



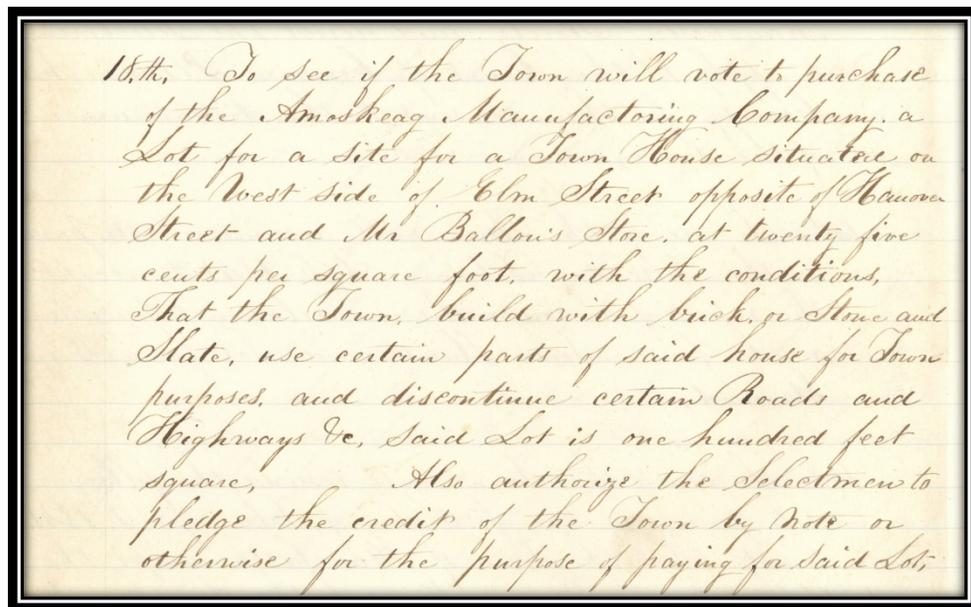
A History of Manchester's City Hall

The City of Manchester's City Hall is a building with a long and rich history. Since 1845, the building has served as the home of the local government.

Prior to City Hall

Before Manchester acquired the property where City Hall resides, two separate structures served as meeting places for the transaction of town affairs. Residents who lived near present day downtown used the second floor of a wooden structure that was located on Amherst Street between Nutfield Lane and Chestnut Street. The town's inhabitants who were living further east of the downtown area, found it excessively distant to the Amherst Street meeting house, and consequently maintained their own meeting place¹.

Seeing a clear need for an official meeting place, in early 1841 the Town Selectmen formed a committee charged with procuring a site for a Town House as well as a cemetery. The committee came back with various sites they felt were suitable; the



Excerpt from an 1841 warrant, notifying voters of the possible purchase of the lot of land where present day City Hall is located (2003.21).

Selectmen issued a warrant for town inhabitants to attend the annual town meeting to vote on a number of issues, including whether to purchase a lot of land from the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company for purposes of building a town house.

After some deliberation, the town decided to acquire a deed of land on the west side of Elm Street, opposite Hanover. The site contained ten thousand square feet, and could be purchased from the Amoskeag for \$2,500. It was a logical choice, as one could assume that the young community wanted to have its government headquartered in a location close to the river and mills that were responsible for its economic survival.

¹ City Hall Historical Data, 1959.

Construction of the building began in 1841, and it was completed that same year, towards the end of summer. The structure was ninety feet long and sixty feet wide, constructed of brick. On the first floor was the post office in addition to four businesses. The space for the actual town hall was located on the second floor, and the attic was used as an armory. The building was surmounted with a cupola and bell, topped with an eagle². It was built at a cost of \$19,131³.



Town House of Manchester. Drawing from the *Manchester of Yesterday*, page 122.

The town house served Manchester well for about three years, until it burned down on August 12, 1844. One of the members of the two militia companies occupying the attic, the *Stark Guards* and the *Granite Fusileers*, dropped a smoldering paper which ignited small traces of gunpowder or wood shavings between floorboards. Before anyone noticed the flames, they were out of control and could not be contained. There was a great panic among onlookers in the street; although the town's fire engine was quickly on the scene, it was of little use. The fire broke through the roof and spread to the bell tower, which eventually crashed through the building along with the giant golden eagle.

One onlooker, a young boy at the time, recollected years later his witnessing of the fire:

I saw a great crowd gathering [at the town house] and heard excited cries on all sides. Men were running and women screaming, and when I saw the great masses of smoke and flame pouring out from the upper floor of the town house, I was badly frightened...People all about were excitedly engaged in...either pumping water or lugging it in pails, firebuckets, pans, etc. to throw on the fire... Pretty soon the flames began to eat through [the roof] and attacked the bell tower. They crept up the stairs, and as they found egress through the cupola, created a draft which made the fire burn all the fiercer inside. I well remember when the tower gave way. Clock, bell, and eagle all came down together, crashing through the burning floors all the way to the cellar. We could hear the great bell jangling as it went down. It sent a thrill of horror through us.

² Manchester on the Merrimack, pg. 166.

³ The City Hall of Manchester, NH by Gerda Peterich. Pg. 6.

The building was unsalvageable, and resulted in approximately \$30,000 worth of damage. The town was left to pick up the pieces, and somehow move forward.

Town House to City Hall

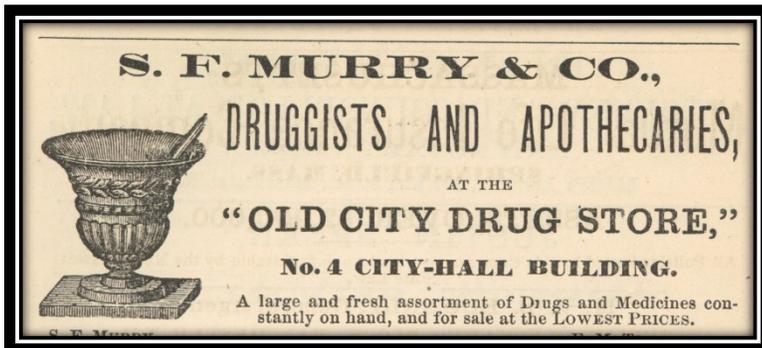
Two days after the fire, the Selectmen issued a notice to the voters of Manchester to meet on August 30th to vote on whether the town would rebuild the town house, and to determine how the structure will be rebuilt.

Additional issues were to be discussed, including several relating to fire suppression and water supply⁴. The meeting resulted in the creation of a committee that was charged with the responsibility of having a new town house constructed.



Excerpt of signatures from the contract between Edward Shaw and the Selectman of the Town of Manchester to construct a new town hall, 1844 (Accession 1998.13).

The town went on to solicit the services of famous Boston architect, Edward Shaw, who had submitted plans and specifications to the committee which were ultimately accepted.



Advertisement from the 1869 City Directory for a pharmacy located in City Hall.

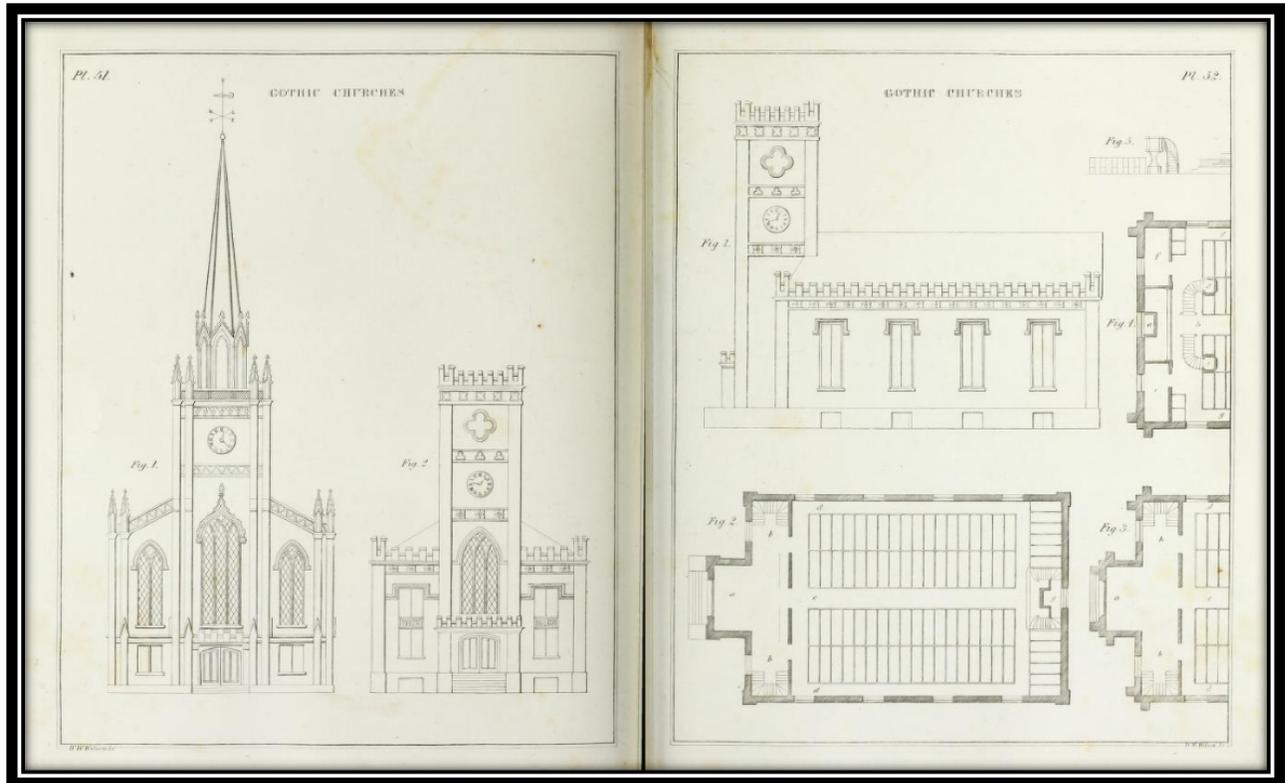
Construction of the new building commenced in 1844, and would be completed in late 1845. The total expenditure for the building was recorded as \$26,807.47.⁵

Although the town initially accepted Shaw's plans, it deviated from them slightly during construction. Shaw had called for the building to be made entirely from stone, but the town decided to instead incorporate the use of brick for the walls. The bricks were then sanded and painted, in order to imitate stone.

The building was one hundred feet in length by sixty feet in width. It had five store-fronts occupying the first floor, along with the City Clerk and the Common Council. The Mayor, City Marshall, and meeting hall were on the second floor; the City Engineer and the School Committee were on the third floor. The locations of these offices would go on to change, as would many other things inside and outside of the building.

⁴ Town Records, pg. 635-636 (accession 2003.21).

⁵ Peterich, pg. 9.



This excerpt from Edward Shaw's book shows a conceptual design for a Gothic style church which is almost identical to Manchester's City Hall. From *The Modern Architect* by Edward Shaw, 1855.

The first official meeting was held in the building on November 29, 1845, when the Town of Manchester held its annual town meeting. On January 12, 1846, a ball was held at the Town House to christen the building, which was hosted by the Stark Guards, a local militia group.

When City Hall was first constructed, it was an architectural marvel that many people in Manchester had never seen. However, over time people's attitudes towards the building changed. City officials began to realize how cramped the building was, and how many repairs were necessary to maintain the building. Citizens' opinion of the building's appearance continued to change, with some admiring the Gothic structure and others considering it an eye-sore. Not long after City Hall was built, people began talking about renovations, alterations, and even constructing an entirely new building.

Changes, Alterations, and Renovations

Almost immediately after the completion of City Hall, there are reports of small repairs and maintenance tasks that were undertaken. For example, in April 1849, the Committee on City Hall voted to let the mayor receive proposals for the building's upkeep, which would include the following: to ring the bell each evening; to keep the Aldermen's council and all the other rooms swept clean; to keep the privy house and lobby well cleaned and the window curtains in the Hall and all the other rooms to be washed as often as they need it; the chandelier and all the lamps to be kept well filled, trimmed, cleaned, and lighted on all occasions when they are to be used, and to remain in the Hall at all times when the same is used until the lights are all put out; to keep the clocks wound up and the snow swept from the roof and the sidewalk; to build fires in all the stoves when used; and the wood to be sawed and

carried upstairs at sixty-seven cents per cord.⁶ Furthermore, in 1866, the building was painted and sanded. In 1872, loose bricks were re-laid. Like any building, City Hall required (and will continue to require) maintenance. For the most part, dedicated city employees have continued to care for and maintain the building from day to day. This narrative does not attempt to document every instance of maintenance, but rather any significant changes to the building, and also proposals to change, sell, or demolish the building that ultimately did not occur.

The [first major resolution](#) (of what would be many) relating to the City Hall building was passed in 1869 by the City Council. Not more than thirty years after its completion, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and the Common Council resolved to give permission to Mayor Isaac Smith to obtain plans for an extension of City Hall to be constructed. No such extension was ultimately built, but it shows that the young city government was already growing beyond the capabilities of the building (although a significant portion of the building was being occupied by private businesses at the time). This was to set the stage, for the next century and beyond, with a common theme of space, efficiency, history, and money.

In 1871, the city received proposals for alterations to the building. The City Council had ordered Mayor James Weston to obtain specifications for alterations to City Hall so that a Police Station could be located there. Although the City Marshal and the Assistant City Marshal both had an office in City Hall during this time period, there was not a fully functioning police station. City records from 1872 include expenses for remodeling City Hall, which totaled \$8,853.42, although specifically what was remodeled is unclear. In any case, Manchester was continuing to grow at a rapid pace, and the local government was exponentially requiring more space.

In September 1889, a committee of five elected officials (the mayor, two aldermen, and two councilmen) was created with the charge of “disposing of the City Hall Building and lot and procuring a new lot.”⁷ Needless to say, this did not come to fruition.

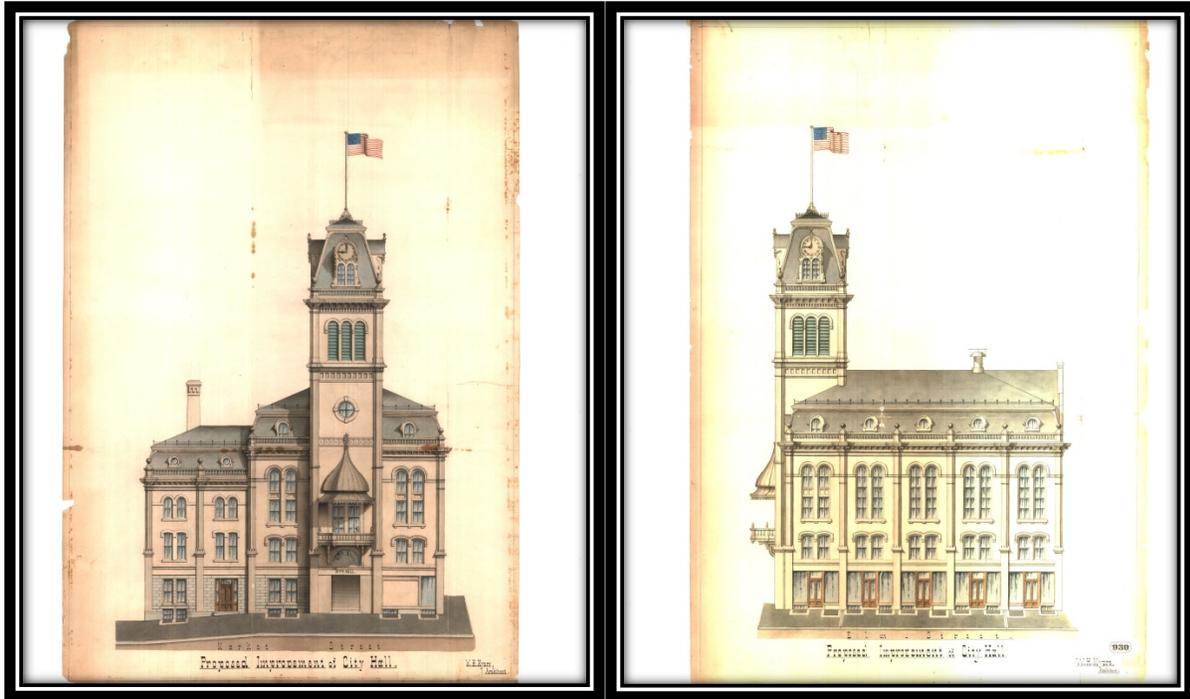
In 1893, questions arose once again about City Hall’s suitability to the needs of the local government. A Special Committee on City Hall was formed and met with Herman F. Straw, an agent of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, in relation to the removal of the restriction upon the City Hall property deed which only allowed the property to be used as a site for a City Hall. Mr. Straw assured the committee that the company would not, under any circumstances, release that restriction. Any chance of the city using the building for another purpose, and perhaps constructing a new building in a different location, was squashed.

The committee was also charged with analyzing the building’s physical condition. Its sub-committee [submitted a report](#) citing that City Hall was “in an unsafe condition” which was so severe that they further recommended to no longer use the third story, for fear of the roof collapsing. The sub-committee ultimately recommended that “the erection of a new City Hall building [be built] as early a date as practicable⁸.” Although a new building was not constructed, City Hall’s first major renovation was to finally take place not long after the committee submitted its report. Up until that point, only minor modifications and routine maintenance work had been done.

⁶ Accession 2003.34.

⁷ Resolution. September 03, 1889.

⁸ 1998.125. Box 162, Folder 7. Second and third items.



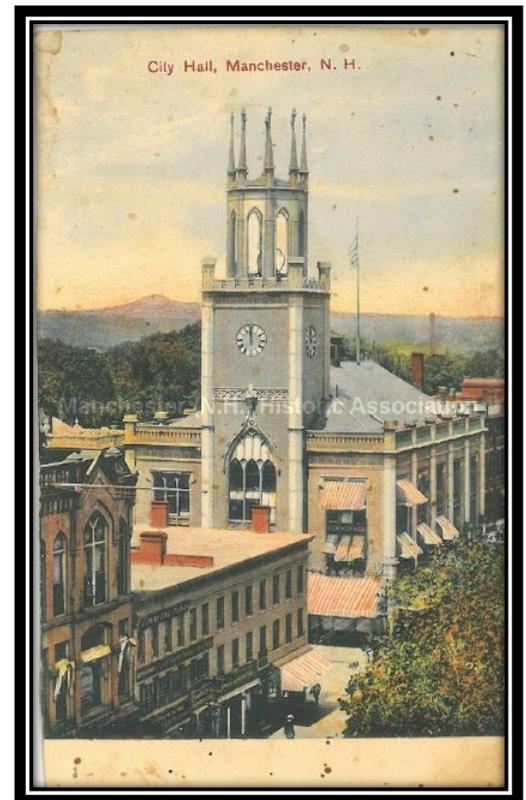
Designs of possible alterations to City Hall, which never came to be. These drawings from 1871 feature City Hall without its open bell tower or crown of spires. It also features a balcony. Accession 2010.253.

In 1895, City Hall underwent its first major renovation. In the preceding years, the City Council habitually debated whether or not the building should be demolished or significantly renovated, and most debates ended with no major initiative moving forward in any direction. This was most likely due to other pressing matters that were facing the young city at the time, such as expanding its sewers and water infrastructure, creating new roads, installing electric lights, updating the equipment of the Fire Department, building new schools, and other initiatives that were financially costly. Mayor William C. Clarke, in his inaugural address given at the beginning of his first term in January 1895, addressed the growing concern about the building:

I trust the city hall can be made to serve the purposes for which it was designed until a relief from the pressure in other directions enables us to erect a new one....The city clerk's office should be moved to the ground floor, where it would be easily accessible, and the closet in which he is now forced to perform his duties converted into a private

office for the mayor.

Even though Clarke did not want to expend funds towards the repair of City Hall, he received pressure early in his administration from the Common Council, which issued an [order in April 1895](#) that the mayor make needed repairs to the building. Ultimately, the



Postcard showing the brick walls of City Hall painted over to imitate stone. Also visible on the right side of the clock tower is one north facing brick pillar, which is also covered with a material to match the two true granite pillars on the front of the clock tower. MHA.

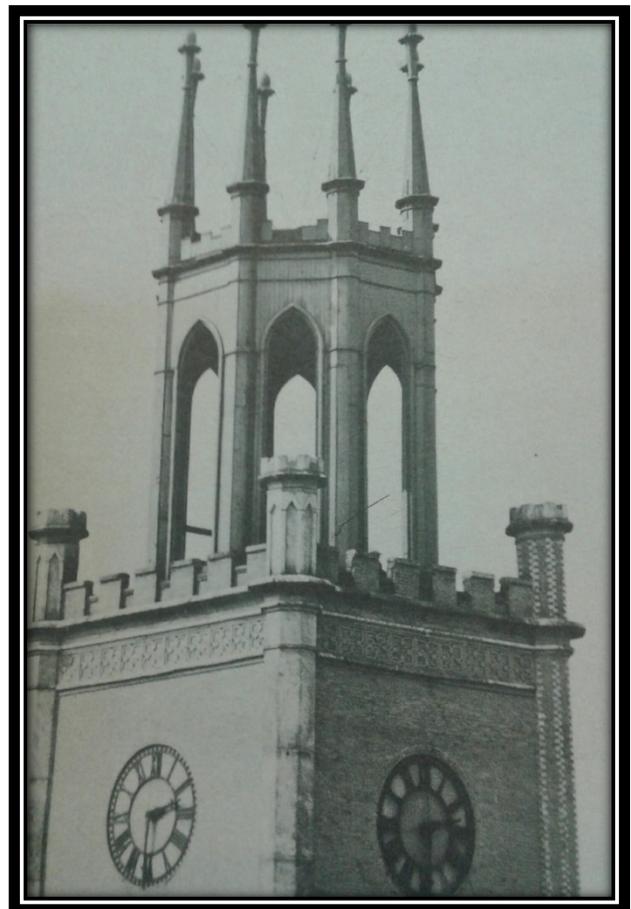
city spent \$18,576.77 for extensive repairs and interior remodeling. Private businesses and store-fronts who rented space on the first floor were removed, and the City Clerk and Mayor's offices were moved down to the street level, while other offices were reorganized and shifted. Sanitary conditions and plumbing were also greatly improved. The main entrance to the building moved from its original location facing south towards Market Street (where present-day City Hall Plaza is located) to facing east towards Elm Street. This entrance remained in use for about 100 years, until the building underwent its second major renovation.

After the late 19th Century renovation, time passed by with relatively little talk on the subject of City Hall, until on May 22, 1911, the Common Council passed [a resolution](#) to construct a new City Hall building. Unsurprisingly, the resolution was [vetoed by Mayor Edward Smith](#), who cited Manchester's other more pressing needs, such as the creation of new sewers and better fire services.

Although discussions (or at least official government discussions) of creating new City Hall building temporarily subsided after the 1911 resolution and veto, City Hall did receive some modifications in the following decades. In the fall of 1922, the Waples Company of Boston was hired to remove the yellow paint and stucco from the building. The company used a torch to peel the paint off, and then scraped it off to show the original brick. After this work was completed, local journalist Frank Frisselle wrote an article which discussed the history of the building's bricks, and also that when City Hall was built, two chimneys were incorporated into its structure. Mr. Frisselle claims that these two chimneys were the two north side pillars of the clock tower. If one were to look at the tops of the pillars from above today, holes in the center of each show that they were at one time used as chimneys. These two pillars are made of brick, while the two south side pillars are made of solid granite. It is assumed that the pillars' of brick were painted to imitate stone, like the rest of the building's brick walls. Pictures of the clock tower before 1922 show all four pillars to be of smooth granite, while photographs after the 1922 exterior work show the four pillars to be split between granite on the south side and brick on the north side.

The next significant proposal to alter City Hall came in 1935, and caused quite a controversy among the public. The Superintendent of Buildings, William E. Sullivan, recommended to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen that the crown of spires atop the City Hall's clock tower be removed and that a gilded dome be used as its replacement.

The Union Leader, which was predicting "a storm of protest" if the recommendations were to be accepted, decided to conduct a poll of Manchester's citizens. The newspaper released



This photograph from the 1940s clearly shows the difference in construction between the granite south pillars and brick north pillars of the clock tower.

ballots allowing the public to cast a vote in favor of retaining the spires or in favor of replacing them with a dome. In [a letter to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen dated October 8, 1935](#), the tabulation of these ballots showed that 294 votes were cast in favor of keeping the spires, while only 64 votes were cast in favor of the dome.

At the special meeting held by the Board on the same date, the Mayor and Aldermen addressed the letter. Alderman Albert Clough (Ward 2) spoke in opposition of removing the spires, stating that “the people of Manchester have developed a great fondness for our present City Hall, which has become a land-mark from generations back... [I] would like to see it preserved as long as possible.”⁹ The Alderman’s sentiment was no doubt shared by the majority of Manchester’s population, who were looking back at the past with a feeling of comfort while simultaneously living during a time of uncertainty caused globally by the Great Depression and locally by the decline of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, which would close its doors for good just over two months later. The conversation at the October 8th meeting quickly went from opposing the construction of a dome to the more urgent and practical (and politically-friendly) discussion of equipping City Hall with a sprinkler system.

Just a few years later, Western Europe found itself in the midst of World War II. After the attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States joined the war. Manchester was not isolated from these events, and many brave men and women from Manchester served their country in various military branches. For those who were able to stay home in the city, life would continue forward, but many made frugal economic decisions in an effort to sustain the global conflict the country was in the middle of fighting. The municipal government encouraged such practices; the best example being the Board of Mayor and Aldermen’s allotment of \$2,500 to the Parks and Playground Department in 1943, for the purposes of establishing victory gardens throughout the city. This led to the establishment of 1,600 victory gardens in Manchester during World War II.¹⁰

Despite this communal effort to support the nation’s military, the city government kept an eye on the possibility of a new City Hall building. Towards the end of the war when the nation was confident that victory was near, Manchester, like other cities across the country, began to organize post-war planning efforts. Part of Manchester’s planning could have potentially included a new structure to house the local government.

In fact, in 1945 there were offers from private investors to buy City Hall. These offers were shrouded in mystery, and the public sentiment was largely opposed to the idea of selling the building, most likely largely because the city would then need to build or purchase a new building.

By the mid-1950s, discussions once again experienced a shift in regards to the fate of City Hall. The talk of mysterious groups offering cash for the building died down, and the city once again was faced with making decisions so that the building could meet the day-to-day functional needs required to efficiently serve the public.

One of the biggest alterations during the 1950s was the electrification of the clock on the building’s tower. On April 19, 1955, the Board received a report from the Committee on Finance regarding bids that the Building Department had received to electrify the clock. The report was accepted, and Howard

⁹ BMA Minutes, October 8, 1935.

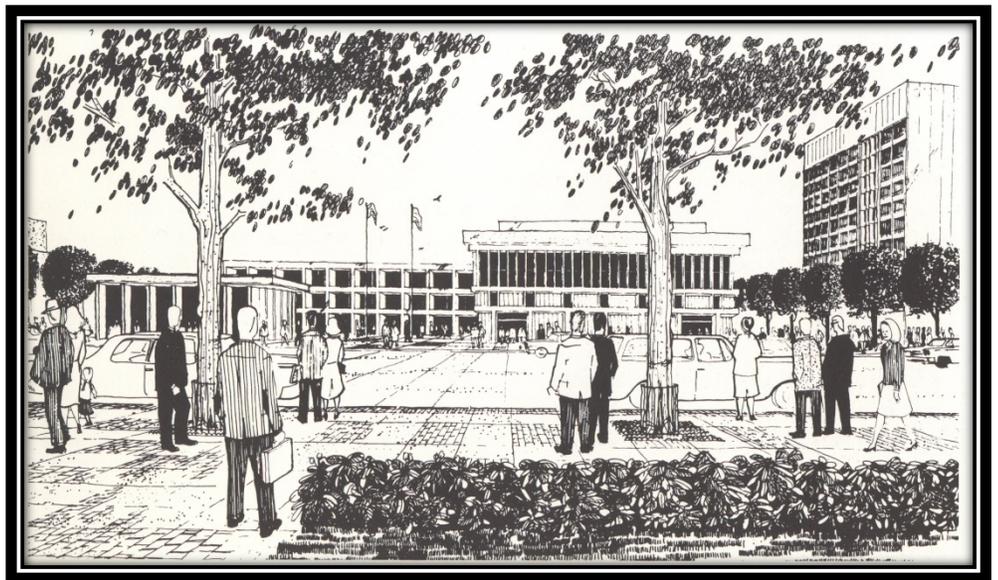
¹⁰ Annual Report, 1943. Parks, Commons, and Playgrounds Commission.

Clock Products, Inc. was awarded the job of installing a new electrically operated clock and installing new glasswork, at a price of \$3,295. Mayor Benoit, who was concerned about visitors to City Hall who needed to reach the second and third floors, explored the idea of installing an escalator in the building. The escalator would help avoid accidents of the building's estimated 50,000 annual visitors at the time, especially among elderly citizens who were at risk of falling while climbing or descending the stairs. An escalator proved to be too expensive, so the Building Department secured bids for an elevator, which was initially estimated to cost \$17,500 in 1956. Also during this time, the third floor was renovated to provide for more working space for the Planning Department.

While these maintenance projects and small renovations were taking place, the Civil Defense Office - which was largely concerned with the escalating tension between the United States and the USSR - recommended the construction of a new City Hall which would also include a civil defense control center. It was intended for the building to also act as a bomb shelter in the case of a nuclear attack. Although it may have been possible to receive matching funds from the federal government for such a project, the office's recommendation was not undertaken.

In 1963, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen would once again begin to shift from alterations and renovations on City Hall to the idea of constructing a new building, although not for the purposes that were given by the Civil Defense Office. Mayor John Mongan laid the groundwork for this shift when he "expressed hope that the building could be restored to the original appearance and preserved for the city... [and] a new building could be erected in its vicinity to accommodate all the city offices."¹¹ Although Mongan was a proponent of the idea, Roland Vallee, an ambitious young Alderman who ran against Mongan for mayor in 1963 and won, would come closer than any other administration to successfully constructing a new building.

In 1964, as the city's downtown area continued to experience various issues – such as poor accessibility, inability to retain businesses, lack of a central focal point, insufficient parking, and obsolete buildings – the Planning Board developed a plan to create a downtown that was "an exciting, attractive place where people will want to visit."¹² This plan, which was released in September 1964, included "a



Artist's rendition of a new City Hall location. From 1964 Community Facilities Plan created by the Planning Board. (Collection 0411.006).

¹¹ *The City Hall of Manchester, New Hampshire: Paper prepared for Seminar in American Architecture.* Harvard Summer School, 1963. Gerda Peterich.

¹² Report: Downtown Opportunities, 1964. Pages 4-5. Box 1, Folder 6. Collection 0411.006.

new City Hall.”¹³ A complimentary plan released by the Planning Board in the same year pushed for construction of a new City Hall to start no later than 1966. It also recommended for the structure to be built on a lot south of Granite Street and West of Elm Street, and it would consolidate the local government by housing most departments within the building.¹⁴

The ideas of urban development and downtown revitalization were important issues facing the city, but



Political cartoon from 11/03/1967 Union Leader of mayoral candidates John Mongan and Roland Vallee. Although a new City Hall wasn't a major political issue during the campaign, Vallee worked tirelessly trying to construct a new building.

the concept of building a new City Hall was quite controversial. The former Alderman and newly elected mayor, Roland Vallee, was in favor of a new building. He was consequently accused of attempting to build a memorial to himself – a claim which he did not outright deny. There was also considerable pushback from the public. Concerns over cost divided the opinion of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, with some members considering the costs or the possible tax increase to citizens to be too burdensome. Other initiatives, such as developing Manchester's downtown and addressing the needs of the school district, also made the construction of a new building seem like less of a priority.

Nevertheless, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen continued to discuss the

matter. At a special meeting in 1964, Mayor Vallee brought up the opportunity for an \$80,000 federal grant which could be

used to start planning a new building. The City Planner, James Minnoch, stated that “the cost of constructing a new city hall is justified” and that the estimated cost for the entire project to construct a high-rise, 100,000 square foot City Hall was \$2.5 million.¹⁵ There was also discussion about whether or not the original City Hall would be retained by the city. Mayor Vallee thought it would be nice to keep

¹³ Ibid, page 23.

¹⁴ Report: Community Facilities Plan, 1964. Box 1, Folder 5. Collection 0411.006.

¹⁵ BMA Minutes, July 21, 1964.

the building as a museum (an idea expressed previously by his predecessor, John Mongan), but if there was a chance to sell it for a significant amount, he would be in favor of selling it. Additional concerns were also brought up during the meeting: would Amoskeag Industries lift the restrictions on the deed; what architectural firm would be hired; other issues facing the city were viewed as more pressing; and some felt that the City should raise the money needed itself. In other words, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen were not all in agreement about if they wanted to move forward with such an initiative, and if they were to move forward, they were not all on the same page as to how they were planning to do so.

Discussions continued for some time. On February 19, 1965, the Board voted to approve and accept a federal grant which would allow them to hire an architectural firm to assist the City in locating a competent architect for the purposes of creating construction plans and specifications for a new City Hall building. The BMA hired the architectural firm Dirsa and Lampron, JL Jacobs Company was authorized to conduct a new City Hall space study, and in September 1965 Mayor Vallee appointed a special committee to focus on the construction of a new City Hall. Towards the end of 1966, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen received permission from Amoskeag Industries, Inc. to erect a new Civic Center on Merrimack Common, which would also house the new City Hall building, even though the original deed restricted any buildings being located there. Things were moving along at a quick pace.

However, in 1967, discussion of a new City Hall building began to fade, although not completely. During his campaign for reelection, Mayor Vallee mentioned that constructing a new City Hall was part of his plan if reelected to another term in office. However, it was not a major political issue, and the campaign season that year was considered relatively apathetic, with more people interested in the Red Sox's chances in the World Series than in politics.

Vallee went on to lose to former Mayor John C. Mongan by [51 votes in what was perhaps the closest mayoral election in Manchester's history](#). After Mayor Mongan took the oath of office in 1968, the work towards a new City Hall that Mayor Vallee's administration focused on largely stopped. Although the BMA received [a report from the Special Committee on City Hall](#) on December 17, 1968 which recommended that the City proceed with the construction of a new City Hall, it was referred to the Finance Committee and ultimately nothing ever materialized.

The Board of Mayor and Aldermen once again shifted its focus, and instead of the construction of a new building, they began to plan minor renovations of City Hall and also sought out an additional building for the city government's use. Due to space requirements, in December 1969 the City of Manchester purchased the building next to City Hall, which was previously used as the Hillsborough County Courthouse. This building, which was designed by architect William



William Butterfield, architect of the Hillsborough County Courthouse, which became the City Hall Annex in 1969.

Butterfield and built in 1905, was incorporated into City Hall as an annex. In 1972, a minor restoration of the Aldermanic Chambers was also completed.

Starting in 1972, the City, in coordination with the Manchester Bicentennial Committee and the Manchester Historic Association, started to seek out funding for the restoration of the City Hall's tower and for the construction and installation of new spires. The original spires had been sawn off in previous years due to disrepair, and at this point they had still not been replaced. Restoration activities were to include: repairing window frames, friezes, and fire escapes; cleaning and sealing brickwork; rebuilding stairs from third floor to bell tower; installing new windows; replacing roof balustrades; restoring wood tower; installing flagpole base, flagpole, new tower battlements, floodlights, wiring, etc.; installation of new spires; and painting interior and exterior of tower. Cumulatively, the project was estimated to cost \$146,800. Sources for funds included the City of Manchester (\$65,000), the Community Improvement Program (\$37,000), an American Revolution Bicentennial Commission Grant (\$1,000), a Historic Preservation grant from Bird & Son Co., Inc. (\$1,000), proceeds from sales, promotions, and events of the Manchester Bicentennial Committee (\$5,800), a contribution from the JF McElwain Co., Inc. (\$300), a grant from the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office (\$25,024), and a grant from the Norwin S. and Elizabeth N. Bean Foundation (\$10,000). Although the project was supposed to correspond with the bicentennial of the United States in 1976, it was delayed due to a lack of funding.

In the midst of this restoration project, the building was placed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#) in 1975, just over a decade after the Vallee administration almost constructed a new City Hall. A commemorative plaque was placed on the southeast corner of the exterior of the building facing Elm Street to mark this recognition.

Some general work for the clock tower restoration project was done in the spring of 1977, such as the repair work for the windows. When the project started receiving some financial backing, the tower renovation was scheduled to begin in the spring of 1978, but it was deferred because of the delayed grant award from the State Historic Preservation Office. Once the grant was awarded, the City received bids in April 1979, and awarded the restoration contract for work on the tower and spires to Henry E. Borbeau, Inc in June 1979.

In the fall of 1979, the already delayed project would once again hit multiple bumps in the road. First, On October 4, the cupola roof was inspected and dry rot was found in the tower's supportive structure. This would have to be repaired before any other work could commence. Before that issue could be addressed, a small fire of undetermined origin damaged the floor of the tower. Approximately 20% of the tower's floor was structurally damaged, as well as one of the supporting members of the tower. These two problems created a major dilemma and put the success of the restoration project in jeopardy.¹⁶ The project would again be delayed until after the winter of 1979-1980.

In the summer of 1980, after amending contracts and being awarded extensions of grants, the restoration project was re-commenced, and was finally completed. The spires were installed and the restoration project was completed in October 1980, during the administration of Mayor Charles Stanton. This would mark the last significant work done on City Hall until the major restoration of the late 1990s, the origins of which can be traced back to July 1989. At that time, the Lands and Buildings

¹⁶ Mayor Stanton Papers. Box 42, Folder 12.

Committee explored an idea which had been looked at countless times over the course of Manchester’s history: the possibility of a new City Hall.

In June 1990, Ingram/Wallace Architects and Building Diagnostics, Inc. had prepared a report for the City of Manchester focusing on the space requirements of City Hall and the City Hall Annex.¹⁷ The city was envisioning a facility that would consolidate the existing municipal departments and provide adequate space for the local government to perform its duties. Manchester’s need for space was mainly due to the creation of new departments and the hiring of additional employees to meet the needs of a growing population. Furthermore, changing building codes made matters worse; for example, the City Hall Annex’s second and third floors were not handicap accessible. Other issues were plaguing City Hall and the Annex during the early 1990s, including water leaks, insect infestations, inadequate parking for visitors and employees, and other generally unsafe conditions.¹⁸ A Master Plan released by the Planning Board in 1993 discussed several options for City Hall and the Annex building, including the purchase of a new building as well as the option to renovate the existing buildings.

The Board of Mayor and Aldermen continued to explore options and discussions over City Hall renovations continued in meetings throughout 1993, 1994, and 1995.

In September of 1995, the City Hall Restoration Committee was formed; the committee, led by Walter Stiles, was formed to “provide financial assistance and appropriate advice and/or guidance to the City of Manchester toward

the historical restoration of City Hall...” The committee was formed after City Clerk Leo Bernier stated that private sector funds would be needed in order to do historic restoration work in addition to the general renovation of City Hall. While the local government allocated the



Walter Stiles salvaging items during the renovations of the 1990s (Item 9800.005_Series05_0015).

majority of the funds needed for the entire project, the City Hall Restoration Committee solicited donations through various fundraisers, including the sale of commemorative Sesquicentennial license plates and bricks from City Hall. The committee also sought out grant funding from various sources. Walter Stiles was such a major component during the renovation that he was nicknamed “Mr. City Hall” and the second floor conference room is named in

¹⁷ 9800.005. Box 1 Folder 1.

¹⁸ 0411.006. Box 1 Folder 17.2.

his honor. Thanks to Stiles' historic awareness, he had the foresight to hire a photographer to take pictures of the renovations, which were later reproduced in [a commemorative book](#). Additional images of the renovation are also available to [view online](#).

In 1996, the City started entering into contracts with outside companies to begin a major renovation of City Hall. The building was to be completely gutted and refreshed. Harvey Construction Corporation of New Hampshire was the primary contractor, in addition to nineteen sub-contractors. Lavallee Brensinger Professional Association was hired as the architects. The entire project would go on to cost \$7.3 million; from 1997-1999, the building was vacated and employees were located at 1000 Elm Street.

In addition to receiving new carpeting, electrical and mechanical systems, fresh paint, and other basic refurbishments, the building's internal layout was also changed significantly. Most notably, the main entrance to the building was moved back to its original location, facing south towards City Hall Plaza (which was originally Market Street when it connected to Elm). The entrance along Elm Street was closed off. A grand staircase was then constructed just within the new entrance; the old wooden staircases throughout the building were removed. The third floor of the building was completely reconstructed to house the Aldermanic Chambers. It was previously used as office space for the Finance Department, which was moved to its new space on the second floor. Also on the third floor were a conference room and the Mayor's Office, which was located in the southeast corner of the building overlooking Hanover and Elm. The exterior of City Hall was also significantly restored during this project. The roof was shingled and all of the original woodwork had been painted. Overall, these restorations were the most significant in all of the building's history. For the next fifteen years, the building received regular maintenance work, but nothing major had been changed until light renovation work started to begin in the summer of 2016. City Hall has had work done on its hallways, the grand staircase, the City Clerk's Office, the Mayor's Office, the Aldermanic Chambers, the Walter Stiles Conference Room, the Primary Election Conference Room, the Finance Department, and the Economic Development Office. The roof also received some maintenance work. With this latest work being accomplished, City Hall continues to stand proudly after serving the people of Manchester for over 170 years.

[A large crane brings supplies to workers on City Hall's roof, April 2017.](#)

