

**Court of Appeals  
of the State of New York**

**Restoration and Renovation**

**1842 – 2004**

*State of New York,  
Court of Appeals,*



*Judith S. Kaye  
Chief Judge*

*Court of Appeals Hall  
Albany, New York 12207*

January 2004

Welcome to Court of Appeals Hall, home of New York State's highest court. On behalf of my Colleagues on the bench and the entire Court staff, we hope this visit (whether in person or in print) heightens your interest in our Court, and indeed in the entire Third Branch of State government, the Judiciary.

As you will see in the ensuing pages, this facility actually predates the Court of Appeals -- the building was first formally opened for State offices in 1842, while the Court itself was not established until 1847. In fact, the Court of Appeals originally sat in the State Capitol, right across the street. When the Court moved here in 1917, our courtroom -- the most beautiful in the world, I believe -- was brought over from the Capitol to 20 Eagle Street piece by piece.

Since our arrival, the building has twice undergone major renovation, the first in the late 1950's, the second close to half a century later. This latest renovation fulfills a dream of mine: we now have sufficient, dignified public space on the first floor, surrounding the Courtroom; all seven Judges' Chambers and our Conference Room are for the first time on the second floor; space for staff meetings, training and such are available alongside our Central Staff and Library on the third floor; and we have up-to-date mechanical systems and technology throughout. Hopefully, this will take Court of Appeals Hall far into the twenty-first century.

Along with the privilege of occupying a landmark public facility such as ours come at least two significant responsibilities. First is upkeep. We are most grateful to the Governor and the Legislature for enabling us to preserve and maintain 20 Eagle Street in the fashion it deserves. Second, we must not only honor our history but also tell it. This booklet is an effort to do both. I thank Marjorie McCoy, Frances Murray, Cynthia Byrne and Lisa Bohannon for their help in assembling this story.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judith S. Kaye".

# COURT OF APPEALS HALL: Its History

## Initial Construction

New York State's Judiciary has been linked to this classic Greek Revival building -- initially called New State Hall, now known as Court of Appeals Hall -- since the structure was first planned in the early nineteenth century.

Located at the corner of State and Lodge Streets, Old State Hall was New York's first public building erected in Albany after the Revolutionary War. By 1833, concerns were raised that Old State Hall was not fireproof, and could no longer adequately meet the needs of the growing State. The Legislature directed the Capitol Trustees to purchase a site and erect a new State Hall with "suitable public offices." The Trustees chose a site on Academy Square, overlooking Academy Park and the Hudson River, a site we today know as 20 Eagle Street.

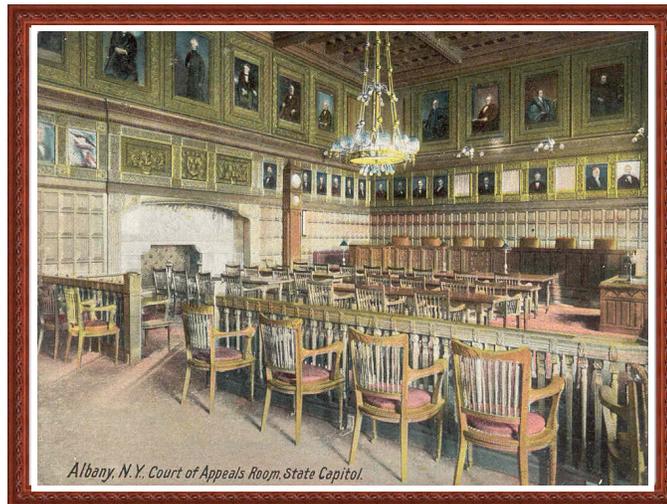
The following year, the Legislature resolved that the new State Hall should be constructed of marble quarried at the State prison at Mount Pleasant (which we know as Sing-Sing). Albany's foremost architect at the time, Henry Rector, was appointed to the project and, in 1835, plans and estimates were submitted to the Legislature. To render the whole building fireproof, ceilings would be constructed of brick arches in place of wood. A hemispherical dome, forty feet in diameter, with a windowed sash, would light the rotunda and its second and third floor galleries. A stone staircase, starting in the main entrance hall and ending on the third floor, would cantilever from the wall with no visible means of support -- an engineering marvel!

The formal assignment of rooms in New State Hall included offices for the Chancellor, the Register of Chancery and the State Supreme Court. New State Hall was formally opened in 1842, and an historical marker memorializing the occasion can be found at the corner of Pine and Eagle Streets.

## The Richardson Courtroom

In 1846, the Court of Appeals was established as New York's court of final appeal, the Court of Chancery was abolished and the old Supreme Court became a court of general jurisdiction in law and equity. On September 7, 1847, and for almost four decades thereafter, the Court of Appeals held its sessions in the old Capitol, in the second floor courtroom once occupied by the Supreme Court.

When the new Capitol was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century, renowned architect H.H. Richardson envisioned the magnificent courtroom in which the Court of Appeals would henceforth hear oral argument. The Courtroom walls were paneled from floor to ceiling in carved oak; the ceiling was oak-timbered. Portraits of thirty-three former New York State Judges graced the walls. An exquisitely sculpted oak clock and a bronze statue of Chancellor Robert Livingston stood in the Courtroom. The Judges' oak bench was of similarly fine craftsmanship; close examination of the bench's intricate detail revealed a host of faces carved into its facade. On January 14, 1884, the Court of Appeals held its first session in the Capitol's Richardson Courtroom.



*The Richardson Courtroom, 1884*



*Court of Appeals Courtroom, 1890*

## Renovation of State Hall and Rededication as Court of Appeals Hall

By 1909, space had become a problem in the Capitol. When much of that building was damaged by the fire of 1911, relocation of the Court of Appeals to its own home grew more urgent. Chapter 445 of the Laws of 1909, entitled "An act relating to the Capitol Building and a suitable building for the Court of Appeals, and making an appropriation therefor," directed the State Architect and a Judge of the Court of Appeals (to be designated by order of the Court) to procure designs, plans, specifications and estimates and to report in writing to the Legislature whether alterations to the building would render State Hall convenient and suitable for use by the Court of Appeals.

The Court of Appeals appointed Associate Judge William E. Werner its representative to the project. He and the State Architect, Franklin B. Ware, commissioned J. Foster Warner of Rochester to carry out the study. As the project committee recommended in the State Architect's 1910 report to the Legislature, "after a careful and repeated study of the submitted designs and plans, the members of the Court of Appeals are satisfied that if the interior of said State House is altered and remodeled substantially in accordance with such designs and plans it will afford a suitable, convenient and permanent abode for the Court of Appeals, as well adapted to its needs as any new building could be, and that the exterior of said State House needs no change since it is all that could be desired for the purpose specified."

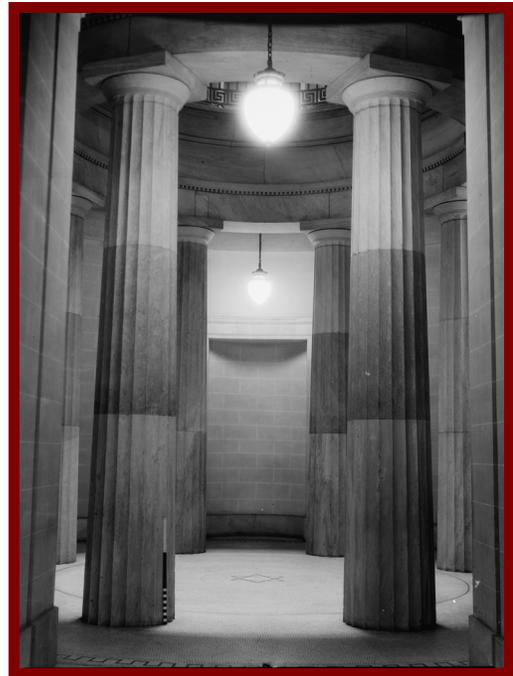
In 1911, the State Architect submitted to the Legislature a counterproposal to the committee's 1910 report. Ware noted that the 1910 plans for the renovation of State Hall failed to provide all the accommodations and facilities the highest Court of the State required for "the proper conduct of its business." Ware proposed a grand plan for the development of Capitol Hill, Albany modeled on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., with a new Court of Appeals building to be located on Swan Street, at the west side of the park surrounding the Capitol. This proposal was rejected.

Thereafter, the Legislature authorized the Trustees of the Capitol to take steps to alter State Hall for Court of Appeals occupancy in conformity with the 1910 plans, as modified by the newly-appointed State Architect, Lewis F. Pilcher. The new design included an extension of State Hall to the east to accommodate the Court's beloved Richardson Courtroom, then over 30 years old; preservation of the Courtroom was Chief Judge Willard Bartlett's highest priority. The Court of

Appeals approved the new design by resolution adopted March 3, 1914. The contract for the renovation was executed on August 3, 1915 and the building, renamed Court of Appeals Hall, was formally dedicated on January 8, 1917.

Research reveals that the walls of the Courthouse rotunda were covered in a dark yellow faux caen stone, and its first floor was mosaic tile. The Judges' Library and Conference Room and their individual Chambers were painted in cream-colored shades and lit by pendant acorn-drop globes. All books previously housed in the Court of Appeals' Capitol Library were transferred to the Courthouse Library.

The hand-carved oak paneling of the Richardson Courtroom was also moved, piece by piece, from the Capitol to its new home in Court of Appeals Hall, as was the massive marble, onyx and bronze fireplace. Oil paintings of former Judges, in sculpted oak frames, now graced all four walls of the Courtroom. The original Courtroom furniture, designed by Richardson and built by artisans in a basement furniture shop at the Capitol in 1883, was displayed on a new Brussels-weave carpet bearing geometrical and floral details in hues of beige, brown, cream and blue-green.



*Courthouse Rotunda, 1917  
First floor mosaic tile*

Governor Charles S. Whitman observed at the ceremony dedicating Court of Appeals Hall:

*From now on and judging from the splendid character of the building itself, we trust for centuries it is to be devoted to a purpose, the noblest purpose to which a building or a life can be devoted, the administration of justice.*



*Marble, onyx and bronze fireplace, moved from the Capitol*

## The 1958-1959 Restoration and Renovation

After forty years, Court of Appeals Hall had deteriorated to the point of danger. In 1949, the State Public Works Department reported that the Courthouse portico was in hazardous condition, the interior looked "tacky and patched up," and the building's electrical wiring and heating system required replacement. In May 1956, after an unannounced, personal inspection of the Courthouse, Governor Averill Harriman authorized reconstruction, and in 1958 a sixteen-month program of restoration and renovation began under the direction of State Architect Carl Larson.



*Clerk's Office, First Floor, 1958*



*Deputy State Reporter's Office, Third Floor, 1958*

Chief Judge Albert Conway appointed Associate Judge Charles W. Froessel to oversee the reconstruction on the Court's behalf. Work was delayed while the Judges of the Court considered and rejected the alternative of an entirely new Courthouse. Governor Harriman agreed with the Judges that Court of Appeals Hall was such a significant landmark that the building should be saved and restored for the people of New York. In the summer of 1958, the Legislature included an appropriation in the State's supplemental budget so construction could begin. Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller continued the Executive Department's support of the project, which was completed ahead of schedule in October 1959. Gehron & Seltzer served as consulting architect to the project. Noted designer H. Clifford Burroughes selected the Courthouse interiors.

During construction, the Court of Appeals sat in the Appellate Division Courtroom on the fourth floor of the Albany County Courthouse, and the Judges each had Chambers space at the Capitol. The State Reporter was relocated to a building at 6 Elk Street housing the Conference of Mayors. The Clerk of the Court and his staff were housed in the old Albany Safe Deposit and Storage Company building at Lodge Street and Maiden Lane, a heavily fortified building where millions of dollars in gold bullion once were stored.

In October 1958, soon after construction on Court of Appeals Hall began, a short-circuit in the old elevator machine room sparked a massive fire. Flames rose as high as forty feet in the air. The Courthouse roof and dome, scheduled for renovation, were completely destroyed and the rotunda was badly damaged. Miraculously, the Richardson Courtroom emerged from the fire unscathed. The decision was made to continue the restoration and renovation project.

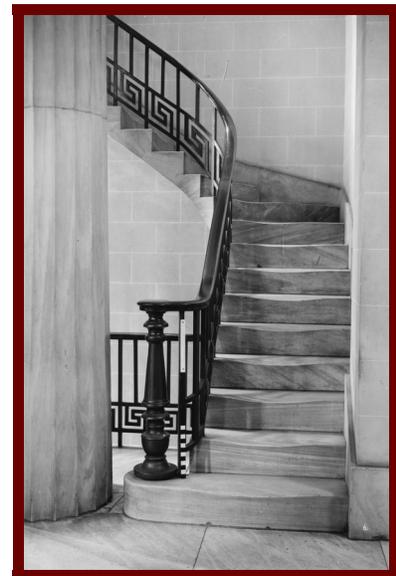


In the course of reconstruction, eighty percent of the Courthouse's exterior marble was replaced with Vermont marble, varying from four inches to a foot in thickness. Six Ionic columns and a granite staircase were built to support a new portico at the Eagle Street entrance to the Courthouse. The remaining stone was cleaned, and the massive wood windows were replaced. As shown above, an eight-ton seal of the State of New York, carved in marble by C. Paul Jennewein, formed the lintel over the Courthouse entrance.

Inside Court of Appeals Hall, the rotunda and the Courtroom remained substantially unchanged, unlike nearly every other feature of the building. In the course of excavation and demolition, contractors discovered that the northeast and southeast corners of the building had over

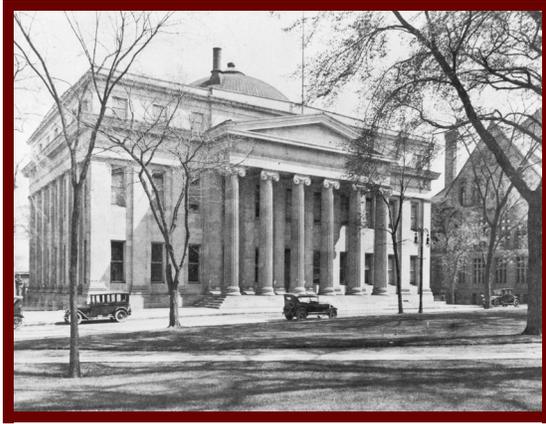


time sunk five inches, severely damaging floors, windows, lintels and interior arches. As a result, the original foundations of eight-foot thick rubble on clay were replaced with reinforced



concrete. Interior arches were repaired; new floors, walls, ceilings, elevators and stairs were installed. The Courthouse's famous stone staircase (shown left and above) was deemed too dangerous to save.

## 1958-1959 Restoration and Renovation



In place of the original dome (shown above left) destroyed in the fire, a new dome was constructed of steel beams, lightweight concrete planks and lead-coated copper sheeting, with a diameter of 64 feet at the base and a height of 23 feet. A painted cupola was erected at the top of the new dome (shown above right.)

The interior of the dome was decorated with a mural painted in oil by 76-year-old artist Eugene Savage, of Woodbury, Connecticut. The mural is 1,000 square feet and 34 feet in diameter, and was actually painted on 16 slices of canvas which Savage fitted together inside the dome. Emblazoned with the sun, moon and stars, the mural depicts "The Romance of the Skies," and symbolizes the three seasons when the Court of Appeals is in session. At the request of the Court and other State officials, the State seal and the seal of the Court of Appeals are also depicted.



The seven Judges of the Court took possession of suites, five on the second floor and two on the third floor of the Courthouse. The Judges' Library and Conference Room on the second floor housed the circular oak conference table at which the Judges of the Court cast their votes on the disposition of cases. Their robing room behind the first floor Courtroom was paneled in birch. The Courtroom received a finely detailed burgundy carpet and crimson damask curtains interwoven with the Arms of the State. The eighty or so paintings then in the Courtroom were cleaned and rehung.

Local newspapers were quick to note that Court of Appeals Hall was fully air conditioned (a 115-ton air conditioning unit was installed in the basement), had a first floor kitchen with ceramic tile walls, a wall oven, electric stove and refrigerator, and that the Judges' reception room was equipped with a television set.

At the October 5, 1959 rededication of Court of Appeals Hall, Chief Judge Albert Conway accepted the keys to the Courthouse from Governor Rockefeller on behalf of his Colleagues, and observed that the renovated Courthouse symbolized the "permanence of an ideal" of liberty under law.



*Chief Judge Hiscock's second floor chamber,  
Court of Appeals Hall, 1922*



*Desk still in use, Judge's Chamber,  
Court of Appeals Hall, 2004*

1958-1959 Restoration and Renovation



*Courtroom, 1958*



*Crimson damask curtains interwoven with the Arms of the State.*



*Robing Room*

## The 2002-2004 Restoration and Renovation

In the last decade of the twentieth century, notwithstanding its excellent condition and beautiful appearance, Court of Appeals Hall proved no longer adequate to house the Court's judicial and nonjudicial staff, or its twenty-first century operations. The mechanical infrastructure of the Courthouse was more than forty years old, and its thick interior walls were not conducive to modern electrical and telecommunication needs. Controlling climate became difficult. The Courtroom became the only space in which Judges and staff could meet together. Finally, public rooms in the Courthouse were small and few in number, greatly limiting the public's access to the history and work of the Court.

In 1999, the Court determined to pursue the restoration and renovation of Court of Appeals Hall and the construction of two three-story additions to the building. Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye designated Associate Judge (now United States Circuit Judge) Richard C. Wesley as the Court's liaison to the project. In 2000, and again in 2001, the Legislature, with the support of Governor George E. Pataki, appropriated monies for the project. The Dormitory Authority of the State of New York served as Project Manager. The DeWolff Partnership of Rochester was the project's Architect, and BBL Construction Services served as Construction Manager.

During construction, the Judges and Court staff moved to temporary quarters about ten miles from the Courthouse. Throughout the seventeen-month relocation, however, oral arguments were conducted in the Courtroom.

Upon completion, the restoration and renovation project had refurbished approximately 60,000 feet of the Courthouse interior, and added approximately 33,000 square feet of space matching the Courthouse's interior and exterior design. The building's electrical, plumbing, ventilation, heating, cooling and telecommunications systems were all replaced. Wherever possible, materials, fixtures and furnishings from the 1959 Courthouse were restored and reused. The Richardson Courtroom remained virtually untouched.

The project team had consulted with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to assure that historically significant features of Court of Appeals Hall would be retained and, in many instances, restored to their original beauty. As in the

1958-59 reconstruction project, the marble for the exterior facade of the Courthouse was quarried at the Danby Quarry in Danby, Vermont. White Montclair marble was again selected for the pilasters on the facade. Royal Danby marble was selected for the rest of the facade because it closely matched the color and veining of the marble used earlier for the exterior wall panels and the cornice.

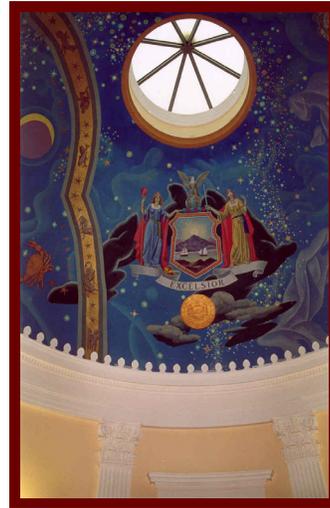


The Greek Revival Courthouse exhibits strong classical features. The two new additions to the Courthouse are similar in scale, proportion and detailing. To comply with Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation requirements that the original building be distinguishable from its additions, the facades of the new additions were designed with subtle differences in detail, including narrower pilaster width and space between pilasters, smooth rather than fluted pilaster bases, and rectangular reveals between the first and second floor windows. Throughout the Courthouse, formerly exterior marble walls were preserved as interior walls in the additions.

The Courthouse dome was renovated and reclad in stainless steel. An oculus and skylight, consistent with the original building design, replaced the 1959 cupola atop the dome. Designed to illuminate the rotunda and its spectacular mural, the new skylight employs high performance glass to reduce heat gain and ultraviolet light.



The oculus is capped by the gold leaf sphere, shown on the left, from the 1959 cupola. The other two 1959 gold leaf spheres still top the flagpoles nearby.



Recognizing the shared architectural history of the Court of Appeals and the Capitol, the Executive Director of the State Commission on the Restoration of the Capitol, Andrea Lazarski, provided invaluable assistance with interior design. Period color schemes were selected for use throughout the Courthouse.

The rotunda galleries are painted in a mid-nineteenth century color scheme of cream, yellow and beige. In selected first floor offices and the new Red Room, a painted faux finish on the walls reflects decorative wall treatments of the early twentieth century. The paint and carpet color scheme on the first floor, principally blues and reds, similarly evokes traditional early twentieth-century design. The color scheme on the second floor, using blues and reds and introducing green and gold, is typical of mid-twentieth century design, when the Courthouse was last renovated. The third floor has a contemporary green color scheme, as the majority of this floor is newly constructed.



*The Red Room – the Court's traditional gathering space*

Fulfilling a major objective of Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, the second floor of the Courthouse now accommodates all seven of the Judges' Chambers, as well as the Judges' Library and Conference Room. The renovated and newly constructed Chambers duplicate as closely as possible, and in many instances re-use, bookcases and lighting fixtures of their 1959 predecessors. Additionally, the Judges' historic furniture was restored and returned to their Chambers.

The Judges' Conference Room and Library underwent extensive renovation. Its north and south bays, which once housed part of the Library collection, were redesigned to provide space for the two additional Judges' Chambers moved from the third, to the second, floor. The paneling and molding on the new north and south walls match in type and detail the existing 1959 woodwork in the room. The new chandelier is an Art Deco fixture in keeping with the 1950's design of the room. To replace Library space lost on the second floor, a twenty-first century library of traditional design was built on the third floor.



When built in 1842, State Hall had high groin-vaulted structures constructed of plastered and painted brick for ceilings. In the course of previous renovations, these elegant structures were concealed. Today, the groin-vaulted ceiling structures are once again exposed to view, plastered and painted as they were 170 years ago, in the Attorneys' Lounge, Attorneys' Library and the Clerk's Office, all on the first floor.



*Exhibit space outside the John Jay Room*



*John Jay Room*

In addition to the Attorneys' Lounge and Attorneys' Library, a third conference room on the first floor, the John Jay Room, was created for public and educational functions. All three rooms are equipped with closed circuit television to provide "overflow" viewing of the Court's oral arguments. Exhibit space in the public rooms will allow the public to enjoy the Court's collection of historic books and artifacts. The teak paneling and molding in the public areas were inspired by and, in many instances salvaged from, wood detailing in the former Red Room, which was demolished in the course of renovation.

Late nineteenth century photographs of the Courtroom were studied to determine the patterns of carpet in vogue at that time. The pattern selected for the Courtroom carpet, an enlargement of the predecessor carpet's design, complements the intricate detailing of the room's wood paneling. The reds of the new carpet match those of the previous carpet, with the addition of royal blue detailing. The Courtroom carpeting extends to the Anteroom, where a lighted dome in the ceiling recalls a proposed 1940 renovation design.

In the Courtroom, the exquisite detail of Richardson's craft is given new life by six brass chandeliers, similar in design to the 1884 original. The prior fixtures, installed some time between 1917 and 1959, furnished insufficient light for modern court operations. The new chandeliers, fully dimmable, raise the overall ambient light in the Courtroom and provide direct light to the bench and table surfaces. Of the twelve older chandeliers, eight could be refurbished and hung in the Red Room and the John Jay Room. The historic Richardson furniture, and all of the portraits, were restored and returned to the Courtroom.



## Conclusion

Now looking toward its third century, Court of Appeals Hall carries into the future the enduring hopes and dreams of the past. It stands as a public building of splendid character dedicated to the permanence of the ideal of liberty under law. Court of Appeals Hall is indeed, as noted in the 1910 report, "all that could be desired for the purpose specified."

### Illustration Attribution

Cover Photo: Northwest corner of Court of Appeals Hall, 20 Eagle Street, Albany.  
New construction meets existing structure with addition of first floor Clerk's Office,  
second floor Chambers and third floor Library.

Page 2. Courtroom, 1884; The Hugh C. Leighton Co., Portland, Maine.

Page 4. Courthouse Rotunda, 1917; Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,  
Detroit Publishing Company Collection.

Page 5. New York State Office of General Services.

Page 6. Courthouse Interior Stone Staircase, 1917; Library of Congress, Prints and  
Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection.

All other photographs are from the Court of Appeals Collection.



