



**OLD STATE
HOUSE 300th**

The Old State House

Historians agree that no surviving landmark from pre-revolutionary America equals the importance of the Old State House in recounting the story of our nation's struggle for freedom. Built in 1713 as the seat of Royal government in provincial Massachusetts, the Old State House both symbolized and helped define the place of the North American colonies in Britain's eighteenth-century empire. It was the center of activity during pre-revolutionary America. It remains nestled quietly in the heart of Boston's downtown financial district, its cornerstone still serving as Boston's zero milestone point. For 300 years, the Old State House has stood as a symbol of liberty, freedom and representative government. In 1770, the Boston Massacre occurred here. In July 1776, the Declaration of Independence was first read to the jubilant citizens of Boston from its balcony. Within its halls, our founding fathers articulated the fundamental ideas that formed the foundation of our nation, and still inform our issues today. It was here, John Adams wrote, that "the child independence was born." And it was here John Hancock assumed office as the Commonwealth's first democratically-elected governor under the Massachusetts Constitution, the world's oldest written constitution still in use.

300th Tercentenary Celebration

While the Old State House is viewed as a Boston icon, its importance is not always adequately explained to the 100,000 people visiting it each year. Little about the immensely important events that occurred here is understood by most visitors, and even by most Bostonians, for whom it is merely a quaint, oddly-mute old building. On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Old State House, the Bostonian Society is launching a dramatic new 'must-see' visitor experience and an ambitious three-phased restoration of the site that will restore it to its former glory and illuminate for the public what happened here during the era that gave birth to our nation. The Old State House is an irreplaceable asset to Boston and indeed to America. The Bostonian Society is working to transform this extraordinarily important site into a place of nationally-recognized significance and the pride of the Commonwealth.



Photo Credit Michael Dwyer



Photo Credit Peter Vanderwarker

The Bostonian Society

Established in 1881, the nonprofit Bostonian Society is the primary steward and caretaker of the Old State House and its collection of Revolutionary American artifacts and records. The Society is twice credited with rescuing the Old State House from destruction, first organizing opposition to its demolition as a 'traffic impediment,' and later to the rejection of an offer by Chicago's citizens to move the building to Lake Michigan. Since then it has preserved and maintained this national historic treasure and interpreted for the public the important stories contained herein. In addition to operating a museum of Revolutionary Boston history, the Bostonian Society maintains a research library and a collection of over 7,500 books, 350 maps, and over 30,000 photographs. The Bostonian Society also holds an extensive collection of paintings, statuary, clothing, weaponry, medals, and ephemera. The Bostonian Society is dedicated to studying, and preserving Boston's uniquely important history, embodied in materials, records, and structures such as the Old State House, and in sharing with the public an understanding of the important revolutionary ideas born here.

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“If these walls could talk. . . .” They do, in a sense. The Old State House is filled with what we at the Bostonian Society call “hidden history.” Each object in our collection tells a unique tale, woven together to recount in a most captivating way the story of the American Revolution. Here are a few of our favorites.



Elizabeth Bull Wedding Dress

Miss Elizabeth Bull began work on her own China silk wedding gown while still in school. An ambitious project undertaken to learn and master the advanced needle arts, the dress was designed, stitched, and beautifully embroidered without any particular husband in mind. She had been working on the gown several years when

Reverend Roger Price spotted her attending service at Trinity Church and was so taken with her beauty that he gave up plans to return to England to stay and court her. The gown was still not completed when Miss Bull wore it to her wedding in 1735.

The Bloody Massacre in King Street

Paul Revere deliberately got the details of the infamous event wrong. A skilled engraver, Revere created this calculated and highly successful piece of political propaganda, meant to galvanize popular opposition to London.



Tea from the Boston Tea Party

Tea reputed to have been shaken from the boots of patriot Thomas Melvill, grandfather of author Herman Melville. A participant in the Boston Tea Party protest, he likely would have felt a bit guilty to find the tea in his boots, as leaders were said to have instructed protestors not to steal any of the valuable tea

John Hancock's Inaugural Coat

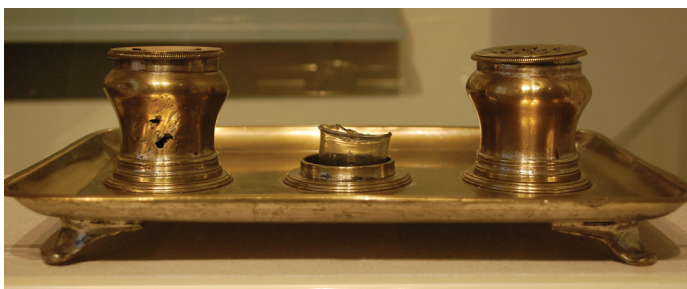
This exquisite “suit of crimson velvet” was worn by John Hancock for his inauguration as the first democratically elected governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1780. Not only did the rich fabric hint at Hancock’s wealth, but the construction of the coat subtly illustrates how the “details made the man” or at least helped with his image. The shoulder seams are low and toward the back, causing the wearers chest to protrude forward. Also the sleeves are stitched with a bend in them, so that Hancock’s arms would inevitably be held at an elegant curve while wearing the coat. This seemingly effortless but really quite deliberate posture was supposed to be indicative of a man of grace and stature.





Liberty Tree Flag

The Stamp Act riot, as the first popular protest against British taxation was known, began under the boughs of a large elm tree located not far from the Old State House. When the Stamp Act was repealed in March 1766, the Sons of Liberty celebrated their victory by decking the elm with colorful banners. Among these was a large flag of nine red and white stripes representing the nine colonies that had joined in protest of the hated tax. Bostonians named the elm the Liberty Tree, and it remained a focal point for popular protest throughout the Revolutionary period.

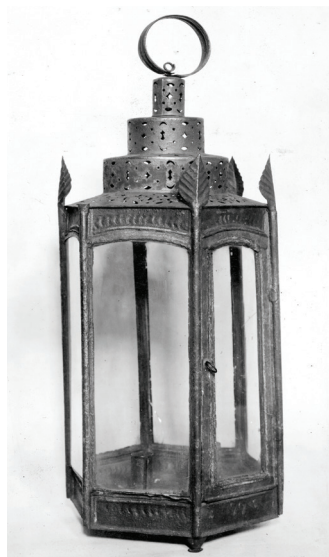


Inkstand

This inkstand was used in Representatives Hall. The quill pens it once held were used by many prominent figures from Boston's Revolutionary leadership, including John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and James Otis, Jr.

Lantern

This lantern was one of 45 that illuminated the Liberty Tree on the night of the arrival of news that the Stamp Act had been repealed. Dated May 20, 1766, the inscription on the bottom reads: "This lantern was on the northwest bough (opposite Frog Lane) of the Liberty Tree illuminated last night with several hundred lanterns on the arrival of the news of the repeal of the infamous George Grenville Stamp Act."



Speaker's Desk

After the devastating 1747 fire at the Old State House, the House of Representatives is said to have commissioned Charlestown cabinetmaker Benjamin Frothingham to construct this Speaker's Desk.

When the British destroyed much of Charlestown in 1775, Frothingham lost his house, barn, and workshop. His work is recognized as important for the study of American craft history not only because he was one of the few early American cabinetmakers to label his furniture but also for his fine craftsmanship.

Lydia Hutchinson Sampler

Stitched by Lydia Hutchinson, the sister of Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson, this embroidered sampler reads: "Lydia Hutchinson is my name, and with this needle I wrought the same, if my skill it had been better, I should have mended every letter, in the year 1730."





300 years through the eyes of the Old State House

- 1713 Old State House opens as the site of British provincial government. Much of the original brick wall remain today.
- 1761 In the Council Chamber, James Otis delivers an eloquent argument against British Writs of Assistance, the rough equivalent of today's warrantless "search and seizure," stirring patriotic sentiment against British rule. John Adams, a spectator that day, would later write, **"then and there the child Independence was born."**
- 1767 Public galleries built in Representatives Hall, one of the first known provisions for allowing public accountability of elected officials in the English-speaking world.
- 1770 Boston Massacre occurs outside. Five Bostonians, including Crispus Attucks, are killed by British soldiers. Nine of the British soldiers are tried for murder. John Adams agrees to represent them in court; seven are acquitted and two are found guilty of manslaughter.
- 1776 Declaration of Independence read to Bostonians from the balcony. Lion and unicorn are torn down and burned in bonfire. King Street is renamed State Street.
- 1780 John Hancock elected first Governor of the Commonwealth and inaugurated in Council Chamber.
- 1780-1798 The building serves as Massachusetts State House.
- 1789 President Washington visits Boston and views parade in his honor from the west side of the building.
- 1793 Open-air banquet at the Old State House in honor of French Revolution. Eight hundred loaves of bread and a 1000-pound ox are consumed.
- 1798 Building renovated for private shops; wine merchants, wig makers, hatters and a restaurant included among tenants.
- 1830 Renovated in 1830 by architects Isiah Rogers and William Washburn, the Old State House is used as Boston City Hall through 1840.
- 1835 Publisher and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison is chased by a Boston mob and takes refuge inside the Old State House. He is rescued by marshals and spirited from the building.
- 1840 Returned to use as a commercial building, the Old State House falls into disrepair for 40 years. Billboards, a porch and a mansard roof are added.
- 1881 The Bostonian Society is founded to preserve the building. City of Boston agrees to restore the Old State House to its historic appearance and leases upstairs to the Society for use as a museum.
- 1882 Restoration completed under City Architect George Clough and Councilman William Whitmore (the Society's first president). Lion and unicorn returned to east facade.
- 1905 State Street subway entrance (Blue and Orange Lines) opens under the Old State House.
- 1907 Joseph Chandler restoration. Paint removed from outside brickwork.
- 1943 Perry, Hepburn & Shaw restoration of Council Chamber.
- 1960 Boston National Historic Sites Commission declares Old State House the most important public building built in America prior to the Declaration of Independence.
- 1974 Old State House becomes a site within the Boston National Historical Park.
- 1976 Queen Elizabeth II visits the city and addresses Bostonians from the Old State House balcony.
- 1988 U.S. postage stamp of Old State House released.
- 1992 Following extensive two-year National Park Service/Goody Clancy restoration, the Old State House reopens with new exhibits, office space and climate control.
- 2013 300th anniversary of the Old State House!**

Old State House images - by permission only; high res available upon request
 contact Elizabeth Roscio, Archivist at elizabeth@bostonhistory.org
 please include photo title and reference number (if available) in your request



1. Paul Revere engraving of "the Bloody Massacre" of 1770
2. Reading of the Declaration of Independence from the Old State House, 206 Washington Street, ca. 1916-1930 (picture postcard) Item number: VW0053/- #005674
3. Old State House, ca. 1860-80. Item number: VW0001/- #001158



4. Old State House, ca. 1870. Item number: VW0001/- #001129
5. State Street station, subway construction, 1903
6. Old State House, ca. 1962. Item number: VW0008/- #002035



7. Old State House at night, ca. 1975. Item number: VW0001/- #001157
8. Queen Elizabeth addresses crowds from OSH balcony for American bicentennial, 1976, photo by permission only.
9. Old State House, 1984. Item number: VW0001/- #004305

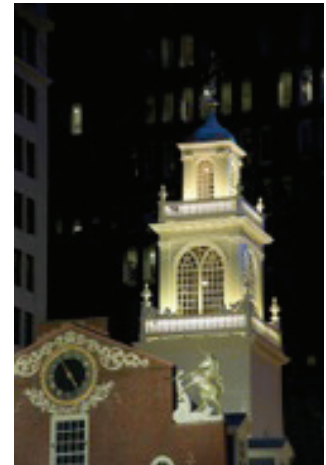
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10. US postage stamp, released 1988



11. Old State House today, photo by Peter Vanderwarker



12. Old State House tower



13. Old State House with confetti, July 4th, 2012



14. Old State House, 2013. Copyright Nick Trainor



15. Old State House with faux fireworks



16. Revolutionary kid



17. photo credit Michael Dwyer



18. photo credit Michael Dwyer