

# WHITE HOUSE HORSES



WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
[www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)

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Throughout history American presidents have appreciated the contribution of horses as workers and as partners and participants in bringing about a better quality of life at the White House. Before automobiles, the presidents, their families, and staff depended on the horse for transportation, communication, and enjoyment. During the 19th century the presidential household needed working horses for delivering messages and for hauling produce and goods. Presidents and their families enjoyed equestrian sports, especially fox hunting and horse racing, and recreational rides on horseback or carriage excursions through the hills of Washington came as a welcome relief from the pressure and public scrutiny at the White House. Beginning with George Washington, many presidents have enjoyed the impressive beauty and skills of these uncomplaining public servants for work, sport, and leisure.

The White House stables, always a hub of activity, progressed from a simple Georgian brick building in 1800 to a High Victorian mansard-roofed structure built for Ulysses S. Grant in 1871. This last stable, expanded in 1891, was extensive enough to house 25 horses, a carriage house, tack and harness rooms and a sitting area for coachmen and stable hands. President Taft converted this stable into a garage and it was demolished in 1911.

Horses can still be seen at the White House during official ceremonies and state occasions, at anniversaries, and funerals, and each December, when a horse-drawn cart delivers the White House Christmas tree to the First Lady.

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The WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION is a nonprofit organization chartered in 1961, to enhance understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the historic White House.

**Please visit the WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION website  
at [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)  
for additional information and images.**

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# WHITE HOUSE HORSE FACTS\*

George Washington was considered one of the best horsemen of his day and enjoyed fox hunting and horse racing.

Thomas Jefferson rode on horseback to the Capitol for his first inauguration. The coach and four that he had ordered did not arrive on time to carry him to the event.

John Quincy Adams recorded in his diary that each morning he rode on horseback about 12 miles in two hours before breakfast.

Zachary Taylor, elected president just after the Mexican-American War, brought his warhorse, Old Whitey, with him to the White House. Visitors depleted the hairs of his tail with frequent requests for a strand as a souvenir.

The White House stables burned during Abraham Lincoln's administration. Lost in the fire were family ponies ridden by his sons, Tad and Willie.

U.S. Grant visited the White House stables every day to inspect his horses, including Cincinnati, Egypt, and Jeff Davis, his mounts during the Civil War.

Teddy Roosevelt and three companions made the 90-mile round trip between the White House and Warrenton, Virginia, on horseback in a heavy ice and snow storm in one day to prove that a test ride required for army officers was not too difficult.

Calvin Coolidge enjoyed a morning ride on his horse "General," but also installed a mechanical horse in the White House to exercise on his busiest days or during inclement weather.

Ronald Reagan was the most avid horseman of modern presidents and rode regularly with Nancy Reagan at his ranch, Rancho Del Cielo in California.

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*"God forbid that I should go to any heaven in which there are no horses"*  
—R. B. Cunningham (1852-1936), British politician, adventurer, and noted horseman to Theodore Roosevelt.