



Presidential Inaugurations

Every four years, Americans gather to witness the Inauguration of a President. On April 30, 1789 at Federal Hall in New York City, George Washington took the first oath as President of the United States. Changes have come to the ceremony, but many of Washington's precedents continue to this day. Over time, several Presidents have added to an event that culminates in a wondrous display of American pageantry complete with addresses, parades, and Inaugural Balls. Even the day has changed. Presidents were inaugurated on March 4th prior to ratification of the 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, shortening the "lame duck" period after Election Day. Franklin D. Roosevelt's second Inauguration in 1937 thereby became the first to take place on January 20th.



March 4, 1829-Andrew Jackson sworn in during first Inauguration at new East Portico of the Capitol.

Inauguration Day normally starts out with the President-elect's participation in a morning worship service at a Washington church. Many Presidents have chosen to attend St. John Episcopal

Church across Lafayette Square from the White House. Following the service, the President-Elect is taken to the White House where he meets with the outgoing President. By custom, the two men journey together to the U.S. Capitol for the swearing-in ceremony.

Traditionally, the Vice President-elect is sworn in first. Prior to the 1937 Inauguration, the Vice President-elect's oath was taken inside the Senate Chamber and witnessed by the President-elect. Following that, the President-elect was escorted

outside to take his oath of office in full view of the public. The oath to "preserve, protect, and defend" the U.S. Constitution normally is administered by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The President swears his oath upon a family Bible, sometimes accompanied by another one. Some Presidents have taken their Inaugural Oath upon the same Bible that George Washington used during his 1789 Inauguration. The oath is followed by the Inaugural Address, the President's first formal opportunity to speak to the Nation.

Following the new President's Inaugural Address, the former President peacefully steps aside and leaves Washington for his retirement from public life. The celebration then moves away from the Capitol. The Inaugural Parade along Pennsylvania Avenue has been an official tradition since James Madison's 1809 Inauguration, but the parade idea originated after George Washington's triumphal journey to his first Inauguration. The evening celebrations take the form of formal parties, or Inaugural Balls, held throughout Washington, D.C. Some Presidents chose not to have Inaugural Balls, with Franklin Roosevelt preferring to offer formal concerts instead.

Overall, Presidential Inaugurations celebrate not the victory of candidate or political party but the victory of the American



January 20, 1977
Jimmy Carter's Inaugural Parade.

Experiment. Our continuity as a nation for more than two centuries is a thing worthy of celebration as is our long tradition of the peaceful transfer of power. In spite of changes, George Washington would recognize the key elements of tradition that he established in 1789 as they take place in a national capital that he helped to create.

Interesting Inaugural Facts

1789 George Washington inaugurated first President of the United States at Federal Hall in New York City.

1801 Third President Thomas Jefferson became the first President to be inaugurated at the partially completed Capitol Building in Washington, DC. An unofficial Inaugural Parade preceded Jefferson's second Inauguration in 1805.

1825 John Quincy Adams elected to use a book of law rather than a Bible while being sworn in.

1829 Andrew Jackson opened the White House to the public after his Inaugural Parade. The resulting party grew so out of hand that much of the White House furniture was ruined.

1841 William Henry Harrison caught cold at his Inauguration after delivering the longest Inaugural Address. Thirty days later, he became the first President to die in office.

1861 Abraham Lincoln reached out to disaffected Southerners in his first Inaugural Address. Lincoln declared, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

1865 Abraham Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address sought to reconcile the country after four years of Civil War. Lincoln ended speech with the stirring statement, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations." Lincoln's second Inaugural Parade was the first to include formerly enslaved African Americans among the marchers.



March 4, 1865
Abraham Lincoln delivering his
Second Inaugural Address at the
Capitol.

1877 Following a disputed election, Rutherford B Hayes took the oath privately on March 3rd in the Red Room within the White House; a traditional public ceremony followed at the Capitol on March 5th.

1917 Woodrow Wilson's second Inaugural saw the first inclusion of women in the Inauguration Parade.

1921 Warren G. Harding became the first president to ride in a car to and from an Inauguration.

1933 Franklin Roosevelt lifted American spirits amidst the Great Depression with his declaration, "let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

1945 Franklin Roosevelt celebrated his fourth and final Inauguration; he is the only President ever to have done so. The Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution now prevents a President from serving more than two consecutive four year terms.

1949 Harry Truman's Inauguration was the first to be televised.

1961 John F. Kennedy used his Inauguration to encourage Americans to participate in community service; he declared, "And so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

1981 Ronald Reagan's first swearing-in ceremony took place on the Capitol's West Front; the setting was moved from the traditional East Front venue for the first time and remains the preferred location for modern Presidents. Fifty-two hostages held in Iran were released on this day.

2009 The Inauguration of Barack Obama may exceed all others in anticipated crowd numbers; the record attendance to date is 1.2 million visitors for Lyndon Johnson's 1965 Inauguration.

For more information, visit: www.nps.gov/inauguration2009

All images courtesy of Library of Congress