

White House

Located along the banks of the Potomac River, the site of the nation's capital city was selected after much debate, through a compromise between southern and northern representatives during the late 1780s.

The Residence Act of 1790 placed the site along the Potomac River, and gave President George Washington the authority to select the exact location of the new capital city.

President George Washington signed the Residence Act in July 1790 declaring that the Federal Government would reside in a district "not exceeding ten miles square...on the river Potomac."

City Planner Pierre (Peter) Charles L'Enfant laid out plans for the nation's new capital and together with President Washington chose the site for the "President's House."

The building's history begins in 1792, when a public competition was held to choose a design for a presidential residence in the new capital city of Washington.

Thomas Jefferson, later the country's third president (1801–09), using the pseudonymous initials "A.Z.," was among those who submitted drawings, but Irish American architect James Hoban won the commission (and a \$500 prize) with his plan for a Georgian mansion in the Palladian style.

The structure was to have three floors and more than 100 rooms and would be built in sandstone imported from quarries along Aquia Creek in Virginia.

President Washington marked the spot for the future north walls and entrance of the White House in 1791. The chosen location and position for the White House symbolically linked the President's House to the U.S. Capitol via Pennsylvania Avenue (1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. in Washington, DC)

The cornerstone was laid on October 13, 1792. Laborers, including local enslaved people, were housed in temporary huts built on the north side of the premises. They were joined by skilled stonemasons from Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1793.

In 1800 the entire federal government was relocated from Philadelphia to Washington. John Adams, the country's second president (1797–1801), moved into the still unfinished presidential mansion on November 1 and the next night Adams wrote in a letter to his wife, Abigail Adams:

I Pray Heaven 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.

At the insistence of President Franklin Roosevelt (1933–45), the quotation was inscribed on the fireplace of the State Dining Room immediately below the portrait of Abraham Lincoln, by George Healy.

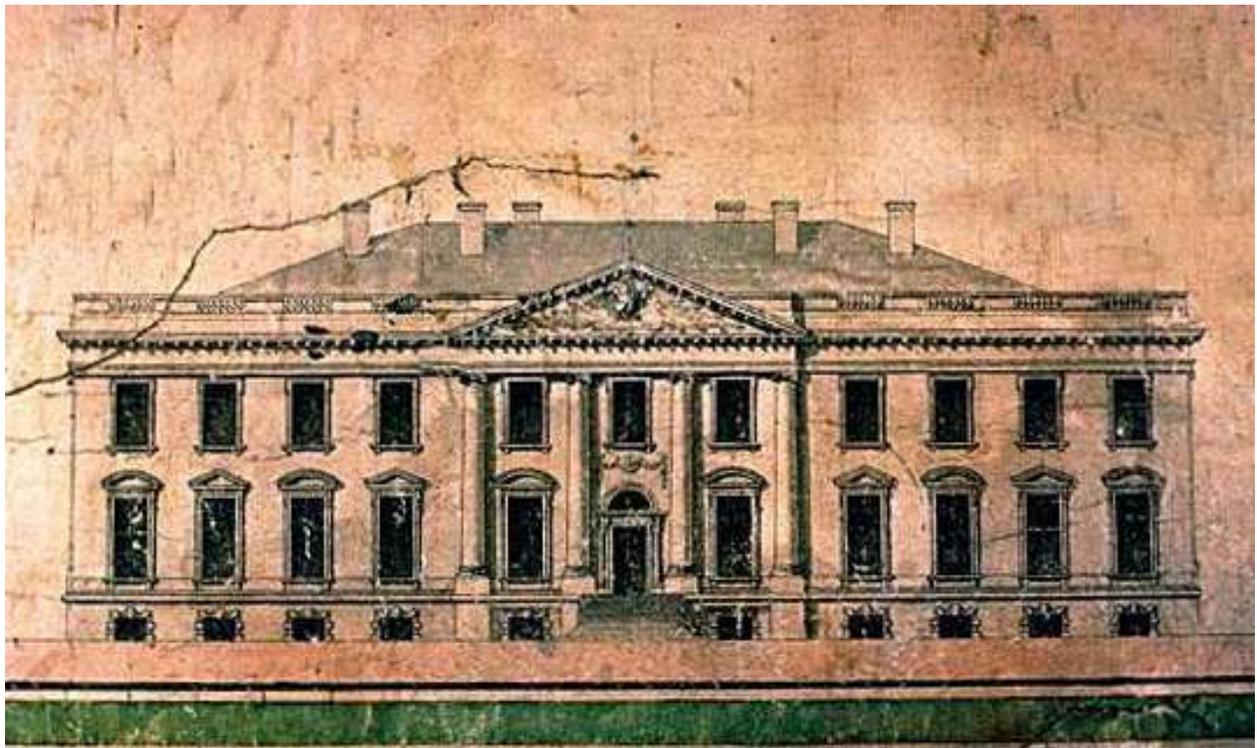
When Abigail Adams finally arrived in Washington several days later, she was disappointed with the inadequate state of the residence.

The first lady wrote,

There is not a single apartment finished. We have not the least fence, yard, or other convenience outside. I use the great unfinished audience room [East Room] as a drying room for hanging up the clothes.

Since that time, each President has made his own changes and additions.

Originally called the “President’s Palace” on early maps, the building was officially named the Executive Mansion in 1810 in order to avoid connotations of royalty.



Rendering Sketch of the White House in 1793

During the War of 1812 the building was burned by the British, and President James Madison (1809–17) and his family were forced to flee the city. The Madisons eventually moved into the nearby Octagon House, the Washington mansion of John Tayloe, a Virginia plantation owner.

Reconstruction and expansion began under Hoban’s direction, but the building was not ready for occupancy until 1817, during the administration of President James Monroe (1817–25).

It survived a fire at the hands of the British in 1814 (during the war of 1812) and another fire in the West Wing in 1929, while Herbert Hoover was President.

James Monroe moved into the building in 1817, and during his administration, the South Portico was constructed. The West Wing evolved from its original construction in 1902 to its present form by 1934. The East Wing was completed in 1942.

Presidents and their wives added modern conveniences and replaced finishes and furnishings to reflect current tastes and personal preferences. Andrew Jackson was responsible for modern amenities such as running water and an indoor bath.

The year 1848 saw the installation of gas lighting during the James K. Polk administration. In 1891, President Benjamin Harrison made notable changes including adding electric lights. The public rooms reflect the stories of the men and women who lived in this house and the events, both public and private, that occurred here.

The East Room is the largest space on the first or State Floor. When John Adams moved into the President's House for his last few months in office, his wife Abigail used the unfinished room to dry the family laundry. Mourners filed by the bodies of seven presidents lying in state here. President Ulysses S. Grant remodeled the room for his daughter's wedding in 1874.

Theodore Roosevelt's children roller-skated on the newly installed wood floors in 1902, and his daughter Alice married Congressman Nicholas Longworth in a famous East Room ceremony four years later. President Lyndon Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act here. The Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington that Dolley Madison rescued when the British invaded Washington in 1814 now hangs in this room.

President James Monroe played the card game whist with his friends in what is now the Green Room, but it did not become a "Green Drawing Room" until the John Quincy Adams administration.

Changes in cultural styles and personal tastes of the presidents and first ladies influenced the evolving appearance of the White House interiors

For example, President Chester A. Arthur, enamored with the new Aesthetic movement and the work of Tiffany, thought Lucretia Garfield's highly patterned finishes were out of fashion, and redecorations have been frequent. Grace Coolidge furnished this room with authentic 19th century furniture, in an early attempt to restore the White House to its historic appearance.

The Blue Room has not always been blue either. Dolley Madison called it her "Oval Drawing Room" and decorated it with red velvet draperies. James Monroe imported fashionable Empire furniture upholstered in crimson silk from France to decorate his "large oval room." Some of those pieces, reupholstered in blue, stand there today.

President Martin Van Buren began the tradition of decorating the room in blue, which continues to today. Used often as a reception area, this room has seen many important visitors, including the chiefs of Great Plains tribes who had tea with James Monroe in 1822 and the first Chinese ambassador to the United States when he presented his credentials to President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1878.

It has also witnessed personal events. The wedding of President Grover Cleveland took place here in 1886, and the christening of President Dwight Eisenhower's granddaughter, Mary Jean, was another reminder that the White House is also a home.

Dolley Madison held her famous Wednesday night receptions in the Red Room, though it was not red, but sunflower yellow at the time. It did not become a true "red room," until the Polk administration. In March

1877, it saw Rutherford B. Hayes secretly sworn in as president, after one of the most bitterly contested elections in the nation's history.

The White House swearing-in was intended to anticipate anything that might disrupt the formal inauguration at the Capitol, scheduled for the following Monday. Ulysses S. Grant, his predecessor, left a dinner party in the next room to attend the ceremony. Presidential families often used this room for informal Sunday evening gatherings in the 19th century.

The State Dining Room, which can now seat 140, originally was much smaller. By the 1850s, it already could not hold the many congressmen, diplomats, and other distinguished guests invited to attend official dinners.

In 1902, architects McKim, Mead & White enlarged the room to its current dimensions by removing the stairway from the west end of Cross Hall. Franklin D. Roosevelt had the blessing that John Adams wrote for the White House in 1800 carved in the large stone mantelpiece. Today this room is the center of White House hospitality.

Hoban designed the Entrance Hall and Cross Hall as a formal reception area and circulation space connecting the main rooms on the State Floor. In the 19th century, the public entered the White House through this space.

In 1837, Andrew Jackson invited everyone in to help him eat a 1,400-pound cheese he received as a gift. The resulting mob trampled so much cheese into the carpeting that it took months to remove the smell.

President John Adams opened the White House to the public and started the tradition of hosting New Year's Day receptions. President Thomas Jefferson expanded on this tradition of hospitality and hosted the first Fourth of July celebration.

Thomas Jefferson held the first Inaugural open house in 1805. Many of those who attended the swearing-in ceremony at the US Capitol simply followed him home, where he greeted them in the Blue Room. President Jefferson also opened the house for public tours, and it has remained open, except during wartime, ever since.

In 1829, a horde of 20,000 Inaugural callers forced President Andrew Jackson to flee to the safety of a hotel while, on the lawn, aides filled washtubs with orange juice and whiskey to lure the mob out of the mud-tracked White House.

After Abraham Lincoln's presidency, Inaugural crowds became far too large for the White House to accommodate them comfortably.

In Grover Cleveland's first presidency he held a presidential review of the troops from a flag-draped grandstand built in front of the White House. This procession evolved into the official Inaugural parade we know today. Receptions on New Year's Day and the Fourth of July continued to be held until the early 1930s.

The 1902 renovation relocated the public entrance to the White House to the East Terrace, but the president and his wife still welcome state visitors in the Entrance Hall.



White House 1846

The Second and Third Floors are private living quarters, used only by the president, family, and guests.

This part of the White House was a joyful place when Grover Cleveland's daughter, Esther, was born here. She is the only child of a president born in the White House, although several grandchildren have been born here. Abigail Fillmore, a former schoolteacher, established the first official library in the White House on the Second Floor in 1850.

It was home to Theodore Roosevelt's rambunctious children. His daughter Alice Roosevelt Longworth once exclaimed at a small dinner party held during the Richard M. Nixon administration, "My goodness . . . this is the room where I had my appendix out!"

The operation performed in the President's Dining Room, had been in her old bedroom, the Prince of Wales Room. The private quarters of the White House also witnessed scenes of great sadness, with the death of Willie Lincoln and the painful dying of President William H. Harrison, to name a few.

Throughout much of Harry S. Truman's presidency, the interior of the house, with the exception of the third floor, was completely gutted and renovated while the Trumans lived at Blair House, right across

Pennsylvania Avenue. Nonetheless, the exterior stone walls are those first put in place when the White House was constructed two centuries ago.

In 1829, Andrew Jackson oversaw the addition of the North Portico. Various proposals were put forward during the late 19th century to significantly expand the President's House or to build an entirely new residence, but these plans were never realized.

Although the name "White House" was commonly used (because the mansion's white-gray sandstone contrasted strikingly with the red brick of nearby buildings), it did not become the official name of the building until 1901, when it was adopted by President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–09). The White House is the oldest federal building in the nation's capital.

There are 132 rooms, 35 bathrooms, and 6 levels in the Residence. There are also 412 doors, 147 windows, 28 fireplaces, 8 staircases, and 3 elevators.

With five full-time chefs, the White House kitchen is able to serve dinner to as many as 140 guests and hors d'oeuvres to more than 1,000.

For recreation, the White House has a variety of facilities available to its residents, including a tennis court, jogging track, swimming pool, movie theater, and bowling lane.

The White House and its landscaped grounds occupy 18 acres. The White House Grounds and the surrounding parkland, known as President's Park, provide an elegant setting to welcome foreign dignitaries and to host national celebrations such as the lighting of the National Christmas Tree and the annual Easter Egg Roll, and on occasion public protests.

President's Park reflects the plans of first L'Enfant and later Andrew Jackson Downing and the 1902 McMillan Plan to connect the White House with the monuments of the National Mall, the United States Capitol, and the Lincoln Memorial.

The 1902 plan envisioned the sweeping lawn and tree-lined vista that today with the public buildings and monuments creates a symbolic city core that honors our most revered presidents and the great events of the nation's history.

The Ellipse is the central landscape feature on the south side. Lafayette Park, on the north side, is surrounded by many historic buildings of interest and is the site of an equestrian statue of President Andrew Jackson and a number of statues of Revolutionary War heroes erected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the mid 1930's, President Franklin Roosevelt contracted Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr to modify the grounds and gardens to provide more privacy for the first family.

The National Park Service maintains the White House Gardens and Grounds, the surrounding parkland known as President's Park, and provides interpretive programs in the park and at the White House Visitor Center.

The White House Historical Association produces educational literature and films, develops special programs, and maintains a web site interpreting the White House and its history and the persons and

events associated with it. The Association published the first official White House guidebook in 1962 and continues to publish books about the White House.

For two hundred years, the White House has stood as a symbol of the Presidency, the United States government, and the American people.



Information here is primarily from White House; National Archives; National Park Service

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young