

altered the fashions of goods produced in France. Appropriately titled the *restauration* style, the new design aesthetic was similar to *empire* designs, but with Napoleonic-associated motifs eliminated. The sphinx, swan, and eagle were all removed from many high-end commissions (Figures 19 & 20). These icons were replaced with heavy neo-classical carving of acanthus leaves, anthemias, reeds, and sunbursts (Figure 21). By 1817, Bellangé survived the numerous turnovers in French political power, all the while acting as a lead *ébéniste* to whomever held authority. His direct involvement in outfitting French interiors exposed him to the power of political portrayal in furniture. Monroe conceded to what was available, trusting the agents and the enlisted French cabinetmaker because of their knowledge for all things of good taste and high quality.

The *empire* style's heavily decorated, gold objects were made fashionable by Napoleon I during his reign as Emperor of France. Monroe was in no way using the Bellangé furniture to suggest the Napoleonic imperial attitude. Instead, Monroe wanted the furnishings to showcase America as a country of prosperity with democratic values. In comparison to other commissions for use in France and other European nations at the time, Bellangé produced an American version for the President. Differences included the size of the furniture as well as the carved detail on the seat rail, crest rail, and legs. Bellangé's European furniture was more heavily carved with classical ornament covering the entire wooden frame. Russell and LaFarge's were in search of furniture with, "simplicity of ornament with the richness suitable to the decoration of a house occupied by the first Magistrate of a free

Nation.”^{xxi} The furniture was therefore made specifically to reflect the notion of what America was at that time: self-confident yet self-effacing.

The close association of Bellangé to Napoleon I and then to Louis XVIII must have reassured Monroe of the cabinetmaker’s competence to craft appropriate furniture. Amidst his many duties as President, Monroe found time to give attention to the reconstruction and decoration details of the President’s House, particularly relating to the furnishings. He knew the Bellangé suite would present just as much about America as the architecture of the house would.

Russell and LaFarge stated that the furniture from Bellangé’s workshop was custom made for the President. The restricted use of carved ornament is a testament to the suite’s custom commission for Monroe. However, modern scholars have questioned whether this furniture formerly belonged to Napoleon, or another high-ranking French official.^{xxii} This scenario could have been a reality, but it is highly unlikely for several reasons. First, there are distinct design references withheld from the Monroe Bellangé furniture in comparison to those produced for the French Émpire under Napoleon I, such as the honeybee, swan, eagle, or lion. Furthermore French government heavily controlled the French furniture trade with specific rules to follow. The beginning of the French Revolution brought about many trade changes including the abandonment of cabinetmaker stamps on furniture.^{xxiii} The elimination of a maker’s stamp continued into the restauration of the monarchy in 1815. Two of the surviving chairs from Monroe’s suite have the mark, “P. Bellangé” under the chair rail (Figure 22). Although a stamp could easily be applied, later, its presence on only some of the chairs leaves the stamp’s significance open for

interpretation. The shape of the furniture also indicates customization. The precise, curved back of the pair of settees fits perfectly against the oval wall of the elliptic room (Figure 23). In addition, Russell and LaFarge clearly stated to Monroe that ready-made furniture was not available from cabinetmakers in Paris. The gilded bronze chandelier purchased for the elliptic room, made to hold thirty candles, was well-known because of its history as a Napoleon I commission.^{xxiv} Although Napoleon never used the chandelier, the agents used its provenance to glorify its existence in the President's House. It would be inconsistent and unlikely that the agents would boast a Napoleonic connection with one object and not with others.

Captain E. F. Jewett's ship, *The Resolution*, delivered the Bellangé furniture order to the port of Alexandria, Virginia, in September 1817. The original cargo inventory and bills provided the arrival information: "41 assorted Packages of goods loaded... bound for Washington, and for the Account and Risk of H.E. James Monroe, President of the United States of America."^{xxv} Monroe highly anticipated the arrival of the furnishings hoping its arrival would coincide with the end of construction. He and his family had taken up temporary quarters in Washington during the construction. The public was equally eager to see the President moved into his new home and to see the interiors of the nearly finished house. Knowledge of the Bellangé suite circulated widely through solicitous gossip and newspaper write-ups across the country in the Baltimore *Niles Weekly Register*, Philadelphia's *Franklin Gazette*, and Washington's *Intelligencer*, among others. *The Resolution's* cargo inventory was published and described as having seating furniture with, "olive-

branch ornament, upholstered in double-warp satin, delicate crimson.” (Figure 24)^{xxvi}

Scrutiny associated with the importation of the Bellangé furniture came from several members of Congress. The disapproval probably originated as a form of political opposition from members of the Federalist Party; Monroe was a Republican. Unfortunately, the later economic downturn of the 1819 Great Panic escalated opposition even after its placement in the President’s House. Monroe and his team of architects and designers requested more government funds throughout the reconstruction process, almost doubling the original budget. Russell and LaFarge’s spent most of the furniture budget, for the entire house, on the Bellangé suite, falling \$283.82 short of the total government appropriated \$20,000.00.^{xxvii} Although expensive, the furniture used in the elliptic room to welcome guests, dignitaries, and foreign leaders was an impressive representation of the United States as a country.

Bellangé created a total of fifty-three pieces for the elliptic room suite. Of the total, eighteen armchairs and eighteen side chairs lined the oval wall along with the pier table and curved pair of settees, precisely hugging the round shape of the wall. The six footstools supported the tired feet of guests, and the four tabouret provided additional seating (Figure 25). The rich, crimson, satin upholstery was provided by the French *tapissier*, M. Leveissiere, showcasing Monroe’s eagle and laurel wreath. The two *bérgères* were most likely placed in a central location, perhaps on the North side of the room facing the entrance, as they were reserved for the President and his wife only. Traditionally, the *bérgère* form was reserved for people of rank. Monroe

would not use a throne, or sit upon an elevated pedestal. This subtle distinction in seating furniture was therefore acceptable protocol for the President. Also included in the order were two fire screens, upholstered in the same manner and most likely situated next to the fireplace on the east wall. Their whereabouts have been lost.^{xxviii}

Excusing the Great Panic of 1819, Monroe's Presidency is often referenced as an "Era of Good Feeling" for America. Along with the rebuilding of Washington and the President's House, came the resurrection of America's economy and morale after the War of 1812. Although there was much to celebrate following the end of the war, Americans had great odds to overcome in its aftermath. With the reconstruction of Washington, classical elements were incorporated into the architecture and décor of the President's House. This Bellangé suite's classical ornament and the architecture complimented one another, unifying the space.

Monroe's term in office, in addition to the "Era," was also considered one of the premiere times for Washington society, with the center of the action happening at the President's House.^{xxix} Monroe hosted numerous formal State functions in addition to the informal open-door policy of the President, permitting any citizen to have an audience with him. Although Monroe's informal open-door policy was purely American, and not a part of the political etiquette for other powerful countries, he did imitate many of the formal social customs from the French. Monroe's wife, Elizabeth, virtually rewrote the code of conduct for political social interaction in Washington, preferring everything to be in "French taste." (Figure 26)^{xxx} This subscription to French manners^{xxx} included the use of rooms and furniture.

Although Elizabeth ran the social and domestic aspects of the President's House, she was not responsible for any of the decoration decisions. Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century males routinely chose nearly all of the decoration that went into the home: furniture, paintings, upholstery, silver, ceramics, and any other type of refinement. Female input and decision-making abilities in the home were not established until the mid-nineteenth century. The trends of décor at this time were based primarily on a man's formal education, dictated by the tutors, colleges, and travels he exposed himself to. This, of course, explains why every individual consulted for the President's House was male.

James Monroe was a gentrified student, turned lawyer, turned politician. His education, in large part, dictated much of whom he became as a person and a politician; his likes, dislikes, and taste streamed from his studies of the Classics. Although he came from a modest Virginia farming family, he attended The College of William & Mary with the generosity of his uncle, Judge Joseph Jones, a member of the House of Burgesses and State Legislature (Figure 27).^{xxxii} With his fellow students, Monroe studied ancient Greek, Roman, and Etruscan cultures as part of the making of a proper gentleman. Caroline Winterer, a professor of American history at Stanford University, examined the culture of the classics in early-American education. Winterer remarked, "[the] admiration for ancient Greece was part of a cultural revolt against a sterile Augustan classicism, religious oppression, fussy Baroque décor, and aristocratic control."^{xxxiii} The lessons learned in the classroom from philosophers, such as Plato and Socrates, helped mold the democratic minds of young students. As a student of antique philosophy, Monroe and his peers had the

moral fibers of ancient cultures woven into their contemporary lifestyles. Robert Herbert, professor of Art at Yale University, believes that at the time of Monroe's education (1774-1775), the ancient prerogatives of liberty, immutable rights and the basic forms of social organization first established in Graeco-Roman times, were being reconstituted as a "new classicism" in art and design preferences in post-Revolution America.^{xxxiii}

In addition to the formal classical education young men acquired in the classroom, they also studied the ancient civilizations being unearthed in Europe. A whole new repertoire of information on classical Greece and Rome was available through published engravings as well as through first hand exposure by way of the customary "Grand Tour." (Figure 28) Although Monroe never took a Grand Tour, due to the onset of the Revolution, many young men in both Europe and America traveled with tutors to the Mediterranean to learn from antiquity. Excavated sites like Herculaneum and Pompeii showed the architecture, furniture, dress, and design of classical life (Figure 29). The theoretical education men, like Monroe, learned in coursework was strengthened with this physical and visual evidence. In addition to serving as a reinforcement of ideas, antique objects were imitated by modern culture in many popular fashions. The waist of women's dresses was raised in the *empire* style mimicking the garb depicted on Greek pottery; men grew their hair to resemble the marble busts of Roman statues; and interiors were modeled after the excavated structures seen in the published engravings and design manuals of Europe. The *Port Folio*, a widely circulated newspaper of Philadelphia, reported in

1816 the idea of ancient civilizations was effectively enhancing the advancement of America:

Accurate information of every thing appertaining to the ancient nations of Greece; to the Romans; and the Carthaginians... would be of inestimable value for us in the administration of our republic by teaching us what it would be safe to imitate, and what it would be prudent to avoid.^{xxxiv}

In his formal education at William & Mary and as an apprentice to Thomas Jefferson's law practice, Monroe understood the philosophy of classicism as it applied to government, politics, and the law. Not until he journeyed to France in 1794, would he see the zenith of classicism's application to decoration. As the Foreign Minister in Paris (1794-1797), Monroe witnessed the European adaptation of ancient forms to modern furniture, called the *Goût Grec* style in France. More than simply seeing the furniture of France's elite, Monroe began to understand the power these objects had as political propaganda. Napoleon I's penchant for antiquity resulted in France's production of decorative arts in the *empire* style. Napoleon built on France's already established lead in the production of fine and decorative arts. He now attached the French empire's political authority to those objects, making their aesthetic synonymous with anti-monarchal superiority.

Although Monroe had already returned to America by 1798, he certainly knew of Napoleon I's *Fête de la Liberté* that took place that same year, bringing the antiquities of Rome to Paris. The *Fête* was a celebratory parade of famous Vatican art from antiquity imparted to France by the 1797 Treaty of Tolentino:

[M]odeled on the triumphal processions held by Roman generals who paraded booty, prisoners, and animals through the streets of Rome on the return of their victorious armies, Napoleon's *Fête* included such revered works as the horse of San Marco in Venice... *Cupid and Psyche*, the *Discobolus*, the *Apollo Belvedere*, and *Dying Gaul*... Napoleon managed to compare

himself to a victorious Roman general, to identify France with the great empire of antiquity....”^{xxxv}

Monroe did not see the grand spectacle, but he most likely saw the widely circulated engravings of the celebration done by Louis Martin Berthault (Figure 30). Monroe saw and understood the powerful political message Napoleon presented through art, and the influence it had on the interior and thus everyday life.

As ruler of France, Napoleon I abandoned the frivolity of the lingering eighteenth-century Rocaille aesthetic of the monarchs for the classicism associated with ancient imperial and democratic cultures. The disposal of the monarchy in France followed what the Americans had accomplished with the British just a few years prior. The United States and France’s subscription to classical political principles reflected their desire to have their country’s philosophical and physical structures imitate the democratic symbolism of classical aesthetics. This idea had burgeoned into both a political and social commonality. In France, Bellangé and other famed ébénistes and menuisiers received commissions to fill the vast interiors of estates and government buildings. Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine’s *Recueil de décorations intérieures* provided the ornamental and structural designs for the craftsmen who produced the objects. The published designs were among the most copied and produced in the early-nineteenth century and known throughout the European Continent and United States.^{xxxvi} Bellangé may have taken inspiration from Plate 29 or Plate 63 while creating the furniture forms for the President’s House (Figures 31 & 32).

Monroe’s time in France shaped his future vision for the refurnishing of the President’s House. While serving as Foreign Minister, he developed a lasting

admiration for Napoleon I's example of intertwined political and cultural existence. As Minister, he was well liked among his French peers, so much that Monroe was the only foreign representative with permission to sit in on governmental assemblies.^{xxxvii} Mrs. Monroe, nee Elizabeth Kortright, was also highly in favor and considered a heroine in her rescue of Mme. Lafayette, wife of General Lafayette, from execution. The celebrated status of the Monroes granted them invitations to the finest homes and private spaces of the French elite. The furniture of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France was largely made of imported exotic woods, with detailed surface decoration of carved wood or applied ormolu mounts of acanthus leaves, scrolls, vines, lions, griffins, swans, wings and sheaths of wheat. This imagery suggested more than just wealth, but a sign of French superiority as well. In particular, the lion's head was often found on the terminal of a chair's arm support in high-style furniture of the Napoleon era (Figure 33). The placement of a high-ranking official in a seat with this detail, arm rested and hand covering the lion's carved head, physically displayed the symbolic "upper hand" and power France had over much of Europe. Monroe's exposure to these intimations of power during his time in Paris influenced his later plans for outfitting the President's House accordingly. He, too, could represent the United States through a room decorated with furniture meant to evoke a sense of power.

The symbolic quality of the President's furniture, as Monroe desired, was instrumental in effectively communicating the authority of the Presidency and the superiority of America. The particular proportion and decoration of each chair signified the social placement of the sitter. The Bellangé suite followed a rank-

oriented philosophy: next in line, behind the bérnières for the President and his wife, were the eighteen armchairs and then the side chairs. The tabourets most likely acted as additional seating when needed. Although the symbolic quality of the two settees is unclear, they may have acted as additional seating, much like the tabourets. Art historian and curator of the Newark Art Museum, Ulysses Grant Dietz, addresses the use of these unique objects, suggesting their indication of social standing may have been equal to the armchairs:

By 1817, sofas [settees] were only just becoming standard fixtures in American parlors, and the two huge gilded Bellangé sofas may well have been the finest and grandest ones in the country... Less magnificent than contemporary gilded furniture made for either the French or English monarchs, it was glamorous enough to reflect the power of the presidency.^{xxxviii}

The manner in which the curved backs of the pair of settees matched the room's wall, suggested that these objects were stationary figures in the elliptic room. In addition to their unique form, their weight and size did not permit easy movement. If all seats were occupied for conversational purposes, the chairs could be moved but the settees stood stationary.

The interior of the President's home, with the Bellangé suite, was now equipped to receive guests. On January 1, 1818, diplomats, congressmen, and the public entered the President's House for the first time since it had burned. This was a momentous occasion. Prominent citizens, like Boston financier and politician Harrison Gray Otis, wrote to their families of the event's attendees and décor. Historians and biographers Dorothy and Carl Schneider researched this event in their biographical dictionary of the First Ladies. The Schneiders outlined the recorded accounts:

Cabinet wives were ushered in to the Oval Room, where President Monroe greeted them and present them to his wife, who sat in state with niece and her older daughter Eliza Hay...These receptions at least satisfied American curiosity about the White House and its furnishings. The Monroes used the furniture... from France... Empire gilt chairs covered in crimson satin and decorated with gold eagles....^{xxxix}

Although Monroe laid the groundwork and set the standard for the house interiors, there was still much to be done as the house was not totally complete. Throughout the changing administrations the interiors changed, along with the use and look of the Bellangé suite. Eventually the suite's usefulness would be altered, and its once important role forgotten. But, before the eventual neglect, the Bellangé furniture for the elliptic room was the premier feature of the President's House. Monroe took pride in what it was able to convey to visitors about the United States as a young country and its ability to prosper. The ability for furniture to convey political messages was the most significant value the Bellangé suite embodied.

Chapter 2: Faded Glory

The changing of administrations following President Monroe also provided a change in the usage of the Bellangé seating furniture. Originally intended to stun and awe visitors upon first entering the President's House, the Bellangé suite's importance lessened with architectural additions, repurposed rooms, and modern trends over the next ten Presidents and forty years.

John Quincy Adams's single-term Presidency had little effect on the Bellangé suite as the furniture had only been in use for seven years. The suite itself, however, had an affect on the President's House and the ability for subsequent Presidents to decorate. An 1824 tariff law passed by Congress levied a duty on imported fine goods, particularly furniture. American furniture makers were given an even further advantage when an 1829 law passed stating, "that furniture purchased for use in the President's House shall be as far as possible of American or domestic manufacture."^{xi} This ban, although not specified, was a reaction to Monroe's decorative overindulgences, which many politicians found imprudent and unnecessary. Although blame was not directed towards Monroe, was clearly this was a motivating factor for the advancement of such legislation. It was also at this time, that the President's House, once referred to as the President's Palace and Executive Mansion, was now widely known as the "White House" due to its whitewashed exterior to mask existing fire marks resulting from the burning by the British. Furnishings and decoration for the White House were now to be imported only from other American cities and be less opulent than Monroe's choices.

Following Adams, President Andrew Jackson took office in 1827. Jackson, unlike Monroe, based much of his administration on “cleaning up” the federal government, particularly its spending. Jackson’s March inauguration ceremony drew thousands to Washington, DC, and the White House’s customary party following the inaugural ceremony (Figure 34). The house was packed with both excitement and people. Men, women, and children crowded the rooms, standing on anything and everything, hoping to get a glimpse of President Jackson. In attendance was a young woman named Margaret Bayard Smith, who described the scene in her memoirs:

Ladies fainted, men were seen with bloody noses and such a scene of confusion took place as is impossible to describe, - those who got in could not get out by the door again, but had to scramble out of windows... the noisy and disorderly rabble in the President’s House brought to my mind descriptions I had read, of the mobs in the Tuileries and at Versailles, I expect to hear the carpets and furniture are ruined, the streets were muddy, and these guests all went hither on foot.^{xli}

As the celebration continued the inside crowd became so chaotic, officials devised a plan to beckon visitors out of the house and onto the lawn with libations. Many of the existing furniture, chairs, sofas, and tables, were damaged or broken by the crowd and their upholstery soiled by mud-soaked boots. The unexpected use of federal tax dollars to clean up after the celebration was not in line with Jackson’s ambition to trim government spending; it was, however, necessary. No records for repairs to the Bellangé furniture exist, so attention may not have been paid to these objects particularly. Not until 1835 was the Bellangé furniture mentioned in an inventory, stating that some of the furniture was broken, including a stool, in the elliptic Blue Room. It is possible the sustained damages came from Jackson’s

inauguration and subsequent use. The furniture mentioned in the inventory does not total to the original order. Perhaps some of the furniture was past the point of repair and simply discarded.^{xlii}

More than just the appearance of the Bellangé suite was damaged under the Jackson administration. Within a decade of its arrival, the furniture's important role as first-impression making objects began to diminish with changes Jackson made to the inside and outside of the President's House. Most noticeable was the addition of the North Portico. This architectural alteration shifted the dynamic of the interior completely, and therefore altered the symbolic quality that the Bellangé furniture was built to embody: acting as the President's House's welcoming device. This alteration of the architectural structure changed the visitor traffic flow, with guests entering now from the North instead of the South, thereby the furniture was no longer seen first and visitors' initial reactions were focused elsewhere. Although the elliptic room still served as a place for reception, the Bellangé suite now also functioned as supplemental furniture for other rooms on the first floor. According to White House scholar William Seale's research, "Monroe's gilded furniture was moved [to the Green Room]."^{xliii} The furniture in the Green Room was outfitted with green matching upholstery, replacing the original eagle-clad crimson textiles. The furniture that remained in the elliptic room was upholstered in blue. The color themed, and titled, rooms were designated at this point, with the elliptic room now referred to as the Blue Room (Figure 35).

It is clear from an existing 1835 inventory list, produced by a White House staff member, that all of the Bellangé furniture did not go to the Green Room, but

was divided between the adjoining Green and Blue Rooms along with other existing furniture: “[in the Green Room] ‘14 elegant gilt green silk bottomed chairs’ ... [in the Blue Room] ‘Elegant gilt and satin’ – 24 chairs, 2 ‘sofas and pillows’... 5 ‘foot stools, one broken’”^{xliv} Although some examples of the Bellangé furniture did stay in the Blue elliptic room location, the division altered their use as a “suite.” Jackson utilized the Green Room as an informal sitting area and for dining, so it was not a reception space as the Blue Room functioned.

Major William B. Lewis, an old friend of Jackson’s, supervised the redecoration with Emily Donelson beginning in 1829 (Figure 36).^{xlv} Jackson was a widower and his wife’s niece, Donelson, presided over the house as hostess.^{xlvi} In this capacity, Donelson initiated a dynamic shift in the White House: a woman now having a more official role in contributing to the decoration of the President’s House. Jackson’s priorities were focused more on the political matters at hand, rather than interior design. This shift in the White House also mirrored what was happening concurrently in America with the role of home decoration taken over primarily by women, instead of men. Future First Ladies and White House hostesses, following Donelson, would demonstrate a much more active role in deciding which furnishings stayed or left, even in regard to Monroe’s Bellangé pieces.

Lewis and Donelson set out to modernize the President’s House’s interior and exterior. The Industrial Revolution produced cheaper, ready-made objects than before, tremendously helping Jackson’s plan to remain a more fiscally responsible President compared to his predecessors. The cost of making and buying furniture had also decreased with the rise of local production, further decreasing the need to

import fine goods. Jackson was finally able to outfit the empty East Room with furniture from the Philadelphia cabinetmaker, Louis Vernon (Figure 37).^{xlvii} Since the reconstruction of the President's House in 1815, the East Room had been left empty and unfinished.^{xlviii} The purchase of new furniture perhaps outweighed the desire to maintain the old furniture. Jackson's new Greek Revival-style furniture outshined the now outdated Bellangé furniture, further decreasing the suite's importance, which formerly occupied the spotlight.

Jackson, in all of his rebellion from the policies of his predecessor, retained respect for some of the Bellangé suite's symbolism. This furniture represented a time when the country endured and overcame one of its most difficult challenges since becoming a new nation; the War of 1812 and burning of Washington, DC by the British necessitated the reconstruction of the city and the President's House. Sometime before the Bellangé furniture was reupholstered in blue and green, Ralph E. W. Earl painted Jackson's portrait, seated in one of the chairs, presumably a *bérgère*, set in front of the Washington landscape (Figure 38). The original upholstery is present on the chair, along with enough of the carved surface detail, to recognize it and place importance on the chair's inclusion in the painting. It is, however, interesting that Monroe never had a true portrait of himself with the Bellangé furniture. There is a full-length portrait painted in 1822 by John Vanderlyn, showing Monroe standing in front of a circular-back chair upholstered in the crimson and gold fabric, with an eagle in the center (Figure 39). Although the circular-back shape was not a form represented in the true suite, the rendered crest rail, leg, and arm ornament, and upholstery in the painting are identical to the actual

Bellangé seating furniture. This chair was most likely a fictional hybrid, conflating the Bellangé furniture's carved detail with the symbolism associated with a circular-back chair. The circular-back chair was used as a symbolic instrument in portraiture, denoting authority and prestige. The bégère Monroe actually used in the White House was also an authoritative symbol, derived from found ancient cultures going back to the Egyptians. However, in contemporary formal portraiture, royal and democratic leaders, including Louis XVI (Figure 40), Napoleon I (Figure 41), Louis XVIII (Figure 42), and George Washington (Figure 43) had their likeness shown next to, or seated in, a chair or throne with a circular back. The self-promotional platform of portraiture was used to visually affirm a person's status within society by communicating their ability to surround themselves with luxurious items in good taste and of high quality. As a political leader, the association of a leader surrounded by refinement symbolized both the power of the individual and the prosperity of the nation.

After Jackson left office in 1837, President Martin Van Buren continued to care for the Bellangé suite, spending federal money to repair 27 pieces. It is uncertain which specific pieces were attended to, but at least four of the tabourets were included.^{xlix} Following Van Buren were Presidents Harrison, Tyler, and Polk, each of whom came and went with little contribution to the suite's upkeep.

Although the furniture's use went unrecorded, presumably it was still actively incorporated into the interior. The lack of information or press regarding any conservation of the President's House's interior, or the furniture suite, had a direct connection to the April, 1840 speech by Charles Ogle, known best as the "Gold

Spoon Oration.” Ogle, a Whig member of the United States House of Representatives from Pennsylvania, disapproved of the money Van Buren, a Democrat, had put towards the beautification of the White House (Figure 44). Most of Ogle’s criticisms pertained to expenditures from previous administrations, and not by Van Buren. As a political opponent of Van Buren, Ogle had to blame it on someone. Ogle paid particular attention to the Bellangé suite, mocking the upholstery, comparing it to “[dressed up] tabby-cats in new damask silk frocks.”¹ His disdain for the well-dressed White House was anything but subtle, and the ridicule probably caused the next three administrations to approach such projects cautiously.

The inauguration of Zachary Taylor in March of 1849, however, provided a second life for the “tabby cat” Bellangé furniture in the White House. The past nine years, from 1840 until 1849, resulted in an unkept White House with little attention paid to the interiors—wallpaper was peeling off walls and the furniture’s upholstery had rips and snags.^{li} The dilapidated White House furnishings were cared for with special attention directed to the Bellangé suite: on December 5, 1849, John Wagner repaired and regilded two sofas for \$50.00, four ottomans for \$40.00, five stools for \$25.00, two large armchairs for \$26.00, and fourteen arm chairs for \$44.00.^{lii} Wagner left his name stamped under the seat rail of each piece he worked on, which would later provide significant information to one chair’s provenance. The original glow of the Bellangé suite had returned. However, its important symbolic role continued to decline. Some of the pieces were now officially missing from inventories. An 1849 inventory produced the following: “Green Room – ’12 chairs (gilt)’, ‘4 Arm Chairs (gilt)’ / Blue Room – ’12 Arm Chairs (gilt)’, ‘2 sofas (gilt) with 4

pillows', '4 Ottomans' / '5 Footstools (gilt)'"^{liii} The total number of footstools and chairs dropped from thirty-six to twenty-eight. The nine missing footstools or chairs did not have their locations recorded. Perhaps, many were retired or sent for further restorative work due to wear. Although part of the Bellangé set received care and remained in use, the Victorian aesthetic was slowly making its way into the White House decorative scheme, taking over the spotlight one piece at a time. Under Taylor, small objects of the Chinese and Rococo Revival fashion appeared (Figure 45).^{liv}

A little less than ten years later, James Buchanan entered the White House as a bachelor President. He, just like Jackson, inherited the living spaces of his predecessors with no wife. Buchanan also enlisted the help of a relative to act as "Hostess." Harriet Lane, his niece, filled the hostess role at the ripe age of twenty-six (Figure 46).^{lv} Lane had spent a great deal of time in England with her uncle acquiring knowledge of English fashion and manners. This exposure helped her to outfit the White House as a grand, modern venue for entertaining, just as Elizabeth Monroe had done in her implementation of the latest French social protocol. The White House never stopped acting as a facility for social occasions, but Lane emphasized the house's capability to entertain with the most up to date trends and fashions of Europe.

Lane received her education from Visitation Convent in Washington, DC, where her uncle enrolled her in 1846 at the age of sixteen. She was always known for her pleasant disposition and cordial manner, which she augmented with extensive travels. In 1854, she accompanied Buchanan to London while he served as