Washington: General Overview Of White House

The sight for the White House was chosen in 1791 by George Washington, who was our first president. After a design competition, a plan submitted by James Hoban was used. It took eight years to construct the building at a cost of $232,372 and President John Adams moved into the house which was unfinished in 1800. In 1814 it was set afire by and the original designer was asked to rebuild the house. In 1917, President James Monroe moved in and during his term, the South Protico was built. The North Portico was constructed during the term of Andrew Jackson. Years later, plans were made to expand the White House or build and entirely new one, but that never happened.

During President Theodore Roosevelt's term, he began a major renovation of the entire White House. His plans were carried out by a famous New York architectural firm and this included the construction of the West Wing, which are the president's offices. While he was president, William Howard Taft, had the Oval Office built inside of the new West Wing. In years to come, the White House began falling apart. President Harry S. Truman ordered renovations which called for redoing everything on the inside of the White House. The Truman's moved back into the newly completed White House in 1952.

Beginning with President John Adams, every president has lived in White House. In more modern times, President Jimmy Carter installed the first computer and laser printer into the White House, while President George H. W. Bush had the internet installed during his presidency. The White House has 142 rooms on six floors with 55.000 square feet of floor space. There are 35 bathrooms and 6 floors within the White House. The White House contains 412 doors, 147 windows, 28 fireplaces, 8 staircases, and 3 elevators. 570 gallons of paint is needed to cover the outside of the White House. It received its official name "White House" from President Theodore Roosevelt in 1901.

Over the years, there have been increased security measures put in place to protect the White House and the president of the United States. The United States Secret Service are the ones who primarily protect the White House and the president. Since the September 11th attacks on our country, the air space around the White House has been restricted as well. Even with these things put in place, there are times when people make attempts to enter the White House without the correct access. In more recent times, many of these incidents are for social media attention and cases where the person or persons have had mental issues. The United States Secret Service has been clear that in many of these cases, the people are harmless and don't pose a really serious threat to the president. The White House is surrounded by a fence and this prevents easy access to the grounds and also prevents someone with a vehicle from driving within close range to cause harm or damage. Because of the increasing numbers of threats from different sources, there have been talks about increasing the height of and attaching sensors to the fence which surrounds the White House. I can recall that when we visited Washington, D.C., we had to write to our local senator in order to gain access. My parents mentioned that we had to provide our names, address, and other information. Now that I am older, I guess that this was needed so that the Secret Service could conduct a background check to be sure that we were not a threat to the president or anyone who works in and around the White House. A few weeks prior to our visit to the White House, the federal government had

shut down and this prevented us from actually going into the White House on an official visit. We were able to stand near the fence that I mentioned earlier, but it didn't have the same affect that we would have gained by actually going into the building. I can remember that the White House visit was one of the only places that was actually shut down at that time because we were able to visit many other historical places around the Washington, D.C. area without any issues.

The Liberty Bell, which was originally known as the State House bell was housed in the Pennsylvania State House. The building is known as Independence Hall today, but the original bell was ordered in 1751 from a London company. During its first test ring, the bell cracked because the metal used was too soft. It was recast twice by two blacksmiths and a new one was formed on the spot. The bell had two important uses, to call lawmakers to meetings and to call the town together to hear news being read in the middle of the town or if there was a cause for alarm within the town. There is no documentation of how the crack in the Liberty Bell developed in the 1840's, but many suspect it was because of over 90 years of hard use. There was one attempt to repair the bell, but it was unsuccessful and another crack developed. If you were to look closely at the bell, you would see the first crack which is very recognizable from history books and photos. The other crack is within the writing which is near the top of the bell. As a result, no one alive today has heard the bell ring. The writing on the Liberty Bell comes from the Bible: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof." During the Revolutionary War, the writing wasn't really important, but after the war, people seeking to end slavery in the America were inspired by the message.

In 1835, the first reference of the "Liberty Bell" was within an anti-slavery document, but the name didn't stick. Through a popular fictional story written in 1847, many Americans became familiar with the bell and it began to be recognized as a symbol of pride. In the later 1800's it would travel across the country to serve as a reminder of the fight for independence. While traveling from place to place around the country, some thieves made off with small parts of the bell and after a while, the town no longer accepted requests to have the bell on display in other areas. From that point on, it was housed in a newly created Liberty Bell Center and visitors can view the exhibit free of charge.

At the time it was ordered, the bell weighed 2,080 pounds and is made of bronze. There is no evidence that it rang on July 4 of 1776, but it was rung to mark the first reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Stamp Act tax and its repeal. The Liberty Bell Center is open to the public and you can view the famous cracked bell and other exhibits.

The Changing of the Guard takes place from October 1 to March 31, every hour on the hour. If you visit from April 1through September 30, you will have more chances to view the change because it takes place on the half hour as well. During the change, you have the relief commander, the relieving sentinel, and the retiring sentinel at the path in front of the Tomb. They all salute the Unknown soldiers who have been given the Medal of Honor as a symbol of their service to our country. Once all of the orders have been given, the new sentinel walks 90 steps a minute in rhythm. The Tomb Guard makes 21 steps behind the Tomb and then faces east and north for 21 seconds each. This is then repeated as he/she moves down the mat and places him/herself between the Tomb and the visitors. The number 21 is used because in the military it is the highest honor that someone can be given, a 21-gun salute. While on duty when the Tomb soldiers are not walking, they are housed in a room below the display. This time is used to study about the cemetery, clean weapons, and help other guards get ready to relieve

those on duty on the outside of the Tomb.

The Tomb is guarded all day and all night, every day of the year and in any weather. All of the sentinels do this for free and are members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment. In order to serve as a guard, they must be in excellent physical condition, have a clean military record, and must be between 5’10” and 6’4” for males or 5’8” and 6’2” for females with the right weight and body build. It usually takes about two weeks to determine if a candidate will be able guard the tomb. During this time, they are required to memorize the history of the Arlington National Cemetery. This information must be repeated word for word just to receive a walk during one of the guard changes. If they can get past this stage, then they will enter into the “new soldier” training session. During this phase, they will learn more about the history of Arlington National Cemetery, but they must also memorize the grave locations of about 300 veterans! In addition to this, they learn about the ceremony itself and how to keep their uniforms and weapons in tip top condition. In order earn this right to wear the Tomb Guard Identification Badge, a sentinel must pass several tests and then finally pass a 100 question test with a 95% or better. The badge is not a temporary award and can become permanent once the person has served for nine months. If someone does this honorably, they can then wear the award for the rest of his/her military career.

The regiment contains three reliefs. In each one, there are six sentinels and one relief commander. Each relief is divided by height so that when visitors view the ceremony, they all look similar. The rotation is every hour in the winter and at night, and every half-hour during the summer days. The schedule for staff is first day on, one day off, second day on, one day off, third day on, four days off. And then this is repeated again.

The members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry or Old Guard have served many different roles within the Army since 1984. They are the Army’s official ceremonial unit and escort the president. They also provide military funeral escorts at Arlington National Cemetery and participate in various parades. If there is a national emergency, they protect Washington, D.C. Even with a very busy schedule, they still have to find the time to prepare for missions just as other soldiers do. Because of all of the training that they must go through, the soldiers of The Old Guard have experience with normal or traditional military duties and also have a lot of training as military police if the need should come up. To set them apart from other Army units, the members of this infantry wear a black and tan “buff strap” on the left shoulder and this serves as a reminder of the knapsack strap used by the previous members of this unit to display pride in looks and performance that have been the custom of The Old Guard for over two hundred years.

The area where Arlington National Cemetery is located once belonged to the wife of Robert E. Lee. Her grandfather, George Washington Parke Custis, was the grandson of Martha Washington and was adopted by our first president, George Washington. During the Civil War, Union troops easily took over the area, but for years after the war, legal battles between the government and the Lees continued for control of the area.

As the war was going on, taxes needed to be paid on the land that was captured, but the Lees were unable to return to their home area to make payment. The property was put up for sale and the federal government purchased it for $26,800. As the war continued, many soldiers began to die and the search for a suitable place to bury the growing number of dead began.

The first soldier buried there was Private William Christman in May of 1864. In the following

month, plans were made to make the area a National Military Cemetery with proper planning. More and more soldiers were buried there and the remains of 2,111 nameless soldiers were buried in a huge pit in the area that was once Mrs. Lee's garden.

As the war ended, the Lees made attempts to retake Arlington. Robert E. Lee's older brother, Smith Lee made a secret visit to the property, but made a mistake by sharing this information with the person who oversaw the cemetery. After the death of her husband, Mary Lee requested that Congress look at the claim made by the government and the cost to remove the bodies. Her request was defeated 54 to 4 and this gave even greater attention to the area.

Mary Lee went back to visit the area in June of 1873 and after seeing how much the area had changed, she had no desire to regain control. She died five months later at the age of 65. Her oldest son would continue to fight for the property and went to Congress with a new proposal. His claim was that his mother had made an attempt to pay the taxes on the property and wanted this to be taken as actual payment. This was pretty much ignored by Congress, but this didn't stop Custis Lee. He never gave up and eventually got the case to court where a jury ruled in his favor. The government appealed, but Lee won again. As a result, the government had to purchase the property from Lee at a cost of $150,000.

I was amazed to find out that such a historical place for our fallen soldiers was once the home of a man who many consider a traitor for his decision to side with the Confederacy. While reading this information, it is easy to see why many within the Union were working very hard to ensure that the property never returned to the Lee family. Losing ownership of property and other items during a war is common, but because of Robert E. Lee's ties to the Confederacy, it was done as a way to punish him for what he had done.

If you are lucky enough to visit Washington, D.C. during the springtime, you will get a chance to experience the cherry blossom trees blooming. Many of the trees bloom around April 4, but that time can range from as early as March 15 to as late as April 18. On average the entire blooming period can last up to 14 days and the best viewing of trees only lasts four to seven days after the peak begins. There are several places around Washington, D.C to view the trees, but the ideal place is at the Tidal Basin near several of the memorials. You can view them at just about any time of the day, but expect more people on the weekends and when the trees are really peaking. It is also against the law to pick the cherry blossoms. The cherry trees have a long history in and around the Washington, D.C. area and were a gift from the Japanese to the United States as a sign of friendship between the two countries. The wife of President William Howard Taft and the wife of the Japanese Ambassador planted two cherry trees on the banks of the Tidal Basin and the rest as they say is history. From this small gesture and its symbolism, the Cherry Blossom Festival grew and the two trees still exist to this day. There were many more trees planted in and around the area where the current memorials stand today and nearly all of the trees were a gift from the Japanese and shipped to the United States. In more modern times, the United States has also gifted cherry trees back to Japan to replenish trees that were destroyed by natural disaster. In an effort to keep the trees as genetically true as possible, cuttings from some have been preserved and are transplanted every five to six years. Some of these cuttings were also sent back to Japan to be planted and remain genetically true. The last time I visited Washington D.C. I was only seven years old and didn't realize all of the rich history that exists in and around Washington, D.C. When you are young and take trips with your parents, you are only thinking about all of the fun things that you can do, like swimming or going to amusement parks. I wished that I could have made the trip with the other eight graders so

that I could have experienced much of what I was able to read for this research paper.