

# **The White House**

The White House has been the scene of many great moments in American history; yet the house endures as more than an object of historical interest. Here the President entertains his guests, holds meetings that decide national and international policy, and carries out the many duties connected with his office. Here, also, he and his family live their private lives, as every President has done since 1800.

The size, placement, and decor of the various historic rooms of the White House can accommodate a wide variety of events. Each room has its own distinctive style.

- 1 The Library.** More than 2,700 volumes dealing with important aspects of American life—biography, history, fiction, the sciences, and the humanities—line the floor-to-ceiling shelves.

The Library contains American furniture of the Federal Period, a chandelier once owned by the family of James Fenimore Cooper, and five portraits of American Indians representing a delegation received by President Monroe in 1821.

- 2 The Vermeil Room.** An extensive display of vermeil (gilded silver) is exhibited on the shelves, and thus this room has often been called the Gold Room. Given to the White House in 1956, many pieces are used for State luncheons and dinners.

- 3 The China Room.** This room was first used for the display of china in 1917 by Mrs. Woodrow Wilson. Behind the glass on shelves are pieces from china settings used by all our past Presidents. On the south wall hangs a full-length portrait of Mrs. Calvin Coolidge painted in 1924.

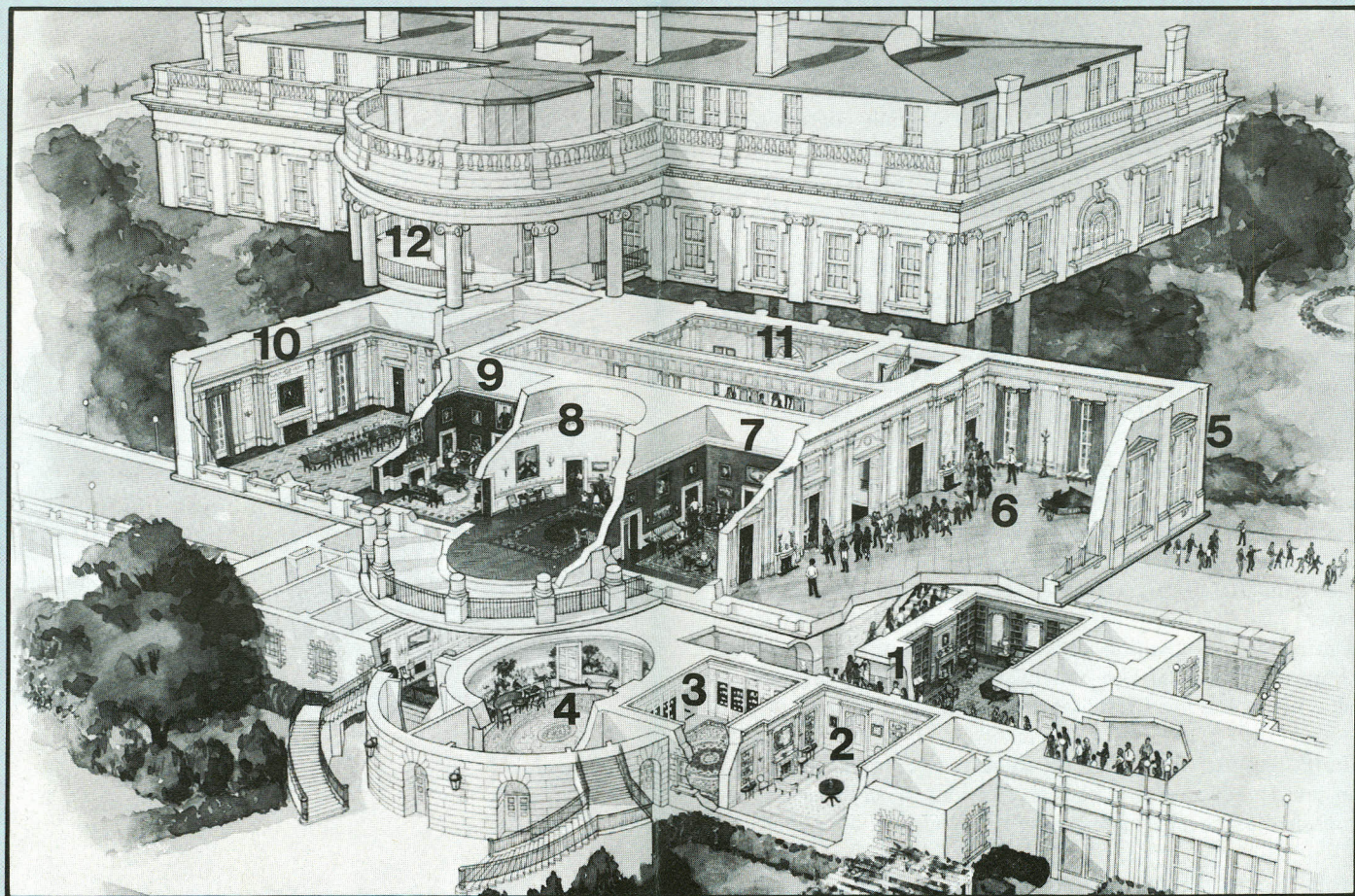
The walls of the China Room, and those in the Library, are paneled in wood from the 1817 timbers which were replaced with steel girders during the 1948-52 renovation.

- 4 The Diplomatic Reception Room.** This oval-shaped room is furnished as a parlor of the late 18th or early 19th century. Its oval rug contains symbols of the 50 States. It was from this room that President Franklin Roosevelt made his fireside chats. The door at the end of the room opens on to the South Lawn. The room is now used as an entrance to the residence by the President, his family, and his guests.

The wallpaper, printed in France in 1834, depicts several American natural wonders and historic places: Niagara Falls, Boston Harbor, West Point, Natural Bridge of Virginia, and New York Bay.

- 5 The State Floor.** Furnishings and decorations are predominantly of late 18th- and early 19th-century styles. Portraits of many Presidents hang from the walls of the lobby, cross hall, and first-floor rooms.

- 6 The East Room.** The largest in the White House, this room is used for State balls, receptions for varied groups, press conferences, and many other events. It has been the



scene of several famous weddings, including those of Nellie Grant, Alice Roosevelt, and Lynda Bird Johnson. Funeral services were held here for Presidents William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Abraham Lincoln, Warren G. Harding, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The bodies of Presidents William McKinley and John F. Kennedy lay in state here.

The East Room, its walls covered by white enameled wood paneling placed in the room by Theodore Roosevelt, is decorated in white and gold. Large cut glass chandeliers, dating from 1902, hang from an elaborately decorated ceiling, and the floor is oak parquet. The Steinway concert piano, decorated with folk dancing scenes and eagle supports, was presented in 1938.

On the east wall is the most notable portrait in the White House—the Gilbert Stuart painting of George Washington. It is the one Dolley Madison saved when the British burned the house in 1814. A portrait of Martha Washington, painted later, also hangs on the east wall.

**7 The Green Room.** This room, which once served as Thomas Jefferson's dining room, has been refurbished as a Federal parlor of the 1810 period and is now used for receptions. The furniture is of American design made

in New York by Duncan Phyfe or his contemporaries. The walls are covered with watered, moss green silk with draperies of a striped silk damask, and on the floor is a 19th-century Turkish Hereke rug. The white marble mantel was purchased in London in 1818. On a table are a silver coffee urn owned by John Adams and a pair of silver candlesticks used by Dolley Madison. The cut glass and gilt bronze chandelier dates from 1810.

**8 The Blue Room.** Famous for its elliptical shape, the Blue Room is usually considered the most beautiful room in the White House and is often used by the President to receive guests. The walls are covered with a cream-colored reproduction wallpaper with classical scenes based on a French paper of about 1800. Portraits in this room include Thomas Jefferson by Rembrandt Peale, John Adams by John Trumbull, and John Tyler by G. P. A. Healy.

The Blue Room is furnished to represent the period of James Monroe who purchased items for the room after the

fire of 1814. On the white marble mantel is the Hannibal clock and a pair of French porcelain vases acquired in 1817. Seven of the original Monroe chairs, one original sofa, and four reproduction chairs are upholstered in blue silk with an American eagle design on the back. The color blue was first used in the room during the administration of Martin Van Buren (1837-41).

The only wedding of a President to take place in the White House occurred in this room on June 2, 1886, when Grover Cleveland married Miss Frances Folsom.

- 9 The Red Room.** Used for small receptions, this room has long been a favorite of First Ladies. It is decorated as an American Empire parlor of 1810-30. The walls are covered with a red twill satin fabric with a gold scroll designed border. Upholsteries are in the same fabric, and draperies are of gold satin with red damask valances. On the marble mantel, a duplicate of the Green Room mantel, is a musical clock presented in 1952 by the President of France.

John Adams used this as a breakfast room, and Rutherford B. Hayes took his oath of office here March 3, 1877.

- 10 The State Dining Room.** Exceeded in size only by the East Room, the State Dining Room can accommodate 140 guests at large dinners or luncheons. English oak paneling originally installed in 1902 by Theodore Roosevelt extends from floor to ceiling. A gilded chandelier hangs from the elaborately decorated stucco ceiling, and on the wall above the mantel is a portrait of President Abraham Lincoln by G. P. A. Healy.

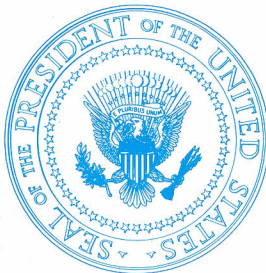
- 11 Lobby and Cross Hall** (not visible on plan). Six classic columns separate the lobby from the cross hall. The columns and the pilasters, spaced along the wall, are of varicolored Vermont marble; floors are of gray and pink Tennessee marble. Over the entrance to the Blue Room is the seal of the President of the United States. Seals of the Thirteen Original States are carved on the marble-faced opening of the stairway. Portraits of recent Presidents may be seen here.

- 12 The Second and Third Floors** (not shown on plan). These floors are reserved for the Presidential family and guests. The Lincoln Bedroom, with its massive 8-foot bed purchased during the Civil War, is restored in the Victorian style. Adjoining this room is the Treaty Room, which served as the Cabinet Room from 1865 to 1902. The cabinet table, settee, and clock, purchased by President Grant in 1869, are in this room. The Queen's Bedroom (Rose Guest Room) is furnished as an early 19th-century bedroom.

**Grounds** (not shown on plan). The White House is enhanced by the natural beauty of its informal, carefully landscaped grounds, which include flower gardens, well-kept lawns, and many trees of historic interest, such as the magnolias planted by President Andrew Jackson and an American elm planted by John Quincy Adams. The Jacqueline Kennedy Garden and the Rose Garden are adjacent to the east and west terraces respectively.



*President and Mrs. Ronald Reagan*



*In a cold, unfinished chamber in the White House in the autumn of 1800, President John Adams concluded a letter to his wife with the words: "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." Today those sentences are carved on the marble mantel of the State Dining Room; they form the motto of the most historic house in America.*

**Early History.** The cornerstone of the White House was laid October 13, 1792, on a site selected by President George Washington. Plans for the house were drawn by Irish-born architect James Hoban, who also superintended its construction. (Hoban also supervised the reconstruction of the house after it was burned by the British in 1814, and the erection of the north and south porticos some years later.) The exterior sandstone 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, people generally referred to it as the "President's House" or the "President's Palace."

The White House was first occupied by President and Mrs. John Adams in November 1800. At that time, most of the building's interior had not yet been completed, and Mrs. Adams used the unfinished East Room to dry the family wash. During Thomas Jefferson's administration, the east and west terraces were constructed. Jefferson also opened the house each morning to all visitors—an extension of the democratic simplicity he favored and practiced in his social life.

When James Madison became President in 1809, his wife, the famous Dolley Madison, introduced brilliance and glitter into the social life of the White House. Then, on August 24, 1814, British forces captured Washington and burned the house in retaliation for the destruction by American troops of some public buildings in Canada. Although only the partially damaged sandstone walls and interior brickwork remained when reconstruction of the building began in 1815, the White House was ready for occupancy by President James Monroe in September 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 the driveway, in 1829.

**Improvements, 1834-1948.** Throughout its history, the White House has kept pace with modern improvements. Spring water was piped into the building in 1834, gas lighting was introduced in 1848, and a hot-water heating system was installed in 1853. During Andrew Johnson's administration, the east terrace was removed entirely. In 1881 the first elevator was installed, and in 1891, during Benjamin Harrison's administration, the house was wired for electricity.

When Theodore Roosevelt moved into the White House in 1901, its interior was a conglomeration of styles and periods, and the house itself needed extensive structural repairs. Congress appropriated money to repair and re-furnish the house and to construct new offices for the President. Work began in June 1902 and by the end of the year the job was virtually completed by the architectural firm McKim, Mead and White.

Several important changes were made between 1903 and 1948. The west wing offices were enlarged in 1909, several guestrooms were made in the attic during Woodrow Wilson's presidency, and the roof and third story were remodeled in 1927. A few years later, an electric kitchen was installed, and a basement was dug under the north portico to provide space for maintenance shops and storage. During World War II, the east wing and an air-raid shelter were constructed and a motion-picture theater was installed in the east terrace. In 1948 a balcony was completed off the second floor behind the columns of the south portico.

**Renovation, 1948-52.** Over the years, piecemeal alterations had weakened many of the building's 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. To allow a survey to be made, President Harry S Truman moved across the street into historic Blair-Lee House, now known as The President's Guest House. Late in 1948, all furnishings were removed from the White House and placed in storage.

Inspection revealed that beams were inadequately supported, heavy ceilings had dropped several inches, and even the foundations were too weak to support the walls erected on them. Renovation began in December 1948 and by late 1950 the most critical phase of the work had been accomplished. The old sandstone walls were retained and 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. In March 1952, the Presidential family resumed residence in the White House.

During the renovation, efforts were made to retain or restore the original atmosphere, while providing a more livable home for the President and his family.

**Refurbishing and Recent Acquisitions.** In recent years, all new interior decorations and acquisitions have been accomplished as a result of public-spirited citizens' donations.

This, then, is the White House. It has seen many historic events and personages. President Reagan and his family invite you to see this great home and experience at first hand its unique warmth and dignity.

**About Your Visit.** The White House is open to visitors from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, Tuesday through Saturday. The house is closed Sunday and Monday, and some holidays.

Visitors with a physical handicap that will not permit them to use stairs should go directly to the North East Gate where wheelchairs are available, if they are necessary.

For further information, please call 456-7041.

More detailed information about the White House may be found in "The White House, An Historic Guide," "The Living White House," "The Presidents," and "First Ladies of the White House," published by the White House Historical Association, 740 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, DC 20506.

*Office of White House Visitors in cooperation with the  
National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior*

