

*Deck the Halls*  
AND *Welcome All*



HOLIDAYS AT THE WHITE HOUSE 2006

**T**hank you for celebrating with us as we “Deck the Halls and Welcome All” at the White House!

Around the world, sparkling decorations reflect the joys of the holiday season. Eager children trim the tree to welcome presents under it. Sweethearts hang mistletoe to welcome a holiday kiss. Grandparents prepare cookies and stockings — and plenty of hugs — to welcome beloved grandchildren. And everyone wears a smile to welcome the holiday spirit.

Throughout our nation’s history, presidents and their families have welcomed many guests to a White House dressed up for yuletide affairs both merry and momentous. As you stroll through this year’s decorations, we invite you to enjoy the historic holiday memories you’ll find in this booklet.

Our thanks go to the Executive Residence staff, floral designers, and all who’ve dedicated their energy to decking these halls — and to helping us welcome one and all to a very festive White House!

With best wishes for a joyous season,

GEORGE BUSH    LAURA BUSH





## EAST WING

The holiday memories from 2006 begin at the East Entrance, where ten-foot-tall Nutcrackers join everyone at the White House in extending a merry welcome. Festive evergreen wreaths adorn the windows throughout the East Colonnade.

Official Christmas cards from the permanent White House collection are displayed in the East Foyer, along with the original oil painting used for the 2006 card. The painting, by Texas artist James Blake, depicts the glowing windows of the Oval Office as seen from the South Lawn.

An original painting by Pamela Carroll, whose illustrations brighten this holiday booklet, sits on the easel. Ms. Carroll — a nationally renowned, award-winning realist painter — is the illustrator of several children's books, including *One Nation: America by the Numbers* and *S Is for Star: A Christmas Alphabet*.

The East Wing is also home to the Family Movie Theater. Like many Americans, first families enjoy curling up to watch holiday classics. In 1978, the Movie Theater screened *It's a Wonderful Life* for President and Mrs. Carter and their daughter Amy; in 1979, the family took in *Miracle on 34th Street*. And last Christmas season, the Theater welcomed Jenna Bush — the daughter of President and Mrs. Bush — and her class of third graders to view *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.



## GROUND FLOOR CORRIDOR

You know Dasher and Dancer, and Prancer and Vixen — Comet and Cupid, and Donner and Blitzen. And surely you recall the most famous reindeer of all! An ivy topiary Rudolph, complete with red nose, prances beneath the portrait of former First Lady Hillary Clinton. His fellow reindeer line the Ground Floor Corridor. Further down the hall, they have three volunteers eager to help pull Santa's sleigh: First Cat Willie, and President and Mrs. Bush's Scottish terriers, Barney and Miss Beazley.

Santa's sleigh won't stop, though, unless children are snug in their beds. On a December night in 1903, hundreds of children may have missed Santa Claus — because they were cavorting at the White House instead. That year, President Theodore Roosevelt's brood threw a Christmas bash for 550 Washington children — a party that was promised to last three hours. The guests' first hour was filled with a concert, music, and dancing in the East Room; during the second, President and Mrs. Roosevelt marched the children to the State Dining Room for treats and punch.

Once the youngsters were filled up with sweets, the adults realized the party still had an hour to go — but there were no planned activities left. So while their mothers were whisked away to the parlors, hundreds of children were unleashed on the East Room, allowed to make merry to their hearts' content.

The children's maids and nannies spent the party down here in the tranquility of the Ground Floor — surely thrilled to take refuge from the “revelry” upstairs.



## EAST ROOM

Today the East Room is draped with snowy greens and red ribbons. Carnations bloom in vermeil containers atop the mantels. Christmas trees are trimmed with silvered-glass ornaments, painted in red and fuchsia.

For years the East Room has been home to the White House crèche, a gift to the White House in 1967 from Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard, Jr., of Far Hills, New Jersey. The figures representing the Nativity are made of carved wood and terra cotta, and were crafted in Naples, Italy, in the late 18th century.

Fortunately, these delicate figures were nowhere near the East Room on a winter night in 1835. In her memoirs, President Jackson's grand-niece, Mary Emily Donelson Wilcox, recalls one of the earliest East Room holiday celebrations: a Christmas "frolic" for Washington children.



As the young revelers arrived that evening, they found a table laden with fruits and vegetables, a pine tree, a decorative reindeer — and a pile of cotton “snowballs.” Behind their soft exterior, these “snowballs” concealed a surprise: Christmas crackers, much like those set off during British holiday celebrations. The Jacksons’ young guests soon began pulling apart the snowballs — setting off the caps, and sending fluffs of cotton all over the East Room.

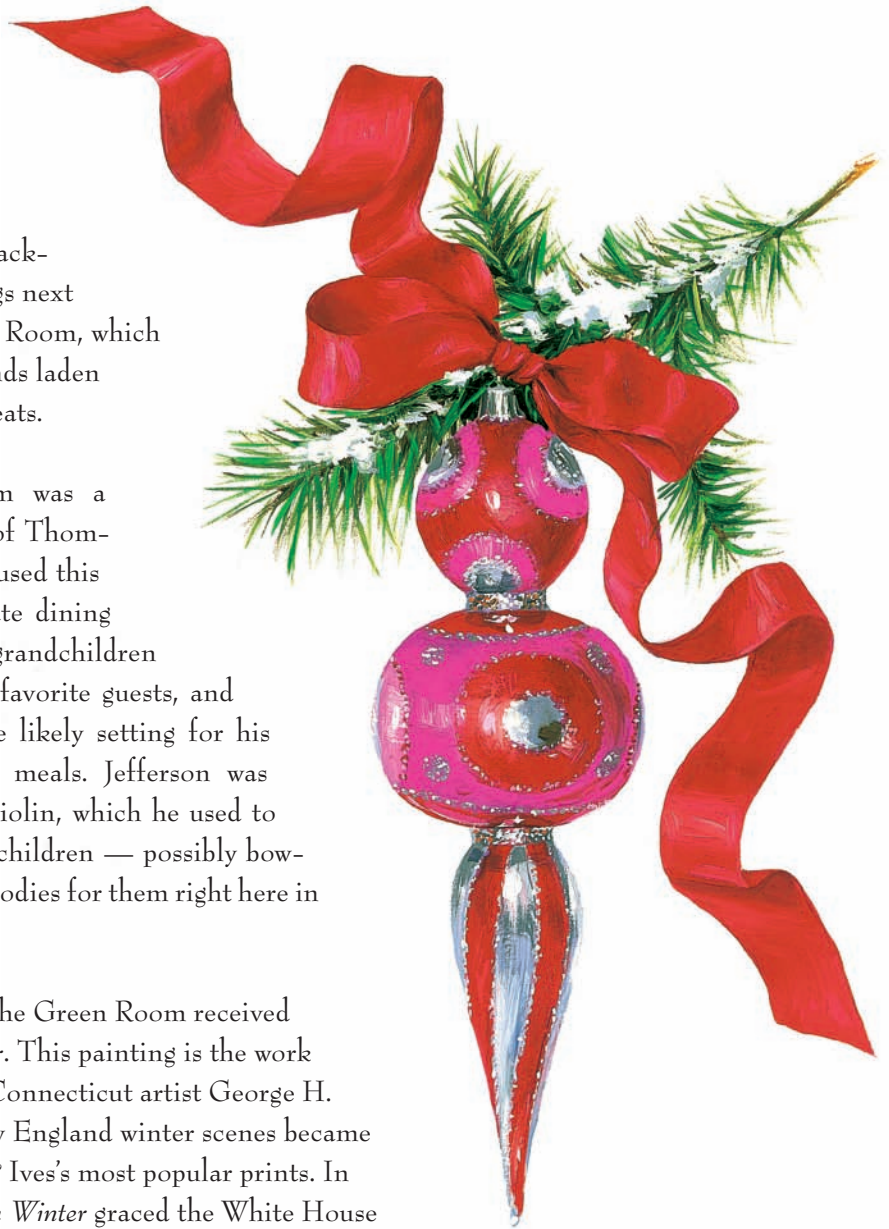
That winter was one of the warmest on record in Washington, leaving little opportunity for boys and girls to play in the snow. So children at the Jackson “frolic” made up for lost time — by waging a tremendous cotton snowball fight inside the White House!

## GREEN ROOM

Today, President Jackson's portrait hangs next door in the Green Room, which is draped in garlands laden with Christmas treats.

The Green Room was a preferred retreat of Thomas Jefferson, who used this space as his private dining quarters. His grandchildren were some of his favorite guests, and this space was the likely setting for his family Christmas meals. Jefferson was also fond of his violin, which he used to play for his grandchildren — possibly bowing Christmas melodies for them right here in this parlor.

Many years later, the Green Room received *Farmyard in Winter*. This painting is the work of 19th-century Connecticut artist George H. Durrie, whose New England winter scenes became some of Currier & Ives's most popular prints. In 1975, *Farmyard in Winter* graced the White House Christmas card of President and Mrs. Gerald Ford.





## BLUE ROOM

The official White House Christmas tree is always the holiday highlight of the Blue Room. This year's tree — an 18-foot, 6-inch Douglas fir — was presented to President and Mrs. Bush by Francis and Margaret Botek and their children, of the Crystal Spring Tree Farm in Lehigh, Pennsylvania. The Botek family won this honor by being named the 2006 National Grand Champion Growers by the National Christmas Tree Association. This year's tree sparkles with crystals and ornaments of iridescent glass.

In years past, New Year's Day was the most important date on the White House holiday social calendar. The president hosted receptions for the Cabinet, the Supreme Court, the Congress, the military, the diplomatic corps, and the public. The first printed invitation for a White House New Year's reception dates back to 1801.





One of the most momentous New Year's Days in our country's history was January 1, 1863. Abraham Lincoln spent that morning at a public reception in the Blue Room, shaking hands with about six thousand people. Afterward, he went upstairs to attend to more historic business: signing the Emancipation Proclamation.

But President Lincoln's own hands still shook from the morning's exertions, and he had to pause before putting his pen to the document. "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper," he said. "If my name ever goes into history it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it. If my hand trembles when I sign the Proclamation, all who examine the document hereafter will say, 'He hesitated.'" The president waited for his hands to steady, and then slowly and firmly signed "Abraham Lincoln."



## RED ROOM

The hostess of many early White House New Year's receptions was First Lady Dolley Madison. Her portrait hangs above the northwest door, brightened by the Red Room's holiday decorations: gold-etched ornaments; silvered containers filled with poinsettia; and the cranberry tree, a White House tradition dating back to 1975.

Given the Red Room's cheer today, it is difficult to imagine the gravity of Christmas Eve 1941. Just a few weeks earlier, Imperial Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, drawing the United States into the Second World War. The White House — and the president's traditional lighting of the National Community Christmas Tree — were possible air-raid targets. The Secret Service asked Franklin Roosevelt to cancel the ceremony altogether.

President Roosevelt compromised by moving the tree-lighting to the south grounds of the White House. From inside this room you can see the south balcony, where President Roosevelt and a visiting Winston Churchill addressed 15,000 people who had gathered in the darkness.



President Roosevelt delivered holiday remarks to the nation — but the most stirring words came from Prime Minister Churchill.

Great Britain had already been at war for two years, enduring the Blitz of London. Yet the prime minister was determined that Christmas should be a time for rejoicing.

“Let the children have their night of fun and laughter. Let the gifts of Father Christmas delight their play,” he said. “Let us grown-ups share to the full in their unstinted pleasures before we turn again to the stern task and formidable years that lie before us, resolved that by our

sacrifice and daring, these same children shall not be robbed of their inheritance or denied their right to live in a free and decent world.”

“And so,” he concluded in an address broadcast around the world, “in God’s mercy, a happy Christmas to you all.” The Marine Band played Christmas music, and finished the ceremonies with the “Star Spangled Banner” and “God Save the King.”

## STATE DINING ROOM

The State Dining Room welcomes the Christmas season with snow-dusted garlands, a forest of illuminated trees, and boughs of greens cascading from the sconces.

The *pièce de résistance* is the gingerbread White House. Every year, White House chefs combine weeks of work, and about 300 pounds of gingerbread and chocolate, to create an edible masterpiece. In a command performance for 2006, former White House pastry chef Roland Mesnier has designed a tasty southern view. More than 800 hand-piped icing snowflakes swirl overhead.

In 1929, President Herbert Hoover and his family welcomed friends to the State Dining Room for Christmas Eve dinner. But the meal was interrupted when the chief usher rushed in — to tell President Hoover that the West Wing was on fire!



The men hurried onto the West Terrace, where they saw fire trucks already battling the blaze. They bolted toward the West Wing, hoping to save the presidential files. One staff member ran to his office to rescue the puppy he had bought his son for Christmas. Another rushed to the Oval Office with President Hoover's son, who pulled the drawers from his father's desk to salvage the president's personal files.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hoover stayed in the State Dining Room, shepherding the women and children toward the Christmas tree at the room's south end. The first lady gathered her guests around the tree, distributing gifts, telling stories, and replacing chaos with Christmas cheer. The next Christmas, Mrs. Hoover gave toy fire trucks to children who had been at the dinner, as reminders of the great Christmas Eve fire of 1929. Today, the mementoes are part of the collections at the Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa.

#### CROSS HALL AND GRAND FOYER

The Cross Hall is adorned with glass garlands, spiral topiaries, and trees of red poinsettias. Holly and berries decorate the pier tables, and garlands of pine and ribbon descend the grand staircase.





The Grand Foyer is best known for welcoming guests with the sounds of the season. At White House holiday receptions, the Marine Band entertains with joyful Christmas melodies.



Many a Christmas tune has been played on the Steinway piano, brought to the White House in 1938. One of the most popular songs that year was “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” penned by Irving Berlin. Four years later, the songwriter would go on to compose one of the most beloved Christmas tunes of all time: “White Christmas.”



Over the years, the White House has been the scene of many beloved Christmas memories. And now you’ve become part of White House holiday history as well. May this season’s visit to the White House be one of your merry memories!



## THE WHITE HOUSE VISITOR CENTER

During the holiday season, examples of this year's White House decorations will be on display at the Visitor Center, located inside the north end of the Department of Commerce building, between 14th and 15th Streets at 1450 Pennsylvania Avenue NW. The Center is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. You will find interesting exhibits, tourist information, and helpful Park Rangers to answer your questions.

## IN APPRECIATION

The White House is grateful to illustrator Pamela Carroll for creating the artwork for this holiday booklet.

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" lyrics by Johnny Marks.

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