

The White House

The White House
Washington, D.C.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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 begins at the Visitor Entrance Building. Exhibits focus on aspects of White House history and seasonal celebrations. As you enter and leave the White House, notice the carefully landscaped grounds that enhance the beauty of the famous house. Among the many historic trees on the grounds is a magnolia planted by Andrew Jackson. The Jacqueline Kennedy Garden 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 tour the historic house, look for the portraits of Presidents and First Ladies that line the corridors and hallways of the Ground and State floors. Notice also the floral arrangements that brighten each room.

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. 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.

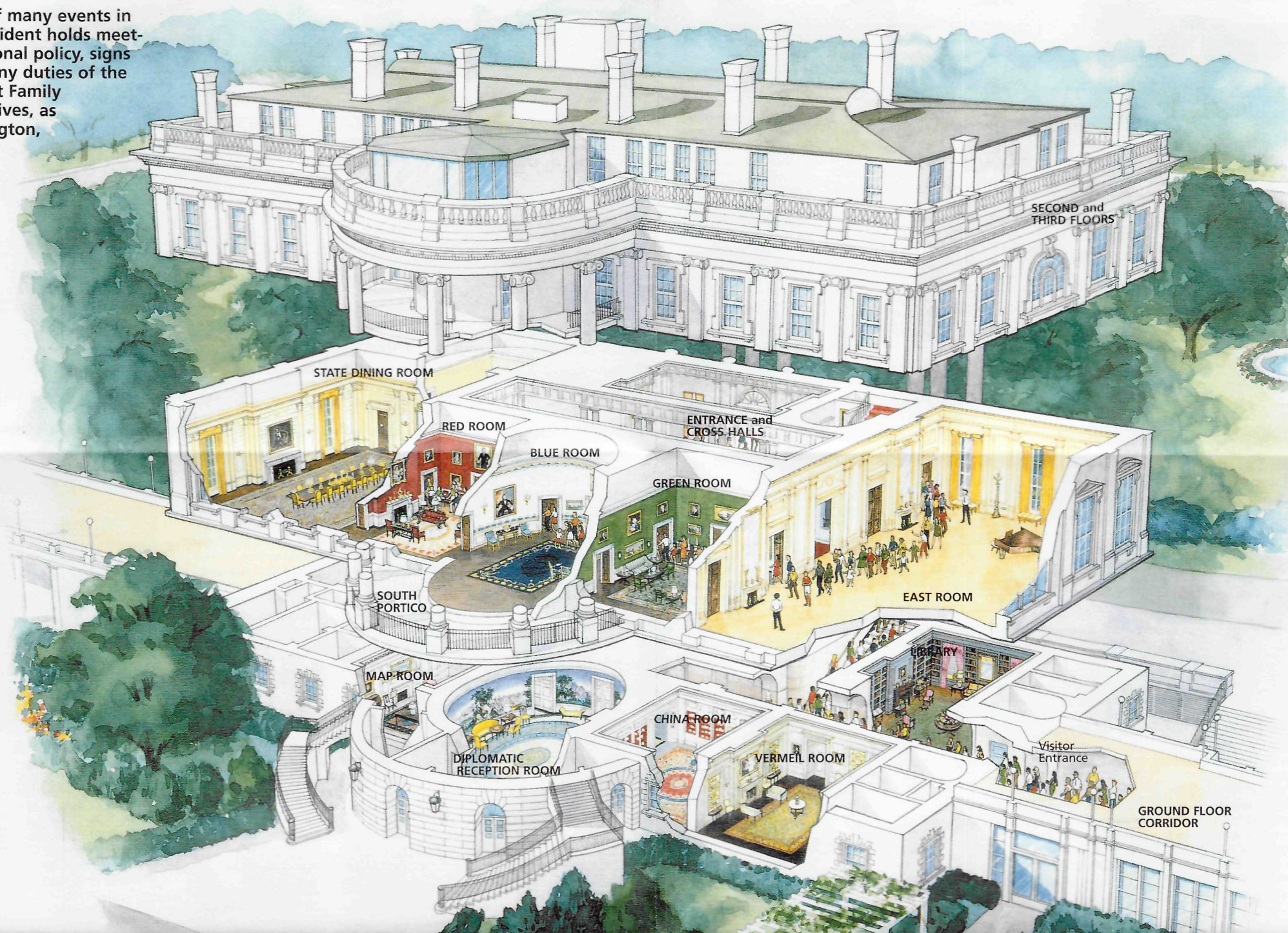


Library

The **VERMEIL ROOM** contains an extensive collection of vermeil (gilded silver) and is used for a variety of functions. Portraits of recent First Ladies are displayed here. This room was once used as a billiard room.



Vermeil Room



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



China Room

The **DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ROOM** (not on tour), one of three oval rooms in the residence, is furnished as a Federal period parlor. The room is used as the entrance for new ambassadors coming to the White House to present



Diplomatic Reception Room

their credentials to the President. It was from this room that President Franklin D. Roosevelt broadcast his fireside chats.

Located on the State Floor, the **EAST ROOM** 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 and is used here or in the Cross Hall.

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 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 those of 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 White House Christmas tree is placed in this room.

When the White House was rebuilt following the 1814 fire, James Monroe bought furniture for the Blue Room from a French cabinetmaker, Pierre-Antoine Bellange. Eight of those pieces remain in the White House today—including this bergère, an armchair whose sides are enclosed.



The **RED ROOM**, used for small receptions, has long been a favorite of the First Ladies. John Adams used this as a breakfast room; 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 the 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 1797 Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington has hung in the White House since 1800. Dolley Madison saved it when the British burned the White House in 1814.



This 1869 G.P.A. Healy portrait of Abraham Lincoln was bequeathed to the White House in 1939 by the widow of Robert Todd Lincoln, the President's oldest son.

The **STATE DINING ROOM** can seat 130 guests at dinners and luncheons. The painted English oak paneling dates from the renovation in 1902. 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 construction and renovation dates of the house. Above the Blue Room entrance is the Presidential seal.

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

Visitor Information For information on public White House tours and events call 202-456-7041, (24 hours). The White House is open for garden tours on selected April and October weekends. On Easter Monday the traditional Easter Egg Roll takes place on the South Lawn. For more information: www.nps.gov/whh, www.whitehousehistory.org, and www.whitehouse.gov/history.

The White House Visitor Center, at 1450 Pennsylvania Avenue, South, is open 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, and offers exhibits, audio visual displays, historic artifacts, and ranger-led talks about the White House. To learn more call 202-208-1631.

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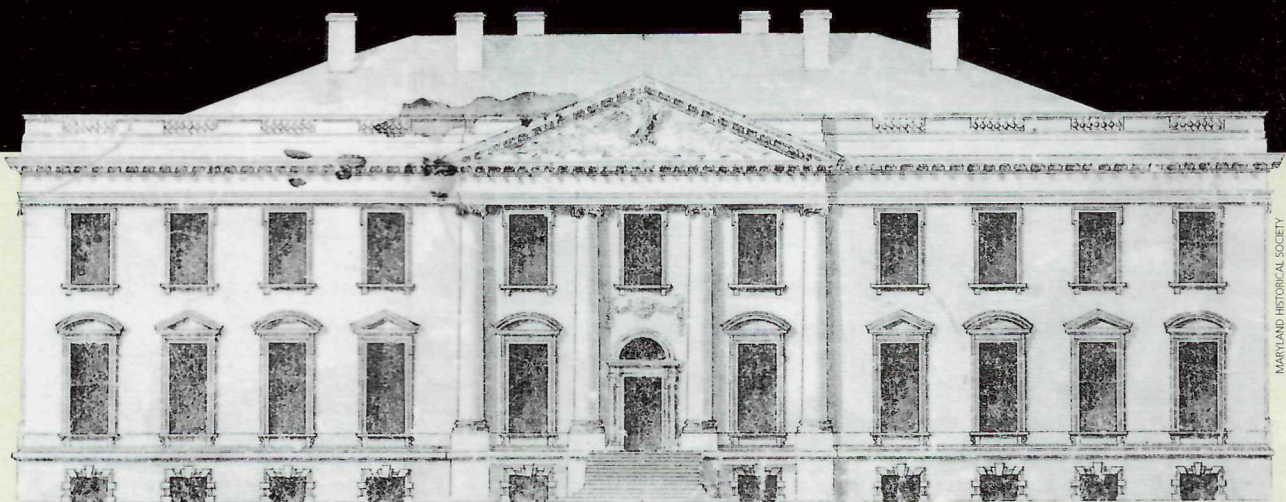
The White House: A Brief History

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. Every President except George Washington has conducted the government of the nation here. In the past 200 years the White House has come to symbolize the American Presidency across the world. While the Capitol represents freedom and the nation's ideals, 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 demands of a growing nation and of a more complicated world.

Throughout all the changes, the basic structure has been honored. After the British burning in 1814, the house was rebuilt between 1815 and 1817 within 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. However, it has remained recognizable for more than 200 years. Engravings and photographs show alterations, additions, and changes to 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 for the Federal City. Once he chose the precise location, planning for the city began. French engineer Pierre L'Enfant based his plan on two strong focal points: the Capitol and the President's House, symbolic



of two of the three branches of government. 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 competi-

tion, which was announced on March 14, 1792. On July 17, 1792, James Hoban, an architect born and trained in Ireland, was declared

the winner. His design (above) was based on country houses of the British Isles. On October 13 the cornerstone was laid by the Freemasons

and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. Hoban supervised the construction.

1793

Work started with making a brickyard on the present north grounds of the White House. Three kilns turned out several million bricks not only for the White House but other federal buildings. Huts built on what is now Lafayette Park housed the laborers. (The task of finding skilled workers 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 the facings on exterior walls came from the Aquia Creek quarry in Stafford County, Va. 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 for flooring and doors and for framing lumber. 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, Md.

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. With the

house not quite finished, the second President, John Adams, moved into the White House on November 1, 1800, 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.



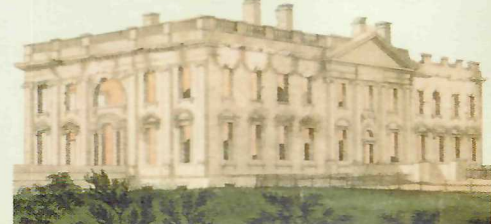
Benjamin Latrobe designed the chairs above for the Madisons during the Greek Revival period. They were made in Baltimore, Md. None survived the fire of 1814.

1814

James Madison moved into the White House in 1809. With his wife Dolley he introduced brilliance and glitter into the new capital's social life in a White House that dazzled as well from the work of architect Benjamin Latrobe. The Madisons hired Latrobe to decorate the oval room and to design furniture. His work survives only 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 (left), as seen from Lafayette Park in 1815, contrasts vividly with the growing city (top) that George Cooke painted in 1833. The White House is at center left in the painting.

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, because, under the now aged Hoban's direction, 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 effi-

cient heating system was introduced in 1853. Bathrooms and water closets were improved on the second floor.

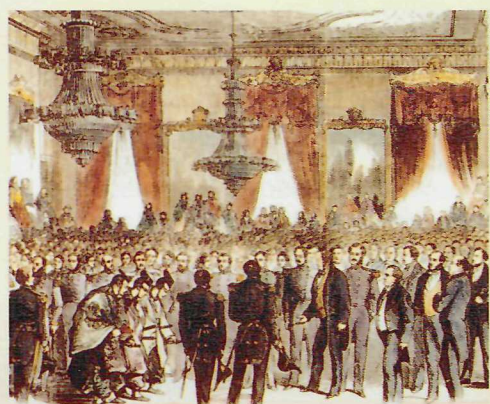


Andrew Jackson was one of the most popular Presidents. The crush of people at public receptions that marked his years in the White House did not deter those who hoped to see their hero.

1860

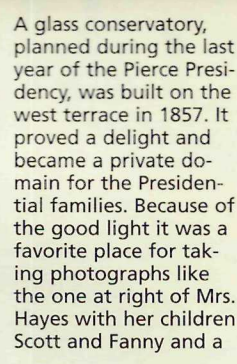
The role of the White House expanded as the nation grew in importance and as the City of Washington developed. Two great social events of the Buchanan administration in 1860 are indicative of this evolving stature: the arrival of Japanese officials

(below) following Matthew Perry's 1853–54 trip to Japan and the visit of the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII of England. In April 1861 the Civil War tore the nation apart, and the White House became a center for decision-making



and other war activity. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in his second-floor office (above). Troops were quartered in the East Room in the war's early stages. 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. Sixteen years later the White House was draped in mourning (right) as once again a President, James A. Garfield, fell victim to an assassin.



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. Because of the good light it was a favorite place for taking photographs like the one at right 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 connected to the White House via the State Dining Room.

a year later, on June 2, 1886, Cleveland married Frances Folsom in the Blue Room (below right). Although other weddings have been performed in the White House, this was the one time a President was married here.



Cleveland's successor Benjamin Harrison made some notable changes, including adding electric lights in 1891.



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 popularly as the White House. Certainly that name predated the fire of 1814. In 1901 Roosevelt made it official. Roosevelt faced major problems, because the house needed extensive structural repairs, more space for both the family and the staff

was required, and the interior was a conglomeration of styles.

Congress appropriated money to repair and refurnish 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, supervised by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White. By the end of the year the job was complete.

1909

Despite the work done in 1902, demand for more space grew, and in 1909 the West Wing offices were enlarged and the well-known Oval Office was built. Before the West Wing



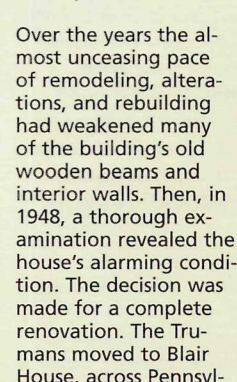
was built, Presidents had used various room arrangements in the mansion for their offices. Since 1909 the Oval Office has been the President's Office. Outside the Oval Office



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.

Soon after his election Franklin Roosevelt began radio broadcasts to the nation—known as “fireside chats” (above). The next year, 1934, he had the West Wing enlarged again. 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. Harry Truman added a balcony to the south portico in 1948.

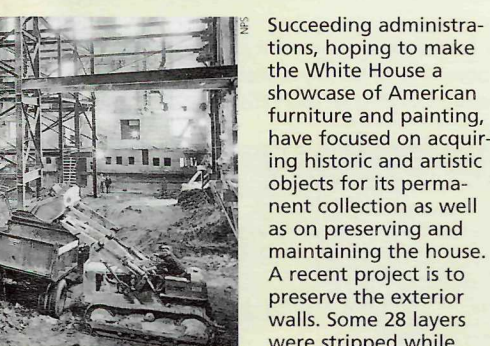


1948



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. Then, in 1948, a thorough examination revealed the house's alarming condition. The decision was made for a complete renovation. The Trumans moved to Blair House, across Pennsylv-

1952



vania Avenue, for four years of White House reconstruction. Paneling, ceilings, and furniture were removed, the interior was gutted, a new basement was excavated, new foundations were laid, and

a steel framework was erected to take their load-carrying burden off the walls (above). In March 1952 the Trumans moved back to the renovated White House.



Succeeding administrations, hoping to make the White House a showcase of American furniture and painting, have focused on acquiring historic and artistic objects for its permanent collection as well as on preserving and maintaining the house. A recent project is to preserve the exterior walls. Some 28 layers were stripped while expert stone carvers repaired the historic sandstone. Column capitals, carved roses, and garland details, cleaned of thick layers of paint, are once again seen in their original crispness (right). Scorch marks from when fire con-

Today



sumed the White House during the 1814 British invasion were briefly visible while the naked walls awaited repainting.



For more information on the history of the White House and President's Park, contact The White House Historical Association at www.whitehousehistory.com. Visit the websites listed on the reverse of this brochure for additional information.

Detailed information about the White House may be found in *The White House, A History*, by William Seale, published by the White House Historical Association, 740 Jackson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20560 202-737-8292.

