

## BEACH READING

# The Teapot Dome Scandal: How Big Oil Bought the Harding White House and Tried to Steal the Country

By Laton McCartney  
(Random House, \$27)

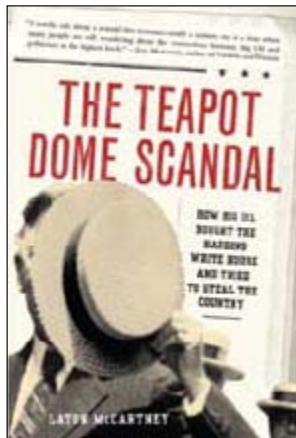
**REVIEWED BY LARRY COX**  
Special to Florida Weekly

The Teapot Dome scandal was the Enron meltdown of its time. Although the story is complex, it all boiled down to greed and big oil, the lubricants that greased the wheels of one of the most blatant and shocking disgraces in American history.

Warren G. Harding became the nation's 23rd president following the election of 1920, due in no small part to the petroleum industry, which helped secure and finance his nomination. Following his election, the fix was in as oil tycoons circled Washington like vultures ready to claim their spoils.

Harding was a rather simple man, and while he tended to his affairs of the heart, he left the affairs of state to others. His right-hand man was Albert Fall, who he picked to be his Secretary of the Interior. Fall lost no time accepting lavish gifts and cash from big oil. He and other members of the cabinet greased the skids so that industry insiders could gain control of fuel reserves owned by the government for pennies on the dollar.

What made the arrangement especially repulsive was that the reserves had been set aside by the government for wartime



use by the U.S. Navy. The sites included a rich Wyoming oil field named for the rock formation that sat atop it, Teapot Dome.

Once Congress learned in 1922 that the Interior Department had acted illegally in the dealings with oil interests, a massive investigation was launched, and ultimately, Fall and several others were indicted and went to prison.

Laton McCartney's latest book has all the page-turning appeal of a crisply written mystery novel. With the eye of an investigative reporter, McCartney once again shows that he can take a complex story and make it exciting, entertaining and accessible. This is historical reporting at its very best. ■

*Books reviewed in this column are available online or at your local bookstore.*

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