

Party Politics:



*Entertaining at the
White House*



One of the oldest and most traditional roles of a First Lady is as the hostess of our country. One of the responsibilities of the President and the First Lady of the United States is to entertain both national and international guests at the White House. Historically the majority of the planning for these occasions has fallen upon the First Lady. Hosting these events is an important opportunity to strengthen existing ties, to set the stage for new relationships, to establish partnerships, or just to extend the hospitality of the White House as the “home” of our national leaders. *Party Politics: Entertaining at the White House* pays tribute to this crucial role of First Ladies through the history of the evolution of presidential china and the social accoutrements that are essential for welcoming the world’s leaders and other honored guests to the home of the United States.

Early First Ladies wrote each dinner invitation out by hand, sometimes with the aid of friends. It was important to know whom to invite and how to seat guests strategically to ensure that no one was offended. As the United States’ contacts grew worldwide so did the number and size of the social events, thus increasing the responsibility of the First Lady. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Edith Roosevelt was the first to reorganize the White House staff and hire a social secretary who helped to schedule all social engagements (in addition to other responsibilities).

Today the First Lady has a large staff as part of the Office of the First Lady in the White House’s East Wing. There are numerous White House staff members who assist with all the social events – including florists, chefs, ushers, butlers, electricians, housekeepers, grounds employees, entertainment coordinators, and photographers. There is even an Office of Protocol to ensure no one is slighted. Since an invitation to a State Dinner is one of the most coveted invitations in America, great attention is given to the guest list and care is taken to invite prominent U. S. citizens of diverse interests and relationships to the guest of honor. There is one thing that has not changed over time: the First Lady still makes the final decisions on who will, or will not, be invited to dine at the Executive Mansion.

The White House burned during the War of 1812, and consequently was extensively renovated in 1814. President Monroe wrote that he wanted to furnish the President’s House “appropriate to the architectural dignity of the



ABOVE: State Dining Room

RIGHT: Handwritten invitation for a dinner with John & Abigail Adams

*Mr Adams
The President of the United States, &
requests the Pleasure of Mr & Mrs Bayly
Company to Dine, on Thursday next,
at 4 o'Clock.
Jan^y. 1801
An answer is requested.*



Nancy Reagan (ABOVE) and Eleanor Roosevelt (RIGHT) working with their staffs.



structure." When the Monroes moved into the newly rebuilt White House, they decorated the interior in the popular French-empire style. The Monroe china was the first official presidential china that was created specifically for an American president. The china was ordered from France in 1817 and manufactured by the Dagoty-Honoré factory in Paris. A thirty-piece dinner service and a matching dessert service were purchased at a cost of \$1,167.²³ In the center of each plate is a Napoleonic eagle that was popular at the time in both France and America. The red, white, and blue banner the eagle carries reads, "E Pluribus Unum" – the national motto first chosen by the Continental Congress in 1782. There are five vignettes inside the dark red border to represent strength, agriculture, commerce, arts and science.

The china and other French furnishings were criticized by the press for being foreign goods. Congress took this seriously, and during the John Quincy Adams administration, a bill was passed "that all furniture purchased for the use of the President's House shall be as far as practicable of American or domestic manufacture." However, when it came to manufacturing china, it would take this country nearly another century to compete with the fine porcelains produced in France and England.

When James and Sarah Polk moved into the White House in 1845, it was in dire need of repairs. A new china service was also desperately needed. The State Dinner service chosen was made by Dagoty-Honoré, the same Paris factory that made the Monroe china. Purchased in 1846, the dinner and dessert services totaled 400 pieces at a cost of \$979.⁴⁰ The dinner service with its plain white design and gold trim was popular china with later administrations – its simplicity made it ideal to mix with other depleted services when the occasion arose.

The Lincoln china is the first State Dinner service that was chosen entirely by a First Lady. Mary Lincoln understood the importance of maintaining the proper appearance so that visitors from other nations would perceive the United States as strong and her husband's administration as in control. In an effort to reinforce this perception, the Lincoln administration was incredibly active socially in the midst of the Civil War. Her choice of china with a purple-red border was called "Solferino", and it became known as the "Royal Purple" set. She personally selected the service in 1861 from E. V.



LEFT: Napoleonic Eagle; RIGHT: Elizabeth Monroe



LEFT: Sarah Polk; ABOVE: Polk China



*ABOVE: Lincoln China;
RIGHT: Mary Lincoln*



Haughwout and Company in New York City. The service was produced by Haviland and Company in Paris, France. With the U. S. Coat of Arms in the center of the plate, the American bald eagle stands above the shield with the national motto intertwined through the clouds.

The Hayes State Dinner service is the most unusual of all the presidential china services. The china's creation came about by a chance meeting in 1879 in the White House conservatory between First Lady Lucy Hayes and artist Theodore R. Davis. Mrs. Hayes was in the process of choosing fern clippings to send to Haviland and Company for a new State Dinner service. As the two talked, Mr. Davis brought up the idea of using the flora and fauna of North America as décor for the new china. Lucy readily agreed and asked Davis to oversee its direction. Theodore Davis went into seclusion at his studio in Asbury Park, New Jersey where he eventually produced 130 different designs of American plants, animals and scenic views. He also created several unique shapes for the fine china itself. The total cost of the new china was \$3,120.00, and it was first used at an intimate dinner in November 1880 in honor of the newly-elected President and Mrs. James Garfield. Though art critics were severe in their reviews, the service was well-liked by the general public and reproductions were extremely popular.

President Benjamin Harrison's platform slogan was "America First". First Lady Caroline Harrison, in support of her husband, wanted her new White House china to be "symbolic and meaningful to Americans." A talented artist herself, she chose the U. S. Coat of Arms for the center of the plates, and to compliment it, designed a corn and goldenrod motif etched in gold around a wide blue band. The corn is in homage to her home state of Indiana. The 44 stars that make up the inner border represent the number of states in the Union at the time. Mrs. Harrison directed a large-scale remodeling effort, which included a china closet to display all past presidential china services. Sadly, Mrs. Harrison was never able to dine on or enjoy the china she had helped to create; she passed away two months before it was delivered to the White House.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the White House had become too small and crowded for its dual roles of housing the business of government and the residence of the First Family. Congress appropriated \$500,000 for a large scale renovation of the building and the addition of the West Wing. When

LEFT: Harrison Administration China;
BELOW: State Dinner Seating Chart,
President Hayes Administration



State Dining Room

<p>Miss Welch.</p> <p>Mr. Brents, M.C.</p> <p>Mrs. Tyler</p> <p>Mr. Morse, M.C.</p> <p>Mrs. Bingham</p> <p>Senator Blair</p> <p>Miss Schurz</p> <p>Senator Burnside</p> <p>Mrs. Hayes</p> <p>The Speaker of the House</p> <p>Mrs. Baldwin</p> <p>Senator Beck</p> <p>Mr. Converse, M.C.</p> <p>Mrs. Morse</p> <p>Mr. W. A. Wood, M.C.</p> <p>Miss Cook</p> <p>Genl. Alex. M. Cook</p>	<p>Mr. Starin, M.C.</p> <p><i>Menu.</i></p> <p><i>Plage</i></p> <p><i>Noek, Turle</i></p> <p><i>Frites de Rock a la Normande</i></p> <p><i>Pommes Parisienne, Concombres</i></p> <p><i>Relove</i></p> <p><i>Fait de Bouy aux ceps a la provencale</i></p> <p><i>Entrus</i></p> <p><i>Saucon de Trisants feneciere</i></p> <p><i>Ris de Veau, Mel. Tris</i></p> <p><i>Steud. Teropfin</i></p> <p><i>Entrus de Tris gras en belle vue</i></p> <p><i>Rock</i></p> <p><i>Polis</i></p> <p><i>Dinde Arroye aux Marron, Salade</i></p> <p><i>Cavens Back, Luchs, galie de groselle</i></p> <p><i>Legums</i></p> <p><i>Fruits d'artichaux a la Italienne</i></p> <p><i>Entrus</i></p> <p><i>Barcous a la quincard</i></p> <p><i>Salie au Madere, garnie</i></p> <p><i>Dessert</i></p> <p><i>Sablons assorti</i></p> <p><i>Fruits glace</i></p> <p><i>Fruits au Caramel</i></p> <p><i>Compotes</i></p> <p><i>Lentons</i></p> <p><i>Fruits garnis</i></p> <p><i>Glace</i></p> <p>Mr. R. P. Hayes</p>	<p>Miss McKell</p> <p>Mr. Hatch, m. c.</p> <p>Mr. Bingham, m. c.</p> <p>Mrs. Andrews</p> <p>Senator Sharon</p> <p>Mrs Wood</p> <p>The Secy. of the Interior</p> <p>Mrs. Randall</p> <p>The President.</p> <p>Mrs. Blair</p> <p>Senator Anthony</p> <p>Mrs. Starin.</p> <p>Senator Baldwin</p> <p>Mr. Tyler, M.C.</p> <p>Mrs. Hatch</p> <p>Mr. Andrews</p> <p>Miss Harlan</p>
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United States Marine Band

RIGHT:
Hayes
Administration
China



President and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt moved into the newly remodeled Executive Mansion in 1902, the State Dining Room was one of the most dramatically altered of all the public rooms. The room, originally only allowing for sixty guests, could now seat over one hundred. The walls were oak-paneled, a fireplace was installed, and Edith had eleven of Theodore's prized big game heads hung on the walls. A new set of china was needed for the expanded dining room, and Edith ordered 1,320 pieces of Wedgwood china highlighting for the first time the Great Seal of the United States. Edith Roosevelt noted the growing interest the American public had in the history of the presidential china, so she decided to complete the project Caroline Harrison had begun. By 1904 she had found pieces of china representative of all twenty-five previous administrations and had them displayed in specially made cabinets on the ground floor corridor.

The first State Dinner service manufactured in the United States was made by Lenox, Inc. in Trenton, New Jersey. First Lady Edith Wilson chose the design "to suit the dignity of the home of the Chief Executive." The ivory porcelain was so thin it was transparent, but it was actually very durable. The Presidential Seal in raised 24-carat gold was placed in the center of each plate. Over one thousand pieces were ordered at a cost of \$11,251.60, and the service was delivered to the White House in 1918. The press was exceedingly favorable to this beautiful American-made china, as it was a great source of pride that fine porcelain china was finally being produced in this country. Edith Wilson also directed the design of the China Room in the White House – this room and its display remains one of the most popular today.

It was announced on November 20, 1934 that the White House would be ordering new State Dinner china. With the country in the midst of the Great Depression, there was public outcry at the extravagance of spending \$9,000 for a new service. Eleanor Roosevelt promptly held a press conference to explain that the cost to replace existing china was actually more expensive than ordering a new complete set. An order was placed with the Lenox factory for 1,722 pieces at a cost of \$9,301.20. Eleanor personalized this china by choosing an alternating motif of roses and feathers along the inner border, taken from the Roosevelt coat of arms.

By 1951 the White House had undergone extensive renovations, and



ABOVE: 1902 State Dining Room with T. Roosevelt's mounted animal heads, *RIGHT:* 1904 White House ground floor corridor, china collection, *BELOW:* T. Roosevelt china



BELOW LEFT: Wilson eagle, *BELOW RIGHT:* FDR china



First Lady Bess Truman selected a new set of china to go with the improvements. The State Dining Room had been extensively remodeled, and the oak-paneled walls were now painted a soft muted green, popularly known as "Williamsburg green." The wide green band of the new porcelain perfectly matched the walls. Even though the same amount of china was ordered as during the Roosevelt administration (1,722 pieces), the post-war inflation cost was \$28,271.40. President Truman added his own touch by standardizing the Presidential Seal in 1945. The eagle's head now always faces the olive branch of peace and the banner with "E Pluribus Unum" is always grasped in the beak. (The eagle faces the arrows on both the Wilson and FDR china.)

Mamie Eisenhower was greatly interested in the White House china collection so she began a project to reclassify and reorganize the collection. She personally made contact with presidential family members to acquire pieces of china from past administrations who had not ordered official china. By 1957 all the personal or official china of each administration was represented in the China Room. The Truman china was still in good supply, but Mrs. Eisenhower wanted to add her own touch, so she decided to have a service plate created to compliment the Truman dinner plates. The 120 plates ordered from Castleton China of New Castle, Pennsylvania, cost \$3,606.40. The rims were covered with pure gold medallions. The process to affix the gold to the white porcelain required eight separate firings.

By 1966 it was determined that new china was needed to replace depleting supplies of the older services and the ever increasing number of state visits. At a press conference on November 8, 1967, it was announced that the new service would serve 140 guests (this is the number of guests the State Dining Room currently seats) at a cost of \$80,028.24. However, this was the first time that a state service was purchased with non-appropriated government funds. The White House Historical Association funded the project through an anonymous donor. Lady Bird Johnson and her staff worked very closely with Tiffany and Company of New York City on the design and the china was manufactured by Castleton China, Inc. Like First Lady Caroline Harrison, Lady Bird Johnson was personally involved in the design of the Johnson china. Mrs. Johnson combined her main cause, beautification and conservation of the country's landscape with the history of White House china. The pieces feature the eagle motif first designed for



ABOVE: State Dining Room during Truman Administration; *RIGHT:* Truman Administration china



ABOVE LEFT: Mamie Eisenhower with display of White House china; *ABOVE RIGHT:* Eisenhower Administration china; *BOTTOM RIGHT:* Lyndon B. Johnson Administration china



the Monroe china, and the porcelain was decorated with wildflowers found throughout the United States. There were over forty different wildflowers represented on different pieces of china. Again with a tribute to nineteenth century history, she had dessert plates made featuring the state flower of each fifty states. The floral decals on original dessert plates did not meet Mrs. Johnson's final approval, so the flower designs were hand painted on each plate, delaying the completion of the china until the summer of 1972.

The first State Dinner of the Reagan administration was held in honor of Margaret Thatcher in May of 1981. First Lady Nancy Reagan found that she had to use a mixture of the Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, FDR and Truman china because there was not a complete set of one pattern that could serve all the guests. When it was announced that a new service was to be ordered from the Lenox Company, public criticism ensued. Like the Johnson china, this service was donated to the White House by an anonymous donor; however, condemnation toward Mrs. Reagan was so great that the donor's name – the Knapp Foundation in Maryland – was disclosed. The service includes a traditional dessert service. Nancy Reagan chose red for the service's color bands – a color of which she was particularly fond. The specific color of scarlet red was chosen after Mrs. Reagan observed different red hues under candlelight. The china service was made to serve 220 people and cost \$210,399.00. Each place setting consisted of nineteen pieces.

The newest presidential china service commemorates the 200th anniversary of the White House. Hillary Rodham Clinton oversaw the creation of each individual piece. The service incorporates architectural motifs found in the State Dining Room, East Room and Diplomatic Reception Room in the design. It breaks with recent tradition by featuring views of the White House instead of the Presidential Seal. The 300 place settings were donated by the White House Historical Association at a cost of \$240,000. First Lady Laura Bush continues to use the Clinton china for State Dinners today.



LEFT: Ronald and Nancy Reagan;
BELOW: Table Setting with
Reagan Administration china



BELOW: Clinton Administration china



About the Collector

The majority of White House presidential china on display is from the private collection of Mr. Set Momjian. He began collecting china by accident in the 1950s when dealers included pieces of china along with the presidential letters and documents he was amassing. As his collection of porcelain pieces grew he came to appreciate the historical significance and beauty of each piece. This led him to seek out the personal china patterns of First Ladies as well. His collections are many and diverse, but he is passionate about his presidential china collection and is delighted to share it with our visitors.

Mr. Momjian is a retired Ford Motor Company executive and served as a representative to the United Nations under the Carter administration. Mr. Momjian has served as Presidential Advisor to the past five administrations and has enjoyed personal friendships with Presidents and First Ladies, starting with the Johnsons. He recently explained why presidential china is so fascinating to him and to others: "White House china shows the personal style of each First Lady and they are the only items that remain in the White House to give us a sense of their tastes and the times in which they lived."





ABOVE: Set and Joan Momjian with Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter



OPPOSITE PAGE: Lady Bird Johnson with Set Momjian; *ABOVE:* White House China Room



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THE WHITE HOUSE***

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This exhibit is made possible from the generosity of the following individuals and institutions:

Mr. & Mrs. Set Charles Momjian
Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio
President Benjamin Harrison Home, Indianapolis, Indiana
Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio

Tours: Tuesday - Saturday at 9:30 & 10:30 a.m.
and 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m.;
plus Sundays at 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m. in June, July & August
Reservations required for groups of 6 or more only, recommended
for all others.

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