

United States White House China Patterns

Volumes I and 2

Compiled and Designed
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Dinnerware is such a great indicator of style and fashion for any given era of a country's history. As such Presidential china, also known as White House china, represents a great retrospective of our American heritage. However, this particular retrospective was not easily compiled. The very nature of china is that it chips and breaks; and as late as into the 20th century chipped White House china was given away to lucky onlookers and sets did dwindle and disappear.

Further, not all who lived at and presided over the White House felt china had significant worth. Warren G. Harding gambled White House china that had been in use since Benjamin Harrison and lost it in one hand of a card game similar to the child's game War! Chester A. Arthur didn't want predecessors' "junk" mucking up his home so he held a giant yard sale on the White House lawn and sold White House china—among other treasures. He netted \$8,000; quite a yard sale haul for any era.

Caroline Harrison, who became First Lady in 1889, began the task of researching and preserving White House decorative arts. Many more First Ladies took up her mantle. By 1961, at the request of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, Public Law 87-286 was passed by the Congress and outlined terms for preserving all things historically associated with the White House. For example, the law required all Presidential china be kept or destroyed...never gifted or sold.

Not every President and First Lady purchased china with the White House furnishings fund. For examples, First Lady Frances Cleveland preferred using her personal china, and First Lady Helen Taft thought to buy a new pattern a waste of money and so supplemented the Roosevelt set instead. The Wilson china was so suitable for state dinners the service was used by the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover administrations. For this compilation, the service plate is shown for Wilson and the dinner plate shown for the next three.

The White House was renovated during the Truman years and so First Lady Bess Truman ordered a new set of china to match the White House's 'face lift'. First Lady Mamie Eisenhower wanted to contribute to the history of the White House, therefore ordered the coin gold border service plates which required eight separate kiln firings. These complemented the Truman set and so she used together, as did the Kennedys. However, Jackie Kennedy did choose a china pattern, but because of her husband's assassination the transaction was never completed. Nevertheless, you will see the dinner plate she chose as part of this book's collection.

During the Lyndon Johnson administration the state dinners had grown to 140 persons, and the White House did not have a service large enough to accommodate this number of attendees. Working with Tiffany and Co. First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson wanted the state flower of each U. S. state to be incorporated into the new design, this, it is assumed, worked in tandem with her Beautify America campaign in which she realized miles and miles of native wild flowers throughout the U. S. highway system. This service along with the hand-painted service designed for the Rutherford B. Hayes' by Theodore R. Davis are the two most revered for their artistic reflection of the nation's states.

For modern presidents I tracked down state dinner photos showing the use of previous Presidential china. For example George H.W. Bush held a state dinner in May, 1991 in honor of Queen Elizabeth II and the photo shows the Lyndon Johnson china as the table setting. Another photo shows the Richard Nixon family dining on inaugural evening using the Warren G. Harding service. Perhaps you will see a presidential photo at some time and will be able to identify the service in use with the help of this miniature compilation.

NOTE: for those Presidents who did not purchase a signature service, the service used primarily for his state dinners is shown.