

The White House



The WHITE HOUSE

FOR MORE THAN a century and a half, the White House has been the home of the Presidents of the United States. Here have lived the men chosen by the people to guide the affairs of the Nation. It has been the scene of many brilliant social affairs—weddings, fetes, receptions—and also of sorrowful events. Like the Nation itself, it bears the imprint of successive chief executives. Designed originally to avoid formal display, it has an air of dignity and charm. Now rebuilt to last for centuries, the White House retains the simplicity of its original appearance and its rich historical associations.

The cornerstone of the White House, the first public building to be erected in Washington, was laid on October 13, 1792. President Washington selected the site which was included on the plan of the Federal City prepared by the French engineer, Maj. Pierre L'Enfant. The plans for the house, approved by Washington, were drawn by James Hoban, an Irish-born architect. Hoban superintended the construction of the house, its rebuilding after burning by British forces in 1814, and the erection of the north and south porticos some years later.

In the classical style of architecture, the main facade of the White House resembles the Duke of Leinster's house in Dublin, on which the design was supposedly based. Details of other faces and the interior arrangement were probably derived from contemporary houses in England and Europe. Built of sandstone quarried on Aquia Creek, Va., the exterior walls were painted during the course of construction, causing the building to be termed the "White House" from an early date. For many years, however, it was generally referred to as the "President's House" or the "President's Palace."

EARLY HISTORY

The White House was first occupied by President and Mrs. John Adams in November 1800. Some of its interior had not then been completed and Mrs. Adams used the unfinished East Room to dry the family wash. During Jefferson's administration, the east and west terraces were constructed. Jefferson practiced democratic simplicity in his social life, and it was his custom to open the house each morning to all arrivals. When James Madison became President in 1809, his wife, the famous Dolly Madison, introduced some of the brilliance and glitter of old-world courts into the social life of the White House. Then, on August 24, 1814, British forces captured Washington and burned the building in retaliation for the destruction by American troops of some public buildings in Canada. Although only the partially damaged sandstone walls and the interior brickwork remained when the work of reconstruction was begun in the spring of 1815, the building was ready for occupancy by President Monroe in December 1817. The south portico, the dominant architectural feature of that side of the house, was built in 1824; the large north portico over the entrance and driveway, in 1829.

IMPROVEMENTS, 1830-1902

Throughout its history the White House has kept pace with modern improvements. Spring water was piped into the building in 1834, and gas lighting was introduced in 1848. A hot water heating system was installed 5 years later. During Johnson's administration the east terrace was entirely removed. In 1882, the first elevator was put in, and the house was

wired for electricity a decade later, during the administration of Benjamin Harrison.

RESTORATION OF 1902

No other important structural changes were made in the house until 1902, in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. By this date the interior of the house had become something of a conglomeration of styles and periods because of the many changes made at various times in decorations and arrangements. The house was also badly in need of extensive structural repairs. To correct these conditions, Congress appropriated more than half a million dollars to repair and refurnish the house and to construct new offices for the President. Work was begun in June 1902 by McKim, Meade and White, architects of New York, and was virtually finished by the end of the year. The improvements included rebuilding and strengthening much of the interior of the house; redecorating and refurnishing the entire main floor; removing the main stairway from the west end of the

corridor to the east of the entrance lobby and using the space thus made available for enlarging the State Dining Room; providing a few rooms for servants in the attic; erecting an office building at the end of the west terrace; and reconstructing the east terrace.

ALTERATIONS, 1903-48

Few important changes were made in the White House during this period. The Executive Office building was enlarged in 1910; several guest rooms were made in the attic during President Wilson's administration; and the roof and third story were remodeled in 1927. Early in the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt funds were raised by public subscription for the construction of a swimming pool. A few years later a modern electric kitchen was installed, and a basement was dug under the north portico to provide space for maintenance shops and storage. World War II saw an air raid shelter constructed off the new East Wing, a motion picture theater put in under the east terrace, and

The East Room



a small gymnasium set up adjoining the swimming pool. In 1946, a balcony was built off the second floor, behind the columns of the south portico, to provide a porch for the President's family and also to improve the appearance of the portico, the columns of which appeared too tall and slender for such an important architectural feature.

WHITE HOUSE RENOVATION, 1948-52

Over the years, piecemeal alterations had weakened many of the old wooden beams and interior walls, but not until a thorough examination of the structure was made in 1948 was the really alarming condition of the house revealed. Beams were found to be inadequately supported; heavy ceilings had dropped several inches; and even the foundations were found too weak to support the walls erected on them. Consequently, a Commission on Renovation of the Executive Mansion was established, according to an act of Congress approved April 14,

1949, to decide whether to erect an entirely new building or preserve as much as possible of the old structure. After careful consideration, the Commission decided that the old sandstone walls would be retained, thus preserving the historical appearance of the famous old structure.

In order to make preliminary surveys, President Truman and his family moved across the street into the historic Blair House, and all of the furnishings were removed and placed in storage in December 1948. The actual work of reconstruction was begun a year later, and by the fall of 1950 the most critical phase of the work had been accomplished. The old walls were now supported by concrete foundations, and the wooden beams and brick supporting walls of the interior were replaced by a modern steel framework. Concrete floors were then laid and partition walls erected.

Space for electrical and refrigeration equipment was provided by excavating an area north-east of the White House. A new floor and steps for the north portico were constructed of Tennessee marble. Georgia marble was used for

The Blue Room



the floor of the south portico and Missouri limestone for the steps.

During 1951, the exterior was painted white, walls and ceilings were plastered, and the interior woodwork was installed.

In addition to making the White House as fireproof and durable as possible, every effort was made during the renovation to retain or restore the original atmosphere and at the same time to provide a more livable and efficient home for the President and his family. Where there were formerly 48 rooms and 14 baths in the part of the house used as living quarters, there are now 54 rooms and 16 baths. In all, the White House now has 132 rooms and 20 baths and showers, compared with 62 rooms and 14 baths prior to the renovation. Formerly, there was but one elevator, now there are five—a main elevator, a service elevator, and three freight elevators. Altogether, Congress appropriated \$5,761,000 for the renovation, which was scheduled to be completed in 1951, but various difficulties delayed its completion. The Presidential family resumed residence in the White House on March 27, 1952.

THE FIRST FLOOR

In general, furnishings and decorations are predominantly 18th-century Georgian in style, but furnishings of historic interest have been retained, and much of the old furniture has been refinished and re-covered to harmonize with the color scheme of various rooms. Some of the new furnishings were given by anonymous donors. Portraits of several Presidents hang from the walls of the lobby, main corridor, and rooms of the first floor, except in the Blue Room.

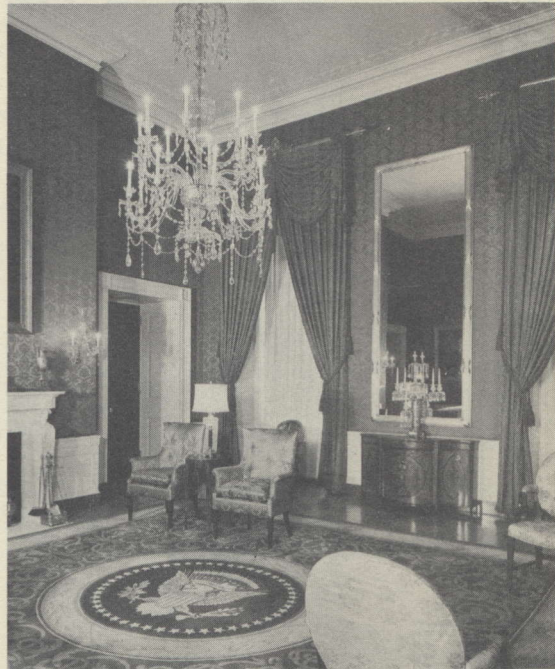
ENTRANCE LOBBY AND MAIN CORRIDOR

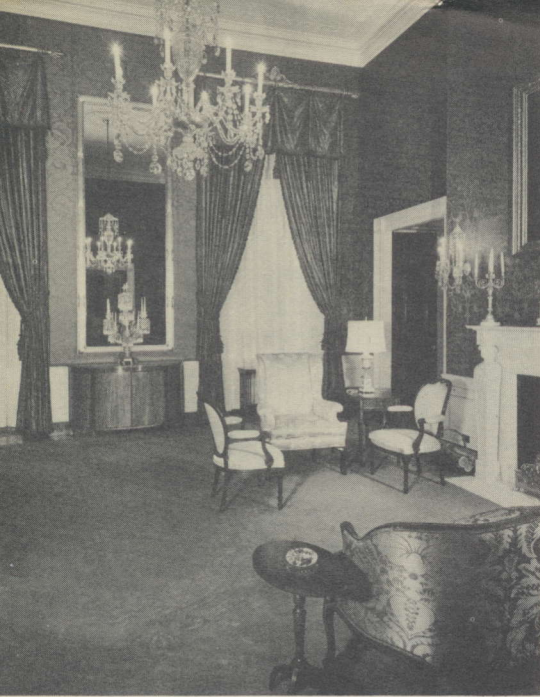
Six classic columns separate the entrance lobby from the main corridor. The columns and the pilasters spaced along the walls are of vari-



Entrance Lobby and Main Stairway

The Green Room





The Red Room

The State Dining Room



colored Vermont marble; floors are of gray and pink Tennessee marble. The entrance to the main stairway, which was formerly from the corridor, is now from the east side of the lobby. Seals of the Thirteen Original States are carved on the marble-faced opening of the stairway. On the opposite wall, a large mirror reaches from floor to ceiling. A red rug extends the length of the corridor.

THE EAST ROOM

Used for state receptions and balls, the East Room is the largest room in the White House. It has been the scene of several famous weddings, including those of Nellie Grant and Alice Roosevelt. Funeral services were held here for William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Abraham Lincoln, Warren G. Harding, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The East Room is decorated in white and gold. Window draperies are of lemon-gold and white silk damask. White enameled wood paneling covers the walls, in which are set six low-relief panels done in 1902 by Piccirilli Brothers. The large crystal chandeliers hanging from an elaborately decorated plaster ceiling also date from 1902. The floor is oak parquetry. On the east wall is seen the most notable portrait in the White House, that of George Washington painted by Gilbert Stuart. It is the one Dolly Madison ordered removed when the British burned the White House in 1814. A portrait of Martha Washington also hangs on the east wall.

THE GREEN ROOM

This room is used for informal receptions. The walls are covered with green silk damask, and the draperies are of the same material. The white marble mantel, imported from Italy when the White House was rebuilt after the War of 1812, was originally in the State Dining Room. The Hannibal clock and gilt vases on the mantel were purchased in France during Monroe's administration. On the oak floor is a Savonnerie

rug bearing the President's seal in its center. The crystal chandelier was presented by an anonymous donor during Herbert Hoover's administration.

THE BLUE ROOM

Famous for its elliptical shape, this room has usually been considered the most beautiful room in the White House. The walls above the white enameled wainscoting are covered with bright blue silk damask with a gold motif. Draperies and upholstery are of the same material. The furniture is white, matching the woodwork. The uncovered oak floor is laid in herringbone design. On the white marble mantel, which dates from 1902, are a French Minerva clock and gilt candlesticks purchased by President James Monroe. The crystal chandelier was anonymously presented several years ago. In this room the President receives guests at state dinners and receptions. Grover Cleveland and Frances Folsom were married in the Blue Room on June 2, 1886, the only wedding of a President to take place in the White House.

THE RED ROOM

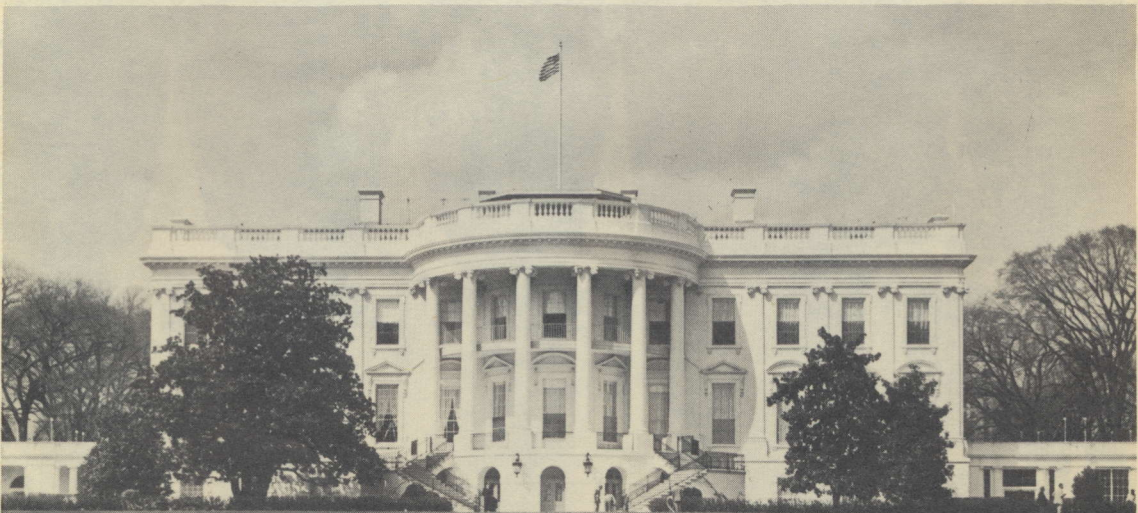
In size and shape the Red Room is identical to the Green Room. It has white enameled

wainscoting and wood work, wall covering and draperies of red silk damask, and a red chenille rug on the oak floor. The white marble mantel is a duplicate of that in the Green Room. On it are two 18th-century candelabra and a musical clock presented in April 1952 by the President of France. A new crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling. This room is used by the First Lady to receive guests, and also as a reception room for small dinners. President Rutherford B. Hayes took his oath of office here on March 3, 1877.

THE STATE DINING ROOM

Except for the East room, this is the largest room in the White House and can comfortably seat 100 guests at large dinners or luncheons. Paneling of English oak extends from floor to ceiling. Originally installed in 1902, it was painted pale green during the course of the renovation, providing an effective background for the gold silk damask window draperies. The fireplace is of verd antique Vermont marble. A green chenille rug covers the oak floor. In the center of the room is an antique mahogany table. Hanging from the elaborately decorated stucco ceiling is a silver chandelier which dates from 1902. On the north wall is an "over

South Front



mantel," a painting of flowers framed in gilt over a mirror, presented for the late King George VI of England by the present Queen Elizabeth II when she was a Princess.

THE PRIVATE DINING ROOM

This room has a vaulted ceiling, white enameled wainscoting, and walls paneled in plaster. The mantel is of marble with a mirror above. A new crystal chandelier, lighted with candles, hangs in this room. To the west is the butler's pantry, which opens also into the State Dining Room and is connected with the kitchen on the ground floor by a servants' elevator, dumb-waiters, and a staircase.

THE SECOND FLOOR

The second and third floors are reserved for the family and guests of the President. Several changes were made to make the rooms on the second floor more livable, but perhaps the greatest single improvement was to provide much-needed closet space. The Lincoln bedroom, in which stands the enormous bed used by the Civil War President, was restored in the Victorian period.

THE THIRD FLOOR

During the renovation the roof was recovered with green slate and raised at the corners to provide additional rooms on the third floor. There are several guest rooms on this floor, most of them furnished with reproductions of 18th-century pieces. A ramp leads to the new sun parlor, or solarium, over the south portico.

THE GROUND FLOOR

A corridor with vaulted ceiling and varicolored Vermont marble walls gives access to the rooms on this floor. The library, china room, and cloak rooms are paneled in pine from the old beams of the White House, and, in places, show old nail holes. Across the hall is the original kitchen of the White House in which the old sandstone fireplaces have been restored, some stones on display bearing the Masonic symbols cut by the original workmen. This room is now used for conferences and for television and radio broadcasting, and has soundproof walls and ceiling. Adjoining it is the present modern electric kitchen, in which almost all the equipment is of stainless steel.

BASEMENT AND MEZZANINE FLOORS

Excavating done in the course of renovation provided these additional floors. Here are the machinery and electrical equipment for heating, lighting, and air conditioning the building, and space for storage and service facilities.

GROUNDS

The impression of simple dignity conveyed by the White House is enhanced by the natural beauty of its informal but carefully landscaped grounds. Many of the trees are of historical interest, such as the magnolias planted by Andrew Jackson. In front of the north portico, English boxwood, as old as the White House itself, has been planted. New trees have been selected for their beauty and variety. Flower gardens and well-kept lawns add to the beauty of the grounds about the White House.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Douglas McKay, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • Conrad L. Wirth, Director

NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS

