

## INTRODUCTION

The White House is over two hundred years old and has seen more than forty presidents. Over the centuries, changes have been made to the home and grounds for both practical and aesthetic reasons. During the course of the building's history, several features have been lost to time. These range from small items to larger elements like structures, swimming pools, and acres of land. Uncover some of the lost features of the White House and learn the history behind why these no longer exist.

## CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

President George Washington did not live in the White House, but he did select the site for the mansion (**Image 1**). The original plan for the grounds included approximately eighty acres, which would be later reduced considerably. This large tract of land was meant for use as a working farm, but President Thomas Jefferson quickly realized that the leader of the nation could not manage a farm and politics simultaneously. He fenced the grounds to about nine acres and ordered Pennsylvania Avenue cut in front of the White House. Losing this land helped create the public park now known as Lafayette Square to the north of the Executive Mansion. With some acreage reclaimed over the years, the modern grounds consist of about eighteen acres (**Image 2**).

In addition to the land, Tiber Creek, a small waterway that ran just south of the White House Grounds, disappeared. In the early nineteenth century, this creek was connected to the Washington



*Image 4*

City Canal which flowed to the Potomac River (**Image 3**). President John Quincy Adams enjoyed swimming in Tiber Creek, but in 1825 he nearly drowned when his boat sprung a leak and sank (**Image 4**). During the next few decades, the creek increasingly became polluted with sewage and its odor permeated the surrounding area. In the 1870s,

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it was enclosed and disappeared underground where it continues to flow today as a part of the Washington, D.C., sewage system.

Around the time Tiber Creek went underground, a statue of Thomas Jefferson was removed from the North Lawn. From 1847 to 1874, this statue had stood as a welcoming landmark at the north front of the White House (**Images 5 & 6**). Originally commissioned by Uriah Phillips Levy in 1833 as a gift to the American people, it was placed in the U.S. Capitol Building and later relocated to the grounds of the Executive Mansion. Years of exposure to the elements tarnished the statue. So in 1874, Congress funded repairs and welcomed the statue back to the Capitol Rotunda, where it stands today.

The interior of the Executive Mansion has seen dramatic changes and losses as well. Perhaps the most famous of these objects was the Tiffany glass screen in the Entrance Hall (**Images 7-9**). In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur asked Louis Comfort Tiffany to create this large piece along while also redecorating several of the State Rooms (**Image 10**). Tiffany was a popular artist best known for his work in stained glass and was much sought after in New York society. Both aesthetic and functional, the colorful Tiffany glass replaced the plain panes from an existing architectural screen that had helped block cross drafts since 1837. The new screen became a model for Tiffany's artistry and a symbol of Victorian taste, but styles changed quickly. In 1902, Theodore Roosevelt began renovations to the White House and the Tiffany glass was removed. The screen was sold to a Maryland hotel that later burned down, and the White House Tiffany showcase was lost forever.



*Image 8*

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Other glass structures removed during the Roosevelt renovations were the White House greenhouses and conservatory. In 1833, Andrew Jackson built the first greenhouse, an orangery. After the Civil War, in 1867, the original greenhouse was destroyed by fire, and a more elaborate structure replaced it. Connected to the White House at the west end, this new greenhouse contained multiple spaces including a tropical room and an orchid room (**Images 11 & 12**). Many presidents and their family members enjoyed the conservatory. For example, First Lady Ida McKinley, who suffered from epilepsy, often took refuge in the greenhouse since it provided privacy from the public eye (**Image 13**). When Theodore Roosevelt took office, he started renovations with architect Charles McKim to provide more space. These plans included a new West Wing to create a dedicated work space for the president and required the sacrifice of the greenhouse complex.

The second Roosevelt to take office, Franklin D. Roosevelt, added a structure to the White House – an indoor pool (**Image 14**). In 1933, within the West Terrace, he built this pool to provide therapy for his physical ailments due to polio. President John F. Kennedy renovated the pool area and added a large wall mural (**Image 15**). Over the next decade, usage of the pool decreased, and the demand for press space grew. These factors led Richard Nixon to announce his plans to deck over the pool and



*Image 15*

provide additional space for the media. Due to the popularity of Roosevelt and Kennedy, Nixon did not remove the pool for fear of the public's reaction. Today, the indoor pool is lost to the public eye, but hidden under the Press Room (**Image 16**). These structures lost to the White House do not represent everything removed or missing but provide a glimpse into the dynamic nature of this unique home and the difficulty of modernizing while also preserving its history.

# LOST FEATURES OF THE WHITE HOUSE



## IMAGES

*Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing*

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	George Washington Inspects the Unfinished President's House	Unknown	N. C. Wyeth	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1426.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1426.tif.info</a>
2	1915 Aerial View of White House, Wilson Administration	1915	F. D. Bradford	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/Views/4200.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/Views/4200.tif.info</a>
3	Plan of the City Intended for the Permanent Seat of the Government of the United States, Detail of Presidents Park	1887	United States Coast and Geodetic Survey Office	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Plans/9649.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Plans/9649.tif.info</a>
4	Tiber Creek: The Bathers: John Quincy Adams Takes a Deadly Chance	2009	Peter Waddell	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Artwork/1112699.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Artwork/1112699.tif.info</a>
5	North Portico of the White House with the Jefferson Statue	Ca. 1845-1870	Unknown	National Archives and Records Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/6375.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/6375.tif.info</a>

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6	The North Front of the White House	1861	Mathew Brady	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/243.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/243.tif.info</a>
7	Entrance Hall Showing the Tiffany Screen, Benjamin Harrison Administration	1889	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/984.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/984.tif.info</a>
8	White House Corridor (Entrance Hall)	1889	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/353.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/353.tif.info</a>
9	The Grand Illumination: Sunset of the Gaslight Age, 1891	2006	Peter Waddell	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/8917.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/8917.tif.info</a>
10	Blue Room, Chester A. Arthur Administration	1883-1884	Frances Benjamin Johnston	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/943.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/943.tif.info</a>
11	Greenhouses, West Lawn of White House	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> Century	Unknown	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/9969.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/9969.tif.info</a>

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12	The White House “Conservatory Promenade”	1877-1902	Unknown	National Park Service		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/1112841.tif/info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/1112841.tif/info</a>
13	Ida Saxton McKinley in the Conservatory	1900	B. Dinst	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/William%20McKinley/1112842.tif/info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/William%20McKinley/1112842.tif/info</a>
14	White House Indoor Pool, Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration	1933	Unknown	National Archives and Records Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/1112.tif/info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/1112.tif/info</a>
15	White House Pool with a Mural of the U.S. Virgin Islands Commissioned During the John F. Kennedy Administration	1963	Robert L. Knudsen	John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/6935.tif/info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/6935.tif/info</a>
16	Press Room	Unknown	Unknown	White House Collection		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/598.tif/info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/598.tif/info</a>

### Additional Resources

Collection: “An Artists Visits the White House Past” from the White House Historical Association.

[Click here](#)



## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

### For Younger Learners

- The Tiffany Screen is a notable lost feature of the White House. The stained-glass styling of the screen brought color into the Cross Hall and Entrance Hall of the White House. Create your own stained-glass feature at home using tissue paper and other materials. See the “Anywhere Activity” for more instructions!
- Each new First Family at the White House has some authority to remove and replace items. Imagine you were to move away from your home and a new family comes to live there. Draw or describe how your home might be different twenty years from now or even two hundred years in the future. What items might be lost? What new features might be added?

### For Older Learners

- Write a proposal for what statue you would like put on the White House Grounds where the Jefferson statue once stood. Think about who – or what – you would choose and consider how it may or may not be relevant in 50, 100, 200 years. Detail, or draw, your statue and explain the significance and symbolism of the features.
- The indoor pool was intentionally covered but not destroyed due to its connections to Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Talk to friends or family about the value of keeping a historic space even if it is hidden from view and cannot be used anymore.
  - Follow up question: Could the indoor pool be removed today if the press center needed space for offices below the conference room?