

## *History of The Carpenters' Company*

The eighteenth century Master Builder, proficient in both construction and design, often began his career as a house carpenter. Though much of Philadelphia was built of brick, the house carpenter, not the bricklayer, usually supervised construction, engaging the other craftsmen: painters, plasterers, glaziers and bricklayers.

About 1724, a group of Master Builders banded together to form The Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia, patterned after London's Worshipful Company of Carpenters, "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 or minor children of members."

As well as fulfilling these benevolent and educational objectives, the Company sought to exert some influence on the construction industry in Philadelphia. First published in 1786, the Company Price Book became the keystone of its continued success and the contents, therefore, a closely guarded secret.

Many members enjoyed a level of wealth and influence unmatched by other craftsmen. They served as Assemblymen, City Councilmen and as Mayor. To name just a few, they were men like Edmund Woolley, builder of Independence Hall; James Porteous, responsible for the Slate Roof House; Samuel Rhoads, good friend of Benjamin Franklin and designer of his mansion; Joseph Fox, speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly until 1771; Thomas Nevell, former apprentice of Edmund Woolley and renowned for his abilities as a designer; and Robert Smith, architect of Carpenters' Hall and of other notable buildings throughout the colonies.

## *The Carpenters' Company Today*

Today, The Carpenters' Company consists of more than 180 builders, structural engineers, and architects actively engaged in the construction industry in and around Philadelphia. While originally a trade organization, the Company's primary mission has become the preservation of Carpenters' Hall, its history and Company's own history. The present Carpenters' Company proudly carries on the traditions of its forbears and recognizes the privilege of maintaining this priceless historic treasure for the benefit of all.

By cooperative agreement between The Carpenters' Company and the United States Department of the Interior, Carpenters' Hall is included within Independence National Historical Park with The Carpenters' Company retaining ownership of the property. The Hall is maintained, as it has been since its completion in 1774, by the Company, which relies almost exclusively on the annual dues paid by its members and contributions from well-wishers. Since 1857, the Hall has remained open free to the public.

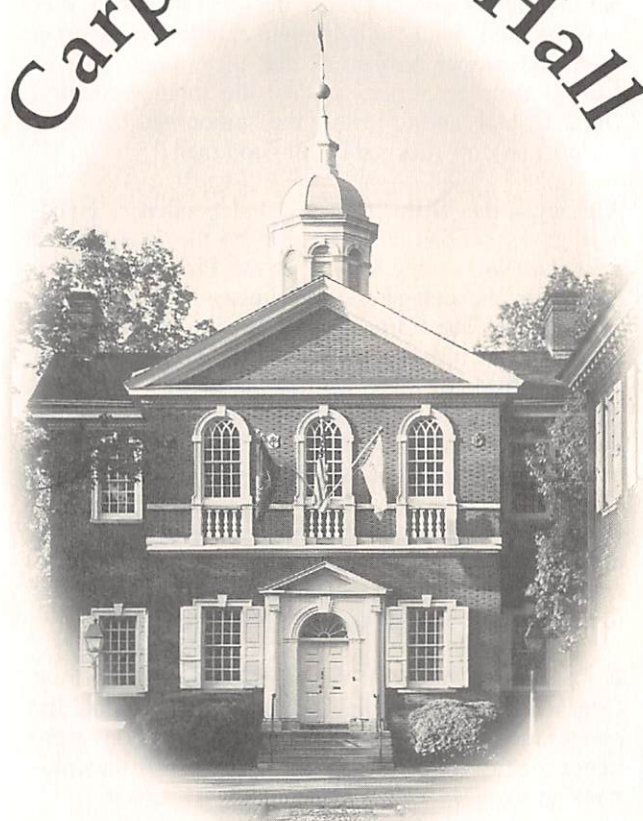
Contributions for the preservation and operation of Carpenters' Hall are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Checks should be made payable to:

**The Carpenters' Company  
Carpenters' Hall  
320 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106**

Carpenters' Hall is open daily except Mondays from 10 AM to 4 PM. During the months of January and February, the Hall is also closed on Tuesdays.

**215/925.0167  
[www.carpentershall.org](http://www.carpentershall.org)**

# *Carpenters' Hall*



Meeting place of the  
First Continental Congress  
in 1774

Built, owned and operated by  
The Carpenters' Company  
of the City and  
County of Philadelphia

## The First Continental Congress

September 5 – October 26, 1774

In the fall of 1774, delegates from 12 of the original colonies, Georgia having declined to attend, met in Carpenters' Hall "to deliberate and determine upon wise and proper measures" that they might take to redress their grievances against the mother country, Great Britain, and to restore the "union and harmony ... most ardently desired by all good men."

Although the State House, "Independence Hall," was given serious consideration as the location for what was to become known as the First Continental Congress, the delegates voted instead to accept the invitation of The Carpenters' Company to meet in its recently constructed Hall only two blocks away. As a privately owned, more neutral building, Carpenters' Hall afforded the deliberations greater secrecy, and removed them from the watchful eye of the conservative colonial government of Pennsylvania.

Before adjourning and returning to their homes, the delegates pledged support to Massachusetts with a trade embargo against Great Britain, and drafted letters to the British people and to King George III.

It was during these fateful eight weeks of the First Continental Congress that the foundation was laid for cooperation among the colonies, and provisions were made for future sessions of the Congress, if the colonists' grievances were not adequately redressed.

In the room in which you are standing, Patrick Henry articulated his famous statement, "I am not a Virginian, but an American."

## The Bonvouloir Affair

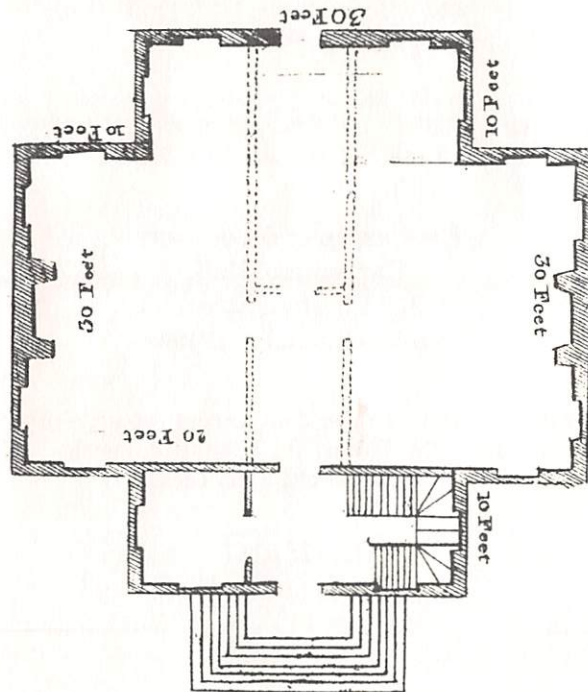
December 18 – December 28, 1775

On three different nights in December of 1775 on the second floor of Carpenters' Hall, four men met in secret session, all having arrived by different routes, so as not to arouse suspicion about their movements. John Jay was one, Benjamin Franklin was another, Francis Daymon was the third and Julien Achard de Bonvouloir was the last. The purpose of the meetings was to inform Bonvouloir that the colonies were anxious to

receive the support of French King Louis XVI in their struggle for freedom from the British.

Bonvouloir was a French secret agent whose assignment was to present himself as a private citizen. His mission was regarded as being so sensitive and so dangerous that if apprehended, the French would deny his existence, since at that time they were nominally at peace with Great Britain. His orders were to gather information, to assure the rebellious colonists of French support for their cause and to offer the use of French ports after independence had been achieved.

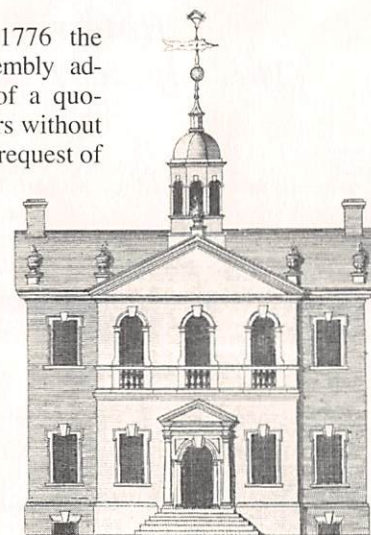
As a result of these secret night-time sessions, Silas Deane was sent to Paris to begin direct negotiations with government officials at the palace in Versailles for money, provisions and technical assistance. It was this initial contact with the French through Bonvouloir in Carpenters' Hall that established the channels through which the new nation obtained military aid. Through a clandestine network, crucial supplies were received almost immediately via friendly West Indian ports.



## The Birthplace of Pennsylvania

June 18 – June 25, 1776

On June 14, 1776 the Pennsylvania Assembly adjourned for lack of a quorum of its members without having acted on a request of the Second Continental Congress for a 6,000 man militia and without having declared Pennsylvania free and independent of Great Britain. Four days later in Carpenters' Hall, delegates from Philadelphia and ten other counties



convened an "Extra-Legal Body," the Pennsylvania Provincial Conference, which declared the Pennsylvania Assembly "not competent" to manage the affairs of its citizens, and unanimously approved the resolutions of the Continental Congress.

The Provincial Conference then organized elections for a new legislature and set about raising the militia to help defend the colonies against Great Britain.

Had these meetings not taken place, Pennsylvanians would have been unable to join with other Americans in declaring their independence on July 4, 1776. For this reason the legislature of Pennsylvania in 1982 officially declared Carpenters' Hall as the birthplace of the Commonwealth.

*The plans left and above are from the 1786 edition of the Company's Rule Book and are thought to represent the architect's original design.*