

INTRODUCTION

The White House serves as both home and office, and because of this, the president of the United States does not have a daily commute. Rather, the president simply walks from the White House residence through corridors to the West Wing—where the Oval Office is located. But what if the president needs to leave the White House Grounds? Presidents use transportation when they leave the White House for diplomatic trips abroad, election campaigning, and family vacations. From horses to automobiles to airplanes, the evolution of transportation at the White House sheds light on both technological advancements in the building and the changing requirements of the modern presidency. Explore the history of transportation and the White House.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

Horses

In the 1800s, horses were the main source of White House transportation. The building's second resident, President Thomas Jefferson, ordered the construction of the first White House stable. After the British burned the White House during the War of 1812, President James Monroe had a new stable constructed. This structure, however, would not provide enough space for President Andrew Jackson's many horses. President Jackson persuaded Congress to fund the building of a new, neoclassical



Image 2. An engraving of the White House stable in 1869 during the Ulysses S. Grant administration. The image features President Grant's horses including two of his favorites, "Egypt" and "Cincinnati."

brick stable in 1834. View **Image 1**, in the chart below, to see an 1829 drawing of President Andrew Jackson on horseback. In the following years, numerous White House stables were built and demolished due to fires and the construction of neighboring government buildings. Refer to **Image 2**, above, to see an engraving of the White House stable in 1869 during the Ulysses S. Grant administration. The image features President Grant's horses including two of his favorites, "Egypt"

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and “Cincinnati.” The last White House stable—a Victorian mansard-roofed structure—was built in 1872. President Theodore Roosevelt, seen in **Image 3** in the chart, was known as a great outdoorsman and rider and was the last president to use the stable for horses. **Image 4**, in the chart below features a photograph of a horse drawn carriage leaving the White House Grounds around 1903. In 1911, the stable was demolished, ending the era of the horse as the preferred mode of presidential transportation as President William Howard Taft embraced the use of the automobile.

Railroads

As the United States continued expanding westward throughout the 1800s, advancements in transportation technology made traveling long distances easier and less time consuming. Railroads, nicknamed the “iron horse,” were often used by presidents. In 1841, President William Henry Harrison became the first president to travel by train to Washington, D.C. for his inauguration. During the administration of President Abraham Lincoln, the railway network was greatly expanded when President Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Acts of 1862—one of multiple congressional acts that led to the construction of 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. Refer to **Image 5**, in the chart below, to see a photograph of President Cleveland’s presidential train in 1887. In 1923, President Warren G. Harding embarked on a two-month speaking tour of the western United States by train. Named the “Voyage of Understanding, President Harding became the first sitting president to visit Alaska on the trip. View **Image 6**, to the left, to see a



Image 6. President Warren G. Harding, First Lady Florence Harding, and staff members at the back of a train car during President Harding’s “Voyage of Understanding” during the Summer of 1923.

stereograph of President Harding, First Lady Florence Harding, and staff members at the back of a train car during Harding’s “Voyage of Understanding” in 1923. President Franklin D. Roosevelt used U.S. Car No. 1—also known as *Ferdinand Magellan*—for state business, reelection campaigns, and personal trips.

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Automobiles

Although railroads were still widely used throughout the 1900s, the automobile transformed transportation like never before. While many Americans initially considered the automobile to be for the wealthy, Henry Ford's assembly line production provided greater access to the new technology at an affordable price. In 1909, President William Howard Taft became the first president to bring cars to the White House.

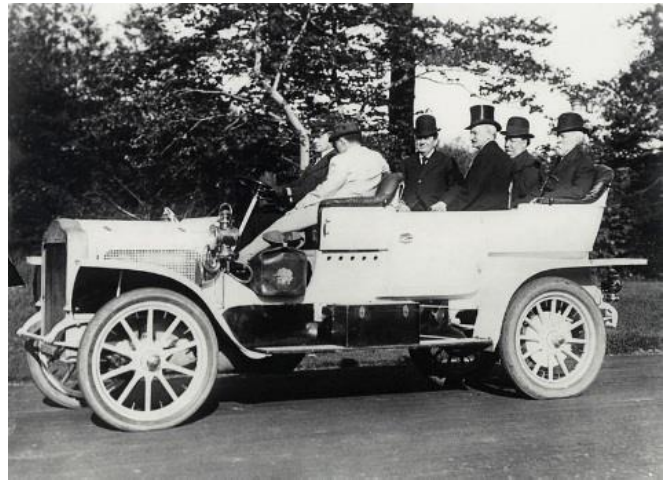


Image 7. President William H. Taft accompanied by government officials in a 1908 Model K Touring Steamer (circa 1908).

Despite some pushback, President Taft fully endorsed the new industry. An avid automobile enthusiast, President Taft's election prompted Congress to appropriate \$12,000 to purchase two motorcars for the residence. **Image 7**, above, features President William Howard Taft accompanied by government officials in a 1908 Model K Touring Steamer. Succeeding presidents increasingly utilized automobiles and helped further propel the industry forward. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Federal Aid Road Act to fund the improvement of roads across the nation. **Image 8**, in the chart below, is a photograph of President Woodrow Wilson and First Lady Ellen Wilson leaving the White House in a car. President Warren Harding was the first president to ride in an automobile to his inauguration in 1921.

Airplanes

With the invention of the airplane and rapid advances in aircraft design in the early 1900s, presidents also began using air transportation. Theodore Roosevelt took a short flight on an experimental airplane in 1910, after his time in the White House had concluded. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first sitting president to travel by airplane and crossed the Atlantic Ocean multiple times during World War II. General Henry Arnold, Commander of the United States Army Air Forces, was concerned that the president was traveling on a civilian aircraft. The Douglas Skycraft Company built the first

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military-grade plane for the president. Known as *The Flying White House*, the plane accommodated Roosevelt's disability and was staffed by a United States Army Air Force crew. The plane was more commonly referred to as the *Sacred Cow*, however, due to its high-level security and special status. **Image 9**, in the chart below, is a photograph of the outside of the *Sacred Cow* around 1946. In 1953, pilots used the call sign "Air Force One" to distinguish a plane that is carrying the president from any other commercial or military aircraft. In the 1960s, President John F. Kennedy became the first president to use a jet, rather than a propeller plane, for presidential travel. Jet planes are specially modified to provide workspaces and high security. Today, *Air Force One* is a symbol of the presidency as air travel continues to play an important role in presidential communication and diplomacy. **Image 10**, in the chart below, pictures *Air Force One* taking off from Kelly Air Force Base in 1981 during the Ronald Reagan administration.

Helicopters

Although airplanes could not land on the White House Grounds, helicopters could. Helicopters provided the United States military forces with a swift and reliable method to transport the president away to safety—especially important during the Cold War. On July 12, 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first president to use a helicopter. **Image 11** and **Image 12**, in the chart below, show President Eisenhower standing next to the first presidential helicopter, a Bell UH-13J Sioux, on the South Lawn of the White House in 1957. This



Image 14. Marine One leaving the White House South Lawn for Camp David in Maryland on December 19, 1986. The White House is decked out in holiday decorations and visitors gather on the lawn.

helicopter was piloted by Major Joseph E. Barrett and Captain Lawrence Cummings. During the administration of President John F. Kennedy, the White House obtained newer and more advanced Sikorsky VH-3A helicopters. Before 1976, the Marine Corps and the United States Army shared the

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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*. Refer to **Image 13**, in the chart below, to see a photograph of President George W. Bush exiting *Marine One*. **Image 14** shows *Marine One* leaving the White House South Lawn for Camp David in Maryland on December 19, 1986.

Conclusion







Today, travel is essential for the president to fulfill their many roles as leader of the United States, commander-in-chief, and chief diplomat. From horses to planes, the White House has had a long history of improving and expanding transportation for the president. As travel has continued to become faster and easier, 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. View **Image 15**, in the chart below, to see a photograph of President George W. Bush boarding Air Force One for a trip to New Orleans in 2001.

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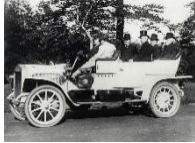





IMAGES

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	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
4	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
5	Presidential Train [of Grover Cleveland]	c. 1887	C. M. Bell	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/item/2005675968/
6	President Harding's	1923	Keystone View Company	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Harding/1113249.tif.info




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	Voyage of Understanding					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		Air Force One Taking Off from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio During Trip to Texas (archives.gov)
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
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/4107.tif.info

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						Eisenhower/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 Fitz-Patrick	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

- Article: “The Wings of Franklin Roosevelt: The Dixie Clipper and Sacred Cow” by Matthew Costello for the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Collection: “By Land, By Sea, By Air” by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Facts Sheet: “Boeing VC-137C SAM 2600 (Air Force One)” by the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force. [Click here.](#)
- Podcast: “The White House 1600 Sessions: The President’s Helicopter” by the White House Historical Association. [Listen here.](#)
- Video: “Journalist Sid Davis Visits JFK’s Air Force One” by the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force. [Click here.](#)

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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

For all learners:

- Download the White House Historical Association’s “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. [Click here.](#)

For older learners:

- Working individually or in small groups, create a list that ranks each mode of transportation discussed in the contextual essay—horses, trains, automobiles, helicopters, and airplanes—based on its significance to the White House. Which mode of transportation represents the greatest innovation or the largest technological leap forward? Be prepared to share the reasoning behind your rankings.
- Conduct your own research on Air Force One planes. How do Air Force One planes differ from traditional commercial aircraft? Why are these accommodations needed for the President of the United States? If you were the aircraft designer, what additional modifications would you make and why? Write your thoughts down or discuss with a classmate, family member, or friend.

For younger learners:

- Build a paper model of President Warren G. Harding’s Pullman company rail car with the White House Historical Association’s “Foldable Train” Anywhere Activity. [Click here.](#)
 - For an extra challenge, use art supplies to create a diorama with train tracks and more to display your rail car