

December 24, 1923

Lighting of the First National Christmas Tree

In preparation for Christmas at the White House in 1923, the first and second floors of the White House were brightly decorated. A few days before Christmas, President Coolidge sent a message to the crew of arctic explorers who were possibly the closest people to the North Pole at that time in 1923. The message was relayed by amateur radio operators and transmitted by shortwave ham radios. First Lady, Grace Coolidge, helped with food baskets at the local Salvation Army.

On Christmas Eve, Mrs. Coolidge was helping with the food baskets at the Salvation Army and sending bouquets of White House roses to thank people who had helped her with her Christmas shopping. President Coolidge spent his time at meetings and clearing his desk of important matters before the holiday. Before finishing, he sent a message to the disabled veterans of World War I, letting them know how much the people of America thanked them for the sacrifice they had made to defend the ideals that America stood for.

On December 24, 1923, crowds began to gather at the White House to see President Calvin Coolidge light the first outdoor Christmas tree on the White House grounds. It was not only the first outdoor Christmas tree on the White House grounds, but it was the first to be decorated with electric lights.

The tree was reported to be forty-eight feet tall and came from President Coolidge's home state of Vermont. There were several local and national organizations involved in arranging for the event. There were many musical groups that performed at the lighting of the first outdoor tree, including the U.S. Marine Corps Band. There were also Christmas carols sung during the lighting of the tree and later in the evening by different church choirs. The program showing the carols to be sung had been published in local newspapers so people could sing along.

Since that first ceremony, lighting the outdoor Christmas tree at the White House has become an annual tradition.

On the following pages, you can be in charge of decorating this special tree by drawing the decorations you would like to see on the picture of the tree that is provided.

There is also a notebooking page for you to write the speech you would give to the country if you were the president and asked to make a speech at this special ceremony.



