HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART II (Portion)

ARCHITECTURAL DATA SECTION

ON

INDEPENDENCE HALL

ASSEMBLY ROOM BAR

Independence National Historical Park

Prepared by
Lee H. Nelson
Architect
May 1965

for

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
Division of Architecture
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia
STATUS OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART II (Portion) Arch'l. Data Sec. ASSEMBLY ROOM BAR, INDEPENDENCE HALL

STRUCTURE/BUILDING #

PROJECT: ________________________________

CLASS AAA

MASTER PLAN _________

PCP _________

PROGRAMMED _________

SECTIONS:

Admin.
Called for _________
Due _________
Rec'd _________

His.
Called for _________
Due _________
Rec'd _________

Architecture
Called for 8/24/65
Due _________
Rec'd _________

Called for _________
Due _________
Rec'd _________

Called for _________
Due _________
Rec'd _________

DISTRIBUTED
Park 8/24/65
EODC
Region 6/7/65
WASO

REVIEWED
Park 6/3/65
EODC
Region 6/7/65
WASO

APPROVED:
Region 6/7/65
WASO 6/7/65
Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Northeast Region
From: Acting Assistant Director, Design and Construction
Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II (Portion), Architectural Data Section, Assembly Room Bar, Independence Hall, INHP (Class AAA)

The divisions concerned have reviewed the subject report and they concur with the recommendations made by Regional Director Lee under date of June 17.

I am pleased to approve this portion of the Part II report this date.

John A. Reshof

cc: Chief, EODC (2)
Supt., Independence
Memorandum

To: Director

From: Regional Director, Northeast Region

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II (Portion), Architectural Data Section, Assembly Room Bar, Independence Hall, INHP (Class AAA)

We recommend the subject report to your approval.

To expedite issuance before June 30 of the change order to the present contract for restoration of the Assembly Room, your early review of the report will be greatly appreciated.

(Sgd.) Ronald T. Lee

Enclosure

cc:
Chief, EOBC
Superintendent, Independence

MHNelligan/gmf
General
Daily
Area
1. Mr. Lukens
   6/8/65 Very interesting analysis of rather slim evidence — beautiful drawings of a handsome and appropriate design. I recommend approval.

2. Mr. Golub
   OK 7/1/65

3. Mr. Christenson
   Recommend

4. Master Plans
   Looks good to me — 2/6/65
   OK 7/1/65

5. Mr. Barnes
   OK

6. Dr. Nelligan
   Recommend OK to WASD
   N/E
Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Northeast Region

From: Superintendent, Independence

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II (Portion), Architectural Data Section, Assembly Room Bar, Independence NHP

We have reviewed the subject report, agree with its findings, and recommend it for approval.

M. O. Anderson
Superintendent

cc: Chief, EODC
Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Independence

From: Acting Regional Director, Northeast Region

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II (Portion), Architectural Data Section, Assembly Room Bar, Independence NHP

Enclosed for your review is a copy of the subject report. Please let us have your comments on this report as soon as possible.

George A. Palmer

Enclosure

cc:
Chief, EODC
Mr. Whitcraft

GM Franey
General
Daily
Area
Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Northeast Region

From: Chief Architect, EODC

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part II (Portion), Architectural Data Section, Assembly Room Bar, Independence

Enclosed for distribution and review are three copies of the subject report. A copy has been retained by this office.

Although the "bar" is a part of the Assembly Room restoration, architectural research on this feature was deferred pending a decision on the Assembly Room Architectural Data Section, which was approved by Assistant Director Jensen on July 28, 1964.

We suggest that the "bar" be built and installed by means of a Change Order to the present contract for restoration of the Assembly Room. This particular feature would not be subject to the scheduled completion date of June 25, 1965. However, to expedite the completion of this restoration, we would appreciate prompt approval of the subject report.

Robert E. Smith

Enclosure

cc: Assistant Director, Design and Construction
Superintendent, Independence
HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT
PART II (Portion)
ARCHITECTURAL DATA SECTION
ON
INDEPENDENCE HALL
ASSEMBLY ROOM BAR
Independence National Historical Park

APPROVAL SHEET

RECOMMENDED

[Signatures and dates]

[Signatures and dates]

[Signatures and dates]

APPROVED

[Signature and date]
When the Assembly Room Architectural Data Section was submitted for review, certain features and details remained incomplete pending a decision regarding the proposed restoration. Architectural research on the "bar," for example, was deferred to expedite completion of the Assembly Room report and because we felt that it did not affect the design of the interior walls. This report therefore completes the general picture and presents a proposal for reconstruction of the bar.

In addition to the bar, numerous other minor details (such as hardware, flooring, plaster moldings, etc.) have yet to be explained, but since these details have been individually resolved as needed (without the benefit of a formal report), we have decided to hold them for inclusion in a completion report at which time any new discoveries and deviations from the preliminary drawings can be discussed.

Lee H. Nelson
Architect
May 1965
The Assembly Room Bar: From the available evidence, the Assembly Room bar was basically a railing or fence extending between the side walls, dividing the room into two areas of unequal size, the larger area "within the bar" for the Assembly and a smaller area "without the bar" for the public. To that extent such a divider was not unlike the railings generally used in other legislative chambers and courtrooms.

Contemporary descriptions refer to this particular feature as a "bar," although a French visitor called it a "balustrade."¹ When considered in context, the word "bar" was less architectural than legalistic, merely denoting any kind of a railing intended to reserve a space for those having certain privileges. Such a "bar" could take a variety of forms; but the term "balustrade" is somewhat more precise and implies a railing with balusters. It is this interpretation that we have

adopted for the proposed Assembly Room bar.  

In general, the Assembly Room bar is the least-known architectural feature in the room. There is adequate documentation to prove its existence during the formal reception of Conrad Alexandre Gérard, the first French minister to the United States, on 6 August 1778. The bills and vouchers for cleansing and repairs following the British occupation (Sep. 1777-June 1778) indicate that readying the building for Gérard's reception was limited to such minor items as rehanging windows, hardware replacements, and whitewashing. In other words, there is no evidence to suggest that the bar was especially erected for the occasion.

Nor is the bar mentioned in earlier documents, including the accounts of Edmund Woolley and Samuel Harding for the

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2 Old views of English courtrooms show both open and solid bars, and we know of no particular preference in the colonies, except among Maryland courthouses where they were frequently referred to as "rails and banisters". See seventeenth and eighteenth century specifications in Morris L. Radoff, The County Courthouses and Records of Maryland (Annapolis, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 21, 47, 67, 75, 119, 147.

It also appears that the Supreme Court Room bar or at least some part of the courtroom fixtures, involved the use of balusters or banisters as suggested in a voucher "for turning work for the Court room," including "8 Newell Posts" and "7 Doz Bannisters with Squares," by John Cornish in 1778-79. See C-Independence Square - State House, Maintenance Vouchers, 1779, Ja. - July; State Archives, Harrisburg.
extensive work of the 1750's. Therefore, lacking documentation to the contrary, we have assumed that the bar was an original and functional part of the Assembly Room.

Bar Location: Unfortunately, the bar was not included in the paintings by Edward Savage or John Trumbull. Trumbull can be excused since he had practically no basis in fact for his representation of the room. Jefferson's 1786 sketchy plan prepared for Trumbull (in Paris) gives no hint of a bar. It appears that Jefferson's architectural perception had not yet been developed for the sketch is demonstrably inaccurate and nearly useless. Even if Trumbull had known about the bar, it would have been hidden by the solid array of seated and standing figures.

As for the Savage painting, the bar may have been deliberately omitted for compositional reasons. The view is such that the bar would have partially obscured the "drama" of "Congress Voting Independence."

The "Plan de la Séance du Congrès..." (see Illustration No. 1) is the only known pictorial representation which gives some indication of general placement and design. As to placement, this

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This plan was enclosed (together with other material relating to the ceremony) in a letter from Gérard to the Comte de Vergennes, 7 August 1778. See John J. Meng, ed., Despatches and Instructions of Conrad Alexandre Gérard (Baltimore, 1939), p. 205. The Plan is reproduced in Henri Doniol, Histoire de la Participation de la France a l'établissement des États - Unis D'Amérique (Paris, 1888), vol 3, p. 312.
plan shows the bar centered on the first pier (between windows) east of the main doorway. This location cannot be accepted at face value because the plan shows four windows on each of the side walls, when in fact there are only three. It is necessary therefore to interpret the intent of the plan.

Allowing for the window error, it can be argued that the delineator merely intended to show that the bar was located between windows. If so, this would allow several possible locations. If he meant that the bar was centered between windows, the "public" area (outside the bar) would occupy a space measuring 16 x 40 feet, or more than 40% of the room (see Illustration No. 2). If he meant that the bar was located somewhere between windows, the problem remains practically undiminished, for at best the "public" area would still consume more than one-third of the room (14 x 40 feet). Considering the primary legislative function of the room, this also seems an unreasonable allocation of space.

If the bar were placed on the near side of the first window, assuming that the delineator inadvertently included an extra window west of the bar, the "public" area is so confined as to hardly allow room for opening the doors.

It seems more likely that the delineator made a simple mistake and intended that the bar was centered on a window instead
of a pier, but the relationship was inadvertently reversed because the delineator showed four windows instead of three. This would create a "public" area that measures 10 by 40 feet, or approximately 25% of the room, which incidentally is the same relative area shown on the Gérard Plan. Considering the window error this location seems more reasonable and we have concluded that it satisfies the intent of the plan. This tedious interpretation only emphasizes the paucity of evidence, and it should be clear that the location recommended herein is a considered judgement (see Illustration No. 2 and Preliminary Drawings). The recommended location is tenuously reinforced by the following excerpt from a description of the Gérard reception, as reported in The New York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury, 24 August 1778, as follows: "The door of the Congress-chamber being thrown open below the bar, about 200 gentlemen were admitted to the audience...." The "public" area as determined above measures 10 by 40 feet or 400 square feet. Despite the possible error in estimating an audience of 200, this allows two square feet per "gentleman," a reasonable figure for computing standing room.

General Design: From the previous discussion, it is obvious that the Gérard Plan cannot be literally interpreted. Nevertheless, it is a significant document which has sufficient basis in fact
that it must be considered a reasonably accurate plan of the room but recognizing that its primary purpose was to record the arrangement of participants in a momentous occasion. Its main contribution with respect to the general disposition of the bar, is that it shows a center passageway for example, rather than dual passages or a side passage along one wall.

The omission of gates (on this Plan) is not deemed significant since the double entry doors have also been omitted. The indication of posts at the passageway does not resolve the question of gates, for the railing probably would have been terminated by posts, with or without gates. Without gates however, the bar could scarcely serve its intended function and we have concluded that they were a necessary part of the bar. There is additional documentary evidence which tends to support this conclusion.4 Beyond the existence and location of the gateway, there

4 See Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Under Their Vine and Fig Tree..., tr. and ed. by Metchie J. E. Budka, New Jersey Historical Society, 1965, pp. 3-4.

In an entry dated 29 August [1797], Niemcewicz describes a joint session of the Legislative Assembly on the second floor of the State House where they were assembled to hear a state of the Commonwealth address by the Governor. After the Governor finished his speech, "the Representatives went down to their own Chamber below. They are, as in the Senate, arranged in a semi-circle, each one having a chair and in front of him a table; the Speaker is on a slightly raised dais with a table and the secretary
is no known documentation which clarifies the general design of the bar.

**Design Sources:** Assuming that the bar is approximately coterminous with completion of the Assembly Room in the early 1740's, we are immediately confronted with the problem of its architectural details. Such a bar would occupy a conspicuous place in this important room. Furthermore it would have to be especially constructed to fit the room. To that extent it is "architectural" rather than "furnishings." There are no known local prototypes for that period which might serve as a design source, although some clues can be derived from later chancel railings, or from similar features to be found in English buildings. However we feel that it is more appropriate to derive the design and details from original elements within the State House. The Tower Stairway contains such elements that are applicable to a bar and the proposed bar is admittedly a composite of original elements from the Tower Stairway.

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below.

The usher announced the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The barrier opened, he entered, greeted the Speaker of the House and stated the purpose of his mission...." The "barrier" undoubtedly refers to the bar, and that the "barrier opened" (to admit the Secretary) seems to imply the existence of gates.
Design Rationale: The proposed bar is essentially a "ramped" railing with a central passageway, double gates, and each section is terminated with posts. The appropriateness of ramped railings for the Assembly Room bar has been based on the Tower Stairway ramped railings which are such a conspicuous part of the overall design. Their juxtaposition to the general Ionic treatment of the Stairhall is a relationship that would be similar to the Assembly Room. Ramped railings were even used outdoors between the arches of the Piazzas, as shown on eighteenth century views of the State House. From surviving examples it appears that ramped rails were first introduced in Philadelphia in the late 1730's.

We feel that the extra articulation of "ramping" would be expected in a room which so amply demonstrates the Queen Anne predilection for bold curves: carved scrolls, the cockleshell frieze, the "broken" pediment, the "swell'd" frieze, the coved ceiling, plaster paneling with cut-out corners, and the baroque derived mantelpieces. Furthermore, "ramp"-like motifs were used in contemporary furniture for skirts around chairs, tables, bed canopies and window valances. Therefore we feel fortunate to have original prototypes so readily available (in the Tower Stairway) which stylistically reflect the same vigor that characterizes the
Assembly Room as finished in the 1740's.

The height, size and configuration of the bar is taken directly from the stairway wainscoting in the Tower Stairhall, including the base, rail, and pilasters or posts. The carved balusters are taken from the railings on the stairhall landings, with the top and bottom changed to a 1:2 height-to-width ratio, according to Gibbs' 1732 Rules... (plate LXII). The baluster shank has been reduced in length approximately one-half inch to suit the height of the stairway wainscoting. The balusters and spaces are equal.

The bar extends from wall-to-wall, with the posts abutting the baseboards but without any connection to the wainscot paneling. For all practical purposes, the bar is a self-contained architectural feature. The double gates open inward as do the Assembly Room double doors. The gate width approximately equals the door opening and thus generally follows the 1778 "Plan". Its exact width is primarily a matter of a judgement to effect a satisfactory distance between gateway ramping and to allow for uniform baluster spacing.

Although the existing Assembly Room bar was designed and constructed as recently as 1955, it was in part derived from a minor stairway between the second and third levels of the
Steeple, and was designed to visually and physically "fit" the Haviland-Rogers-Sellers "restored" Assembly Room. The original appearance of the room was so different from the above mentioned pastiche, that we believe the 1955 bar to be architecturally inconsistent with the present restoration and recommend that it be abandoned. We further recommend that the bar be reconstructed as shown on the accompanying Preliminary Drawings.
ILLUSTRATION NO. 1

"PLAN de la Séance du Congrès..." showing the Assembly Room as arranged on 6 August 1778 for the reception of Conrad Alexandre Gérard, first French minister to the United States. This plan appears to have been included in a letter from Gérard to the Comte de Vergennes, on 7 August 1778, and is reproduced here from Henri Doniol, Histoire de la Participation de la France à l'établissement des États-Unis D'Amérique (Paris, 1888), vol. 3, p. 312.

While the plan is historically significant and generally accurate, the room is not shown in context with the building, and the plan contains one conspicuous error, i.e., instead of four windows in each of the side walls, there are actually only three. This error complicates placement of the "bar", especially since there is no physical evidence for its location. If it is assumed that the delineator meant to show the bar located between windows, the "public" area is disproportionately large with respect to the area "within the bar." For further discussion see "Bar Location," this report, and Illustration No. 2.

INHP Neg. No. 1504
Plan
de la Scène du Congrès des États-Unis de l'Amérique
lors de la réunion des lettres de créance du Ministre Plénipotentiaire du Roi.

Renvoi.
A. Fauteuil du Président.
B. Fauteuil du Ministre Plénipotentiaire.
C. Siège du Comité.
D. Membre du Congrès.
E. Secrétaire du Congrès.
F. Secrétaire des États-Unis.
G. Table couverte d'un tapis vert.
H. Public debout.
ASSEMBLY ROOM BAR LOCATION
Possible Interpretations of 1778 Plan
Based on Original and Undisturbed Window Locations

A. Possible Bar Location—if 1778 Plan is interpreted to mean that bar was centered between windows.
B. Possible Bar Location—if 1778 Plan is interpreted to mean that bar was located between windows but not necessarily centered.
C. Possible Bar Location—if 1778 Plan is interpreted to mean that bar was centered on a window but that relationship was inadvertently reversed because delineator showed \( \frac{1}{3} \) instead of 3 windows.
D. Possible Bar Location—if 1778 Plan is interpreted to mean that bar was located on pier adjacent to window and that delineator inadvertently included an extra window west of the bar.

Central Hall

Tower Stairhall