

"THE TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED ..."

Nation's Youngest President Thus Wrote His Own Epitaph

"Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans - born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage - and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation always has been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world..."

By RICHARD L. HENSCHEL

With these phrases President John Fitzgerald Kennedy took office on January 20, 1961—the youngest man ever elected to the Presidency of the United States, the first man born in the twentieth century ever to lead a major nation.

These words, from his Inaugural Address, seem to stylize and to personify President Kennedy.

These were words to lift men's hearts. They could not have come at a better time in history. The young President was inheriting from his predecessor the greatest problems the nation ever has faced in time of peace.

"I do not shrink from this responsibility," he said on the Capitol steps, "I welcome it."

On that day, Washington, D. C., and much of the nation were cold and snow-bound, not only by weather but by the creeping chill of Cold War reverses and the effects of a sagging economy.

Today, almost three years later, without a full four years to face his responsibilities, the curtain has been drawn. The President of the United States is dead.



DYNAMIC FIRST FAMILY—The entire Kennedy family illuminated the national scene, but the spotlight always focused on the President and the glamorous First Lady.

"THE TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED ..."

President Kennedy was eminently tailored for the role of leading the United States towards the lofty goals he had envisioned.

Born the second of nine children on May 29, 1917, in Brookline, Mass., his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, served under President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Ambassador to the Court of St. James (Great Britain) from 1937 to 1941.

President Kennedy's mother, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, is the daughter of one-time Boston mayor, John F. ("Honey Fitz") Fitzgerald, who more than a half century ago had served in Congress.

At an intimate dinner party in the home of newspaperman Charles Bartlett, Sen. Kennedy met vivacious Jacqueline Lee Bouvier and their romance blossomed, culminating in marriage on Sept. 12, 1953. A daughter, Caroline, was born on Nov. 27, 1957, a son, John, Jr., was born on Nov. 25, 1960. Tragedy struck the First Family in August of this year when another son lived less than 40 hours.

President Kennedy's World War II service was in the Navy. He was commissioned an ensign and separated as a lieutenant at the end of hostilities in 1945. His exploits as PT-109 (torpedo-boat) commander brought him two decorations.

His war-incured injuries left a legacy of pain which he bore gallantly throughout the remainder of his life.

Before and immediately following World War II, the late President had been a newspaper correspondent. He covered the San Francisco United Nations Conference, the Potsdam Conference and the British election in 1945. He had often said that his vocation was "journalist."



The President and son, John, gave White House a special flavor.

"THE TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED . . ."

He campaigned for office in six elections—three times for a seat in the House, two times for the Senate, once for President—and was never defeated.

He was the first Catholic to occupy the Presidency of the United States.

As President, he displayed a youthful vigor and drive that was phenomenal. He submitted massive and wide-ranging domestic and international programs to each session of Congress, and fought for them tenaciously. At the same time, he displayed a rare skill in the art of compromise.

In the words of the late Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sam Rayburn of Texas, this smiling son of the Boston Irish was "a man of destiny."

President Kennedy's death closed the door to the writings of a great chronicler of the twentieth century. As an author, the late Chief Executive received the Pulitzer Prize in 1956 for his second book, "Profiles in Courage," written 15 years after "Why England Slept." All of his books have been best-sellers, including "The Strategy of Peace" published in 1960.

OldMagazineArticles.com