



THE WHITE HOUSE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## The White House and Press Timeline

*Compiled January 2017*

1800s	The White House began to take shape as an institution with a professional executive staff. Reporters frequently waited outside Lincoln's Second Floor White House offices in hopes of hearing the latest news.
1800	The <i>National Intelligencer</i> newspaper was founded in Washington D.C., marking the beginning of White House press coverage.
Mid 1800s	Press changed its focus from serving presidential or party interests to getting a sensational story quickly in order to attract more readers.
Late 1800s	The White House became a distinct beat for the press, and presidents began to hold regular meetings with reporters.
1902	The executive offices were moved from the Second Floor of the White House to the newly erected Temporary Executive Offices, later known as the West Wing.
1901-1909	Reporter access during the Theodore Roosevelt administration changed markedly when he required that cabinet members forward all press requests through his private secretary.
1909-1913	William Taft's limited interactions with the press, compared to his predecessor, led to accusations of withholding news.
1913	Woodrow Wilson held the first press conference on March 15.

1914	Reporters who regularly covered the White House became alarmed at rumors that the Congressional Standing Committee of Correspondents would be entrusted with choosing reporters for a series of regular press conferences planned by President Woodrow Wilson. Eleven White House reporters responded to the reports by establishing the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) to support "the interests of those reporters and correspondents assigned to cover the White House." Although the rumors proved to be untrue, the WHCA endured and elected as its president William W. Price, a <i>Washington Evening Star</i> reporter who was one of the early journalists to cover the White House on a full-time basis (and the first to write a column of White House news morsels).
1920s	Press conferences became the primary form of direct presidential communication with the American people.
1921	Warren G. Harding hired professional speechwriter Judson Welliver and began to hold public press conferences twice a week.
1923-1929	Calvin Coolidge was the first president to use radio to speak directly to the citizens of the nation, broadcasting monthly programs.
1929	Herbert Hoover formally established the position of the press secretary, hiring George Akerson to the position.
1933-1945	Franklin D. Roosevelt transformed the modern era of president-press relations by holding long and informal press conferences in the Oval Office. He also began the tradition of an annual press reception modeled after state diplomatic events. FDR was the first president to fully utilize radio as an instrument to promote his programs and policy.
1933	On March 6, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt became the first first lady to hold an official press conference. These became regular media interactions and were often conducted in the Red Room.

1945	<p>Harry Truman proposed a major West Wing expansion that would add a studio and auditorium for press briefings. The plans lacked Congressional support and were not carried out. Truman moved the meeting place for press conferences from the Oval Office to the Indian Treaty Room in the State Department (today's Eisenhower Executive Office Building).</p> <p>Truman's press conferences were reduced to once a week and became more scripted, usually including a formal presidential statement to outline positions or issues.</p>
1955	<p>After January 19, Dwight D. Eisenhower's Press Secretary James C. Hagerty permitted radio, television, and newspaper equipment to record coverage of news conferences. The conferences were held about every two weeks and before the film was released to the public Hagerty edited what were considered the most newsworthy portions.</p>
1961	<p>On January 25, John F. Kennedy became the first president to hold a live televised news conference, showing his comfort with members of the media. Briefing books, practice sessions, and increasing amounts of staff time were needed to prepare for conferences that were now major news events as more than half the nation's households had television sets.</p>
1963-1969	<p>Lyndon B. Johnson changed the nature of press conferences by including impromptu sessions where reporters might ask a few questions rather than the formal forums held in the Indian Treaty Room or State Department (Eisenhower EOB) auditorium.</p>
1969	<p>The White House Office of Communications was established in 1969 to reach out to the nation's reporters and specialty media beyond those with White House credentials, including out-of-town press and the specialty press.</p>
1969-1970	<p>The creation of the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room by the General Services Administration (GSA), the White House, and the Vosbeck, Vosbeck, Kendrick, and Redinger Firm in Alexandria, Virginia. Now referred to as the 'Press Briefing Room,' it is still used for press conferences, workspace, and broadcasting.</p>

1974-1977	Gerald R. Ford established regular meetings with the press during his administration in order to appear more transparent with reporters. He held regular monthly press conferences and conducted interviews with leading journalists and television news anchors such as Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw, and Barbara Walters.
1975	Helen Thomas was elected WHCA president, the first woman selected to hold the post.
1977-1981	Jimmy Carter expanded his press contacts by scheduling bi-monthly meetings with out-of-town journalists in the Cabinet Room. Carter maintained regular monthly press conferences held in the Old Executive Office Building (Eisenhower EOB).
1980	Robert Pierpoint of CBS became the first non-print media journalist to be elected head of the WHCA.
1981-1989	Ronald Reagan preferred to present himself and his policies in venues other than a formal presidential press conference. He held about six conferences a year and usually staged them in the East Room at night.
1989-1993	George H. W. Bush made frequent use of press conferences in the Press Briefing Room during his first three years in office, holding on average about three per month. He also instituted the practice of holding joint sessions with visiting heads of state.
1991	Robert M. Ellison, White House correspondent for the Sheridan Broadcasting Network, became the WHCA's first African-American president.
1995	Press Secretary Mike McCurry started the practice of televising the daily press briefings.

2009

In addition to news conferences, President Barack Obama set out policy priorities and connected with the public through the use of growing social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages as well as accounts on Flickr, iTunes, Tumblr, Vimeo, and YouTube. The president has appeared in numerous one-on-one televised interviews and briefer question-and-answer sessions. Despite the growth of digital communication, press conferences continue to remain an important element of presidential communications. As Towson University Professor Martha Kumar, a historian of presidential communications, observed in *Politico* “Press conferences are a place where presidents establish the legitimacy of their ideas and call for public support.”

**Compiled by the White House Historical Association.**

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