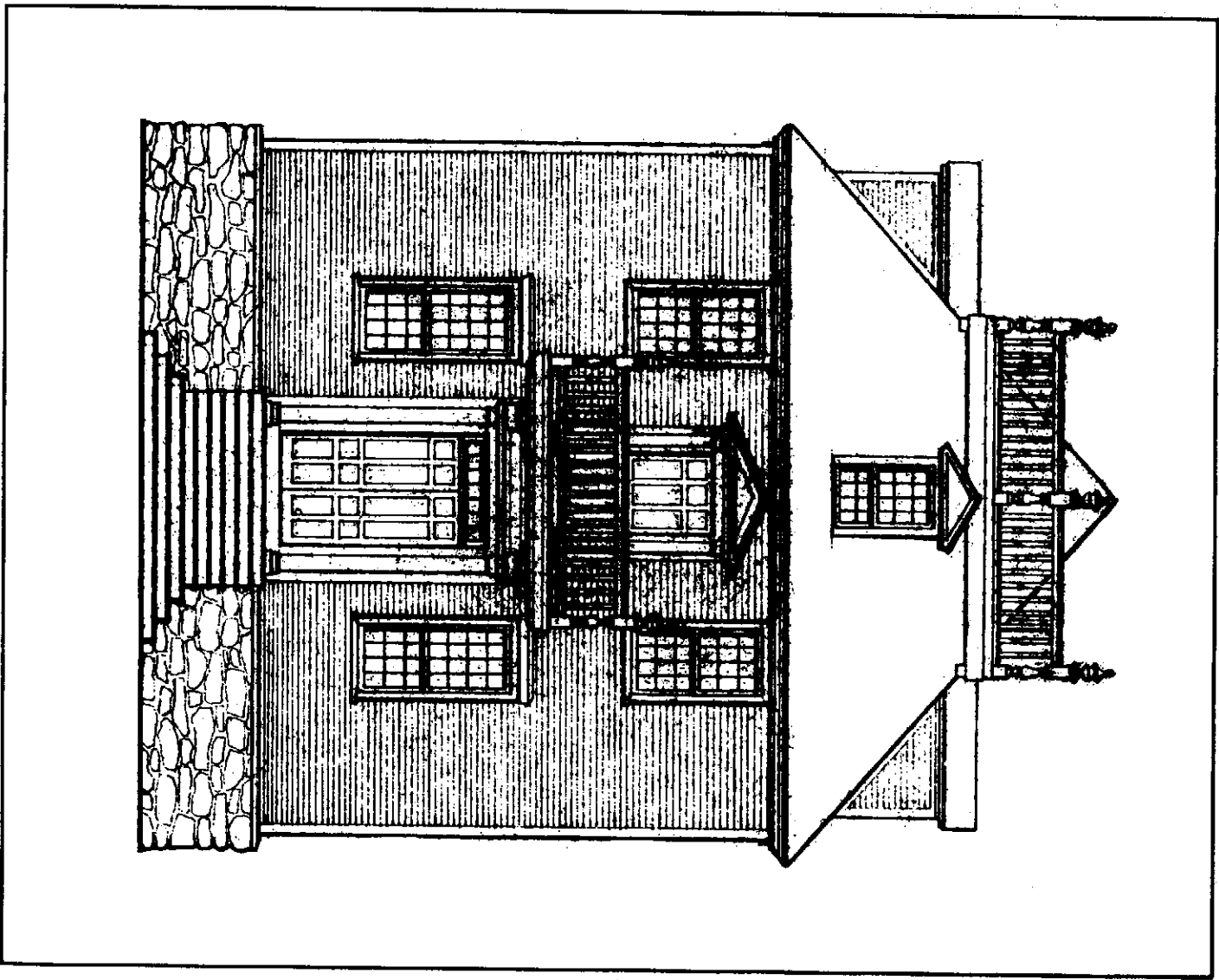


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*The Old State House as it may have appeared about 1805. The cupola and roof walk were completed by 1766 and were apparently removed some years before the building was dismantled in 1836. The appearance of the cupola is conjectural. Illustration by William Paarlberg, 1988.*

## The Old New Hampshire State House

*James L. Garvin*

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The *Portsmouth Daily Rocket* of July 1, 1860, carried an extended article by a “man of years,” recalling a time two or more decades in the past when the port city had still been only a town, and a town facing stagnation. After recounting a breathtaking array of enterprises and ventures which had rebuilt the community into an engine of manufacture and trade, the writer recalled one fortunate accident that had cleared the center for rebuilding:

The improvements in the vicinity of City Square are scarcely less than in other parts of the city. There used to be an old building stuck up nearly in the centre of that spacious opening then called the Parade. It was once the *State House*— and as an apology for its standing, they used to sentence the Judges, Jurors, Lawyers and Culprits to confinement there several hours in the day, half a dozen times a year. It happened, however, that in the fire of 1837 it was destroyed. . . . Notwithstanding the loss of property by this fire was great, yet the improvements which followed more than made it up. The result has been the opening of the spacious City Square . . . <sup>1</sup>

Researchers seeking more information about the “fire of 1837” will find nothing. The fire was an invention, and the article was a hoax. The column was a clever piece of visionary writing which appeared in the *Portsmouth Journal* of May 14, 1836, not in the *Rocket* of 1860. The writer was trying by an attractive fiction to do what others would attempt through more strident editorials and letters: to convince the citizens of Portsmouth that it was

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James L. Garvin is Architectural Historian for the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

1. *Portsmouth Journal*, May 14, 1836. I am indebted to Richard G. Winslow III for supplying this reference.

high time to clear the Parade of the "ugly old fire-box" that had once been the provincial state house, thereby creating the plaza that would become Market Square.<sup>2</sup>

The issue was a complex one, clouded by inertia on the part of the town; uncertainty as to whether the town, the county, or the state owned the building and the ground upon which it stood; indecision as to whether the building, then used mainly as a court house, should be moved to the nearby alms house lot and continued in use, or whether the courts should be housed in the remodeled Pleasant Street Church, the Academy, or elsewhere; a lawsuit under which the North Parish, whose meeting house adjoined the state house, was seeking to confirm its title to the alms house lot so that it could build a new church there; and the question of where to house the town poor if the North Parish secured title to the alms house lot or if the state house were moved there.

To add to the impasse, judges Bradbury Bartlett and Dudley Freese of the Rockingham County Court of Common Pleas had unilaterally entered into an agreement under which two local merchants, Samuel Treat and John Norton, would raise and repair the state house and provide new court rooms within it in return for the privilege of building four stores beneath it and having the exclusive lease of those stores for twenty years.<sup>3</sup>

By threatening to fix the decrepit state house in the center of town forever, the judges' action provided the necessary impetus for all contending parties to resolve their differences. The result was a mediation that pleased everyone. The North Parish abandoned all claims to the alms house lot. In return, the selectmen agreed to remove the old state house within ninety days and to confirm to the North Parish a lot sufficient to permit the

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2. *Portsmouth Journal*, April 12, 1834; July 23, 1836; July 30, 1836; August 6, 1836; September 24, 1836; *New-Hampshire Gazette*, August 16, 1836; September 27, 1836; see also Portsmouth Town Records, 6:79; 7:233; 7:235-6; 7:242.

3. Portsmouth Town Records, 7:236.

remodeling of the old meeting house on its ancient site. The town agreed to build a larger and better alms house elsewhere, thereby freeing the old alms house lot for construction of a stylish new court house. So compelling was the vision of a new plaza in the center of town that a number of private citizens pledged seven hundred dollars toward the cost of removing the old state house.<sup>4</sup>

The agreement between the town and the North Parish required that the state house be removed by early November, 1836. Accordingly, the state house was offered at public auction on October 22, with the buyer obligated to remove the building within ten days.<sup>5</sup> The structure was sold to Capt. Israel Marden, a tavernkeeper, farmer, and former stage driver who lived on Lafayette Road. Marden quickly began to reduce the venerable building to a shell.

In early November, Charles W. Brewster, the thirty-four-year old owner and editor of the *Portsmouth Journal*, paid one last visit to the empty hulk. An antiquarian from his youth, Brewster regarded the forlorn building with more sympathy than did those whose eyes were turned only to the future:

As the shell of the old house is yet presented to public view, its vacant windows seem glaring most beseechingly upon passers-by, and the borrowed tone of the neighboring [meeting house] bell seems hourly to say—"Am I to sink, unwept, unhonored and unsung? Once the greatest and most honored fabric in the granite State: am I to pass off at the blow of an ivory hammer, and even my foundations be *treated with contempt?*" It was in pity to the frail tenement, that we entered its propt doors to administer what cordials we possessed to its relief,—not with the hope of resuscitating it from its sinking disease, but to ease down without a groaning creak, the last firm post of its oaken frame.

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4. *Reports of the Selectmen and School Committee: Presented to the Annual Town Meeting . . . March 25, 1837* (Portsmouth: by the town, 1837); *Receipts and Expenditures of the Town of Portsmouth . . . for the Year Ending March 24, 1837* (Portsmouth: by the town, 1837).

5. *Portsmouth Journal*, October 22, 1836.



*Remnant of the Old State House as it appeared on Court Street, Portsmouth, about 1935-38, with garage doors probably installed in the 1920s. Photograph by Arthur Harriman, courtesy Portsmouth Athenaeum Photograph Collections.*



*Remnant of the Old State House as it appeared on Court Street, Portsmouth, about 1935-38, with garage doors probably installed in the 1920s. Photograph by Arthur Harriman, courtesy Portsmouth Athenaeum Photograph Collections.*



*Photo-montage of the Old State House by Caleb Stevens Gurney, c. 1900. Based on a photograph of the building fragment that stood on Court Street, this composite picture incorrectly shows a door in the center of the south side and the chimney toward the western end. It omits the roof walk, the cupola, the high foundation, and the stone steps.*

Brewster proceeded to envision the activities that had taken place in the stripped rooms—protests against the Stamp Act in 1765 and against the importation of tea in 1774, the inauguration of Governor John Wentworth in 1767, the proclamation of peace in 1783, the reception of Washington in 1789—and to sketch a picture of Portsmouth as Washington saw it from the balcony of the state house. Looking up from his reverie, the editor saw “the undertaker . . . standing with tools in hand [waiting] for us to depart,” and so bade a final farewell to the old capitol.<sup>6</sup>

But the state house did not wholly perish in 1836. In 1878, Lewis W. Brewster, who had succeeded his father as editor of the *Journal*, noted that “a portion of the building is now standing on the north side of Court street . . . where it was removed and made into a dwelling house, the many-paned windows still remaining.”<sup>7</sup> Whatever Captain Marden may have done with most of the building he bought, he sold part of it—approximately the eastern one-quarter—to Mads Danielson, a Norwegian-born boarding house proprietor who owned a lot on nearby Pitt (later Court) Street. Danielson closed the open end of his fragment with second-hand timbers and boards, and had the shell moved and remodelled into a decent-looking Greek Revival dwelling that long bore the address of 47 Court Street.<sup>8</sup>

There the remnant stood for over one hundred and thirty years. During most of this time, the structure served as a private dwell-

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6. *Portsmouth Journal*, November 5, 1836. The italicized word is a pun on the name of Samuel Treat, one of the local merchants who had proposed to build stores under the state house.

7. *Portsmouth Journal*, April 6, 1878. See also, [Sarah Haven Foster,] *The Portsmouth Guidebook* (Portsmouth: J. H. Foster, 1876), p. 56.

8. Rockingham County Deeds, 360:155, as cited in Joseph W. Hammond, “The New Hampshire Provincial State House,” unpublished seminar paper, Boston University, c. 1970. For information on the enclosure, remodeling, and subsequent evolution of the building fragment, see Gregory Clancey, *Historic Structure Report: Old New Hampshire Statehouse, Portsmouth, N.H.* (Portsmouth: Adams and Roy Consultants, Inc., 1988). The building’s address was eventually changed to 449 Court Street.



ing. Whatever had survived of its first floor room was apparently removed in the 1920s, when a garage was created at street level.<sup>9</sup>

The building attracted occasional public attention, as in 1902 when Caleb Stevens Gurney attempted to use a photo-montage to recreate the original appearance of the structure in his book *Portsmouth . . . Historic and Picturesque*. Using a photograph of the building fragment as it stood on Court Street, and relying on "the testimony of many old people, who can remember it distinctly," Gurney produced an interesting picture of the state house. Although Gurney confidently claimed that his reconstruction was "correct, even to the small details," recent study of the structure has shown that the image was misleading.<sup>10</sup> Because his elderly informants recalled the state house only in its final period of decline, when several important architectural elements had already been stripped from the building and when the structure was universally regarded as a "deformity to the town," Gurney was led to produce a picture that conveyed a false sense of crudity. His technique of photo-montage also led Gurney to reproduce inappropriate Greek Revival features that had been added to the building in 1836 or later.

Despite the distorted image of its original character, the old state house remained attractive to Portsmouth antiquarians. As early as 1935, Donald Corley, architectural research advisor to the Works Progress Administration, suggested that the state house be "rebuilt" as the administration building of an ambitious slum clearance project in Portsmouth.<sup>11</sup>

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9. See the *Portsmouth Journal*, November 4, 1854, et seq., for an advertisement for the sale of the property by George W. Danielson, a son of Mads Danielson. For sale of the house in 1855 to John Fritz, baker, see Rockingham County Deeds, 364:35.

10. C. S. Gurney, *Portsmouth . . . Historic and Picturesque* (Portsmouth, N.H.: the author, 1902), 17-21.

11. Donald Corley, "Report on Restoration and Housing Project, Portsmouth, New Hampshire," August 31, 1935. Typescript, files of Strawberry Banke, Inc., Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Corley developed his proposal in consultation with Portsmouth mayor Robert Marvin, architect John Mead Howells, and local historian Stephen Decatur of Kittery Point.

While nothing came of this early proposal, it was not forgotten. In 1958, the founders of Strawberry Banke, Inc., a historical preservation project, made the acquisition of the surviving portion of the building part of their plans, proposing to move the structure to an area to be acquired through an urban renewal program, to reconstruct the missing portions, and to make the restored structure the centerpiece of a group of buildings which would be moved to the site to illustrate the political history of Portsmouth and New Hampshire.

In 1967, supporters of Strawberry Banke who were also members of the New Hampshire House of Representatives secured passage of a law appropriating \$35,000 with which the New Hampshire Division of Parks would purchase the remnant of the old state house from its private owners and move it to a site within the outdoor museum.<sup>12</sup> In 1969, the State of New Hampshire secured title to the building at a price of \$13,500, and in December had the structure moved to Strawberry Banke at an additional cost of \$15,523.<sup>13</sup>

With the old state house moved to a fledgling outdoor museum which wanted the building as the focal point of its public entrance, and with support from the State of New Hampshire, there seemed every chance that the vision first put forward as part of a W.P.A. project might be realized some thirty-five years later. But interest in the old state house slowly waned. Doubts were introduced as to the identity of the structure.<sup>14</sup> Strawberry Banke's

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12. *Laws of the State of New Hampshire*, 1967, chapter 394. See also House Bill 556 of 1965, an earlier attempt to accomplish the same end.

13. Quitclaim deed, Sophie Sados and Fanny Gerber to the State of New Hampshire, 3 October 1969, Rockingham County Deeds, 1988:448. Contract estimates, project no. 8179 (Moving the Old State House), between the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development and Dana Wood Building Movers, Auburn, New Hampshire, 1970 (New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives).

14. Joseph W. Hammond, "The New Hampshire Provincial State House," unpublished seminar paper, Boston University, c. 1970. This study suggested that the structure might have been a portion of the contemporary Portsmouth Alms House, which was also removed from its original site in the autumn of

interpretive program began to emphasize a portrayal of the social history of Portsmouth's South End during three centuries rather than the political history of provincial New Hampshire. Left on mover's cribbing in 1969 to await further plans, the old state house began to deteriorate.

Several attempts, limited in time and funding, were made during the 1980s to resolve the question of the identity of the building.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in 1987, the New Hampshire legislature passed a law appropriating \$125,000 to study the building and make recommendations and plans for its restoration and future use.<sup>16</sup> This work, carried out during the following year under the direction of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, entailed both documentary research and a detailed physical investigation of the building. Out of this scrutiny emerged proof that the structure at Strawberry Banke was indeed a portion of the New Hampshire provincial state house. More important, the state house was revealed as having been one of the most costly and ambitious structures in provincial New Hampshire, built by some of Portsmouth's best craftsmen as a worthy peer of the capitol buildings in neighboring colonies.

From the seventeenth century until after 1750, the New Hampshire government had no public building in which to meet. Although the assembly or house of representatives and the council considered the construction of a state house as early as 1718, these two bodies, and the courts of law, continued for many years to meet in taverns. During the first decades of the century, govern-

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1836 as part of the program to secure both a better court house and a newer alms house for Portsmouth.

15. New Hampshire Provincial State House Research and Planning Project grant file, 1980-81 (New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources); Memoranda, 2 October 1983 and 13 December 1983, James L. Garvin, New Hampshire Historical Society, to Commissioner George Gilman, New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources); Randolph P. Dominic, Jr., "Analysis and Critique of Joseph W. Hammond's 'The New Hampshire Provincial State House,'" October 1983 (Strawbery Banke, Inc.).

16. *Laws of the State of New Hampshire*, 1987, chapter 364.

ment functions were generally centered on Thomas Packer's Portsmouth tavern, at the corner of present-day Pleasant and Court Streets, which had special rooms referred to as the "Court House and Council Chamber;" later, Sarah Priest's and David Horney's taverns in Portsmouth served the same function.

The general court made several other unsuccessful attempts to fund construction of a state house. In 1741, with New Hampshire separated from Massachusetts by the King in Council and provided with a royal governor in the person of Benning Wentworth, the legislature took steps to secure funds for a number of long-delayed internal improvements. The province issued £25,000 in bills, placed them on loan for ten years, and from the interest on this loan allocated funds for the building and repair of forts and a prison, for cutting new roads, for building a light house, and for constructing a state house.<sup>17</sup>

Despite this theoretical funding, nothing was done toward building a state house for another fifteen years. Some progress was made in 1752, when the house of representatives appointed Richard Jenness, Henry Sherburne, Jr., and speaker Meshech Weare a committee to join with a delegate from the council, to select a site for a state house, and to prepare a plan for such a building.<sup>18</sup> In March, 1753, John Downing of the council presented a plan for a brick state house, to measure eighty feet by thirty. In February, 1754, the house voted that "the Parade, so called, by the North meeting-House in Portsmouth . . . is the most suitable and proper place to set the said House upon, PROVIDED the Town of Portsmouth will consent therunto." The house voted to appropriate £2,000 to build the state house, but showed its frugality by adding that the materials be changed from brick to wood and that a cupola, shown on the plan, be omitted.<sup>19</sup> Neither this vote, nor two others by the council and assembly

17. *Laws of New Hampshire*, April 3, 1742, chapter 18.

18. New Hampshire, [*Provincial and State Papers*], 40 vols. (Concord: State of New Hampshire, 1867-1943) 6:168 (hereafter cited as *NHPP*).

19. *NHPP*, 6:193, 259-60, 553. The plan of the state house has not been found.

in 1756, were assented to by Gov. Benning Wentworth.<sup>20</sup> On December 22, 1757, both houses again voted to build, agreeing to increase the appropriation to £2,500 new tenor. This time, Governor Wentworth concurred.<sup>21</sup> Henry Sherburne, Jr. and Clement March of the house joined Mark Hunking Wentworth (Governor Wentworth's brother) and Daniel Warner (Henry Sherburne's father-in-law) of the council to form a building committee charged with contracting for "the building of said house [with] such person or persons as will build the same in the best manner."

The building committee advertised for proposals to construct the state house during the spring of 1758. On March 17, they invited "Any Person or Persons inclining to take said Building, and find all the Materials (except Iron Work) to frame, raise, inclose and compleat all the out-side Work by the Month of *June* next [to] treat with us at Portsmouth aforesaid, any Time next *Week* or the *Week* after." A few weeks later, in April, the committee sought further proposals to finish "The Cellar, Doors, Spouts, Trunks and Decorations thereto belonging; all the Floors, Partitions and Stair Ways; the Lathing and Plaistering, Glazing, Painting, and Chimnies."<sup>22</sup>

It is clear from the original construction accounts that the state house was completed in two stages, and that councilor Daniel Warner assumed primary responsibility for completion of the first phase between the spring of 1758 and the spring of 1760.<sup>23</sup> The state house that emerged from this period of construction looked much like the building as it stood in 1836. It was largely finished on the second floor, which was its principal story. It still lacked a number of exterior features which must have been indicated

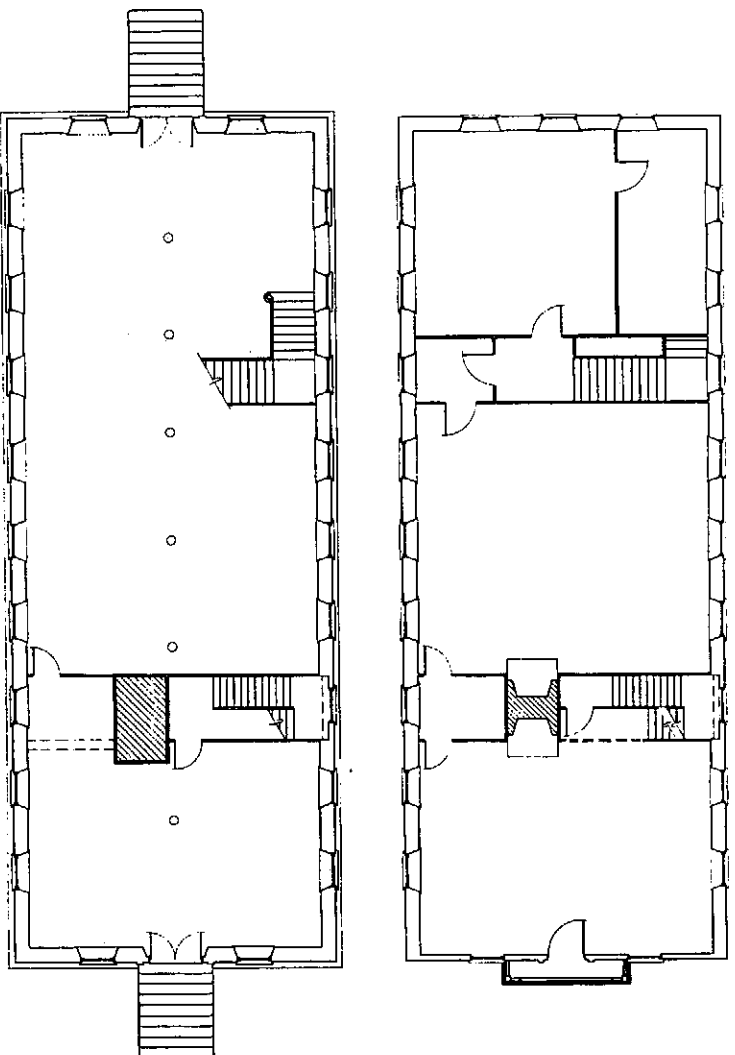
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20. *NHPP*, 6:457, 547.

21. *NHPP*, 6:616-17.

22. *New-Hampshire Gazette*, March 17, 1758 et seq., and April 21, 1758 et seq.

23. Building accounts for the state house, not available to earlier researchers, are found in the Treasury Papers, Record Group V, Box 8, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives, Leon W. Anderson Building, Concord, N.H.

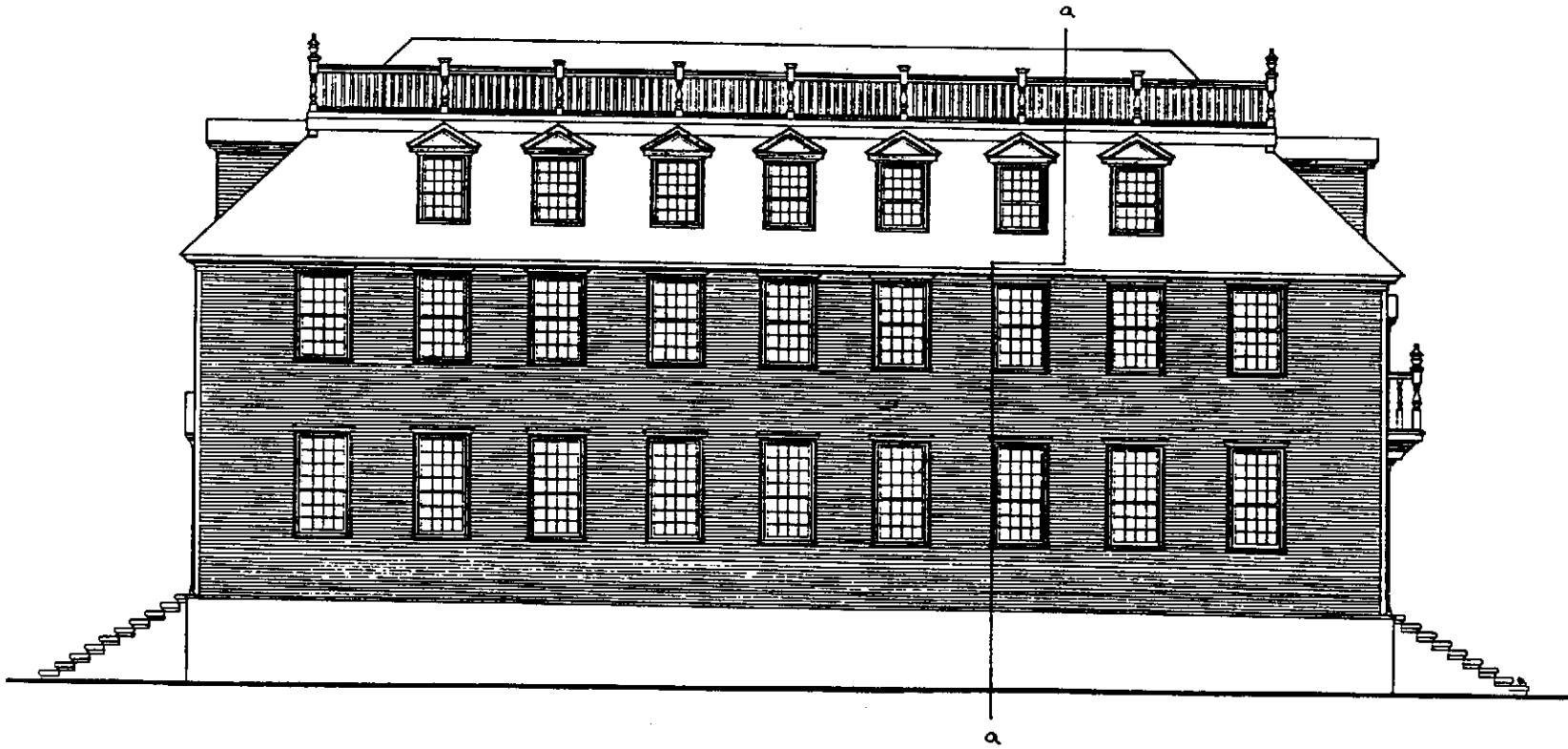


*First (below) and second floor plans of the Old State House. The second floor plan shows the council chamber on the right (east), the house of representatives chamber in the middle, and the unheated court room on the left. Locations of the "lobbies" and the jury room are speculative. Drawing by Paul G. Gosselin, Salmon Falls Architecture, 1988.*

on the plan and which were added in a second phase of construction between 1764 and 1766. Most of these features were apparently removed well before the building was finally carried away in 1836.

As it stood in 1760, the state house was described as built of wood, about eighty feet long, thirty wide, and twenty-one feet post, two stories high. The upper story is divided into three apartments. The easterly room is appropriated for the Council chamber; the middle, for the House of Representatives; and the westerly room is for the Courts of Common Law. The lower story is undivided. In the garret are several convenient lobbies.<sup>24</sup>

24. Nathaniel Adams, *Annals of Portsmouth*, reprint of 1825 ed. (Hampton, N.H.: Peter E. Randall, 1971), p. 199. Adams evidently quoted from a contemporary source, not located.



*South side of the Old State House. The portion to the right of line "a-a" was moved to Court Street in 1836 and remodelled into a dwelling by altering the roof form and adding new chimneys and woodwork. Drawing by Paul G. Gosselin, Salmon Falls Architecture, 1988.*

The building accounts and a physical investigation of the structure reveal that the building closely matched this description. It stood on a high foundation, was topped by a hipped roof, and had only two entrances, on its narrow east and west ends. The second floor was by far the most elaborately finished portion of the building, and was divided into the three chambers mentioned. The first floor, sometimes referred to as the "basement," long remained a single undivided and apparently unheated room.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of a state house with an essentially empty first floor and with its three principal chambers aligned on the second story may seem strange to the modern imagination. Yet this arrangement was the norm in eighteenth century New England. The plan was seen as early as 1658 in the Boston town house, a building which combined a public market on the street level with a court room, town hall, and other chambers on the second floor.<sup>26</sup> This building was used by the governor, council, assembly, and courts until it burned in 1711. It was thereupon replaced on the same site by the structure now known as the Old Massachusetts State House, a brick building measuring thirty-eight by one hundred and ten feet. Rebuilt after a fire in 1747 consumed all but its walls, this capitol, like the later Portsmouth building, had a council chamber at the eastern end of its second floor, a chamber for the house of representatives in the center, and a court room on the western end; its first story was described as serving as a meeting

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25. Physical evidence indicates that this room was eventually subdivided by a partition in the vicinity of the chimney base. In 1813, the Proprietors of the Portsmouth Library, who had occupied the council chamber on the second floor of the state house since 1796, petitioned the New Hampshire General Court to be allowed to partition off another room in the southwest corner of the "lower or ground floor" of the state house. General Court Records—Petitions, June 1813, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives.

26. *Rededication of the Old State House, Boston, July 11, 1882.*, sixth ed. (Boston: by the city, 1893), pp. 26-44 and Appendix A.



place for merchants or as a covered walk for townspeople.<sup>27</sup> Rhode Island's Colony House in Newport, built between 1739 and 1741, had virtually the same floor plan.<sup>28</sup> The New Hampshire state house, then, was a wooden version of an architectural form long established for capitol buildings in New England.

Only the eastern end of the building, housing the council chamber, survived after 1836, and it is clear that even this fragment had been stripped of its interior finish before being moved from the Parade. Still, much physical evidence became apparent in this end of the building once the lath and plaster of 1836 were removed, and these clues, combined with the detailed financial accounts kept by Daniel Warner, offer a good picture of the state house as it stood when the first phase of construction ended early in 1760.<sup>29</sup>

The building committee began by contracting for the mason's work. The contract was taken by Capt. Thomas Peirce of Portsmouth, who began his work in early May, 1758.<sup>30</sup> All descriptions of the site of the state house agree that the Parade was encumbered by an outcropping of ledge which protruded from the street north of the North Meeting House. Peirce's first task would have been the leveling of this ledge, and his charge of £66 old tenor for gunpowder seems to indicate that he had to break the stone by blasting.

Peirce employed about a dozen men in various aspects of the

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27. Ibid. See also, Sara B. Chase, "A Brief Survey of the Architectural History of the Old State House, Boston, Massachusetts," *Old-Time New England* 68 (Winter-Spring 1978):31-49.

28. Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 2d ed., rev. (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1967), pp. 61-63.

29. For a detailed description of the physical evidence, with photographs and drawings, see Clancey, *Historic Structure Report*.

30. "The Committee for Building the State House to Thos. Peirce," account, Treasury Papers, 1759, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives.



*Second floor chamber installed in the Old State House in 1836. Photograph by Jack E. Boucher, Historic American Buildings Survey, 1961.*

masonry work, some of them working for nine weeks on the job. Peirce made no extra charges for stone, so much of the material for the foundation may have come from the underlying ledge itself. A comparison between the height of stone steps that survive from the building and the number of such steps shown in the building accounts allows the height of the foundation to be calculated as somewhat over five feet. This would have placed the state house on a basement of unusual height for the period; most dwellings of the era have unmortared cellar walls with only a foot or so of mortared stone rising above grade.

Once the high foundation walls were ready, perhaps by mid-July, the frame of the state house was erected. Daniel Warner's accounts make it clear that Col. Jeremiah Folsom, Jr., a merchant and tavernkeeper from New Market, took the contract to supply all necessary materials and to "frame, raise, inclose and compleat all the out-side Work" of the building, as called for in the advertisement of March 17th. Folsom's bill of £3,122 old tenor, paid in March, 1759, is the single largest entry in the accounts.<sup>31</sup>

While the full design of the frame of the state house cannot be deduced from the surviving fragment, many of its characteristics are evident. The first story of the building was nearly eleven feet high; the second story, about ten feet. As was common in unusually large buildings in eighteenth-century New Hampshire, the frame has posts and braces of oak, with girts, plates and rafters of eastern white pine. The major timbers of the skeleton are hewn, some of the posts measuring nine by fourteen inches at their tops.

The floors are framed with sawn 2" by 8" planks used as joists. Taking advantage of vast quantities of sawn planking manufactured in the Piscataqua region in the eighteenth century, this

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31. "Province of New Hampshire for the State House to Daniel Warner Esqr.," account, Treasury Papers, 1759, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives. Warner kept his accounts in old tenor, which had four times the face value of new tenor currency; unless otherwise noted, all figures are given in old tenor. See John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Williamsburg, Va.: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1978), pp. 135-36.

method of floor framing was common by 1760 and presaged an increasing use of sawn elements in building frames toward the end of the century. Comparable techniques are seen in the contemporary Moffatt-Ladd House; in the Wentworth-Gardner House (c. 1760), even the posts and girts are sawn.

Warner's accounts show that this skeleton was further strengthened after its raising. Carpenters cut a twenty-five foot section of mast into cellar posts to help support the thirty-by-eighty-foot expanse of the first floor. Local turner John Mills fashioned six solid wood columns which were placed at intervals along the center of the first floor room to support a longitudinal beam overhead. Probably resembling the posts beneath the galleries of eighteenth-century meeting houses, these columns are reminiscent of a "range of Doric pillars" which supported the second floor of the Massachusetts state house.

Once the frame was erected and enclosed, probably by August, Thomas Peirce and his crew of masons returned to build the chimney. It is clear that the building was intended to have only one chimney, providing fireplaces for the council chamber and the house of representatives on the second floor, and for at least one of the "lobbies" or conference rooms in the garret. The court chamber on the west remained unheated until a stove was installed there in the early 1770s.

Evidence within the building shows that the frame was fabricated without a clear idea of the ultimate location of the chimney. When the frame was erected and the bricklayers began their work, a second-floor girt was found to lie in the way of the stack. This was cut, and the frame was crudely pieced out around the new chimney opening, permitting work to continue. Such makeshifts are not uncommon in eighteenth-century buildings, where the carpenter often cut his frame far from its destination and thus had little contact with the masons or joiners who were ultimately responsible for interior arrangements.

Peirce built the stack with bricks and hearth tiles supplied by Daniel Warner, finishing his work by September, 1758. At first, the fireplace bricks were left exposed, or perhaps plastered. Later,

in the fall of 1764, slates were shipped from Boston to finish the hearths or fireplaces with greater elegance.

The building accounts show that finishing of the interior proceeded for another full year, through the fall of 1759. Warner purchased great numbers of nails of various sizes, door hinges, and locks for the use of joiners who were subdividing the interior, with additional quantities of nails supplied by fellow committee member Henry Sherburne, Jr.<sup>32</sup> Warner also bought four boxes of 8" by 10" "London best Crown Glass," apparently totalling 1,441 panes, and one box of 7" by 9" glass, or 456 panes. The larger panes were undoubtedly used in the main windows of the first and second floors, with the smaller panes saved for the building's dormer windows; some glass was probably also set aside for later use in a cupola.

The chief joiner on the job was James March of Portsmouth, who was paid £2,117 for his work; lesser amounts were paid to John Martin and John Martin, Jr. The accounts reveal few details about the interior, merely mentioning the three main chambers on the second floor and such subordinate rooms as a "Lobby," a "Lobby in the Assembly Room," a "Jury Room," and a "Com-mitree Room."

The only description of the interior that has come to light relates to the court room on the western end of the second floor. William H. Hackett, clerk of the United States Circuit Court for New Hampshire, wrote a description which may have been based on recollections of his father, William H. Y. Hackett, a lawyer who would have seen the room in the years after 1822:

In the second story of this building, constructed with the stately magnificence of colonial buildings, was the court-room with its elevated bench, its bar with its circular table covered with green baize, held fast by the round-headed brass tacks which the present generation never sees. The elevated boxes where sat the dignified and con-

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32. "The State House in Portsmouth, Dr.," account kept by Henry Sherburne, Jr., Treasury Papers, 1758, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives.

sequential high sheriff and the humble though none the less indispensable crier, while the dock was flanked on either side with a box in which a deputy of the sheriff constantly sat with argus-eyed care of the prisoner, showed conclusively to the spectators that no guilty man could escape.<sup>33</sup>

This rantalizing description leaves the imagination hungry for images of the other two chambers. The building itself, fortunately, revealed enough evidence to provide a picture of the council chamber's interior. Despite the loss of all its original finish in 1836, the room retained a multitude of notches, blocks, nail holes, and other clues to its original detailing.

The council chamber measured some nineteen feet in width from its fireplace wall to its eastern windows. Its depth, from north to south, was more than twenty-six feet. Its ceilings were some ten feet high. The north and south walls of the room were double-studded, allowing deep window embrasures with seats (which may eventually have been fitted with cushions) and probably with folding shutters. All walls of the room were wainscoted to a height of nearly four feet, and the ceiling was bordered by a heavily moulded cornice. The fireplace on the west wall was set into a splayed recess in a paneled wall, and the six-panel doors of the room were probably fitted with iron latches with brass knobs.

By October, 1759, the first stage of work on the state house was ending. A second crew of masons, led by William Doak of Portsmouth, had consumed large quantities of laths, lime, sand, and hair in plastering the interior. Warner's accounts document the purchase of two brooms for the building, followed by "1 Day Sweeping & Cleaning." At a cost of £15,092.12.1 old tenor, or £3,773.3.0-¼ new tenor, the building stood in usable condition.

Unfortunately for Warner, only £2,500 new tenor had been appropriated for the job. In February, 1761, Warner was summoned before the house to account for the overrun. He answered

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33. William H. Hackett, "The Circuit Court for the New Hampshire District One Hundred Years Ago," *The Green Bag* 2(1890):263-64. I am indebted to Constance T. Rinden for supplying this reference.

that he had charged the province exactly what he had paid for those items that he had bought from others, and that he had charged "the price he sold them to every other person" for items from his own stock. The house voted to pay the bill from contingency funds.<sup>34</sup>

Even in its empty and unfinished state, the building was put to immediate use. In October, the house voted to "illuminate" the structure in celebration of the capture of Quebec, emulating a practice already established at the Massachusetts state house. The bill for this celebration survives, and shows that the windows of the building were lighted with fifty pounds of candles, secured in clay sockets on "Ledges in the Windows" and carefully watched as they burned.

In March, 1761, Andrew Clarkson, clerk of the house of representatives, was appointed to secure tables, chairs, looking glasses, and other furnishings for the council and assembly chambers; the vote was renewed a year later.<sup>35</sup> By June, 1762, a furnishing committee had supplied the state house with most of the furniture it would have during the provincial period, and the house of representatives soon began to meet in the building. The most important purchases of furniture were "three Dozon and [a] half of Common Chairs," made by John Mills, Portsmouth's leading turner, for the house chamber; and "13 Round Setting Chairs," made by Mills' son Richard for the council chamber. Attendance records for the house kept between 1758 and 1761 show that about twenty-six delegates were elected at each session, so the forty-two common chairs supplied by the elder Mills would have been more than ample for the house chamber and could have provided seating in the courtroom as well.

The committee also purchased andirons, hearth brushes, jamb hooks, and fire safes for the fireplaces. They equipped the rooms with seven block tin ink stands and with writing paper. They pro-

34. *NHPP*, 6:766, 769-70.

35. *NHPP*, 6:775, 824.

vided at least two tables, one of which was a "Table for the Council Chamber," covered with green cloth held with brass tacks. Turner Thomas Triggs fashioned ninety-six hat pins which were undoubtedly mounted on wall cleats around the rooms and lobbies of the building.<sup>36</sup>

The committee's account also lists "the King's Coat of Arms if the Assembly think proper to have it." Since the £52 extra cost for these arms was paid, it seems certain that such an ornament was hung in the assembly room.

In 1763, joiner George Gains billed the province for "makeing a Maple Book Case for the Records which I have Lodg'd at the Record Office;" details of the bill suggest that this case was fitted with wheels to permit it to be moved easily. As in the Massachusetts state house, the small, lockable lobbies of the building may have served not only as antechambers but also as storage rooms for books and papers.

In June, 1764, the house voted funds to permit Andrew Clarkson and his committee to proceed with the finishing of the state house.<sup>37</sup> Clarkson died in August, 1765, at the age of forty-one, leaving incomplete accounts for the second phase of construction, but chairmanship of the building committee passed to Mark Hunking Wentworth of the council, who had been a member of the earlier building committee.<sup>38</sup> Wentworth kept meticulous accounts through completion of the work in the spring of 1769, and his records portray a building transformed from a merely serviceable structure to a symbolic fixture in the town and province.<sup>39</sup>

36. "Province of New Hampshire to the Committee for providing Tables, Chairs, &c., for the State House," account, Treasury Papers, 1762, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives; see also, separate bills in the same file.

37. *NHPP*, 7:47.

38. *New-Hampshire Gazette*, August 16, 1765.

39. "Province of New Hampshire to Mark Hunking Wentworth, Chairman of the Committee for finishing the State House pr Vote of the General Assembly," account, Treasury Papers, 1769, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives.



The building committee began by advertising in the *New-Hampshire Gazette* of July 6, 1764, for men to complete the structure:

WANTED (for finishing the STATE HOUSE), a Quantity of clear Boards, Laths, and Lime—likewise Joyners, Painters and Masons will be wanted immediately to compleat the Same, any Person inclined to furnish any or all of said Materials, as well [as] those who incline to undertake the Joyner's Painter's or Mason's Work; are desired to send in their names, and [the] lowest they will do it for, next Wednesday to the Committee appointed to get same done . . . ; all are desired to take notice in making their Calculations, that nothing but the money will be paid them, on the completion of any of their agreements.

Wentworth's accounts begin in July, 1764, with the purchase of lumber and of nails delivered to painter Joseph Symes for the construction of staging. Whatever painting may have been done earlier, this shows that the exterior of the state house was now painted with finish coats. At the end of December, Symes and John Elliott together were paid £2,362.10.0 for painting, with additional bills from Symes alone in 1766, probably for architectural details which had not been completed when the first painting job was done. Despite the high charges of these bills, no unusual or costly painting techniques were discovered during examination of interior or exterior features of the building in 1988.

Experienced stonemasons William Doak and William Caverly completed exterior work which transformed the character of the building. Wentworth purchased "8 Large Stone Steps," and documentary evidence shows that these were set at the western door of the building, probably replacing temporary wooden steps built earlier. In May, 1766, Wentworth paid Joseph Chew of New London [Connecticut] an additional sum for "the large Steps Eastward, also one step to make up the West End Flight [of] Stairs."

These entries lend credibility to the local legend that several surviving steps of Connecticut brown sandstone were salvaged from the old state house.<sup>40</sup> The surviving steps measure seven inches

40. Gurney, *Portsmouth . . . Historic and Picturesque*, p. 43.

in height; thus, a flight of nine such steps would rise to a total of over five feet, demonstrating that the capitol was impressively elevated above the street.

Local joiners, too, transformed the appearance of the structure. In the fall of 1764, Wentworth recorded charges for the construction of a balcony of wood, supported on wooden "knees." Although a surviving wrought iron balcony has been said to have been salvaged from the building, it is clear that the original feature was made of wood. Other joiner's charges at the same time probably reflect the remodeling of the central window on the east end of the council chamber into the door that opened onto this balcony; clear evidence of this door was found during examination of the structure.

Most of the important joiner's work done during the second phase of construction was carried out by Michael Whidden III, one of Portsmouth's leading craftsmen. In December, 1764, Whidden submitted a bill for nearly £2,000 of work. Shortly before, Whidden had finished building the Moffatt-Ladd house, one of the largest and most ambitious dwellings ever constructed in Portsmouth. Whidden employed a number of apprentices and journeymen, having nine apprentices and two journeymen at his side when finishing the Moffatt-Ladd House.<sup>41</sup> He and his crew appear to have finished most or all of the joiner's work remaining to be done on the state house.

Wentworth's accounts also document the transformation of the roof of the state house in 1766. A roof walk or balustrade was added, complete with urns turned by Thomas Triggs from sections of a sixteen-inch mast. Michael Whidden returned under separate contract to build "the Cupelo and other work" for an additional £1,400. It is clear that the original drawing for the building included a cupola, but that this feature was deleted from the structure in the interest of economy. Wentworth's accounts

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41. James I. Garvin, "Academic Architecture and the Building Trades in the Piscataqua Region of New Hampshire and Maine, 1715-1815," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1983, p. 182.

show that the idea of building a cupola never died, but was merely postponed. Regrettably, no view of Portsmouth discovered so far has given the slightest hint of the design of the cupola.

The inauguration of Governor John Wentworth in June, 1767, provided an occasion for the public display of the nearly completed state house. Joiner George Gains billed the province for pine planks and boards, for nails, and for "Eight Days Work [of] my Self & 3 hands more making Tables [and] benches" and in "fixing the State House for the Reception of His Excellency John Wentworth." Several Portsmouth tavernkeepers prepared a hundred sumptuous dinners to be served at these temporary tables, which were covered with twenty-four yards of "fine wide Red Baze." At the conclusion of the banquet, Gains billed the province for "two Days my Self and Boy Clearing [the] State House & Returning of Goods & Furniture that Was Used on the Occasion."<sup>42</sup>

One permanent addition to the state house resulted from this occasion. A "Mahogany Chair for the Gover[nor]" was made for the council chamber by Robert Harrold, Portsmouth's leading cabinetmaker, at a cost of £120. Probably an elegant armchair in the Chippendale style, the piece was fitted with a silk damask cushion sewn by Lydia Peirce at an additional cost of £44.

This was the state house at its height. Later years saw a slow deterioration of the structure, with many alterations and repairs recorded in the files of province and state treasurers. The town of Portsmouth assumed increasing responsibility for maintenance of the building, carrying out major repairs in 1817 and later.<sup>43</sup> Evidence suggests that this work included removal of the cupola and roof walk, replacement of the wooden balcony with one of iron, and innumerable small changes which, in the aggregate, rendered the building "unsightly and inconvenient" by

42. Treasury Papers, 1767, New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives.

43. Portsmouth Town Records, 4:318; Portsmouth Cash Day Book, 1817-1821: June 25-Dec. 31, 1817, as cited in Hammond, "The New Hampshire Provincial State House."

the 1830s. In 1834, the Portsmouth town meeting resolved that the building, once the pride of the province, "ought to be removed."<sup>44</sup>

### Postscript

Following the investigation of 1988, an attempt was made to appropriate funds to reconstruct the missing portions of the building as a museum of New Hampshire history under royal government, a project which would have included a full restoration of the surviving eastern end. Senate Bill 247, introduced by Elaine Krasker of Portsmouth during the legislative session of 1988, would have appropriated \$1,750,000 to accomplish this work. The bill was defeated.

With the building in rapidly deteriorating condition, some means had to be found to protect the structure from the elements. Senator Krasker successfully introduced Senate Bill 61 during the legislative session of 1989. The bill appropriated \$50,000 to mark each element of the state house fragment, to dismantle the structure, and to transport the disassembled building to a safe place of storage.

During the spring and summer of 1990, every surviving piece of the original fabric of the state house was marked and recorded on architectural drawings. The structure was thereupon dismantled, largely by hand, and the marked pieces placed in a forty-foot trailer. The trailer was brought to Concord, and placed under the care and surveillance of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. The old state house today awaits further plans for its preservation and interpretation.

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44. *Portsmouth Journal*, April 12, 1834.

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