



THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Background: History of the White House Easter Egg Roll

[The Easter Egg Roll](#) is one of the oldest annual events in White House history. [Beginning in the 1870s](#), Washingtonians from all walks of life celebrated the Monday after Easter on the West Grounds of the U.S. Capitol. In 1876, however, Congress restricted public use of the Capitol due to concerns about damaging the landscape, prohibiting future egg rolling on its grounds. The new edict went unchallenged in 1877 since rain cancelled all the activities that day. In 1878, President Rutherford B. Hayes decided to open the White House South Lawn to egg rollers, as it had previously been reserved for the First Family's private Easter activities. From that moment on, a new tradition was born.

As the attraction of the event grew, [a rule was put in place](#) to limit the number of people allowed on the South Lawn. The rule stated that a "grown person would be admitted only when accompanied by a child" and vice versa. As a result, unescorted egg rollers and childless adults began teaming up at random so that each could gain admittance. Enterprising children even charged a fee for parading a series of unrelated "grown persons" past the White House security guards. The situation grew so scandalous that on Easter Monday 1939, the *Evening Star* reported that Secret Service men were stationed at the White House gates to "break up the kids' rackets."

The primary entertainment during this annual event has always been [egg rolling](#). As the Egg Roll tradition evolved, [wooden eggs](#) have grown to replace real eggs, which created a foul odor and messy clean up when smashed. Today, wooden eggs, created and available exclusively through The White House Historical Association, are used in the White House Easter Egg Roll and given as gifts to children attending the event. This year, the [Official 2019 White House Easter Eggs](#) are inspired by the rich colors found in the White House State Rooms and gardens: the Green Room, the Blue Room, the Red Room, the Vermeil Room, and the Rose Garden.

Since the start of the Easter Egg Roll, [the role of the First Family](#) has varied:

- President Benjamin Harrison gave his grandson limited exposure to the crowds and the Cleverlands kept their daughters inside and away from the rollers.
- [Grover Cleveland hosted an audience of children](#) for both his terms in office. In 1885, children with baskets of brightly dyed hard-boiled eggs were reported by *The Washington Post* to have ruined the East Room carpet with broken egg shells and smashed hard boiled eggs.

- Theodore Roosevelt's family watched from the portico, while Edith Wilson invited family friends and cabinet members to join in the Egg Roll, and two Hoover grandchildren spoke from the bandstand for news crews in 1931.

[The presence of animals](#) have also been a reoccurring theme at the annual Egg Roll. Many first pets have attended the event over the years, including: Warren G. Harding's Airedale Terrier, "Laddie Boy," and Grace Coolidge's raccoon, "Rebecca." Naturally, bunnies are also an important presence every year—both live and costumed.

Though no president wants to be known for cancelling the event, [periods of war and food rationing](#) have caused disruptions for the annual tradition. World War I stopped the event from being hosted at the White House. During 1946 and 1947, President Harry Truman did not host an egg roll due to food conservation efforts. From 1948 through 1952, Truman's renovation of the White House made the South Lawn a construction zone. President Dwight D. Eisenhower revived the tradition after a twelve-year hiatus, but a string of his successors could not be at the White House on Easter Monday to greet their egg roll visitors. President Gerald R. Ford reinstated the presidential appearance in 1976—the first since Eisenhower had acted as host in 1960.

[See a timeline](#) of Easter Egg Roll's rich history and [photos](#) from past White House Easter Egg Rolls.

Please credit the White House Historical Association when using information and photos.

To learn more about the annual Easter Egg Roll visit the White House Historical Association's [press collection](#). For media inquiries, please contact press@whha.org.

About The White House Historical Association

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion's legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association's mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than \$47 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit www.whitehousehistory.org.

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