



THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

WHHA PRESS ROOM | *Article*

CONSERVATION OF THE WHITE HOUSE COLLECTION

Care of any museum collection includes the conservation of objects to correct or stabilize deterioration from age or exhibition. Although the White House is an accredited historic house museum, it does not provide the traditional exhibition setting of objects under glass or behind ropes at all times. As the official residence of the president of the United States, objects from its collection are used to furnish both the public and private rooms. In these spaces they sustain natural wear and damage as a result of the busy activities of family life or official entertaining. The funding of professional conservation of objects from the White House collection has been an important element of the White House Historical Association's preservation activities.

The White House has a large collection of 18th- and 19th-century English cut glass lighting fixtures (chandeliers, sconces, and candelabra having glass components), reportedly the foremost collection outside of Great Britain. In January 1997 this collection, in addition to some 19th-century French fixtures and the East Room chandeliers and standards of 1902, was surveyed and researched with Association funding. The written findings included the origin, date, rarity, and completeness of these fixtures, as well as recommendations about safety, installation, and the conservation or replacement of components.

With this data in hand, a program was begun for the conservation of this large collection of lighting fixtures, principally twenty-one chandeliers – two on the Ground Floor, nine on the State Floor (including the three massive fixtures in the East Room), and ten on the Second Floor. The work included the replacement of missing parts or of parts on which repairs would seem exceptionally unsightly or would pose structural problems. All removed parts - whether original elements or earlier replacements - have been carefully stored. The work also included the cleaning of all metal parts, re-pinning of strands of glass components, electrical rewiring, and rehangng on safety wires.

In addition, a set of ten sconces, four in the Family Dining Room and six in storage, were conserved, as were four pairs of glass candelabra. In the East Room, the glass swags and pendants on the 1902 light standards were restored and properly rehung to match the original dressing pattern. The massive lantern that has hung under the North Portico since 1902



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was also conserved; its black-painted brass frame was stripped and re-coated, and the glass panes, both originals and replacements, replaced with more durable modern security glass.

William Allman, White House Curator

