

INTRODUCTION

The President's Park currently consists of approximately eighteen acres surrounding the White House and is used by the president, the first family, and – on special occasions – the public. These grounds are reputedly the oldest continually maintained ornamental landscape in the United States. Various changes have been made to the White House Grounds since the completion of the building in 1800, including the addition of the Rose Garden. Discover the history of these grounds and learn how residents of the White House have utilized this outdoor space for over two centuries.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

Originally, the White House Grounds consisted of approximately eighty acres selected by George Washington. The land was intended to make the President's House a self-sustaining farm with orchards, pastures, barns, and stables. However, the first presidents to reside in the White House, John Adams in 1800 and Thomas Jefferson in 1801, quickly realized that a president's life did not allow time for farming. Jefferson fenced in the grounds to about nine acres of land and greatly scaled back the idea of a full farm to a few vegetable and flower gardens alongside a fruit tree (**Image 1**). Later in the nineteenth century, the fences were extended to include more land. By the 1870s, the White House Grounds had grown to today's eighteen acres.

Within the current grounds lie the North Lawn (**Image 2**) and the South Lawn (**Image 3**). The smaller North Lawn contains a fountain built during Ulysses S. Grant's administration and a variety of trees including buckeyes planted by Ohio native Rutherford B. Hayes. The larger South Lawn slopes downward toward the National Mall and the Washington Monument (**Image 4**). The concept for the sprawling South



Image 4

Lawn was created in 1935 by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. for President Franklin D. Roosevelt (**Image 5**). In the nineteenth century, the grounds also contained a vast complex of greenhouses on the west side of the White House (**Image 6**). However, these greenhouses were demolished in 1902 to make room for the West Wing.

A well-known view from the West Wing is the Rose Garden (**Image 7**). This famous garden, located to the west of the main building and adjacent to the Oval Office, did not always exist. In 1902, during renovations, First Lady Edith Roosevelt created a colonial-style garden on the site of the current Rose Garden (**Image 8**). Mrs. Roosevelt's vision was modified by First Lady Ellen Wilson, Woodrow Wilson's first wife (**Image 9**). The Wilson garden was eventually transformed into the modern Rose Garden by landscape designer Rachel Lambert Mellon for President John F. Kennedy, who wanted a place to hold outdoor ceremonies (**Image 10**).



Image 12

Balancing the Rose Garden on the west, the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden is nestled between the East Wing and the main White House (**Image 11**). Its history mirrors the Rose Garden, with influences from Edith Roosevelt's (**Image 12**) and Ellen Wilson's gardens. Several decades later, the East Garden found new life under the direction of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. At the time of President Kennedy's death in 1963, however, this garden was still a work in progress, unlike the recently finished Rose Garden. To honor the efforts of Mrs. Kennedy to revitalize the White House, its gardens, and the surrounding neighborhood, President Lyndon Johnson and First Lady Lady Bird Johnson dedicated the completed East Garden to Mrs. Kennedy in April 1965 and renamed it the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden (**Image 13**).

The White House Grounds do not exist for purely ornamental reasons. Vegetable gardens have existed on the grounds since the time of Thomas Jefferson. Seed receipts from the Lincoln

administration reveal an extensive list of vegetables and fruits grown on the grounds, including eggplants, cantaloupes, pumpkins, cucumbers, and rhubarb. In the twentieth century, kitchen gardens became less important with modern advancement in food production. However, during World Wars I and II, “victory gardens” – small vegetable gardens meant to supplement food rations – were planted at the White House. In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama revived the vegetable garden to teach children about eating healthy, fresh food (**Image 14**).

Along with planting flowers and vegetables, presidents and their families also use the White House Grounds for recreation and entertainment. Since Theodore Roosevelt’s administration, the grounds have had a tennis court on the South Lawn (**Image 15**).

More recently, the tennis court was renovated so that it can be converted into a basketball court (**Image 16**). Presidents have also played horseshoes (**Image 17**) or enjoyed swimming in the outdoor







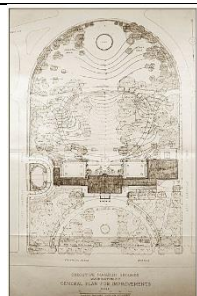
Image 17

pool, built in 1975 for President Gerald R. Ford (**Image 18**). Additionally, first families have hosted garden parties and elaborate State Dinners on the grounds of the White House. For example, President Dwight Eisenhower and First Lady Mamie Eisenhower honored wounded soldiers at a garden party in 1953 (**Image 19**). Finally, the White House Grounds are also used for festive events like the Easter Egg Roll and the National Christmas Tree lighting.

The White House Grounds vary greatly from George Washington’s original vision of a large farm. That original dimensions of around eighty acres still exists as a legal entity, but many of those acres are filled by streets and public buildings, including Lafayette Park, the Treasury Building Grounds, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building Grounds, the Ellipse, Sherman Plaza, and the First Division Monument. These areas constitute President’s Park, an official national park, overseen and maintained by the National Park Service. While the area is appreciated by the first family, the White House Grounds also bring great enjoyment to everyday citizen.








IMAGES

Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	Engraving of South Lawn	1833	Unknown	White House Collection		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112636.tif.info
2	North View of the White House	2008	Bruce White	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112626.tif.info
3	View of the South Grounds	2012	Bruce White	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112861.tif.info
4	Bo on the South Lawn	2012	Bruce White	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112641.tif.info
5	Olmstead Plan	1935	Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr.	National Park Service		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5006-Digital-Library-WHHA/Main%20Index/Plans/1112680.tif.info




THE WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS




6	Greenhouses, West Lawn of White House	Late 19 th Century	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/9969.tif.info
7	Rose Garden	2014	Bruce White	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112709.tif.info
8	Edith Roosevelt's Colonial Garden	Ca. 1902-1903	Unknown	Abby Gunn Baker Papers, The White House		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1369.tif.info
9	Ellen Wilson's Formal Garden	1913	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112652.tif.info
10	The Rose Garden	1961	Rachel Mellon	Bruce White for the White House Historical Association/Oak Spring Garden Library Collection		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112710.tif.info
11	Jacqueline Kennedy Garden Outside the East Colonnade	2010	Bruce White	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112812.tif.info
12	East Garden	1904	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1112661.tif.info

THE WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS



13	Lady Bird Johnson Speaks at Kennedy Garden Dedication	1965	Joseph J. Scherschel	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Lyndon%20B%20Johnson/6096.tif.info
14	Mrs. Obama and Schoolchildren Harvest Vegetables	2013	Chuck Kennedy	Official White House Photo		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Barack%20Obama/1112833.tif.info
15	First Photograph of White House Tennis Courts	Ca. 1902-1909	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Views/1991.jpg.info
16	President Obama Playing Basketball	2014	Pete Souza	Official White House Photo		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Barack%20Obama/1112753.tif.info
17	President George Bush Playing Horseshoes	Ca. 1989-1993	Unknown	George Bush Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/George%20H%20W%20Bush/1112752.tif.info
18	Gerald Ford Backstrokes in the New White House Swimming Pool for Reporters	1975	David Hume Kennerly	Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archive/s/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Gerald%20Ford/1626.tif.info



19	President and Mrs. Eisenhower Greet Soldiers	1953	Unknown	White House Collection		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Dwight%20Eisenhower/1112740.tif.info
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Video: “Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Park System of the Nation’s Capital.” [Click here.](#)
- Collection: White House in Bloom by the White House Historical Association. Click [here.](#)
- Podcast: “The 1600 Sessions: The White House Gardens” by the White House Historical Association. [Listen here.](#)
- Article: “The President’s Park” by Lucinda Prout Janke for the White House Historical Association. [Read here.](#)
- Essay: “A Beautiful Spot Capable of Every Improvement” by Jonathan Pliska for the White House Historical Association. [Read here.](#)



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

For Younger Learners:

- First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy created a scrapbook of pressed flowers from the Rose Garden. Pick fresh, young flowers on a sunny morning that you'd like to press and keep and, with adult help, press them between sheets of wax paper with a hot iron. *More detailed instructions available in the Anywhere Activity: Flower Pressing.*
- Vegetable gardens have been grown on and off on the White House Grounds since Thomas Jefferson's presidency (1801-1809). For a science project, grow a small box garden on the windowsill of your home or see if you can start a small garden in your yard, if possible.

For Older Learners:

- There are many important buildings and monuments located outside the White House Grounds in President's Park. Pick one of these monuments and research the history of the person, organization, etc., and analyze how it is connected to the White House and the presidency. Present your findings to friends or family.
- President Rutherford B. Hayes was born in Ohio. He chose to plant the Ohio state tree, the buckeye, on the North Lawn of the White House. Research your state, district, or territory's flower and/or tree.
 - Take the activity another step by researching whether that tree or flower would grow well in the climate of Washington, D.C. Compare and contrast the plants that grow well in Washington, D.C., versus where your school is located. How are the two climates different?