

Washington DC

Washington DC has not always been the capital of the United States. How long has it been the capital? When was it constructed?

The first capital of the United States was Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia served as the capital throughout the American Revolution and was home to the First and Second Continental Congress, as well as the Congress of the Confederation. New York City also briefly served as the nation's capital. In fact, George Washington was inaugurated in New York City, and the Bill of Rights was drafted there as well. However, there was a belief amongst many of the Founding Fathers that the nation's capital should not reside in any state, so that it could provide for its own maintenance and safety. Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution authorized the creation of a seat of government with land ceded from states.



There was considerable debate over where the new capital should be built. Northern states desired that it be located in the North, while Southern states believed it should be in the South. The eventual location was positioned on the borders of Maryland and Virginia, along the Potomac River. This was a centralized location between the Northern states and the Southern states.

In 1791, President George Washington appointed Pierre Charles L'Enfant to create a plan for the new capital city. L'Enfant submitted his first proposal on June 22, 1791. He was dismissed from the project in February of 1792, but many of his original plans were retained. Andrew Ellicott made many of the revisions that served as the basis for the final plan.

In the spring of 1792, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson suggested competitions for the design of both the Capitol Building and the Presidential Mansion. The prize for winning would be \$500. The victor would also receive a plot of land in the city which had been christened Washington in honor of the first president. The broader federal district was named the District of Columbia. The name Columbia was chosen because it was a poetic title being used for the United States at the time.

Over ten entries were submitted for the Capitol Building, but all were deemed unacceptable. Finally, a very late entry was submitted by William Thornton. Both Washington and Jefferson praised his design, and it was officially approved on April 5, 1793. The competition for the Presidential Mansion design was won by James Hoban, an Irish-born architect who had immigrated to the United States in 1785.

The cornerstone of the Presidential Mansion was laid on October 13, 1792, and construction took place over the next eight years. Most of the labor was done by African American slaves and European immigrants. The first president to take residence in the mansion was John Adams. Adams moved in on November 1, 1800, but only lived there for six months before the newly elected Thomas Jefferson took his place. At the time, it was not known as the White House. In its earliest days, it was referred to as the Presidential Mansion or the Presidential Palace. The earliest known use of the term White House dates back to 1811.

Words to watch for:

*capital christened
cornerstone chambers*

Work on the Capitol Building began in 1794. Construction took more than a decade, but Congress moved in prior to its completion. The first full session of Congress (with both chambers in attendance) took place on November 17, 1800. Construction would not be officially completed until 1811. Unfortunately, part of this newly constructed building was burned by the British on August 24, 1814, during the War of 1812.

Washington DC has grown and matured over the years. Yet, the Capitol Building and the White House remain the two featured landmarks, as well as the seats of power. Washington DC will continue to be a focal point for world affairs as long as it serves as the nation's capital.

Name _____

Guided Reading: *Fill in the blanks below to create complete sentences.*

1. Philadelphia served as the capital throughout the _____ and was home to both the First and Second Continental Congress, as well as the Congress of the Confederation.

2. _____ of the United States Constitution authorized the creation of a seat of government with land ceded from states.

3. The location eventually picked for the national capital was positioned on the borders of Maryland and Virginia, along the _____.

4. In the spring of 1792, Secretary of State _____ suggested a competition for the design of both the Capitol Building and the Presidential Mansion.

5. The federal district was named the _____.

6. The first president to take residence in the Presidential Mansion was _____.

7. In its earliest days, the White House was known as the _____ and the Presidential Palace.

8. Construction on the Capitol Building began in _____.

9. The first session of _____ with both chambers in attendance inside the Capitol took place on November 17, 1800.

10. The Capitol Building and the White House remain the two featured _____ of Washington DC.

Multiple Choice: *Select the choice that completes the statement or answers the question.*

1. _____ Which of the following cities never served as the capital of the United States?
 - a. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 - b. New York City, New York
 - c. Chicago, Illinois
 - d. Washington DC

2. _____ Which of the following best describes the contributions made by Andrew Ellicott?
 - a. He made the earliest plans for the layout of Washington DC.
 - b. He made many of the final revisions to the plans that served as the basis for Washington DC.
 - c. He proposed the name District of Columbia and suggested naming the city in honor of George Washington.
 - d. He designed a revolutionary sewage system that ran underneath Washington DC and helped to eliminate many airborne diseases.

3. _____ Which of the following best describes how they chose the designs for the Capitol Building and the Presidential Mansion?
 - a. Thomas Jefferson personally designed both buildings himself.
 - b. George Washington's personal architect designed both buildings.
 - c. They held a contest with entries being submitted by different architects.
 - d. The Capitol Building was designed by James Madison, but it is unknown who designed the Presidential Mansion.

4. _____ Who did most of the construction on the Presidential Mansion?
 - a. The construction was done by the Founding Fathers as they wanted to play a part in personally constructing the national capital.
 - b. Most of the construction was done by Chinese laborers who had been brought to the country specifically for this task.
 - c. The construction was done by a private company hired by John Adams.
 - d. Most of the construction was done by African American slaves and European immigrants.

5. _____ Which of the following statements is true?
 - a. Construction on the Capitol Building did not begin until 1808.
 - b. Construction on the Capitol Building was a fast process, taking only two years.
 - c. The Capitol Building's construction would not be completed until 1845.
 - d. The Capitol Building was burned by the British during the War of 1812.

Vocabulary: *Match each word with its correct definition. Consider how the word is used in the lesson. This might help you define each term. Use a dictionary to help if necessary.*

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|----------------|--------------|
| a. Capital | d. architect |
| b. Christen | e. chamber |
| c. cornerstone | |

6. _____ to name and dedicate; to make use of for the first time
7. _____ the city or town that is the official seat of government for a country or state
8. _____ a person who professionally designs buildings and other large construction projects
9. _____ a stone representing the starting point of construction of a monumental building
10. _____ the meeting hall of a legislative assembly

Summarize: Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation!

1. Who won the competition to design the Presidential Mansion?
2. What does Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution authorize?
3. When was the earliest known use of the term "White House"?
4. Where is Washington DC located? (What two states is it in between?)
5. Why did the Founding Fathers feel that the nation's capital should not be in any state?
6. How much was the prize for winning the design contest?

Student Response: Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of at least five complete sentences.

7. Have you ever been to Washington DC? If so, what was your favorite part of the experience? If not, what would you most like to see and why? Explain your answer.