



George Washington's New York

How England's Treasured Colony
Became the Capital of a New Nation

Take a Walk Through History

New York City was established by the Dutch on what is perhaps the greatest natural harbor in the world. Then called New Amsterdam, the settlement was ideally positioned for trade, not only across the Atlantic with Europe but also by river to Canada. These lucrative trade routes made the harbor a target as well as a prize.

In 1664, the British captured the Dutch city, and New York became England's prized colony. Over the years, the British military invested in strong fortifications to protect the harbor city from attack by European rivals, never dreaming when they installed a 100-cannon battery aimed at the harbor mouth that those same cannons would someday be turned on its own colonial subjects during the American Revolution.

This dramatic story will be revealed as you walk the route of this tour and trace George Washington's path through New York to experience the city's transformation from colonial treasure to the cradle of revolution and the capital of a new nation.



Tontine Coffee House,
N.Y.C., ca. 1797, by Francis
Guy. Oil on linen, lined
to fiberglass. *New-York
Historical Society*

Walking Tour Stops

- 1 Castle Clinton/The Battery**
- 2 Bowling Green**
- 3 Fraunces Tavern**
- 4 Stone Street**
- 5 Trinity Church**
- 6 St. Paul's Chapel/City Hall Park**
- 7 Federal Hall**

This self-guided tour begins with the battery fortifications that protected the strategic harbor from invasion. It concludes on Wall Street at Federal Hall, the site of America's first capitol building.

There you can enjoy the National Parks of New York Harbor Visitor Center and take your photo with the famous statue of George Washington.

The tour should take about 90 minutes, including time to see and explore each site.



Imagine the Past

Tune out the traffic and construction of lower Manhattan and imagine a New York filled with a different type of noise – the bustle of sailors and merchants, the clamor of cargo moving on and off ships and the commotion of commerce in a thriving 18th century port.

Look out at the harbor and imagine the fleet of nearly 500 British war ships and supply vessels which filled it. With over 30,000 soldiers, this was the largest invasion force ever mounted by England, unequalled until D-Day in the 20th century. The battle for New York took place here in August 1776, resulting in a near-disastrous defeat for George Washington's army. Seven years of occupation followed for the city's dwindling population.

New York was reborn with Washington's return and inauguration, as the great general became the first president of the United States, and this became its capital.

A View of Fort George With the City of New York From the Southwest, circa 1764, by John Carwitham after William Burgis. Hand-colored engraving. *New-York Historical Society*

A Plan of the City of New-York & its Environs, surveyed in the Winter, 1775, by John Montresor. *Private Collection*





1

A Great Harbor



Southeast Prospect of the
City of New York, 1756.
New-York Historical Society

In 1776, you would be walking on water here at **Castle Clinton**. The ground beneath your feet is all 19th century landfill. Castle Clinton was completed in 1811 after the storm of revolution had passed. Built as a fortification, it was one of the earliest military undertakings of the new nation. The speed of its construction is a testament to how quickly and effectively America organized its government.

At that time, Castle Clinton was a man-made island connected by a long bridge to the harbor shore. It provided a strategic military presence at the northern edge of New York harbor, which had been protected first by the Dutch and then by the English throughout New York's colonial history.

At the time of the Revolution, The Battery – named for its fierce array of 100 cannons – began at the present-day Staten Island Ferry terminal and extended just to the north of Bowling Green (the next stop on this tour). Together with Fort George, home to the Commander of all British forces in North America, the Battery protected colonial New York from water attack.

Fort George no longer exists, but during an excavation for New York's subway system, a piece of the original battery wall was found. The oldest remaining structural element in all of Manhattan, this vital piece of history was moved here for display at Castle Clinton.

Dioramas in the Visitor Center at Castle Clinton National Monument reveal how the New York skyline sprouted as the city expanded north in the 19th and 20th centuries. The 1812 diorama provides a good sense of the scale of New York City in Washington's day.



2

The Eruption of Revolution

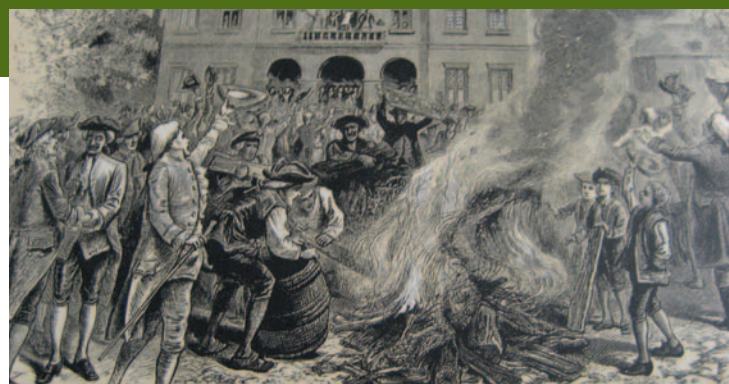
Walk inland through Battery Park to **Bowling Green** and you will arrive at the ground that originally had been the water's edge in colonial times. The Battery and its companion fortification, Fort George, were right here. The Fort, the Battery and a barracks one half mile up Broadway at the city's northern limit, made up the largest military complex in the region.

Pulling Down Statue of King George III, New York City, by Johannes Adam Simon Oertel, ca. 1859. Oil on canvas. *New-York Historical Society*

Reading of the Declaration of Independence at City Hall in Wall Street, 1776, published by A.S. Barnes & Co., 1880 in *History of the City of New York Vol. II* by Martha J. Lamb. Engraving. *Private Collection*

Bowling Green was a recreation area for the popular sport of lawn bowling. When New York was still a loyal colony in 1770, a statue of King George III was erected approximately where that fountain in Bowling Green Park now stands.

Just six years later, after the Declaration of Independence was read for the first time in New York State in the city Commons (currently City Hall Park), a throng of patriots stormed Bowling Green. They ripped off the royal crowns that decorated the fence posts and tore down the statue of King George. Today, the original iron



fence remains, enclosing the park. The statue of King George and the fence post crowns were melted into two tons of metal and turned into 42,088 musket balls for George Washington's Continental Army.

The Museum of the American Indian in the beautiful Alexander Hamilton U.S. Customs House completed in 1907 occupies the former site of Fort George. Across the street, at 1 Broadway, is the spot where General George Washington set up his very first New York headquarters in June 1776.



3

A Nest of Spies



A Midnight Modern Conversation, by unknown artist after William Hogarth, ca. 1780. Engraving. Fraunces Tavern Museum/Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York

Samuel Fraunces, ca.1760. Collection of Fraunces Tavern Museum/Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York

A few short blocks away is **Fraunces Tavern**. On August 23, 1775 tensions were high between the American colonists and the British forces stationed up and down the East Coast. Under the cover of darkness, a group of American rebels, including a young student named Alexander Hamilton, began to dismantle the British cannons at the Battery. When they were discovered, they shot at British boats killing one sailor. In response, the British ship HMS *Asia* lit up the sky with cannon fire from the harbor. The first cannon ball blasted through the roof of Fraunces Tavern, and this opening salvo of the Revolutionary War in New York earned Fraunces Tavern instant fame.

Fraunces Tavern was a popular spot with both British officers and colonial merchants. Samuel Fraunces, master of the house, was a fervent but undercover patriot. He allowed the Sons of Liberty to convene here as they secretly planned and

plotted against the British government. When British officers came to the tavern to carouse and dine, Fraunces listened closely and relayed their battle plans to George Washington.

In 1783 when the Continental Army was victorious, Washington chose the Tavern's Long Room as the site to bid farewell to his officers, a speech that has gone down in history for its moving eloquence. In 1789 when New York became America's first capital, Samuel Fraunces became the newly-elected President Washington's steward.

Carefully restored, Fraunces Tavern provides an accurate glimpse of the scale and architectural style of colonial New York. It still operates as a restaurant and houses a museum where you can visit the Long Room and see the memoir that documents Washington's famous farewell speech.



4

A Daring Escape

Stroll through the winding streets that reflect New York's colonial development to **Stone Street**, one of the first roads paved with stone in Dutch New York and a treasured reminder of what the city looked like in the 18th century. As you walk the length of the street, now filled with lively outdoor cafes, recall that on July 9, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read in the Commons and King George's statue at Bowling Green was toppled.

General George Washington was desperate to hold New York, but the British outmaneuvered him in the Battle of Brooklyn (also known as the Battle of Long Island), the first battle after independence was declared. Washington calculated that his outnumbered troops would have to retreat across the East River to join the rest of the army in Manhattan – or face annihilation. It would be a daring move as the huge British fleet lay at anchor in the harbor,

ready to cut the troops off if their escape became known. On August 29, under cover of night, the troops crossed the river in silence. With this brilliant retreat, Washington succeeded in saving the Continental Army to fight another day, but at great cost. The British achieved their strategic objective of capturing New York City, and held it for seven long years.

As you reach the end of Stone Street, look to your right towards the East River. Imagine Washington's troops as they came ashore undetected and passed through Manhattan to escape. Many historians consider this to be the greatest military retreat of all time.

Unlike Boston and Philadelphia, much of the colonial landscape of New York was destroyed. We will discover the reasons for that as the tour continues at Trinity Church.

Washington's escape from Brooklyn Heights, by J.C. Armytage; published by Virtue & Co., 1860. Engraving. *New-York Historical Society*

5

The Great Fire



Ruin of Trinity Church,
1780, by John Evers after
Thomas Barrow, ca.1841.
Color Lithograph. I.N.
Phelps Stokes Collection,
New York Public Library

The charred ruin of **Trinity Church** was replaced in 1846 by this beautiful building that stands before you. Along with the original structure of Trinity Church, much of New York erupted in flames just weeks after Washington retreated to the north with his troops. Washington had proposed burning the city down rather than leave it to the British to occupy. Congress forbade the massive destruction, but somehow the general's intentions were realized anyway. On September 21, 1776, fire raced up Broadway, across to the west, then toward Trinity Church. It was consumed in minutes.

Originally the main entrance of the church faced the waterfront. From its doors you could see straight across the Hudson River to New Jersey. Its steeple had been the tallest point in New York and a landmark visible from the harbor. When The Burnt Church was rebuilt, the new entrance faced Broadway.

Several important historical figures from the Revolutionary War are buried in the churchyard, including Alexander Hamilton, the rebel student who had tried to remove the cannon from the Battery and later became Washington's trusted aide. He served his new country as America's first Secretary of the Treasury.

As you stand facing the Broadway entrance of Trinity Church, look to the right towards the treetops. They mark the northern boundary of developed New York City in 1776, today's City Hall Park. Look to your left to the trees in Bowling Green Park – the southernmost point. For all its vital commercial importance, in Washington's day the city was only a brief walk from one end to the other.

During the long British occupation of the decimated city, the population of New York dropped significantly to only 12,000 people. Disease, another fire in 1778 and the loss of manpower to the war emptied the streets of the once bustling city.



6

A New American City

Washington rode down Broadway passing **St. Paul's Chapel** when he liberated New York City after seven years of British occupation. Only two blocks north of Trinity Church, St. Paul's survived the Great Fire thanks to an impromptu bucket brigade. Washington worshiped here before his retreat from the city in 1776, and it was still standing to greet the victorious colonial army after the long years of the Revolutionary War. New York was now an American city.

Six years later, Washington returned to St. Paul's as president-elect and prayed here on his Inauguration Day in 1789. During the seventeen months of his New York presidency, St. Paul's served as his family church, and the pew where he and his wife Martha worshipped is on view inside.

But St. Paul's has sheltered more than presidents and survived more than Revolutionary arson. Just one block away from the now hallowed ground of the former World Trade Center complex, the attacks on September 11th left St. Paul's Chapel virtually unscathed. During the eight-month relief effort, firefighters, police officers, and construction workers used its sanctuary as a place of refuge and rest. As they slept in its pews, their heavy work belts left deep dents in the 18th century wood. Despite some controversy, it was decided the pews would be restored.

Just up the street is City Hall Park, once the city's Commons. In 1777, British barracks, an armory and a prison for American soldiers stood there. That all changed after Evacuation Day on November 25, 1783, when the British were forced to leave New York. Today, Washington's presidential desk is preserved in the Governor's Room of City Hall.

Evacuation Day & Washington's Triumphant Entry in New York City, November 25, 1783, published by F.P. and L. Restein, 1879. Chromolithograph. New-York Historical Society



7

Birth of a Nation

FEDERAL HALL

First in War, First in Peace and First in the Heart of His Countrymen, Inauguration of Washington, April 30, 1789, from an engraving by Montbaron and Gautschi. Color lithograph. New-York Historical Society

Federal Hall, formerly the British city hall, became the seat of the new American government. The population of New York doubled from 12,000 to 24,000 within just two years of the war's end and reconstruction proceeded quickly. The guns at the Battery were removed and the stones from a demolished Fort George became landfill to build a Battery promenade. The most accessible city in America by sea, New York was already filled with inns and taverns when it was chosen as the nation's capital in 1788.

On April 23, 1789, the president-elect landed at the foot of Wall Street on the East River. Escorted by two marching bands and cheered on by thousands of American citizens, the presidential procession made its way to Cherry Street, the site of the first presidential mansion.

One week later, on April 30th, the cannons at the Battery boomed at dawn, awakening New Yorkers to celebrate Inauguration Day. A large crowd assembled

at the intersection of Wall and Broad streets. Dressed in a plain suit of American cloth, Washington stepped out on the second-floor balcony of Federal Hall. The need for a Bible had been forgotten, and someone had to run to a nearby shop to find one. Washington placed his right hand on its pages, and the Governor of New York administered the oath of office. Then, overcome with emotion, he called out to the crowd, "Long live George Washington, President of the United States!"

The Federal Hall of Washington's day was replaced in 1842 with this building in the Greek Revival style, which served as the U.S. Customs House and Sub-Treasury and is today a National Park Service site. Historical exhibits inside include the iron railing from the original balcony where Washington took the oath of office and the Bible he used.

While making your way up the steps of Federal Hall, take a moment to take your picture with the statue of George Washington. It marks the exact height he stood while taking the oath of office.



George Washington's Presidency

Though New York's tenure as the nation's capital lasted a short seventeen months, George and "Lady" Washington enjoyed their time in the most cosmopolitan city in North America. The President often took walks along the water's edge at the Battery and rode his canary yellow-colored carriage through the cobblestoned streets.

Washington Attends Congress, Wall Street, 1789. Color Engraving. *New-York Historical Society*

The Republican Court (Lady Washington's Reception Day), by Daniel Huntington, 1861. Oil on canvas. *Brooklyn Museum*

Entertaining was a top priority and Martha Washington held social receptions every Friday evening. Official presidential dinners were grand and the official presidential steward, Sam Fraunces, planned the menu. The former tavern owner took great pride in his new position, but he was fired when he offended Washington's sense of propriety. He had the audacity to dine on the same food and wine he served the President.

The war had left America a nation in debt and the northern states, including New York, had yet to pay off their overdue credit. On June 20, 1790 Alexander Hamilton visited Thomas Jefferson's house on Maiden Lane. In what would become



known as "the deal," it was decided the Federal government, not the states, would assume the Revolutionary War debts if, and only if, the national capital was changed to satisfy southern congressmen who wanted a more central location. Hamilton and Jefferson agreed and the capital was moved to Philadelphia for the interim. Ten years later, the capital was moved again to a newly constructed city on the Potomac River – known today as Washington D.C.

In late August, 1790, the President and First Lady left New York as they came, on a barge across the Hudson. Washington would never again see the city he had both lost and liberated.

[Visit the National Parks of New York Harbor Visitor Center inside Federal Hall where you can learn more about New York's history.](#)



The Conservancy is a non-profit partner of the National Parks of New York Harbor. George Washington's New York was produced by the Conservancy with generous support from The History Channel and the Alliance for Downtown New York.



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National Parks of
New York Harbor

National Monuments, Memorials and Historic Sites:

African Burial Ground
Castle Clinton
Federal Hall
Governors Island
Grant's Tomb
Hamilton Grange
Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island
St. Paul's Church
Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace

Affiliated site:
Lower Eastside Tenement Museum

Gateway National Recreation Area:

In Brooklyn, NY:
Canarsie Pier
Floyd Bennet Field

In Queens, NY:
Breezy Point
Fort Tilden
Jacob Riis Park

In Brooklyn and Queens, NY:
Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

In Staten Island, NY:
Great Kills Park
Fort Wadsworth
Miller Field

In Monmouth County, NJ:
Sandy Hook
Fort Hancock

Cover image:
George Washington, a
reproduction of an
original by Gilbert Stuart.
*New-York Historical
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For more information visit
www.nyharborparks.org



National Park Service

The National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy wishes to thank the National Park Service (NPS) for assisting in the creation of this walking tour. Established in 1916, NPS manages 391 park sites across the United States, including the ten national parks with 23 separate historic and recreational treasures that make up the National Parks of New York Harbor. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/npnh.