

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Old State House, Second Town House

AND/OR COMMON Old State House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER corner Washington and State Streets

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Boston

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Eighth

STATE

Massachusetts

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CODE  
025

COUNTY

Suffolk

CODE

025

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

| CATEGORY  | OWNERSHIP                                  | STATUS   | PRESENT USE      |  |
|---|--|--|------------------|--|
| ___DISTRICT                                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED       | ___AGRICULTURE   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | ___PRIVATE                                 | ___UNOCCUPIED                                      | ___COMMERCIAL    | ___PARK                                    |
| ___STRUCTURE                                    | ___BOTH                                    | ___WORK IN PROGRESS                                | ___EDUCATIONAL   | ___PRIVATE RESIDENCE                       |
| ___SITE   | <b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>                  | <b>ACCESSIBLE</b>                                  | ___ENTERTAINMENT | ___RELIGIOUS                               |
| ___OBJECT                                       | ___IN PROCESS                              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES RESTRICTED | ___GOVERNMENT    | ___SCIENTIFIC                              |
|   | ___BEING CONSIDERED                        | ___YES UNRESTRICTED                                | ___INDUSTRIAL    | ___TRANSPORTATION                          |
|   |  | ___NO  | ___MILITARY      | ___OTHER                                   |

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME City of Boston, Office of the Mayor (leased to Bostonian Society)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

New City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Suffolk County Registry of Deeds

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Suffolk County Court House, Somerset Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None

DATE

\_\_\_FEDERAL \_\_\_STATE \_\_\_COUNTY \_\_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                |                                       | CHECK ONE                                   | CHECK ONE   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT       | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR            | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED    |   |   |

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old State House, located at the intersection of Washington and State Streets, Boston, is the oldest extant public building of Georgian design in the United States. Built in 1712-13 as Boston's Second Town House, it replaced the original wooden town house, completed on the same site in 1658 and destroyed in the great fire of October 2-3, 1711. The new building, like its predecessor, served as the seat of government not only for the Town of Boston but for Suffolk County and the Province of Massachusetts Bay as well. The Second Town House was itself nearly destroyed by fire on December 9, 1747, but was rebuilt the following year, utilizing the surviving exterior walls. The plan and architectural details of the 1712-13 building are unknown because the fire of 1747 destroyed the original records relating to the construction of the building.

As rebuilt in 1748, the Second Town House was a handsome 2 1/2-story brick edifice in the Late Georgian style. The building stood in the center of King Street (now State Street) with its gable ends facing east and west. The main entrance at the west end was at street level. Framed by engaged colonnettes bearing scrolled brackets, the door was topped by an angular pediment. Round windows adorned both gable ends, and "steps" in the parapet at the west end were filled with baroque scrolls.

There were also doors with angular pediments and engaged colonnettes at the middle of both long sides. The interior of the ground story was one large hall (except for the two small offices at the north side and the two staircases which led to the second story) which served as a merchants' exchange. The second story was supported on the interior by a row of 10 Doric columns, presumably on the long axis. The center of the dormered roof was topped by a square tower or cupola, with its three stories finished according to the Tuscan, Doric, and Ionic orders.

The east end of the Town House faced King Street as it sloped down to the waterfront. This facade was dominated at the second floor level by a fine doorway, framed by Corinthian pilasters and topped by a segmental pediment, which led from the Governor's Council Chamber to the small balcony from which the laws were customarily proclaimed to the sound of trumpet and beat of drum. The east gable end was more ornately treated than that at the west end, with steps in the parapet filled by vigorously carved figures of the British Lion and Unicorn. The central circular panel was evidently first filled by a sundial; the clock that superseded it first appeared in a view made in 1826.

Access to the second floor was provided by two interior stairways leading to hallways between the three main rooms. Of these, the Governor's Council Chamber, located at the east end and measuring 32 feet square, was the most ornately furnished and decorated. In the middle of the building was the Representatives' Chamber, about 32 by 38 feet in size, with small lobbies in the stair halls at either side. The speaker's chair was on the south

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD  | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC          | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING     | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE           | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY HISTORIC     | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION           | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW                              | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS              | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE                       | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION              | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY                         | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING            | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                            | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899            | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE                | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY                       | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900-                | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS          | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT * | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)     |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   |  |

## \* Development of English Colonies, 1700-1775

SPECIFIC DATES 1713;1748

BUILDER/ARCHITECT original work-unknown  
1830 renovation - Isaiah Rogers

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old State House, located at the corner of Washington and State Streets in Boston, Massachusetts, is the oldest extant public building of Georgian design in the United States. During the 18th century, the building was the scene of a number of events which contributed to the political revolution which preceded the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. Erected in 1712-13 as Boston's Second Town House, the Old State House also housed the governmental offices of the Province of Massachusetts Bay and of Suffolk County. From 1776 until 1798, the building was the seat of government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, becoming the Old State House on the completion of the new Bulfinch State House on Beacon Hill.

The Old State House was nearly destroyed by fire (only the exterior walls remained standing) in 1747 but was rebuilt the following year. Remodeled in 1830 and again in 1882, the building has been substantially altered inside but retains much of its original character on the exterior. Owned by the City of Boston and administered by the Bostonian Society, the Old State House is open to the public Monday through Saturday from 9 to 4.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Boston's Second Town House was erected to replace the original town house on the same site, a wooden structure completed in 1658 and destroyed in the great fire of October 2-3, 1711. Like its predecessor, the Second Town House was intended to serve a number of governmental functions. The Massachusetts General Assembly directed the committee in charge of its construction to "fit the East Chamber (on the second floor) for the Use of His Excellency the Governor & the Hon<sup>ble</sup> the Council, the Middle Chamber for the House, the West Chamber for the Sup<sup>r</sup> & Inf<sup>r</sup> Courts". Two small offices were provided on the first floor, "one for the Secretary" of the province, "the other for the Register of Deeds in the County of Suffolk"; the remainder of the ground floor was kept open as a "Walk for the Merchants". Construction costs were divided among the province (one half) and the town and county (one quarter each).

Boston town meetings were held in the Middle of House Chamber until 1743 when they were moved to the newly completed Faneuil Hall. On December 9, 1747, fire gutted the interior of the Town House, destroying furniture,

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- "Final Report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission to the Congress of the United States", (Boston, 1960).
- Howe, Mark De Wolfe and Samuel Chamberlain, Boston Landmarks (New York, 1960).
- Morrison, Hugh Early American Architecture (New York, 1952).
- Reed, Charles F. "The Old State House and Its Predecessor, the First Town House", Proceedings of the Bostonian Society (Boston, 1908).

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

|   |      |             |                 |   |      |         |          |
|---|------|-------------|-----------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1, 9 | 3 30 5 3, 0 | 4, 6 9, 1 4 5 0 | B |      |         |          |
|   | ZONE | EASTING     | NORTHING        |   | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C |      |             |                 | D |      |         |          |
|   |      |             |                 |   |      |         |          |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The property on which the Old State House (Second Town House) is located and the traffic island immediately east of it (the location of the "Boston Massacre" stones) divide State Street into northern and southern branches between Washington and Congress Streets. Both the property and the island are included in the boundaries of the National Historic Landmark designation for the Old State House, shown in red on the accompanying street map. The subway station located beneath the eastern portion of the Old State House is, of necessity, included in these boundaries but does not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | COOE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | COOE | COUNTY | CODE |

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Charles W. Snell, Historian 12/20/67

|                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| ORGANIZATION               | DATE         |
| Historic Sites Survey, NPS | 7/24/75      |
| STREET & NUMBER            | TELEPHONE    |
| 1100 L. Street, NW.        | 202-523-5464 |
| CITY OR TOWN               | STATE        |
| Washington                 | D.C.         |

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS

NATIONAL      STATE      LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY   |                     |
| I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER |                     |
| DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION                 | DATE <u>12/7/77</u> |
| ATTEST:  | DATE _____          |
| KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  |                     |

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1 ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

side, and wooden seats for the members were arranged around the other sides of the room. Over one door were the arms of the colony, carved, painted, and gilded by Moses Deshon in 1750. Hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the room was a large wooden codfish, "Emblem of the staple of Commodities of the Province." In 1766 a gallery for visitors was provided by utilizing space over the west lobby. The room at the west end, measuring about 22 by 32 feet, was the Court Chamber. This housed the superior and inferior courts until a new courthouse building was completed in 1769. The third floor, under the roof, was occupied in colonial times by a number of offices and committee rooms.

In 1776 the building became the State House of the new Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The large size of the new legislature necessitated an enlargement of the representatives' Chamber, and since the former Court Chamber was not being used, the stairway and lobby between the two rooms were removed and they were thrown together, making a large hall 57 1/2 feet in length. A new stairway and lobby, 11 feet wide, with a visitor gallery over it, was also built at the west end of the building. The former Governor's Council Chamber at the east end was then used for the State Senate. Revolutionary animosities led to the removal of the lion and unicorn from the east gable, and they were not replaced until 1882. The present figures, made of hammered copper rather than wood, were installed in 1901.

The building became the Old State House on January 11, 1798, when the Massachusetts legislature moved to the new State House on Beacon Hill (designed by Charles Bulfinch and constructed in 1795-97). In 1803, the Town of Boston acquired full title to the building and for the next 27 years rented space in it for various commercial purposes. In 1830 the structure was remodeled by Isaiah Rogers, noted architect of the Greek Revival style, for use as Boston's City Hall. The principal new feature of the replanned interior was a spiral staircase in the center of the building. To install it, old transverse floor girders were cut out in the center section, their ends being carried by iron rods to the roof trusses on the third floor. Classical porticoes were also added at the east and west ends of the building.

From 1840 to 1880 the Old State House was again rented by the City to a number of commercial firms. During this period, the spiral stairway was removed and the interior remodeled several times. By 1876 the exterior had been defaced by a high mansard roof and numerous business signs, and the building as a whole was so badly deteriorated that the City Council decided it should be demolished. However, strong local opposition to

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CONTINUATION SHEET

2

ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

3

the demolition and a purchase offer from the City of Chicago (see significance) convinced Boston to preserve the building, and the Old State House was accordingly "restored to its pre-Revolutionary condition" in 1881-82.

The restoration was based on a plan found in Cincinnati by Boston City Architect George A. Clough and assumed to be that for the reconstruction of 1748; only later was it proved to be the plan for the Rogers remodeling of 1830. Thus the spiral stairway was reinstalled and equipped with Georgian detail copied from the Shirley-Eustis House (c. 1747) at Roxbury, Massachusetts. While no further attempt has been made to restore the 18th century floor plan, some progress has been made in recent years toward returning the decorative detailing of the second floor rooms and the Council Chamber in particular to its probable character c. 1748-76.

The traffic island at the eastern end of the eastern end of the Old State House is now the location of a circle of 18th century cobblestones and a bronze marker commemorating the "Boston Massacre" of March, 1770. The stones, part of the paving of State (then King) Street at the time of the "Massacre", were originally set at the center of the intersection of State and Congress Streets but were moved to their present site in 1972 when the alignment of those streets was altered slightly.

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

books, portraits, and government records. The exterior walls survived and were retained when the building was reconstructed the following year. The cost (£ 3,705:11:4) was again divided among the province, the town, and the county, according to the original proportions.

Of the many significant events with which the Town House was associated during the mid to late 18th century, three serve to illustrate the growing colonial opposition to British authority evidenced in all. In November, 1747, one month before the disastrous fire, Commodore Knowles, commander of a British fleet then anchored in Boston harbor, ordered out a press gang which seized sailors from other ships and even landsmen from the waterfront. The reaction in Boston was immediate and violent. A crowd of several thousand gathered outside the Town House and threw stones and bricks through the windows of the Council Chamber. Three days of rioting followed, during which several of Knowles' officers were taken hostage and the Commodore threatened to bombard the town. Finally, through the intervention of the Governor and the General Court (the legislative assembly), the impressed men were released and order was restored.

On December 16, 1761, James Otis appeared before the Superior Court, which met in the Council Chamber of the Town House, and delivered his spirited though unsuccessful argument against the issuance of Writs of Assistance. In line with the New British policy of strict enforcement of the Trade Acts, Charles Paxton, the Crown's Commissioner of Customs at Boston, had applied to the Court for authority to use the Writs in searching for smuggled goods. Blank forms on which the customs officer could enter names and descriptions at his own discretion, the Writs empowered the officer to enter, by force if necessary, any private dwelling or warehouse where he suspected smuggled goods might be hidden. There is no exact record of Otis' speech, but John Adams, who witnessed the event, summarized its significance in a letter written some 50 years later: "Then and there was the first scene of the first act of opposition to the arbitrary claims of Britain. Then and there the child Independence was born."

British troops occupied the lower story of the Town House late in 1769 and on March 5, 1770, the square at the eastern end of the building became the scene of the "Boston Massacre" when Redcoats on duty there fired on a mob which had been pelting them with snow-balls, killing three and wounding six others, two of them mortally. Samuel Adams appeared almost immediately in the Council Chamber to demand the removal of the British garrison to Castle William in Boston harbor. On October, 1770, John Adams and Josiah

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CONTINUATION SHEET

2

ITEM NUMBER

8 PAGE

3

Quincy defended the troops involved in the "Massacre" at their trial in the same room.

On July 18, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read for the first time in Boston from the balcony of the Town House and on that evening all royal emblems were removed from the building and burned. The Town House officially became the State House in 1780, when John Hancock was inaugurated in the Council Chamber as the first Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and served in that capacity until 1798, when the legislature moved to the new State House on Beacon Hill designed by Charles Bulfinch. Thereafter, the State Street building was identified as the Old State House. In 1803, the Commonwealth sold its interest in the Old State House to the Town of Boston, and the Counties of Suffolk and Norfolk (originally a part of Suffolk) followed suit. For the next 27 years, Boston leased portions of the building to various tenants, including attorneys, saddlers, hairdressers, and a Masonic lodge.

In 1830 the Old State House was remodeled by Isaiah Rogers, noted architect of the Greek Revival style, for use as Boston's City Hall (the town had incorporated as a city in 1823). The interiors were completely replanned at this time and classical porticoes were added to the eastern and western elevations of the building. The city government moved to other quarters in 1840 and for the next four decades the Old State House was again occupied by commercial tenants. During this period the interior was remodeled several times, and by 1876 the exterior had been defaced by a high mansard roof and numerous business signs. The building as a whole was so badly deteriorated that the City Council decided that it should be demolished. However, William H. Whitmore, a member of the Council, and other influential citizens organized the Boston Antiquarian Club and began a campaign for retention of the building.

When the City of Chicago offered to transfer the Old State House to Lincoln Park, paying all removal and reassembly costs, Boston was stung into preserving the building on its original site, and in 1882-82 an extensive restoration program was carried out. Unfortunately, the plan on which the work was based, then assumed to be that for the reconstruction of 1748, later proved to be that for Isaiah Rogers' 1830 remodeling; as a result, the restored interior was more closely related to the Greek Revival than to the Georgian style. Within recent years some progress has been made toward correcting this mistake in the second floor rooms and in the Council Chamber in particular.

The Boston Antiquarian Club incorporated as the Bostonian Society in 1882 and, under a long-term lease from the City, assumed the responsibility of furnishing the Old State House and operating it as a museum of local history. In addition to its regular exhibits, ranging from paintings to shipwright's



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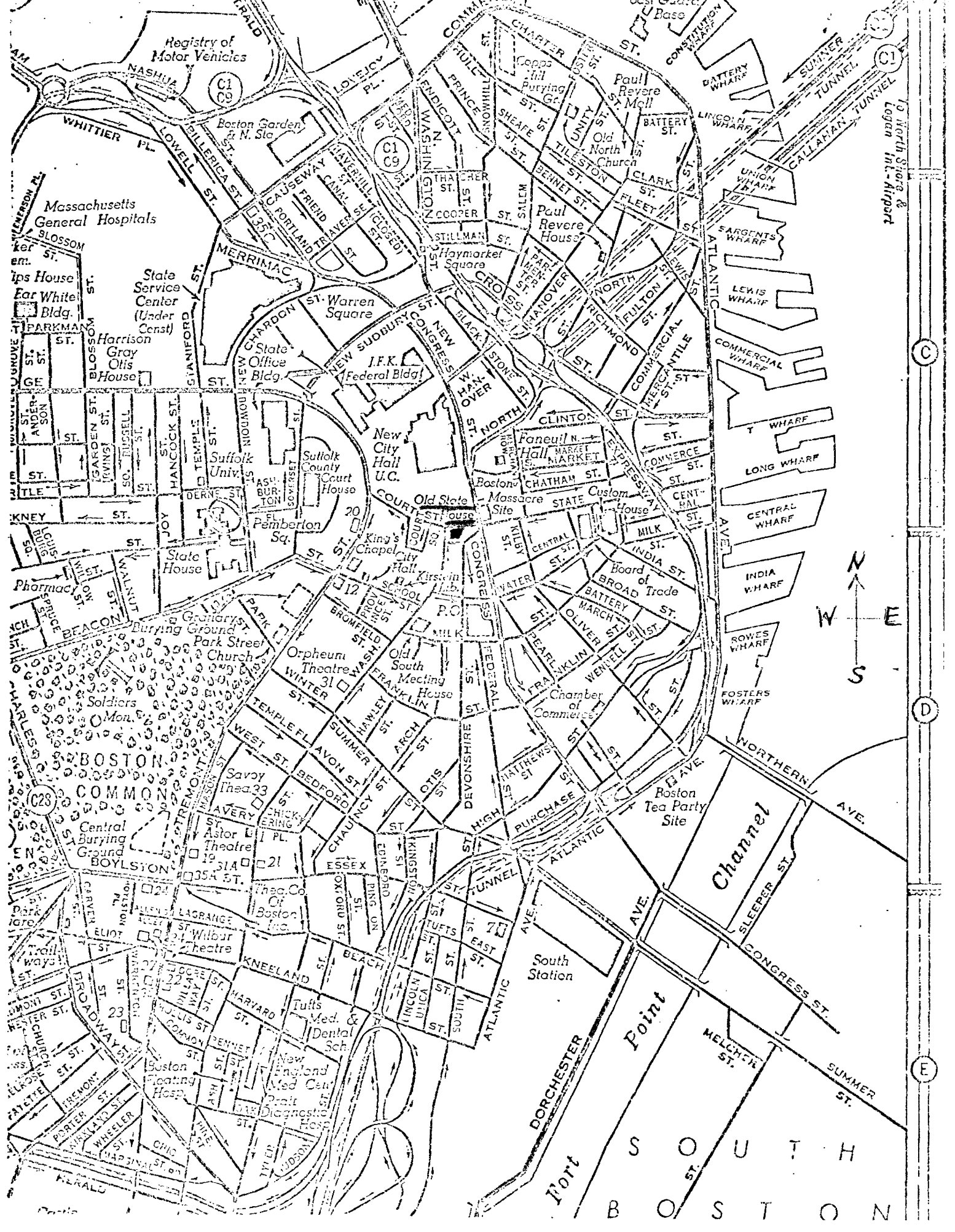
8

PAGE

4

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tools, the Society has assembled an excellent research library and an extensive collection of historic photographs of Boston.





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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

28

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PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

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**1 NAME**

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Old State House, Second Town House

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Old State House

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

Boston

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

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Suffolk

STATE

Massachusetts

**3 PHOTO REFERENCE**

PHOTO CREDIT Polly M. Rettig, Landmark Review Project DATE OF PHOTO April, 1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT

Historic Sites Survey, NPS, 1100 L. Street, NW., Washington, D.C.

**4 IDENTIFICATION**

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET  
east and north (long) elevations.

PHOTO NO 2



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**4 IDENTIFICATION**

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET  
north (long) and west elevations.

PHOTO NO 1



PETER HINES  
FOR COUNCIL

FOR CITY COUNCIL  
KILGARRIFF

ONE WAY

DO NOT  
J  
HALL

669 800

94. (381) - 4623 Second Boston Town House  
(Old State House), 1712-13, 1748  
West end (left) and south side  
Boston, Mass.

N.P.S. Photo, 1967





7. No other building in the thirteen colonies saw more of the popular movement toward independence than the Second Boston Town House.

National Park Service photograph



93. (380) - 4621 Second Boston Town House  
(Old State House), 1712-13, 1748  
East end and north side  
Boston, Mass.

53

N.P.S. Photo, 1967



92. (379) - 4624 Second Boston Town House  
(Old State House), 1712-13, 1748  
West end and north side  
Boston, Mass.

N.P.S. Photo, 1967