



**Old State House  
in 1801**

On view in the Old State House is The Bostonian Society's collection of paintings, prints, Revolutionary War artifacts, wood carvings, ship models and marine paintings. There is a video theatre and a gift shop.

### **The Bostonian Society**

As a city historical society, The Bostonian Society, welcomes new members interested in the history of the city. A research library at 15 State Street, 3rd floor is available to the public for the study of Boston's history. The Society offers a wide variety of programs for school and youth organizations and adult groups. In addition to our regular programs, special tours and lectures can be arranged. For further information about these activities please call (617) 242-5619.

*Prints from the collection  
of The Boston Society.*

### **Hours**

Summer  
April 1–October 31  
Daily 9:30–5:00

Winter  
November 1–March 31  
Weekdays 10:00–4:00  
Saturday 9:30–5:00  
Sunday 11:00–5:00

### **Closed**

New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas

### **Location**

On the Freedom Trail at the intersection of Washington and State Streets. Opposite the Boston National Historical Park Visitor's Center and at the head of Harbor Walk.

### **Phone**

(617) 242-5655

### **MBTA Stops**

State Street (Orange and Blue lines)  
Government Center (Green line)

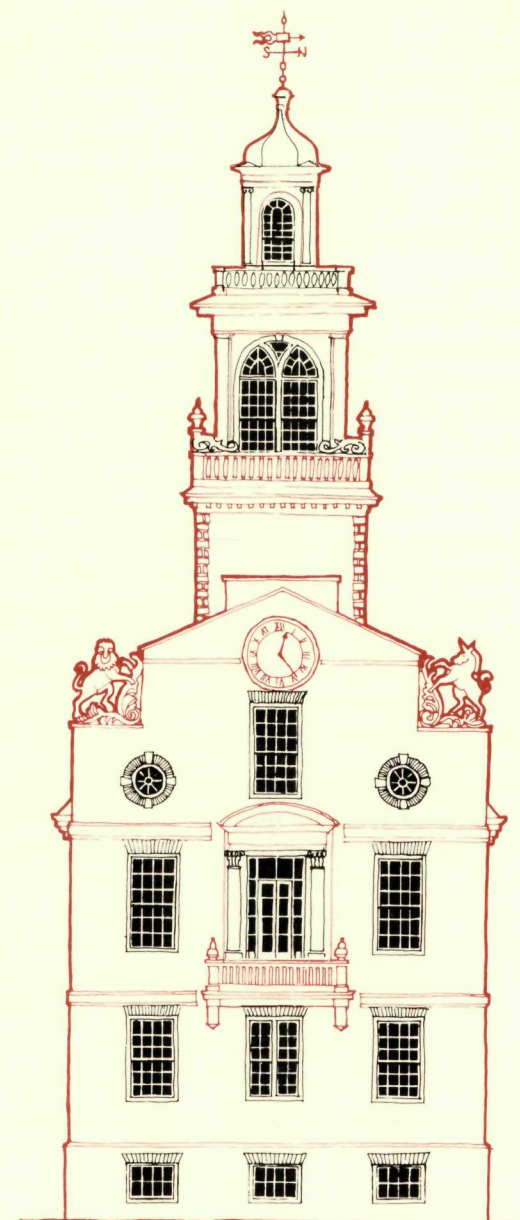
### **Admissions**

Varying fees for adults, senior citizens, students and children. Massachusetts schoolchildren free. Group rates available.

The Old State House, owned by the City of Boston, has been maintained by The Bostonian Society as a museum since 1882. In 1974 the Old State House became a site of the Boston National Historical Park. Today the Bostonian Society, the City of Boston and the National Park Service cooperate in preserving this historic site.



# Old State House



**Boston National Historical Park**

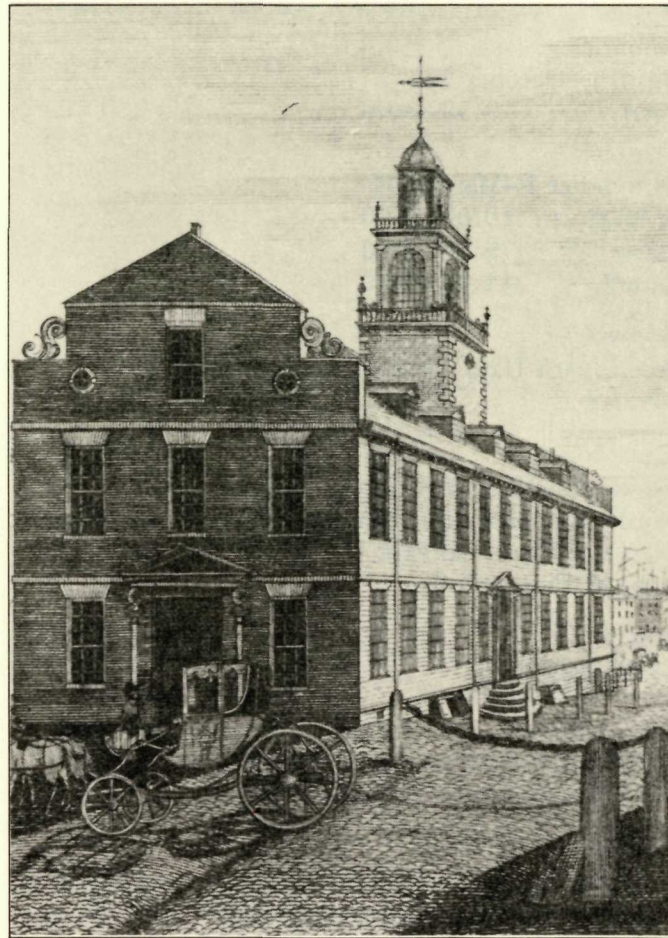
## Old State House

The Old State House, Boston's oldest public building, was built in 1713 to house the offices of the royal colony of Massachusetts and both town and county government operations. It stands on the site of Boston's first Town House of 1657/8 which burned in 1711. As the center of political life and thought in the colony, it has been called the most important public building in America prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

In the 18th century the first floor of the Old State House was used as a Merchant's Exchange, while the basement was rented by John Hancock and others as warehouse space. Upstairs at the east end looking toward Long Wharf and the Harbor was the Council Chamber of the royal governors. Here in February 1761 James Otis argued eloquently against the Writs of Assistance, the British Crown's policy of issuing general search warrants that specified neither charges or individuals. He lost his case but he inspired events that would lead to Revolution fifteen years later. "Otis was a flame of fire," wrote John Adams. "Then and there was the first scene of the first act of opposition to the arbitrary claims of Great Britain. Then and there the child Independence was born."

Representatives Hall, at the opposite end of the building, was the meeting place of the Massachusetts Assembly, one of the more independent of the colonial legislatures. The Assembly began the debates on Englishmen's rights that led to the break with Britain; it was the first body in the colonies to call for unity and the formation of a Continental Congress. While today no trace remains, a visitors' gallery was installed there in 1766 to allow citizens, for the first time in modern history, to watch their legislature in session.

From the balcony at the east side of the building, looking down King Street (now State Street), official proclamations were read. It was here on July 18, 1776, that the Declaration of Independence was first proclaimed to the citizens of Boston. Later that day, the lion and unicorn along with other symbols of royal authority were taken down from the roof of the Old State House and burned in a great bonfire in Dock Square.



View of the west end of the Old State House in 1791

### Boston Massacre

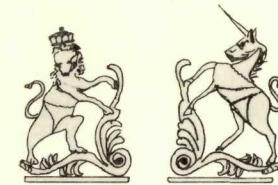
The square beneath the balcony was the site of the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, when a handful of British soldiers fired into a hostile mob. Crispus Attucks was one of the three men killed; two others were mortally wounded. Paul Revere's engraving helped make the massacre a key event in the growing popular resistance to the British rule. Today a circle of paving stones marks the spot.

### Temple of Liberty

After the Revolution, the Old State House continued as the seat of Massachusetts government until a new State House was built on Beacon Hill in 1798.



Boston Massacre  
Paul Revere Engraving



Lion and Unicorn detail from the Old State House

From 1830 to 1841 the building was used as Boston's City Hall and later it was rented for commercial use. In 1881 the Bostonian Society was formed to promote the study of the history of Boston, and to urge the preservation of the Old State House. It was at this time that replicas of the lion and unicorn were returned to the roof of the Old State House where they remain today. Since 1882, the building, once referred to as a "Temple of Liberty", has been maintained by the Society as its museum of Boston's history. The Old State House on the Freedom Trail, is owned by the City of Boston and maintained in cooperation with the National Park Service. It is a site within the Boston National Historical Park.