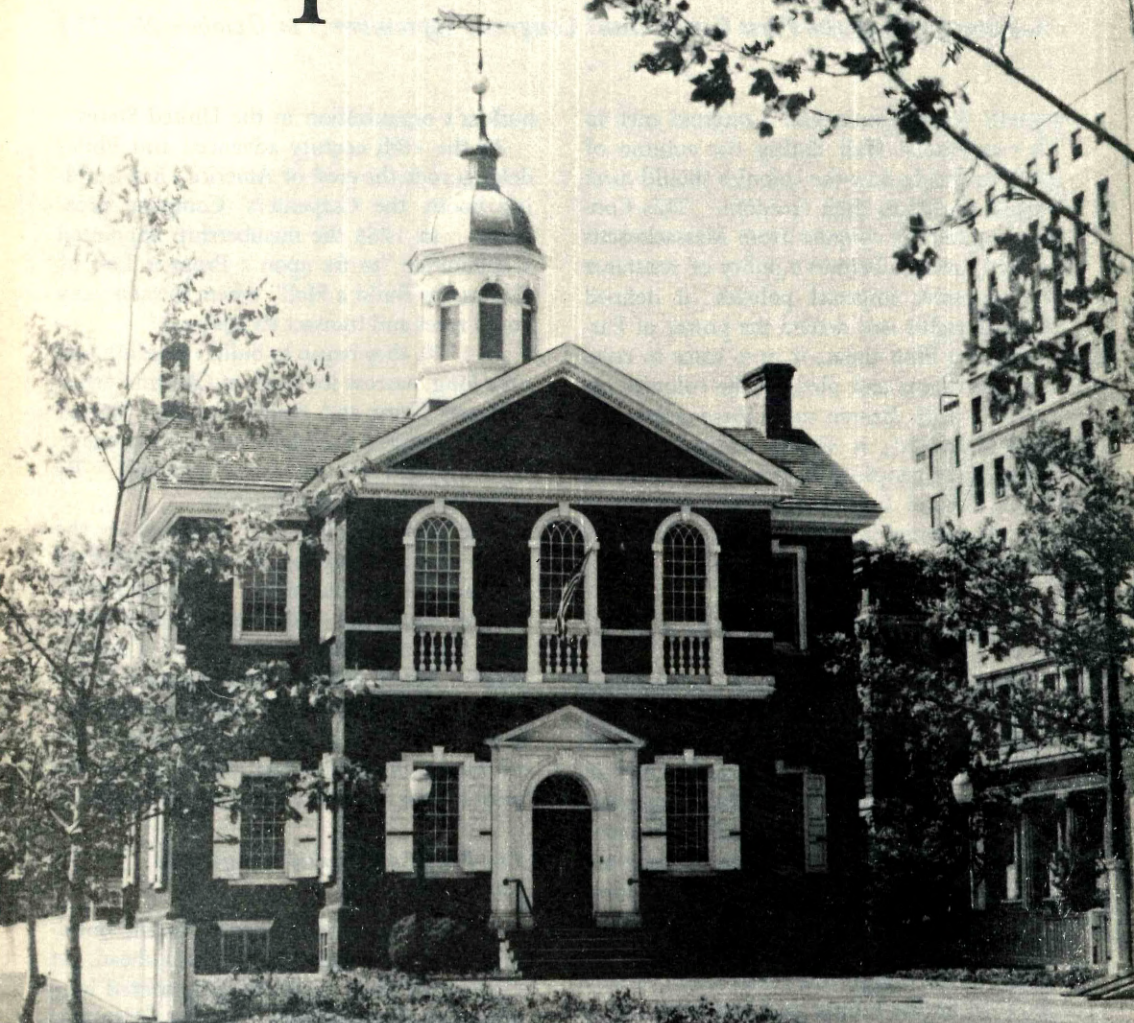


# Carpenters' Hall



INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Pennsylvania

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*Meeting place of the First Continental Congress, September 5 to October 26, 1774*

THE First Continental Congress met in Carpenters' Hall during the autumn of 1774 to decide how the colonies should meet British threats to their freedom. This Congress united the colonies from Massachusetts to the Carolinas behind a policy of resistance to oppressive imperial policies; it defined colonial rights and denied the power of Parliament to limit them; it gave voice to colonial grievances and pledged the colonies not to trade with Britain until these grievances were redressed; it vowed support for the beleaguered people of Boston; and it resolved that a Second Continental Congress should meet if colonial appeals for justice went unanswered.

## *The Carpenters' Company and Its Hall*

Edmund Woolley, who built Independence Hall, Samuel Rhoads, who built the Pennsylvania Hospital and Benjamin Franklin's house, and David Evans, who built Old City Hall, were all members of the Carpenters' Company of Philadelphia. These master craftsmen worked not only with hammer and saw but were also architects and builders. From the date of the company's organization in 1724, its members were responsible for much of the design and construction of what grew to be the largest and best built city of the American colonies.

Patterned after the guilds of England, the Carpenters' Company was founded "for the purpose of obtaining instruction in the science of architecture and assisting such of their members as should by accident be in need of support, or the widows and minor children of members." It is today the oldest

builder's organization in the United States.

As the 18th century advanced and Philadelphia rode the crest of America's first building boom, the Carpenters' Company prospered. In 1763 the membership appointed a committee "to fix upon a Propper Lott of Ground to Build a Hall" where the company could meet and transact its business.

In 1770, they began to build a meeting hall on a long, narrow lot south of Chestnut Street between Third and Fourth Streets. Robert Smith provided the plans while other members supplied the labor and materials. By 1774 the structure was finished.

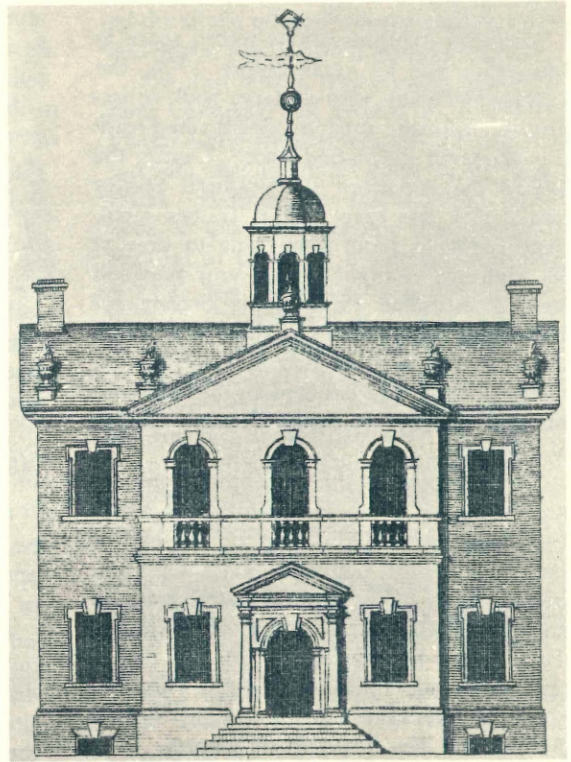
The new building was designed in the shape of a cross, giving the unusual effect of a facade on all four sides. Trim and well-proportioned, the two-story structure stood back from the street at the end of a narrow court. Finely wrought appointments and a pleasing cupola made what was unpretentious in mass excellent in quality. An entry divided the first floor into two rooms, and on the second floor were three rooms and a hallway.

## *The First Continental Congress at Carpenters' Hall*

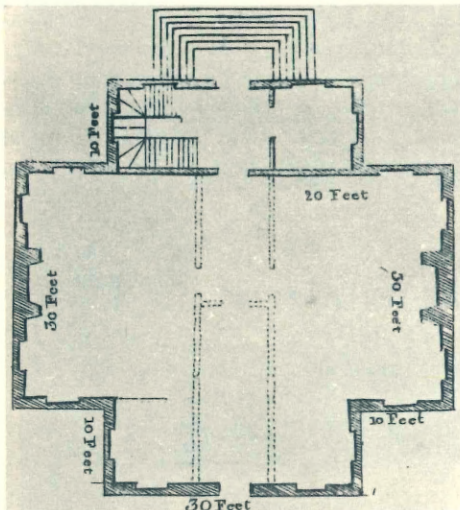
Larger and more impressive public buildings were to be raised in the years ahead, yet Carpenters' Hall would be remembered long after their disappearance. As the *Columbian Magazine* observed in 1790:

"This edifice, though more humble in its architecture and less conspicuous in its situation, than some of the others, is, nevertheless, rendered famous, by being the place in which that august body,—the first general Congress of America, assembled and held their councils."

*Carpenters' Hall as the delegates saw it in 1774. This drawing appeared 12 years later in the company's rule book and is believed to have been made from the architect's drawing.*



*This plan from the company's rule book shows in outline the "long entry" John Adams described, and the room to the right of it where the Congress met.*



The decade between the appointment of the committee to build a hall and the completion of the building was marked by what John Adams called "a radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people." This change had brought the colonies and the mother country close to a parting of the ways. Inflammatory acts of Parliament now met with riotous resistance. An open break loomed.

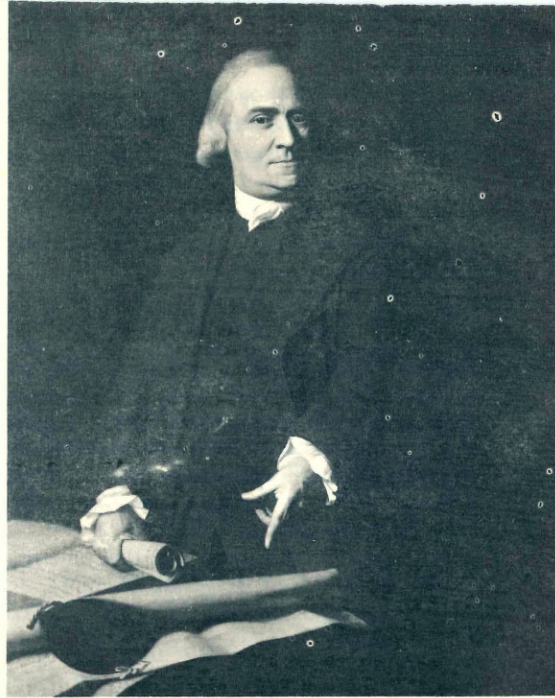
A general congress was called

"... to consult upon the present state of the Colonies and the miseries to which they are and must be reduced by the operation of certain acts of Parliament respecting America, and to deliberate and determine upon wise and proper measures, to be by them recommended to all the Colonies, for the recovery and establishment of the just rights & liber-

ties, civil and religious, and the restoration of union & harmony between Great Britain and the Colonies, most ardently desired by all good men."

On June 17, 1774, Massachusetts proposed that this congress meet at Philadelphia on September 1 and appointed the first delegates. Soon all of the colonies except Georgia followed suit.

By September 4 most of the delegates were in town. It became clear that they were of two minds. The majority, led by Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, were determined to resist Britain by any means short of war. The others, led by Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly Joseph Galloway, wished to patch up the quarrel. In the maneuvering which marked the preliminary meeting of the delegates on September 5, the radical majority first asserted their strength. Would the delegates accept Speaker Galloway's invitation to meet in the Assembly Room of the State House? Or would they accept the city's offer to meet in Carpenters' Hall?



*Samuel Adams, more than any other colonist, was responsible for the events which led to calling a Congress. Portrait by John Singleton Copley. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

*The Honorable Peyton Randolph, President of the First Continental Congress. Portrait by Charles Willson Peale, Independence National Historical Park Collection.*



According to John Adams:

"At ten the delegates all met at the City Tavern, and walked to Carpenters' Hall, where they took a view of the [east] room, and of the chamber where is an excellent library; there is also a long entry where gentlemen may walk, and a convenient chamber opposite to the library. The general cry was that this is a good room. . . ."

So the radicals won out.

A disappointed Galloway wrote the same evening, "The Congress this Day met at Carpenters' Hall, notwithstanding the Offer of the Assembly Room a much more Proper Place."

*"Gentlemen from the Several Colonies"*

The delegates were men of exceptional ability and long experience. All had served their colonies in responsible positions, many

as legislators or judges.

Samuel Adams, the organizer, and Patrick Henry, the voice of the resistance against Great Britain, were the best known delegates. Two others had won respect both in England and in the colonies for their political writings—Richard Bland with *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies*, and John Dickinson with his *Letters of a Farmer in Pennsylvania*. Rhode Island's Stephen Hopkins was a veteran of the Albany Congress of 1754, where the idea of Colonial union was first broached. Nine other delegates had attended the Stamp Act Congress of 1765, which declared that taxation without representation was a violation of colonial rights. And among the delegates not yet widely known outside their own colonies were John Adams, John Jay, Roger Sherman, and George Washington.

For President, the members chose portly, aristocratic Peyton Randolph, Speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses and acknowledged leader of the Virginia delegation. As Secretary, they chose Charles Thomson whose

leadership of the local Sons of Liberty had earned him recognition as "the Sam Adams of Philadelphia."

Next, the "gentlemen from the several Colonies" produced their credentials which the Congress read and approved. Following the adoption of rules, Congress appointed the two important committees: One to "State the rights of the Colonies in general, the several instances in which these rights are violated or infringed, and the means most proper to be pursued for obtaining a restoration of them"; the other to "examine and report the several Statutes, which affect the trade and Manufactures of the colonies."

For the next 2 weeks, these committees deliberated, Congress assembling only to admit new delegates.

Then came a flurry of activity when Congress pledged assistance to Boston's embattled people, who suffered under the punitive measures known as the Intolerable Acts.

Finally, on September 24, the delegates moved to consider the reports of the two committees.

*The First Prayer in Congress.* Engraving by William Pate after painting by T. H. Matteson, Independence National Historical Park Collection.





*John Dickinson, able penman of the Congress.* Portrait by Charles Willson Peale, Independence National Historical Park Collection.

### *Resistance or Reconciliation?*

This was the signal for members of more moderate temper to make a last effort at reconciliation. Joseph Galloway introduced his Plan of Union providing for an American legislature which would have an equal voice with Parliament in colonial affairs. Galloway's plan was not acceptable to the radicals and it was defeated.

Having voted down the attempt at reconciliation, Congress now conferred on means for asserting American rights and forcing recognition of them.

From their debates came the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, affirming those fundamental rights which have become the cornerstone of American political faith:

"Life, liberty, & property . . . a right in the people to participate in their legislative council . . . the great and inestimable privilege of being tried by their peers . . . a right peaceably to assemble, consider of their grievances, and petition. . . ."

These expressions would recur again and again in the great charters of the Nation.

To force recognition of these rights, the Congress unanimously adopted "The Association," which pledged the colonies not to import from, export to, or consume goods made in Great Britain. The Association was much more than an economic weapon; it was, as the modern authority on the work of the Continental Congress, Edmund C. Burnett, has stated, "an important step toward the creation of an organic union among the colonies. . . ."

Even as the Declaration and the Association were being debated, the ablest penmen of the Congress—Patrick Henry, John Dickinson, John Jay, John Adams, Richard Henry Lee—were at work drafting memorials to justify acts taken by the colonies. These appeared as a series of notable state papers: An address to the people of Great Britain, a memorial to the inhabitants of the British colonies, a letter to the inhabitants of Quebec, and the Address to the King.

As the First Continental Congress neared its end, the thoughts of its members turned to the future. On October 22 they resolved "that another Congress should be held the tenth day of May next, unless the redress of grievances, which we have desired, be obtained before that time."

The decision to resist having been made, the Congress dissolved itself on Oct. 26, 1774. By its work, the middle ground of compromise had been swept away; now the colonies must submit or triumph.

### *Carpenters' Hall in the Revolution*

With war in progress, Carpenters' Hall became a center of military activity. The Americans established a hospital on the lower floor and stored arms and equipment in the basement. The British also used the hall as a hospital following their occupation of Philadelphia in 1777. By June of the next year the Continental Army was again in possession of the city, and Col. Benjamin Flowers, commissary general of military stores, took over the lower floor and cellar. A brass-founder's

and file-cutter's shop was set up on the grounds around the building.

The commissary general remained in the building through the 1780's. When the Rev. Manasseh Cutler visited Carpenters' Hall in 1787, he found the room where the Congress had met full of

"Trophies of War . . . pieces of Cannon, small-arms, side-arms of officers and men, Colors, standards, tents, military chests, and all the various accouterments of officers and men; and many complete uniforms of different regiments, from field officers down to privates collected principally from the two captured armies of Burgoyne and Cornwallis. There are also in this collection several trophies captured by partisans of the American Army, in bold and desperate attempts, displayed in honor to those Heroes who obtained them."

#### *Carpenters' Hall in the Federal Period*

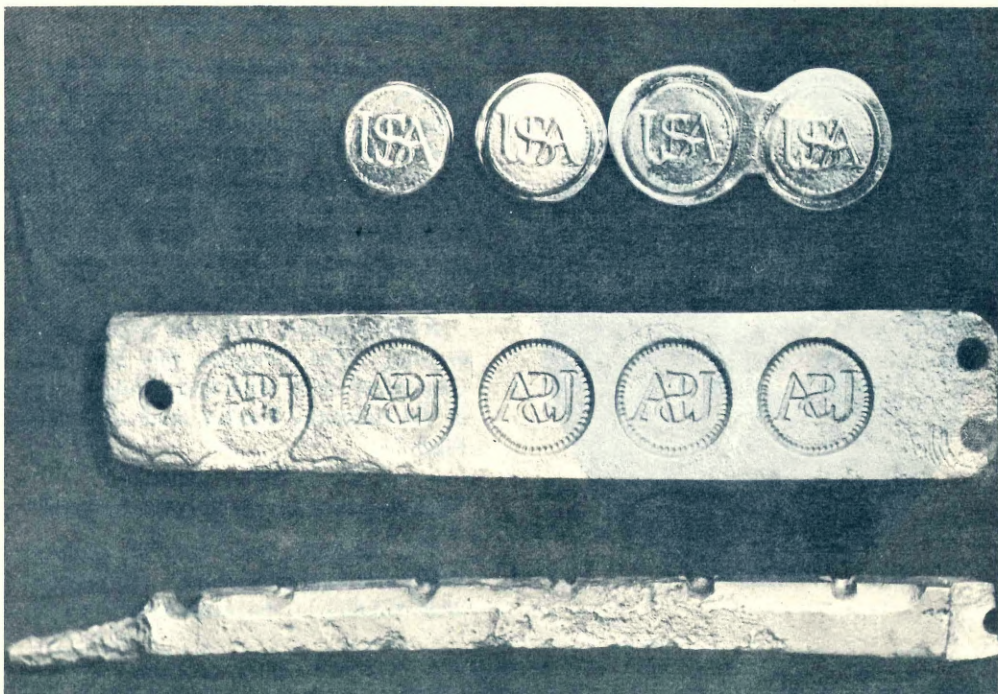
In 1790 the Secretary of War, Henry Knox, rented the ground floor. From this office,

Knox, five clerks, and a doorkeeper conducted the affairs of the Nation's military services and supervised relations with the Indians.

The next tenant, secured after the Carpenters' Company had erected New Hall and moved along with Secretary Knox to the new quarters, was the First Bank of the United States. Business was transacted on the first floor, at this time probably thrown open by removal of partitions. The directors of the wealthy and powerful institution met in a room on the second floor. Gold, silver, and banknotes were stored in cellar vaults.

Six years later, in 1797, the First Bank transferred operations to its magnificent new building across Whalebone Alley. Within a year the Bank of Pennsylvania had rented Carpenters' Hall. Its stay is best remembered for America's first great bank robbery, an inside job which netted its perpetrators the then astounding sum of \$160,000 in coin and banknotes. The culprits were apprehended when one of them deposited large sums in the bank he had just robbed.

*Mold found in Carpenters' Court was used by the Commissary General of Military Stores to cast pewter buttons for infantrymen of the Continental Army.*



## *Later History of Carpenters' Hall*

Many other organizations rented space in the hall. For 17 years before 1790, the Library Company with its large book collection and scientific apparatus maintained reading rooms on the second floor. During the 1780's the American Philosophical Society had shared this space. The Tailors' Company rented a room from time to time at 10 shillings a night, closet and firewood thrown in. The Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture met there after 1785. At a meeting held on July 3, 1787, this influential body was honored by the presence of that pioneer scientific farmer, George Washington.

On the records of the Carpenters' Company are the names of these organizations which used Carpenters' Hall during the first half of the 19th century: United States Customs, Second Bank of the United States, Franklin Institute, Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, Fuel Saving Society, Society for the Education of Female Children, Musical Fund Society, The Hicksite Friends, Johnny Willets School, and The Apprentice's Library.

In October 1824 the Franklin Institute held the first exhibition of American manufactures in the hall. Among some 300 items displayed were these prize winning entries: Blister steel and grass bonnets, japanned goods and broadcloths, camel's hair brushes, and a bass drum.

Finally, in 1828, C. J. Wolbert and Company rented the building as an auction hall. Thus it was that in 1848 the historian Benson J. Lossing found Carpenters' Hall "... filled with every species of merchandise and

the walls which once echoed the eloquent words of Henry, Lee and the Adamsons, reverberating with the clatter of the auctioneer's voice and hammer."

Eight years after Lossing's visit, the Carpenters' Company decided to rescue the building and renovate it, "especial care to be taken to preserve, as much as possible, every feature in said Hall as it now exists indicative of its original finish." This early restoration was opened to the public on September 5, 1857. In the century since then, it has been maintained as a historic landmark and kept open by the Carpenters' Company, which continues to meet here.

### *About Your Visit*

Carpenters' Hall is on Chestnut Street between Fourth and Orianna Streets. It is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Other historic sites in Independence National Historical Park are within easy walking distance. A folder with a map locating these sites is available at the information center in the West Wing of Independence Hall.

### *Administration*

By cooperative agreement of May 10, 1950, between the Carpenters' Company and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Carpenters' Hall is included within Independence National Historical Park, the Carpenters' Company retaining ownership of the property. Inquiries may be addressed to the Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park, 420 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia 6, Pa.



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
*Cooperating with Carpenters' Company*

