

The Inaugurations of Franklin Delano Roosevelt

March 4, 1933,

January 27, 1937

January 20, 1941

January 20, 1945

The day dawned with a clear sky and "the smile of nature." Franklin Delano Roosevelt became the 31st President of the United States of America in a colorful ceremony on the steps of the Capitol before an enthusiastic throng. Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes administered the oath of office to a President who faced more critical conditions than any ever before, excepting, perhaps, the critical era of 1861 when President Lincoln assumed the office of the Chief Magistrate. Mr. Roosevelt, always a gallant figure, delivered his Inaugural Address before the largest assembly of his fellow-countrymen to witness an inaugural ceremony. His address was carried by radio to tens of millions of American citizens. The Inaugural Parade of over 18,000 was a glittering spectacle. Mr. Roosevelt and his family, accompanied by members of his new Cabinet and their families, went to St. John's Church for prayer services before going to the Capitol for the inaugural ceremonies. On the return trip from the Capitol to the White House, the new President gave no indication that the rapidly developing events of the greatest economic crisis America had ever known had sobered his mind. He rode down Pennsylvania Avenue in a gay, festive mood, exchanging smiles and waving his top hat to the multitude of well-wishing friends and fellow-citizens.

The United States was without a President and a Vice President for 29 minutes on January 20, 1937, due to a delay in the inaugural ceremony when President Roosevelt renewed his oath of office. The oath was administered by Chief Justice Hughes at 12:29 P. M. instead of 12 o'clock noon, as prescribed by the Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution. The President and the Chief Justice stood bareheaded in a driving rain during the ceremony. Special trains and numerous special sections of regular trains were cancelled due to the heavy storm which broke over the city and the eastern states the night before the inauguration. The President remarked, "If these people can take it, I can, too," when urged by members of the Inaugural committee to be sworn in within the shelter of the Capitol. He, as well as a courageous multitude of well-wishing fellow-citizens, ignored the unkind elements as the "Grand March" went down rain-soaked Pennsylvania Avenue. The glass enclosure, constructed on the President's booth at the reviewing stand in the Court of Honor in front of the White House, was ordered removed by President Roosevelt.

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He did not want any special privileges, even that of comfort and shelter from the driving and cold rain, that were not readily available to his host of admirers, who were braving the storm to pay homage and respect to their reelected President. President Roosevelt and his family attended prayer services at St. John's Episcopal Church at 10 o'clock on the morning of his second inauguration.

For the first time in the history of the United States of America the people elected a third-term President. On January 20, 1941, the oath of office was administered by Chief Justice Hughes. President Roosevelt pledged his faith on an Old Dutch Bible, a family heritage, which was dramatically opened at the 13th Chapter of First Corinthians, at the 13th Verse: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." This was a day of personal triumph for Franklin Delano Roosevelt and it was a day of sunshine and festive mood for the city of Washington. After attending prayer services at St. John's Church, Mr. Roosevelt left the White House at 11:40 A. M. for the Capitol. Mrs. Roosevelt and members of his immediate family followed in the second car of the procession. They reached the Capitol at 11:53, where a crowd of more than 75,000 eager and cheering people were thronged around the plaza to witness the historic inauguration ceremony. The President took his oath of office at 12:11½ P. M. with four generations of his family surrounding him. His mother, his five children, and four of his grand children were seated as his special guests.

In strict contrast to the pomp and circumstance of his preceding inaugural ceremonies, President Roosevelt took the oath of office on January 20, 1945, in one of the simplest and shortest inaugural ceremonies ever conducted for the installation of the Chief Magistrate of the United States. Breaking precedent in this, as he had with many other established customs, Mr. Roosevelt was sworn in by Chief Justice Harlan Fiske Stone at 12:05 P. M. in a brief and unpretentious ceremony on the South Portico of the White House. It was devoid of all the pageantry of former years. Not more than 10,000 persons witnessed the ceremony, which lasted only fourteen minutes. The invited guests were gathered in a tight little circle under the Balcony on the lawn while the general public, in unusually small number, stood behind the fence outside the White House grounds. The traditional family Dutch Bible was used again and was opened to the same famous 13th Chapter of First Corinthians, the 13th Verse. There was no parade to mark this fourth inaugural, as war-time restrictions made such public gatherings ill-advised. The official guests numbered but 5,913, whereas in peace time more than five times that number would have been honored with invitations.