

Independence Hall

● **Location:** Chestnut Street between 5th & 6th Streets ([Map](#))

● **Built:** 1732-53

● **Architects:** Andrew Hamilton with Edmund Wooley

● **Style:** Georgian

● **Commissioned by:** Pennsylvania colonial legislature

● The basement once served as the city's dog pound

● The second floor was once home to Charles Willson Peale's museum of natural history.

● Some historians note that Ben Franklin would occasionally trip other delegates from his aisle seat.

● George Washington, knowing that his opinion would carry undue weight, contributed little to the debate over the Constitution.

● Even though the days were very hot in the summer of 1787, windows were kept closed so others could not overhear their discussions.



It is the birthplace of America. The Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were both debated and signed inside this building. Built between 1732 and 1756 to be the Pennsylvania State House, the building originally housed all three branches of Pennsylvania's colonial government. The Pennsylvania legislature loaned their Assembly Room out for the meetings of the Second Continental Congress and later, the Constitutional Convention. Here, George Washington was appointed Commander in Chief of the Continental Army in 1775, the Articles of Confederation were adopted in 1781, and Benjamin Franklin gazed upon the "Rising Sun" chair in 1787. There is much history to

explore - from the Georgian architecture, to Peale's Museum, to fugitive slave trials - in addition to the story of the founding of the nation.

The Second Continental Congress

The Pennsylvania legislature loaned their room out to the men of the Second Continental Congress in May 1775. Meeting just a month after shots had been fired at Lexington and Concord, the men prepared for war. They approved the nomination of George Washington as Commander in Chief of the newly created army, and they approved the resolution creating the Marine Corps. They also pursued peace, drafting the Olive Branch Petition. King George III never responded to that petition and talk began to grow of seeking independence. On July 2, 1776, the men voted to approve the resolution for independence. On July 4, 1776, they voted to approve their document, the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence was signed in this room on August 2, 1776.

The Constitutional Convention

The Pennsylvania legislature loaned their room out again in May 1787 to the men of the Constitutional Convention. The nation's first framework of government, the Articles of Confederation, had proven unsatisfactory. In a climate of great concern, delegates arrived in Philadelphia to address the inadequacies of the Articles. In four months, they created the U.S. Constitution, a feat George Washington called "little short of a miracle". The debates of the Constitutional or Federal Convention were heated at times, over issues like the power balance between large states and small states as well as the slave trade. During the debates, Pennsylvania

delegate and elder statesman Benjamin Franklin looked at the chair where Washington was seated as the presiding officer. Carved into that chair is a sun. As the men signed the Constitution, Franklin said that he had the great happiness to know it was a rising and not a setting sun.

Transition to Shrine

The state capital left Philadelphia in 1799, moving on to Lancaster and then Harrisburg. In 1818, the state sold this building to the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphians welcomed the war hero Marquis de Lafayette to the Assembly Room in 1824 during his triumphant return visit to America. The committee preparing for his visit first referred to the Assembly Room as "the hall of Independence". It would be decades before the entire building became known by that name. The room took on the appearance of a shrine with the 1854-55 redecoration. President-elect Abraham Lincoln stepped into this shrine-like room in 1861 as he journeyed to Washington D.C. for his inauguration. Standing in the Assembly Room, he said that he would rather be "assassinated on the spot" than give up the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. After his assassination in the nation's capital in 1865, his body returned to the Assembly Room for two days. Upwards of 85,000 mourners passed by the casket.



Rooms in Independence Hall

Courtroom of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania sat in this room in the 1700's. On July 8, 1776, an act of defiance occurred here when a group of Pennsylvania militiamen stormed in and tore down British King George III's coat of arms. A hundred years later, visitors came to this room during the Centennial to experience the National Museum, a collection of artifacts celebrating the founding of the nation,

Long Gallery

The Long Gallery on the second floor of Independence Hall served as a reception area for visitors meeting with Pennsylvania's governor. It was also the scene of dinners and celebrations. During the British occupation of Philadelphia, the Long Gallery became a hospital for wounded American prisoners of war. Later visitors to this room marveled at Peale's Museum, one of the earliest museums in America.

Governor's Council Chamber

Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council met in this room in the 18th century. Later use of the room includes U.S. District Court, the scene of fugitive slave trials in the 1850's. Displayed on the table today is the surveyor's tool used by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon to determine the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Committee of the Assembly Chamber

Used in the 18th century for meetings and as a storeroom for military goods, this room housed the U.S. Marshal's Office in the 19th century. Accused fugitives from slavery were held for trial here, right above the room where the Declaration of Independence had been signed.



Resources for classroom viewing:

A brief movie about Independence Hall
utube - Virtual tour of Independence Hall – Philadelphia

Good pictures in a slide show

Utube - Independence Hall, Independence National Historical Park - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania