# Source 6 – Creating the John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site

## **Procedures**:

Read the following source and answer the questions below.

## “A House of a Different Color” Site Bulletin. John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site

In 1969, the National Park Service (NPS) took ownership of a 2 1/2 story wood-frame house at 83 Beals Street, Brookline, Massachusetts. This house was the gift of Mrs. Rose Kennedy to the people of the United States to memorialize the birthplace of her son, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President of the United States. The Kennedy family lived in the house from 1914 until they moved to another house in Brookline in 1920. The Kennedys repurchased the birthplace in 1966. In the fall of 2012, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site returned to the color Mrs. Kennedy chose for its exterior in 1967. By repainting the house in its 1967 colors, the National Park Service (NPS) sought to restore unity of the treatments of the interior and exterior as envisioned and achieved by Mrs. Kennedy at the time of her gift.

Intent on returning the birthplace to its appearance in 1917 when the President was born, Mrs. Kennedy faced challenges when she returned to 83 Beals Street in 1966. She had not lived in the house for nearly 50 years, and no family members who had lived in the house were able to help.

Relying on her own memories and with the active assistance of her interior decorator, Robert Luddington, Mrs. Kennedy spent the next three years assembling a collection of family pieces, period antiques, reproductions and contemporary items she felt best showed family life at 83 Beals Street in 1917. Mrs. Kennedy, aided by Mr. Luddington, also chose wallpapers and other interior finishes, as well as paint colors for the exterior. In 1967, the exterior of the house was painted in the colors that Mrs. Kennedy recollected from the 1917 period or simply preferred: soft gray for the siding and ivory for the trim.

When the National Park Service received the property in 1969, NPS staff began customary work to document the museum collections as well as the historic structure. They catalogued the contents of the house and conducted a paint study of the house exterior. By the mid-1960s, NPS historical architects began to rely on scientific analysis, tools, and equipment, combined with archival research, to document changes to historic structures, and to prescribe restoration treatment. Microscopic paint analysis revealed that the shingles on the bay window, a feature added in 1914 by newlyweds Joe and Rose Kennedy before they moved in, and those on the 1909 house were both dark green, with a cream-colored trim. This differed from Mrs. Kennedy’s choice of gray with ivory trim for the exterior of the house.

As a result of its research, the NPS decided to change the color of the house exterior, and in October 1970, the house was re-painted dark green with cream colored trim. In doing so, the NPS significantly altered the decision that Mrs. Kennedy had made three years earlier.

In recent years, the NPS explored multiple scholarly studies to better understand the home during the Kennedy’s family residency, and the later commemoration of the property in 1969. When the house needed repainting in 2012, after careful consideration and further research, the NPS decided to honor the decisions made by Mrs. Kennedy in 1967. The house was repainted soft gray with ivory trim. Once again, the interior and exterior of the house reflect the choices made by Mrs. Kennedy when she refurbished the house and gave it to the American people in 1969.

**Questions:**

What were some of the challenges that Rose Kennedy faced as she re-created President Kennedy’s birthplace?

What kind of studies did the National Park Service conduct in the 1970s? What did they discover?

What did the National Park Service do in 2012? Why? What do you think about this decision? Why?

What does this decision tell you about history and memory?

## Additional Resources:

[Pictures of John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site of varying color](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/a-house-of-a-different-color.htm) can be found in the digital article: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/a-house-of-a-different-color.htm>

More information on the [history of 83 Beals Street](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/a-history-of-83-beals-street-birthplace-of-john-fitzgerald-kennedy.htm) can be found here: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/a-history-of-83-beals-street-birthplace-of-john-fitzgerald-kennedy.htm>