

# FEDERAL HALL

*Memorial*





# Federal Hall MEMORIAL



*National Historic Site*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

*Site of old Federal Hall, first Capitol of the United States of America  
under the Constitution.*

IN the old New York City Hall on this site occurred some of the most momentous events in American history: the trial and acquittal of John Peter Zenger, marking the first important victory in the continuing struggle for freedom of the press and freedom of speech in America; the Stamp Act Congress, angrily protesting British "taxation without representation"; the sessions of the Second Continental Congress, adopting resolutions calling the Federal Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia, adopting the Northwest Ordinance and transmitting the completed Federal Constitution to the colonial legislatures for ratification. In this building, altered and renamed Federal Hall, convened the First Congress under the Constitution, and on its balcony General Washington was inaugurated first President of the United States of America. Here the Departments of State, War, and Treasury were created; the Supreme Court came into existence; and the Congress adopted the Bill of Rights.

Cover: *Federal Hall Memorial*. Courtesy, Mr. Schell Lewis.

## THE CITY HALL

The City Hall, which was destined to become the scene of so many historic events, was built in 1699–1700. Prior to that time, the city government had been quartered in the old Dutch Stadt Huys on Pearl Street, and it was late in 1703 before the functions of government were transferred to the new building.

The first important historical episodes to take place in City Hall began in 1734, when John Peter Zenger was imprisoned in its garret on a charge of publishing "seditious libels" in his newspaper, the *New York Weekly Journal*. Defended by Andrew Hamilton, one of the most brilliant lawyers in the colonies, Zenger was acquitted on August 4, 1735. This was the first significant step toward establishing a free press and freedom of speech in America.

On October 7, 1765, the Stamp Act Congress convened at City Hall to offer the first organized opposition to England's colonial policy. Delegates from 9 of the 13 colonies participated. Before adjourning on October 26, an Address was sent to the King, petitions were

directed to Parliament, and a Declaration of Rights and Grievances was drawn up. In the following year Parliament voted to rescind the Stamp Act.

In September 1774, the First Continental Congress convening at Philadelphia in Carpenters Hall, now a part of Independence National Historical Park Project, undertook peaceful measures seeking redress of the colonies' rights and liberties violated by the British. These efforts failed. Before the Second Continental Congress convened on May 10, 1775, the American Revolution was in progress. The next year that Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence.

After the War, the Continental Congress selected New York as the seat of government

and on January 11, 1785, began meeting in City Hall. Here, on February 21, 1787, the resolution calling for the Federal Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia was adopted. The Constitution, the result of 4 months' labor, was transmitted on September 28 from the City Hall to the States for ratification.

While the Constitutional Convention labored behind closed doors at Philadelphia, the Continental Congress, in New York, adopted the famous Northwest Ordinance of 1787 which provided for the government of the territory northwest of the Ohio River. In September 1788, that body designated New York City to be the capital of the United States under the Constitution. The New York City Council promptly offered the use of the City Hall and

approved the expenditure of funds for putting the building in "proper order and repair."

## CITY HALL BECOMES FEDERAL HALL

Under the supervision of Major Charles Pierre L'Enfant, City Hall was largely reconstructed in 1788–89. At the time the First Congress under the Constitution held its initial session, the building, then known as Federal Hall, was said to be the most beautiful in America. In an upper chamber of this building, the electoral votes were counted, on April 6, 1789, and an announcement was made of the unanimous election of George Washington as first President. On April 30, while standing on the balcony, Washington took the oath of office.

Within the next few months, the Departments of State, War, and Treasury were established by the Congress, meeting at Federal Hall. The Supreme Court was created on September

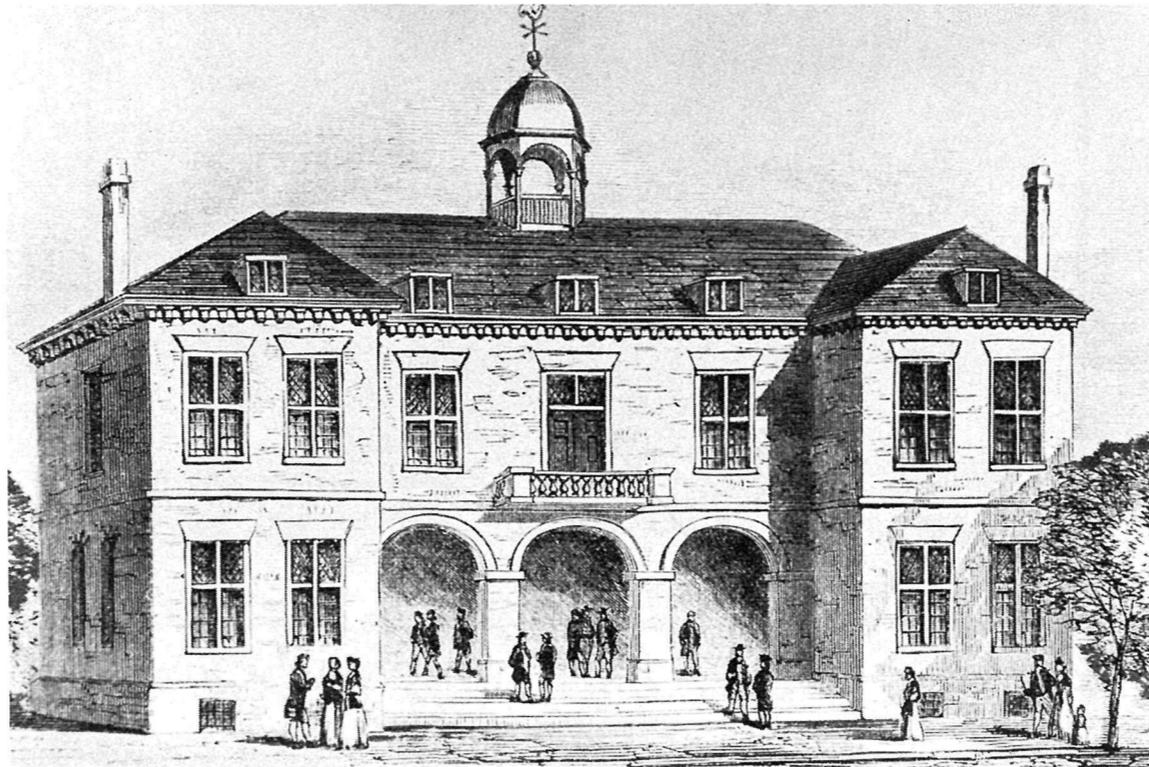
24. The Bill of Rights was adopted the following day and transmitted to the States for ratification.

In July 1790, a 10-mile-square site on the banks of the Potomac (the District of Columbia) was chosen as the site of the permanent capital. On the last day of August, the Federal Government was transferred from New York to Philadelphia, where it remained for 10 years before moving to Washington. Utilized alternately for State and city offices during the two decades following, the now crumbling Federal Hall was sold for salvage in 1812 for \$425.

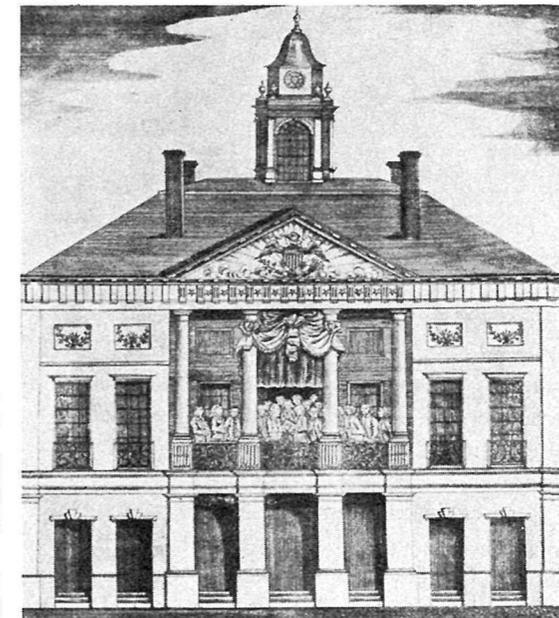
## THE HISTORIC SITE

In 1842, the present structure, one of the most outstanding examples of Greek Revival architecture in the United States, was completed on the site of old Federal Hall. It served as the New York City Custom House until 1862 when

*City Hall, 1701–88. Courtesy, the New York Historical Society.*



*Washington's Inauguration at Federal Hall, 1789.*



*John Peter Zenger at his press—a model in the Zenger Room.*



it became the United States Sub-Treasury. Later it housed the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and a number of minor government offices. After most of these had been removed, civic and patriotic organizations in and about New York conceived the idea of preserving the structure as a memorial to the founding of our republican form of government. The area became a part of the National Park Service on May 26, 1939, when it was designated a national historic site by the Secretary of the Interior.

Other nearby areas in the National Park System include Statue of Liberty National Monument, on Bedloe's Island, Castle Clinton National Monument, New York City, and Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N. J.

#### PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES FOR VISITORS

The site is open daily to visitors from 8 a. m. to 4 p. m. During these hours exhibits of historic objects and documents associated with this site may be seen. One room is set aside as a memorial to John Peter Zenger, in which are exhibits depicting the struggle in the colonies for freedom of the press.

The stone on which Washington traditionally stood to take the oath of office is preserved in the rotunda.

Free literature and information may be secured by all visitors, and special service is provided groups and organizations if arrangements are made in advance. No charges are made for admission or service.

#### HOW TO REACH THE SITE

Federal Hall Memorial National Historic Site is situated in lower Manhattan at the corner of Wall and Nassau Streets, just off Broadway. It is within convenient walking distance of South Ferry, the landing place for ferries from Staten Island, Governors Island, and the Statue of Liberty. The site is easily reached by Broadway bus, IRT subway (Wall Street Station), Inde-



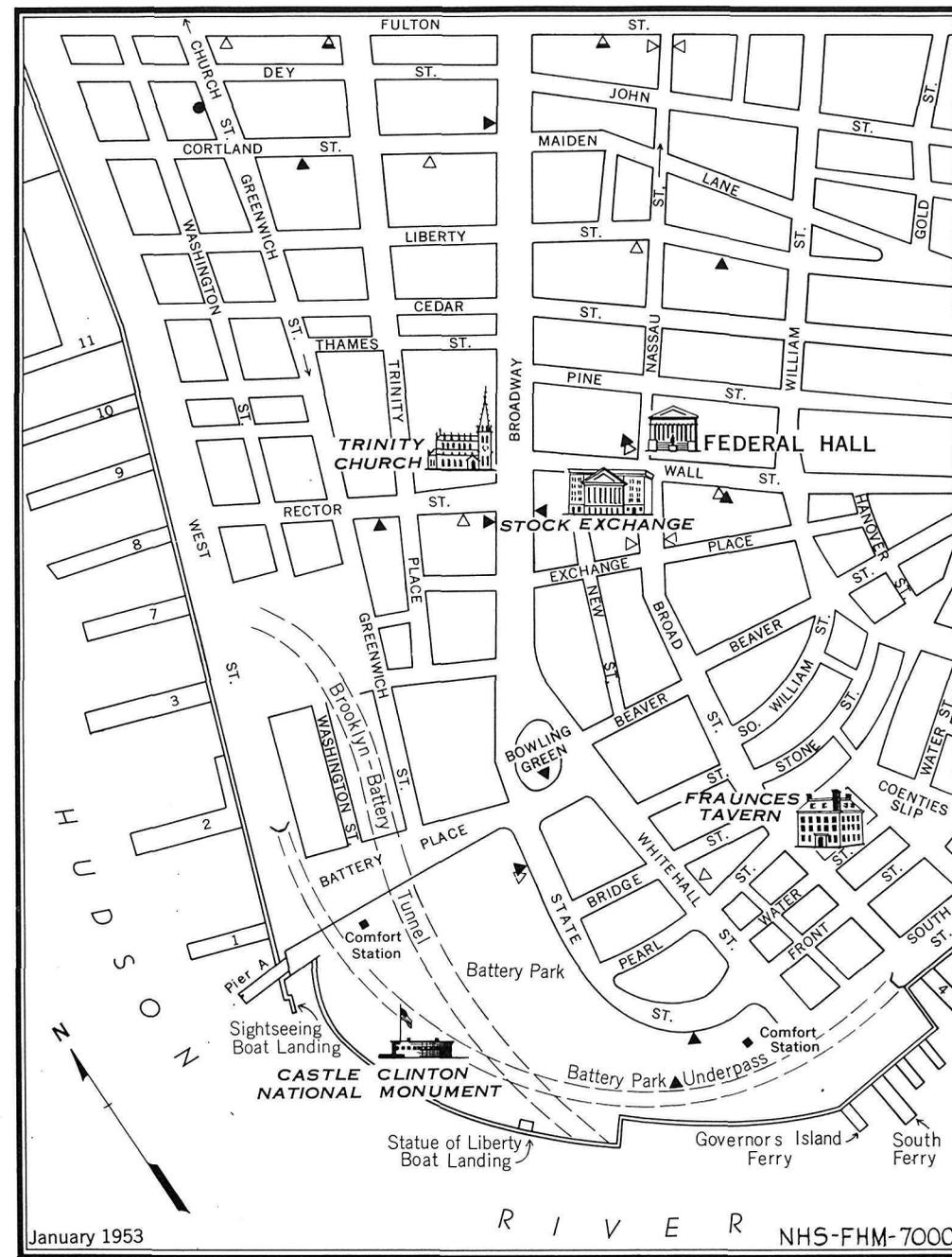
Statue of Washington by John Quincy Adams Ward on the steps of the Memorial.

pendent subway (Broadway-Nassau Street Station), or BMT subway (Fulton Street Station).

#### ADMINISTRATION

Federal Hall Memorial National Historic Site is owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. The Federal Government is assisted in all phases of restoration, preservation, and interpretation by Federal Hall Memorial Associates, Inc., under the terms of a cooperative agreement dated February 20, 1940.

All communications concerning the site should be addressed to the Superintendent, Statue of Liberty National Monument, Bedloe's Island, New York 4, N. Y.



### FEDERAL HALL MEMORIAL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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