

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Philadelphia City Hall (Public Buildings)

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Penn Square, Broad and Market Streets

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Pennsylvania

__ VICINITY OF

CODE

COUNTY

Philadelphia

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Philadelphia

Hon. Frank L. Rizzo, Mayor

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Department of Records

STREET & NUMBER

City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

Pennsylvania

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Philadelphia Historical Commission

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

City Hall Annex

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

Pennsylvania

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located at the crossing of Philadelphia's two main downtown Streets (Broad and Market Streets). The tower rising 548 feet, City Hall was the highest occupied building in America until 1909.

John Maass writes:

"Even today it is apparently the world's tallest building of bearing-wall construction without a steel skeleton. Construction lasted for thirty years (1872-1901); the building was occupied in stages over a period of twenty-two years (1877-1898), which must be the most protracted moving job in modern times. No expense was spared to make this the biggest and best civic edifice: the total cost was \$24,344,355.48. To approximate present values, this figure should be multiplied by five.

City Hall's complex elevations are the epitome of High Victorian pomp but its plan is both simple and efficient. The square building encloses a central court which is linked to the streets by four high archways; every day tens of thousands of pedestrians pass through this court, which is in effect a public square. Both horizontal and vertical circulation are excellent. There are no less than fourteen entrances at street level. An unusually wide corridor runs around each of seven floors; every office has outside windows and opens on this public passage. This is in marked contrast to the typical European public buildings of the period where the officials' rooms were shielded from the populace by suites of antechambers. There are staircases at every corner and four banks of elevators were provided from the start.

The interior displays lavish materials and superior craftsmanship--polished marbles, handcarved woodwork, wrought iron grilles, ornamental ceilings, mosaic floors. The principal ceremonial chambers and courtrooms are two stories high. The Mayor's Reception Room is splendid with a blue-and-gold cassetted ceiling and columns of red marble. Until 1919 Philadelphia had a bicameral legislature; the Select and Common Council each had a sumptuous chamber, and they shared a "Conversation Hall of Councils," a domed room of Piranesian grandeur which is three stories high. The seventeen members of the present City Council sit in an alabaster-walled chamber, larger than many national parliaments. No two of the courtrooms are alike in design;

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | |

SPECIFIC DATES 1871-81 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John McArthur, Jr. and Thomas U. Walter

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The largest and most elaborate City Hall in America still being used, it is also the tallest bearing-wall construction laid up without a steel skeleton. Designed by John McArthur, Jr. (1823-1890) he was assisted in detailing by Thomas U. Walter (1804-1887) and the elaborate sculpture program was directed by Alexander Milne Calder (1846-1925). Philadelphia's ornate public building has progressed from bitter criticism to widely accepted admiration in the last decade.

John Maass has recorded its history:

"The building has many features of outstanding architectural interest, but it is most remarkable for its embattled history. The Philadelphia City Hall has now been the object of incessant controversy for 104 years. The record is unusually complicated and full of bizarre episodes; at every stage its architectural history is entangled with social, economic, political, legal and constitutional issues.

In 1854 the City of Philadelphia doubled its population by consolidating with neighboring townships. The seat of municipal government was the small two-story building of 1790 which is still standing east of Independence Hall. The metropolis of over 500,000 people needed a larger City Hall. In 1860 a competition was held for municipal buildings on Penn Square, a site which had been reserved for that very purpose by William Penn 175 years before. Only three entries from Philadelphia architects were received. The prize was awarded to John McArthur Jr., a 37-year-old native of Scotland, for two domed Classical designs, a City Hall and a Courthouse. Almost nothing is known about the entries by the prominent Samuel Sloan and the obscure George Bethell. However, Sloan had his supporters among city councilmen who carried on an acrimonious debate for several months. The outbreak of the Civil War put an end to both the debate and the project.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Fairmount Park Art Association Sculpture of a City, Walker and Company, New York, 1974, pp. 94-104.

Maass, John. Philadelphia City Hall, Monster or Masterpiece? American Institute of Architects, February 1965, pp. 23-31.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3.5 acres approximately

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|-------|---------|---|------|---------|----------|--|--|
| A | 1,8 | 4,8,6 | 0,0,0 | 4,4,2 | 2,2,6,0 | B | | | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | ZONE | EASTING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | |
| C | | | | | | D | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary is 540 feet on the west along 15th Street by 620 feet on the north along John F. Kennedy Boulevard, 540 feet on the east along Juniper Street and 620 feet on the south along South Penn Square.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service - Historic Sites Survey

DATE

8/11/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

the somber Supreme Court of Pennsylvania with its bronze caryatids is particularly impressive. In the corner pavilions are four authentic masterpieces of space design: octagonal staircases in which suspended stairs of cut stone rise through six stories; these remarkable staircases must be experienced, for the effect cannot be conveyed by photographs.

The walls of City Hall bear a fantastic array of sculpture "to express American ideas and develop American genius." At the top of the tower stands a bronze statue of William Penn, thirty-seven feet tall and weighing 53,348 pounds. At the base of the tholus are four more colossal bronze figures: a Swedish settler, a Swedish woman, an Indian and an Indian woman. The dormers of the central pavilions are crowned by pediment groups representing the quarters of the globe and flanked by male and female caryatids of appropriate race: Vikings face north, Asians east, Negroes south, and Indians west. Further below are innumerable marble groups, figures, heads, masks, medallions, keystones, capitals, spandrels and reliefs, carved to represent every likely and many unlikely subjects: the seasons, the elements, the continents, virtues and vices, heroes and powers, the races of mankind, arts and sciences, trades and industries. There are many animals, described in 1876 by an unsympathetic journalist as "Beasts and birds of all kinds, ideal and real, extinct and actual, but generally looking evil, primeval and medieval." Sculptures of subjects like Folly, Pain, Admonition and Repentance were actually placed near the sheriff's cell block to make an impression on persons under arrest!

All these hundreds of carvings were designed by one man, Alexander Milne Calder (1846-1923), a Scottish immigrant. He was to become the father and grandfather of two famous American sculptors, Alexander Stirling Calder (1870-1945) and Alexander Calder, fortunately still with us. The architectural sculpture of City Hall marks the very end of the long Renaissance tradition of stereotomy and stone carving. The effect of this ambitious program is disappointing; many of the sculptures are placed so high that they can barely be viewed; strangely, none is identified by an inscription.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

The matter hung fire until the last day of the year 1868 when a Commission was appointed to provide Philadelphia with a new City Hall or "Public Buildings." A new competition was announced in April 1869. The record of nineteenth century architectural competitions--both in Europe and America--is a checkered story of accomplishments and frustrations; careless rules and lay juries sometimes led to abortive contests and disputed awards. Although the Philadelphia competition of 1869 would not meet the standards of the present AIA Code, it was well organized as nineteenth century competitions go. The Commission advertised it in several cities and published a brochure under the ponderous title "General Directions to Architects who may prepare plans for the New Public Buildings to be erected on Independence Square in the City of Philadelphia." A subcommittee of the Commission acted as jury. The celebrated Thomas U. Walter, who had recently returned to his native Philadelphia after completing the US Capitol, was named chairman. Two eminent civil engineers, Strickland Kneass and Frederick Graff, ranked next; the other jurors were businessmen who deferred to the experts.

Seventeen entries were submitted, and the result of the competition was announced on September 28, 1869. The first premium of \$2,000 was awarded to John McArthur Jr, who estimated the cost of construction as \$2,385,000. The second prize of \$1,500 went to Samuel Sloan (estimated cost, \$3,154,000). Sloan thus found himself runner-up to McArthur for the second time, and he seems to have taken it badly. Later in the same year the Philadelphia Chapter AIA was founded, and McArthur was elected president. Sloan refused to join the local chapter although he was a member and later a Fellow of the AIA.¹

In years after 1869 controversy arose over the site and a new site was selected by special election in 1870.

¹Maass, John: Philadelphia City Hall: Monster or Masterpiece, American Institute of Architects Journal pp. 23.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

"In September 1870 the Commission for the Erection of Public Buildings had met to elect an architect. John McArthur Jr was chosen by a vote of nine to one. This was *the third time* in ten years that McArthur was commissioned to design the new City Hall, and the way now seemed clear at last. Instead, there followed two years of devious maneuvering and utmost confusion. The Commissioners were deadlocked, and they wavered between the concepts of a single City Hall in the center of the square and of four separate buildings. McArthur strongly urged the former, but the Commissioners ordered their architect to prepare plans for both schemes. No progress was made until April 1872 when John Rice, a contractor of unsavory reputation, resigned as president of the Commission. He was succeeded by Samuel C. Perkins, a strong-willed corporation lawyer. Perkins was a man representative of nineteenth century America in general and of Philadelphia in particular. He never ran for political office but exerted power through his civic activities as vice president of the Union League, as solicitor to the Park Commission, as a leading layman in the Presbyterian Church and as Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge. Perkins had found his site and his architect. He determined that he would back McArthur and carry out the architect's plan for a single City Hall. This determination was to expose Perkins to thirty years of the most scurrilous attacks ever brought to bear upon a public man in America.

Construction finally started in 1872. McArthur's design was essentially an enlarged version of his 1869 Independence Square scheme, modified to fit the new site. Cornerstone-laying ceremonies were held on July 4, 1874, when the walls had already reached the level of the second floor. President Grant was unable to attend because of a death in his family, and the main address was given by Benjamin Brewster, an eccentric Philadelphia lawyer and famous orator. The Commission published a book on the occasion and publicized the grand project all over the world.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

The design now called for a 450-foot tower, surmounted by a statue of William Penn. Estimated cost of construction had tripled to \$6,250,000.

The facades of City Hall with their superposed orders, towering pavilions and prominent mansard roofs were inspired by the new Louvre of 1852-57. During the eighteen-sixties and 'seventies city halls in this flamboyant French manner were built in Boston, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Detroit, as well as in Paris itself, in Montreal and Sydney. But all were surpassed by the Philadelphia City Hall, the greatest monument of the worldwide Second Empire style. Its larger scale is due to the circumstance that Philadelphia is both a city and a county. The building therefore combines the functions of City Hall and County Courthouse.

Construction proceeded slowly throughout the seventies, the eighties and the nineties. Above the first story of solid granite blocks with walls up to 22 feet thick, rose six upper stories of brick faced with \$5,467,505 worth of white marble. One appreciative spectator was Walt Whitman who wrote in his diary on August 26th, 1879:

Returning home, riding down Market Street in an open summer car, something detain'd us between Fifteenth and Broad, and I got out to view better the new three-fifths built marble edifice, the City Hall, of magnificent proportions--a majestic and lovely show there in the moon-light--all flooded over, facades, myriad silver-white lines and carved heads and mouldings, with the soft dazzle--silent, weird, beautiful--well, I know that never when finished will that magnificent pile impress one as it impress'd me those fifteen minutes."²

Many other bitter political battles were fought over City Hall including actual seizing of the building by the Mayor in 1901. Even more recently there was a serious effort to demolish it (1957) but an American Institute of Architects study found it irreplaceable--John Maass concludes:

²Ibid., pp. 25 (our page 8-4)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 5

"The AIA's endorsement in 1957 marked the closing of a full circle: City Hall had successively been regarded as a marvel of the age, as an out-moded relic, as a grotesque monstrosity, as a period piece of quaint appeal and now again as a major architectural monument."³

³Ibid., pp. 26-31 (our page 8-5)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

The sculptural program has been thoroughly researched by George Gurney. (See Sculpture of a City).

In brief: Tower

The famous bronze statue of William Penn is the largest sculpture on a building in the world. It is 37 feet tall and weighs 53,348 lbs. The statue was cast at the Tacony Iron Works and hoisted to the top of the tower in fourteen sections in 1894. Penn looks towards the Northeast, the site of his Treaty with the Indians.

Four more colossal bronze statues are at the four corners of the tower below the dome. Each is 24 feet tall and weighs between 8 and 11 tons:

Indian and Dog (Northeast)
Indian Woman and Child (Northwest)
Swedish Settler (Southwest)
Swedish Woman and Lamb (Southeast)

On each of the four faces of the tower, between the statues, is a bronze eagle with a wing spread of 12 feet, weighing over 3 tons.

In the Crypt below the tower (North Archway) are four columns with capitals which are carved with figures representing the races of man. Four animal heads on the walls represent the continents:

Elephant (Africa)
Bear (America)
Tiger (Asia)
Bull (Europe)

Throughout the building, both outside and inside, are hundreds more sculptures, reliefs, keystones, spandrels, panels, capitals and medallions, in marble and bronze. They represent plants, animals and subjects like the Elements, the Arts, the Sciences, the Professions, etc.

**The symbolism of the sculpture on the West facade refers to the fact that persons under arrest were formerly brought in through the West archway and sent by elevator to cells in the tower.*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 4

The huge structure is load bearing. The walls are brick faced with marble to a height of 337 feet. The upper storys are supported by cast-iron plates over a wrought iron frame (210 feet). Walls are twenty-two feet thick at the base. Several of the rooms have been beautifully restored: the Mayor's Reception Room, City Council Chamber and a Common Pleas Court Room. Perhaps the most beautiful detail are the handsome cantilevered stairs in the four corners of the building finished with delicate wrought iron balustrades.

Much of the durable original decoration has been retained in the Hall. However, most of the gilded and fabric surfaces have been eliminated. The main corridors are of glazed yellow tile about half way to the ceiling; the remainder of the wall is plaster. The interiors of many of the important rooms are still very beautiful as described by Hautman, op. cit.,

"...with high ceilings, marbled fireplaces, and intricate wood paneling. Below the balcony in City Council are lamp shades of white marble, chipped so fine that they are translucent. Interspersed in the marble and granite of the interior are innumerable illustrated tiles and elaborate allegorical mosaics. Doors have decorated bronze knobs and hinges, some elaborately carbed with seals."

In Faust, op. cit., are black and white photographs of the original interiors, of the more important rooms, that give a good indication of the decoration of the Hall in the Victorian era. The accessories are typical of the times. The more permanent elements can be described as follows:

1. Mayor's Office - Flat paneled ceiling. Walls - paneled 1/3 with wood. Fireplace - statues on each end support Baroque lintel--classic feeling (not Roccoco).
2. Supreme Court Room - Ceiling: paneled gold and plaster - heavy chandeliers. Walls - broken by Corinthian pilasters - doors with arch pedament above.
3. Consultation Room - Supreme Court - Ceiling: paneled - gold and plaster - chandeliers. Walls: paneled - 1/3 contains glazed bookcases 2/3 to top - classic allegorical murals between Corinthian pilasters.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Philadelphia City Hall

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 5

4. Common Pleas Court Room - Walls: Ionic columns different color from walls. White capitals - start from base 1/3 up walls; large windows - rich drapery from ceiling to three feet from floor. Ceiling: paneled - solid white.

The comprehensive scheme of emblematic treatment is continued in the principle apartments, notably in the Supreme Court Chambers, which are further embellished with portraits of famous jurists of the State.

Medallions in the old Conversation Hall of Councils are of distinguished early Philadelphians. Here are portrait reliefs of: Mifflin, Morris, Rush, Biddle, Rawle, Evans, Cope and Shippen.

For a complete list and photographs of all the original sculpture and relief work on the Hall as well as descriptions see: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, New City Hall, Sculpture and Ornamentation, Volumes 1-5, Philadelphia.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

Photographs and Their Descriptions

Location: Philadelphia City Hall, Philadelphia, Pa.

Photo credit: City of Philadelphia, Records Department, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and City of Philadelphia Archives.

- Photo description:
1. City of Philadelphia, 1900.
 2. Old photograph.
 3. Philadelphia City Hall under construction.
 4. Inner Courtyard.
 5. Detail: Clock tower.
 6. East vestibule, 1910.
 7. Room 401.
 8. City council chamber, 1910.
 9. Mayor's Reception Room.