

SouthCarolinaStateHouse.com



# SOUTH CAROLINA STATE HOUSE GUIDE



DISCOVER  
*South Carolina*

# WELCOME TO THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE HOUSE



It is our pleasure to welcome you to the seat of South Carolina's executive and legislative branches of government. Within these walls, South Carolina laws are enacted by the General Assembly, composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The offices of the governor and the lieutenant governor are also located here.

The State House was called "one of the most notable buildings in the world" by Charles Wilson, a renowned South Carolina architect responsible for several creations listed in the United States National Register of Historic Places. Construction of the present building began in 1855.

The Civil War and its aftermath temporarily halted work. For more than 150 years, five principal architects worked to complete the State House.

The latest renovation took place from 1995 to 1998.

As you tour the magnificent State House, you will be impressed by its outstanding architecture, historical paintings and fascinating history. Guided tours are available or you may walk through the building at your leisure. This brochure is designed to acquaint you with some interesting facts about the State House and the role of this great building in the lives of all South Carolinians.

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and return soon.



*Overlooking the main lobby is a beautiful mosaic glass depicting the Seal of South Carolina. Dating from the 1800s, it is made of more than 37,000 pieces of glass and is original to the building.*



# A HISTORY OF THE **BUILDING**



## **FIRST** BUILDING

South Carolina's first State House was built in the 1750s in Charleston, the state's first capital. In 1786, the capital was moved closer to the center of the state. Columbia, laid out in the wilderness along the Congaree River, was the nation's first planned capital city.

The new State House was built quickly and economically, and the legislature met in it as early as 1790. Both of the first State Houses were largely made of wood. Fire destroyed both.





## **PRESENT** STATE HOUSE

The present State House traces its beginnings to the 1850s and the desire to provide a fireproof storage space for state records. A larger and grander building was also a consideration. The outbreak of the Civil War slowed construction, but it was the invasion of the state in 1865 by the Union Army under General William T. Sherman that severely disrupted progress. Sherman's occupation resulted in one third of Columbia being burned, including the existing wooden State House. Building material, construction equipment and architectural plans for the new State House were also destroyed. With only its exterior walls and foundation completed, and with the old wooden State House in ashes, the General Assembly met at the nearby University of South Carolina for approximately four years.

From 1867 to the mid-1880s, little work was done to complete the building other than to make it functional. A majority of the present interior décor was completed from 1885 to 1895. The dome, porticos and exterior steps were the last features added and the building was declared completed by 1907.

The columns on the porticos are each carved from a single piece of stone and are believed to be the largest monolithic columns used in a public building in the United States.

### **BRONZE** STARS

Shells from Sherman's cannons damaged the new State House.

Today the west and southwest walls wear six bronze stars to mark the cannon fire of February 1865.



# BEGINNING IN THE **LOBBY**



## **ARCHITECT**

Austrian immigrant John M. Niernsee was the primary designer of the State House, which was built to be fireproof. His son, Frank, was largely responsible for completing the interior from 1887 to 1890.



## **RENOVATION**

A complete renovation of the State House from 1995-1998 included extensive modification to the basement and foundation, making it the state's first retrofitted, earthquake-proof building.



## INTERIOR DESIGN

Interior features completed in the decade after 1888 include floors of pink Tennessee and white Georgia marble. The columns, like much of the building's foundation and walls, are of blue granite, the state stone. The original arched ceiling is of handmade brick. In the lower lobby is a painting of Confederate soldier Richard Kirkland, "The Angel of Marye's Heights." Kirkland risked his life to share water with wounded enemy troops during the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg.

The governor's office is housed in the west wing of the lower lobby, and the lieutenant governor's office is located in the east wing of the lower lobby. Beginning in 2018, the lieutenant governor is elected jointly with the governor for a four-year term, and aids the governor in performance of their duties. The lieutenant governor is next in line in the order of succession.

## STAIRCASE

Ascending the wrought-iron staircase, the decoration on the banister incorporates the yellow jessamine, the state flower.





## A **SECOND FLOOR** VIEW



### **THE SENATE CHAMBER**

The South Carolina Senate is composed of 46 members elected to four-year terms. Senators sit by political party affiliation and seniority. The large, elegant desk in the center of the chamber was hand carved in 1915 of British Honduran mahogany in Columbia.

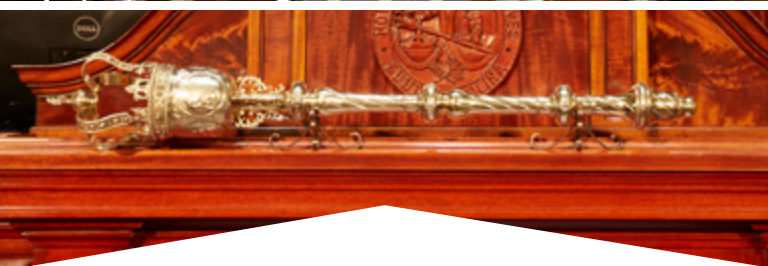
### **THE SWORD OF STATE**

The sword represents the authority of the Senate. The Sergeant at Arms places the sword in brackets on the front of the desk, which activates the original lamps on each side of the desk.

The presence of the sword symbolizes that the Senate is in session. The original sword, which dated to 1704, was stolen in 1941. Lord Halifax, a former British ambassador to the United States, presented the current sword to the state in 1951. Its etched silver blade bears the state seal and the yellow jessamine.







## THE HOUSE CHAMBER

The 124 members of the House of Representatives are elected to two-year terms and are seated by county delegation. They elect a Speaker of the House, who presides over this legislative body when it is in session. The large desk in the center of the chamber is of British Honduran mahogany and dates from 1937.

## THE MACE

The mace represents the authority of the House. The Sergeant at Arms places the mace on the front of the desk to symbolize the House is in session. The mace was made in London, England, in 1756 and is the oldest original mace used in this country. Hidden during the American Revolution, the mace disappeared for over 40 years. It was later discovered in a Philadelphia bank vault in 1819.

## A **SECOND FLOOR** VIEW



### **THE MAIN LOBBY**

The main lobby is adorned with paintings, plaques and statues that reflect the state's history. Like many antebellum-era state houses, the South Carolina State House is designed in the shape of a cross to allow each body of the legislature to have its own wing.

### **JOHN C. CALHOUN**

A statue of John C. Calhoun (1782-1850) stands in the center of the State House lobby. A vice president under two presidents, Calhoun also served as secretary of state, secretary of war, and was a U.S. representative and senator. His brilliant intellect and skilled leadership made him a dominant figure in national affairs for more than 40 years.





## **THE DOME**

The State House dome is in two parts – an interior and an exterior dome. The false interior dome, designed for aesthetic reasons, fits inside the exterior dome. The exterior dome is made of steel and wood and is finished with copper.



# A **SECOND FLOOR** VIEW



## **BATTLE OF COWPENS**

Located in the Senate antechamber is the painting of the Battle of Cowpens. This painting is of an encounter between Colonel William Washington and Colonel Banastre Tarleton at the Battle of Cowpens and is one of the first works to depict an African American in a Revolutionary War battle. South Carolina saw more Revolutionary War battles than any other state. Cowpens was one of the Patriots' most decisive victories.



**SOUTH PORTICO**

**JOINT  
LEGISLATIVE  
CONFERENCE  
ROOM**

**SENATE CHAMBER**

**MAIN LOBBY**



**NORTH PORTICO**

**GERVAIS STREET**

**SUMTER STREET**



## THE STATE SEAL

Designed by William Henry Drayton and Arthur Middleton, the state seal was adopted in 1776. Used for the first time in 1777, the seal depicts a palmetto tree growing on the seashore – symbolic of the Revolutionary War fort on Sullivan’s Island. The state’s Latin motto translates to: “Prepared in mind and resources.” The reverse side of the seal depicts hope overcoming danger in the form of a woman walking a shore littered with swords and daggers as a new day dawns. The second motto translates to: “While I breathe I hope.”

## HOUSE CHAMBER

ASSEMBLY STREET

★ *Statue of John C. Calhoun*



## A **SECOND FLOOR** VIEW



### **THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM**

The joint legislative conference room was formerly used as a legislative library. It is the only room in the building that has remained original. The twin spiral staircases, railing and pillars are made of wrought iron and the ceiling is pressed metal. The once gas-lit chandelier weighs over 1,000 pounds and is the only original chandelier in the building.





## STATE HOUSE PORTRAITS

*James F. Byrnes* (1879-1972), born in Charleston, SC. He served the United States government as congressman, senator, Supreme Court justice and secretary of state. He was called “assistant president” under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His last political office was as governor of South Carolina.



*Ann Pamela Cunningham* (1816-1875), born in Laurens, SC. In 1853, she founded the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association which oversaw the preservation and restoration of President George Washington’s home.



*Benjamin Mays* (1894-1984), born in Greenwood County, SC. He was a minister, educator, scholar and social activist. He grew up in poverty in rural South Carolina and went on to become the president of Morehouse College, where he mentored the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.



*Andrew Jackson* (1767-1845), born in Lancaster County, was the seventh president of the United States (1829-1837). He was known for being as tough as “Old Hickory” following the Battle of New Orleans and for representing the common man throughout his career.



*This is a small sample of the many portraits that can be found throughout the State House.*

DISCOVER

South Carolina



## THANK YOU

*for taking the time to visit the South Carolina State House.  
Free guided tours are available. For information  
or to schedule a tour, call 803.734.2430*

*The State House Gift Shop provides our guests with an opportunity  
to purchase an array of items to commemorate their visit.  
Items in the gift shop include apparel, home décor, jewelry, holiday-themed  
items and professional gifts. Contact the gift shop at 803-734-0865.*

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