White House History



For more than two hundred 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**.

President Washington, together with city planner **Pierre L'Enfant**, **chose the site** for the new residence, which is now **1600 Pennsylvania Avenue**. As preparations began for the new federal city, a **competition** was held **to find a builder** of the "President's House." Nine proposals were submitted, and Irish-born **architect James Hoban** won a gold medal for his practical and handsome design.

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 and another fire in the West Wing in 1929**. 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**.