



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2013

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National Geographic Presidential Photography Exhibition Comes to Richmond

Newest Virginia Historical Society Display Gives Visitors Rare Look into Life and Work at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

Richmond, VA—A new exhibition at the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) showcases nearly fifty photographs of U.S. presidents from John F. Kennedy to Barack Obama. The recently-opened *The President's Photographer: Fifty Years Inside the Oval Office*, a traveling National Geographic show, is a companion to the popular book and documentary by the same name.

The exhibition features both iconic and rarely seen images of American presidents through the eyes of their official photographers. Kennedy was the first president to have an official photographer and almost every president since then has had one.

“It is not often that we get an all-access pass to see inside the Oval Office,” said VHS lead curator Dr. William Rasmussen. “It is also not often that a National Geographic exhibition travels to central Virginia.”

Since the 1960's, photographic images have become an increasingly critical tool in how we understand our presidents. The presidential photographer's job is two-fold: taking photographs of the president greeting dignitaries, visitors, and guests; and perhaps more challenging and gratifying, documenting for history every possible aspect of the president, including official events, backstage happenings and “off-duty” private moments.

“Creating a good photographic archive for history is the most important part of my job, creating this archive that will live on,” said Pete Souza, current chief official White House photographer for President Obama. “This is not so much photojournalism as photo-history.”

To take the best possible images to document history, the photographer needs to develop a kind of invisibility. “For a presidential photographer, there's no higher praise than being utterly ignored, so that the subjects pay you no attention and you get the most natural shots,” said Stouza.

John Bredar, author of the book and producer of the National Geographic documentary, writes that what presidential photographers try to capture is not just the cumulative experiences of a presidency, but what the president was like as the events happened.

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“The job of the presidential photographer is all about access and trust, and if you have both of those you’re going to make interesting, historic pictures,” Souza says.

“I believe this reviewer said it best: the images are ‘true treasures’ showing ‘moments of candid relaxation with staff, of unexpected warmth and humor with the first family, and of world-changing anxious tension as seen through the lenses of the men and women who were there for it all,’” said Rasmussen.

The exhibition includes the fifty-minute National Geographic documentary about the current chief photographer. It also features interviews with most of the other photographers who served in the White House. It will be shown at the top of every hour.

The President’s Photographer: Fifty Years Inside the Oval Office is on display at the VHS through July 8, 2013. Admission is free.

“Many have no doubt seen many of these powerful and impressive images on television or in a newspaper,” Rasmussen added. “But experiencing the photographs in person creates a sense of undeniable reality that makes you feel like you were present at that very moment in history.”

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For more than 180 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been connecting people to America’s past through the unparalleled story of Virginia. The VHS—a history museum and research library—features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. The Society is the only museum with all of Virginia’s history under one roof—all centuries, all regions, and all topics are covered. Although designated the Official State Historical Society, the VHS is a privately funded non-profit organization that relies on contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations to sustain its operations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. Admission is free. Museum hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Library hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. For more information, call (804) 358-4901, visit www.vahistorical.org, or find the VHS on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).