

## Restoration of a New York City Treasure

In 1981, recognizing the extensive use of the house and the need for a comprehensive restoration, Mayor Edward I. Koch established the Gracie Mansion Conservancy. The Conservancy, a not-for-profit corporation, was formed to preserve, maintain, and enhance Gracie Mansion. It was under the Conservancy's leadership that a major renovation and restoration project was undertaken from 1981-84. While preservation of the historic character of the house was integral to the planning process, the restoration plan also strove to accommodate the house to its modern day use. During the administrations of Mayors David N. Dinkins, Rudolph W. Giuliani, and Michael R. Bloomberg, the Gracie Mansion Conservancy continued to expand the collection of fine and decorative art to be displayed at the house.



The Dining Room of the house features an historic scenic wallpaper, Les Jardins Français manufactured by Zuber in the 1830s. Photo by William Waldron @achardimages.com

## Gracie Mansion Today *The People's House*

In 2002 the interior and exterior of Gracie Mansion were structurally reinforced and again restored to their original grandeur under the guidance of the Gracie Mansion Conservancy. The restoration, which was made possible through private donations, transformed Gracie Mansion into the "People's House" providing increased public access to the house and its collection of fine and decorative arts. In addition to the numerous civic and community events hosted by the City at Gracie Mansion, tours of the house are offered year-round. Public art is often displayed on the lawns of the house for the enjoyment of visitors.



The Gracie Mansion Foyer was constructed during a circa 1810 expansion of the house which provided the Gracie family with more room in which to entertain during their renowned parties. The Foyer is known for its painted trompe l'oeil floor which gives the illusion of marble. Photo by William Waldron @achardimages.com



### Mayors at Gracie Mansion

Fiorello H. La Guardia	1942-1945
William O'Dwyer	1946-1950
Vincent R. Impellitteri	1950-1953
Robert F. Wagner	1954-1965
John V. Lindsay	1966-1973
Abraham D. Beame	1974-1977
Edward I. Koch	1978-1989
David N. Dinkins	1990-1993
Rudolph W. Giuliani	1994-2001
Michael R. Bloomberg	2002-2013
Bill de Blasio	2014-

The Gracie Mansion Conservancy  
Gracie Mansion  
East End Avenue at 88th Street  
New York, New York 10128

Gracie Mansion is a member of the Historic House Trust of New York City.

For more information on Gracie Mansion, including tours, call 311 or visit [www.nyc.gov/gracie](http://www.nyc.gov/gracie).

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Top image: A magnolia tree in bloom on the lawn of Gracie Mansion, with the Hell Gate and Robert F. Kennedy bridges in view. Photo by Diana Carroll Toole.

Cover image by William Waldron @achardimages.com.  
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# GRACIE MANSION

## 1799

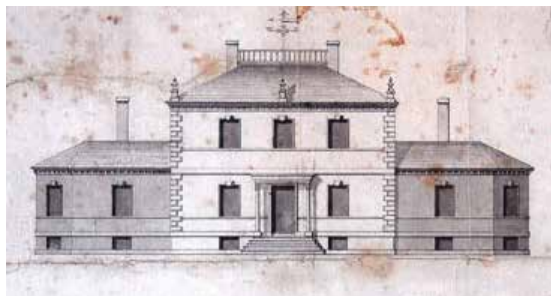


## From Farm to Fort

The history of the Gracie Mansion property spans more than three and a half centuries and mirrors the history of New York City in many ways. The earliest records relating to the property date back to a time more than 150 years before Archibald Gracie built Gracie Mansion and nearly 300 years before the house became the official residence of New York City mayors in 1942.

A Dutch farmer and carpenter named Sybout Claessen was the first recorded owner of the property on which Gracie Mansion stands today. Claessen acquired 106 acres of farmland in northern Manhattan in 1646 from the Dutch West India Company and called his property “Horn’s Hook” after his birthplace, the town of Hoorn in Holland. The property was five miles north of the City and only modest farm structures stood on the site for over a century.

In 1770, Jacob Walton, a wealthy Flatbush merchant, purchased the prime portion of what had been Claessen’s property, the tract overlooking the waters of Hell Gate, where the East River, Harlem River, and Long Island Sound intersect. Walton built a substantial house on the land. At the outset of the American Revolution, George Washington realized the strategic importance of Walton’s property; his troops commandeered the site in 1776. A British regiment stationed across the river destroyed both the fort built by the patriots on the property and Walton’s house, pictured below.



Detail from a drawing of the Walton House, dated 1774. The original drawing was donated by a Walton descendant to the Gracie Mansion Conservancy in 2006.



## Archibald Gracie Builds his House

After the war ended and America’s independence was gained, Walton’s descendants reclaimed the land, and in 1798 sold it to Archibald Gracie. The property remained a location in the countryside, as New York City had not yet expanded north from lower Manhattan. Gracie had emigrated from Scotland in 1784 and established a trading company in New York; he subsequently became one of the wealthiest men in the City. In 1799, Gracie built a handsome woodframe house on the property to serve as his family’s country home. The new house stood at the center of a colony of similar homes—all accessible only by water—owned by families including the Astors, Rhinelanders, Crugers, and Schermerhorns. Gracie frequently hosted parties and social events for his circle of friends and neighbors at his country estate and enlarged the residence by 1810. Guests at Gracie’s country home included Alexander Hamilton, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Governor DeWitt Clinton, Josiah Quincy, and Joseph Bonaparte. Gracie sold his house and the surrounding property in 1823 due to financial reversals. Two other nineteenth-century families lived in the house, the Foulkes and the Wheatons.

Archibald Gracie, miniature by an unidentified artist, circa 1795-1800, watercolor on ivory. Collection of The New-York Historical Society.

## From Family Home to Concession Stand to Museum

In 1896, the City of New York appropriated the property from the Wheaton family due to the non-payment of taxes. Eleven acres of the former Gracie estate provided the nucleus of the newly established East End Park, later renamed for Carl Schurz, a German immigrant who had been editor of the *New-York Evening Post*, a United States Senator from Missouri, and served as Secretary of the Interior under President Rutherford B. Hayes. In the early days of the twentieth century, Gracie Mansion was used by the City’s Department of Parks as a storage area, comfort station, and an ice cream parlor for the park; over the next two decades the house deteriorated rapidly as a result of hard use and neglect. By 1920, various civic groups, realizing the historic worth of the structure, lobbied to have it restored. In 1923, Gracie Mansion became the first home of the Museum of the City of New York. Having outgrown the space at Gracie Mansion, the museum moved to its present location on Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street in 1932. Gracie Mansion once again fell into a state of disrepair.



The country home of Archibald Gracie by an unidentified artist, circa 1810.



## The Mayor’s House

During the administration of Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia, Parks Commissioner Robert Moses convinced City authorities that Gracie Mansion should be designated the official residence of the Mayor of the City of New York. Mayor La Guardia moved into the house with his family in 1942, becoming the first mayor to live at Gracie Mansion, and making New York the first city in the United States with an official mayoral residence. During the tenure of Mayor Robert F. Wagner (1954-65), the house was used increasingly for public functions, and the construction of a wing containing three reception rooms—designed by architect Mott B. Schmidt—was begun under the leadership of Mayor Wagner’s wife, Susan. Private contributors financed the entire construction of what was to be called the Susan E. Wagner Wing, which was dedicated in 1966. The Wagner Wing is primarily used to welcome the public to Gracie Mansion for community receptions, meetings, and other civic events.

Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia at his desk at City Hall, by Samuel. J. Woolf, circa 1945, charcoal on paper.