

INTRODUCTION

The president does not need to worry about a daily commute, since the White House functions as both a home and office. The commander in chief simply walks from the Executive Residence to the West Wing where the Oval Office is located. But what happens if the president needs to leave the White House Grounds? Presidents need transportation for many reasons including diplomatic trips abroad, election campaigning, and family vacations. The evolution of the president's transportation illustrates how the White House has adapted to advancing technologies and how the requirements of the presidency have changed over time.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

In the nineteenth century, the horse dominated White House transportation. The second resident, Thomas Jefferson, ordered the construction of the first White House stable. After the White House was burned by the British in 1814, James Monroe constructed a new stable, but this small structure would not be enough for Andrew Jackson's many horses (**Image 1**). Jackson persuaded Congress to fund a new neoclassical brick stable in 1834. Subsequent White House stables came and went due to fire and the construction of

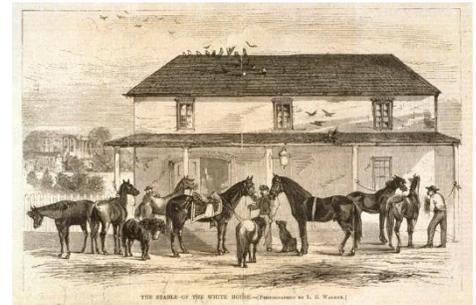


Image 2

neighboring government buildings (**Image 2**). In 1872, a Victorian mansard-roofed structure became the final in the long line of White House stables. Known as a great outdoorsman and rider, Theodore Roosevelt was the last president to use that stable (**Images 3 & 4**). In 1911, it was razed, ending the era of the horse as the preferred mode of presidential transportation.

As the United States expanded westward, advancements in transportation technology made traveling long distances easier and less time consuming. Known as the iron horse, railroads were used by presidents for many of reasons in the nineteenth century. President William Henry Harrison became the first president to travel by train to Washington, D.C., for his inauguration in 1841.

President Abraham Lincoln expanded the railroad network when he signed the 1862 Pacific Railway Act, which eventually led to the first transcontinental railroad. In 1887, President Grover Cleveland befriended engineer George Pullman and carried out a goodwill tour across the country in Pullman's elegant railroad cars (**Image 5**). In the twentieth century, President Warren Harding participated in a two-month speaking tour of the western United States by train called the "Voyage of Understanding," becoming the first sitting President to visit Alaska (**Image 6**). President Franklin D. Roosevelt used U.S. Car No. 1, also known as *Ferdinand Magellan*, for state business, reelection campaigns, and personal trips.

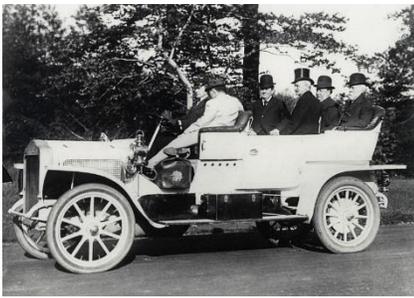


Image 7

While railroads continued to be used in the twentieth century, the real transportation powerhouse was the automobile. At first, many Americans thought the automobile was only for the rich, but Henry Ford's assembly line production gave many people an opportunity to acquire this new technology at an affordable price. William Howard Taft would become the first president to bring cars to the White House (**Image 7**). An avid automobile enthusiast, Taft's election prompted Congress to appropriate \$12,000 to purchase two motorcars for the residence. Despite some protests, Taft fully endorsed the new industry. Succeeding presidents increasingly utilized automobiles and helped propel the industry forward. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Federal Aid Road Act funding the improvement of roads across the nation (**Image 8**), and President Warren Harding was the first to ride in an automobile to his inauguration in 1921.

Leaving the ground, presidents began to use air transportation in the mid-twentieth century. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first president to travel by airplane while in office and crossed the Atlantic multiple times during World War II. Officially called *The Flying White House*, a military plane was built to accommodate the commander in chief and was staffed by a United States Army Air Force crew (**Image 9**). It was better known by its nickname, *The Sacred Cow*, a reference to the

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high security surrounding the aircraft and its special status. In 1953, the call sign “Air Force One” came into use to distinguish the plane the president was flying in from any other commercial or military aircraft. President John F. Kennedy became the first president to use a jet rather than a propeller plane for presidential travel. These planes are specially modified to provide work spaces and high security. As air travel has become an integral tool of presidential communication and diplomacy, *Air Force One* has gained notoriety as a symbol of the presidency (**Image 10**).

On July 12, 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first president to use a helicopter (**Images 11 & 12**). He flew on a Bell UH-13J Sioux piloted by Major Joseph E. Barrett and Captain Lawrence Cummings. While airplanes could not land on the White House Grounds, a helicopter could (**Image 13**). Important in the post-World War II nuclear age, helicopters provided the United States military forces with a reliable and swift method to transport the president away to safety. In this spirit, President John F. Kennedy upgraded the helicopters used at the Executive Mansion. Before 1976, the Marine Corps and the United States Army shared the duty of flying helicopters for the president. After 1976, the Marines took sole responsibility and the call sign for the president’s helicopter transport became exclusively known as *Marine One* (**Image 14**).



Image 14

Travel has become essential in fulfilling the president’s many roles as commander in chief, leader of the nation, and chief diplomat. From horses to planes, the White House has had a long history of improving and expanding transportation for the president (**Image 15**). As travel has become easier and faster, the roles and expectations of the presidency have adapted along with it to embody the foreign and domestic goals of the president, the U.S. government, and the American people.

IMAGES

Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	The President of the United States	Ca. 1829	Auguste Hervieu	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Andrew%20Jackson/1113249.tif.info
2	The Stable of the White House	1869	Harper's Weekly	White House Collection/ White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Ulysses%20S%20Grant/270.tif.info
3	Horse-Drawn Hack Leaving Through the North Gates	1903	Unknown	National Archives and Records Administration		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Transportation/4949.tif.info
4	Theodore Roosevelt on Horseback	Ca. 1902	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/8284.tif.info
5	Presidential Train [of Grover Cleveland]	c. 1887	C. M. Bell	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/item/2005675968/

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6	President Harding's Voyage of Understanding	1923	Keystone View Company	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Warren%20G%20Harding/1111977.tif.info
7	William H. Taft in a 1908 Model K Touring White Steamer	Ca. 1908	Unknown	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/William%20H%20Taft/9858.tif.info
8	President and Mrs. Wilson Leaving by Car	Ca. 1913-1914	Harris & Ewing	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Woodrow%20Wilson/1112871.tif.info
9	Exterior of "The Sacred Cow"	Ca. 1946	Unknown	Harry S. Truman Library & Museum/ NARA		https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/65-565
10	Air Force One taking off from Kelly Air Force Base during a trip to Texas	1981	Unknown	Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/photographs/large/C2681-13.jpg
11	Eisenhower Prepares to Board Helicopter	1957	Unknown	Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Dwight%20D%20Eisenhower/4107.tif.info

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12	Eisenhower Inspects the First Presidential Helicopter	1957	Warren K. Leffler	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Dwight%20D%20Eisenhower/1175.tif.info
13	President George W. Bush Salutes While Exiting Marine One	2001-2008	Unknown	George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/George%20W%20Bush/8085.tif.info
14	Marine One Departing from the South Lawn	1986	Bill Fitzpatrick	Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Transportation/6869.tif.info
15	New Orleans Departure	2001	Unknown	George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Transportation/4066.tif.info

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Collection: “By Land, By Sea, By Air” from the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Podcast: “The 1600 Sessions: The President’s Helicopter” from the White House Historical Association. [Listen here.](#)
- Facts Sheet: Boeing VC-137C SAM 2600 (Air Force One) at the National Museum of the US Air Force. [Click here.](#)
- Video: Journalist Sid Davis Visits JFK’s Air Force One. [Click here.](#)



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

For Younger Learners

- Complete the associated “Anywhere Activity” and build a paper model of President Harding’s Pullman rail car. For an extra challenge, use art supplies to create a diorama with train tracks and more to display your rail car.
- Download the [“White House Experience”](#) app and try your hand at flying the President’s helicopter in the interactive “Fly Like Ike” game. Pilot a helicopter on a virtual tour of downtown Washington, D.C. before landing on the South Lawn of the White House.

For Older Learners

- Write an essay or create a diagram ranking the importance of each mode of transportation for the White House discussed in the contextual essay – horses, trains, automobiles, helicopters, and airplanes – and describe why you chose these particular rankings. Which mode represents the greatest innovation or the largest technological leap forward?
- Research how Air Force One planes differ from traditional commercial aircraft. Consider why these modifications are needed for the President of the United States. If you were the aircraft designer, what additional modifications would you make, and why?
- Read the “Security and the White House” Classroom Resource Packet. Discuss the connections between transportation and security for the President of the United States.