

The White House

1792-1992



The White House has been the scene of many events in the history of our Nation. Here the President holds meetings that decide national and international policy, signs new legislation, and carries out the many duties of the office. Here, too, the President and First Family entertain guests and live their private lives, as every President, except George Washington, has done.

Your visit to the White House begins at the East Wing Entrance. Exhibits focus on various aspects of White House history and seasonal celebrations.



As you enter and leave the White House, notice the informal, carefully landscaped grounds that enhance the beauty of the historic house. Among the many historic trees on the grounds are an American elm planted by John Quincy Adams and a magnolia planted by Andrew Jackson. The Jacqueline Kennedy Garden (above) on the east and the Rose Garden on the west are used for formal ceremonies and bill signings. The White House grounds are maintained in the classical tradition according to standards established in 1935 by the landscape architecture firm of Olmsted Brothers.

As you begin the tour through the historic house, look for the floral arrangements that brighten each room. Notice also the portraits of Presidents and First Ladies that line the corridors and hallways of the Ground and State Floors.

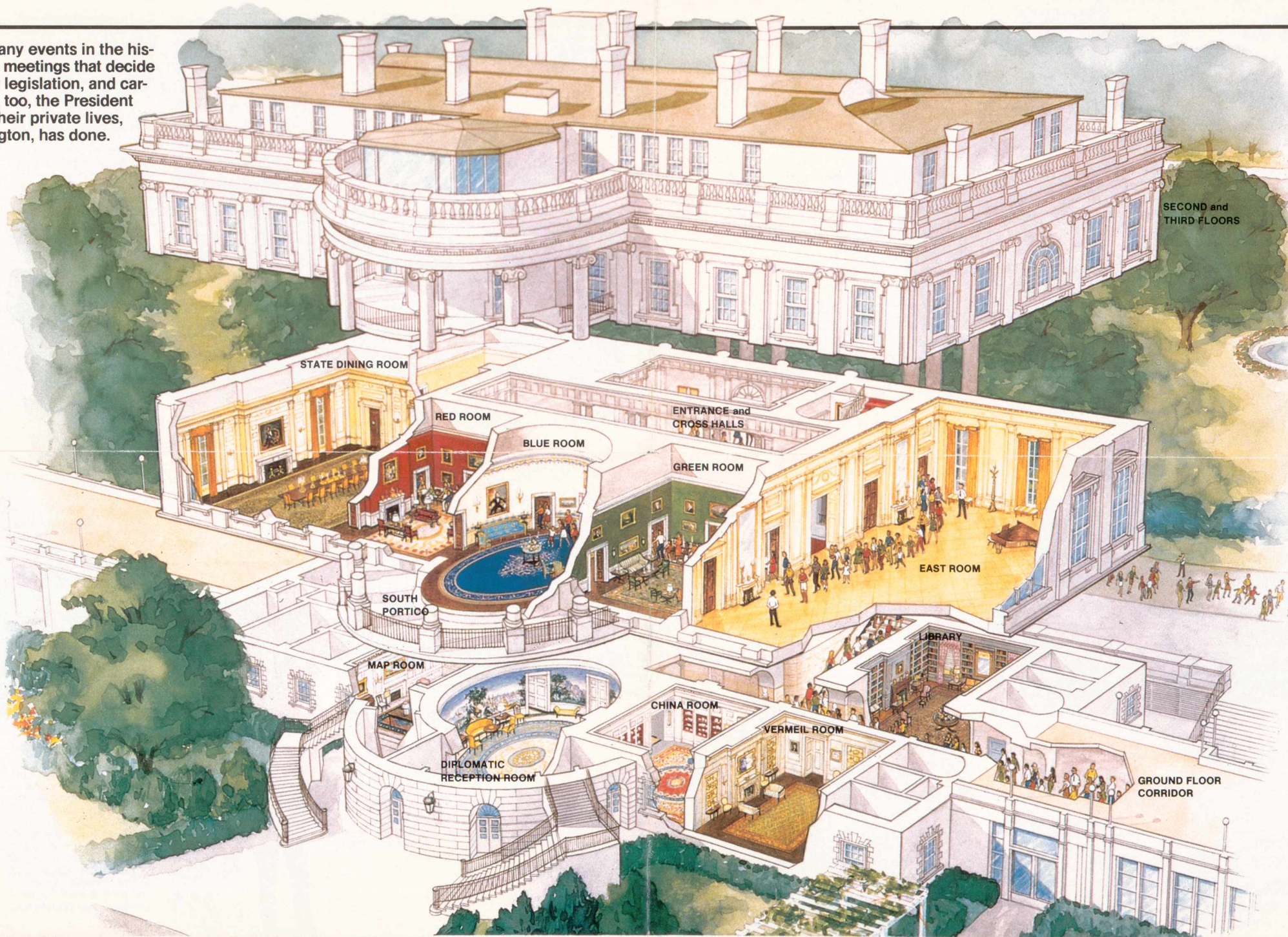
The **LIBRARY** contains volumes of history, biography, fiction, and the sciences, all by American authors. The furniture is American of the Federal period, and the chandelier once belonged to the family of James Fenimore Cooper. Five portraits of American Indians by Charles Bird King were painted in 1821-22 when these Indian leaders visited James Monroe. The paneling in this room, the Vermeil Room, and the China Room is made from the 1817 timbers that were salvaged during the 1948-52 reconstruction.

The **VERMEIL ROOM** contains an extensive collection of vermeil (gilded silver) bequeathed to the White House in 1956 and used for various functions. On the south wall hangs the Aaron Shikler portrait of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. This room was once used as a billiard room.



The Hayes china (far left) featured American wildlife and native plants. Monroe ordered the first official service (below). Wilson bought the first American-made china (below right).

The **CHINA ROOM** was set aside in 1917 by Edith Wilson for displaying pieces of china and glass used by the Presidents. The portrait on the south wall of Grace Coolidge was painted in 1924 by Howard Chandler Christy.



Each year the White House Christmas tree is placed in this room.

When the White House was rebuilt after the 1814 fire, James Monroe bought furniture for the Blue Room from a French cabinetmaker. Of the pieces he purchased, eight remain in the White House today—including this bergère, an armchair with enclosed sides.



The **RED ROOM**, used for small receptions, has long been a favorite of the First Ladies. John Adams used this as a breakfast room, and Rutherford B. Hayes took the oath of office here on March 3, 1877. The room is decorated as an American Empire parlor of 1810-30. The marble mantel is identical to one in the Green Room. An 18th-century French musical clock presented in 1952 by President Vincent Auriol of France is on the mantel.



This portrait of Abraham Lincoln, painted by G. P. A. Healy in 1869, hangs in the State Dining Room. It was bequeathed to the White House by the widow of Robert Todd Lincoln, the President's eldest son, in 1939.

The **STATE DINING ROOM** can seat 140 guests at dinners and luncheons. The painted English oak paneling dates from the 1902 renovation. Carved into the fireplace mantel is a quotation from a letter by John Adams: "I Pray Heaven to Bestow the Best of Blessings on THIS HOUSE and All that shall hereafter Inhabit it. May none but Honest and Wise Men ever rule under this Roof."

In the Tennessee marble floor of the **ENTRANCE** and **CROSS HALLS** are the major construction and renovation dates of the house. Above the entrance to the Blue Room is the Presidential seal.

The **SECOND** and **THIRD FLOORS** (interiors not shown on diagram) are used only by the Presidential family and guests. Located here are the Lincoln Bedroom, the President's Office (used as the Cabinet Room, 1865-1902), and the Queen's Bedroom, named for its royal visitors.

Operating Hours

The White House is open to visitors from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, Tuesday through Saturday; it is closed Sunday, Monday, some holidays, and for official functions. Handicapped visitors should go directly to the Northeast Gate on Pennsylvania Avenue, where wheelchairs are available. The White House is open for garden tours on selected weekends in April and October and for candlelight tours during the Christmas season. On Easter Monday the traditional Easter Egg Roll takes place on the south lawn. For more information about these events and for answers to other questions, call 202-456-7041 or 472-3669.

All photographs and illustrations on this side come from the White House Historical Association, except for the cover (NPS) and the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden (HG magazine).

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior
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The **DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ROOM** (left), one of three oval-shaped rooms in the residence, is furnished as a Federal period parlor. The rug contains symbols of the 50 states. The wall-paper, printed in France in 1834, depicts Niagara Falls, Boston Harbor, West Point, Natural Bridge of Virginia, and New York Bay. It was from this room that President Franklin Roosevelt broadcast his fireside chats.

The first room that you enter on the State Floor is the **EAST ROOM**, which is the largest in the White House. It is used for receptions, ceremonies, press conferences, and other events. It has been the scene of several weddings, including those of Nellie Grant, Alice Roosevelt, and Lynda Bird Johnson. The bodies of seven Presidents have lain in state here. From the elaborately decorated ceiling hang glass chandeliers that date from 1902. The concert grand piano, decorated with folk dancing scenes and eagle supports, was presented by the Steinway company in 1938.

The most notable portrait in the White House is Gilbert Stuart's 1797 portrait of George Washington. It has hung in the White House since 1800. Dolley Madison saved the painting when the British burned the White House in 1814.



The **GREEN ROOM**, which once served as Thomas Jefferson's dining room, is now furnished as a parlor and is used for receptions. Most of the furniture was made in New York by Duncan Phyfe about 1810. The walls are covered with watered green silk with draperies of striped silk damask. The Italian white marble mantel was purchased in 1818 for the State Dining Room and moved here in 1902. The coffee urn, owned by John Adams, is flanked by French candlesticks used by James Madison.

The **BLUE ROOM** is usually considered the most beautiful room in the White House and is often used by the President to receive guests. It is furnished to represent the period of James Monroe, who purchased pieces for the room after the fire of 1814. Seven of the French chairs and one sofa of the set bought by Monroe are in the room. Portraits include John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and John Tyler. The Hannibal clock on the white marble mantel was acquired in 1817. The color blue was first used during the administration of Martin Van Buren.



The Diplomatic Reception Room is used as the entrance for new ambassadors coming to the White House to present their credentials to the President.

The White House

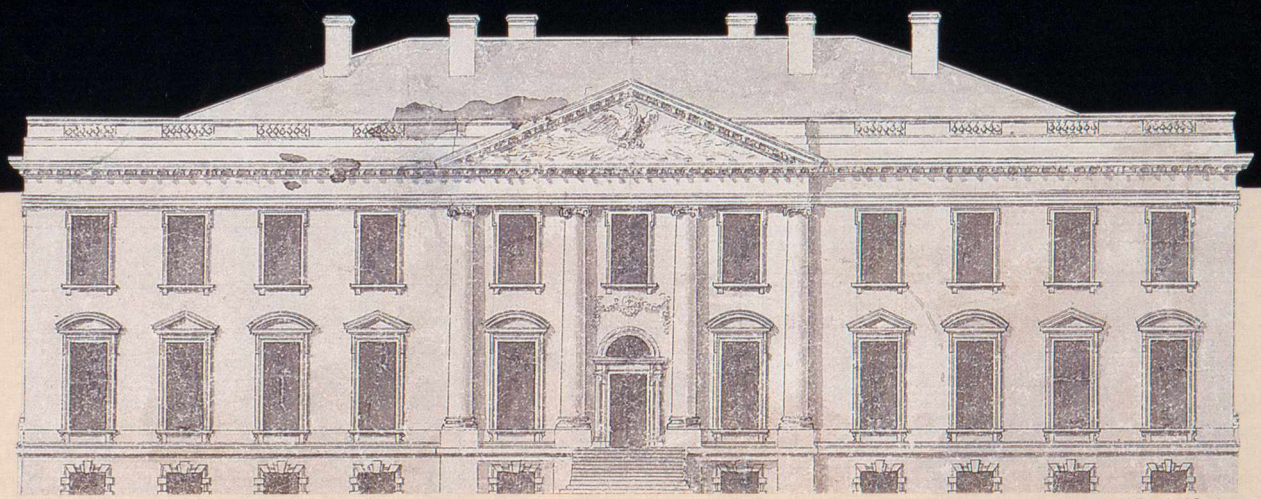
The White House: A Brief History

The White House is the oldest public building in the District of Columbia, and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is the most famous address in the United States. Here every President, except George Washington, has conducted the government of the Nation. In the past 200 years, the White House has become symbolic of the American Presidency throughout the world. While the Capitol represents the freedom and ideals of the Nation, the White House stands for the power and statesmanship of the chief executive.

The White House itself has been altered, adapted, or enlarged to suit the needs of the residents and the demands of a growing Nation and of a more complicated world. Throughout all the changes, the basic structure has been honored. Following the

British burning in 1814, the house was rebuilt between 1815 and 1817 on the same walls. The State Dining Room was enlarged and space for presidential staff was created in a new West Wing in 1902. A greatly weakened structure was completely rebuilt within its original walls in 1948-52. Yet it has remained recognizable for almost 200 years. Engravings and photographs show alterations, additions, and landscape features since the White House was first built, but what remains is a structure that George Washington would recognize should he come upon it today.

On July 16, 1790, the U.S. Congress passed the Residence Act that established a permanent capital for the United States on the banks of the Potomac River. It empowered George Washington to select the site of the Federal City. Once he chose the precise location, planning for the city began. French engineer Pierre L'Enfant created a plan based on two strong focal points: the Capitol and the President's House, symbolic of two of the three branches of gov-



Maryland Historical Society

ernment. Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, suggested to Washington and the Commissioners for the District of

Columbia that designs for both structures be solicited through a nationwide architectural competition. On March 14, 1792, the

Commissioners announced a competition. On July 17, 1792, James Hoban, an architect who was born and trained in

Ireland, was declared the winner. His design (above) was based on the country houses of the British Isles. On October 13 the cor-

nerstone was laid by the Freemasons and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. Hoban supervised the construction.

1793

*I Pray Heaven To Bestow
THE BEST OF BLESSINGS ON
THIS HOUSE
And All that shall hereafter Inhabit it.
May none but Honest and Wise Men enter
under This Roof.*

From a letter of
JOHN ADAMS

November
MDCCXC

Work began with the establishment of a brickyard on what is now the north grounds of the White House. Three kilns turned out several million bricks that were used in the White House and other federal buildings. Huts were built on what is now Lafayette Park to house the laborers. Finding skilled workers was one of the enduring problems that vexed Hoban throughout the project. In 1793 a number of stonemasons were recruited in Edinburgh, Scotland. Slaves were hired from their owners, too. The stone for the foundations and for the facings on the exterior walls came from the

Aquia Creek quarry in Stafford County, Virginia. Boats could navigate the creek up to the quarry and then carry the stone back up the Potomac to Washington. Hoban advertised throughout the region for fine quality wood to be used in flooring and doors, as well as for lumber for framing. Much of it came from North Carolina and Virginia, including Mount Vernon and Stratford Hall Plantation. Lime for the mortar was procured from the region around Frederick, Maryland. By the time Washington left office in 1797, the walls stood and the roof was framed. In the next three

years windows were installed, and interior walls were plastered. The house was not quite finished when on November 1, 1800, John Adams, the second President, moved into the White House, just a few months before his term ended. At that time, much of the building's interior had not yet been completed, and Abigail Adams used the unfinished East Room to dry the family wash. During Jefferson's administration, the east and west terraces were built. He also opened the house each morning to all visitors—an extension of his democratic beliefs and a practice that continues today.



Both chairs, Maryland Historical Society



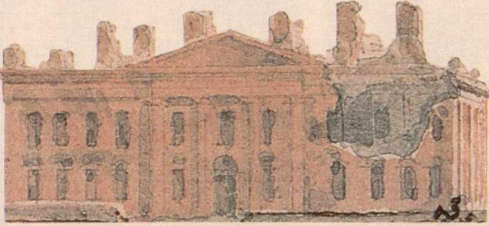
Benjamin Latrobe designed these chairs for the Madisons during the Greek Revival period. They were made in Baltimore, Maryland. Not one survived the fire of 1814.

1814

When James Madison moved into the White House in 1809, he and his wife, Dolley, introduced brilliance and glitter into the social life of the new capital in a White House that dazzled as well from the work of architect Benjamin Latrobe. The Madisons had hired him to decorate the oval room and to design furniture. None of his work survives except in sketches, for on August 24, 1814, British forces captured Washington and burned the White House in retaliation for the destruction of some

public buildings in Canada by American troops. The exterior sandstone walls and interior brickwork were all that remained. Reconstruction began in 1815 under Hoban's supervision, and the White House was ready for James Monroe in September 1817.

The burnt-out shell of the White House (below) as seen from Lafayette Park in 1815 contrasts vividly with the growing city (right) that George Cooke painted in 1833. The White House is at center left in the painting.



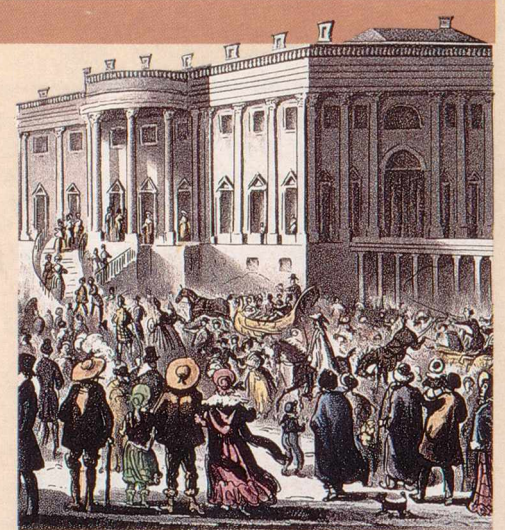
St. John's Church



White House Collection

1829

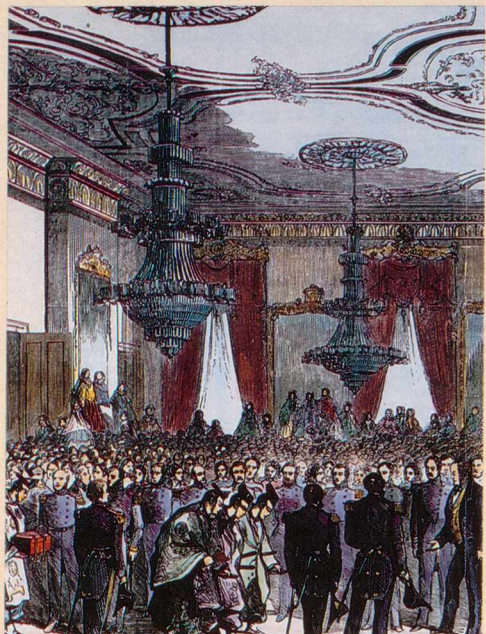
By the time Andrew Jackson came to live in the White House, the Nation was expanding rapidly. Jackson, elected by a large margin, reflected that growth; he was the first "westerner" in the White House. Under his guidance, the East Room was first furnished and opened for public use. These years before the Civil War were important ones for the White House, for under the direction of the now aged Hoban, the north and south porticoes were built in 1824 and 1829 respectively. Running water was added, and an indoor bathroom was constructed in 1833. Gas lighting was installed in 1848. When Franklin Pierce was President, the first truly central and efficient heating system was introduced in 1853. Bathrooms and water closets were improved on the second floor.



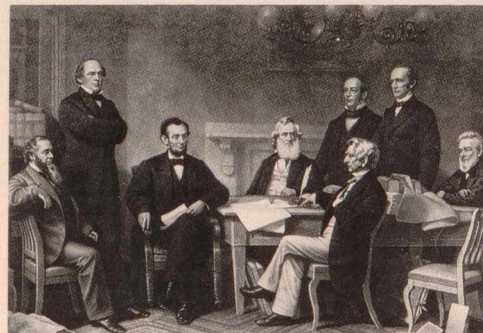
White House Collection

Andrew Jackson was one of the most popular Presidents. The crush of people at public receptions that marked his years in the White House did not deter those who hoped to see their hero.

1860



Library of Congress



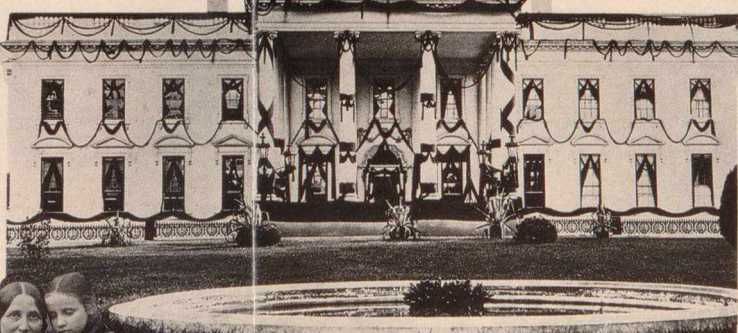
White House Collection

Increasingly the role of the White House expanded as the Nation grew in importance and as the City of Washington developed. Two great social events of the Buchanan administration in 1860 are indicative of this evolving stature: the arrival of Japanese officials (left) following Matthew Perry's 1853-54 trip to Japan and the visit of

the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII. Within the year, the Civil War tore the Nation apart. The White House became a center for decision-making and activity during the Civil War. It was in President Abraham Lincoln's second floor office that he signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 (above). Troops were quartered in the

East Room during the early stages of the war. In the wake of this national conflict came the first assassination of a President. Thousands of stunned mourners filed by Lincoln's coffin in the East Room in 1865. Only 16 years later the White House was draped in mourning (right) as once again a President—James A. Garfield—fell victim to an assassin.

1881



Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center



Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center

A glass conservatory, planned during the last year of the Pierce Presidency, was built on the west terrace in 1857. It proved a delight and became a private domain for the Presidential families and, because of the good light, a favorite place for taking photographs like this one (left) of Mrs. Hayes with her children, Scott and Fanny, and a

family friend. During the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes the conservatory was greatly expanded with walks and benches as a part of the interior design, and it was connected to the White House through the State Dining Room.

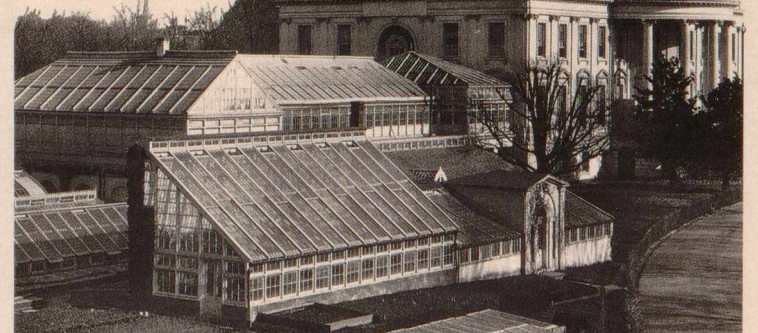
1885

In March 1885, the second bachelor President, Grover Cleveland, took office. Little more than a year later, on June 2, 1886, Cleveland married Frances Folsom (below) in the Blue Room. Though other weddings have taken place in the White House, this was the only time a President was married here. Cleveland's successor, Benjamin Harrison, made some notable changes, including adding electric lights in 1891.



Library of Congress

1901



Library of Congress

When Theodore Roosevelt became President, one of the first things he did was to change the name of the structure to the White House. Since the mid-19th century it had been called the Executive Mansion, and before that it had been described in government documents as the President's House. But almost from the beginning it was known pop-

ularly as the White House; certainly that name predated the fire of 1814. In 1901 Roosevelt made it official. Roosevelt faced major problems, for he found that the house needed extensive structural repairs, more space for both the family and the staff was required, and the interior was a conglomerate of styles. Congress appropriated

money to repair and refurbish the house and to construct new offices for the President, with an executive office building (the West Wing) replacing the old conservatories (above). Work began in June 1902 under the supervision of the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White. By the end of the year the job was complete.

1918



National Archives

Despite the great amount of work done in 1902, demands for more space grew, and in 1909 the West Wing offices were enlarged and the well-known Oval Office built. Prior to construction of the West Wing, different Presidents had used various arrangements of rooms in the mansion for their offices. Since 1909 the Oval Office has been the President's Office. Outside the Oval Office is the Rose Garden. The 1902 renovations made this space available for a formal garden. Roses were first planted here in 1913. A third floor was added in 1927 to provide more living space in the residence.

Woodrow Wilson's years in the White House saw him test new radio links with aircraft and listen to the appeal of suffragettes for the right to vote.



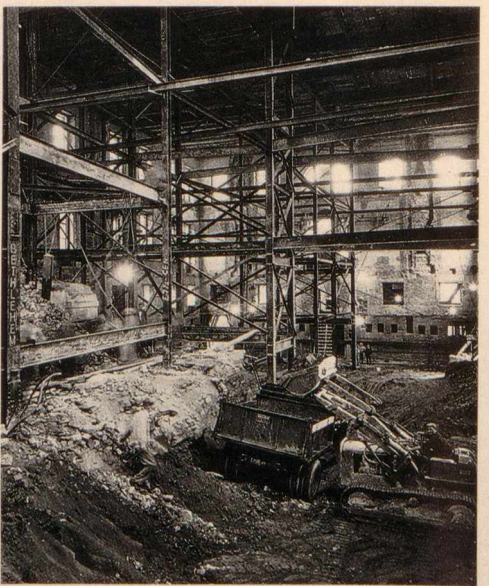
Library of Congress

1933



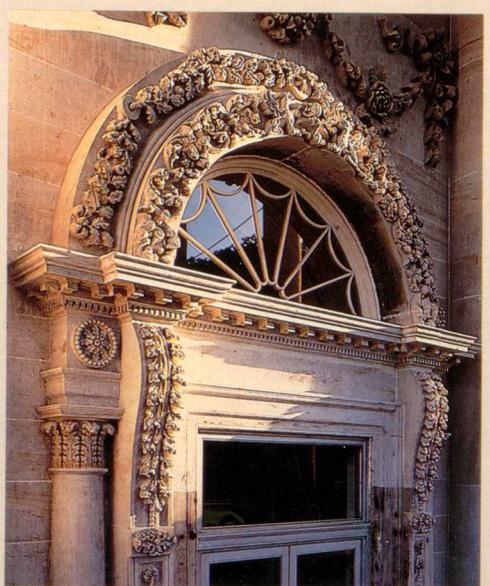
Soon after his election Franklin Roosevelt (above) began radio broadcasts to the Nation that became known as his "fireside chats." The very next year, 1934, FDR again had the West Wing enlarged. Once the United States entered World War II, the East Wing and an air raid shelter were built and a movie theater was installed in the east terrace. In 1948, Harry Truman added a balcony to the south portico.

1948



Over the years, the almost unceasing pace of remodeling, alterations, and rebuilding had weakened many of the building's old wooden beams and interior walls. But not until a thorough examination of the structure in 1948 was the alarming condition of the house revealed. A decision was made for a complete renovation. The Trumans moved to Blair House, across Pennsylvania Avenue, for four years during the White House reconstruction. Paneling, ceilings, and furniture were all removed, the interior was gutted, a new basement was excavated, new foundations were laid, and a steel framework was erected to take the burden of carrying the load off the walls (left). In March 1952, the Truman family moved back to the renovated White House.

Today



Succeeding administrations, hoping to make the White House a showcase of American furniture and paintings, have focused on the acquisition of historic and artistic objects for its permanent collection as well as on the preservation and maintenance of the house. The most recent project is the preservation of the exterior walls. Some 28 layers of paint are being stripped while expert stone carvers repair the historic sandstone. Column capitals, carved roses and garland details, cleaned of thick layers of paint, are once again seen in their original crispness (left). Scorch marks from the mighty fire that consumed the White House during the 1814 British invasion were briefly visible while the naked walls awaited repainting. The entire exterior restoration



White House

will be complete when the Nation celebrates the bicentennial of the laying of the White House cornerstone on October 13, 1992.

More detailed information about the White House may be found in *The White House, An Historic Guide*; *The Living White House*; *The Presidents of the United States*; *First Ladies of the White House*; and *The President's House: A History*,



by William Seale, all published by the White House Historical Association, 740 Jackson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20560.