

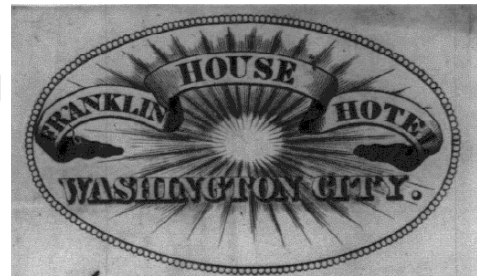


# WHAT FAMOUS HOTELS DID JOHN GADSBY RUN IN D.C.?

## FRANKLIN HOUSE HOTEL (1823-1826)

John Gadsby appears in Washington, D.C. in late 1823 operating the Franklin House Hotel. A 40-minute ride to the Capitol, it already had a reputation for hosting the most distinguished men in the city. Surviving documents suggest John Gadsby began bringing his family into the business with his son, John, Jr. handling hiring of staff.

Gadsby hosted a number of special guests at the Franklin. During his grand tour, the marquette de Lafayette took up lodging in October and December of 1824 and Gadsby hosted a large public dinner in Lafayette's honor. Senator Andrew Jackson and his family stayed at the Franklin from December 1824 to January 1825. This was during a presidential election crisis, when John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson tied in electoral votes. Once the House of Representatives chose Adams, Jackson paid his \$86.25 bill and left town.



*Franklin House Hotel Bill Head. The hotel stood at the corner of I & 21st Streets, near what is now George Washington University. It was demolished in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

By summer of 1826, however, Gadsby announced the hotel was for rent. The Franklin boasted a billiard room, six parlors, coach house for 30 horses, private suites, and rooms for 60 to 70 people.

## NATIONAL HOTEL (1826-1836)

After he left the Franklin, Gadsby set his sights on the block of Pennsylvania Avenue & Sixth Streets, not far from what is now the National Gallery of Art. Here he built the National Hotel with suites, entertainment spaces, and private apartments for families. It opened to the public late 1826.

The four-story hotel could accommodate 300 to 400 people. The *Providence Patriot* in Rhode Island wrote in 1829, "The public hotel of Mr. Gadsby, at Washington, may be regarded as one of the wonders of that capital. It exceeds any establishment of the kind which we have seen in America, if not in dimensions, at least in convenience and airiness... Mr. Gadsby, who superintends it indefatigably and courteously, possesses ample experience and peculiar skill in his profession."



Gadsby decorated the rooms in the most fashionable style of the period. Senator Levi Woodbury in 1828 praised the “*superb bed and fine hangings, the good carpet, and curtains rivaling the snow in hue.*” Gadsby also made a point in his advertisements to mention his bar, offering “*a great variety of choice and well selected wines, of various kinds, from the oldest established wine merchants in the United States.*”

Gadsby used enslaved labor to run this large business. The 1830 census shows Gadsby enslaved 39 people and hired an additional four free blacks to carry out the various work of the hotel business.

The National Hotel was the temporary home to President-Elect Andrew Jackson when he arrived in Washington on February 12, 1829. He stayed in a suite of rooms where he worked on selecting his Cabinet. After his inauguration at the Capitol on March 4, Jackson hosted a large celebratory party at the White House. Things got out of hand quickly, (legend has it thanks to some alcoholic punch), with Jackson escaping from the White House and returning to his room at the National Hotel.



*The National Hotel. It was demolished in 1942.*

In addition to Jackson, a number of congressmen and diplomats resided at the National Hotel both during the legislative session and out of session, including Henry Clay, representing Kentucky; Stephen F. Austin, representing the Republic of Texas; and William Henry Harrison during his failed 1836 presidential campaign.

## **A SIDE NOTE**

The National Hotel is infamous for many events that occurred after John Gadsby left the business:

- While William, John’s son, ran the hotel, Solomon Northrup was kidnapped in 1841. Northrup later wrote *Twelve Years a Slave* about his experience as a slave before being rescued.
- Henry Clay died in his hotel room in 1852.
- In March 1857, a mysterious disease, known in the papers as the National Hotel disease, struck almost 400 people, killing 36 of them, including three members of Congress.
- John Wilkes Booth stayed at the hotel the night before he assassinated Abraham Lincoln.