

# Inaugural Luncheon

After the newly elected President has taken the oath of office and delivered his Inaugural address, he will be escorted to Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol for the traditional Inaugural luncheon, hosted by the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC). While this tradition dates as far back as 1897, when the Senate Committee on Arrangements gave a luncheon for President McKinley and several other guests at the U.S. Capitol, it did not begin in its current form until 1953. That year, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mrs. Eisenhower and fifty other guests of the JCCIC dined on creamed chicken, baked ham, and potato puffs in the now-restored Old Senate Chamber.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Presidents left the Capitol after the Inauguration ceremonies and traveled to the White House for a luncheon prepared by the outgoing President and First Lady. After the luncheon, the President and his party would view the parade from a stand erected in front of the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue.

As the parade grew larger over the years, and lasted later and later into the afternoon, organizers began to look for ways to hasten its start. In 1897, they proposed that the President go directly from the Capitol to the reviewing stand, and have lunch there, if he desired. Instead, the Presidential party dined in the Capitol as guests of the Senate Committee on Arrangements. In 1901, the President again took his lunch at the Capitol, and the parade delays continued. In 1905, the luncheon returned to the White House, again in the hopes that the parade could start earlier. Eventually, the organizers turned their focus to shortening the parade, rather than the luncheon.

As the twentieth century progressed, the White House luncheons became more and more elaborate. In 1945, President and Mrs. Roosevelt played host to over two thousand guests in what would be the last White House post-inaugural luncheon. In 1949, Secretary of the Senate Leslie Biffle hosted a small lunch for President Truman in his Capitol reception room. They dined on South Carolina turkey, Smithfield Ham, potato salad and pumpkin pie. And in 1953, the JCCIC began its current tradition of hosting a luncheon for the President, Vice President and their spouses, Senate leaders, the JCCIC members and other invited guests.

Since then, the JCCIC has organized a luncheon celebration at eight Presidential Inaugurations. Often featuring cuisine reflecting the home states of the new President and Vice President, as well as the theme of the Inauguration, the luncheon program includes speeches, gift presentations from the JCCIC and toasts to the new administration.