

A Belief In Books

TOUR

1 REFERENCE ROOM



Ratzer Map of the City of New York.

Named for its cartographer, this map is often cited as the finest 18th-century American example of its kind. Admired for its geographic and topographic accuracy and Bernard Ratzer's artistic skills, it shows New York in 1766-67 when the city's population was around 25,000. Stretching as far north as today's 50th Street, the map includes street names, ward names, a table of notable structures, and a city view from Governor's Island.

2 REFERENCE ROOM



A South Prospect of Ye Flourishing City of New York....

New York's bustling 1777 waterfront is shown from Brooklyn Heights. Its deep-water harbor—large enough for hundreds of ships to dock, load, and unload—became the most important British port in North America. During the Revolutionary War, the harbor could easily accommodate and shelter the powerful Royal Navy as New York City became the center of British operations.

3 CIRCULATION AREA



Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan as Laid Out by the Commissioners, 1811.

New York State legislators decided to increase the footprint of Manhattan by 11,400 acres to “provide space for a greater population than is collected this side of China.” In 1811, after spending 20 years measuring every inch of Manhattan, planners drew up a grid system composed of 12 avenues and 155 numbered streets bisected by a diagonal Broadway. The design leveled hills and other scenic features to maximize house construction, greatly favoring real estate developers over residents' wishes for a green environment.

4 CIRCULATION AREA

Reproduction of the 1777 Ratzer Plan.

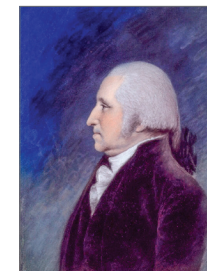
This is an 1854 reprinted reproduction of the Ratzer plan. One of the three copies produced in 1777 was presented to King George III. In 2011, *The New York Times* described Bernard Ratzer, a lieutenant in the British Army, as “a Da Vinci of New York cartography.”



5 MAIN STAIRCASE

George Washington.

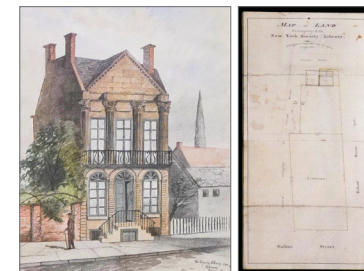
Like many of the nation's founders and most of his colonial contemporaries, George Washington was a slaveowner. On the death of his father, the 11-year-old Washington inherited 10 enslaved people and went on to buy dozens more over the course of his life.



6 & 7 STAIRCASE

The Nassau Street Library and Plan.

In 1795, the Library moved from its City Hall location to its own home on Nassau Street. Washington Irving, later a Trustee, and James Fenimore Cooper were both visitors. By 1838, the catalog included 25,000 volumes but many members had moved uptown as the city rapidly spread northwards.



8 STAIRCASE

View of Nassau Street, New York.

When the British occupied New York during the Revolutionary War, they imprisoned 8,000 Patriots in the Middle Dutch Church. Post-war, the congregation dwindled as parishioners relocated north to tonier addresses. In 1845, the United States government leased the church and converted it into the city's central post office. The sketch shows the façade of the Nassau Street Library clearly visible across from the church.

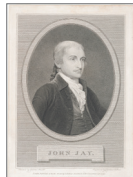




9 & 10 STAIRCASE

The Library at 109 University Place.

In 1840, after a 16-year stint on Broadway and Leonard Street, the Library continued its move uptown. The Greek Revival University Place location was built on land donated by Mrs. Adeline M. Schermerhorn, the widow of former trustee Peter Augustus Schermerhorn. In the 81 years it remained at this address, the population of the five boroughs skyrocketed from 800,000 to 7.5 million and the Library provided a peaceful haven for writers including Herman Melville and Willa Cather.



11, 12, & 13 STAIRCASE

George Washington, John Adams, and John Jay.

While the new U.S. government was based in New York, founders George Washington, John Adams, and John Jay borrowed books from the Library. Jay was a founding member of the New York Manumission Society. Established in 1785 by wealthy white men, some of them slaveowners, the society supported a very gradual elimination of slavery.



14 STAIRCASE

Panoramic View of New York from the East River, 1844.

New York outlawed slavery in 1829. However, an 1838 court ruling allowed slave ships to anchor and restock in the harbor so long as none of the enslaved onboard were sold or transferred to other ships. Bringing enslaved people to the city from out of state was legal for periods of up to nine months and courts continued to return fugitives from other states.

15 STAIRCASE

Facsimile of the Charter of the New York Society Library from George III.

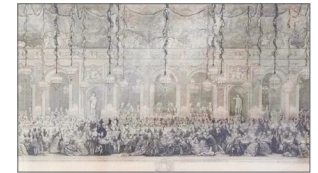
Seventy-one Library members are listed here, including lawyers, merchants, physicians, five “gentlemen,” five prosperous artisans and tradesmen, and a sole woman. Described here as “widow,” the successful New York merchant Anne Waddell assumed her husband’s membership after his death.



16 & 17 STAIRCASE

King George III and Soirée des Fêtes à Versailles.

Enlightenment ideas inspired revolutions in the American colonies and France. The goal in the former was independence from Britain, but the French wanted freedom from their royal family. While workers starved, aristocrats lived and entertained in excess and extravagance. The Palace of Versailles was a symbol of French aristocratic indifference and corruption. At the outbreak of revolution in 1789, an angry crowd besieged the Palace, forcing King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette to return to Paris.



18 STAIRCASE

Map of the Country, Thirty Miles Around the City of New York.

Dedicated to New York City mayor DeWitt Clinton, this popular 1811 circular map—reprinted multiple times in the first half of the 19th century—encompasses a 30-mile radius around the city, with Manhattan at its center. John H. Eddy, the cartographer, made a number of significant maps and surveys of the New York area. The Hudson River is the dominant feature. It flows through the middle of the map down into New York Bay and on to the Atlantic Ocean. Acclaimed for his precision and detail, Eddy included many cities, towns, villages, turnpikes, roads, railroads, and canals.

