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SENATE HOUSE

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2 In 1777, a year after Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence proclaimed the 13 [American colony's freedom from English rule](#), this limestone building housed the first meeting of New York's newly organized State Senate. A "government on the run" being chased north from New York City by the British Army, the state government moved to Kingston in February of 1777, and took up residence in the Ulster County Courthouse in order to create a formal state constitution. The delegates approved the state's first constitution in April of 1777, and held elections in June. While the Supreme Court remained in the Courthouse and the Assembly met in a local tavern, the Senate convened its first session in the generously-offered old stone home of Abraham VanGaasbeck. Built in 1676 only 12 years after the British assumed control of New York from the Dutch, the house reflects both the building traditions of the original Dutch colonists and the gradual acceptance of English construction styles. In

October of 1777, after meeting in the Senate House for only a month, the Senate and the rest of the newly formed State government hastily fled Kingston when a British force sent north from New York City began plundering the Hudson Valley. On October 16, 1777, British forces swarmed through and set fire to every house in town as punishment for Kingston's role in supporting the Revolution. Both Kingston and Senate House were rebuilt, and over 100 years later, New York State acquired Abraham VanGaasbeck's home to recognize the role Senate House played in the American Revolution. Senate House quickly became a vital community museum, exhibiting a wide range of artwork, documents and historical objects donated by local residents. A two-story museum was constructed next door in 1927 to house and display this collection. The second building in New York preserved by the State for its historic value, the Senate House has been finished and restored to depict the building as it would have looked in 1777.



Senate House
Photograph by John Reinhardt



Senate House, c. 1885
Photograph courtesy of John F. Matthews

The Senate House is located in the Stockade Historic District at the corner of North Front

Street and Clinton Avenue. The building and grounds are open to the public. Senate House staff provides guided tours. For more information call 845-338-2786.



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