



Foundation Document Overview

Federal Hall National Memorial

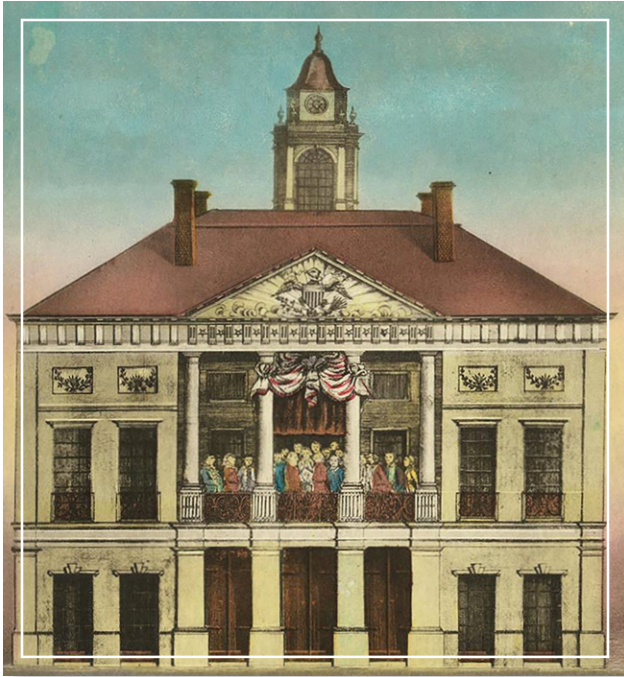
New York



Contact Information

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Purpose



FEDERAL HALL NATIONAL MEMORIAL commemorates the inauguration of George Washington as America's first president, is the site of the first American capitol under a federal constitution, the birthplace of constitutional government, and where Congress adopted the Bill of Rights.



Significance

Significance statements express why Federal Hall National Memorial resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Federal Hall National Memorial is the site where George Washington was inaugurated as the first president of the United States. Federal Hall National Memorial provides opportunities to commemorate this historic event and reflect on the accomplishments of the first leader of a young nation.
- The site of Federal Hall National Memorial was the birthplace of American government and home to the first Executive Offices and United States Congress from 1789 to 1790. The site was the scene of many important events including the trial of printer John Peter Zenger in 1735, which reinforced the “freedom of the press,” the Stamp Act Congress (1765), the Second Continental Congress (1785–1788), the passage of the Northwest Ordinance (1787) which paved the way for the creation of six free states that banned slavery, the Bill of Rights in 1789, and the first United States Congress (1789-1790).
- The location of the first U.S. Congress in New York City greatly influenced lower Manhattan’s development as the financial center of the nation. Even after the nation’s political capital was relocated to Philadelphia in 1790, New York City remained the nation’s financial capital serving as the government’s main sub-treasury from 1862 to 1920.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Site of the First American Capitol.** The site upon which Federal Hall National Memorial is located was originally the location of New York City's City Hall (built in 1703). In 1788 the original City Hall was redesigned and renamed Federal Hall when it became the first capitol of the United States under the Constitution and was the site of George Washington's inaugural in 1789. Foundations of the original City Hall / Federal Hall building still exist in the basement of the current structure.
- **Federal Hall National Memorial (the building).** Federal Hall National Memorial was constructed in 1842 on the site of the original New York City's City Hall. The neoclassical edifice would serve as the U.S. Custom House (1842–1862) and eventually the U.S. Sub-Treasury (1862-1920) before eventually becoming a unit of the national park system.
- **George Washington Statue.** On the front steps of Federal Hall National Memorial stands a heroic bronze sculpture of George Washington commemorating his inauguration as the first president of the United States. The statue was created by John Quincy Adams Ward and was installed on the steps in 1883. It is part of the late-19th-century tradition of commemorating historic events with monumental statuary.
- **Opportunity to Exercise First Amendment Rights.** Federal Hall National Memorial occupies a prominent position on Wall Street and offers a popular platform for first amendment rights, speakers, and programs addressing the large crowds of tourists and financial district workers.

Federal Hall National Memorial contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Collections.** The park's collections consist of artifacts relating to George Washington, the evolution of the Bill of Rights, the constitutional government, the historical development of New York City, and the evolution of the site's buildings.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **New Form of Government.** Federal Hall National Memorial preserves the story of the birth of our nation. It was the site of events that led to revolution, the headquarters of British operations during the Revolutionary War, the final home of the Confederation Congress, and the launching point for our current national government, symbolized by the first session of the United States Congress, the inauguration on April 10, 1789, of George Washington as the first president of the United States, and adoption of the Bill of Rights.
- **Development of Treasury.** Strategically located at the heart of American finance, the site of Federal Hall National Memorial has been integrally connected with our nation's economic history. The present building served as the U. S. Custom House (1842–1862), collecting some 70% of all Federal revenues, and as the U.S. Sub-Treasury for New York (1863-1920) where it housed public financial operations supporting the nation's transcontinental growth.
- **Architecture.** The massive stone construction and Classical architectural style of Federal Hall National Memorial symbolize not only the strength and stability of the nation, but also the founders' commitment to the ideals of the ancient Greek and Roman world: democracy, representative government, and a moral form of governance.



Description



Federal Hall National Memorial is in lower Manhattan in the heart of the financial district at the intersection of Wall, Nassau, and Broad Streets. The existing Federal Hall National Memorial building is the third structure known to have occupied the site. (Please note that the park unit and the building share the same name—Federal Hall National Memorial.) The first building, completed in 1703, was New York City’s City Hall and eventually housed some of the government functions of our young nation including the Common Council, Provincial Assembly, and the courts. It was here, in 1735, that John Peter Zenger was jailed, tried, and acquitted of libel for exposing government corruption in his newspaper—an early victory for freedom of the press. In 1765, the Stamp Act Congress met in City Hall and the building became the permanent home for the Articles of Confederation from 1785 to 1788.

When the Constitution was ratified in 1788, New York remained the national capital. Pierre L’Enfant was commissioned to remodel City Hall for the new federal government and the building was renamed Federal Hall. It became the first capitol of the United States under the Constitution, and, on April 30, 1789, George Washington was inaugurated on the building’s second-story balcony. The first U.S. Congress officiated in Federal Hall and in 1789 adopted the Bill of Rights. When Congress and the capital moved to Philadelphia in 1790, the building again housed city government offices until 1812, when Federal Hall was demolished.

Shortly after the first Federal Hall was demolished, a small brick building was constructed and became the U.S. Customs House. As lower Manhattan quickly became the financial center of the nation, the need for a larger customs house grew. In the late 1830s, the brick building was demolished and construction of the existing building began; the new U.S. Customs House was completed in 1842. In 1862, the primary use of the building would change again when it became the U.S. government’s main sub-treasury.

Millions of dollars of gold and silver were kept in the basement vaults, until the Federal Reserve Bank replaced the sub-treasury system in 1920. In 1939, the Secretary of the Interior designated the building as a national historic site, and in 1955 it was redesignated as Federal Hall National Memorial.

The exterior of Federal Hall National Memorial was modeled after the Parthenon. The principal facade fronts Wall Street, and the rear fronts Pine Street. The structure is 177 feet long and 89 feet wide and occupies an area of just less than 0.5 acres. It is constructed completely of stone with a white marble exterior. Today, the building houses the administrative offices of Manhattan Sites, NPS Northeast Field Offices, cooperators’ offices and classrooms, and exhibits pertaining to the history of the site. Federal Hall National Memorial occupies a prominent position on Wall Street and offers a popular platform for speakers and programs addressing large crowds of tourists and financial district workers.

