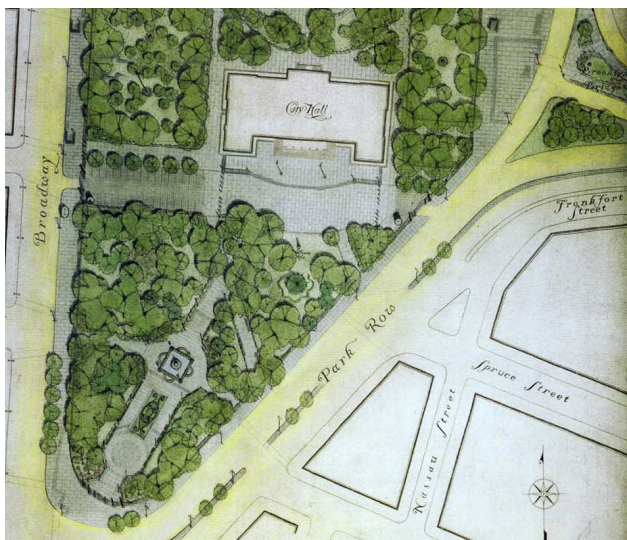




CITY HALL:

A Self-Guided Tour





Welcome to City Hall

The site of City Hall Park was originally known as the Commons — communal land established by Dutch settlers in the 17th century. In the 18th century, it was the site of civic institutions such as an almshouse, jails, and barracks, as well as two burial grounds.

In 1802, the City of New York held a competition for a new City Hall with a prize of \$350. The winning plan by architects Joseph François Mangin, a French émigré, and John McComb, Jr., a New Yorker, set the stage for the construction of one of the finest architectural achievements of the period.

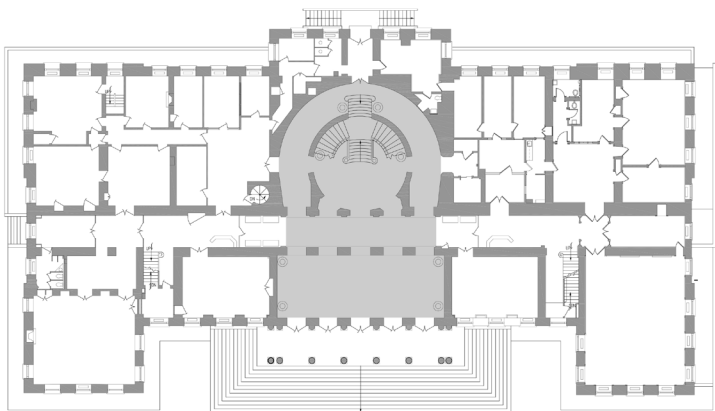
City Hall is designed in the Federal style with clear French influences that are exemplified by the arched windows, delicate ornamental swags, and decorative Corinthian- and Ionic-style columns and pilasters.

At the time of its completion in 1812, City Hall was one of the tallest buildings in the city. For a small fee, visitors could climb up into the cupola for a panoramic view.

The sculpture of Justice atop the building's cupola is a copper replica of the original, which was carved in wood by John Dixey. The original figure held a builder's steelyard balance (shown at left) instead of scales.

In 2015, a comprehensive rehabilitation of City Hall by Beyer Blinder Belle was completed. The project preserved the building's historic character, upgraded electrical and life-safety systems, made critical structural repairs, and added sustainable design features.





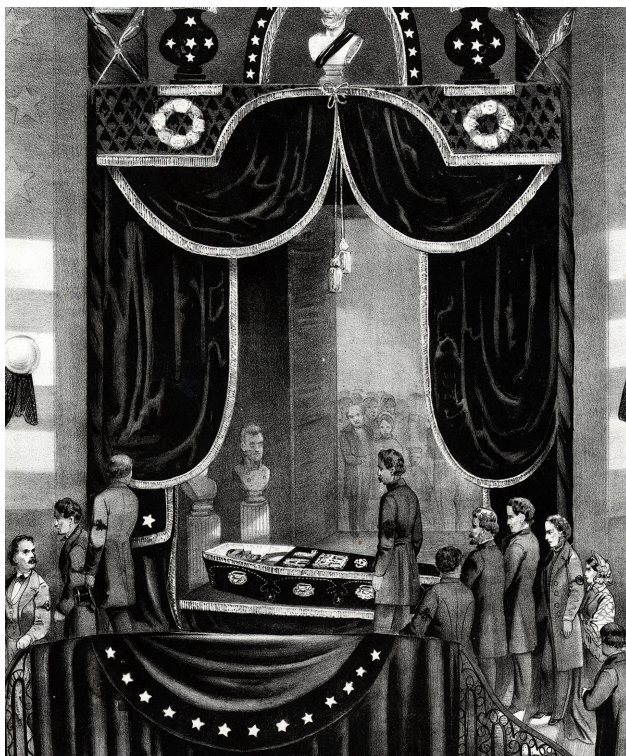
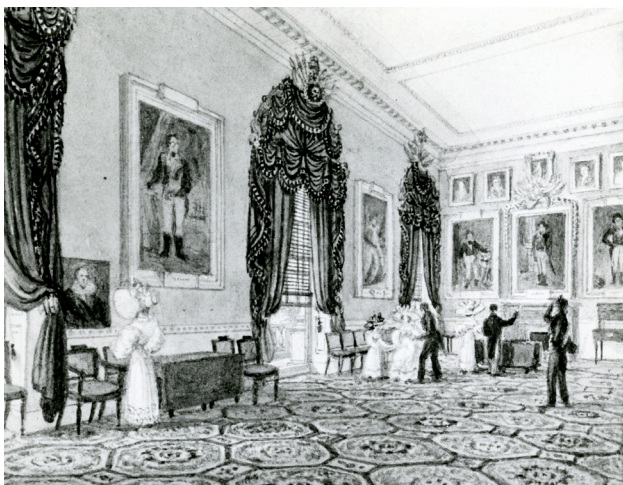
Entrance Hall and Rotunda

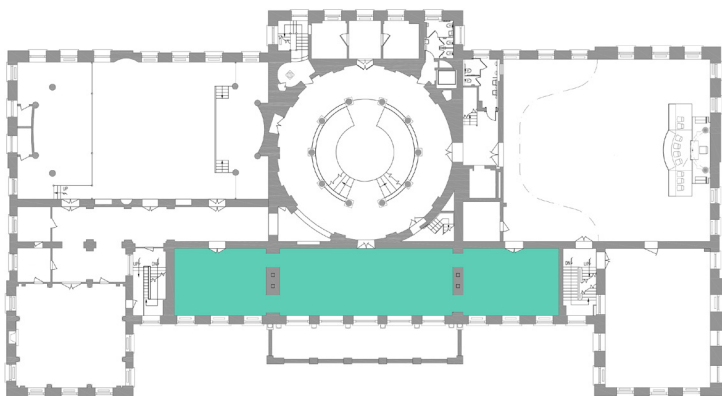
Just inside City Hall’s entrance stands the life-size bronze statue of George Washington, which is one of six copies made of an original marble statue by French artist Jean-Antoine Houdon. To create the original sculpture, Houdon took measurements of Washington’s body and made a “life mask” that is now in the collection of the Morgan Library & Museum.

City Hall’s exterior architectural details are repeated within the entrance hall, including the five arched doorways that lead through a vaulted central corridor and into City Hall’s most magnificent architectural feature — the soaring rotunda. The rotunda contains some of the building’s original material, including the marble flooring, cast-iron handrails, and marble columns that encircle the second floor.

A central feature of the rotunda is the marble keystone-cantilevered staircase — one of the first of its kind in the country and a feat of engineering ingenuity. Seemingly unsupported, it has been nicknamed the “floating staircase.” The top and bottom landings act like keystones in an arch, locking the stairs into place.

The rotunda extends the full height of the building and is topped by a coffered dome, with rosettes that are graduated in size to create the illusion of greater height and an oculus that floods the rotunda with light. The current dome is a reconstruction of the original, which was twice damaged by fire.



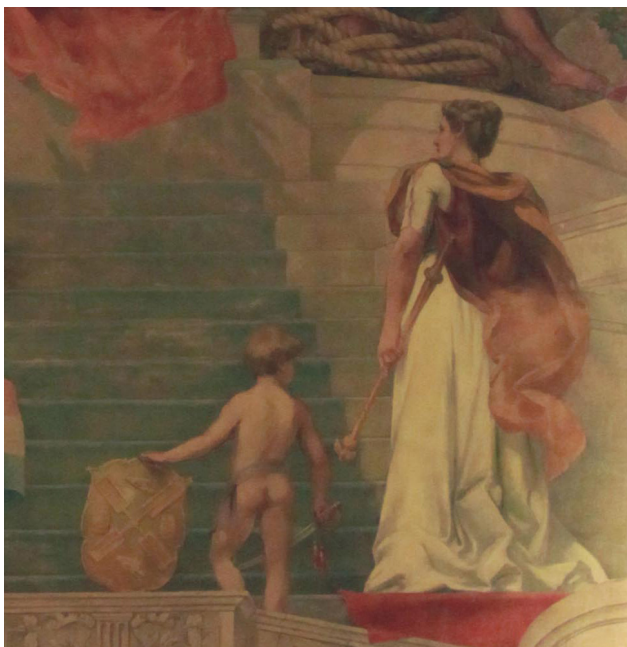


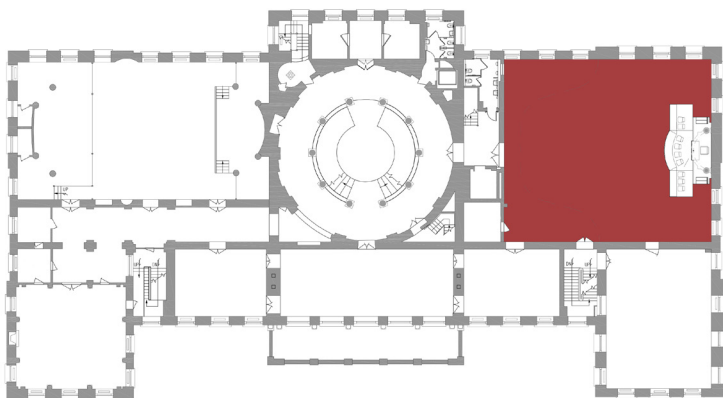
The Governor's Room

At the top of the rotunda staircase is the entrance to the Governor's Room, a museum and reception hall celebrating the civic history of New York City and the nation. Its three chambers house significant paintings and decorative items, historic furnishings — most of which are original to City Hall — and notable artifacts, like George Washington's writing table, which was brought to City Hall in 1844.

The Governor's Room showcases the City Hall portrait collection, an integral component of City Hall that includes paintings of United States presidents, New York State governors, New York City mayors, foreign dignitaries, and military and political leaders who worked in City Hall or whose actions made an impact on the people of New York City. The collection contains more than 100 paintings by some of the leading late-18th to mid-19th century American artists.

In 1861, when President-elect Abraham Lincoln visited the Governor's Room, *The New York Times* reported that the crowd "was like turning on the Croton [Aqueduct], or tapping a new barrel of ale, or opening a bottle of champagne." Greeting more than 3,000 people per hour, Lincoln was exhausted to the point where it became painful for him to shake hands. After Lincoln's assassination, his coffin was placed in the rotunda just outside the Governor's Room and more than 100,000 people came through City Hall to pay respects.





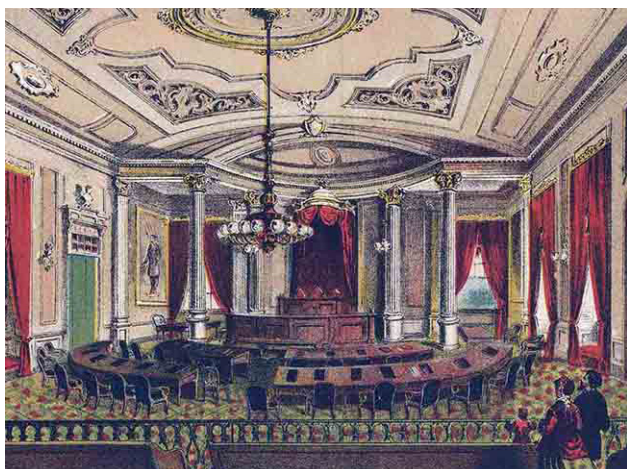
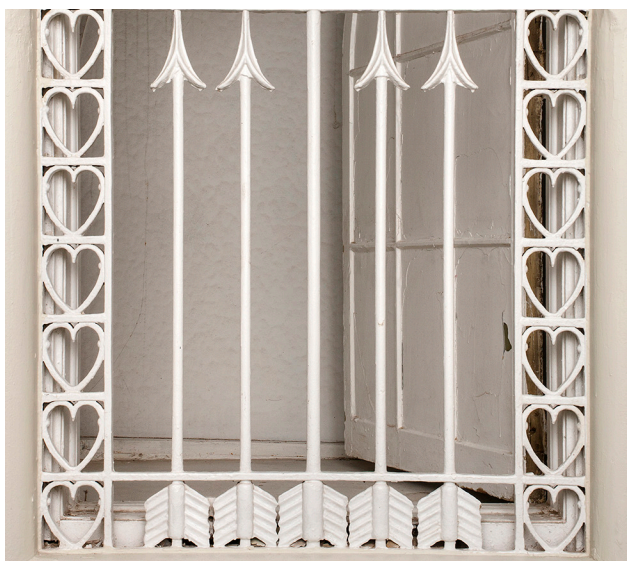
City Council Chamber

On the east side of the second floor of the rotunda is the City Council Chamber, which is used by the City Council for public meetings and ceremonial events. The room's current configuration was designed by architect John H. Duncan in 1897 and constructed within three months, just in time for the unification of the five boroughs into the City of New York in 1898.

The allegorical ceiling mural by Taber Sears was completed in 1903 and includes figures representing prosperity, civilization, wisdom, navigation, and agriculture, as well as a woman in a white robe personifying New York City. A young boy holds a shield with the arms of the City in his left hand and the sword of the State in his right. The Brooklyn Bridge represents the accomplishments of the unification of the boroughs, while a large sailing vessel alludes to New York City's importance as a port.

The Marquis de Lafayette was a Frenchman who volunteered his services under George Washington during the Revolutionary War. After his visit to City Hall, the City commissioned Samuel F. B. Morse to paint his portrait. While working on the painting, Morse was notified via horse messenger that his wife had died suddenly. Heartbroken and frustrated with the delay in finding out about his wife's failing health and death, he began to explore a means of rapid long distance communication that led to his invention of the telegraph and Morse Code.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was celebrated at several events in New York City on December 17, 1964. In the City Council Chamber, he received the Medallion of Honor from Mayor Robert F. Wagner for his unparalleled contributions to the civil rights movement.





Secrets of City Hall

The desk in the circa 1913-15 photograph of the Mayor's Ceremonial Office (above) was later used by Mayor La Guardia and is now used by Mayor de Blasio. One of the chairs and the clock on the fireplace mantle are now on the third floor.

The basement of City Hall once included wine and beer cellars, jails, and the marriage bureau, complete with a chapel. The chapel's decorative metal grills with hearts and arrows (top left) can still be seen in the basement.

From 1860 until 1914, the third floor served as an apartment for the building's custodian and his family, with four bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, parlor, and bathroom. The Design Commission's offices have been located on the third floor since 1914.

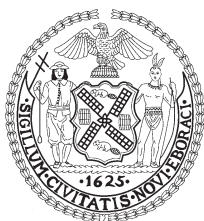
The room now known as the Bullpen and occupied by mayoral staff was previously called the Board of Estimate Chamber. Originally a court room, it has been used for large celebrations, meetings by a number of different governmental bodies, and as a public hearing room. The lithograph to the left shows the room in 1868, when it was likely being used as an assembly chamber for the Board of Councilmen.

Archaeological excavations completed as part of the recent City Hall rehabilitation project uncovered significant architectural features relating to the Almshouse, Bridewell, and City Hall, as well as thousands of artifacts that reveal what life was like for people who lived and worked in City Hall Park hundreds of years ago, including a circa 1790-1840 mug or tankard featuring George Washington (left).

Image Credits

1. City Hall exterior, photo by Andrew Moore, 2005.
2. City Hall Park, plan by George Vellonakis, 1998.
3. City Hall, aquatint by W. G. Wall, 1826.
4. Justice, drawing by John Dixey (attributed), date unknown.
5. City Hall front elevation, John McComb Architectural Drawing Collection, Collection of the New-York Historical Society.
6. George Washington (detail), c. 1857. Copy of original by Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1796.
7. City Hall rotunda and staircase, 1961.
8. City Hall rotunda and dome, photo by Andrew Moore, 2005.
9. Central chamber of the Governor's Room. drawing by Charles Burton, 1830.
10. George Washington (detail) by John Trumbull, 1790. Photo by Glenn Castellano, 2006.
11. Abraham Lincoln lying in state outside the Governor's Room, Currier & Ives, 1865.
12. *The City of New York, as the Eastern Gateway of the American Continent, Receiving Tributes of the Nations* (detail) by Taber Sears, 1903. Photo by Glenn Castellano, 2011.
13. The Marquis de Lafayette (detail) by Samuel F. B. Morse, 1826. Photo by Glenn Castellano, 2006.
14. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the City Council Chamber after receiving the Medal of Honor, 1964.
15. Decorative grilles of the former wedding chapel, City Hall basement, photo by Glenn Castellano, 2015.
16. Custodian and family in the third floor of City Hall, before 1914.
17. Assembly chamber, lithograph by W. C. Rogers & Co., 1868.
18. Selection of items unearthed during an archaeological dig, 2011.
19. Mayor's Private Office, taken during Grosvenor Atterbury's restoration of City Hall, circa 1913-15.

To sign up for a guided tour of City Hall, please visit:
nyc.gov/CityHallTours



City of New York Bill de Blasio, Mayor

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