

WHITE HOUSE FIRST OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Corner Stone of Historic
Structure Laid by George
Washington in 1792.

BURNED BY BRITISH 1814

The White House, the official residence of the President, was the first public building erected in Washington. The site was selected by George Washington himself, who laid the corner stone October 13, 1792, and lived to see the building completed. John Adams was the first occupant in 1800.

The building, which is 176 feet in length and eighty-six feet deep, was partly destroyed by fire started by marauding British troops in 1814. After its restoration the Virginia limestone was painted white to obliterate the marks of the fire.

The east room, or state parlor, used for presidential receptions and other social functions, is a magnificent apartment, eighty-two feet in length, forty feet in width and with ceilings twenty-two feet high from which depend massive chandeliers. The wall and ceiling decorations are in white and gold with draperies of old gold. This is open to visitors daily from 10 a. m. to 2 p. m.

Offices Under Separate Roof.

The President's offices are west of and connecting with the Executive Mansion, and just across the street from the State, War and Navy departments. They are in an addition made in 1902-3 during President Roosevelt's administration, when elaborate alterations were made to the entire structure. A beautiful public entrance through a terrace was constructed on the east side and the handsome executive offices of the President were built connecting with the main house by a terrace on the west side. Persons having business with the President are received there between 12 and 1 p. m. on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

The White House is of Virginia freestone, after plans by James Hoban, which follow closely those of the seat of the Duke of Leinster, near Dublin, Ireland.

The White House was not always the presentable place it is today. In John Adams' time there was a turbid little creek which almost surrounded the mansion, and when the President wanted water to drink he had to get it from a spring half a mile away. There were beds of growing vegetables in the White House grounds, and the streets surrounding it were deep in slush and mud during a large part of the year.

The burning of the White House by the British in 1814 furnished the setting for one of the most picturesque stories associated with the historic structure. Tradition relates that Dolley Madison, on that occasion, saved the Stuart painting of Washington, the greatest of all portraits of the first President.

Although historians disagree as to the person who actually did save the portrait, the story goes that Dolley Madison, wife of President James Madison, upon learning that a troop of British soldiers had started toward the White House with the intention of making it, climbed upon a mantel and cut the Stuart painting of George Washington from its frame. She carried this with her when she hurried from the White House a few minutes before the arrival of the soldiers, and is said to have taken it to a farmhouse on the Tenleytown road, where she stayed in hiding until after the British had left the city.

First Lighted by Candles.

The first occupants of the White House got along at night with candles and the lighting apparatus of the early days of the country. Gas was installed in 1846, and a system of heating and ventilating in 1853. For the first seventy years of the existence of the building the average yearly cost for furnishing was \$6,000.

The original building contained terraces something like those now connected with the building, except not so imposing. They are thought to have been erected during Jefferson's administration, as Jefferson had his office in a small building near where the executive offices are now located. Congress appropriated money in 1819 to enlarge the offices west of the President's house.

It is supposed that the west terrace and buildings were turned into a greenhouse in the 1840s, while the east terrace, where were located the conservatory and stables, was removed to make room for the extension to the Treasury building.

The main building continued to be both the office and residence of Presidents until the fall of 1902. In the spring of that year Congress appropriated \$15,000 for the erection of temporary offices for the President and \$475,000 for remodeling and refurnishing the White House.

The contract was let for the work, the stipulation being that everything must be done within four months, so that the family could again occupy the building and the President's offices, in that time great problems were to be worked out.

Completed in 1902.

While the work was going on in the summer of 1902 President and Mrs. Roosevelt were at Oyster Bay. Upon their return in September they were quartered temporarily at No. 22 Jackson place, Lafayette Square.

In October Mr. Roosevelt moved into the new executive offices at the extreme west end of the west terrace, and his family moved into the enlarged quarters of the White House, the former executive offices there having been changed into bedrooms.

Until 1902 the sums available have never been sufficient to accomplish a thorough reconstruction. Referring to the changes made that year, the President in a message to Congress said:

"Through a wise provision of Congress at its last session, the White House, which had become disfigured by incongruous additions and changes, has now been restored to what it was planned to be by Washington. In making the restoration the utmost care has been exercised to come as near as possible to the early plans and to supplement these plans by a careful study of such buildings as that of the University of Virginia, which was built by Jefferson. The White House is the property of the nation, and so far as is compatible with living therein it should be kept as it originally was. The stately simplicity of its architecture is an expression of the character in which it was built, and is in accord with the purposes it was destined to serve. It is a good thing to preserve such buildings as historic monuments, which keep alive our sense of continuity with the nation's past."