

For almost 200 years, the White House has stood as a symbol of the Presidency, the United States government, and the American people. Its history, and the history of the nation's capital, began when President George Washington signed an Act of Congress in December of 1790 declaring that the federal government would reside in a district "not exceeding ten miles square... on the river Potomac." President Washington, together with city planner Pierre L'Enfant, chose the site for the new residence, which is now 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. (...)

Construction began when the first cornerstone was laid in October of 1792. Although President Washington oversaw the construction of the house, he never lived in it. It was not until 1800, when the White House was nearly completed, that its first residents, President John Adams and his wife Abigail, moved in. Since that time, each President has made his own changes and additions. The White House is, after all, the President's private home. It is also the only private residence of a Head of State that is open to the public free of charge.

The White House has a unique and fascinating history. 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. Throughout much of Harry S. Truman's presidency, the interior of the house was completely renovated. Nonetheless, the exterior stone walls are those first put in place when the White House was constructed two centuries ago.

Presidents can express their individual style in how they decorate the house and in how they receive the public during their stay. Thomas Jefferson held the first Inaugural open house in 1805. Many of those who attended the swearing-in ceremony at the U.S. 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. (...)

President Clinton's open house on January 21, 1993, renewed a venerable White House Inaugural tradition. Two thousand citizens, selected by lottery, were greeted in the Diplomatic Reception Room by the President and Mrs. Clinton and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore.

Clinton White House Archives