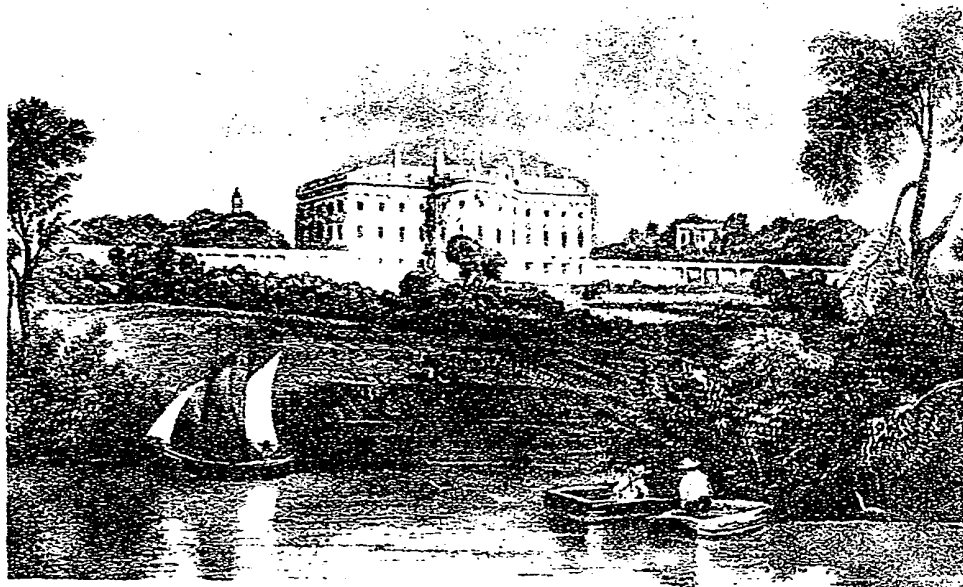


# THE WHITE HOUSE RENEWS ITS YOUTH

Passing Through the Builder's Hands  
 Again, It Keeps Step With  
 Contemporary America



The White House When the Potomac Flowed Near By.

that Mrs. Adams used the big, empty East Room for drying the family wash and storing the family meat barrel. President Washington, whose own country seat was on the Virginia side of the river a little lower down, had, during his two terms, lived in rented houses in New York and Philadelphia.

To the still unfinished house came Thomas Jefferson—Adams refusing to escort his successful rival to the Capitol for that inauguration, which (facts to the contrary notwithstanding) has not ceased to be linked with the story of the horse tied to the Capitol fence by a militant Democrat. The truth is that the Sage of Monticello arrived at the house (which Adams had left abruptly) on foot, under escort of the same company of "militia artillery" which had walked with him ceremonially when he went, likewise on foot, from his lodgings to take the oath. Jefferson was an

architect and a man of taste. He was, indeed, a specialist in precisely the architecture which the White House affects. He brought in some good French furniture. The house remained unfinished—partly because of Congressional parsimony, partly because of a lingering feeling that trying to make a national capital city on the banks of the Potomac was a mistake which would presently be realized. Perhaps the mad undertaking would be abandoned.

When Madison went in, wearing a suit of all-American wool "from merino sheep," the coat grown by Colonel Humphreys and the waistcoat and small-clothes by Chancellor Livingston, the house was still incomplete and inadequately furnished. Nevertheless, Dolly Madison managed to give it an air of gayety, and the President—"a withered little applejohn," Washington Irving calls him in contrast to Jefferson's lank six foot two of height—was a genial host.

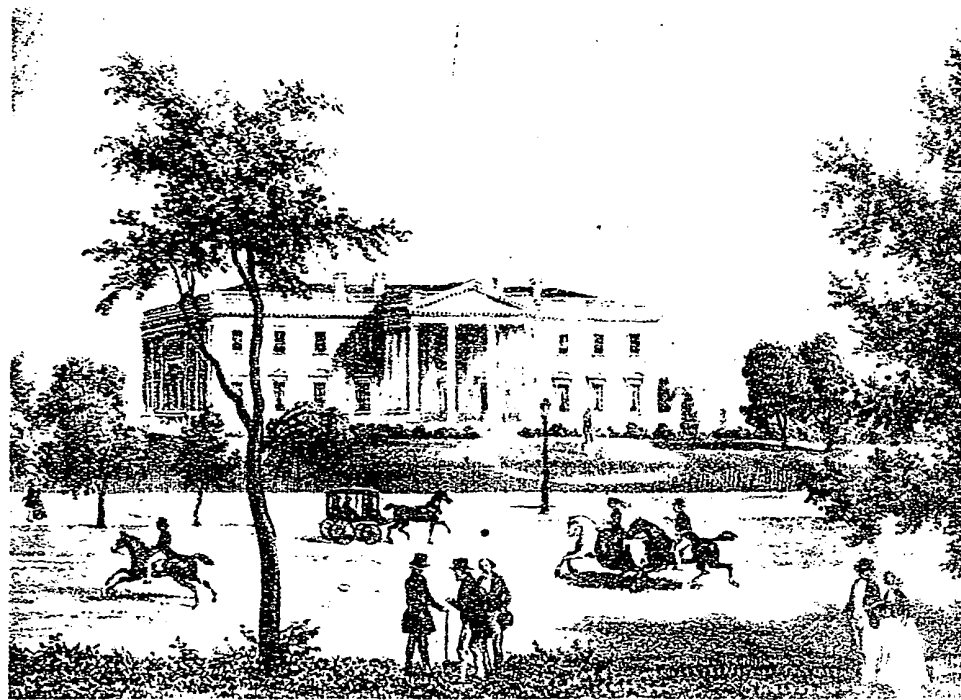
ONCE more a President returns to a "new" White House. Since his exile early in March, Calvin Coolidge has lived for a few months on Dupont Circle and for the succeeding weeks in the rugged hills of South Dakota. Now he re-enters the most American building in America, changed once again to meet the spirit of the current day.

The White House has been well termed a building of fragments. It has been burned once and reconstructed and refurbished so often that it is hard to tell where the work of one generation leaves off and that of another begins. Yet these changes have kept step with changes in the whole country so closely that at any given time the atmosphere of the mansion on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue has been the atmosphere of the contemporary generation, and the changes to a degree epitomize the history of the Republic.

IN October, 1792, when the cornerstone was laid, 300 years to a day after Columbus discovered America, we had just got safely through the war that won us political independence. But the leaders under whom we had won that war were conscious heirs of the best European culture. The furthest thought from their minds was setting up independent standards in arts, letters or manners. The pioneers were just behind them—and just ahead of them, too, in the wilderness west of their seaboard cities and plantations. But they did not think of themselves as pioneers; the real pioneers did not set up the new Government or run it. It was not time for that yet.

So, although politics placed the new capital city among the swamps on the banks of the Potomac, and the farmers' fields of corn and tobacco were appropriated for the new Capitol and the new President's House—or Palace, as they called it—the plan of the building was the plan of the country seat of a European gentleman of the late eighteenth century. Such was the contemporary custom of American homes of the gentry—because we still had a gentry.

Major James Hoban, an Irishman residing in Charleston, S. C., planned the White House—in its exterior aspect at least—pretty much as we see it today. It has been so generally admired in later years for a happy combination of dignity and simplicity that care has been taken not to spoil the original design. Although the City of Washington is no longer exactly the setting for a country seat, the White House is



A View of the "President's House" in the Days of Tight Trousers.

enabled to hold to the type by virtue of its parked demesne.

In the beginning, with Washington "a wilderness city set in a bog-hole," a town of "magnificent intentions" and very small performance, with streets too wide between their straggling rows of shanties, and with too many parks where the urban built-up effect had yet to be created, the new President's House (the plan half executed, to be sure) met with criticism. Congressmen remarked that, even with the north and south porticoes lacking, the building was too large. One roof, they said, ought to be enough to shelter both the Government and the President. Nor did the dense fogs from the Potomac, the damp of the rooms, the mud a foot deep in the adjoining streets, endear it to its occupants or visitors. The distance from the Capitol, likewise in process of construction, was discouraging.

John Adams, who had been inaugurated in Philadelphia (bitterly resentful of being overshadowed on that occasion by the great figure of his predecessor), was the first President to live in the new house. When the Massachusetts Federalist took possession in November, 1800, the "Palace" was in an unfinished state and so sketchily furnished



The White House Today, With Its New Roof.  
 Times Wide World Photograph.

THE house was just beginning to take on some of the quality of ease and distinction it was intended to have when the War of 1812 brought Admiral Cockburn with his raiders from the British fleet in the Chesapeake. The British arrived as Mrs. Madison was sitting down to a gala dinner. Everybody knows the story of the sprightly Dolly's hasty departure in her coach with what she could carry—including the Stuart portrait of Washington, snatched from the frame. Off to the east, they say, "the Capitol was already ablaze," and as the coach rolled away she could see flames shooting up from the house she had left.

Some historians doubt the Dolly Madison anecdote. The fact remains that the British did burn the White House and that President and Mrs. Madison escaped capture. That event marked the end of the first period of the mansion, though the influence of that period extended over two more Presidencies. It was not until Andrew Jackson's term that the pioneer took possession of the capital and the true reign of Democracy began—the reign that was to extend in spirit and in spite of Republican Administrations—through the Civil War

and, in fact, up to the arrival of Roosevelt.

The British were in no force to linger, and President and Mrs. Madison were presently back, living at the famous Octagon House not far from the blackened ruins of their official residence. Major Hoban began the restoration of the mansion according to his original plans. Because the fire had stained the stones the walls had to be painted, and through that necessity it became for the first time "the white house." The name fixed itself in the popular mind and got into general usage. But it took the courage of Colonel Roosevelt to put the plain words "White House" on the Presidential stationery in place of the pedantic "Executive Mansion," which had early been substituted for the too monarchical sounding "President's Palace." For a while after the burning the restored house lacked its porticoes, the deep-bayed square porch, facing Pennsylvania Avenue on the north, and the curved colonnade facing the gardens and looking south toward the Potomac.

**M**ONROE was the first President to occupy the rebuilt house, not yet completed. As Minister to France, Monroe had got some French furniture, and this he put into the empty house. He had more made expressly in France. This had to be gilt because European fashion so decreed. Gilt was the only thing suitable "even for a private gentleman's salon." Thus the famous oval Blue Room was first decorated and furnished in gilt and rose damask, and even the great East Room was furnished after a fashion. When Maria Monroe, the youngest daughter, was married to Samuel Lawrence Gouverneur "all the lower rooms were thrown open to the wedding guests and warmed with great fires of hickory wood." Incidentally, Mr. Monroe's new furniture had cost \$18,000. He had a



A White House Reception in the Days of Abraham Lincoln.

and all hungry for office." They included "every Jackson editor in the country"; and the town had been full of them for days waiting to escort the General from his lodgings at Gadsby's Tavern to his triumph.

It has been the habit to represent Jackson's tenure of his high office and his tenancy of the White

Jackson spent considerable sums on refurbishing the White House, which had grown a bit shabby before he arrived. Martin Van Buren, a Democrat, who went in more particularly for polish, had Monroe's French furniture "done over"—covered with more French damask. In biting words Congressman Ogle of Pennsylvania declared

(1833) Fanny Kemble described the outside. It is "a comfortless, handsome looking building with a withered grass plot enclosed with wooden palings in front."

The democratic "flavor—native simplicity accented by war conditions—prevailed in Lincoln's time. The President himself used to emerge in the early morning in his

toned over the chaste marble mantels.

President Arthur permitted Tiffany glass screens to enter the classic hall, with its Ionic columns simulating marble, and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison decorated the Blue Room with stained glass windows and stuck jigsaw scrollwork in the dignified doors of the private dining room. These items are enough to show how representatively American the White House has been in each decade—in spite of the few exterior changes. The turnover of household objects incident to keeping it so is roughly indicated by the fact that twenty-four wagon loads of furniture and such like were removed from the house in 1882 and sold at public auction.



The East Room—A Presidential Reception Before the Civil War.

lot of trouble collecting payment from the Government for his own furniture supplied in the emergency.

It was Monroe's dainty stuff, faded but still in use, over which General Andrew Jackson's eager admirers trampled with muddy boots in 1829 when the mob followed the hero as he rode on horseback to the White House after his inauguration—from which the younger Adams managed to absent himself as his father had done in the case of Jefferson—that other type of democracy.

"A great multitude," Daniel Webster called the crowd, "too many to be fed without a miracle.

House as a season of the utter upset of manners and the downfall of decency. It is true that in Jackson the pioneer arrived, and the eastern gentry lost their hold on the country, never to recover it.

But Old Hickory was a bit of a dandy in his way and a man of native dignity, if not of high urban polish. While some of his followers were frontiersmen and border fighters, the débâcle of polite behavior in the White House was greatly exaggerated by Jackson's enemies, who dwelt on his rough ways, as Lincoln's enemies later emphasized the Emancipator's un-gainliness.

that the President "spent the people's money with a lavish hand and at the same time saved his own with sordid parsimony." The White House, Ogle asserted, was "a royal establishment, a palace as splendid as the Caesars." A less excited contemporary witness said:

"The President's house has a spacious entrance hall furnished simply, with plain stuccoed walls and a screen of Ionic columns of imitation marble. The oval room has upon the walls plain crimson flock paper with a deep gilt border, a marble mantel and crimson draperies at the windows."

In the middle of Jackson's period

carpet slippers and shawl, cross the lawn with long strides and step out into Pennsylvania Avenue to buy an extra from a casual newsboy.

In the furnishings every President's wife had made eliminations and additions as her taste and interest dictated, but the next complete renovation—after Van Buren's indulgence in doing over Monroe's French furniture—was in Andrew Johnson's day, and thus dates itself as the beginning of the post-Civil War era. By this time the original French style lingered but faintly. In General Grant's term enormous rosewood wardrobes arrived and lambrequins were fea-

**A**S the country grew, the mansion, which had been so bitterly condemned for its huge size, proved no longer adequate to the demands on it. When Prince Buchanan entertained the Prince of Wales in 1860 he gave up his own bed to the Prince and slept in an improvised bedroom in the Executive offices. Most of the Prince's suite had to be accommodated in outside quarters. The situation in respect to accommodations was made more acute in 1867 when President Johnson abandoned the old practice of farming-out work to clerks housed in the Treasury Department and brought over several of them to work in the White House. When President Roosevelt moved in with his large family there was acute congestion. Lincoln's very long and wide bed used to be made up sideways so that the Roosevelt children could be disposed of in a group for the night. Various makeshifts were suggested. One was that the White House be retained for office purposes and a new house built for the President; another was to build a duplicate White House south of the old one and connect the two with a corridor. Some urged that the residence was in a low and sultry part of the city a mile away from the fashionable quarter. They thought it should not be so. The answer was that the President must keep a twenty-four-hour day—particularly in war time he must keep in immediate touch with the Executive office. Practical and sentimental considerations blocked all

(Continued on Page 20)

# THE WHITE HOUSE "RENEWED"

(Continued from Page 9)

proposals for relief till Roosevelt pressed the matter.

In 1903 Charles F. McKim of McKim, Mead & White took Major Hoban's original plan of a European gentleman's country house and expanded it according to a tradition approved on both sides of the Atlantic. He added low wings to the ranges on either side of the main building. In the west wing the Executive offices were provided. At the same time the house was done over in a fashion that got rid of accumulations from the pioneer period and restored, with an elaboration characteristic of the architects, the style of the original design. It was essentially an early nineteenth century interior in the French taste with furniture more or less inspired by the styles of the later Louises.

Only the state dining room was an exception. That was made English to suit Colonel Roosevelt's outdoor sporting tastes. The McKim or Roosevelt interior has lasted through the terms of three of the Colonel's successors and into the administration of the fourth, though the Americanism of Plymouth Notch was credited some time ago—quite erroneously, it appears—with a plan giving the furnishings of the official first home in the land a purer native flavor. The whole period represents our national revival of culture after the General Grant blight, and the return of reverence for approved good taste and historic backgrounds, including those that happened to be in Europe.

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**N**OW comes 1927 with its changes. In the recent alterations the primary purpose has been characteristically in accord with the spirit of the day. In giving the White House a new roof the idea of safety is predominant. The third floor of the mansion was suspended from the wooden trusses of the old roof; the alterations give the new third floor steel beams to rest on and the beams are solidly based on the walls. The roof is of slate and not of tin and the fire hazard is thereby reduced.

At the same time, many additional rooms are made available—some eighteen of them—including servants' quarters, guest suites and store rooms.

This will enable the President of the United States to entertain more adequately both privately and publicly. Fortunately the exterior appearance of the White House remains the same. Considerable publicity has been given in recent weeks to the construction of a so-called roof garden. The fact is that a modest roof promenade has been built. Let those who wish to call it a garden make the most of it. At all events, the President can escape from official cares to this aerie and, looking to the south, gaze on the beautiful shaft dedicated to Washington, or perhaps beyond to the waters of the friendly Potomac.

Americans are notoriously keen for souvenirs. While the rebuilding was going on hundreds of letters poured in asking for timbers. Presidents of Rotary Clubs modestly dreamed of making gavels for all of the brother Rotarians in the country. Ladies' Aid Societies visioned historic picture frames. It soon became evident that it would take the material of several White Houses to meet the demand. The problem was solved when the officials in charge of the work wrote to the Attorney General for advice. He replied that the White House was Government property and that it could not legally be given away. It is probable that small lots of the wood will be offered for public sale at some not distant date.

The contents of the White House are in many cases historical rather than artistic. Presidents themselves have sometimes introduced the unusual. Thomas Jefferson was re-

sponsible for a compartment to be placed beside each diner. It contained the entire meal to be served, and thus the presence of eavesdropping servants was avoided, leaving the statesmen to discuss freely affairs of state. He also had a piece of furniture in which the pressing of a spring disclosed a number of objects, including a bottle of wine and a candle. With its aid Jefferson could send the servants to bed and work on into the night, refreshments close at hand.

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**A** GAIN the White House china strikes a keynote. From an artistic point of view it is deplorable, but what hundred per cent. American would not be thrilled by chinaware covered with turkey gobblers, screaming eagles and American flags?

Then there are the Presidents who have had animal friends. Innumerable tame squirrels have been chased up the White House trees by a succession of bulldogs, poodles and collies. Jefferson had a pet mocking bird. Every day when he came in from his ride he would open the bird's cage, call it forth, and then, lying down on his couch, would let it sing him to sleep. In his Administration grizzly bears brought from the Far West were penned up in the White House grounds, which came to be called "The President's Bear Garden." President Taft had a celebrated "Executive cow" in Pauline Wayne, which had a pasture near the White House.

There is a tradition, which at times has been hard to maintain, that the first floor of the White House belongs to the public, but that the other two floors are the private preserve of the President and his family during tenancy. Officials discourage the taking of photographs of the south front because it looks out on the President's private yard. Such customs have arisen from a feeling that inasmuch as the fierce light of publicity beats down on the President in all of his official actions, it is considerate to leave to his family life as much privacy as possible. By the way, there is a total lack of formality about the way a new President moves in. Mrs. Taft once said: "You just drive up and walk in, and there you are!"

Six Presidents have died in office. Two died in the White House—Zachary Taylor and William Henry Harrison. The obsequies of the three martyr Presidents and of President Harding were held there. In it Wilson suffered the strains of invalidism after apoplexy stopped his effort in behalf of the war settlement treaty.

The White House is not merely a mosaic of fragments. It is a mosaic of memories. More than any other building in the country it records the mingled triumphs and tragedies of the American people.