

The White House renovation

Background:

In 1945, President Harry Truman moved into the White House and noticed large areas of cracking plaster. A structural survey revealed major problems caused by stress from previous expansions, including the third floor built in 1927. Then in 1948, architect Lorenzo S. Winslow was constructing a balcony on the South Portico when the whole building started to show alarming signs of collapsing.

Quickly, Truman appointed a Commission on the Renovation of the Executive Mansion, and Winslow began a full renovation of the White House. The Truman renovation retained the original walls, the third floor and the roof, while removing, and then reinstalling, the interiors within a skeleton of steel structural beams on a new concrete foundation. Two levels of sub-basements and service areas under the North Portico were constructed, and the Grand Staircase was substantially changed.

During these renovations, Truman and the First Family lived in Blair House across the street on Pennsylvania Avenue. Finally, on March 27, 1952, the Truman family moved back into the White House after the building had undergone four years of extensive renovations.

Abbie Rowe

In 1930, Rowe was employed by the Federal Government with the Bureau of Public Roads, and in 1932, he joined the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks (now known as the National Capital Parks and part of the National Park Service). It was in the latter job, that he took an interest in photography, when working as a policeman for the Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary. His photographs of the birds led him to an apprenticeship to the NCP photographer, and he would be promoted as assistant photographer, and then senior photographer.

In December 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted a photographer to temporarily cover his official day-to-day duties (which could be seen as a precursor to the Chief Official White House Photographer). Roosevelt was so impressed by Rowe's work, that he kept the Virginian on to document other official White House events. Rowe went on to photograph the presidencies of Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Standard:

3.TS.7.A.a Select, and analyze primary and secondary Social Studies' sources to determine importance with guidance and support.

3.TS.7.E.a Generate supporting questions about social studies' topics.

Materials Needed:

Copies of photographs (5)
Photo analysis worksheet

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet_novice.pdf

Vocabulary:

renovation – to restore to good condition; make new or as if new again; repair.

photographer – a person who takes **photographs**, either as a job or hobby

structural survey – inspection of a property to provide a detailed evaluation of its condition

Blair House – the president's guest house across the street from the White House

Procedure:

1. Discuss background information
2. Define vocabulary words
3. Activity 1: Analyze/discuss primary source photographs
4. Activity 2: Interview the photographer Abbie Rowe

Assessment:

Students will use the information they've learned about the White House Renovation to write interview questions for the photographer.

Activity 1:

Divide students into five groups. Each group should examine one photograph using the photo analysis worksheet linked below. Some groups can use the same photograph if you have more groups.

Use the photo analysis worksheet to examine these photos.

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet_novice.pdf

Discussion

1. Observe the photograph. What do you notice? What else do you notice? What makes you say that?
2. Consider why President Truman renovated the White House from 1948–1952 rather than replacing it.
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of saving historic homes?
4. What can we learn from using historic photographs like this?

Activity 2:

Conduct an interview with the photographer Abbie Rowe. Write questions for him and ask about his career and the White House renovation.

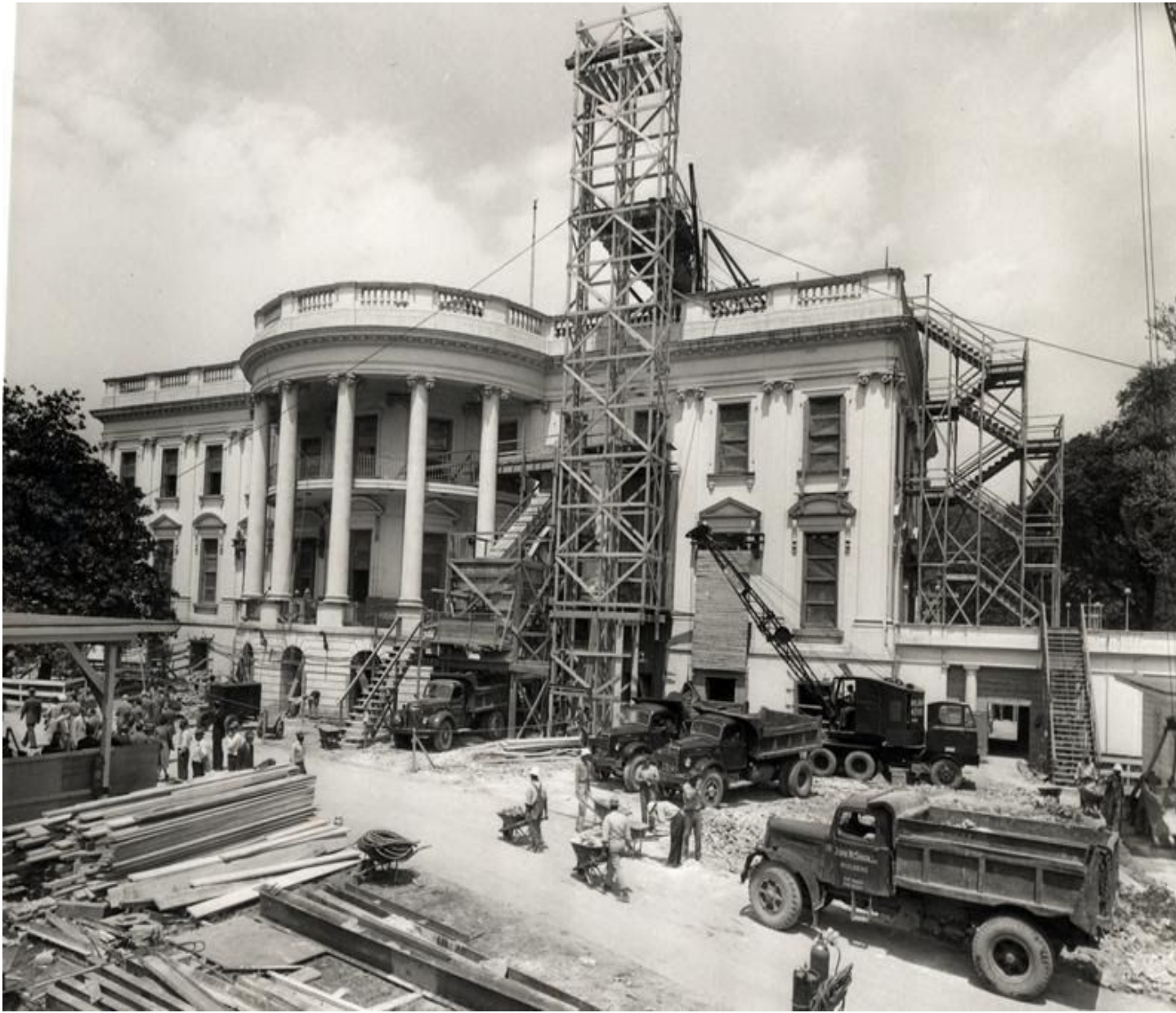
Optional; research and role play – reporter/photographer



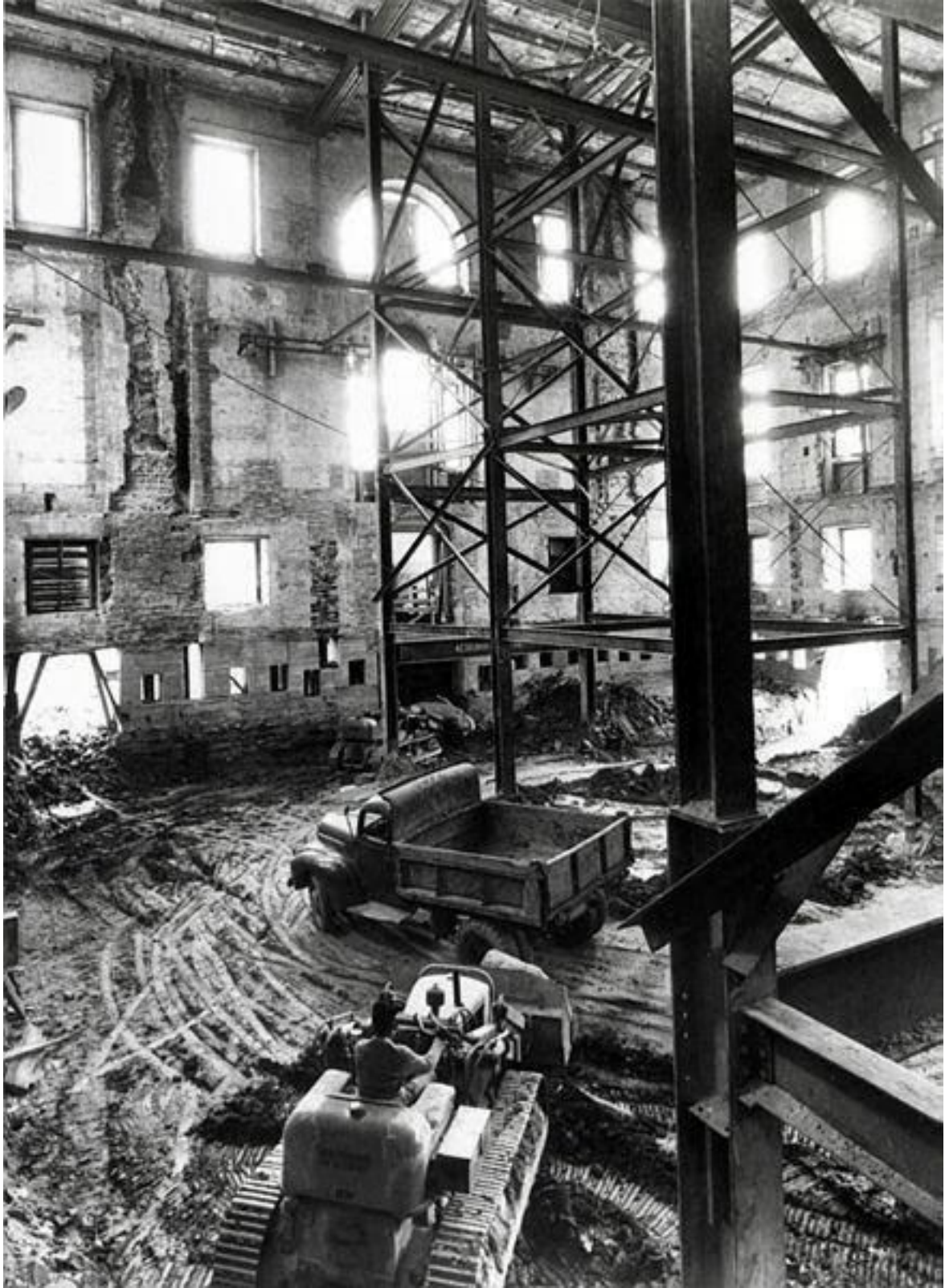
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