



Independence Hall Accessibility Book for Second Floor



The Assembly Room of the Pennsylvania State House served as the meeting place of the Pennsylvania Assembly for over sixty years until the State Capital moved away from Philadelphia in 1799. In 1776, the Continental Congress declared Independence in this room and in 1787 the U.S. Constitution was debated and signed. Most historians consider this room one of the most historic rooms in the United States.



Pictured Left: A detail of the actual chair Washington sat in while presiding over the Constitutional Convention in 1787. At the signing Franklin was optimistic about the document and said that now he had the happiness to know that the carving on the back was a rising, not a setting sun.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court chamber was the meeting place of the colony's and (later state's) highest court. In 1791 the U.S. Supreme Court used this court chamber for one session until their courtroom in City Hall (now Old City Hall) had been completed. Prior to independence, many citizens learned of their rights as Englishmen by attending trials here.



Pictured Left: A detail of the Pennsylvania Coat of Arms, by George Rutter c. 1785. This painting replaced the coat of arms of King George III after it had been taken down and burned following the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8th, 1776.

These steps lead to the second floor of Independence Hall, originally named the Pennsylvania State House. The first floor was used for the state's Supreme Court Chamber and the legislative Assembly Room. These two branches of Pennsylvania's government worked here from 1736 until 1799. The second floor contains the Governor's Office, the long gallery and a committee room for the Assembly.





This staircase has been used by some famous feet, including Benjamin Franklin's. He would have used it to get to his office as President (Governor) of Pennsylvania from 1785 - 1788.



The doorway pictured left, leads into the Long Gallery, with a committee room on the right and the Governor's office on the left. Another flight of steps can be seen in the background. These steps lead to the bell tower (not open to the public).

Governor's Council Chamber and Long Gallery

William Penn's sons and grandsons, or their appointed representatives, presided over the Provincial Council, highest legislative body in the Colony. 1776 brought an end to the Provincial Council, but similar authority was vested in a Supreme Executive Council over which Benjamin Franklin presided from 1785 – 88.

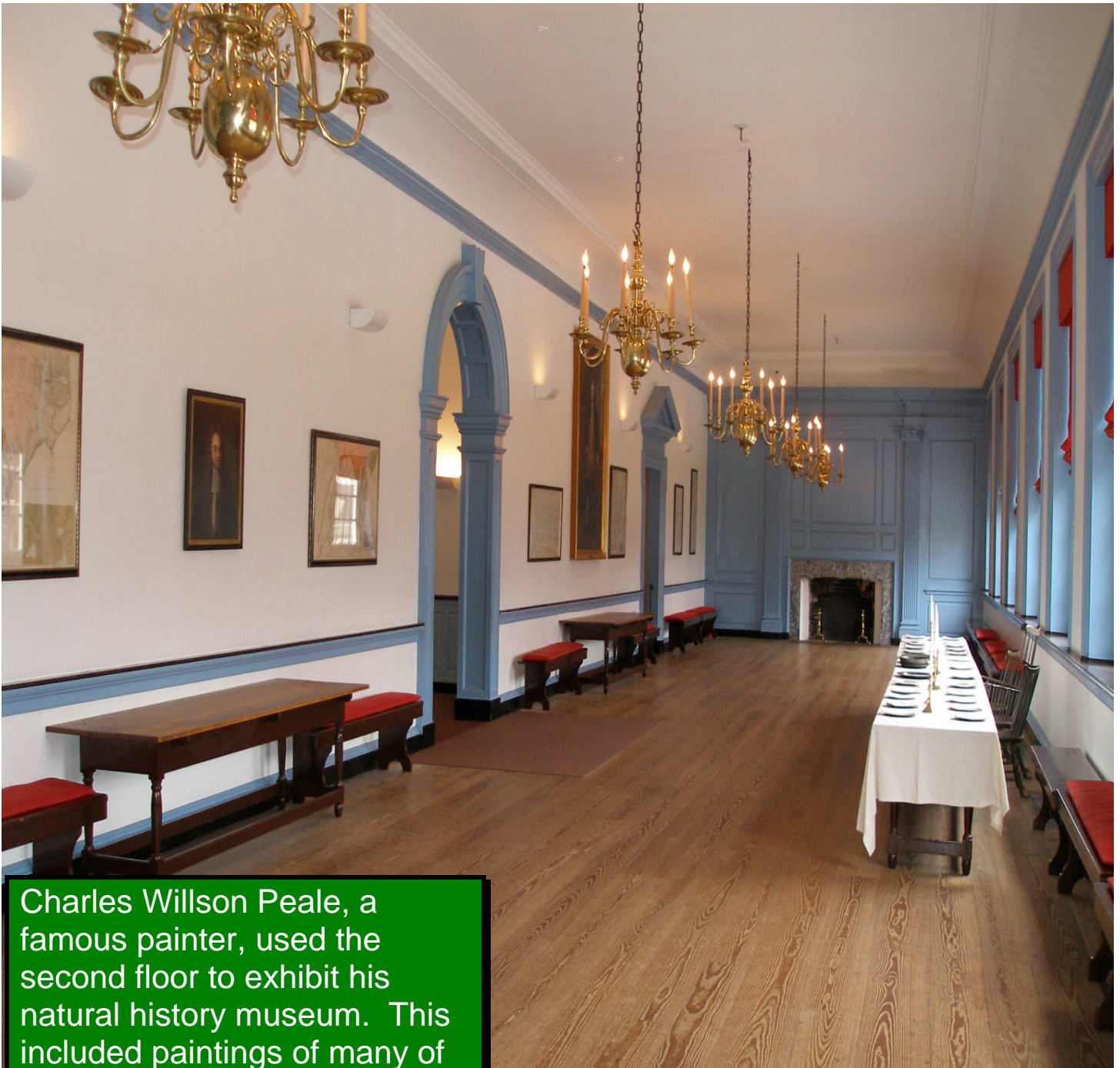




Above: Astronomical transit instrument, John Bird, London c. 1760. This instrument is said to have been used to track the transit of Venus across the sun from a platform erected in the State House yard and manned by members of the American Philosophical Society. Proprietor-Governor Thomas Penn supplied such an instrument for this purpose. It also was later used to establish Philadelphia's mean time.



The Long Gallery - This room was the scene of concerts, dances, lectures and celebrations in the 18th Century. During the British occupation of the city in 1777 – 78, the second floor housed American prisoners of war.



Charles Willson Peale, a famous painter, used the second floor to exhibit his natural history museum. This included paintings of many of the founders, many of which can still be seen at the Second Bank of the United States located just one block away.

Also, in the 1840's and 1850's, this room was the site of a U.S. District Court, which ruled on cases dealing with the Fugitive Slave Act. Downstairs many consider the Assembly Room the birthplace of liberty in America but here on the 2nd floor, many African Americans were denied that liberty and were sent into or back to slavery.



On the walls of the Long Gallery, several maps and paintings are on display. The painting on the left is James Hamilton, former Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania, by Benjamin West c. 1767.



Andrew Hamilton, James' father designed Independence Hall, served as Speaker of the Assembly and was considered the first good "Philadelphia Lawyer". He is best known for his legal victory on behalf of New York printer and newspaper publisher John Peter Zenger. This 1735 decision helped to establish that truth is a defense for an accusation of libel. Many historians consider the Zenger case to be the foundation of freedom of the press and speech as expressed in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Andrew Hamilton, by Cogswell, 1852, after Wertmuller's, 1808, after an original now lost.

Committee of the Assembly Chamber

No room better reflects the changes of use which times impose. From 1747 to 1752 this room served its original purpose as a combined Committee Room and Library for the Pennsylvania Assembly. It was then given over to the Militia of the City of Philadelphia for the storage of military accoutrements and small arms. In May of 1775, the PA Assembly convened here, while the first floor chamber was occupied by the Continental Congress and in 1779 the wall was removed to enlarge the Assembly's space to a rectangular room that occupied the eastern end of the floor plan.





In 1787, a special convention was formed by Pennsylvania to decide the question of a national government. Here in this room on December 12, 1787, Pennsylvania became the second state to approve the U.S. Constitution.

Stairs to the Bell Tower and Steeple

This stairway leads to the bell tower and steeple where the Centennial Bell now hangs and strikes the hour. The Liberty Bell hung in an earlier steeple that decayed so badly that it was torn down in 1781.

The present steeple, designed by American architect William Strickland, was built in 1828. The stairs above this level are steep and narrow, with open railings. They are not safe for visitors to use.



Pictured right: The 13,000 pound 1876 Centennial Bell.