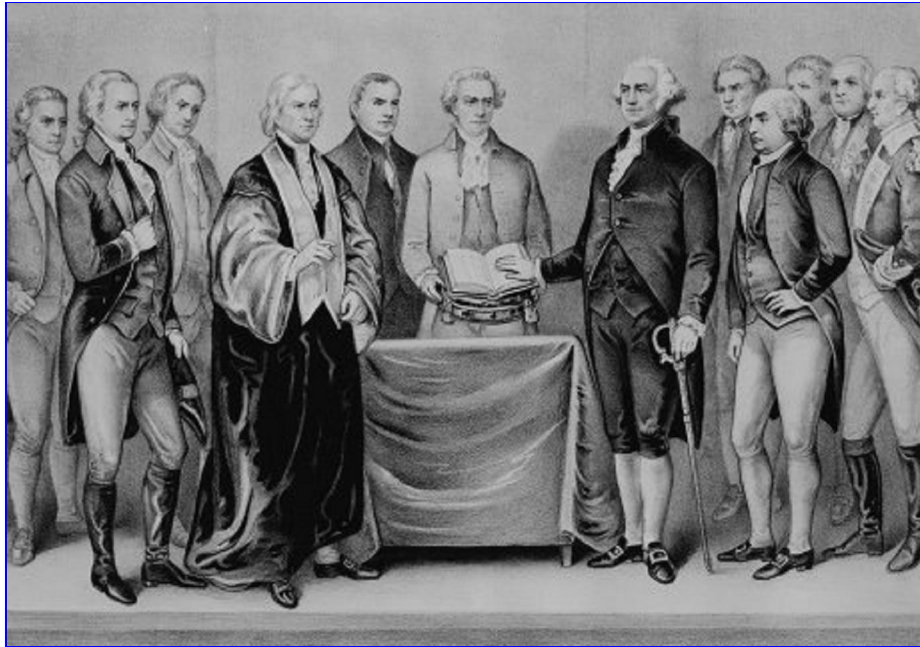


# President's Swearing-In Ceremony



*"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."*

*—Presidential oath of office, Article II, Section 1, United States Constitution*

Proceedings associated with the Presidential elections and Inaugurations, almost routine after two centuries, were entirely new and untried following the Constitutional Convention of 1787. The Constitution provides that the President be elected through an electoral college, with membership equal to the number of Senators and Representatives from each state. It authorizes Congress to

determine when elections are held, when the Electoral College meets, and when the new President takes the oath of office. The Constitution also requires that the President must be a native-born citizen of the United States, have lived in this country for at least fourteen years and have attained the age of thirty-five. It even specifies the oath of office that the new President should swear or affirm. Beyond that, the Constitution says nothing about the Inaugural ceremony.

The first Inauguration of George Washington occurred on April 30, 1789, in front of New York's Federal Hall. Our nation's first President took the oath of office on a balcony overlooking Wall Street. With the ceremony complete, the crowd below let out three big cheers and President Washington returned to the Senate chamber to deliver his brief Inaugural address. He called upon "That Almighty Being who rules over the universe" to assist the American people in finding "liberties and happiness" under "a government instituted by themselves."

Four years later, on March 4, 1793, Washington's second Inauguration happened in Philadelphia, where the government had taken up temporary residence while a permanent capital was being built along the Potomac. The President took his oath in the small Senate chamber on the second floor of Congress Hall, a Georgian-style structure just west of Independence Hall. In contrast to his elaborate first Inauguration, this ceremony was a simple affair. Amidst a room crammed with dignitaries, Washington gave the shortest Inaugural address on record—just 135 words—and repeated the oath of office, administered by Supreme Court Justice William Cushing.

## First Inauguration at the U.S. Capitol

By March of 1801, the seat of the U.S. government had moved to Washington, D.C. The streets were muddy, almost impassable, and

overgrown with bushes. Crude arrangements for the workers charged with constructing buildings for the federal government scarred the landscape. At the time, the Capitol Building comprised just one wing, which housed the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Library of Congress and the Supreme Court, all under one roof. On March 4, 1801, President-elect Thomas Jefferson walked with few attendants and little fanfare to the Capitol Building from his nearby lodgings at a boarding house to become the first President to be inaugurated in the nation's new capital city. Upon entering the Senate chamber, now the Old Supreme Court Chamber, Jefferson immediately took the oath of office administered by Chief Justice John Marshall and addressed the audience gathered in the Senate chamber. After his Inaugural address he finished his day with a meal at the boarding house. But for a few occasions, the Inauguration ceremonies for all future Presidents and Vice Presidents would take place in the City of Washington.

Andrew Jackson's Inauguration on March 4, 1829 was the first of 35 held on the east front of the Capitol. Though Jackson's second Inauguration in 1833 took place inside the House chamber because of his ill health and bad weather, Presidents from Martin Van Buren in 1837 to Theodore Roosevelt in 1905 were sworn into office on the Capitol's east front. In 1909 a raging blizzard forced William Howard Taft's ceremony indoors to the Senate chamber.

## The Joint Committee is Formed

The turn of the century brought a milestone worth noting—the formation of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. Until the twentieth century, the Inaugural ceremonies had been handled exclusively by the United States Senate. In 1901, one hundred years after the Inauguration of Thomas Jefferson, the Joint Committee was formed to plan and conduct the Inauguration ceremonies at the U.S. Capitol. Senator Marcus A. Hanna, a

Republican from Ohio, became the first chairman, responsible for President William McKinley's second Inauguration.

On March 4, 1913, Woodrow Wilson resumed use of the east front for his Inauguration. The ceremony continued to be held there until Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented fourth Inauguration on January 20, 1945. With the nation and the President weary after four years of war, Roosevelt chose to have a simple, low-key ceremony on the south portico of the White House.

In 1949, Harry Truman's Inauguration saw the return of the ceremonies to the Capitol's east front, where they remained through the Inauguration of Jimmy Carter in 1977.

## Moving to the West Front

Ronald Reagan's 1981 Inauguration was the first held on the west front of the Capitol. Seeking to minimize construction costs and improve visibility for a larger number of spectators, Congress shifted the ceremony from its traditional location of the east front. Although Ronald Reagan's second Inauguration, on January 21, 1985, was forced indoors to the Capitol Rotunda because of bitterly cold weather, the Inaugurations of George Bush in 1989, Bill Clinton in 1993 and 1997 and George W. Bush in 2001 continued the west front tradition.

## More Somber Swearing-In Events

Sadly, not all Presidential Inaugurals have been stately, formal ceremonies, or happy occasions. Eight Vice Presidents have taken the oath of office upon the death of a President, while another was sworn in following a Presidential resignation. John Tyler was at his home in Williamsburg, Virginia, when he received the news that President

William Henry Harrison had died. Tyler immediately took a coach to Washington. The next day, April 6, 1841, Tyler was sworn in as President at the Indian Queen Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue. Chief Justice William Cranch of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia administered the oath to Tyler, as he did nine years later to Millard Fillmore, following the death of President Zachary Taylor. On July 10, 1850, Vice President Fillmore took the oath in a public ceremony in the House of Representatives chamber.

President Abraham Lincoln died early on the morning of April 15, 1865, and shortly afterwards Vice President Andrew Johnson was sworn in quietly at Kirkwood House, in Washington, by Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. At 2:00 a.m. on September 20, 1881, Chester Alan Arthur took the oath at his home on Lexington Avenue, in New York City. Two days later, President Arthur repeated the oath in the Vice President's Room in the Capitol, in the presence of former Presidents Grant and Hayes. When William McKinley died, on September 14, 1901, Theodore Roosevelt took the oath in the home of Ansley Wilcox, in Buffalo, New York. News of President Harding's death reached Vice President Calvin Coolidge at his family's homestead in Plymouth, Vermont in the small hours of the morning on August 3, 1923. By the light of a kerosene lamp, Coolidge took the oath from his father, Colonel John Calvin Coolidge, a farmer, notary public, and justice of the peace. On August 21, Coolidge repeated the ceremony in his suite at the Willard Hotel in Washington.

Harry Truman took his oath as President in the Cabinet Room at the White House on the evening of April 12, 1945, following the death of Franklin Roosevelt. On November 22, 1963, in a crowded cabin on Air Force One, at Love Field in Dallas, Texas, Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as President after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Judge Sarah T. Hughes, who administered the oath that day, became the first woman to swear in a President. Most recently, when President Richard Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974, Vice President Gerald R. Ford took the oath of office in a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, becoming the ninth Vice President to complete

an unexpired Presidential term.

Although Inaugural traditions have changed through the years, their fundamental premise remains unchanged and unwavering. The American Presidential Inauguration Ceremony, with its speeches and attendant festivities, has represented both national renewal and continuity of leadership for the past two hundred years and will continue to do so into the future.