology is somewhat formulaic, even “lawyerly” with its many qualifications (“if possible in some degree,” etc.) For the rest of his school days, including at Harvard, he appears to have struggled with the pull exerted by life, rather than the one exerted by books.⁴⁰

Wood's joy—and surprise—upon graduating from Harvard is recorded in a letter to his mother in July of 1874: “the greatest event of my life up to this time is over and I am perfectly satisfied with the re-

sult..." He was all the more "satisfied" because he firmly believed that he had failed, or, as he put it, "I thought then that all hope for me was gone." This all changed at his graduation ceremony when a tutor called out, "Mr. Blair, you are one of the fortunate ones," and handed him his papers. Recalling the event, he wrote home, "I don't think I have felt so well for years..."

He duly celebrated with friends and relatives—especially his mother's brother Charles, a well-known judge, his maternal aunts, and cousin Lowery, all of whom had become a second family to him during his Cambridge days and would form an important part of his social life during his first and only year at Harvard Law School.

His successful graduation made 1874 an invigorating year for Woodbury, but it was not a good year for his father. Montgomery lost the nomination for a seat in Congress. Montgomery felt especially bitter about the loss, since he had intended to use his Congressional seat to fight corruption in the Grant administration.⁴¹

In hindsight, we can say that the Blairs' influence on national politics had peaked by the late 1860s, but it would take years until they and their contemporaries came to recognize that. For a very brief time after Andrew Johnson became president in 1865, the Blairs again occupied a privileged position. The doors to the White House were as open to them as they had been under Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln.⁴² In 1868, Frank Blair returned to political life and became the running mate of Democratic presidential candidate Horatio Seymour. Broadly speaking, the party had concluded that "opposition to racial equality had much potential" as an electoral strategy, and Blair's

stump speeches were marked by virulent invocations of the supposed horrors that white Southerners were enduring in the course of Reconstruction. Nonetheless, the Republican ticket of Civil War hero Ulysses S. Grant and Indiana politician Schuyler Colfax triumphed.⁴³

In any case, Woodbury made no mention of politics in his letters from college. Instead, his letters reveal a preoccupation with social life at Harvard—where he joined the Hasty Pudding Club—and with the difficulties of his studies.⁴⁴ The Washington he found on his return from Harvard was vastly different from the Washington he had left ten years earlier. The barracks, tents, and corrals from the feverish preparation



Figure 2: The Pension Building, seen here in an 1897 postcard, was one of Washington's first large institutional buildings.

of war had been dismantled and the city's parks restored. The legacy of the Civil War found striking expression in the monumental Pension Building, erected to administer Union soldiers' pensions. The impressive structure was designed and built by General Montgomery Meigs in a free-style American adaptation of Michelangelo's Palazzo Farnese.⁴⁵

Over the course of Woodbury's years away at school, Washington had become a much more modern city, offering comfort and conveniences that soon attracted the fashionable and wealthy who arrived to spend the winter in Washington. In 1871, in order to govern the capital city, Congress had set up a Board of Public Works that was soon headed by Alexander ("Boss") Shepherd, one of Washington's most forward-looking planners and entrepreneurs. He focused his energies on the city's infrastructure, building water and sewer systems, bridges, and sidewalks. He expanded and, above all, *paved* the city's roads, lined them with trees, and installed gaslights. He also engaged in much residential construction. Boss Shepherd was instrumental in creating the conditions for the development of the mansion district near Dupont Circle that would eventually become the setting of Woodbury's Second Blair House.⁴⁶

One component of the city's postbellum growth was a rapid increase in the number and proportion of African American residents in the city: the number increased from just over 14,000 in 1860 to more than 43,000 by 1870; meanwhile, African Americans came to represent more than one-third of city residents. An important component of the implementation of the new city government was that it barred the city's residents from voting in both local and national elections.

Like most white Washingtonians, the Blairs seem to have viewed their own disenfranchisement as an acceptable sacrifice in order to prevent African Americans from taking part in the city's politics. The Blairs had enslaved people before the Civil War; after the war, several servants continued to live with the family, including Malvina Fletcher, who had been the Blair siblings' childhood caregiver, alongside other regularly employed African American domestic servants. In their correspondence, they commonly discussed African Americans in derogatory terms, yet also thought of themselves as fair and benevolent employers.⁴⁷

Having graduated from Harvard in 1874, Woodbury then went on to law school at Harvard. In a touching letter to his mother, he wrote: "I never before had such a strong desire to remain. It has always been very hard for me to fix upon a day for my departure, but this year I found it particularly disagreeable to make up my mind to start." He added a separate letter to his fourteen-year-old brother Gist with messages to sister Minn and Uncle Fur, who was possibly a teddy bear or family dog.

Dear Gist,

I received your letter today and you must kiss mother tonight to put in a letter for me and pull Min's hair, tell hur (sic) that I Sent it to hur and kick and poke uncle Fur and tell him to charge it To me, from Woody

Only five years later, in September of 1879, Wood dispensed grown-up, practical advice to "his little brother" Gist, who was about

to graduate. “In your last letter you referred to the subject of class photographs—if you are wise you will buy just as few as possible. In one or two years you will not remember who the men are and will regret every cent you paid out for them...”⁴⁸ This is a vintage Woodbury comment, exhibiting the money-conscious realist.

By 1879, when this letter was written, Woodbury had been back in Washington for three years, having returned from Harvard Law School after just one year. He then enrolled at George Washington Law School and was admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia in 1877.⁴⁹

The Blair political machine that had once been in the vanguard of the slavery struggle and prepared the ground for Lincoln, only to lose ground with the times, was broken up by death just as Woodbury returned to Washington. On July 9, 1875, Wood’s uncle Frank, congressman, senator, unsuccessful presidential candidate, and Civil War general, died in St. Louis. He was eulogized by Missouri’s political elite and by General Sherman, and eventually the state of Missouri commissioned a marble statue of him as its contribution to the Capitol’s Statuary Hall.⁵⁰

Frank’s death was hardest on his eighty-four-year-old father. Francis Preston Blair lost a beloved son who was both a troublemaker and golden boy but, above all, a source of hope for his father’s presidential dreams. Montgomery and his family took care of the debts Frank had left behind. Meanwhile, after Frank’s passing, Francis Preston lost his drive and ambition. He died, barely a year later, in October 1876, leaving a complicated will that was to be administered

and eventually sorted out by his faithful son Montgomery. Francis Preston's death was front page news from Washington to New Orleans to the Dakota Territory, and his contributions to the nation were recognized in the *New York Herald* and other major newspapers throughout the country.⁵¹

Wood must have mourned his grandfather's death, for Francis Preston Blair was said to have adored his grandchildren, spending as much time with them as he could, giving them the run of the house at Silver Spring and arranging pony and hayrides for them.⁵² For the Blair family—and in many ways for the country—an era came to an end with the passing of Francis Preston Blair, a firebrand who had helped redefine the role the media would play in American politics.

The times in which Woodbury lived, by contrast, would be characterized by financial excesses and political corruption at both the federal and the local levels. As staunch Democrats during an era when the White House and the Congress were almost always controlled by Republicans, the Blairs attacked corruption at the national level while keeping silent about local development deals benefiting insiders that increased the value of their real estate holdings.⁵³ Montgomery Blair was a strident critic of the shenanigans surrounding the election of 1876, which ended with a Congressionally appointed commission declaring Rutherford B. Hayes the winner in exchange for his promise to withdraw the federal troops attempting to enforce the Reconstruction amendments guaranteeing civil rights to African Americans in the South. Though Blair was no strong supporter of racial equality, he considered the commission's decision a travesty and, together

with William C. Corcoran and two others, he founded a daily paper, the *Union*, and turned it into a lobbying platform for Tilden as president, declaring the Electoral Commission unconstitutional. The *Union* quickly garnered the largest morning circulation in Washington but folded on March 3, the day after the commission decided the election in Hayes's favor. After being elected to the Maryland state legislature, in 1878, Montgomery persuaded it to pass a resolution asking the attorney general of Maryland to bring a case before the Supreme Court with the aim of overturning the Electoral Commission's decision, but it led nowhere.⁵⁴

By the time Montgomery died in 1883, Woodbury had worked in his father's office for seven years, specializing in real estate and banking. He had also helped run his father's unsuccessful campaign for senator of Maryland in 1882. Public reaction to Montgomery's death confirmed for Woodbury the prominence of his own family. Cabinet secretaries, former Union generals, and members of Congress all attended the funeral, while the Post Office was closed for a day and draped in black for a month to honor Montgomery's role as Postmaster General and prominent citizen. He was laid to rest in Rock Creek Cemetery.⁵⁵

Woodbury's practice appears to have supported him comfortably, although he was apt to complain about slow business. He no doubt inherited some of his father's clients and was able to gain new ones. He was, after all, a very well-connected young man who knew the city and its power brokers. His expenses were reasonable since he lived at home with his mother and sister Minna. His youngest brother Montgomery

attended Princeton, as had Gist before him.⁵⁶ Gist, in the meantime, had moved on to St. Louis, where he established himself as a lawyer; he would not return to Washington until 1907.⁵⁷ The two brothers maintained a lively correspondence, with most letters concentrating on business and legal matters, including shared investment interests.

By contrast, the few letters to his mother were more personal; they attempted humor and showed affection. A letter excerpt from the early eighties written to Minna from a business trip in Alabama states: “There were but two passengers in the Pullman Car in which I hap-



Figure 3: Montgomery Blair’s family vault at Rock Creek Cemetery.

pened to be. An old woman... scolded and found fault with every one and every thing—and myself. I did not speak to her except to answer on one occasion when she addressed me directly that I thought the car was perfectly comfortable, which had the desired effect.” The year his mother died, Wood repeatedly expressed concern over her health to Gist.⁵⁸

As the Blairs retreated from political affairs, they became increasingly self-conscious about their family reputation. By the end of the nineteenth century, prosperous families like theirs who had been in the capital for a half-century or more had become known as the “cave dwellers” for their purported reluctance to mix with wealthy newcomers drawn to the capital as a place to show off fortunes gained from mining, meatpacking, or other industrial enterprises. The “cave dwellers” defined themselves by their strict adherence to traditional values, whether characterized by adherence to formal etiquette, collecting the “right” kinds of antiques, or living according to a traditional family structure. At the same time, couples were free to pursue separate lives so long as they observed the outward formalities. Woodbury’s first cousin Violet Blair Janin, for example, lived apart from her husband Albert Janin from the late 1880s onward, yet she was considered the “Queen of the Cave Dwellers” and was singled out in one magazine profile for her “conservative standards” and “orthodox churchmanship.”⁵⁹

Within this context, an unusual letter Wood wrote in 1892 deserves explanation. It pertained to his rumored engagement to Marion McKay, whom his family could not accept as his potential bride because she had fallen into disrepute, having been divorced and accused

by her husband Gordon of being unfaithful. Woodbury's sister Minn and aunt Ellen evidently sought to convince Wood to end the relationship. It seems clear that he had become the topic of what Minn in a different situation had described as "compromising stories." Woodbury, for his part, apparently hoped to eventually marry McKay but sought to assure his relatives that he would not compromise the family's honor. "Whatever our marital wishes might be," he explained, "she could never marry anyone until some settlement was made and money placed in the Trust Company for the benefit of her children. Her mother and sister by an unfortunate failure in some business matters are now entirely dependent on her. *No man could assume such a burden* [emphasis added] and she would not of her own will permit a man to support the family." Woodbury asked his family not to turn against him but to take a "quiet attitude without necessarily sponsoring or encouraging ... [to] refrain from saying anything disagreeable about Mrs. McKay should she be attacked in your presence." He wrote the letter to encourage family loyalty, a virtue he had consistently seen practiced by his father, grandfather, and uncle.⁶⁰

This letter offers a rare glimpse into Woodbury's emotions as well as into the Blair family dynamics and shows the importance he placed on his family's name and legacy. Time and again letters written by him and his brothers refer to family honor, for example Montgomery Jr.'s letter to Gist of Nov 9, 1891: "Wood and I have joined The Society of the Sons of the Revolution by way of doing some honor to those of our ancestors who were in the scrap, and keeping alive the spirit of '76."⁶¹ Woodbury himself reported on a visit to Uncle Charles—"the

Counselor”—shortly after the family upheaval over Mrs. McKay, “The Counselor and I understand each other and I am quite certain he has no particular worries or anxieties on my account or that the family will ever be humiliated or have any reason to be ashamed of any act of mine—where the family is concerned.”

Later on, the relationship seems to have been a well-established fact within the family with no sign of any change in its status. Letters to Gist between 1894 and 1896 quite casually refer to Wood’s plans to meet up with Mrs. McKay in Paris, without any further explanation or any sign of embarrassment. There appear to have also been no protestations on the part of the family. The way Wood describes his paramour in later letters suggests that he was quite content to keep the relationship at an informal level. On June 16, 1896, he wrote to Gist, “I will meet her there [Paris]. I don’t know if she will take an apartment or go to a hotel or what she will do before I arrive. After that, much depends on her plans where I go. She usually makes a thousand plans and when the time comes does something entirely different from anything she has planned. I never make any plans, therefore am never obliged to change my arrangements. So, we therefore hit it off very well together.” Mrs. McKay figures less prominently as the 1890s come to a close.

Most of Wood’s letters to Gist for the remainder of the 1890s concern business, as they had before that emotional interlude of 1892, and would for years afterwards.⁶² Occasionally, family concerns surface in the letters. Wood seems to have felt despair over his older sister’s unhappy marriage, certainly when he wrote to Gist in 1895, “I

am very uncertain about going away ... and would give anything or do anything in the world for her happiness and comfort." But over time he seemed to have resigned himself to her situation, although the occasional sharp remark about Minna's husband Richey continued to enliven his letters.

Falkland and its need for repairs is another recurring theme. There were discussions as to the disposition of the country estate among family members, especially when Gist considered returning to Washington in 1896. He and Wood discussed Gist's possible affiliation with the trust company where Woodbury was a director, but the topic was dropped and Wood continued to address his letters to St. Louis. In 1895, brother Montgomery, the youngest of the siblings, married Edith Draper, a young woman who was well received by the family. The young couple and their rapidly growing family spent summers at Falkland.⁶³

What is most striking about the period between 1883, when his father died, and 1907, when Wood began a new phase of life by entering into marriage, is the near total absence of any discussion of political, social, or cultural issues. Even current events are rarely discussed. The Gilded Age, characterized by industrial expansion, corporate empire-building by the likes of J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie, and the accumulation of tremendous wealth alongside social injustice and the development of urban ghettos, was the period of Woodbury's most active professional and social life. It was *his* age, but we find few references to presidential elections or of major events such as the tragic massacre of Indians at Wounded Knee in 1890. We find no

discussion of the Spanish-American War of 1898 that was originally framed as a war of liberation, stirring the hearts of Americans, but quickly turned into an instrument for gaining territory and power, marking the United States' entry into imperial politics. There is no mention of the struggle between the Democrats and Republicans or the rise and fall of the Populist Party, issues which would have preoccupied his father and grandfather; likewise no comment is made on developments in the South, where white Southerners established and jealously guarded a system of segregation, often enforced by violence. There is also no mention of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the novels of Henry James, or the poems of Emily Dickinson.

Surely, Woodbury read the papers and participated in the discussion of current events at his clubs, but none apparently stirred him enough to make him vent his anger, outrage, or concern in letters to his brother. He simply wasn't the political animal his father, uncle, or grandfather had been. Instead of trying to bring about change, he "rode" the waves of his day and tried to assess how current events would affect business and real estate. In a letter written just after the 1888 presidential election, he noted that while, as a Democrat, he was "disappointed" by the victory of Republican Benjamin Harrison, he was "reasonably certain a Republican administration will help Washington real estate and particularly our property."⁶⁴

The city and power structure of Washington were Woodbury's sphere—not the White House or Congress. He knew it inside and out, he served it as a lawyer, and he made use of his knowledge as a businessman. Gist did the same in St. Louis. Together, the broth-

ers did well for themselves and for each other. Their letters are like a ball game, one brother batting a suggestion, the other receiving it and batting another back.⁶⁵ As white, Protestant, upper-class men, the brothers were bound to benefit from a political and social system dominated by other men from similar backgrounds.

From about 1900 onward, Woodbury was associated with the National Savings & Trust Company, one of the most prominent financial institutions in the city. He served as a trust officer and held the title of vice-president. Though it began with only a small amount of business, the trust department gradually increased in size and demanded more and more space. Woodbury does not seem to have worked full-time at the bank; instead, he worked nearby first in an office in the Corcoran Building, at 15th Street and F Street, and later in the Hibbs Building, located next door to the trust company's office building at the corner of 15th Street and New York Avenue NW.⁶⁶ Stray references in the newspapers to his role in overseeing the estates of other wealthy families suggest that he may have been something akin to a "professional trustee," an attorney from an elite background who spent his workday overseeing the assets of families like his own.⁶⁷

Between 1890 and 1910, Washington's population grew by more than 100,000 residents, creating a series of real estate booms. In order to control the direction of growth and ensure a well-planned city, city officials—acting within the constraints of congressional oversight—adopted a variety of measures intended to regulate the subdivision and plotting of land. The city's growth provided plenty of scope for business for financial institutions and property developers. Nation-

al Savings & Trust and other trust companies played an important role in financing the city's real estate projects. Woodbury was also a director of the Columbia Title Insurance Company, the Washington Electric & Railway Company, and other corporations that helped steer and profited from local real estate development.

As someone whose family owned considerable property and with social ties to other prosperous families that had accumulated real estate, Woodbury was well-positioned to make a considerable fortune both in his business deals and for himself. In the course of his work, Blair helped establish conditions that benefited developers and financiers. Like most other American cities, Washington saw the emergence of a "dual housing market" that restricted housing supply by using covenants forbidding the sale of property to African Americans and other non-white purchasers. In 1922, for example, a portion of the family's land near Silver Spring was sold to land developers who then created a new subdivision called "Blair" whose streets were named after members of the family—including Woodbury, Gist, and Violet.⁶⁸

The year 1907 turned out to be another banner year in terms of family news in letters, and was also the last year that allows us to follow events through Woodbury's and his brother's eyes. Their correspondence—at least intermittently revealing—ended when Gist returned to Washington permanently in late 1907.⁶⁹ Early in 1907, Woodbury made one of his rare comments on politics—or rather, the effects of politics on the financial sector. He wrote to Gist from New York, "I am over here for a day or two and a more depressed crowd you never saw. No one sees any hope anywhere in the financial world—

but I have seen greenbackism, free silver and Mr. Rooseveltism, and I don't believe this last Crank is any worse than the others."⁷⁰ In May, Wood's letters concerned the health of Mont, their youngest brother, who had returned from a Panama Canal trip with a serious fever. He was hospitalized in New York, and for weeks his life hung in the balance. Wood reported faithfully on his brother's condition to Gist and discussed the practical steps he and the family took to care for Montgomery's children so that his wife Edith could stay with her husband in New York.⁷¹ He also, of course, expressed his concern.

After it became clear that Mont was likely to recover, Wood turned to discussing his own plans. He informed Gist: "I cabled you immediately when I settled the date of my marriage..." Wood sounded happy and eager to have his brother experience the same good fortune. He ended his letter with "My advice to you, young man is to go and do likewise."⁷²

Aged fifty-five, Woodbury had known his bride Emily Neville Wallach for many years, according to family lore.⁷³ Emily was the daughter of Richard Wallach, the mayor of Washington during the Civil War and its immediate aftermath, from 1861 to 1868. The Blairs and Wallachs met when Woodbury was a boy of eight, if not before. We know from city records that Richard Wallach, Francis Preston Blair, and Montgomery Blair were among the dignitaries who greeted President-elect Abraham Lincoln when he first arrived in the city. Like Woodbury, Emily's family had made its fortune in real estate; her mother and maternal uncle had jointly inherited much of the land where the neighborhood of Petworth now sits.⁷⁴

We know via Emily's niece that the couple courted for almost twelve years and that Woodbury had aimed to make his fortune before marrying.⁷⁵ By this reckoning, the courtship began around 1895. Wood's comments to Gist give an initial impression of Emily Wallach. By his own account, Wood did not need the church's formal blessing for his union. "I am too old for that farce," he wrote to Gist on July 5, 1907, and commented on the wedding breakfast that was to follow the church service, "... breakfasts are amusing for children but not ... dignified for a man of my age." He always referred to his bride Emily with affection and pride: "Have seen Mrs. Fox, Ellen and Cousin Mary and they are all delighted with Emily."

Emily Neville Wallach must have been an amiable and charming woman, and she was part of Washington's established society. Woodbury and Emily came from the same social class. It is a groom at ease who reported to Gist, "When Robert [a servant at 1651 Pennsylvania Ave] was packing up my things [to visit the aunts] I told him to put some of my old socks in my trunk as I thought Emily would like to make herself useful and mend up a few during our outing. She has not commenced yet, but I have been doing something more difficult than sewing—hooking up the back of a dress. Did you ever try to work those damned little hooks and eyes? Give me mending socks any time. Emily joins me in much love."⁷⁶

All lightheartedness and down-to-earth expectations of darning socks aside, it would appear that the couple were well suited for each other. Later that year, Wood wrote from Narragansett, where he and Emily had gone to escape Washington's summer heat, that he had not

been feeling well, but “Emily has come up a trump. She has discovered to me a new phase of life and comfort. I may have had such a care when a child ... but it left only a dim memory, almost impersonal.”⁷⁷ He clearly enjoyed her affectionate care.

WOODBURY AND EMILY BLAIR AT THE SECOND BLAIR HOUSE

In April 1910, Woodbury received the official city permit to erect a private residence on two lots along New Hampshire Avenue.⁷⁸ The decision to build a stately home was a major step for the middle-aged couple, especially since both Emily and Woodbury had never left their parents' homes, yet not an unusual choice for a married couple eager to live on their own. Within months of the couple's wedding, Gist returned from St. Louis and moved into 1651 with them. Unfortunately, Gist and Emily Blair did not get along, likely creating tension within the siblings' household and probably spurring Woodbury's decision to construct his own home.⁷⁹

In addition, by 1910 Woodbury had made his fortune, through his own efforts but also thanks to family inheritance. Ellen Woodbury, his mother's sister, died in 1909, leaving most of her estate to her nephews and nieces, including the two building lots on New Hamp-

shire Avenue. Woodbury bought out the other heirs and applied for a permit to build.⁸⁰

Woodbury was at the pinnacle of his career; his marriage to Emily had, if anything, solidified his position in society. If he wanted to give visible expression to his professional achievement, social position, and respectable status, now was the time to do so. Upper-class America was rich in 1910. Woodbury's wealth reflected that of his city and that of the nation.

While Boss Shepherd had laid the groundwork for making Washington an attractive and comfortable place to live in the 1870s, the Park Commission of 1901 added—or rather revived—the concepts of dignity, harmony, and gravitas envisioned for the nation's capital by its original planner, Pierre L'Enfant. Under its watchful eye—and that of the Commission of Fine Arts and later the National Capital Park Commission—Union Station and the Lincoln Memorial were built, as were the Museum of Natural History, the Pan American Union building, the American Red Cross building and Constitution Hall of the Daughters of the American Revolution—formidable structures meant to draw attention to themselves and the achievements of the nation within generously laid-out spaces.⁸¹

The area around Dupont Circle benefited from the efforts of these commissions and from the largesse of the Dupont family. When Congress decided to honor the Civil War hero Admiral Samuel Francis Dupont in 1882, it commissioned a small bronze statue to be placed in what had been Pacific Circle. Around this circle, which came to rival New York's upper Fifth Avenue as *the* place to live, the homes of

some of the Gilded Age's most prominent citizens sprang up: senators, publishers, retired statesmen, gold mine moguls, speculators, and businessmen. Since Woodbury and Emily would have known them and might have been inspired by them while planning to build their own home, a look at some of their mansions provides context for the Blairs' home.⁸²

In 1881, Senator James G. Blaine of Maine built the brick and terra cotta Queen Anne mansion at 2000 Massachusetts Avenue. As the Republican Speaker of the House, he ran for president three times. The Leiter family—partners of Marshall Field—lived there after him, and then in 1904, the house was bought by George Westinghouse, the founder of one of America's largest electrical corporations, who lived there until his death in 1914. The Leiters built a 55-room mansion of their own on the north side of Dupont Circle; their daughter Mary was married to British aristocrat George Curzon—a future viceroy of India—in Washington in 1895.

In 1892, Sarah Adams Whittemore, a cousin of Henry Adams, moved into her impressive Arts and Crafts mansion on 1526 New Hampshire Avenue, designed by Harvey Page. It is one of the least pompous dwellings in the area, characterized by clean lines. Later owners of the Page Mansion include the banker John C. Weeks, who served as Under Secretary of War under Harding and Coolidge. Today it houses the Women's National Democratic Club.

15 Dupont Circle, a white marble Renaissance palazzo, was designed by architect Stanford White for Robert Wilson Patterson, the publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. The building, constructed between

1901 and 1903, consists of two wings adjoining a center block in a wide U-shaped plan, creating the impression of outstretched arms. As if taking her cue from the building, Patterson's daughter "Cissy," owner of the *Times-Herald*, met the world with outstretched arms. Throughout her life she made a regular appearance in American and European high society columns. After years of housing a social club, in 2017 the former single-family mansion was adapted into a residence with more than 90 separate apartments.

Grandeur attracts grandeur. In 1903, architect Henry Anderson completed a residence for Irish immigrant Thomas Walsh at 2020 Massachusetts Avenue that is now the Indonesian embassy. Walsh had made his money from gold mining and let the world know it by embedding a brick of gold into his front porch. The Walshes attracted high society to their parties, which were so lavish that even the *New York Times* reported on them. But their ostentatious mansion was not a happy home. Walsh fell into depression and died of alcoholism; his daughter Evalyn spurned the mansion after her father's death. By then she was the owner of the Hope Diamond. She and her husband, heir to the *Washington Post*, Edward Beale McLean, went through a fortune of a hundred million dollars while in the prime of their life. Ed McLean's parents, John and Emily McLean, attended the Blairs' quiet wedding in 1907.⁸³

Pride in nation and family were of the utmost importance to Larz and Isabel Anderson, a couple with roots in Cincinnati and Boston, who commissioned Boston architects Little & Browne to build them a home further up the avenue, at 2118 Massachusetts Avenue. Their imposing



Figure 4: The Larz Anderson House at 2118 Massachusetts Ave. NW.

mansion was intended to provide a backdrop for Larz Anderson's aspirations to become an important American diplomat. The house, completed in 1905, was designed with a structural steel frame sheathed in limestone and featured a notable entranceway with arched gates.⁸⁴ The 95-room mansion became the scene of many splendid balls and receptions. The house was—and remains—filled with busts and portraits of the couples' ancestors, among them Revolutionary and Civil War heroes, and with exquisite tapestries, maps, flags, and other Americana. Fittingly, the mansion was bequeathed to the Society of the Cincinnati, established by George Washington for the officers who fought in the War of Independence and their male descendants.



Figure 5: The mansion of Richard and Mary Scott Townsend at 2121 Massachusetts Ave. NW.

Across from the Andersons' house is the mansion of Richard and Mary Townsend at 2121 Massachusetts Avenue, now the home of the private Cosmos Club. Each was an heir to a railroad fortune, and they commissioned the architects Carrère & Hastings to transform the existing Victorian house on their land into a mansion inspired by the Petit Trianon of Versailles (on a smaller scale). The result was a pleasing city château where the Townsends gathered the elite of Washington around them. Their daughter Mathilde married Sumner Welles, who served in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration in several key positions.

Clarence Moore, a stockbroker, commissioned Jules Henri de Sibour to design a beautifully proportioned *palais* in the Louis XV fash-

ion with a harmonious façade at 1746 Massachusetts Avenue. De Sibour created a mansion of simple elegance that was completed in 1909. Now the embassy of Uzbekistan, it was judged “one of the finest houses ever erected in the city” in a guide written by the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects.⁸⁵

It was this same architect, Jules Henri de Sibour, that Woodbury and Emily chose to design their new home. De Sibour’s life and career will be outlined in the following chapter, but we can say this much now: no one was more qualified by birth, training, and professional association to serve the city’s elite than de Sibour. He was the son of a French aristocrat, trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, and had

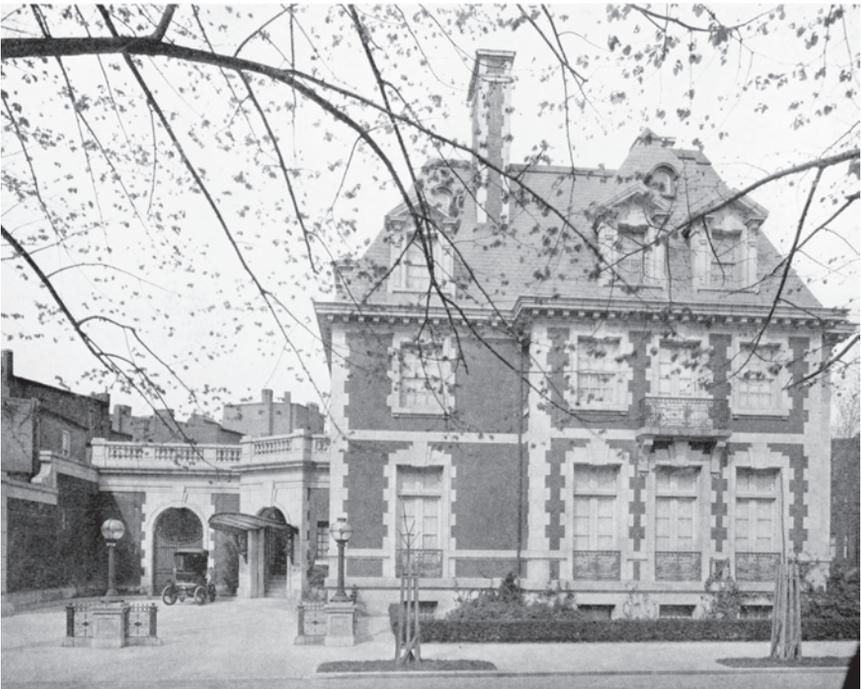


Figure 6: Thomas Gaff House, c. 1923.

worked for two leading New York architectural firms. Perhaps more importantly, he had already designed several beautiful mansions in the Dupont Circle area, including, besides the Moore house, the Thomas Gaff residence, which is today's Colombian embassy, and the Alexander Stewart residence, today's embassy of Luxembourg.⁸⁶

Woodbury and Emily may well have seen and admired his houses on social occasions, and they may have known their architect personally. Both men belonged to the city's most elite social clubs, and de Sibour had designed the Hibbs Building where Woodbury's law practice was located. De Sibour helped redesign the building of the Metropolitan Club, one of the primary outlets of Blair's free time. Wood and de Sibour may have even met in Paris when Jules Henri was a student at the École and Woodbury summered there.

Paris, the city of grand boulevards, elegant houses, and city palaces, had impressed Woodbury's aesthetic sensibilities. He even toyed with the idea of opening an office there in 1895 as we know from a letter to Gist. "I can see wonderful opportunities here If I could speak French ... better, I would open a large office in Paris." We know that he was sensitive to architecture from a letter to Gist of July 5, 1907, in which he wrote of a Mrs. Ellis, "I thought her house had excellent lines and proportions."⁸⁷ This stands out as one of Woodbury's few references to literature, music, or the arts in his letters.

Emily, too, appears to have had some artistic flair and is credited with having persuaded de Sibour to design the Georgian entrance to their home. According to family lore, she had a hand in painting the *putti* over the doors of the Dining Room.⁸⁸ Whatever the individual

contributions of the couple may have been, together with their architect they succeeded in creating an exquisite mansion, fit to receive high society and yet provide comfortable and attractive living space.

When their residence was finished in 1911, we may assume that it was furnished with items from both the Blair and Wallach households. We know that a portrait of Woodbury's grandfather, Francis Preston Blair, graced the space above the library fireplace.⁸⁹ By assigning such a prominent place to the painting—all visitors would have been ushered into the library before being greeted by the Blairs—Woodbury drew attention to his illustrious forebears and expressed pride in them.

In both design and usage, the house reflected the classical separation of the owners' quarters from those of the servants. The front rooms of the house, devoted to receiving and entertaining spaces, faced New Hampshire Avenue. They boasted large windows and were connected by a beautiful staircase. The back areas of the house, with its functional rooms such as the kitchen and servant quarters, were connected by a narrow staircase and looked out on a small alley.⁹⁰

We know that Woodbury and Emily had their needs met by a staff of twelve—two chauffeurs, a butler, a lady's maid, an upstairs maid, a chef, two kitchen helpers, a laundress, and two all-around helpers. Most of the servants were housed at 1607, while the chauffeurs lived in a house around the corner on Corcoran Street that also included garage space. While in 1900 the Blair family's servants had been African Americans, by the time Woodbury and Emily Blair moved to their new home it had become more prestigious for a wealthy family to employ white servants.⁹¹

Census records for 1920, 1930 and 1940 show how the household help at the Second Blair House changed over the decades. In 1920, the majority of their servants were European immigrants. The butler was a 34-year-old Swiss-French immigrant named Julius Cramatte; his wife Mathilda, also 34, was French-Canadian and described as a housemaid. The household also included two maids from the United Kingdom, a German cook named Victoria Heints, and a Puerto Rico-born “houseman” named Joseph Davis. The only U.S.-born servant was Marie Pollard, a 32-year-old kitchen maid of mixed-race heritage from Virginia. By the interwar years, many European immigrants had come to see domestic work as unappealing, and the Blairs’ servants may have pursued any number of alternative careers before and after their time working at 1607 New Hampshire Avenue. Julius Cramatte, for one, had described himself as an auto mechanic in a 1919 immigration interview.⁹² In 1930, the Blairs had five live-in servants, all born in Europe (from Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, and Italy).⁹³ Julius and Mathilda Cramatte lived only a few blocks away, in an apartment on New Hampshire Avenue. Julius Cramatte continued to list his occupation as “butler,” but it is unclear if he was working for the Blairs or for another household. The 1940 Census shows that instead of European immigrants, the household’s live-in servants were all white, native-born Americans. Two of the female servants, Sally Kayser and Kathleen Moore, were both young women from rural Virginia. The effect of the Great Depression pushed many women like them to the cities to take up jobs as domestic workers.⁹⁴

Notwithstanding depictions of devoted, long-lasting household employees in popular culture, the typical servant only stayed with an employer for no more than two years. For the most part, quitting was the only option for an employee to register dissatisfaction with his or her working conditions.⁹⁵ The roster of servants the Census recorded living at the Blair mansion in 1920 was completely different from those living there ten years later, as well as from those living there ten years after that. The Blairs' female servants might only have worked as domestic servants for a short period of time before marrying or finding jobs in other fields.⁹⁶ It may be the case that servants who chose to remain in the Blairs' employ for long periods of time were those who were able to afford to "live out."

Servants' lives revolved around accommodating their movements and their responsibilities to the calendar set by their employers. At 1607 New Hampshire, the servants would likely have woken an hour or more before the Blairs to prepare breakfast, tidy the downstairs rooms, and make sure the furnace was heating the house properly. After breakfast, one of the household chauffeurs might have driven Woodbury Blair to his downtown office, while the other would have been at Emily Blair's disposal. Housemaids and other staff would have straightened up the bedrooms upstairs while the Blairs ate breakfast, or perhaps they would have waited until after they had left the house for the day. If the Blairs were hosting a formal dinner party, the servants would likely have had to spend many hours preparing place settings and flower arrangements while the cook and the other kitchen staff focused on preparing a multi-course meal. Servants usually ate

their meals after their employers did, yet had to remain available to respond to a summons by the internal bell system.⁹⁷

Glimpses of the lives of domestic workers away from the house are few and far between. While domestic service was a respectable—if not desirable—way to make a living among African Americans, who were excluded from almost all other jobs, among white adults, whether immigrant or native-born, there was a social taboo against household work. Most wealthy Washingtonians also required their servants to wear depersonalizing uniforms.⁹⁸ Thus, many servants' social lives probably revolved around relationships with others in the same line of work. A newspaper article from 1927, in the depths of Prohibition, reported on a party thrown on New Year's night at which servants from the Blair mansion and other Dupont Circle households “doff[ed] livery,” danced, played bridge, and enjoyed “lemonade.”⁹⁹

No detailed accounts of entertaining at 1607 are available, though occasional newspaper mentions suggest they gave their share of receptions, dinners, and dances. On election night 1912, for example, they gave a dinner party, and the next spring they hosted a “young people's dance” for two of Woodbury's nieces.¹⁰⁰ They probably also made the rounds at social occasions in their neighborhood. They may have met the Prince of Wales—later the Duke of Windsor—in 1919 when he stayed ten days with the Belmonts, their neighbors across the street at 1618 New Hampshire. After all, for eight years they had been neighbors of Perry Belmont, the grandson of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, who later became ambassador to Spain. The Blairs were also on good terms with their next-door neighbor, former Republican congressman

John Dalzell, who in private practice as an attorney worked energetically on behalf of the railroads. After Dalzell left Washington, Sir Willmott Lewis, correspondent of *The Times of London*, became their new neighbor at 1603 New Hampshire.¹⁰¹

Woodbury Blair certainly enjoyed convivial gatherings and was also very much involved in Washington's club life, so much so that one of his obituaries characterizes him as "Woodbury Blair, prominent lawyer and clubman." He had been a member of the Metropolitan Club, the most prestigious social club in Washington, for almost sixty years, and served as its president from 1915 to 1933. He was also a member of the exclusive Alibi Club, the Columbia Historical Society, the Chevy Chase Club, the University Club in New York, and the Newport Reading Room; he also belonged to the Bar Association of the District of Columbia.¹⁰²

The Blairs maintained their consciousness of the importance of the family's propriety. On the one hand, Emily's relatives were regular visitors to the home. Woodbury, Minna, and Montgomery, Jr. became estranged from their brother Gist after he began a relationship with a married woman, Laura Thomas, served as her divorce lawyer, and then married her. After 1911, the brothers no longer shared an office, although their joint inheritance probably required them to continue to make agreements about business transactions. Woodbury's decision to break ties with his brother may have been related to the fact that he could not forgive his brother for being unwilling to submit to the pull of family duty as he had more than a decade earlier during his relationship with Marion McKay.¹⁰³

After moving into 1607 New Hampshire Avenue, Woodbury began engaging in more charitable works. He devoted much of his time and some of his money to Emergency Hospital, whose growth he guided from a small neighborhood hospital to a large, modern city hospital over a period of 23 years. He joined its board in 1910, was elected president in 1913, and served in that capacity until his death in 1933. When he first became affiliated with it, the hospital had one horse-drawn ambulance and thirty beds. When he died, it occupied the north block of 1700 New York Avenue NW, contained 200 beds, modern operating rooms, X-Ray and lab facilities, and was adjoined by a home for nurses and interns. In a note to his fellow Harvard alumni, he described his work bringing “high standards, efficiency, and an enlarged field of usefulness” to the hospital as his “greatest interest.” Thousands of patients were treated there every year and two ambulances served the needs of emergency callers night and day. It is said that Woodbury visited the wards almost every day and lent an ear to everyone who approached him.¹⁰⁴

Considering the duties of his banking and legal affairs, his club obligations, and his almost daily involvement with the hospital, one wonders how much time Woodbury had left for entertaining at home. Furthermore, summers were spent away from Washington. Every May, Woodbury and Emily motored to Beach-Holm, their summer home in Newport, Rhode Island. The house at 1607 was essentially closed down, the silver and other valuables placed in a safe and the formal rooms closed off.¹⁰⁵

It was at Beach-Holm that Woodbury took ill during the summer of 1933. The couple returned to Washington, and Wood underwent

an operation at Emergency Hospital, but he never fully recovered and died on October 14, 1933. His estate was valued at just over \$1.2 million; most of his assets, including his real estate, were left to Emily. Family portraits, papers, and family mementos were left to his brother Montgomery and nephews and nieces, though Emily was granted their use until her death. By bequeathing his wife three houses, household goods, and investments (apart from a \$10,000 bequest to Emergency Hospital), Woodbury provided Emily with the means of maintaining their comfortable lifestyle. He also expressed the wish that “my wife and I be as near together as possible in our final resting place.”¹⁰⁶

Emily would continue to live at 1607 for another fifteen years while the world around her changed dramatically. The Great Depression depleted countless family fortunes and made the running of grand houses a luxury. Even Woodbury’s beloved Metropolitan Club saw itself beset by deficits caused by members who were unwilling or unable to pay their bills.¹⁰⁷ The mansions around Dupont Circle passed from the hands of wealthy families into those of institutions—foreign governments that turned them into embassies, charitable and educational organizations. The Washington of think tanks, lobbying groups, and law offices that still define the city today was emerging. No longer the exclusive playground for old and new money, it did remain the home for political power players, policy wonks, intelligence services, and major interest groups. World War II and America’s role in the Allied victory turned the United States into an acknowledged world power.

Emily remained largely shielded from world events and the transformation of Dupont Circle. Woodbury’s prudent investments allowed

her to maintain her grand home in style. And she was surrounded by family. After her nephew Edward A. Mitchell, a Navy officer, was widowed, his two young children came to live at the Second Blair House. Eventually their grandmother, Emily's sister Mary Wallach Mitchell, also came to live at the house. Edward Mitchell's daughter, also named Mary, later recalled that the clank of the elevator provided her and her beaux with ample warning of approaching chaperones during her courting days. She also spoke of a cook who chased the children away with his cleaver. Later on, her wedding reception was held at the Blair mansion in 1943, and eventually her daughter, Emily Blair Chewning, was born at 1607. Emily Wallach Blair died on January 5, 1948, and was laid to rest beside Woodbury in Rock Creek Cemetery.¹⁰⁸

Looking back on Woodbury's life, one can fairly say that he grew from an impetuous boy who did not know his limits into a responsible citizen and family man. If his swashbuckling Uncle Frank had been his hero as a boy, he outgrew him by learning to fit into society and avoiding debt—in fact, he accumulated a fortune. There were no great scandals in his life apart from his youthful indiscretions and the whisperings that may have arisen from his involvement with Mrs. McKay.

He had the good fortune of having been born into a nationally prominent family. Their prominence may well have strengthened his rebellious streak when he was young. A boy who played ball with the president of the United States and whose father walked in and out of the White House was not to be intimidated by obscure teachers in a country school. He was also born into one of the nation's most contentious and anxious times. In some ways this experience—and the

tumultuous ups and downs of his family's political gambits—may have strengthened his desire for stability and financial security.

If he experienced any loneliness from growing up in such a busy household, this would have been countered by his love of life. He enjoyed fine food and social gatherings, and he chronicled this in his letters. If he was born into anxious times, he rose and made his fortune during promising times. America was on the rise as an industrial, commercial, and incipient world power. His father's and grandfather's generation had laid the groundwork, Woodbury's and later generations reaped the benefits, though building and advancing in different ways.

We can conclude that Woodbury achieved balance with age and experience and appeared to be content within a well-defined sphere of influence—his hometown. There he rose to prominence in his own right and gave expression to it in building his grand residence, Washington's Second Blair House on New Hampshire Avenue.

JULES HENRI DE SIBOUR, THE BLAIRS' ARCHITECT

If measured by his legacy, de Jules Henri de Sibour would deserve a much larger treatise, certainly larger than the scope of this booklet. There is no authoritative biography on this eminent architect who helped shape the area around Dupont Circle like few others, though there are numerous dictionary entries and an enlightening thesis by Janet Davis on five of his Massachusetts Avenue houses.¹⁰⁹ De Sibour was, above all, a master synthesizer and re-creator, shaped and inspired by two cultures: France and America.

De Sibour was born in France in 1872. His parents were Gabriel de Sibour, a French aristocrat, and Mary Louisa Johnson, who came from a wealthy Maine family. Jules was born in Paris in 1872. When he was three years old, the family moved to Richmond, Virginia, where his father served the French Republic as Vice Consul. His parents lived in style and became known for their “lavish hospitality,” but due to poor

health Gabriel de Sibour gave up his position, moved to Washington, and died there in 1885.¹¹⁰

Jules was just barely a teenager when his family moved to Washington, while Woodbury was already a well-established lawyer who had practiced with his father for seven years and on his own since 1883. The de Sibours lived first at 822 Connecticut Avenue, only a short stroll away from the Blair House on Pennsylvania Avenue. As a boy, Jules attended Young's School (which is still in existence as the Emerson Preparatory School). His mother, Mary Louisa, moved the family into a house on Farragut Square after her husband's death, but the family moved to France shortly afterward so that his brother Louis could study architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. At seventeen, Jules returned to Washington and eventually entered Yale in 1892. He graduated four years later having spent much of his time engrossed in athletics and social activities.

Woodbury was almost forty at the time Jules Henri de Sibour graduated and began his first journey to Paris that summer. The young graduate seems to have had a difficult time deciding what to do after college and decided to try following in his brother's footsteps. He gained a position in the well-known architectural firm of Ernest Flagg in New York City. Flagg, who had been a classmate of Louis de Sibour at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, designed the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, a magnificent Beaux-Arts building that opened in 1897. De Sibour was not happy at Flagg's and was not sure if he had chosen the right profession when he was introduced to Bruce Price. Price, a well-respected, successful New York architect, had designed the *Châ-*

teau Frontenac in Quebec and many office buildings, hospitals, and terminals. De Sibour immediately liked Price, and their relationship proved productive and lasting, cut short only by Price's death in 1903.

With Price's encouragement, de Sibour returned to Paris to study architecture. He was joined by his wife, Margaret Clagett, a Washington socialite he had married in 1898, at the age of 26. As was common practice for Americans, he first "apprenticed" himself to an architectural studio, in his case the *atelier* of Daumet and Esquié. One of the signature achievements of its principal, Honoré Daumet, was the recent restoration of the Chateau de Chantilly. However, his time in Paris was cut short after a year by a "financial reversal" in his wife's family, which meant that the couple could no longer afford to live in France.¹¹¹

Price must have been well pleased with de Sibour's work—with or without official *École* affiliation—for he made him a partner in 1902 and supported his participation in a competition for the design of Freedmen's Hospital, Washington's segregated hospital for African Americans. After de Sibour's design won the contest, the young man no longer expressed doubts about his chosen profession. Without his marriage to Clagett, de Sibour might have remained in New York, but over time the pull of Washington grew stronger. After Price's death in 1903, de Sibour gradually shifted his practice to Washington and increasingly made his reputation as a designer of grand houses.

The mansion—larger and more formal than a house but smaller and more individualized than an institution—remained his signature work. There his designs flow, surprise, and delight; they are never heavy-handed or pompous. In many of his buildings, including the

Second Blair House, he worked with the building company of William P. Lipscomb.¹¹² The inspiration for the exteriors of de Sibour's houses varied widely, including French Renaissance mansions, Louis XV-era *hotels particuliers*, and Georgian and Adamesque countryhouses. De Sibour doubtless used his prestigious French background and his Beaux-Arts experience to enhance his status at a time when wealthy Americans in Washington were eagerly looking towards French architectural design and the urban setting of Paris for inspiration.¹¹³

In his domestic architecture, however, de Sibour did not cling to French tradition. Rather than following the dictum that a building's interior should match the stylistic inspiration of the exterior, de Sibour generally followed a pattern set by Bruce Price of creating a more free-flowing arrangement of spaces for entertainment and private

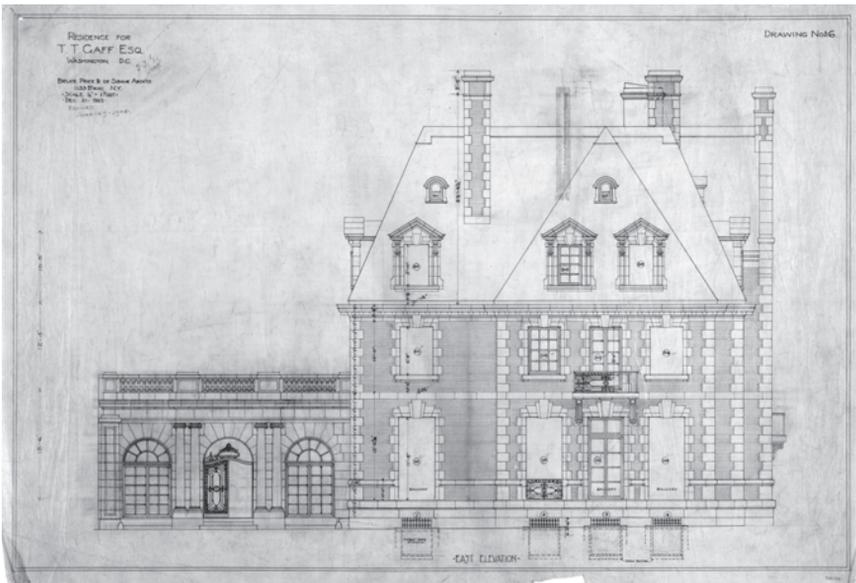


Figure 7: Jules Henri de Sibour's rendering of the front façade of the Thomas Gaff House, one of his first important Washington mansions.

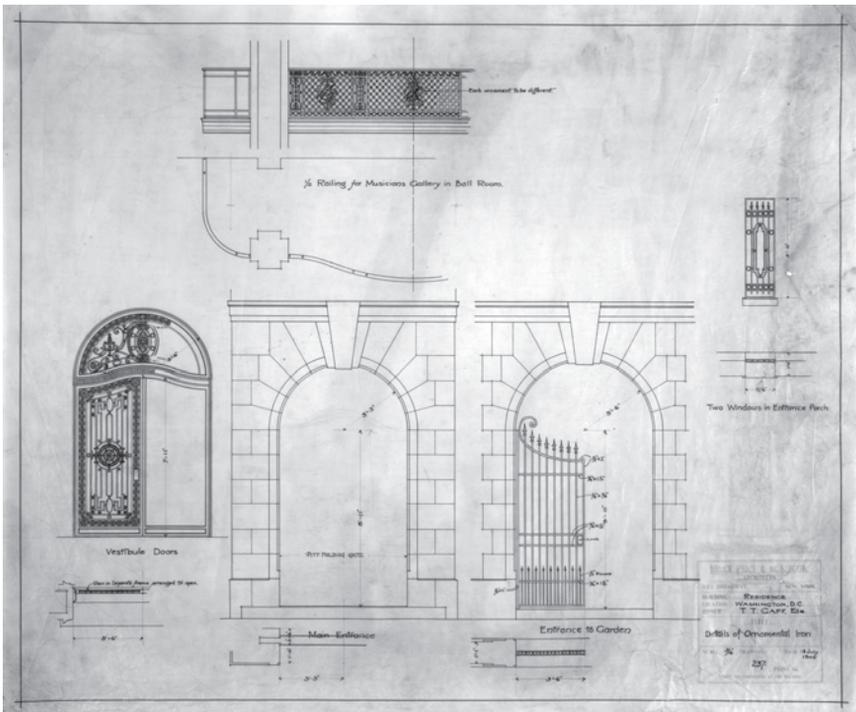


Figure 8: A drawing of ornamental ironwork for the mansion of Thomas T. Gaff illustrates J. H. de Sibour's attention to detail.

family life. Often the interiors drew inspiration from classic English architecture rather than French design. The Thomas Gaff House, at 1520 20th Street, was one of his earlier successes, admired for its great clarity of geometric form, elegance, and sharp detail. If we compare the ballroom of his Gaff or Moore House with that of the Belmont House, we recognize in an instant his hallmark of elegant restraint. His proportions are harmonious, his decorations “dance” rather than overwhelm, his spaces flow and curve.¹¹⁴

After World War I, and even more so after the Depression, de Sibour worked for businesses, designing office buildings for institutions

and for the government. He was a consulting architect for the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis and also designed the Public Health Service Building at Constitution and 19th Street, which now houses part of the Interior Department. He was also assigned to remodel the Pension Office Building, General Meigs's magnum opus, but this commission was never carried out due to the Depression.¹¹⁵

Jules Henri de Sibour died in 1938 after an operation at only 66 years old. He was survived by his three sons—Henri Louis, Jacques Blaise, and Jean Raymond. In a sense, de Sibour's life mirrors America's fortunes from the late 1800s to the time before World War II. His entry into professional life coincided with an economic boom in America—the country had just won the Spanish-American War and was beginning to imagine itself as an imperial power; meanwhile, wealth that had been tapped by mining magnates, industrialists, financiers and other rich individuals poured into Washington and provided funding for a boom in many varieties of architecture. After World War I and the Wall Street crash of 1929, however, the mood in the country shifted. The suffering of the poor and the middle class could no longer be ignored or dismissed out of hand. Opulence and elegance appeared obscene in light of the country's struggles. As private commissions became scarce, de Sibour focused instead on government commissions. But it was the grand mansions that established his reputation and keep it alive still today.

A TOUR OF THE SECOND BLAIR HOUSE



Figure 9: 1607 New Hampshire Ave. NW, present day.

Rising four stories high from two building blocks that form a substantial polygon, Woodbury Blair's mansion embodies the successful interplay between mass and motion, between solidity and fluidity; squared and rounded space, axes that run at surprising angles as well as straight ones. The exterior successfully harmonizes these tensions. By using small bricks in courses of alternating colors—a Flemish bond—the architect created a ripple effect, an impressionistic pattern that distracts the viewer from noticing the building's bulk.

The building's weight is further "lightened" by wrought-iron balconies, the white balustrades below the mansard roof, as well as the swirling lines of the iron screens over the narrow windows flanking the entrance. Perhaps most effective is the tripartite division of the façade with its center part or bay extending toward the street—stepping toward the viewer—creating the impression of wings. Without that break in the façade, we would see a "block" rather than a building profile. Viewed from the outside, the house is a Georgian revival inspiration.

The floral tympanum above the entrance hints at the Adamesque or late Georgian style, according to architectural historian Janet Davis. She points out that American architects trained in the Beaux-Arts style, as de Sibour was, often combined elements of several historical styles according to their taste and that of their clients, rather than slavishly following one particular style.¹¹⁶

Three and four appear to be the magic numbers for the building's façade: three wings or bays, three windows per floor—with four panes running across—three white horizontal dividers, three mansard win-



Figure 10: Front door of the German Historical Institute.

dows. The interplay between rectangular and rounded forms is equally intriguing. The circular drive is echoed in the rounded door arch, and the three brick arches above the second floor windows reflect

symmetry, perhaps the key tenet of the Beaux-Arts style. The arches, in turn, are set off—contradicted even—by the square windows, the horizontal lines of the limestone courses, and the square shape of the building.

The north wall along Corcoran Street is organized around the number four: four floors, four arched windows, set off against four rectangular ones on the third floor, and four dormers. A viewer, standing on New Hampshire across from the front door, sees the Corcoran wall flowing away from him, disappearing from view—for good reason. The building plan was adopted to solve the problem of reconciling the angle created by the conjunction of New Hampshire Avenue and Corcoran Street—a legacy of the ingenious L'Enfant who superimposed a number of wide boulevards at diagonals onto a grid of parallel streets. By the time Washington's Second Blair House was built in 1910–1911, de



Figure 11: The Alexander Stewart House, at 2200 Massachusetts Ave. NW, exemplifies J. H. de Sibour's ability to adjust his house designs to awkwardly shaped lots.

Sibour had become an expert in dealing with these unusual lots, with the Alexander Stewart residence perhaps marking his masterpiece.¹¹⁷

Visitors who enter Woodbury Blair's mansion through the front door are taken by surprise. They step into a perfectly square foyer as if stepping into a box, but are immediately led down a hallway at a sharp 35-degree angle away from the entrance—just as the wall on Corcoran Street recedes away from the viewer outside. If not for this shift, the guest would run straight into a pillar and eventually into the party wall between 1607 and its neighboring building. But the architect skillfully ensures that most visitors are not aware of the shift in axes. Black-and-white checkerboard marble floor tiles direct them along the intended path and white columns form an open wall—a kind of balustrade—between visitors and the connecting wall. Merely by stepping through the front, we have entered an interior composed of several interiors, a space filled with decorative elements repeated throughout the house.¹¹⁸

A complement of steps—an advance—lead toward the connecting wall on the right, only to make a sharp, ninety-degree turn to the left, rising majestically upward. The elegant vase-like shapes of the cast-iron banister, the black and white pattern of the floor, and the columns and door frieze all catch one's eye. To the left of the hallway is the library, the main room on the first floor. The wooden wall panels of the room are simple, almost devoid of pattern, without the elaborate linen folds that characterize other de Sibour libraries.¹¹⁹ The walls and ceiling calm the eye after the abundance of shapes and lively black and white accents of the entrance hall. The room unfolds quietly, inviting visitors to read or simply rest before a host or hostess steps in to greet them.



Figure 12: Front hallway.

One of de Sibour's typical architectural techniques to overcome Washington's awkward lot shapes was to introduce rounded spaces designed to make rooms as large as possible without using an awkward



Figure 13: Fireplace in the former library.



Figure 14: View toward the apse in the library.

diagonal wall. On the ground floor, for example, one end of the commodious library is an apse-like space, shaped as if to enclose readers and protect them from the distractions of the outside world. A paneled door next to the fireplace—opposite the apse—leads to a smaller room, perhaps the smoking room, while the closed-off back part of the first floor accommodated the kitchen and the servants' dining room. The entire back section of the house, separated from the front or representative part by a wall and door on each floor, was entirely devoted to functional rooms and, on the top floor, to servant quarters. A narrow servant staircase connects the back floors, in stark contrast to the majestic front stairway with its decorative rail.¹²⁰

A visitor to the house on the afternoon of January 1, 1914, would have had the opportunity to see a good deal of the house. That day, Woodbury and Emily held a New Year's reception that was reported as "one of the largest and handsomest" of the day. Guests probably would not have stopped in the library; instead, after entering, they might have stepped into the small vestibule to the right of the door where a maid or butler would have taken their wraps while they adjusted their finery or made use of the small lavatory. Refreshed, they would have ascended the grand stairway to the second floor. Once they reached the landing they would have found the dynamics between the hallway and the main room—the ballroom—reversed from that of the first floor. The second-floor hallway flows quietly, there are no black-and-white checkerboard tiles, no boxes within boxes, but instead a light wooden floor that opens into a vestibule toward New Hampshire Avenue. The



Figure 15: The grand stairway.



Figure 16: The second-floor vestibule facing New Hampshire Ave.

light-filled space, with its striated marble fireplace, served as the orchestra space when the Blairs hosted dances.¹²¹

On the second floor, the eye-catching features were reserved for the ballroom. The guest would probably have handed his or her card to a waiting butler before entering through the double doors, perhaps taking note of the broken pediment and floral frieze overhead. Emily and a group of female friends, or perhaps her sisters or sisters-in-law, would have formed a receiving line to formally greet the guests. For such a large party, the butler would probably have announced the guests' names aloud as they passed through the double doors; the tradition of New Year's visiting among Washington's elite meant that at least some of those attending the reception were wealthy, like the



Figure 17: The ballroom, now the lecture hall of the GHI.

Blairs, but strangers to them. Those attending who were important American or foreign officials—and “many members of the diplomatic circle” attended—would have had the privilege of cutting ahead of those of lesser status.

The ballroom, like the library below and the sitting room above, rounds out toward New Hampshire Avenue. Its apse appears to be “divided” into three parts, with a crescent-shaped wall niche framed by two windows. Only one, however, is a true window; the other is a glass door leading into the light-filled vestibule. The niche might have held a statue, vase, or rare art object. Again, we admire de Sibour’s ingenuity. The concept of symmetry required a second window up front, but he had run out of exterior wall space because of the vestibule. So he

created a glass door in the shape of a window, restoring the balance. Two additional windows face New Hampshire Avenue and fill the interior with light—though on New Year’s Day the house was “thronged” with visitors and it might have been difficult for the guest to reach them. Above, plaster garlands unfold along the ceiling, forming a rosette around the center chandelier and swirling around the rounded form of the front apse as if echoing the sound of music or the swirl of skirts around the room. At a reception like that on New Year’s Day, Washington hosts almost always hired musicians, although their performances were not a focus of the event. After being introduced, the guests would have entered the ballroom, shaken hands with Emily, and



Figure 18: The dining room, now the Seminar Room of the GHI.

then gone on to greet other guests. The men who hosted the party were not required by etiquette to greet the visitors.

Across from the apse, on the far wall, a gold-and-white marble fireplace delights the eye. Its colors are delicate, the marigold mottled with a deeper brown, its decoration in keeping with the theme of vases, garlands, and urns. A majestic mirror above the fireplace would have provided depth, reflecting the light from the chandelier. On nights when the Blairs hosted dances, the mirror would have reflected the dancers' flushed faces and shimmering gowns. Mirror and fireplace are framed by two wooden double doors, leading to the dining room.

The dining room receives ample light from four wide windows—two facing east and two north. It is almost as large as the ballroom, boasting the same beautiful wooden floor and a marble fireplace in the same delicate colors, this time with a hunting scene as the main theme. But it is toned down and offers fewer distractions. There is no enclosing apse, no rosette or wall niche, but the guests seated to the south or west can admire the painted medallions of cherubs with musical instruments on the upper wall. At the New Year's reception, it is likely that food would have been laid out here in order to be convenient to the kitchen. For such a large gathering, there was probably cake or other desserts that guests would have enjoyed with fruit punch or coffee. At smaller-scale receptions, there would also have been wine and perhaps more substantial food to eat. Formal dinners, by contrast, would likely have been six courses long, with guests offered three different wines over the course of the evening. Pulling off such events and being known as sophisticated hosts depended on the work of the Blairs' servants.



Figure 19: Painted medallion of cherubs in the dining room.

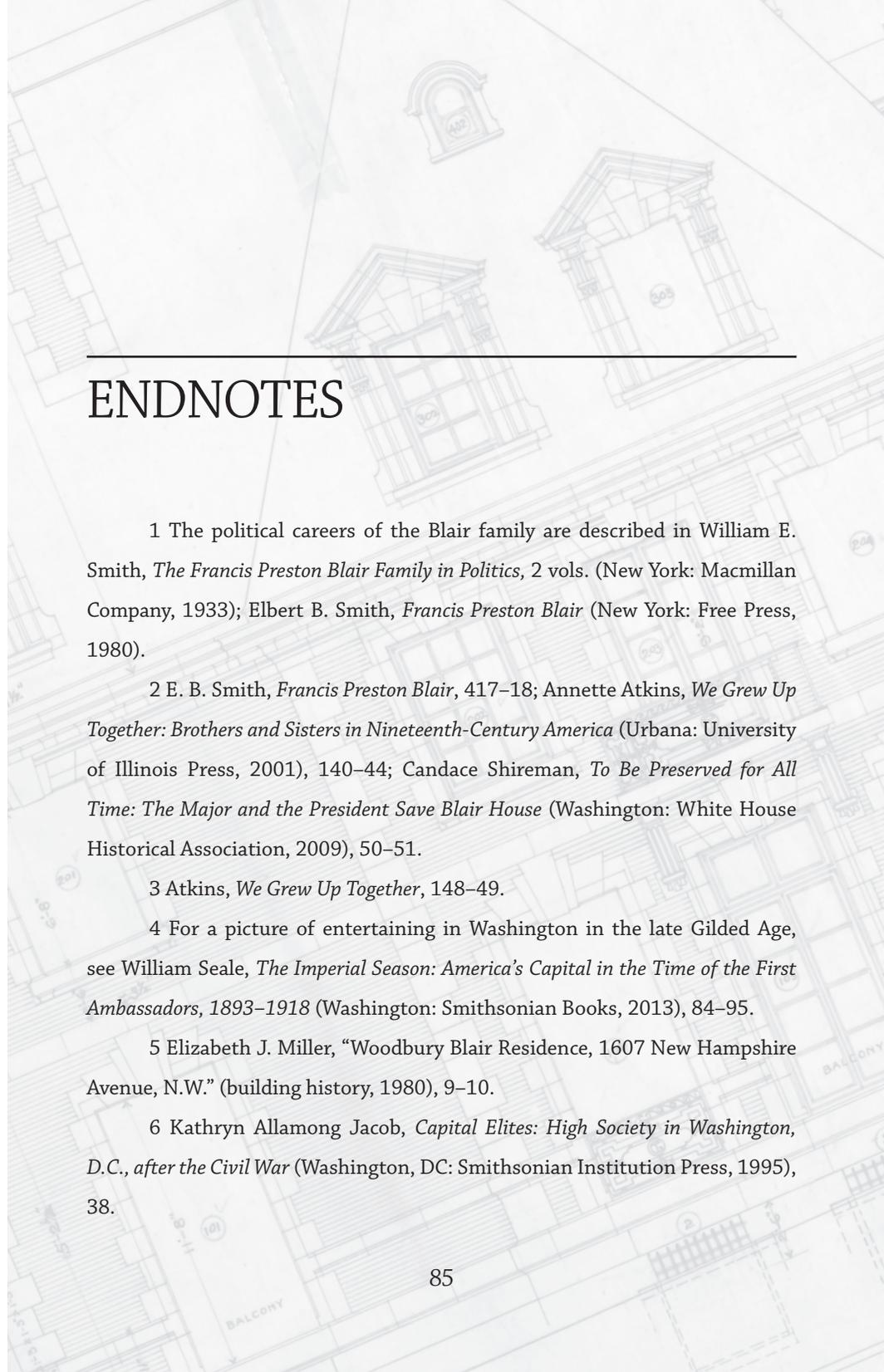
Many would not have even been seen by the guests; proper etiquette demanded that only male servants be seen during formal events.¹²²

If we now return to the hall and take the stairs beyond the second and main floor up to the family quarters on the third floor, we would most likely be ushered into the comfortable sitting room, with one window, in a rounded alcove, facing New Hampshire Avenue and the other Corcoran Street on the north side of the house.

The fourth floor features a second sitting room—again with an apse facing New Hampshire Avenue—with adjoining bedroom and bathroom. Since the suite was designed for family or guests, it has a generous hallway and skylight, and the elevator connects it to the rest of the house. The remainder of the fourth floor was reserved for ser-

vant quarters. The guest or family suite opens to the light-filled hallway, while the inner or servant rooms open on a windowless hallway.

Woodbury and Emily were fortunate to live most of their lives in an America of abundance, even excessive abundance, that allowed them to build their elegant residence according to taste and enjoy it in style. A closer look at the architecture of their home, however, allows us to see the contradictions and inequalities that made their way of life possible.



ENDNOTES

1 The political careers of the Blair family are described in William E. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933); Elbert B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

2 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 417–18; Annette Atkins, *We Grew Up Together: Brothers and Sisters in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 140–44; Candace Shireman, *To Be Preserved for All Time: The Major and the President Save Blair House* (Washington: White House Historical Association, 2009), 50–51.

3 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 148–49.

4 For a picture of entertaining in Washington in the late Gilded Age, see William Seale, *The Imperial Season: America's Capital in the Time of the First Ambassadors, 1893–1918* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2013), 84–95.

5 Elizabeth J. Miller, “Woodbury Blair Residence, 1607 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.” (building history, 1980), 9–10.

6 Kathryn Allamong Jacob, *Capital Elites: High Society in Washington, D.C., after the Civil War* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 38.

7 On Blair's role: Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005), 288–91, 372–73.

8 *Ibid.*, 288–91, 303–304, 359; Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 117–18, 122; Donald A. Ritchie, *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 19–20, 23–25.

9 On Eliza Blair's role, see Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 118.

10 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 92; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 359–60.

11 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 166–67; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 578. By the mid-1840s, Blair was able to provide each of his sons \$10,000—or roughly \$320,000 in 2015 dollars—to launch their careers. E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 182.

12 On the Blair family's life at Silver Spring, see Virginia Jeans Laas, *Love and Power in the Nineteenth Century: The Marriage of Violet Blair* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 2–4. Francis and Eliza Blair's daughter Elizabeth, who married Navy officer Samuel Phillips Lee, eventually inherited a considerable portion of her father's real estate, and her descendants would play an important role in developing it into the modern-day suburb of Silver Spring.

13 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 92–93.

14 Minna Woodbury Blair inherited several pieces of early nineteenth-century furniture that remain in the collection of Blair House; both she and her son Gist used their money to buy several more fine examples of early republic antiques. Margaret M. Newman, "To Adorn This Past': Family Furniture Collection at the Blair House," M.A. thesis, Corcoran College of Art + Design, 2009, 17–19.

15 On Montgomery Blair's career in St. Louis, his second marriage, and the Woodbury family, see E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 178; Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 140–42.

16 Kenneth C. Kaufman, *Dred Scott's Advocate: A Biography of Roswell M. Field* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 193. Eventually, in 1855, Montgomery Blair was appointed solicitor to the U.S. Court of Claims.

17 Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 409.

18 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 104–105.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 190.

21 Dred Scott (c. 1799–1858) had been enslaved at birth, in Virginia, and eventually was sold to John Emerson, a surgeon in the U.S. Army whose hometown was St. Louis (in Missouri, a slave state). Emerson was later posted to Illinois and then the Wisconsin territory—two areas where slavery was barred—and Scott joined him there (as did his wife, Harriet). Eventually, the Scotts returned to St. Louis, where the surgeon and then, after his death, his widow hired out the Scotts, profiting from their wages. The Scotts attempted to purchase their freedom, but when this was rebuffed, Dred Scott raised the claim that because he had lived in a free state he could no longer be considered a slave under Missouri state law. Eventually, Emerson's widow transferred ownership of the Scotts to her brother John Sanford, a New York resident, and because of the multistate issues involved it became a U.S. Supreme Court case. The formal title of the case was *Dred Scott v. Sandford*—John Sanford's name was misspelled due to a clerical error. For background on Montgomery Blair's participation in the case, see Kaufman, *Dred Scott's Advocate*, 191–95.

22 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 121, 125; Newman, ““To Adorn This Past,”” 13–19.

23 Letters exchanged among family members take up at least a dozen boxes in the Blair Family Papers collection at the Library of Congress (which also includes an extensive collection of the Blairs' political correspondence). At least ten more boxes of family correspondence can be found in the Blair-Lee Papers

at Princeton University, the archives of Francis P. Blair's daughter Elizabeth, her husband Samuel Phillips Lee, and their descendants.

24 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 123.

25 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 187–88. On Frank Blair's life, see William Earl Parrish, *Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998).

26 Parrish, *Frank Blair*, 79–88.

27 W. E. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family*, 2:2–3.

28 *Ibid.*, 2:17–18.

29 *Ibid.*, 2:137.

30 W. E. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family*, 2:4–17.

31 *Ibid.*, 2:65–86.

32 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 343–46.

33 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 123–24.

34 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 344–47. Lincoln's letter and Blair's reply were made public almost immediately. See "Cabinet Changes," *New York Times*, Sep. 24, 1864.

35 On Montgomery Blair as Postmaster General, see W. E. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family*, 2:90–111, and E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 310–13.

36 Woodbury Blair to Mary E. W. Blair, Feb. 15, 1864, reel 6, Blair Family Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

37 Woodbury Blair to Mary E. W. Blair, June 2, 1865, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

38 Woodbury Blair to Mary E. W. Blair, Oct. 13, 1865, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

39 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 426.

40 For this and the following references to Woodbury Blair's letters from the 1870s, see reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

41 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 434–35.

42 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 404–405.

43 Frank Blair's eagerness to reach out to Confederate sympathizers had also alienated many of the antislavery German Americans who once backed his political career. E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 405; Parrish, *Frank Blair*, 244–46.

44 See, for example, Woodbury Blair to Mary E. W. Blair, April 11, 1872, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

45 Christopher Weeks, *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 73–74.

46 Alan Lessoff, "Washington under Federal Rule, 1871–1945," in *Berlin—Washington, 1800–2000: Capital Cities, Cultural Representation, and National Identities*, ed. Andreas W. Daum and Christof Mauch, 244–46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

47 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 134n2; Alan Lessoff, "Washington under Federal Rule, 1871–1945," 239, 249–54. See, for example, Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Dec. 17, 1888. For attitudes towards African American domestic workers in the decades after the Civil War, see David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 190–93.

48 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Sep. 25, 1879, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

49 *Harvard College Class of 1874, Fiftieth Anniversary: Eleventh Report* (Boston, MA, 1924), 27.

50 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 436.

51 "Death of Francis P. Blair," *Washington Star*, Oct. 19, 1876; "Death of Mr. Blair," *New Orleans Republican*, Oct. 20, 1876; "A Veteran Gone," *Yankton Daily Press*, Oct. 20, 1876, 1; "Francis P. Blair, Sr.," *New York Herald*, Oct. 19, 1876, 10; Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 133. E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 435–40.

52 E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 417–18.

53 On corruption, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 161–73; Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Norton, 2011), 93–133; Alan Lessoff, *The Nation and Its City: Politics, "Corruption," and Progress in Washington, D.C., 1861–1902* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

54 C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little Brown, 1951), 137, 210; E. B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair*, 439.

55 *Washington Post*, July 28, 1883; *Washington Post*, July 30, 1883.

56 John C. Proctor, Edwin M. Williams and Frank P. Black, eds., *Washington, Past and Present: A History*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1930), 4:633.

57 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 143–46.

58 For example, Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Jan. 23, 1887, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

59 Jacob, *Capital Elites*, 198–229, esp. 227. On the Janins' marriage, see Laas, *Love and Power*, 103–19.

60 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Feb. 25, 1892, reel 6, Blair Family Papers; Laas, *Love and Power*, 93. See also Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 144–47; and, on Gordon and Marion McKay, June Hall McCash, *The Jekyll Island Cottage Colony* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 111–19.

61 Montgomery Blair Jr. to Gist Blair, Nov. 9, 1891, and Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, March 8, 1892, both in reel 6, Blair Family Papers. On the Blairs' pride in their ancestry, see Laas, *Love and Power*, 107–109.

62 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, June 16, 1896, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

63 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 141, 145.

64 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Nov. 9, 1888, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

65 For example, Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, April 2, 1887, Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Nov. 1, 1888, and Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, Nov. 9, 1888, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

66 On the growth of the trust company business, see *History of the National Savings and Trust Company, Washington, 1867-1942*, 44–47. Washington city directories indicate that the three Blair brothers—Gist, Montgomery, and Woodbury—all had offices in the Corcoran Building until 1910, when they moved to the newly built Hibbs Building. See *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia*, 1910 edn., p. 277; 1911 edn., p. 292. Both the Hibbs Building, now known as the Folger Building, and the National Savings & Trust Company Building are still standing, at 725 15th Street NW and 1445 New York Avenue NW, respectively. The two buildings were important components of Washington's financial district. See Kim Williams, "Financial Historic District, Washington, D.C." (National Register of Historic Places registration form, 2016).

67 See, e.g., *Washington Post*, May 15, 1914; *Washington Post*, April 7, 1931. The rise of the professional trustee is described in David Grayson Allen, *Investment Management in Boston: A History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 66–80.

68 "Blair, New Suburb," *Washington Post*, May 7, 1922; Carol Hooper, "Banks and Financial Institutions of Washington D.C." (National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1993), sec. E, 21–26; Michael R. Harrison, "The 'Evil of the Misfit Subdivisions,'" *Washington History* 14, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002); Sarah J. Shoenfeld and Mara Cherkasky, "A Strictly White Residential Section," *Washington History* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 27–30.

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70 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, March 12, 1907, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

71 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, June 16, 1907, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

72 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, c. June 1907, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

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74 Allen C. Clark, "Richard Wallach and the Times of His Mayoralty," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 21 (1918); Bill Marzella, Kimberly DeMuro, and Oscar Beisert, "Grant Circle Historic District" (National Register of Historic Places registration form, 2015), section 8, 15-21.

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77 Woodbury Blair to Gist Blair, August 24, 1907, reel 6, Blair Family Papers.

78 Miller, "Woodbury Blair Residence," 6

79 Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 148-49.

80 Miller, "Woodbury Blair Residence," 4-5.

81 Weeks, *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington*, 12-13.

82 For the discussion of Dupont Circle mansions and their builders that follows, see Weeks, *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington*, 175-82; Seale, *The Imperial Season*, 133-46, 157-73; Jacob, *Capital Elites*, 182-85, 192. Dupont Circle itself did not attain its current appearance until almost four decades later, in 1921, when members of the Dupont family funded a project to re-landscape the circle and install a fountain that replaced the statue of Dupont.

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84 Emily Schulz, "In Stone and Steel," *Cincinnati Fourteen* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2005).

85 Weeks, *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington*, 176.

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94 *1930 U.S. Census*, Washington, District of Columbia, enumeration district 76, page 12A (NARA microfilm T626, roll 294); *1940 U.S. Census*, Washington, District of Columbia, enumeration district 1-98, page 21A (NARA microfilm T627, roll 556); Phyllis M. Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920–1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 89.

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103 Newman, "'To Adorn This Past,'" 34–35; Atkins, *We Grew Up Together*, 149–51. Compare *Boyd's Directory*, 1911 edn., p. 292 and 1912 edn., p. 293.

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118 Solutions to such awkward entry spaces were a speciality of de Sibour’s tutor in architecture, Honoré Daumet. Davis, “J. H. de Sibour,” 34–35. Information about how the rooms of the Second Blair House were used during the Woodbury Blairs’ residence is given in Miller, “Woodbury Blair Residence,” 9.

119 Davis, “J. H. de Sibour,” 56.

120 Davis, “J.H. de Sibour,” 34.

121 “Society Doings,” *Washington Herald*, Jan. 2, 1914; “Day in Capital Society,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 2, 1914, 4. For the description of the typical reception that follows, see Seale, *The Imperial Season*, 149–52.

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IMAGES AND CREDITS

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