George W to George ‘W”

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and when he was sworn in after the assassination of William McKinley in
1901. According to witnesses at the impromptu event, Roosevelt simply
raised his hand.

Ironically, as successive generations bemoan this nation’s fleeting family
values, the presidential inauguration has been going in the exact opposite di-
rection. The ceremony took several decades to become a family affair. When
George Washington was initially sworn in, Martha did not even travel to
New York to watch the event. James Garfield, in 1881, was the first to have
his mother attend the ceremony. William H. Taft, in 1909 was the first to
have his wife ride with him in the procession between the Capitol and White
House. Calvin Coolidge was the only President to be sworn in by a family
member. His father, a Vermont Justice of the Peace, gave the oath in 1923.
John F. Kennedy was the first in 1961 to have both of his parents attend the
ceremony.

Rain dampened last week’s Washington ceremonies, graying the scene and
forcing Barbara Bush and John McCain to hide their Saturday’s best under
plastic ponchos. Soggy shoes, however, are by no means the worst punish-
ment inflicted by Mother Nature on inauguration day. The coldest inaugura-
tion in history plagued Ulysses Grant, whose outdoor ball went on despite
the four degree weather. Dancers were forced to keep their coats on and the
champagne finally froze. John F. Kennedy used an extreme measure to con-
bat the uncooperative weather: flamethrowers to clear snow off of Pennsyl-
vania Avenue.

As old a tradition as the inauguration itself is the inaugural ball; nearly
every President since Washington has treated himself to a post-swearing-in
gala. The first ball was held in New York City and attended by new members
of Congress, Washington, and his vice president, John Adams. Public inter-
est in the ball began in 1809 when James Madison sold 400 tickets at $4 a
piece. Harrison managed to make an appearance at all four galas staged in
his honor despite his cold (he should have stayed home).

For more firsts and oddities, check out the adjacent article. See how a few
of our 43 presidents orchestrated their first day as leader.

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The information above is courtesy of the Architect of
the Capitol.