

## Morris-Jumel Mansion Interior

Interior Landmark

First Floor, 65 Jumel Terrace

Designation Date: May 27, 1975



*The interior of the Morris-Jumel Mansion in 2005. Photo: Wikipedia*

The historic Morris-Jumel Mansion is the only pre-Revolutionary War house surviving in Manhattan. This Georgian house, with its impressive pedimented portico, has a feeling of grandeur and elegance. Beautifully situated in Roger Morris Park on one of the highest elevations in Manhattan, this spacious country residence, restored and refurbished as a museum, now ranks among the finest of our national historic landmarks. It was named a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in 1962 and designated a New York City Landmark five years later. The mansion provides a focus for the Jumel Terrace Historic District.

Built between 1775 and 1766 for Colonel Roger Morris, the house served as a gracious country seat for this member of the Executive Council of the Province of New York. Morris had come to the American Colonies in 1746 as a young Captain in the British Army. He fought with General Braddock in the French and Indian Wars, and then served with General Wolfe on the plains of Abraham in Quebec. His marriage in 1758 to Mary Philipse established a link with

that illustrious New York family. Morris lived with his family in the mansion, which they named Mount Morris, until 1775. A Loyalist sympathizer and retired from the British Army, he returned to England. His wife and children then moved to the Philipse family estate in Yonkers. He returned to New York in late 1777, during the British occupation of the city, and was appointed Inspector of the Claims of Refugees. He remained in this post until 1783, when he and his family returned to England after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.

During the war, after the disastrous Battle of Long Island, General Washington effected a strategic retreat to Harlem Heights, and made the Morris home his headquarters from September 14 through October 18, 1776, when the American forces withdrew. The British then moved in. During New York's seven years under British occupation, the Morris Mansion housed General Sir Henry Clinton and his officers for a while and, at intervals, the Hessians. When peace was declared, the house and land were confiscated and sold by the Commissioners of Forfeiture.

In 1810, Stephen Jumel, a wealthy French wine merchant, purchased the mansion. His wife and former mistress, Eliza Jumel, anxious to be accepted in New York society, refurbished the house in the fashionable Napoleonic Empire style, and made a few minor architectural alterations. Living with the Jumels was their adopted daughter Mary Bowen (or Bownes,) who was thought to be the daughter of Madame Jumel's stepsister. Despite their wealth, the Jumels were not socially accepted, and so in 1815 they moved to France. Marital relations between the Jumels became increasingly strained, and in 1817 Eliza returned to New York. In 1821 she went again to France. Madame Jumel came back to New York in 1826, this time with Stephen Jumel's power of attorney for his New York property, which she transferred to herself and Mary Bowen. In 1828 Jumel returned to New York City and died at the Morris-Jumel Mansion four years later.

In 1833, the widow Jumel, one of the wealthiest women in New York, married Aaron Burr. The former Vice President of the United States was 77 years old, almost 20 years her senior. Burr had considered acquiring the Morris estate in 1803, before Jumel purchased it. Philip Hone, a former mayor of New York, made these comments, regarding the July 1st, 1833 wedding, in his diary: "The celebrated Col. Burr was married on Monday evening to the equally celebrated Mrs. Jumel, widow of Stephen Jumel. It is benevolent in her to keep the old man in his latter days. One good turn deserves another."

Unfortunately, Burr's stay at the mansion was brief: on July 12, 1834, Eliza filed for a divorce, which was granted shortly before his death in 1836. Until 1848, Madame Jumel spent very little time actually living in the Morris-Jumel Mansion; instead, she divided her time between Saratoga, Hoboken, and lower Manhattan. Nelson Chase, the husband of Mary Bowen, and their children lived with Madame Jumel until 1862. With increasing age, Madame Jumel became quite eccentric and was even thought to be insane. The last three years of her life were lived as a recluse until her death in 1865.

Following extensive litigation by various heirs and relatives, the property changed hands several times. In 1903, when the old mansion was put up for sale, a group of patriotic women petitioned the city to buy the remaining portion of the original estate to preserve it for

posterity. The City of New York purchased the property, and, by a special act of legislation, custodianship was awarded to the Washington Headquarters Association, founded by the Daughters of the American Revolution, who restored it as a museum. The house and grounds are owned by the City of New York and are under jurisdiction of the Parks, Recreation And Cultural Affairs Administration. The Association maintains the mansion as a house museum which is open to the public.

The interiors of the Morris–Jumel Mansion remain remarkably true to their original Georgian state. The entrance doorway, flanked by sidelights, is crowned by a graceful, Federal style fanlight, one of the changes introduced by the Jumels after they acquired the house. Following Madame Jumel’s death, later tenants and owners decorated and furnished the rooms more in accordance with later 19th century taste, as may be seen in contemporary photographs. Over the years, many of the architectural details have been preserved and repaired where necessary. These include floorboards, baseboards, door frames, doors, cornices, windows, and paneled window shutters. The furnishings of the rooms are diversified in style, to reflect the three major people and the periods when they occupied the house—Roger Morris, George Washington, and Eliza Jumel.

In its basic plan, the house is typical of the pre-Revolutionary War period, displaying the formal symmetry advocated by the Italian 16th century architect Palladio, and transmitted to the United States via England through architectural folios and builders’ guides. The main entrance is centered on the front facade and opens directly into an entrance hall with adjoining stair hall. The principal rooms are arranged at each side of the hall. One of the most unusual and architecturally advanced features of the mansion is the wing in the shape of an elongated octagon which forms a single room at the rear of the house, on an axis with the two halls.

At the left of the entrance hall, as one faces the rear of the house, is the small parlor, also known as the tearoom or the reception room. Elisa Jumel and Aaron Burr were married there. The architectural features are simple but elegant; they include molded cornices and chair rails, and paneled window shutters protecting six-over-six sash. Most notable is the fireplace which is enframed by marble and has a marble hearth. The wood mantelpiece is of the simple classic design that was used throughout the house when it was built. Unlike many mantle pieces of the period, those in this house have no overmantels.

The dining room, opening off the right side of the entrance hall, has architectural details very similar to those of the small parlor. An unusual feature is an adjoining alcove separate from the main dining area by a wide archway. There is a doorway opening into the alcove from the hall, and at the outer wall it adjoins what was originally a butler’s pantry.

Beyond the archway separating the entrance hall from the stair hall, a room now known as the library opens to the left of the hall. Its original use has not been determined; a 1795 advertisement for the house suggests that it would be well-suited for use as a nursery. It also has the fine architectural detail which characterizes the other first floor rooms, although the hearth is brownstone, not marble.

The staircase to the right of the stair hall is set behind a graceful low archway. Scalloped motifs decorate the ends of the risers. The handrail with its slender spindles has the grace and simplicity characteristic of this house. A door on the first landing formerly led to the back stairs connecting with the former butler's pantry.

The drawing room in the octagonal wing - the grandest room in the house - is connected by a short passage to the hall. In addition to cornices, paneled shutters and six-over-six sash, there is also a paneled wainscot of windowsill height. This is the only room to have a wainscot, a typical feature of the period; the other rooms have chair rails.

Fiske Kimball, the noted architectural historian of colonial American houses, has theorized that the decreasing use of paneling in the late Georgian period was a result of the introduction of imported wallpaper. Recent work has determined that the walls in the Morris-Jumel Mansion were originally primed for wallpaper. The drawing room is currently being restored with a reproduction of an 18th century Chinese wallpaper and a mantelpiece similar to those in the other rooms of the house. The furnishings of this room will stress the period of occupancy by the Morris family, when it was used for formal entertaining. It is also the room where Madame Jumel set up her dais during the last few years of her life to receive her imaginary titled guests. A small reminder of her occupancy can be seen in the leaded Federal style transom in the doorway leading into the room.

The second-floor stair hall and front hall have the same generous proportions as the halls downstairs, which may indicate that this front hall was used as a sitting room. A doorway with sidelights and fanlight in the Palladian tradition opens onto an exterior balcony under the portico. Bedrooms have been furnished to suggest the character of some of the people connected with the house. All retain fine architectural features such as cornices, paneled shutters with three-over-six sash, and handsome fireplaces with mantels like those of the first floor.

The large room in the southeast corner with adjoining dressing room is considered to have been Madame Jumel's bedroom. It has Empire style wallpaper and Empire furniture of the Napoleonic era.

A room of the same proportions in the southeast corner, also opening off the front hall, is known as the "Aaron Burr Room" and has appropriate period furnishings. Mary Bowen's bedroom, behind Aaron Burr room, is somewhat smaller than the two front rooms. The furnishings are appropriate to the period when Mary lived with the Jumels as a girl.

A short passage and hallway lead to the rear half of the octagonal wing, which is now furnished as George Washington's office. This division of the octagon creates a room with six walls and a generous expanse of windows with architectural features like those of the other bedrooms. Embedded fossils in the enframing of the fireplace and the marble hearth are unusual.

In brief, the history of this mansion in the 100 years between 1765 and 1865 provides a fascinating mirror of the life of wealthy New York residents of the period. Architecturally, it is a distinguished example of a Georgian country seat. In addition, its preservation as a house

museum by the Washington Headquarters Association, is an early instance of effective preservation in New York City.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)