

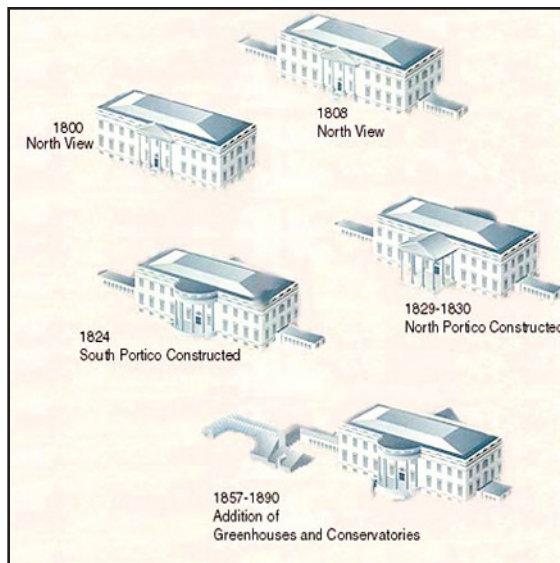
THE WHITE HOUSE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**CLASSROOM | 4-8 Activities : “Building the White House”**

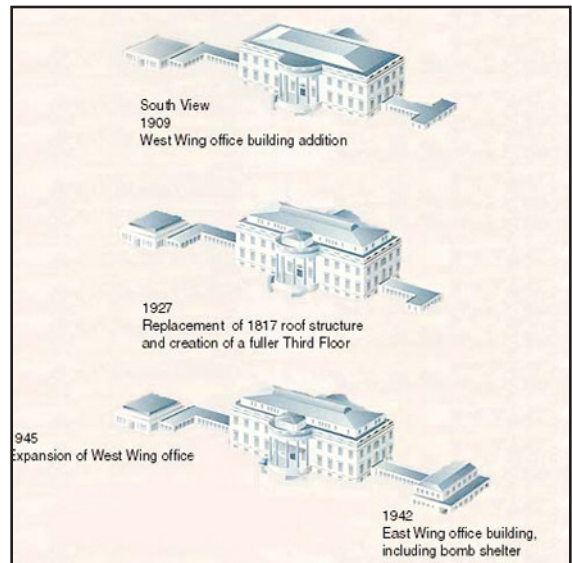
**“A House for the Ages” / Design the White House of the Future**

Abigail Adams was the first first lady to live in the White House. Although she had to put up with an unfinished house, she also knew that the President’s House would be a structure that would last far into the future. She called it a “house for the ages.” In order for the White House to serve the president and the executive office of government, additions have been built. These drawings will give you an idea of how the building has grown, but how the central core has remained about the same for 200 years.

Once in awhile, suggestions for enlarging the White House are rejected. In 1889, First Lady Caroline Harrison tried to convince Congress to approve a grand design for expanding the White House. Congress would not give her the money to do the work. The design created for Mrs. Harrison seems too large and out of scale to us today. (*American Architectural Foundation*)



*Evolution of the White House, 19th century*

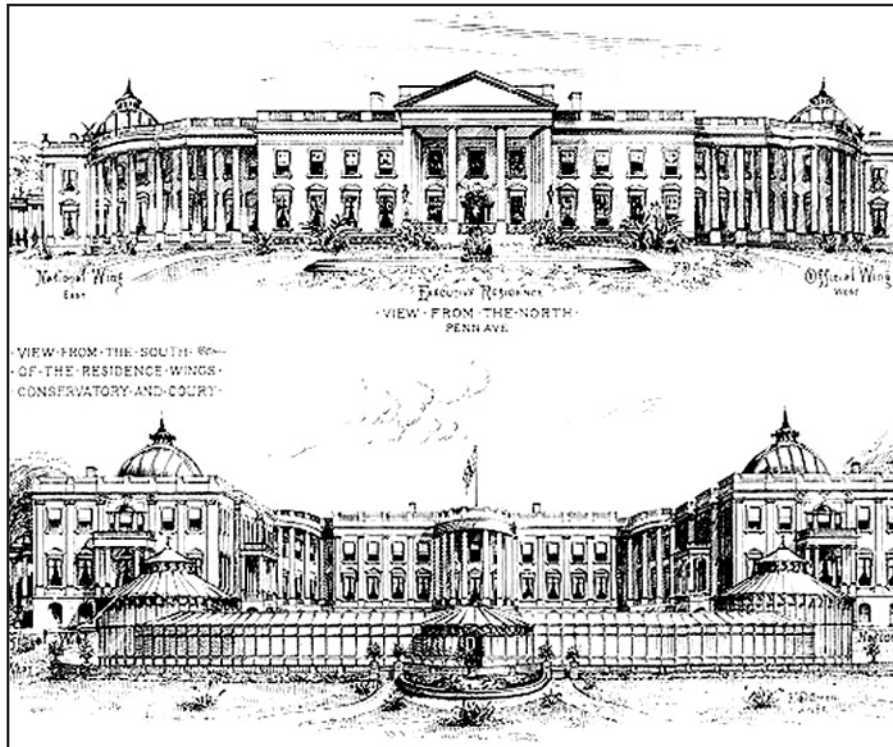


*Evolution of the White House, 20th century*

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*First Lady Caroline Harrison unsuccessfully proposed additions to the White House in 1889. National Archives*

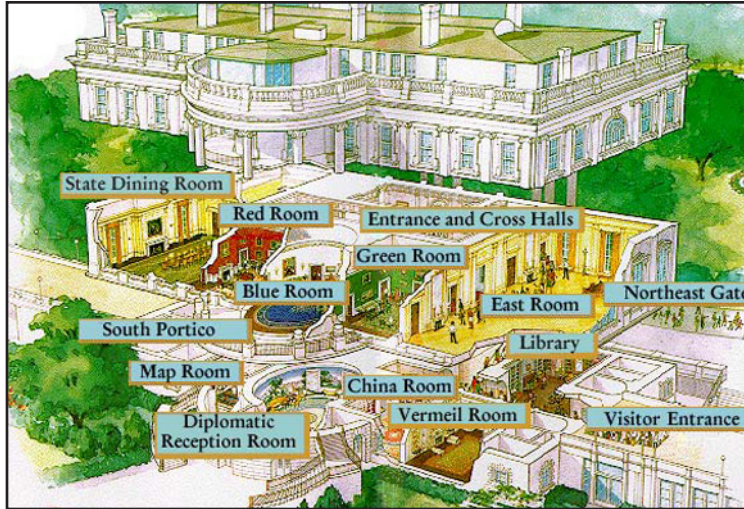
In 1998, a plan was developed to provide more space for the family — a kind of playroom and entertainment space that would be located underground, beneath the north lawn of the White House. There are also plans to create storage space and parking underground so that the areas inside and surrounding the White House will look much less cluttered. There are no plans in the future for adding onto the existing building above ground.

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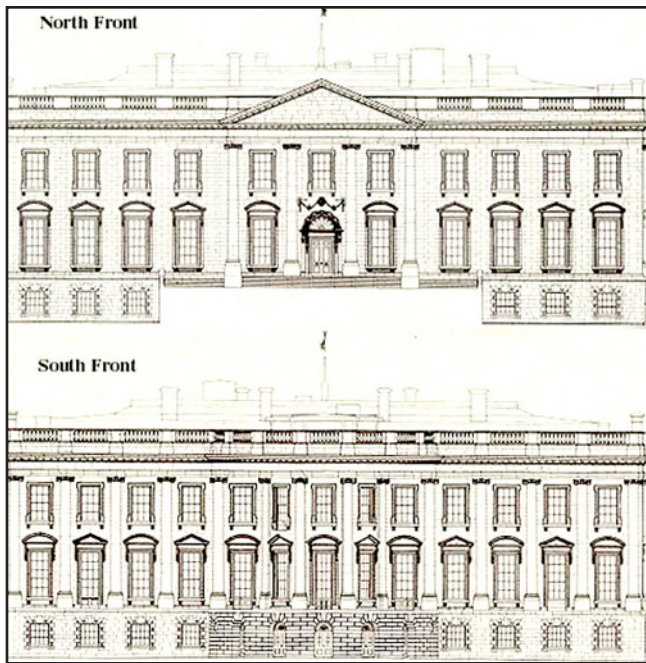


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Study the cutaway view and the other images of the White House in this lesson. Think about how you would design for the needs of the White House in the 21st century.



Would you add more space for the first family? What kind of space do you think they need? What about rooms for public entertainments, dinners, concerts, and ceremonies? How about office space? Will you have to plan for new technologies? Would you close off any rooms to the public? Why or why not?



*This architectural drawing shows the central section as it looks today. Historic American Building Survey*

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Consider the fun facts, too, then make a list of the changes you would make (and those you would certainly not make). Now imagine you are an architect and sketch your design for the White House in the 21st century. Present your design to your classmates and be ready to answer questions about the decisions you made.

### **FUN FACTS**

*\* There are 132 rooms in the White House, including 32 bathrooms.*

*\* There are 28 fireplaces throughout the house [Remember, when Adams moved in there were 39 fireplaces. With modern heating available, not as many were needed when Truman rebuilt the house.]*

*\*The chief usher is in charge of keeping the house in good shape. He has a staff of 90 workers to assist him: maids, butlers, carpenters, plumbers, gardeners, and engineers.*

*\* The chef and his staff can prepare a dinner for 200 guests or a reception for 1,000 guests. The kitchen is located in one of the basements.*

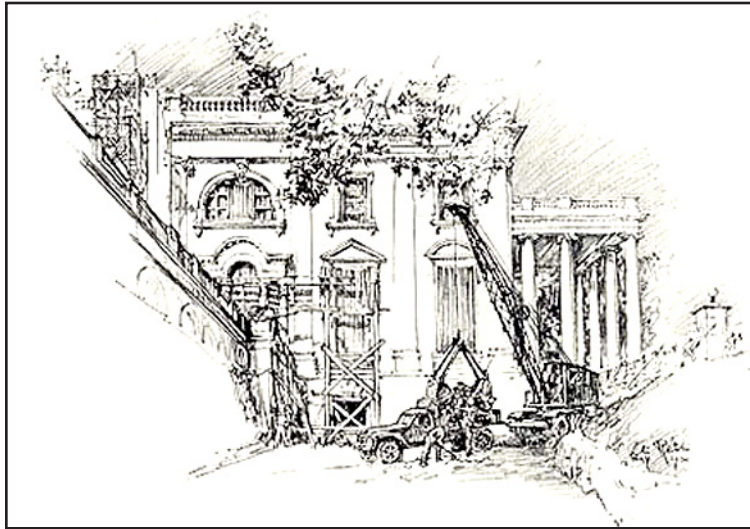
*\*There is an outdoor swimming pool, a theatre, a bowling alley, tennis courts, and a putting green for the first family to enjoy.*

*\*More than one million tourists visit the state rooms every year.*



### ***Consider This ...***

If the White House, or an important historic building in your town, burned to the ground, how would historians and architects know how to rebuild it? When it comes to understanding how an old building was constructed, some of the most important historical records are architectural drawings. Like James Hoban's design plans for the White House, there are drawings and blueprints for other historic buildings. A very real way to save history is to save historic buildings, and this is the job of the preservationist.



*A sketch of the construction site during the Truman renovation in 1950*

Think about a historic house you have visited with your class, family, or friends. What materials were used to build the outside walls? What about the floors? Do you remember the color of the walls? Were they painted or papered? Who built the house, and what were they trying to say about themselves when they made the decisions about the materials and decoration of their home? These are the kinds of questions that preservationists need to ask and answer if they are going to use a building to tell the story of the people in your community's past. Historians, curators, architectural historians, and architects all play a part in discovering and sharing these stories that enrich our understanding of who we are.

Take a class field trip to a historic house or building, or visit these places on the Web:

*Mount Vernon, home of George Washington:* <http://www.mountvernon.org>

*Monticello, home of Thomas Jefferson:* <http://www.monticello.org>

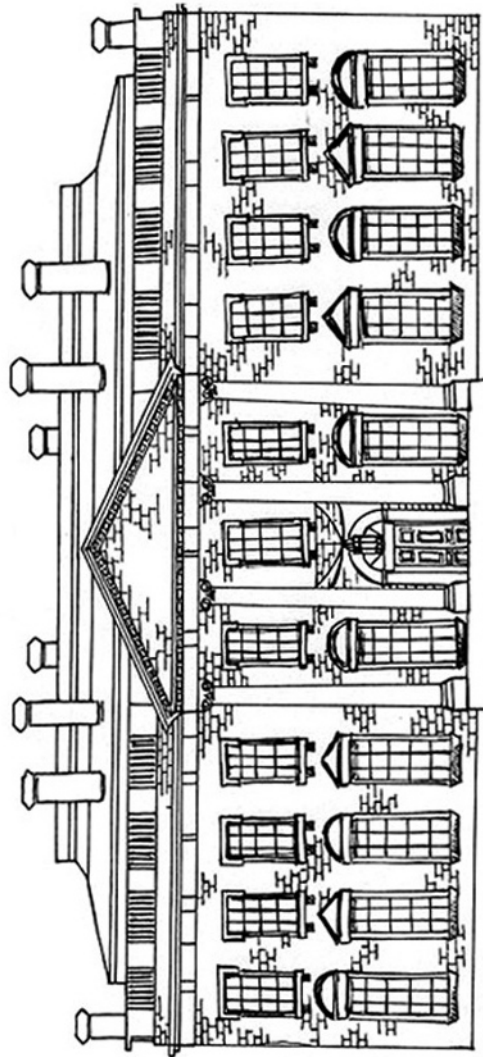
*National Trust historic sites:* <http://www.nationaltrust.org>



## ***Paint the White House! (Or, Why is the White House White?)***

You say that white is not your favorite color (or maybe not a color at all)? Well, here's your chance to be a decorator. Use the drawing of the White House to paint it with your favorite color. But before you do, consider why the White House is white. It has nothing to do with painting over burn marks after the British set the house on fire in 1814, although you may have heard that story.

The answer has to do with the walls themselves, which are made of sandstone. Sandstone is soft and porous and it is easy for water to seep into it. When this moisture then freezes and later thaws — over and over — the stone will eventually crack and crumble. To prevent the water from getting into the stone, the building was covered with a lime-based whitewash in 1798, two years before the first president moved in. Later, for reasons not known, workman replaced the thin whitewash with paint. It could be that the paint was thicker and did not wear away like the whitewash did. The house was given the nickname “The White House” as early as 1812. It was Theodore Roosevelt who made the name official, which he did in 1901.



YOU COLOR THE WHITE HOUSE!



## **Quiz : Test Your Knowledge**

1. *Who designed the White House in 1792?*

Thomas Jefferson  
James Hoban  
William Thornton

2. *Which president ordered the West Wing to be built in 1902?*

William McKinley  
Calvin Coolidge  
Theodore Roosevelt

3. *The White House is printed on the back of what U.S. currency?*

\$1 bill  
\$5 bill  
\$20 bill

4. *Which room did Abigail Adams use to dry her laundry?*

East Room  
State Dining Room  
Blue Room

5. *Who said, "Smash the glass houses!"*

Caroline Harrison  
Theodore Roosevelt  
Harry Truman

6. *Where did the Truman family live during the White House renovation of 1948-52?*

Holiday Inn  
The Capitol  
Blair House

7. *During which war did the British burn the White House?*

The Revolutionary War  
The War of 1812  
World War I

8. *Franklin Roosevelt was the first president to enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ at the White House.*

Greenhouse  
Swimming pool  
Porch



**ANSWERS :**

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