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Roosevelt Story More Than Belated Bit of Gossip

A departing White House official recently wrote to a friend that the wall separating the outer from the inner offices of the White House is thick and few penetrate it.

This would seem to be confirmed by Jonathan Daniels' disclosure of the family secret that Franklin D. Roosevelt had a lasting relationship with Mrs. Roosevelt's social secretary in their earliest and latest days in public life.

There is more involved here than a belated bit of gossip. A point is to be made about how much we know about the private and public lives of residents.

Roosevelt's attachment with Mrs. Rutherford lasted until the end. The young and pretty social secretary of Roosevelt's 30s was with him in his 60s when he died in Warm Springs, Ga.—a fact that was for years carefully kept from the press and public.

Emily Bronte or Daphne du Maurier could not have devised a more romantic ending. Those who love the memory of Eleanor Roosevelt will not thank Jonathan Daniels for his

explicit disclosures. But Mrs. Roosevelt was equal to all this, and more. She made a great life of her own that both supplemented and enlarged her husband's.

Many who thought they knew a good deal about Roosevelt and his four administrations were surprised by Daniels' disclosures. These matters are often loosely bruited about in Washington but rarely so authoritatively stated.

Daniels, a Raleigh, N.C., newspaper editor, is a son of Josephus Daniels, secretary of the Navy in the early part of the century when Roosevelt, as assistant secretary of the Navy, was entranced by his wife's social secretary. The younger Daniels was in the White House in both the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.

For a while, Jonathan Daniels was press secretary to President Truman, and thus the primary source of public information from the White House. But 30 years passed, and all the participants were dead, before Daniels told what

he knew to enliven a book on his knowledge of history between World War I and World War II.

Roosevelt's little affair, although clearly a matter of importance in his personal life, had little significance in his public life. Yet the incident illustrates how little is known of the private lives of presidents.

How much more we know of their public lives is open to debate. We know what they say, and what those who speak for them say. But we cannot claim to know how they make their decisions.

It is not known yet how, or even if, Truman decided to use the atomic bomb. He may well have only found himself in the flow of events that were irreversible without there ever having been a conscious decision to use or not use the bomb.

Nor is it known now, and never may be known, whether the increasing involvement in Viet Nam was accidental or a carefully contrived plan to carry us by easy stages into a major war.

Nor were we told in Vienna of the ominous exchange between John F. Kennedy and Nikita S. Khrushchev that preceded erection of the Berlin Wall.

The full account of the Bay of Pigs fiasco is still hidden behind Kennedy's statement that he would take the blame but not tell the story.

Today serious questions are being raised on the competence and scope of the Warren inquiry into the murder of President Kennedy. The more heard of this the more it appears that the Warren inquiry was strongly motivated by a desire to quiet public anxiety and doubt.

This is probably far afield from Jonathan Daniel's romantic tale of Roosevelt's attachment to Mrs. Rutherford. But those of us who are supposed to inform the public, and who did not know about Mrs. Rutherford, begin to wonder how much else we do not know about much more important, if less provocative, subjects.