

HISTORY OF THE OLD SOUTH MEETING- HOUSE IN BOSTON

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History of the Old South Meeting-House in Boston by Everett W. Burdett

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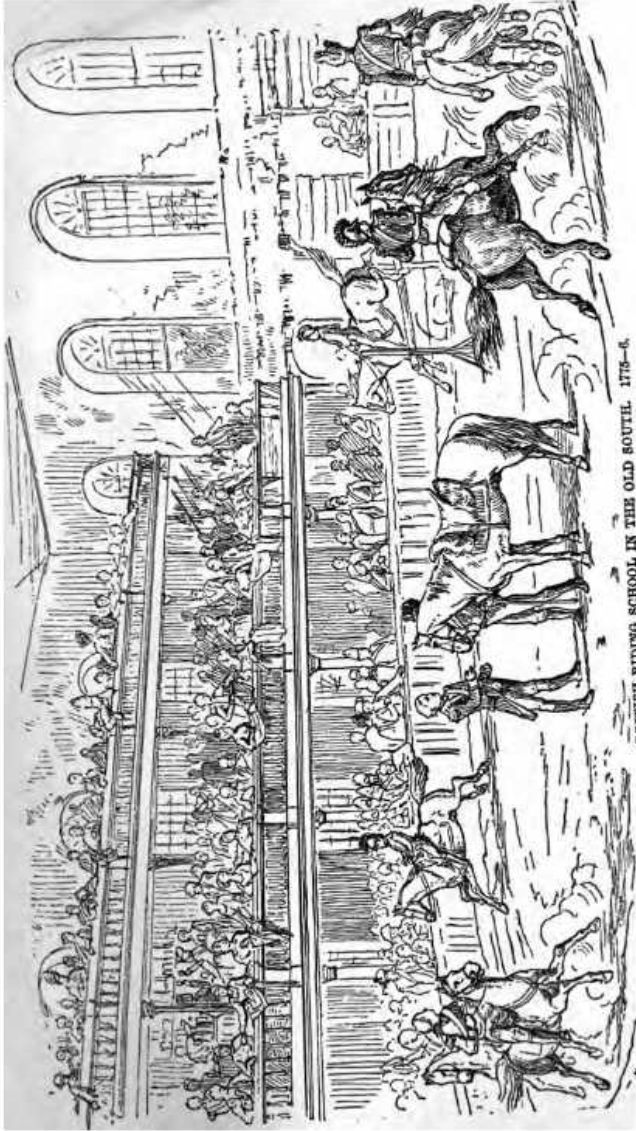
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EVERETT W. BURDETT

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SOUTH MEETING-
HOUSE IN BOSTON**



BRITISH RIDING SCHOOL IN THE OLD SOUTH. 1775-6.

1775-6

HISTORY
OF
THE OLD SOUTH MEETING-HOUSE

IN
BOSTON.

BY EVERETT W. BURDETT.

BOSTON:
B. B. RUSSELL.

1877.

J. F. Clark
jr.

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PREFACE.

The thousands who have felt interested in the fate of the Old South Meeting-House have nowhere been able to find a connected record of the events which have rendered it illustrious. These pages are intended to supply this deficiency, and to create a larger veneration for the monument whose history they record. The author waited long before beginning a work which would seem to be so worthy of an abler pen. But no such work appearing, this was begun and finished in the hope that it might at least be deemed better than none at all.

At the meeting of June 14, 1876, it was said that if there were time to tell to the people the story of this building, the money for its preservation would be forthcoming. "For every city, every church, every house, every man, every woman that has a dime, hearing this thing properly put before them, inspired by the memories of this place, would give and give freely that not a stone of this foundation, not a brick of these walls, not a tile of this roof over us, should be touched from this time forward, even forever."

Sharing this faith, the author contributes this sketch to the cause of preservation, and trusts that, in some measure, it may be instrumental in creating a public sentiment which will render the destruction of the Old South impossible. Though it has been found impracticable to make it a part of the official programme, it is hoped that it may not entirely fail in promoting the common cause.

This little volume does not pretend to be a church history. Nor does it profess to be a history of that religious corporation legally known as the Old South Society in Boston. Though having asked little and received no aid from the curator of the records of that association, the writer has suffered therefrom but little inconvenience: material from other sources has been abundant. The following sketch is simply a plain recital of the

story of one of the most historic buildings in America—the brick church, popularly known as the Old South Meeting-House. Such a recital necessarily deals to some extent with the history of the church or society; but it is most largely devoted to those associations of a particular building, which make it interesting to the general public. If the mode of treatment be found to be at all worthy of the subject, the following pages will not fail to prove of general interest. The limits of the work forbid the full development of the antiquities of the meeting-house, but the principal features are presented and enough is given to show upon what basis the fame of the Old South is founded. As to whatever inaccuracies may be discovered, the author can only promise in the words of a worthier writer, that "if the work be found of sufficient merit to require another edition, they will probably be corrected, and if no such demand is made, the book has received as much labor as it deserves."

The authorities consulted in the preparation of this history are sufficiently indicated in the text and foot-notes. Suffice it to say, that these pages have not been thrown together carelessly or without investigation. Careful researches have been made, notwithstanding the fact that the limits of the work forbade the reproduction of much of the information thus acquired. Among the most valuable of the authorities consulted were the following: A series of four sermons on the History of the Old South Church, or Society, preached by Rev. Dr. Benj. B. Wisner in 1830, and, by request, published in the same year of their delivery; S. G. Drake's "History and Antiquities of Boston," which was never brought down to a later date than 1770; Richard Frothingham's "Life and Times of Joseph Warren;" Wm. V. Well's "Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams;" and George Bancroft's "History of the United States." Besides these many other historical and biographical works relating to the same periods have been consulted.

To the sermons of Dr. Wisner the author is indebted, more than to any other source, for the material for the first three chapters of this work. But though Dr. Wisner presented a full history of the church as a church down to the year in which he wrote, he almost entirely neglected the civil and political associations of the meeting-house. It is to the latter that these pages are principally devoted, and it is to them that the Old South chiefly owes the celebrity it enjoys.

The proper study of the history of Boston—and of the Old South Meeting-House, for the two are inseparable—during the period embracing these events can be had from no one or several publications in bookform. Private and official correspondence and contemporary public prints are invaluable for this purpose.

If newspapers can properly be said to be "photographs of passing time," both those of the colonies in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and those of Boston and New York in the last half of the nineteenth century, well deserve the name. A notable collection of newspaper clippings upon a single topic is that in the possession of Mr. George W. Simmons, Jr., of Boston, which comprises over eight hundred articles, long and short, concerning the Old South Meeting-House. The fact that these articles have all appeared since the 7th of June, 1876, and are principally taken from the papers of Boston and New York, furnishes some indication of the interest which exists upon the subject to which these pages are devoted. Had it not been for this collection, the compilation of the last chapter of this work, undertaken after the excitement of the work of preservation had subsided, would have been a task of not a little difficulty and vexation.

The papers of the period just prior to the Revolution, when taken together and properly studied, present an accurate and animated picture of the times in which they were published. Access has been had to rare and valuable files of these publications, embracing the years 1767 to 1775 inclusive. Among them the papers which were found to be most valuable for the purposes of this work were the *Boston Chronicle*, whose publication ceased in 1770; the *Boston Evening Post*, an independent paper whose columns were open to Whig and Tory alike; and the *Boston Gazette*, the most patriotic and most popular of all the publications of the time and place. Perusing the same columns scanned by the patriots, and reading the same articles which fired their zeal or roused their indignation, one can hardly fail to catch something of the spirit of the times and to form a somewhat vivid conception of the events by which they were distinguished.

E. W. B.

MELROSE, Dec. 1, 1877.

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