

It was inevitable that the area where the “Half Moon” halted its Hudson River voyage in 1609 would play an important role in New York history. Nearly two hundred years later, Albany became a center of political power.

Albany is the northernmost port on the Hudson. The city formed around Fort Orange, built by Dutch traders in 1624. In 1652 Pieter Stuyvesant, the governor of the New Netherland colony, separated the settlement, by then called Beverwyck, from Kiliaen Van Rensselaer’s patroonship. The British renamed Beverwyck into Albany after taking over New Netherland in 1664.

Chartered as a municipality in 1686, Albany was the site of a 1754 inter-colonial congress where Benjamin Franklin presented the “Albany Plan of Union,” a prototype for the future federal government of the United States. After New York broke with Britain, the state legislature met in Albany beginning in 1780.

George Clinton (1777-95, 1801-4) was New York’s first governor after independence. Before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, New York had the right to print its own money and levy taxes on imports. Clinton opposed the Constitution because it reduced state power, but eventually served as Vice President under the federal government.

From 1780 until 1797 the legislature alternated sessions in Albany, Kingston, New York City and Poughkeepsie. When Albany’s turn came again in January 1797, legislators proposed making it the permanent state capital. In March, they approved a bill that authorized the erection of a public building in Albany to house the Supreme Court, the Secretary of State and other officials, but didn’t name a permanent capital. Albany wasn’t officially named the capital city until 1971.

The Senate and Assembly met at City Hall until State Hall opened in 1809. By 1831, state government had outgrown State Hall. It conducted much of its business in hotels until the current capitol building, already twelve years in the making, opened in 1879. The massive structure wasn’t fully finished for another twenty years.

During the 19th century, Albany was the geographic center of a booming state economy. It was where the Erie Canal, spearheaded by George Clinton’s nephew **DeWitt Clinton** (1817-22, 1825-8) completed the link between Lake Erie and the Hudson. As New York became a leading force in the national economy, its governors became influential figures in national politics.

While DeWitt Clinton ran for President before becoming governor, nine of his successors used Albany as a springboard to the Presidency or Presidential nominations. **Martin Van Buren** (1829) practically invented the modern Democratic Party and rode it to the White House in 1836. Fellow Democrats Horatio Seymour (1853-4, 1863-4) and Samuel Tilden (1874-5) won nominations in 1868 and 1876, respectively, but lost their races.

It took Grover Cleveland (1883-4) only one year as governor to earn the 1884 Democratic presidential nomination and two non-consecutive terms as President. Cleveland won national praise by governing on a non-partisan basis as a conservative Democrat. He set a precedent for governors who put practical policies over ideological partisanship.

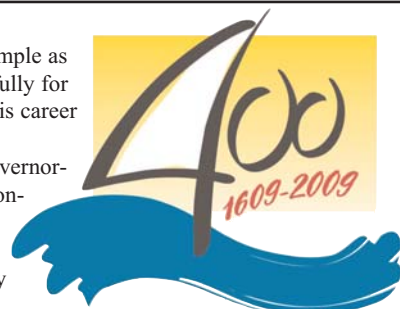
Already a war hero when he was elected in 1898, Theodore Roosevelt (1899-1900) was a progressive Republican dedicated to nature preservation and civil service reform. He was actually nominated for Vice President in 1900 because local party leaders thought him too progressive. He proved even more so as President, while Charles Evans Hughes (1907-

10) followed his progressive example as governor. Hughes ran unsuccessfully for President in 1916, and finished his career on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Democrats reclaimed the governorship the following decade, and consolidated their power under Alfred E. Smith (1919-20, 1922-8). Before running unsuccessfully for President in 1928, Smith increased the governor’s authority over the state budget process, established a Cabinet on the White House model, and increased state spending on housing and historic preservation. His successor, Franklin D. Roosevelt (1929-32), took Smith’s reforms further in all areas before winning the first of four Presidential elections in 1932.

The power and prestige of the governor’s office attracted relative aristocrats like the Roosevelts as well as multi-millionaires like Averill Harriman (1955-8). But it remained within reach of men from humbler backgrounds, like Thomas E. Dewey (1943-54). The youthful prosecutor became governor in 1942 following a major campaign against organized crime. He was an unsuccessful Republican presidential candidate in 1944 and 1948.

Dewey and Nelson Rockefeller (1959-1973) both espoused a moderate Republicanism that succeeded in an era of economic expansion. Both men invested massive amounts into the state infrastructure, as did Harriman between them. Dewey established the State University of New York and authorized construction of the State Thruway. Rockefeller transformed Albany with the Empire State Plaza project. The massive towers and innovative egg-shaped convention center cemented Albany’s standing as one of America’s most important political centers. New York’s governors have shaped the capital city and the state, just as they’ve so often shaped national politics throughout American history.



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## Albany Leadership

This is one of a 10-part educational series created by the NYNPA NIE Program © 2008



### Newspaper Tie-ins to Today:

Look in the newspaper for a map of New York State and locate Albany on the map. Now locate Kingston, Poughkeepsie and New York City (all former capitals of the state). Why do you think Albany was finally selected as the official capital city of New York?

New York State has been home to many great leaders. This leadership made a difference and helped develop the Empire state and our nation. Find examples of superior leadership in the news. Who are the leaders? What did they do that made a difference?

*Image: Photo of New York State Capital from the website, [www.state.ny.us](http://www.state.ny.us)*  
For more information on the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial go to [www.exploreny400.com](http://www.exploreny400.com).