TOURS OF GRACIE MANSION

PUBLIC TOURS
Join us for free guided tours offered on select Tuesdays at 10:00am, 11:00am, 2:00pm, and 3:00pm.*

Reserve /Full Calendar online at the Gracie Mansion Conservancy website
NYC.GOV/GRACIETOURS

SCHOOL TOURS
Educators planning a visit are encouraged to take full advantage of the new teacher visit guide and curriculum package including pre-visit and post-visit activities. The primary sources featured in it offer a deeper understanding of New York’s history especially during the early Republic, as well as key events involving Mayors who have lived in the house. Issues range from slavery, to development of the port, to the New Deal, and entry into World War II.

School tours are on select Wednesdays at 10:30am and 11:30am.
Reserve/Full Calendar online at the Gracie Mansion Conservancy website
NYC.GOV/GRACIESCHOOLTOURS

*All Tours Exclude Holidays. Full Calendar Online.
FIORELLO H. LA GUARDIA  
1934 – 1945

WILLIAM O’DWYER  
1946 – 1950

VINCENT R. IMPELLITTERI  
1950 – 1953

ROBERT F. WAGNER  
1954 – 1965

JOHN V. LINDSAY  
1966 – 1973

ABRAHAM D. BEAME  
1974 – 1977

EDWARD I. KOCH  
1978 – 1989

DAVID N. DINKINS  
1990 – 1993

RUDOLPH W. GIULIANI  
1994 – 2001

MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG  
2002 – 2013

BILL DE BLASIO  
2014 –
RESIDENTS OF GRACIE MANSION SINCE 1942

FIORELLO H. LA GUARDIA
MARIE FISHER LA GUARDIA
ERIC LA GUARDIA
JEAN LA GUARDIA
WILLIAM O’DWYER
CATHERINE LENIHAN O’DWYER
SLOAN SIMPSON O’DWYER
VINCENT R. IMPELLITTERI
BETTY IMPELLITERI
ROBERT F. WAGNER JR.
SUSAN E. WAGNER
DUNCAN WAGNER
ROBERT F. WAGNER III
JOHN V. LINDSAY
MARY LINDSAY
ANNE LINDSAY
JOHN LINDSAY JR.
KATHY LINDSAY
MARGARET LINDSAY
ABRAHAM D. BEAME
MARY BEAME
EDWARD I. KOCH
DAVID N. DINKINS
JOYCE DINKINS
RUDOLPH W. GIULIANI
DONNA HANOVER
ANDREW GIULIANI
CAROLINE GIULIANI
BILL DE BLASIO
CHIRLANE MCCRAY
CHIARA DE BLASIO
DANTE DE BLASIO

New York 1942

This is the second in a series of installations commemorating the 75th anniversary of Gracie Mansion as the official mayoral residence. It includes artwork, documents, and objects focused on 1942, the year Fiorello La Guardia became the first mayor to inhabit the house. As a group, these objects depict the evolving landscape of New York City and the profound cultural and economic forces that were transforming the five boroughs into a crossroads of progressive change.
On May 26, 1942, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and his family moved into Gracie Mansion, marking the transformation of this landmark building from our nation’s founding era into the official residence of the Mayor of New York.

The year 1942 was also a time of transformation for New York City itself. On the same day the La Guardias moved in, the cover of The New York Times was emblazoned with headlines summarizing the “savage combat” of World War II. And no city played a greater role in supporting America’s war effort than New York. Between 1942 and 1945, more than 85 percent of the men, women, and material deployed in the European theater passed through New York Harbor. But our harbor was just one front in a citywide war mobilization effort. Japanese codes were cracked in the New York Public Library. Our skyline went dark to protect the city from attack by air or sea. And New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs pitched in however they could, from collecting tin cans to volunteering at Civil Defense offices.

In the midst of all this activity, we can also detect the beginning of seismic social and cultural shifts that would shape the future of our city and world long after the war was won. Manhattan was the epicenter of revolutionary artistic developments, most notably the introduction of machine-age functionality in design, abstraction in art, and genre-blending experimentation in music. At the same time, neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs were being remade and revitalized by waves of newcomers. Some of these newcomers were refugees fleeing the horrors of Europe, but even more were African American and Puerto Rican migrants seeking greater opportunity. While the war effort offered new opportunities for women and people of color, it also highlighted a profound injustice: When would America launch an all-out campaign to secure their freedoms? They would address that question themselves in the coming decades by launching civil rights campaigns that continue to this day.

New York 1942 shines a light on the struggles and triumphs of many different communities in the years before, during, and after World War II. While most of the works on display are at least 70 years old, they pulse with the energy of New York, which would soon become our global trademark. This exhibition is an opportunity for us to celebrate a truly great generation of New Yorkers, especially those who have not yet received the recognition they deserve.
New York 1942 is the second in a series of installations envisioning New York through the framework of Gracie Mansion as it has been inhabited over time. It includes artwork, documents, and objects from the period that the La Guardias lived in Gracie, shown together to tell a more complete story of the overall historic context as perceived from diverse perspectives.

Two principle themes guided the selection process:

**A Changing Cityscape:** New York emerges as the safe harbor for people and ideas by making room and breaking barriers;

**New Opportunities and Cultural Intersections:** Economic growth and social change amidst global strife bring new opportunities and an unprecedented encounter of cultures transforming New York into a crossroads of progressive change.

Both themes are as applicable today as they were in 1942.

More than 20 institutions and collectors showed their generosity in the telling of this narrative with the variety of loans. These objects evoke visions of the people and the city in the shadow of World War II, as it is connected to migrations, labor, civic discourse, creative innovation, and popular culture. In all, they offer a glimpse into the texture of life in New York City during a time of dynamic change in local and global history. It was an age of new possibilities and progressive momentum that placed New York at the epicenter of the post-war world, much as it holds today.

KALIA BROOKS
NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 2017
Visitors to Gracie Mansion can view the official website to learn more about the works on display and the context they bring from the outside in. The docents and other educators who guide these visits can also explain and answer questions about all of the art and objects.

This illustrated guide to exemplary installation objects provides an introduction to the themes of a changing cityscape, new opportunities at work, as well as leisure and cultural intersections that *New York 1942* explores.

Look for them while touring the public, ground-floor rooms.
In these works, the American artist and illustrator Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) illustrates the four essential freedoms outlined in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s seminal State of the Union address on January 6, 1941. The Four Freedoms speech served as the thematic basis of the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 that defined the Allied mission in World War II and plans for the creation of the United Nations. Rockwell sought to animate these four basic human rights with idealized scenes of daily life, whose nostalgic accessibility reminded Americans of the urgent need to defeat global fascism.

The text of Roosevelt’s speech describes the artist’s intent.

In the future days, which we seek to make secure we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want, which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings, which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear, which translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in the position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.
PROSPECT PARK, ca. 1942-1944
Irving Boyer
Oil on Academy Board
Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society

This painting shows a typical encounter between New Yorkers and servicemen. By his son’s account, Irving Boyer (1900-1983) saw this scene of carousing U.S. servicemen and their dates on the Prospect Park train platform while he was riding home. Boyer, who immigrated to the U.S. from Russia at the age of five and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, was Display Director for Hears Department Store and created theater billboards in Times Square.

ALBERT EINSTEIN AND MAYOR LA GUARDIA WITH THE CAST FROM “THE BROTHERS ASHKENAZI,” 1937
Artist Unknown
Gelatin Silver Print
Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York

SIGNED WORLD CHAMPION YANKEES BASEBALL, 1941
Spalding
Cushion cork center; yarn wrapping; rubber cement coating, and loosely stitched horsehide cover.
Autographs of the 1941 World Champion New York Yankees team
Courtesy of Goldin Auctions

The New York Yankees took the World Series title in 1939, 1941, and 1943 marking one of its Golden Age winning streaks. The 1941 season marked its 19th playing at Yankee stadium in the South Bronx. After securing the American League pennant 17 games ahead of the Boston Red Sox, the team went on to win the world championship by beating the Brooklyn Dodgers in five games. Joe McCarthy managed the roster highlighted by the sensational emergence of center fielder, Joe DiMaggio, whose 56 consecutive game hitting streak still stands as a major league record deemed “unbeatable.” Pearl Harbor fell just two months later and brought with it the departure of Joltin’ Joe and other teammates drafted for service.

Nineteen forty two saw return of the segregated Negro World Series after a 14-year Depression era hiatus with the legendary Kansas City Monarchs of the NAL beating the NNL Washington DC– Homestead Grays in six games. The series included a double header played at Yankee Stadium on September 13. Also emerging that fall (due to the draft and depletion of the minor league ranks) was the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League launched to ensure that the national pastime would continue.

Even though America’s entry in World War I had ended the 1918 season a generation earlier, concerns that a new conflict would again jeopardize baseball were set to rest on January 15, 1942 in Roosevelt’s famous “Green Light” letter. In it he stated, “I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going” and advocated for more night games workers could attend.
HARLEM RESIDENT WITH DOG, ca. 1943
Gordon Parks
Gelatin Silver Print
Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was a pioneering African American photographer and filmmaker, who won renown in the 1940s with a Federal Security Administration commission to record the lives of men and women too often ignored.

This was a time of widespread racial exclusion. Despite the efforts of leaders like Mary McLeod Bethune, her friends, Eleanor and Sara Roosevelt, and Mayor La Guardia, there was little institutional integration. Even the military remained segregated until 1948, but the War and its massive domestic upheaval and demand for labor set the stage for reform. FDR’s 1941 Executive Order 8802 made it official, “to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”

In 1940 there were 4,000 African Americans enlisted in the armed services; by the end of 1945 there were more than 1.2 million. Systemic exclusion and training barriers gradually gave way.

As this wartime shift gained momentum, African American reformers began questioning why they should fight abroad for the very freedoms and social justice denied them at home. This collective criticism brought about the Double V campaign calling for defeat of the “enemies from within,” as well as “enemies from without.”

In New York, civil rights pioneer and head of The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union, A. Philip Randolph, emerged as the Double V’s foremost champion. This campaign helped not only to lift the determination and enlistment of African Americans, but more to forge a progressive post-war commitment to the cause of equal rights.

FULTON FISH MARKET, 1940
Gordon Parks
Gelatin Silver Print
Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

EVERY FIRE IS SABOTAGE TODAY, 1942
Victoria Keppler
Offset Lithograph
Courtesy of the New York City Municipal Archives

WILLIAMSBURG, ca. 1941
Miklos Suba
Oil on Canvas
Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum
SAMMY’S NIGHT CLUB ON BOWERY, December 1944
Weegee
Gelatin Silver Print
Courtesy of the International Center of Photography

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, 2003
Penelope Jencks
Plaster Maquette
Courtesy of Mina Rieur Weiner

LA GUARDIA, ca. 1942
Artist Unknown
Paper, glue, ink
Courtesy of Queens Museum

A NIGHT IN TUNISIA
Dizzy Gillespie, 1942
Audio/Visual
The Brooklyn College Jazz Ensemble with Adam O’Farrill on Trumpet
Conducted by Arturo O’Farrill
Recorded at Brooklyn College, November 2016 for New York 1942 at Gracie Mansion
Courtesy of Brooklyn College

The legendary musician Dizzy Gillespie (1917-1993) was one of the New York artists who forged the bebop era in American Jazz during the early 1940s. In 1942, Gillespie composed his signature masterpiece, A Night in Tunisia, which was covered by Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, and Ella Fitzgerald. The Grammy-winning composer, conductor, and pianist Arturo O’Farrill led this new version, which was produced for this exhibition.
An explosive advancement of women in the workforce was born of wartime necessity. National mobilization of all sectors and the draft enrollment of men from age 18 to 45 brought stateside demand for labor to a fever pitch. Rosie the Riveter became a symbol of such social upheaval and mounting feminism in the ongoing fight for women’s equality.

Part of this progress was work for the military itself in ways that freed up men for combat roles. Towards that urgent end, the Dean of Barnard College, Virginia Gildersleeve, and her professor colleague, Elizabeth Reynard, helped forge the July 30, 1942 Congressional authorization of the Navy’s Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service or WAVES and its allied Coast Guard SPARS; Women Marines; Women’s Army Corps or WACS; and WASPS; Women Airforce Special Pilots. Stress was placed on both their voluntary (i.e. non-conscripted) and temporary nature in order to gain acceptance from a change-averse, men-only officer corps.

The principle location of WAVES training as pushed urgently by Mayor La Guardia emerged on the Bronx campus of Hunter College (today known as Lehman College,) where more than 80,000 women from across the nation enrolled by War’s end. Local residents were displaced from their apartments so they could be used for dormitories. The size and efficiency of this facility prompted the nickname, USS Hunter. While at first segregated (like the armed services themselves,) racial barriers gradually came down due to need and the resolute persistence of progressive leaders like First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1944, USS Hunter graduated its first African American female officers: Harriet Ida Pickens and Frances Wills Thorpe, whose memoir, Navy Blue and Other Colors, recounts this milestone on the road towards racial equality at a time of war.

Over the full course of the War, 400,000 women served in the various branches of the US military.
THE MIGRANTS ARRIVED IN GREAT NUMBERS, ca. 1940-1942
Jacob Lawrence
Casein tempura on hardwood
Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art
Digital Image © the Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York

This picture is one of 30 in Jacob Lawrence’s famous Migration Series, which is now shared between MoMA and the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. Lawrence (1917-2000) took as his subject the exodus of African Americans from the rural South to Northern cities starting in World War I and continuing through the 1940s. As the son of migrants, Lawrence had a personal connection to the topic. At the age of 23, he researched the subject extensively and wrote the narrative before making the paintings.

While influenced by the work of the Mexican muralists and earlier artists such as Francisco de Goya, he drew his stylistic inspiration primarily from the Harlem community in which he lived. The vivid pattern and palette created in tempera paint (as Lawrence worked on all 30 Migrant panels at once) also reflect an aesthetic that itself had migrated from the South.

In 1943, after completing the Series, Lawrence enlisted in the Coast Guard and served on the US Sea Cloud, the first integrated vessel assigned to the War. The boat was a German-captured yacht converted into a weather-patrol cutter based out of the Coast Guard’s Manhattan Beach Training Center.

Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn became a gateway for black recruits both men and women thanks to the overdue embrace of Lieutenant Carlton Skimmer, who exclaimed, “this is no experiment in social democracy, but an efficient use of manpower to help win a war.”

WATERCOLOR OF GRACIE MANSION, 1942
Artist Unknown
Watercolor
Courtesy of the La Guardia and Wagner Archives, La Guardia Community College, The City University of New York

REFUGEES, 1944
Arnold Hoffmann
Watercolor on Paper Mounted on Board
Courtesy of the Staten Island Museum

DURING THE WAR: SHORTAGE OF FOOD IN EASTON, 1942-1944
Louise Bourgeois
Woodcut Print
Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, The Easton Foundation/VAGA
Digital Image © the Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York
Photo: Christopher Burke
JITTERBUGS II, 1941-1942
William H. Johnson
Screenprint
Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art
Digital Image © the Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York

TRAFFIC UNDER THE THIRD AVENUE ELEVATED, ca. 1940
Weegee
Gelatin Silver Print
Courtesy of the International Center of Photography

PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY, 1942
Artist Unknown
Print
Courtesy of the New York City Municipal Archives

CONTOURED PLAYGROUND, 1941
Isamu Noguchi
Bronze
Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum

Japanese American New York artist, Isamu Noguchi (1894-1988) did not have to go to an internment camp, but volunteered to do so as a protest and to be of use to those suffering in the camps. He is the only American to have gone to the camps of his own volition. This model for an unbuilt playground is the sort of project he hoped to realize when he arrived at the Arizona Poston War Relocation Center, but all of his plans were thwarted.

NEW YORK HARBOR, 1943
Louis George Bouché
Oil on Canvas
Courtesy of the Staten Island Museum
There are many iconic images of Times Square on the evening of Victory over Japan Day, August 14, 1945, none more so than Albert Eisenstaedt’s photograph for *Life Magazine* capturing the fervent embrace of a sailor and nurse. Among the many other artists on hand to record this historic scene was New York painter and illustrator, Cecil Bell, who drew directly from the crowded streets.

As rumors spread that afternoon about an unconditional Japanese surrender, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers began gathering in the Square. At 7:03pm the famous zipper sign flashed the news from President Truman, “This is the day Facism finally died, as we always knew it would.” World War II had come a victorious end.

The crowd celebrating around the towering mockup of the Statue of Liberty grew to more than two million by 10:00pm. It was likely around then that Bell recorded this scene of joyful revelry with light and color emerging at last from the shadows of the wartime dim-out.

Despite wartime disruptions, 1942 brought Parkchester’s completion to serve as the kind of thriving middle class rental community much in demand by discharged soldiers establishing first-time households. The post-Depression era leading up the America’s entry into the War heralded a great surge in such large-scale model housing initiatives, whether built as development partnerships or as wholly public projects of the New York City Housing Authority. This optimistic embrace of affordable housing took hold as core policy thanks in part due to the shared progressive ambitions of President Roosevelt, Mayor La Guardia, and the Parks Commissioner, Robert Moses. Demand and opportunity set the civic stage accordingly.

With the help of city financing, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company built Parkchester initially as a culturally varied yet racially segregated development. That divisive status endured up until 1968, when the company finally broke down this barrier with an “Open Occupancy Pledge,” negotiated with the City’s Human Rights Commission. Most of the complex today is cooperative housing, whose occupant owners reflect the full measure of New York’s contemporary diversity.
NEW YORK TENEMENTS, 1942
Franz Kline
Oil on Linen
Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art

A NEW HORIZON, OPENING OF IDLEWILD AIRPORT (KNOWN AS JOHN F. KENNEDY AIRPORT), ca. 1945
Burris Jenkins, Jr.
Graphite on Paper
Courtesy of the Queens Museum

SHINE! - S.I. FERRY, 1944
Cecil C. Bell
Gouache on Cardboard
Courtesy of the Staten Island Museum

BROTHER “HERMANO” SPANISH HARLEM, 1942
SISTER “HERMANA” SPANISH HARLEM, 1942
John Albok
Gelatin Silver Prints
Courtesy of El Museo del Barrio

John Albok (1894-1982) was a Hungarian immigrant working as a tailor and living with his family at Madison and 96th Street, where he taught himself photography and chronicled life in Spanish Harlem.

The Great Migration of Puerto Ricans unfolded across the 20th century due above all to job prospects. The Great Depression had a devastating impact on the mainland-reliant Puerto Rican economy. As unemployment spread and food shortages loomed, New York became a beacon of hope. As a result, barrio neighborhoods took root in Brooklyn and the Bronx, as well as East Harlem, featuring such vital customs as their bodega stores and refreshing shaved ice piraguas.

The advent of war opened this door even further once again due to the mass mobilization of white Americans in the still segregated armed forces and the work left behind in their conscripted wake. As summarized by the Latin Education Service Network, “Puerto Ricans, both male and female, found themselves employed in factories and ship docks, producing both domestic and warfare goods. The new migrants gained the knowledge and working skills which in the future would serve them well.” The Brooklyn Navy Yard was one such cradle of career-building.
In her photographs, Lisette Model (1901-1983) captured the abnormal, the marginal, and sometimes the grotesque. Sammy’s, the only Bowery saloon with a cabaret license in the early 1940s, offered her—and fellow photographer Weegee—a location in which to depict the varied and raucous nightlife of the era.

Illustrating the ways cultures mixed in the city, this video is a five-minute excerpt from a feature-length documentary about a Chinese American jazz vocal quartet (later trio) that became the first Asian American act ever featured on Broadway.
Printmaker, painter, satirist, and illustrator, William Gropper (1897-1977) spent six decades bearing witness to social injustice and the struggle to redress it. Born in the Lower East Side to impoverished Jewish immigrant parents, he learned early about the abuse of human rights. His aunt’s death in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911 radicalized him and fueled his notion of art as a catalyst for change. When America joined the war in 1941, he conjured New York as a key contributor to FDR’s “arsenal of democracy.”

Due to this lifelong no-holds-barred zeal, he was one of the twenty-four artists examined in 1946 by the post-war House Un-American Activities Committee. Three years later Congressman Dondoro of Michigan placed Gropper on the list kept by the CIA of suspected Communist sympathizers. And in 1953, Gropper was one of only two visual artists (Rockwell Kent was the other) subpoenaed to appear before Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations to answer this allegation. Though never a Party member, he invoked the Fifth Amendment prohibiting self-incrimination and was the first artist blacklisted by Congress as the McCarthy witch-hunt unfolded.
During World War II, New York schools took responsibility for the safety of their students. Principals and teachers received training in civilian defense and first aid. The Board of Education distributed emergency equipment to teachers. Air raid drills became part of the classroom routine. And the School Defense Council arranged for public, private, and parochial school students to wear emergency identification tags around their necks. By July 1942, 1.6 million children had received tags, each embossed with their name, date of birth, school district, and a serial number. This tag was issued to Rosalind Weiss Rothman in 1942, when she attended J.H.S. 118 on the Upper West Side.

In May 1941, during his campaign for a third term as Mayor (which he won that November against his eventual successor, William O’Dwyer), La Guardia was appointed the nation’s first Director of the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) by President Roosevelt. This protective helmet was worn by the Mayor. Among his many accomplishments, La Guardia emerged as a pioneer of what is now labeled “homeland security.”

The federal Office of Price Administration (OPA) was established during World War II to control prices and rents after war broke out. In April 1942, OPA issued a general maximum-price regulation that enforced price controls for most commodities and residential rents, an order that defined New York’s rent control and stabilization laws. This agency issued ration books, coupons, and tokens such as these “Red Points.”

Rent laws are the sole surviving legacy of the OPA mandates as shaped in a partnership with state and local governments.
One of the worst scars on the face of American immigrant history is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. It was an overtly racist law banning Chinese newcomers and naturalization that was hatched in California in response to a perceived threat of foreign labor. During World War II, the United States suddenly became an ally of China and pressure to repeal the Act mounted, as illustrated by this broadside. While repeal passed, it was not until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that immigration from China gained force.

The Chinese population in the New York of 1942 was just one quarter of one percent of the 7.5 million total.

Today nearly 20 percent of New Yorkers across every borough boast Asian roots.
THE LITTLE PRINCE, ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, 1943
First Edition
A Novel Translated from French by Katherine Woods
Courtesy of Paul Gunther

Among the refugees pouring into the city were 30,000 French citizens, including artists like Marc Chagall, Marcel Duchamp, and Fernand Léger. The author and illustrator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1890-1944) lived in an apartment on Central Park South in 1942. Asked by his New York publisher Reynal & Hitchcock to write a children’s book, he created his most famous work. It now stands as the fourth biggest bestseller of all time and an example of the City’s role as a cultural incubator.

DEXTERITY GAME, “BLACKOUT,” 1941-1942
Plastic, Metal, Cardboard
Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society

This Chippendale style 1967 walnut piano was manufactured in Long Island City, Queens by Steinway & Sons.

The company was founded in Manhattan in 1853 by immigrant Heinrich Engelhard Steinweg, whose rapid success led to factories in both Queens and in his native Hamburg, Germany. His distinguished namesake instruments still endure as a global standard of musical excellence.

In 1942 with its German production suspended and its factories nearly destroyed, Steinway & Sons was ordered by the Allied Armies under local command to convert its Long Island City piano manufacturing to the building of wooden gliders to convey troops silently behind enemy lines. Like so many New York manufacturers, wartime urgencies and mobilization took instant precedence. Shared sacrifice meant victory. While its normal instruments were thus suspended, Steinway did fulfill one additional Army order: 2,436 special “Victory Vertical” or “G.I. Pianos.” Built from 1942 to 1945 as small, economical, and portable instruments, they could be disguised by painted camouflage and taken aboard outgoing troop ships or even dropped by parachute behind enemy lines to bring music to soldiers at a time when they often needed to make it themselves.

Nearly a generation passed before Steinway & Sons could fully regain its pre-war momentum. It was at this resurgent time in both Hamburg and New York that this fine example arrived at Gracie Mansion from Long Island City.
Times Square and its resident theaters and clubs were an unforgettable part of New York during the War. Soldiers arriving and departing the battlefield flocked to the “Crossroads of the World” in search of escape, solace, and the company of others. Even after Mayor La Guardia’s 1942 order that lights be dimmed throughout the city, life on these kaleidoscopic sidewalks shone brightly. A local choreographer named Jerome Robbins, using a new score by his friend, Leonard Bernstein, created a ballet he called Fancy Free in 1944. It depicted in frenzied movement the 24-hour shore leave of three sailors looking for fun and romance amidst New York skyscrapers.

Fancy Free served as the narrative inspiration for a show written in its heady wake with book and lyrics by the team of Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Robbins conceived this sequel as “a new form for theater and ballet, with three mediums of expression: dance, music, and voice.” They named it On the Town. Comden and Green summed up their artistic intent best, “the poignancy of young people trying eagerly to cram a whole lifetime into a day.”

It endures as a valentine to New York at a time of war.
Dominick La Valle (1891-1952) arrived in New York in 1908 at the age of 17, trained as a shoemaker. In 1922 he and a partner, Antonio LoPresti, opened a small factory and storefront called La Valle Shoes at 632 Broadway, where it remained until 1952. Mr. La Valle gained broad recognition as both innovative manufacturer and stylist. He created this patriotic pair as the nation prepared for war and sartorial symbolism helped swell the call to duty.

The renowned “power-brokering” Commissioner of the City of New York’s Department of Parks, Robert Moses (1888-1981), had long sought to become landlord to the mayor in one of the historic properties that fell within his municipal jurisdiction. Mayor La Guardia had no interest in leaving his East Harlem apartment but the specter of war and its prospective threats to the homeland finally proved decisive catalysts. Moses used Works Progress Administration funds to stabilize and update the Gracie Mansion landmark and it stood out in part therefore as the most appropriate site. In the fall of 1941 (with Pearl Harbor just there weeks away.) Moses wrote this letter (and expense memorandum) to both Mayor La Guardia and the Board of Estimate squaring away the final details and requesting formal approval of Gracie Mansion to serve “permanently as the residence of the Mayors of New York.”
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LENDERS TO GRACIE MANSION
Brooklyn Museum
Bronx County Historical Society
Chinese Historical Society of Americas
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The Lisette Model Foundation
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The Museum at FIT
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Representing Mayor Bill de Blasio

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