

East Wing Fact Sheet

- 1805 – Construction began on two one-story colonnades extending east and west from the White House on the footprint of what would become the modern East and West Wings. President Thomas Jefferson worked with architect [Benjamin Henry Latrobe to design the colonnades](#), and based them off similar dependencies at his plantation, Monticello. The colonnades were designed to blend into the gradual slope on which the White House was built to hide them from view when standing in front of the White House. The ambitious original plans were for the colonnades to connect the White House to the Treasury Building and the executive offices, but excessive cost and political pressure forced Jefferson to scale back his plans.¹
- 1808 – When construction of Jefferson’s colonnades was completed in 1808, they did not connect to any other buildings and instead served primarily as storage and workspaces for White House domestic staff, including enslaved workers. The East Colonnade also housed a smokehouse for meats, a privy or bathroom, servants’ quarters, a henhouse, and stables.²
- 1866 – After the original East Colonnade built under President Jefferson became dilapidated, President Andrew Johnson ordered it torn down.³
- 1902 – President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the construction of the East and West Wings. While the West Wing housed offices for the president’s staff, the East Wing primarily served as a receiving area for visitors and guests attending functions at the White House. It featured a circular driveway with a porte cochère where guests would drive their carriages up to the entrance and a coat room known as “the hatbox.” Guests passed through the East Colonnade and entered the main White House through the Ground Floor.⁴
- 1942 – [President Franklin D. Roosevelt expanded the East Wing’s footprint](#) and added a second story. He originally intended it to house a White House museum, but the space became filled with offices and support staff. During the expansion, an underground bomb shelter was constructed as the United States had recently entered

¹ William Seale, *The President’s House: A History* (White House Historical Association, 2008), 1:109-115.

² Seale, *The President’s House*, 1:112.

³ Seale, *The President’s House*, 1:419.

⁴ Patrick Phillips-Schrock, *The White House: An Illustrated History* (McFarland & Co., 2013), 57-58.

World War II. President Roosevelt also converted a room previously used as a coat room into a movie theater.⁵

- 1965 – First Lady Lady Bird Johnson [dedicated the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden](#) in honor of the former first lady. The garden, adjacent to the East Wing and Colonnade, was designed by Rachel “Bunny” Mellon, who also designed the Rose Garden outside the Oval Office during the John F. Kennedy presidency and intended the two gardens to complement each other.⁶
- 1977 – First Lady Rosalynn Carter moved her office to the East Wing, becoming the first presidential spouse to have her own office there. A year later, Congress passed the White House Personnel Authorization Act, creating the official Office of the First Lady. Since then, all first ladies and their staff have worked in the East Wing.⁷
- 2025 – On July 31, 2025, the [White House](#) announced plans for construction to begin on a new Ballroom, citing the need to host major functions for world leaders, dignitaries, and guests. The White House stated: “The site of the new ballroom will be where the small, heavily changed, and reconstructed East Wing currently sits.” White House public tours were closed by September, and demolition of the East Wing began on October 20. Two days later, the [White House Historical Association](#) announced that it had supported efforts to digitally preserve the East Wing and Jacqueline Kennedy Garden with comprehensive scanning and photography projects.

Additional Reading:

- [The Office of the First Lady: The Evolution of the East Wing Staff](#)
- [White House in Bloom](#)
- [The Ever Changing White House](#)
- [President Truman’s Renovation](#)
- [Preservation of the White House](#)

⁵ Phillips-Schrock, *The White House*, 67-68, and William Ryan and Desmond Guinness, *The White House: An Architectural History* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 164.

⁶ Jonathan Pliska, *A Garden for the President: A History of the White House Grounds* (White House Historical Association, 2016), 98, 106-107.

⁷ For Rosalynn Carter’s move to the East Wing, see Diana B. Carlin, Anita B. McBride, and Nancy Kegan Smith, *U.S. First Ladies: Making History and Leaving Legacies* (Cognella, 2024), 139. For the passage of the White House Personnel Authorization Act, see Elizabeth Rees, “The Office of the First Lady: The Evolution of the East Wing Staff,” *White House History*, September 6, 2024, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-office-of-the-first-lady-the-evolution-of-the-east-wing-staff>.

- ["A Beautiful Spot Capable of Every Improvement" - White House Historical Association](#)