

Richard Morris Hunt

Architect (1827–1895)



Hunt was a preeminent figure in the history of American architecture. According to *New York Times* critic PAUL GOLDBERGER, he was “American architecture’s first, and in many ways its greatest, statesman.” Hunt’s sculpted the face of New York City, including designs for the facade and Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty and many Fifth Avenue mansions lost to the wrecking ball. He founded both the American Institute of Architects and the Municipal Art Society.

Hunt was born in Vermont and, following the early death of his father, his mother took the family to Europe, where they remained for more than a decade. The aspiring architect Hunt became the first American to attend the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He later supervised work on the Louvre Museum, which was being renovated for Napoleon III, and he designed the Pavillon de la Bibliothèque.

After his return to America in 1855, Hunt founded the first American architectural school at his 10th Street studio building. One of his first students, WILLIAM ROBERT WARE, went on to found the first two university programs in architecture: MIT in 1866, and Columbia in 1881.

Hunt’s greatest influence was his insistence that architects be treated, and paid, as legitimate and respected professionals equivalent to doctors and lawyers. He sued one of his early clients for non-payment of his five percent fee, which established an important legal precedent. He brought the first apartment building to Manhattan, and set a new grand style of houses for the social elite and millionaires of the Gilded Age.

After Hunt died in 1895, the Municipal Art Society asked sculptor DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH and architect BRUCE PRICE to design a memorial for him, which is installed in the wall of Central Park across from today’s Frick Museum. Following Hunt’s death, his son RICHARD HOWLAND HUNT took over his practice.