



Smithsonian American Art Museum

***“Something of Splendor”*: Decorative Arts from the White House**
Wall Text and Extended Labels

As the official residence of the president of the United States for over two hundred years, the White House is an important symbol of our nation. This exhibit, organized in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the White House Historical Association, showcases selected treasures from the White House decorative arts collection, most never before seen outside of the house. These objects provide a glimpse into how the presidents and their families have lived, worked, and entertained within the historic walls of the White House.

Although the mansion’s gleaming white exterior has changed little over the years, the White House has been refurbished repeatedly. In the nineteenth century the interiors were often at the forefront of American fashion, and at times the public and Congress felt the rooms were excessively splendid. In 1819, artist and inventor Samuel Morse defended the importance of quality furnishings for the White House, writing “Something of splendor is certainly proper about the Chief Magistrate for the credit of the nation.”

When Theodore Roosevelt renovated the White House in 1902, the public rooms assumed a more formal and ceremonial character evocative of the early nineteenth century, which they retain today. In the early 1960s, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy initiated an ongoing museum program to preserve and interpret both original furnishings and those collected since to represent more fully the breadth of American decorative history. Each first family charged with stewardship of the White House has helped to shape the collections, thus leaving an extraordinary legacy to the nation.

Something of Splendor: Decorative Arts from the White House is organized by the White House Office of the Curator, the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the White House Historical Association.

The President's House

about 1824

watercolor on plaster

Rufus Porter (1792–1884)

Gift of the White House Historical Association, 1992

This mural depicting a triumphant sun rising behind the White House is thought to reflect the “era of good feelings” in the United States during the decade after the War of 1812. It was painted above a fireplace mantel in a New Hampshire tavern early in the career of Rufus Porter, who saw his murals of real or fanciful America as a more permanent alternative to expensive French scenic wallpapers. This view was probably based on an engraving by noted American artist George Catlin (1796–1872), as published in an 1820 magazine. Although the engraving does not include the adjoining buildings seen in the mural, they presumably represent the four (not six) government office buildings that flanked the President’s House at the time. Removed from its original location about 1950, this folk art mural was acquired for the White House permanent collection by the White House Historical Association in 1992.

§

Desk

about 1800

mahogany

attributed to James Hoban (about 1758–1831), Washington, DC

Gift of James Hoban Alexander, 1974

By family tradition, James Hoban, architect and builder of the White House, made this desk from mahogany left over from construction. Irish-born Hoban won the 1792 competition to design the President’s House in the new capital city of Washington. He also was entrusted with building the stone structure that President George Washington wanted to compare favorably with the “first buildings of Europe.” The desk’s unusual design and construction with its fold-back front suggest that Hoban was a better builder than cabinetmaker.

§

Wallpaper

about 1809–11

block-printed paper made by Jacquemart et Bénard, Paris, lining a painted wood box, about 1811, China

Gift of the White House Historical Association, 1971

A pink French wallpaper was among the elegant additions that First Lady Dolley Madison, famous for her entertaining, made to the interiors of the White House. Mrs. Madison gave a sample of this apparently prized paper to the wife of her architect and designer, Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Lining a contemporary Chinese box, it is an extremely rare artifact of the White House décor before British forces torched the building during the War of 1812.

§

Goblet

about 1840–60

ruby-stained glass, Bohemia

Gift of the White House Historical Association, 1993

Early nineteenth-century European manufacturers capitalized on the market in the United States for furnishings decorated with such national symbols as the American eagle, likenesses of the presidents, and even the White House. Whether made in Europe or America, not every piece so ornamented was commissioned for or purchased by the federal government. This Staffordshire pottery plate and Bohemian glass goblet are decorated with an image of the “President’s House,” based on a popular 1831 London engraving.

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§

Mantel Clock

about 1816

gilded bronze

works by Louis Mallet, Paris

Gift of the National Society of Interior Designers, 1960

Vase

about 1825–30

porcelain, France

Gift of the White House Acquisition Fund, 1979

Service Plate

Woodrow Wilson State China Service

1918

porcelain

made by Lenox, Inc., Trenton, NJ

U.S. Government purchase, 1918

Early nineteenth-century European manufacturers capitalized on the market in the United States for furnishings decorated with national symbols such as likenesses of the presidents. This small mantel clock and porcelain urn are examples of the fine decorative arts produced in France for the American market. As “father of his country,” George Washington was the most frequently represented president on decorative arts, sometimes shown in his general’s uniform, other times in a civilian suit as the first president. John Vanderlyn’s 1819 portrait of General Andrew Jackson in uniform inspired the decoration on this small French porcelain vase.

Services of china and glassware ordered for the White House in the nineteenth century were frequently decorated with American eagle emblems derived from the Great Seal of the United States. The first White House state china produced in America—the 1918 Woodrow Wilson service made by Lenox—was also the first china to bear the formal presidential coat of arms. The inner border on this service plate was designed to be the Stars and Stripes.

§

Soup Tureen

about 1809–17

silver

made by Jacques-Henri Fauconnier (1779–1839), Paris

U.S. Government purchase, 1817

For the postfire White House, President James Monroe ordered many elegant furnishings from France, including a pair of silver soup tureens. Superb examples of the neoclassicism of the Empire and Restoration periods in France, these tureens contributed to the elegance of White House dinners. Customized with American eagle finials, they helped Monroe dramatize his presidency and an American sense of triumph after the War of 1812.

§

Coffeepots and Cream Jug

1809–19

silver, ivory

made by Martin-Guillaume Biennais (1764–1843), Paris

U.S. Government purchase, 1833

With funds raised by an auction of old White House furnishings, President Andrew Jackson purchased a 464-piece service of French Empire table silver. The elegant tableware, including this coffee set, was acquired secondhand from the estate of a former Russian minister to the United States. Jackson's critics in Congress attacked the expenditure as extravagant, but the survival of the service, engraved with the traditional "President's House," is a testament to its quality and the value of the investment.

§

Armchair
1817
gilded beechwood
made by Pierre-Antoine Bellangé (1758–1827), Paris
Gift of Catherine Bohlen, 1961

This armchair was part of a lavish fifty-three-piece suite that President James Monroe acquired from France for the refurnishing of the postfire White House. It was originally upholstered in red silk for installation in the oval drawing room, which later became the Blue Room. Monroe believed that the furniture was "not less deserving attention than the building for which it is intended." His expensive French acquisitions prompted Congress to require that future furniture purchased for the President's House be of "American manufacture." The suite, all but one table, was sold in 1860; one hundred years later, this chair was donated back to the White House. Six additional chairs and one sofa from the Monroe suite have been returned to the White House collection for the Blue Room.

§

Armchair
1818
mahogany
made by William King Jr. (1771–1854), Georgetown, DC
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Ford Sollers Sr., 1986

After his expensive purchases from France for the drawing room and dining room of the rebuilt White House, President James Monroe economized by having a suite of mahogany seat furniture for the East Room made locally by William King Jr. of Georgetown. This White House patronage made King the most famous cabinetmaker in the District of Columbia. When funding ran out, the East Room was not finished and the suite was left un-upholstered for twelve years. Later sold at auction, at least six pieces of the East Room suite were purchased by John T. Ford, onetime owner of Ford's Theatre in Washington, for his theater in Baltimore. Ford descendants returned this chair to its original home in 1986.

§

Pier Table
about 1829
mahogany, marble, mirror glass
made by Anthony Gabriel Quervelle (1789–1856), Philadelphia
U.S. Government purchase, 1829

President Andrew Jackson directed that the funds available to him for the furnishing of the White House be spent on completing the heretofore unfinished East Room. Four large tables, scaled to fit the great piers between the windows at the north and south ends of the room, were provided by Philadelphia cabinetmaker Anthony Quervelle, a French emigrant who became one of the great makers of American furniture in the late Empire style. Only this one pier table, bearing Quervelle's paper label, has survived in the White House. Extensively restored, it bears microscopic evidence indicating that it was once more highly decorated.

§

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Dinner Platter

Rutherford B. Hayes State China Service

1880

porcelain

made by Haviland & Co., Limoges, France, designed by Theodore R. Davis (1840–1894)

U.S. Government purchase, 1880

This beautifully painted dinner platter depicting a wild turkey is one of the most dramatic pieces of the elaborate state service produced for President and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes in 1880 by French manufacturer Haviland & Co. First Lady Lucy Hayes asked American artist Theodore Davis to design a service that “should combine elegance and appropriate American decoration.” Davis created 130 unique designs featuring animals and plants native to the United States. Many forms in this service were decorated with images of the foods they were intended to serve.

§

Centerpiece

Franklin Pierce State China Service

1853

porcelain and Parian ware

decorated by Haughwout & Dailey, New York, on French or English blank

U.S. Government purchase, 1853

This sculptural centerpiece was the most elaborate component of the state dinner and dessert service selected by President Franklin Pierce during his visit to the 1853 world’s fair, in New York. China supplier Haughwout & Dailey offered Pierce two designs for a presidential service, and he chose this pattern in cobalt blue and gold. The centerpiece is the only piece from the Pierce service to have survived uninterrupted at the White House and remains the highlight of the White House china collection.

§

Two (Center) Sections of a Plateau and Accessories

about 1817

gilded bronze and mirror glass

made by Denière et Matelin, Paris

U.S. Government purchase, 1817

Accessory Dishes

1853

cut glass, American or English

U.S. Government purchase, 1853

Two of seven sections of a gilded bronze plateau ordered from France by President James Monroe for the State Dining Room are displayed here. Plateaus served as decorative table centerpieces upon which flowers, candles, sugar sculptures, or porcelain figurines could be displayed. Supremely expensive, they were very rare in the United States but fashionable among the European elite. The use of a plateau at the President’s House began during George Washington’s administration and demonstrates the importance that early American leaders placed on securing the respect of foreign representatives. The Monroe plateau was accompanied by a number of accessories, including a set of classical figures and small urns that were set directly into the balustrade, as well as larger vases and baskets for holding flowers or fruit.

§

Centerpiece

1871

silver

made by Gorham Mfg. Co., Providence, RI

Possibly a gift from Gorham Mfg. Co., about 1876

At the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the prominent American silver maker Gorham Mfg. Co. exhibited this sculptural centerpiece, inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Song of Hiawatha." First Lady Julia Grant was a frequent visitor to the exposition and admired this piece, writing "I took much pleasure in selecting a piece of silver for the Executive Mansion and was happy in securing a piece entirely American in history, ideal, skill, and material." The boat was often decorated with flowers when used at a formal event.

§

Compote

about 1853

cut and engraved glass, probably New York

U.S. Government purchase, about 1853

Water Bottle

1891

cut and engraved glass

made by C. Dorflinger & Sons, White Mills, PA

U.S. Government purchase, 1891

Water Goblet

1938

cut and engraved glass

made by T. G. Hawkes & Company, Corning, NY

U.S. Government purchase, 1938

This compote, water bottle, and goblet represent three generations of White House glassware, purchased, respectively, in the Franklin Pierce, Benjamin Harrison, and Franklin D. Roosevelt administrations. American manufacturers of fine glassware were able to compete with their European counterparts much earlier than domestic porcelain makers. As a result, all of the major glassware services purchased for the White House throughout its history were made in the United States. Beginning as early as the James Monroe administration, the engraved coat of arms of the United States was the preferred method of customizing glassware used at the President's House.

§

Dessert Stand and Dinner Plate

Abraham Lincoln State China Service

about 1861

porcelain

decorated by E. V. Haughwout & Co., New York, on French blanks

U.S. Government purchase, 1861

Water Goblet and Wine Glass

1861

cut and engraved glass

made by Christian Dorflinger's Greenpoint Glass Works, Brooklyn, NY

U.S. Government purchase, 1861

Upon becoming first lady, Mary Todd Lincoln delighted in refurbishing the President's House in the latest styles. This dessert stand, dinner plate, water goblet, and wine glass are from the elegant state services of china and glassware selected by Mrs. Lincoln. Always fashion conscious, Mrs. Lincoln requested that the china feature a reddish-purple border color invented in France just two years earlier. The glassware was similarly stylish, featuring stemware with colored bowls and fine diamond-pattern cutting that represented the latest in glass technology. The Lincoln china and glass patterns both proved popular among future presidents and were reordered often until the end of the nineteenth century.

§

Side Chair
about 1845
rosewood
made by Charles A. Baudouine (1808–1895), New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1845

Purchased for the State Dining Room in 1845 during the James K. Polk administration, this rosewood side chair in the Rococo Revival style represented the height of current furnishing fashion. The original set of forty-two chairs was upholstered in purple velvet, coordinating with the new purple and gold draperies installed at the same time. A guest who dined at the President's House soon after the room was refurbished reported that "it was very splendid."

§

Side Table
about 1853
walnut
probably made by A. & H. Jenkins, Baltimore, MD
U.S. Government purchase, 1853

This table is believed to be from a set of four made by A. & H. Jenkins of Baltimore for the State Dining Room in 1853. Like many of the ceramic and glass services used in the president's dining room, these side tables were customized with a carved shield from the Great Seal of the United States on the front apron. The tables were used in the dining room for almost fifty years before being removed during Theodore Roosevelt's comprehensive redecoration of the house in 1902.

§

Armchair
1902
white oak and cane
made by A. H. Davenport, Boston
designed by McKim, Mead & White, New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1903

This imposing armchair, in the William and Mary style popular in the late seventeenth century, is one of six provided by McKim, Mead & White in 1902 for the newly enlarged and refurbished State Dining Room. Taller and more visually engaging than the fifty Queen Anne-style side chairs also provided for the room, the armchairs were intended to be used by the principal diners at an event, typically the president and/or first lady.

§

Cabinet
about 1904
white oak
made by Gustav Stickley (1858–1942), Eastwood, NY

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U.S. Government purchase, 1904

Oyster Plate, Platter, and Dinner Plate
Theodore Roosevelt State China Service
1902–3

porcelain

made by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Ltd., Etruria, England

U.S. Government purchase, 1903

Breakfast Plates, Dinner Plate, and Demitasse Cup and Saucer
Benjamin Harrison State China Service
1891

porcelain

made by Tressemanes & Vogt, Limoges, France

U.S. Government purchase, 1892

Oyster Plate, Dinner Plate, and Ice Cream Plate
Rutherford B. Hayes State China Service
1880

porcelain

made by Haviland & Co., Limoges, France

U.S. Government purchase, 1880

Cake Stand, Fruit Basket, and Dinner Plate
Ulysses S. Grant State China Service
1870

porcelain

made by Haviland & Co., Limoges, France

U.S. Government purchase, 1870

To display White House china, First Lady Edith Roosevelt ordered a pair of cabinets in the Arts and Crafts style from American craftsman Gustav Stickley. Placed in the Ground Floor Corridor, a high-traffic area where guests entering through the new East Wing could easily see them, the cabinets were the precursors to the permanent display of White House tableware in the China Room, created by First Lady Edith Wilson in 1917. Examples from the state services of recent presidents were arranged by shelf, with the 1903 Wedgwood dinner service selected by the Roosevelts at the top.

§

Service Plate
Ronald Reagan State China Service
1982

porcelain

made by Lenox, Inc., Trenton, NJ

Gift of The Knapp Foundation, 1982

Champagne Glass
1961
made by Morgantown Glass Guild, Morgantown, WV
U.S. Government purchase, 1961

Water Glass

1974

made by Fostoria, Wheeling, WV

U.S. Government purchase, 1974

Dinner Wine Glass, Dessert Wine Glass

1991

made by Lenox, Inc., Trenton, NJ

U.S. Government purchase, 1991

Dessert Spoon

1809–19

gilded silver

made by Pierre-Joseph Dehanne (active 1800–20), Paris

U.S. Government purchase 1833

Dinner Fork, Dessert Fork

1894

gilded silver

made by Durgin Silver Co., Concord, NH

U.S. Government purchase, 1894

Dinner Knife

1924

gilded silver

made by American Silver Co., Bristol, CT

U.S. Government purchase, 1924

Fish Knife, Fish Fork, Salad Fork

1950

gilded silver

made by S. Kirk & Son, Baltimore, MD

U.S. Government purchase, 1950

Salad Knife

1994

gilded silver made by Kirk Stieff, Baltimore, MD

U.S. Government purchase, 1994

Given in honor of a visiting head of state, the state dinner has long represented the ultimate White House social event. Guests at modern state dinners have sat down at place settings such as this one, featuring a service plate from the Ronald Reagan state china service. While new state china services have been introduced periodically through the years, this style of gilded flatware has been in use for the most prestigious White House events since 1833, when President Andrew Jackson purchased French-made spoons and forks at a diplomatic estate sale. The flatware was customized with the inscription "President's House." Glassware in a simple, unadorned style, made by several manufacturers, has been used at state dinners since Jacqueline Kennedy selected it for White House dining in 1961.

§

Teapot
1881
silver and ebony
made by Dominick & Haff, New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1881

Jar
about 1901
cut glass and silver, American
U.S. Government purchase, 1901

Salt Cellar
about 1900
cut glass, American
U.S. Government purchase, about 1900

As the home, office, and principal entertainment venue of the president of the United States, the White House has chefs who prepare everything from elaborate, multicourse state dinners to a simple breakfast for one, as seen in the image of Theodore Roosevelt's breakfast tray. First Lady Lucretia Garfield selected this silver teapot for the White House in 1881. The small glass dish would have held salt, while the silver-lidded jar was probably used for a condiment.

§

Fire Screen
about 1876
embroidery and gilded wood
embroidery by Edward A. Richter, Vienna, Austria
Gift of Edward A. Richter, 1877

Austrian embroiderer Edward Richter created this fire screen for display at the 1876 world's fair, held in Philadelphia in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Following the Centennial Exposition, Richter donated the fire screen to President Ulysses Grant "only under the condition that they [the embroidery and its frame] have to belong to the furniture of the Executive Mansion." Upon receipt, the fire screen was placed in the Red Room alongside the Herter Brothers chair and table, also seen here.

§

Armchair
about 1875
gilded ash
made by Herter Brothers, New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1875

Center Table
about 1875
rosewood
made by Herter Brothers, New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1875

The celebrated New York interior design firm Herter Brothers provided this "lady's chair" and coordinating center table for the White House as part of its renovation of the Red Room for First Lady Julia Grant. Originally part of a thirteen-piece suite of furniture in the emerging Aesthetic style, these two are the only pieces to have survived in the White House collection.

§

Urns

about 1860–67

bronze, Japan

Undocumented acquisition by 1867

This pair of bronze urns featuring sculptural dragons entered the collection by 1867, possibly as a gift from the first Japanese delegation to visit the White House. Japanese art and furnishings and those objects inspired by the artistic output of this formerly isolated country became extremely fashionable in the late nineteenth century. As authentic examples of Japanese craftsmanship, the urns contributed to the exotic quality of the heavily used Red Room and were displayed prominently on top of an upright piano.

§

Cabinet (*chigai-dana*)

about 1854

lacquered and gilded wood, Japan

Probable gift of the government of Japan, 1855

This finely lacquered Japanese cabinet, known as a *chigai-dana*, is believed to have been delivered to President Franklin Pierce, as an official gift, by Commodore Matthew Perry following his successful negotiation of the first trade agreement with Japan. The novelty of this exotic object, and the diplomatic success it represented, inspired its prominent placement on the State Floor. Later in the century, it was enjoyed by presidential families in the private quarters of the Second Floor, as seen in an image of members of the Benjamin Harrison family some thirty-five years later.

§

Vase

1898

porcelain and gilded metal

made by the National Porcelain Manufactory of Sèvres, Paris

Gift of the French Republic, 1898

To celebrate the successful construction of a transatlantic cable between the United States and France, French president Félix Faure sent President William McKinley a very large pair of cobalt vases from the celebrated Sèvres porcelain factory. Upon their arrival in 1898, the vases were prominently displayed flanking the central bow window of the Blue Room. As part of the Theodore Roosevelt renovation of the White House in 1902, the vases were moved to the East Room, where they remained for the next forty-five years.

§

Armchair

1859

gilded ash

made by Gottlieb Vollmer (1816–1883), Philadelphia

U.S. Government purchase, 1860

Harriet Lane, hostess for her uncle, President James Buchanan, selected gilded Philadelphia seat furniture in the French Rococo Revival style for the Blue Room in 1859. Replacing the 1817 Monroe furniture from France, which was sold at auction, this suite remained for over forty years in that principal parlor, scene of the only presidential wedding held in the White House—Grover and Frances Cleveland, in 1886.

§

Candlestick
about 1810–30
gilded bronze, France
Possible U.S. Government purchase, 1817

Torchère
about 1835–50
gilded bronze, France
Possible gift of Robert Patterson, about 1837

Not every longtime treasure from the White House collection has a clear-cut history. This pillar-form candlestick, one of a pair, may once have been a candelabrum fitted with removable candle arms. It was definitely in the White House by 1853, when, apparently in the absence of a light structure, it was fitted with a cut-glass bowl so it could be used as a compote on the dining table. Its scale and quality are comparable to the gilded bronze furnishings bought in France for the Monroe White House, but it is not clearly identifiable on the detailed shipping inventory, even if received as a candelabrum.

It is known for certain that this torchère, one of a pair, was in the White House by 1862. Twenty years later a visitor claimed that the pair had been given to President Andrew Jackson. If that history is true, the torchères would be early examples of the eighteenth-century Rococo style that had been revived in France in the 1830s. Since the torchères were in the Blue Room at the same time as the pillar-form candlesticks, it is possible that their histories were confused.

§

Armchair
1902
painted and gilded cherry
made by L. Marcotte & Co., New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1903

Side Chair
1902
painted birch
made by L. Marcotte & Co., New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1903

Upholstery Fabric
1937
woven silk brocade
made by W. & J. Sloane, New York
Gift of Ilse Vietor-Haight, 1998

This painted armchair and side chair are from a suite made for the Blue Room during the Theodore Roosevelt renovation of the White House in 1902. McKim, Mead & White, the architects of the renovation, entrusted New York decorating firm L. Marcotte & Co. with returning the Blue Room to the style of President James Monroe's postfire refurbishing of 1817. The Empire style armchairs supplied by Marcotte bear a strong resemblance to the original Monroe armchairs but were probably modeled on a furniture suite at the Château de Compiègne, one of Napoleon's imperial residences.

L. Marcotte & Co. completed the Blue Room's seating furniture with shield-back side chairs inspired by early nineteenth-century English, rather than French, design. These side chairs originally had cane backs, but more durable upholstered backs had been substituted by the mid-1920s. In 1937 a new upholstery fabric on the chair backs featured the presidential

coat of arms, as seen in this surviving example removed from one of the chairs in 1951 for the design director of the Truman renovation.

§

Drapery Pole

1902

gilded wood

made by L. Marcotte & Co., New York

U.S. Government purchase, 1902

Drapery Valance

1952

silk lampas

made by Shaffro, Inc., New York, for B. Altman & Co., fabric by F. Schumacher

U.S. Government purchase, 1952

For sixty years, from Theodore Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy, gilded drapery poles surmounted by a spread-winged eagle supported successive generations of blue silk draperies at the three bow windows of the Blue Room. One of the three original 1902 poles is installed here with a valance from the 1952 draperies added to the room during the Truman renovation. The blue silk lampas fabric was made by F. Schumacher, the firm that made the original 1902 fabrics for the room.

§

Blue Room, The White House

1903

oil on canvas

Charles Bittinger (1879–1970)

Gift of Francis G. Bittinger and Charles Bittinger Jr., 1983

In this 1903 painting, Washington-born artist Charles Bittinger produced a rare color document of the décor of the Blue Room under President Theodore Roosevelt.

§

Andirons

about 1902

brass, France

U.S. Government purchase, 1902

Egyptian Revival andirons were installed in the Blue Room fireplace during the Theodore Roosevelt renovation of 1902. To emulate the room's décor in the James Monroe administration, the fashionable New York decorating firm of L. Marcotte & Co. relied on French Empire models for some of the furnishings which they provided. Made in France, these sphinx-form andirons were inspired by antiquities seen during Napoleon Bonaparte's military expedition to Egypt from 1798 to 1801.

§

Worktable

19th century

mahogany and curly maple veneer, American or English

U.S. Government purchase, 1929

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Inspired by the Colonial Revival movement, which celebrated the values and material goods of early America, First Lady Grace Coolidge felt a “strong desire to refurnish some of the rooms of the Mansion with furniture of the period in which it was built.” To accomplish her goal, Mrs. Coolidge pioneered the practice of soliciting donations and furnishing recommendations from an advisory committee. In 1925, at Mrs. Coolidge’s request, the committee first refurbished the Green Room, selecting antique Federal-style furniture when available. This oval-top worktable was purchased from a New York antiques dealer for the Green Room and remained there until it was replaced during First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s refurbishment of the room.

§

Coverlet

1925–27

crocheted shoe thread

made by Grace Goodhue Coolidge (1879–1957), Washington, DC

Gift of Grace Coolidge, 1927

First Lady Grace Coolidge personally made this coverlet for the famous “Lincoln bed” at the White House. She intended it to be a “token which shall go down through the ages to serve as a definite and visible link connecting the present and the past.” On one border appears “President’s House,” the early nineteenth-century name for the White House; on the other are the dates of President Coolidge’s term of office. Patriotic decoration includes an American eagle emblem, the national motto *E pluribus unum*, the Liberty Bell, and an abundance of American shields. Mrs. Coolidge hoped the coverlet would begin a tradition of first ladies leaving a memento of family life for the White House, but to date she remains the only one to produce such an artifact.

§

Desk

1932

mahogany

made by Morris W. Dove (1878–1968), Washington, DC

U.S. Government purchase, 1932

This fall-front desk is a reproduction of the French *secrétaire à abattant* on which President James Monroe reportedly signed his 1823 Annual Message to Congress. The section of that message concerning European noninterference in the Americas, a cornerstone of American foreign policy, has long been called the Monroe Doctrine. After initiating the first thorough study of White House furnishings, First Lady Lou Hoover celebrated the importance of the postfire refurnishing by James and Elizabeth Monroe with the creation of a “Monroe Room” in the private quarters in 1932. She commissioned reproductions of seven pieces of furniture, including the French desk that had been among the personal furnishings brought by the Monroes to the White House.

§

Sconce

about 1891

brass and cut glass, American

U.S. Government purchase, 1891

Four cherub-form electric sconces were installed in the Family Dining Room when electricity was introduced to the White House in 1891. President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison were tentative about the new technology, so the majority of the existing gas fixtures were wired to provide both gas and electric light. The Harrisons also refused to touch the electric light switches for fear of getting shocked, relying on staff to turn the lights on and off throughout the house. The sconces

were moved to the West Sitting Hall in the private quarters of the White House during the 1902 renovation, remaining there until the next major renovation began in 1949.

§

Drop-leaf Table

about 1933

walnut

made by the Val-Kill Furniture Shop, Hyde Park, NY

U.S. Government purchase, 1933

This “butterfly” drop-leaf table was made by the Val-Kill Furniture Shop on the Hudson River estate of President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. To bolster employment near her New York home, Eleanor Roosevelt had founded the shop in 1927, with the goal to “copy early American furniture, doing it as nearly as possible in the same ways as the early Americans did it.” The Val-Kill shop was a precursor to such New Deal agencies as the Works Progress Administration, created by President Roosevelt to provide assistance during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mrs. Roosevelt brought Val-Kill furniture with her to the White House, and shortly after she became first lady in 1933 the White House bought eleven pieces, including this table.

§

Mantel

about 1902

painted pine

made by Norcross Bros., Worcester, MA

U.S. Government purchase, 1902

Plaque

1902

painted plaster, Washington, DC

made for the White House during the 1902 renovation

Gift of the United States Secret Service, Uniform Division, 1992

During the Theodore Roosevelt renovation, Victorian marble mantels on the Second Floor of the White House were replaced with neoclassical mantels in wood or marble. This wooden mantel was in Margaret Truman’s sitting room when the leg of her piano dropped through the floor, prompting the discovery that the mansion’s interior was close to collapse after 150 years of heavy use. During the Truman renovation (1949–1952), much of the interior was removed in order to excavate basements and erect a steel frame around which to rebuild and modernize. Many of the 1902 mantels were donated to museums and historical organizations. Other impressive 1902 architectural elements were given away, including this plaster plaque, probably removed from above the doorway to the President’s Study on the Second Floor.

§

Dressing Chest

about 1951

mahogany

made by Kaplan Furniture Co., Cambridge, MA

U.S. Government purchase, 1952

This chest was acquired for the bedroom of President Harry S. Truman as part of the Truman renovation. The refurbishing of the rebuilt interiors of the White House was overseen by the New York department store B. Altman & Co. A large quantity of furniture was provided by the Kaplan Furniture Co., a firm that specialized in reproducing or adapting fine antique furniture. Illustrated both open and closed in catalogues of Kaplan’s “Beacon Hill Collection,” this case piece was

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described as “Sheraton High Chest, re-created from American design of the period 1790” and as “Chiffonier . . . Ideal chest for the head of the house.”

§

Tureen

1778–79

gilded silver

made by James Young, London

Bequest of Margaret Thompson Biddle, 1957

Robert Adam, the preeminent British architect of the late eighteenth century, designed this gilded silver tureen, one of a pair, for the Duke of Northumberland. James Smithson, the duke’s son, would later provide the endowment for the founding of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. The tureens are part of a large collection of gilded silver—mostly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pieces made in England and France—that was received in 1958 as a bequest of Margaret Thompson Biddle, heiress to a Montana mining fortune. Mrs. Biddle, a famous hostess in Paris whose guests included General and Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower, reportedly decided at a White House dinner to leave her collection to the White House.

§

Sofa

about 1800

mahogany and satinwood, Portsmouth, NH

Gift of Mrs. Albert Lasker, 1961

Card Table

about 1800

mahogany, Baltimore, MD

Gift of Mrs. Fred T. Couper, 1961

Superb American craftsmanship in the Federal style is demonstrated in two pieces of early nineteenth-century furniture that were the centerpiece of the Green Room as refurbished by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. From New England came a graceful sofa made in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, once owned by senator and statesman Daniel Webster. Southern furniture was represented by a skillfully inlaid and veneered Baltimore card table. Mrs. Kennedy’s celebrated program to build a museum collection for the White House led many people to donate objects from their personal collections or, in the case of these two objects, the funds to acquire them.

§

Argand Lamp

1784

Sheffield silver plate

made by Matthew Boulton, Soho, England

designed by Aimé Argand (1750–1803)

Gift of the American Institute of Interior Designers, 1962

This English Argand lamp, one of a pair, is believed to have been presented by the Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the American Revolution, to his friend and comrade in arms Major General Henry Knox in 1784. The next year Aimé Argand, the Swiss-born physicist who invented this more efficient oil burner, gave lamps of the same model to King Louis XVI of France. As part of Jacqueline Kennedy’s program to fill the White House with a museum-quality collection of fine and decorative arts, the American Institute of Interior Designers funded improvements to the White House Library. Their donations included this historic lamp.

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§

Shelf Clock

about 1825

mahogany

made by Simon Willard & Son, Roxbury, MA

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Meyer, 1961

Simon Willard, one of a famous family of Massachusetts clocksmiths, advertised in 1822 that President James Monroe had granted him a patent for an illustrated “Alarum [Alarm] Timepiece.” Now known as a “lighthouse clock,” this example, ornamented with an unusual sulfide medallion portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette, was probably made a few years later when Lafayette made a yearlong “Triumphal Tour” throughout the twenty-four states of the United States. He was received at the White House by Presidents Monroe and John Quincy Adams on several occasions in 1824 and 1825. During his visit, the park north of the White House was named Lafayette Square.

§

Pitcher

1828

porcelain

made by Tucker & Hulme, Philadelphia

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond G. Grover, 1962

William Ellis Tucker and a series of partners operated a factory in Philadelphia for twelve years, trying to manufacture porcelain that could successfully compete with imports from Europe and the Far East. One of the firm’s trademark products was pitchers such as this example, made in 1828. Two years later Tucker sent a gift of porcelain to President Andrew Jackson, who was much impressed by the “perfection to which your skill and perseverance has brought this branch of American manufacture.” Nonetheless the firm failed, and the White House would not buy a service of American-made china until 1918, for the Woodrow Wilson administration.

§

Desk and Bookcase

about 1798–1808

mahogany

made by Thomas Seymour (1771–1848), probably with John Seymour (about 1738–1818), Boston

Gift of an anonymous donor and the White House Historical Association, 1974

In the early 1970s the White House acquired a large collection of New England Federal furniture by the talented father-son cabinetmakers John and Thomas Seymour of Boston. This handsome desk and bookcase, considered a Seymour masterpiece worthy of illustration on the dust jacket of the major scholarly study of the Seymour shop, was one of many fine objects added to the White House collection during a second major period of collecting initiated by First Lady Patricia Nixon. Both the desk and the Seymour book were partially funded by the White House Historical Association.

§

Side Chair

about 1846

black walnut

made by J. & J. W. Meeks, New York

U.S. Government purchase, 1846

During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln’s cabinet met around a plain conference table on Gothic Revival side

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chairs, including this example, purchased in 1846 during the James K. Polk administration. The chairs became familiar to Americans after the Civil War when they were clearly depicted in an engraving based on a monumental painting of the 1862 cabinet meeting at which Lincoln first read his proposed Emancipation Proclamation. The artist, Francis B. Carpenter, spent six months at the White House sketching in the presidential offices, which, until 1902, shared the Second Floor with the family quarters.

§

Sofa
1869
black walnut
made by Pottier & Stymus Manufacturing Co., New York
U.S. Government purchase, 1869

Presidents following Abraham Lincoln have had an office and a separate Cabinet Room, whether in the Residence, until 1902, or in the West Wing thereafter. President Ulysses S. Grant commissioned Pottier & Stymus Manufacturing Co., a New York maker of furniture for the luxury trade in America, to redecorate his Cabinet Room in 1869. An elaborate conference table, now used as a desk in the president's private office on the Second Floor, was accompanied by this large sofa ornamented with the shield from the Great Seal of the United States.

§

Mantel Clock
about 1869
marble and malachite, France
U.S. Government purchase, 1869

The Grant redecoration of the Cabinet Room included not only an elaborate suite of furniture, but also an imposing French clock with a marble and malachite case that contained a barometer, thermometer, and perpetual calendar. Standing atop the marble mantel, in front of a mirror provided with the Pottier & Stymus office furniture, it kept time for cabinet meetings from 1869 until 1902.

§

Armchair
1902
mahogany
made by A. H. Davenport, Boston
U.S. Government purchase, 1902

This armchair in the English Regency style is one of a set that has been used in the Oval Office since 1930. Originally purchased in 1902 for the offices in the newly built West Wing, these chairs were added to the Oval Office as part of its refurbishment following a West Wing fire on Christmas Eve in 1929 during Herbert Hoover's administration.

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