

LINCOLN LORE

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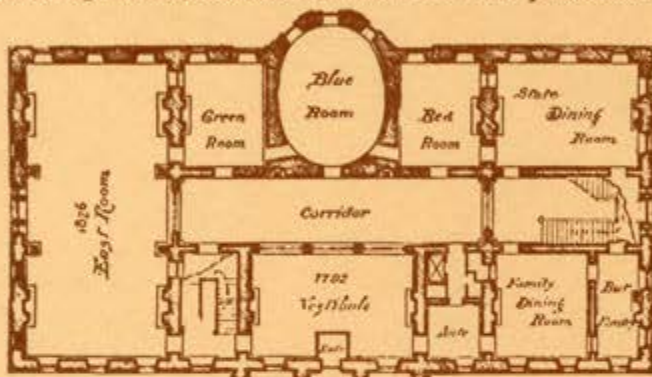
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THE WHITE HOUSE—1861 TO 1865

The Executive Mansion which the Lincoln family occupied for a little over four years is most often visualized from an exterior viewpoint. In 1814 when the British attacked the City of Washington the building was partly destroyed. Upon being restored the walls were painted white to cover the unsightly ravages of the flames, hence its name, the White House.

It is the interior of "The President's House," so designated in appropriation bills, as it appears between 1861 and 1865 which is of most interest to the Lincoln student. The arrangement of rooms, their use, and the outstanding incidents associated with them are presented in



Main Floor

this bulletin. There is also made available plans of the main floor and the second story which, with a few minor details, reveals the arrangement of rooms during the Lincoln administration.

There were 31 rooms in the White House of Lincoln's time. The basement contained eleven rooms and they were used as kitchens, pantries, and butler's quarters. All of the rooms on the main floor were devoted to state purposes with the exception of the family dining room. On the second floor the rooms in the west wing were used as chambers by the President's family and most of the rooms in the east wing were utilized for executive offices and reception rooms.

The great room in the White House, then as now, was the East Room, and it was here that the body of Abraham Lincoln lay in state after his assassination in 1865. This room with its four marble mantle pieces, three mammoth chandeliers and eight large mirrors contained also the oil paintings of several past presidents. A contemporary writer describes the carpet on the East Room floor as follows: "The most exquisite carpet ever upon the East Room was a velvet one chosen by Mrs. Lincoln. Its ground was a pale green and in effect looked as if the ocean in gleaming and transparent waves were tossing roses at your feet."

Of the three rooms on the main floor named for the colors which predominated in the decorating and furnishings of the rooms, the Blue Room, elliptical in shape, is one of the most excellently proportioned rooms in the country. It was in this room that the President and his wife most often received their guests. The Red Room was the usual drawing room of the Lincoln family and it contained a portrait of Washington which Dolly Madison cut out of the frame to save from the British. The fact that Mrs. Madison's first husband was a Todd, made the picture of special interest to Mary Todd Lincoln. The Green Room is well known to Lincoln students, as it was within these walls that Willie Lincoln's body was placed after his death. From this time on Mrs. Lincoln is said never again to have entered the Green Room.

In the west wing on the main floor were the two dining halls, one known as the state dining room and the other

known as the family dining room. The furniture in the state dining room dated back to the year of Washington and Jefferson, and on one of the marble mantels stood an antique clock and the accompanying candlesticks of the Madison period.

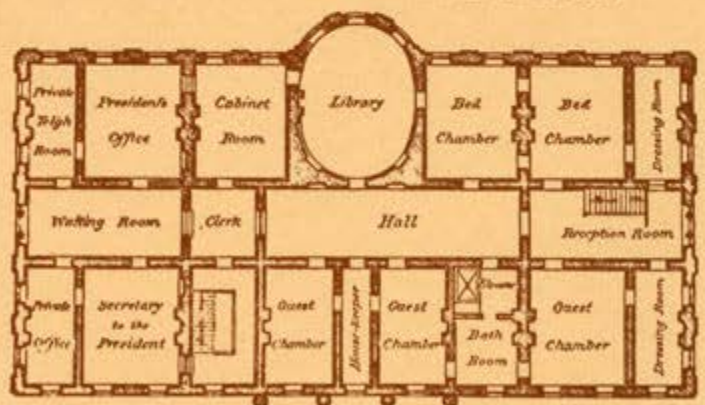
The Lincoln family had very little privacy, as the second floor at the time was as freely open to visitors as the first floor today. The beautiful room designated as the library, directly over the Blue Room, was often used by the Lincolns as a sitting room. It contained very few books until the Filmore administration, when about \$2,000 was appropriated for their purchase. Although Buchanan added some books to the library, when the Lincolns arrived they found a very meager selection of literature available.

Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln's room faced the south in the west wing, and across the hall in one of the guest rooms Willie Lincoln passed away. It is said that Mrs. Lincoln had the same aversion against entering this room afterwards that she had against entering the Green Room. Robert and Tad occupied another guest room in the same wing adjacent to the one in which Willie died.

After the death of her husband, Ben Hardin Helm, a Confederate general, Emily Todd Helm, half-sister of Mrs. Lincoln, was invited to the White House. She described in her diary the beautiful state bedroom as follows: "The room I occupy had been fitted up for the visit of the Prince of Wales. The purple hangings seem gloomy and funeral although brightened with yellow cords."

The sleeping apartment of the two secretaries of Mr. Lincoln, Nicolay and Hay, was the small room in the extreme northeast corner of the second story, designated on the plat as a private office.

The executive offices in Lincoln's day consisted of three rooms located in the east wing on the second floor facing the south. They are correctly located on the chart with the exception of the secretary's office which was a small room in the southeast corner which later became a private telegraph office. It will be noted that the secretaries were not then placed in the line of approach to the President where they would first come in contact with the visitors but were at the extreme end of this suite.



Second Floor

One observer suggests that the stairway, as well as the long hall which was later divided into waiting rooms and clerk's room, was often crowded with people waiting to see Mr. Lincoln, so his office might just as well have been entered from the street floor. The cabinet room next to the President's office was pressed into service as a reception room.

While the White House itself has undergone little change as far as room arrangements are concerned on the first and second floors, there have been additions made both interior and exterior which have greatly improved the facility of the President's House.