

While covering the Civil War for THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, famous American writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, gave this description of the Willard:

"This hotel, in fact, may be much more justly called the center of Washington and the Union than either the Capitol, the White House, or the State Department . . . You exchange nods with governors of sovereign States; you elbow illustrious men, and tread on the toes of generals; you hear statesmen and orators speaking in their familiar tones. You are mixed up with office seekers, wire pullers, inventors, artists, poets, prosers . . . until identity is lost among them."

The site on which the Willard InterContinental Washington now stands has served as a hostelry in some form since 1816. When brothers Henry and Edwin Willard bought the property in 1850, the hotel's history as a major force in the social and political life of Washington began.



Brothers Joseph C. Willard (left) and Henry A. Willard, founded the famous hotel.



Willard's City Hotel around 1850.

★ The Willard has hosted every president, as a sleeping guest or as a guest at a social function, since Zachary Taylor in 1850.

★ Because of assassination threats, President-elect Abraham Lincoln was smuggled into the Willard at dawn by Detective Alan Pinkerton on February 23, 1861. Lincoln held staff meetings in front of the lobby fireplace and the Willard was bursting at the seams on the eve of his inaugural, with visitors packed ten to a room. He and his family of five stayed at the hotel until his inauguration on March 4. They returned to the Willard to view the Presidents inaugural parade. Lincoln paid his Willard bill with his first presidential paycheck. The total for his family's ten day stay, including meals, was \$773.75.



Prior to his 1861 inauguration, president elect Abraham Lincoln seated before the Willard's big lobby fireplace surrounded by his aides and staff.



Bill for President Lincoln's stay at the Willard.

★ The first Japanese delegation to visit the United States stayed at the Willard in 1860. Three ambassadors and their entourage of 74, travelled to Washington to sign the first trade and friendship treaties between the two countries. One of the delegates wrote, "The house of the Secretary of State is not as fine as the hotel."



Local officials and their wives greet members of the Japanese retinue in the Willard lobby.

★ The Willard was the site of the Peace Convention from February 4 to February 27, 1861. Delegates from 21 of the 34 states met in a final, desperate attempt to avoid the Civil War. A plaque from the Virginia Civil War Commission, paying tribute to this courageous effort, is mounted on the Pennsylvania avenue facade of the hotel.



In a final effort to avert the Civil War, delegates from both North and South convene at the Willard for the Peace Convention in February 1861.

★ In the 1840's Kentucky Senator Henry Clay mixed Washington's first Mint Julep in the Willard's Round Robin Bar. The southern classic is now the bar's elegant signature cocktail. In 1862, Walt Whitman immortalized the Round Robin Bar in his poetic appeal to the Union troops:

"There you are, shoulder straps, but where are your companies? Where are your men? Speak, blow, put on airs in Willard's sumptuous bar, or anywhere! No explanation will save you. Bull Run is your work"

★ Julia Ward Howe, while a guest at the Willard in 1861, was awakened by the sound of Union soldiers marching under her window singing the popular song "John Brown's Body." She had often thought that this song, which had become something of an anthem for the Union troops, deserved more dignified words. Mrs. Howe rose from her bed and wrote the words for the song that would inspire a nation, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"



While a guest at the Willard, poet Julia Ward Howe wrote the inspiring words of The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

★ After a long day in the Oval Office, President Ulysses S. Grant escaped the pressures of the presidency with a brandy and a cigar in the Willard lobby. As word spread of Grant's fondness for the Willard lobby, many would-be power brokers approached him on individual causes. Grant called these people "lobbyists," thus coining the term.



President Ulysses S. Grant labeled the petitioners who approached him at the Willard as "lobbyists".

★ The 1870's ushered in an era of prosperity and progress for America and the Willard continued to keep pace with the nation. Rooms now cost \$4.00 a day, and even more luxurious accommodations were available with private baths. The Willard installed mechanical elevators and sold Washington's first ice cream sodas.

★ At the dawn of the twentieth century, one of Washington's first skyscrapers was taking shape in the form of the New Willard Hotel. The first phase of the 12-story building opened in 1901, the building completed in 1904. Architect Henry Janeway Hardenbergh also designed New York's Plaza Hotel, The Dakota and the original Waldorf-Astoria. Built in the Second French Empire Beaux-Arts style, the building is one of Washington's first steel structures.

★ In 1916, Woodrow Wilson held meetings of the League to Enforce Peace, predecessor of the League of Nations, at the Willard. Wilson's Vice-President, Thomas Marshall, in criticizing the price of cigars at the hotel news stand said, "What this country needs is a good five cent cigar."

★ The Willard stood in as the official presidential residence for nearly a month in 1923. While President Coolidge was waiting for the widowed Mrs. Warren Harding to move from the White House, he made the hotel his home. During this time the presidential standard flew from the main entrance of the Willard.



*While President Coolidge lived at the Willard, the presidential standard flew from the main entrance of the hotel.*

★ On August 28, 1963, while a guest at the Willard, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Dr. King delivered this speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during The March on Washington, America's first large-scale integrated protest march. Afterward, he and other civil rights leaders met with President John F. Kennedy in the White House.

★ The Willard family sold their interest in the hotel in 1946. The hotel continued to operate until July 1968 when its doors were closed. After a long legal battle, the newly created Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation was given the authority and funding to purchase the hotel and property. The Washington-based Oliver Carr Company, managing general partner of the ownership entity, directed the meticulous restoration of the hotel and the construction of the new office building including the *Willard Collection*, a group of luxury retail shops. The Willard InterContinental Washington opened its doors on August 20, 1986 and celebrated the formal grand opening, which took place September 22 to 26, 1986.

★ As a result of this historic restoration, the Willard resumed its place as a major force in the social and political life of Washington, D.C. The hotel is once again the scene of meetings, gala social events and sumptuous dinners in elegant dining rooms. Heads of state stride through the vast lobby, celebrities and senators stroll under the chandeliers of Peacock Alley. Glasses are raised once more in the Round Robin Bar, and crowned heads rest again in lavishly appointed suites.

★ Famous guests of the Willard have included: Jenny Lind, P T Barnum, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Tom Thumb, Samuel Morse, the Duke of Windsor, Flo Ziegfield, Harry Houdini, the Barrymores, Mae West, Gloria Swanson and Gypsy Rose Lee. Today, the Willard continues to be the hotel of choice for celebrities, heads of state and royalty.

★ Recently, the Willard enjoyed an opulent renovation of its 341 guest rooms including 42 suites, the hotel's fine-dining establishment, The Willard Room, and its casual restaurant, Café 1401. Gracious service of a bygone era is evident everywhere as the Willard InterContinental Washington enters a new era on its illustrious, historic path as one of the country's most notable hotels and grand American institutions.



*THE WILLARD HOTEL 1904*



WILLARD  
INTERCONTINENTAL.  
WASHINGTON D. C.

1401 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004-1010  
(202) 628-9100  
For Reservations  
800-327-0200

THE HISTORY OF THE  
WILLARD  
INTERCONTINENTAL  
WASHINGTON

*"The Residence of Presidents"*