

THE OLD TOWN- HOUSE OF BOSTON

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The Old Town-house of Boston by Bostonian Society

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BOSTONIAN SOCIETY

**THE OLD TOWN-
HOUSE OF BOSTON**

THE
OLD TOWN-HOUSE
OF BOSTON.



BOSTONIAN SOCIETY.

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"Here the child Independence was born."—JOHN ADAMS.



THE
OLD TOWN-HOUSE
OF BOSTON.

THIS ancient structure, familiarly known as the Old State House, standing at the head of State Street in the metropolis of New England, and for many years devoted to the uses of commerce, has lately been re-dedicated to public purposes. The city of Boston, having in its municipal councils determined upon the preservation of the renowned building, has caused the restoration, to as nearly as possible their original condition, of the ancient Council Chamber and Representatives' Hall of the Provincial period. A brief glance at the history of this venerable spot, so closely associated with the patriotic memoirs of Colonial Boston, will justify the claim that these time-honored walls, which witnessed many scenes of stirring action in the early days, are destined to take their place by the side of Faneuil Hall and the Old South, as most prominent among the historical buildings in the land.

From the infant days of the struggling puritan settlement, gathered upon the Peninsula of Shawmut, nestling in the low land lying between Beacon, Fort and Copp's Hills, and following the water line of the Town Dock, now covered by the present Quincy Market and streets abutting upon it even farther inland, this site has, been one of central interest. Here, upon land now forming the present corner of State and Devonshire streets, the fathers of early Boston consecrated with prayer and psalm, their first religious edifice, and it was here, also, that they first held their deliberations upon the conduct of their temporal affairs. As early as 1634, according to an unquestionable authority, a parcel of ground, definitely recognized and described in the *Book of Possessions*, under date of eleven years later, was set apart as a market place. This estate, the area of which has never been curtailed or widened, is to-day intact, enclosed within the walls of the Old State House.

To this purpose, then, was devoted "the ground reserved for public uses," until in 1656, died Captain Robert Keayne, a well-known, wealthy and eccentric citizen of that day, who by his will left "the sum of three hundred pounds, current money," which was, to be expended for the public interest; or to quote the phraseology of the ancient record: "For building a

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as before. Captain Francis Goelet, in his journal (*See N. E. Hist. Gen. Register, 1870*), thus describes it as it stood in 1750: "They have also a Towne-House, built of brick, situated in King's [the present State] Street. Its a very Grand Brick Building, Arch'd all Round and two Storie heigh, Sashed above; its Lower part is always open, designed as a Change, the Merchants in Fair Weather make their Change in the Open Street, at the eastermost end. In the Upper Story are the Council and Assembly Chambers. It has a neat Capula, Sashed all Round, which on rejoicing days is Elluminated.

The successful and brilliant administration of Governor Shirley, noted in Provincial annals for the great military expedition which under General William Pepperell [afterward baronet], achieved the conquest of Louisbourg, was the first to occupy the restored building. Then came in turn the rule of Thomas Pownal and Francis Bernard, bearing the King's commission; which carries us down to 1760, when the accession of George the Third to the English throne was proclaimed "with Beat of Drum and Blast of Trumpet from the Balcony under the East Window of the Towne-House. From thence we tread rapidly the path which brings us to the threshold of the Revolution. In 1761 came the famous plea of James Otis, Jr., in the Representatives' Hall of this structure, against the Writs of Assistance, followed by numerous manifestations of patriotic sentiment, prominent among which stands forth the record of the meetings called in Faneuil Hall by the Colonists, to protest against the passage of the Stamp Act, and the imposition of the tax on tea. In 1768, a misguided ministry determined to over-awe and if possible humiliate the people, by quartering a division of the King's soldiery in Boston, an arbitrary and impolitic act, calculated to severely try the loyalty of the Colonists to the Crown.

MILITARY OCCUPATION.

Persistingly closing its ears to the indignant protest against its action, the Royal government, 1768-69, maintained an attitude of stubborn indifference to the petitions of its colonial subjects. Landing its regulars at Long Wharf, it took measures looking to military occupation, and regiment after regiment, wearing England's scarlet, were marched up King Street to the encampment upon the Common, until in the winter of 1769-70, there were four thousand troops of the line mustered in the seething town. One regiment was quartered in the lower story of the Town house, which was flanked by two pieces of ordnance. So prepared the officer of the Crown to uphold King George's sovereignty in restless Boston, little reckoning the ominous portent of the storm of popular indignation which was soon destined to burst upon them. In those