

# OLD SOUTH MEETING HOUSE

310 Washington Street / 2 Milk Street, Boston



## BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION STUDY REPORT

Petition # 268.20

Boston Landmarks Commission | Office of Historic Preservation  
City of Boston

Approved by:



Elizabeth Sherva, Executive Director

May 20, 2025

Date

Approved by:



Bradford C. Walker, Chair

May 20, 2025

Date

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Cover image: Old South Meeting House, Boston, 2024, Gretchen Pineo.

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## 1. DESIGNATION

The Boston Landmarks Commission was established by Ch. 772 of the Acts of 1975 as amended to identify and safeguard the public's interest in preserving historic sites that represent distinctive features of the political, economic, social, cultural or architectural history of the city. As part of the process of designating a new Landmark or District, a Study Report is prepared to locate and describe the site; to provide a record of the rationale for creating the designation; to identify the character-defining features; and to list Standards and Criteria that will guide the Boston Landmarks Commission in evaluating proposed changes in the future.

The designation of the Old South Meeting House was initiated in 2020 after a petition was submitted by then-Commissioner Lynn Smiledge to the Boston Landmarks Commission asking that the Commission designate the property under the provisions of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended (hereinafter "Chapter 772"). The purpose of such a designation is to recognize and protect a physical feature or improvement that in whole or part has historical, cultural, social, architectural, or aesthetic significance.

The Old South Meeting House meets the following criteria for designation as a Boston Landmark as established in Section 4 of Chapter 772:

A. Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places as provided in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

The Old South Meeting House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960. This designation is recognized by the Secretary of the Interior for sites of national significance. The Old South Meeting House is also part of the Boston National Historical Park, established by Congress on October 1, 1974, to preserve resources associated with the opening campaigns of the Revolutionary War and the founding of America.

B. Structures, sites, objects, man-made or natural, at which events occurred that have made an outstanding contribution to, and are identified prominently with, or that best represent some important aspect of the cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the city, the commonwealth, the New England region or the nation.

The Old South Meeting House is nationally significant for its association with events in Boston that led to the American colonies' revolt in 1775. Most notably, the building was the site of large public meetings following the altercation on March 5, 1770, that became known as the Boston Massacre, and as the staging ground for the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773. Additionally, the Old South Meeting House is nationally significant for its association with the history of historic preservation.

C. Structures, sites, objects, man-made or natural, associated significantly with the lives of outstanding historical personages.

The Old South Meeting House is associated with several outstanding historical personages in American history. Members of its congregation include Phillis Wheatley, Samuel Adams, James Otis, William Dawes, and Benjamin Franklin.

D. Structures, sites, objects, man-made or natural, representative of elements of architectural or landscape design or craftsmanship that embody distinctive characteristics of a type inherently valuable for study of a period, style or method of construction or development, or a notable work of an architect, landscape architect, designer, or builder

whose work influenced the development of the city, the commonwealth, the New England region, or the nation.

Old South Meeting House, originally constructed in 1729-1730, is nationally significant as a rare example of a colonial church that combines an early Georgian exterior influenced by Christopher Wren's work with the traditional interior proportions and seating plan of the seventeenth-century four-square meeting house. Old South Meeting House was constructed by Joshua Blanchard (1692-1748), a master mason who later erected Faneuil Hall in 1740-1742.

Therefore, the Boston Landmarks Commission staff recommends that the Commission designate the Old South Meeting House as a **Landmark** under Chapter 772; and further recommends that the boundaries of the designated Landmark correspond to the Assessor's parcels 0303905000, 0303905001, 0303906000, 0303906001, and 0303904000. The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Boston Landmarks Commission and/or Commission staff shall be required for any proposed alterations to the following elements:

- The Old South Meeting House (parcel numbers 0303905000 and 0303905001):
  - The exterior envelope of the Old South Meeting House, including any attached enclosures or awnings used for retail purposes.
    - Also, any physical attachment to or contact between the Old South Meeting House and any existing or new structures on this parcel.
  - Certain landscape elements including:
    - Brick paving;
    - Fences and gates.
  - Certain interior elements of the Old South Meeting House including:
    - Great hall (meeting room) including galleries, all fixed furnishings and fixed display cases, and all architectural features;
    - Spiral staircase at west entrance tower;
    - Spiral staircase to east second-floor gallery;
    - Staircase from second to third-floor galleries at southeast corner.
  - Any new structures that will be fixed to the ground on this parcel.
- The alley to the north of the Old South Meeting House (parcel numbers 0303906000 and 0303906001) – Commission review shall be limited to:
  - Any permanent new construction, paving, or fencing.
  - Any physical attachment to or contact between the Old South Meeting House and any existing or new structures on this parcel.
- The parcel to the east of the Old South Meeting House which currently contains a one-story retail building (parcel number 0303904000) – Commission review shall be limited to:
  - Any permanent new construction, paving, or fencing.
  - Any physical attachment to or contact between the Old South Meeting House and any existing or new structures on this parcel.
- Any below-ground digging on any of the included parcels, including any expansion or additional excavation of the Old South Meeting House basement.
- **Exclusions:**
  - Basement interior finishes, partitions, and office furniture;
  - Interior of enclosed entry vestibule (reception area) behind tower;
  - Interior of entry vestibule at south wall;
  - Movable furniture, exhibit furnishings, and display cases that are not permanently attached to architectural elements;

- Current audiovisual equipment at the time of designation, and any reasonable upgrades to that equipment that do not require significant new attachment points to architectural elements;
- Freestanding exterior elements that do not attach to the building or the ground; i.e. movable signage.

If designated, the Standards and Criteria in section 7 of this report will serve as guidelines for the Commission's review of proposed changes to the elements listed above, with the goal of protecting the historic integrity of the landmark and its setting. The designation would not regulate use.



**Map 1.** Map showing the boundaries of the Landmark designation in red.

## 2. LOCATION AND ZONING

According to the City of Boston's Assessing Department, the Old South Meeting House (assessor's parcel numbers 0303905000 and 0303905001) is located at 2 Milk St, Boston, MA 02108. However, the Assessing Department lists the owner's mailing address as 310 Washington St, Boston, MA 02108, which is also the address typically used by the organization that occupies the building (Revolutionary Spaces).

According to the City of Boston's Assessing Department, the alley to the north of the Old South Meeting House (assessor's parcel numbers 0303906000 and 0303906001) has an address of 308 Washington St, Boston, MA 02108.

According to the City of Boston's Assessing Department, the one-story retail structure to the east of the Old South Meeting House (assessor's parcel number 0303904000) has an address of 4 Milk St, Boston, MA 02108.

The current zoning district for all of the included parcels is the Midtown Cultural District, and the property is also located in the zoning sub-district of Newspaper Row/Old South Protection Area, which currently allows for an as-of-right maximum building height of 125 feet and a floor area ratio of 8. The zoning overlays for the property include a Restricted Parking District and a Shadow Impact Area.

The Boston Planning and Development Agency (now the Planning Department) adopted PLAN: Downtown in December of 2023. As of April 2025, the Planning Department released an updated draft Downtown zoning text amendment and a draft amendment to PLAN: Downtown. The draft Zoning Amendment has raised concerns among preservationists as it calls for including a "SKY-R" zone that would allow 500' towers throughout the Ladder Blocks under certain circumstances as well as "SKY" zones that would permit structures to be built up to the ceiling allowed by the FAA. The block containing the Old South Meeting House is currently located in a "SKY" zone. Thus, the new zoning proposed by the City would remove the protection currently afforded by the Newspaper Row/Old South Protection Area and would allow structures up to the FAA limit to be built around the Old South Meeting House.

The Old South Meeting House is part of the Boston National Historical Park. See section 6.4 Planning Context for more information.

### **3. OWNERSHIP AND OCCUPANCY**

According to the City of Boston's Assessor's records, the Old South Meeting House has two parcel numbers: 0303905000 and 0303905001, both of which are listed as owned by the Old South Association (OSA). However, as of 2020, the Old South Association merged with The Bostonian Society (TBS) and is now Revolutionary Spaces, Inc. (RSI). All of the Old South Association properties now belong to Revolutionary Spaces, Inc.

Old South Meeting House was used historically as a Puritan space for worship and public gathering space, a British riding school, a Civil War recruiting station, a Post Office and is now utilized as a museum operated by Revolutionary Spaces, Inc. There is also a gift shop in the upper basement level.

According to the Assessor's records, parcel 0303905000 (associated with the museum) is used by a charitable organization and has a total assessed value of \$4,099,500.00, with the land valued at \$2,854,400.00 and the building valued at \$1,245,100.00 for fiscal year 2025. Parcel 0303905001 (associated with the gift shop) is used for retail and has a total assessed value of \$355,500.00 with a land value of \$0 and a building value of \$355,500 for fiscal year 2025.

According to the City of Boston's Assessing Department, the alley to the north of the Old South Meeting House has two parcel numbers: 0303906000, which is owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and 0303906001, which is owned by Winter St. Enterprises. Parcel 0303906000, which is owned by the MBTA, has a total assessed value of \$592,500, with the land valued at \$592,200.00 and the building valued at \$300.00 for fiscal year 2025. Parcel 0303906001, which is owned by Winter St. Enterprises, has a total assessed value of \$48,300, with a land value of \$0.00 and a building value of \$48,300.00 for fiscal year 2025. Currently, there is an MBTA head house

for the State Street T station located on the parcel. Winter St. Enterprises does not currently appear to occupy or have any physical structures located on the parcel.

According to the City of Boston's Assessing Department, the parcel to the east of the Old South Meeting House containing a one-story retail structure is owned by the Old South Association (which is now Revolutionary Spaces). The structure is currently occupied by a small boutique.

## **4. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

The Old South Meeting House was built in 1729-1730 as the second meeting house for its Puritan congregation, replacing a 1699 structure on the same site. The design is credited to Robert Twelves, a carpenter about whom little is known, and the construction to Joshua Blanchard, a master mason who also built Faneuil Hall. The Old South Meeting House combines the Georgian style with elements of traditional New England meeting house design. The building is well preserved and maintained.

### **4.1 A History of Alterations**

Over the course of nearly three centuries, the Old South Meeting House has been modified to reflect changes in use, social and political context, architectural styles, and structural concerns. Today, visitors can see physical traces of each era of the meeting house's history from 1729 to the present. Much of the information in this section comes from *An Architectural History of the Old South Meeting House*, published by the Old South Association in Boston in 1995.

The original interior of the Old South Meeting House was oriented in a similar fashion to what visitors see today in the space, with the pulpit on axis with the Milk Street entrance on the south side of the building. The location of the pulpit and the arrangement of the pews in a wide U shape brought the congregants closer to the minister. The floor and lower gallery were filled with box pews, while the upper gallery contained benches for apprentices, servants, and enslaved people.

When the British occupied Boston during the American Revolution from 1775 to 1776, they used the Old South Meeting House as a riding school – committing a symbolic desecration of an iconic site of democracy. They gutted the interior of the meetinghouse, tearing out the pews, the pulpit, and the galleries (except for the east galleries). In 1782, the congregation began raising money to restore the Meeting House.

The new interior was designed in 1782-83 by mason Thomas Dawes, who was an Old South congregant and a member of the Sons of Liberty. Instead of box pews, Dawes laid out “slip” pews that were long and narrow, allowing more people to fit into the space. Dawes rebuilt the missing galleries and pulpit (all of which would be later altered). Elements from Dawes’ reconstruction that can still be seen today include the balustrades and the columns that support the lower gallery, as well as paneled wainscoting – about half of which survives today from 1783.

In the nineteenth century, the Old South congregants continued to support the renovation and modernization of the meeting house. In 1808 the pulpit was replaced, and a ceiling-mounted sounding board was installed in place of the previous, wall-mounted version. The central “wine glass” portion of this pulpit and the sounding board are still visible today.

In 1838-39, the curving stair was added to the clock tower, blocking one of the ground floor entrances. The steeple structure was rebuilt in 1857 and its exterior wooden trim was replaced.



By the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian tastes dictated more elaborate decoration, including a chandelier, organ, and trompe-l'oeil panels painted on the walls (none of which is currently extant). The upper galleries were cut back to half their depth, presumably to make them feel lighter, which would also be accomplished by the installation of thin cast iron columns to support them. The entire ceiling was replaced in 1857 when the plaster failed. Alterations that are still present today include the more elaborate pulpit with Corinthian columns, the arch and plaster moldings behind the pulpit, and the cast iron columns supporting the upper galleries.

Following damage incurred during the Great Boston Fire of 1872 as well as the desire of the congregation to move to the more fashionable Back Bay neighborhood, the Old South Meeting House was leased to the U.S. government from 1873-75 and used as a post office. All of the pews and wainscoting, the pulpit, the chandelier, and the organ were removed from the meeting house, and two new two-story brick additions were built on either side of the tower.

Following the departure of the post office, the Old South Church auctioned off the building and the dismantling of the clock was already underway when a movement to save Old South gained momentum and eventually succeeded in purchasing the land and securing a mortgage for the building. The newly formed Old South Association took over ownership of the meeting house and opened it as a museum. During this era, the main floor of the building was occupied by glass display cases, many of which could be moved aside to accommodate the setting up of wooden folding chairs for events.

The Association decided to undertake the restoration of the Meeting House to its colonial appearance. The two-story additions were removed, the colonial-era window behind the pulpit was uncovered, and the 1783 wainscoting was found in the basement and reinstalled. The ornamented Victorian ceiling was replaced by a simpler ceiling probably similar to the original. A reproduction of the 1857 central cast plaster rosette was installed and is the only reminder of the Victorian-era ceiling. Several structural problems were also addressed. In 1898-99, the floor and its original beams and joists was replaced, and a new roof on iron trusses was installed.

In the early 1900s, in the spirit of the Colonial Revival movement that was widely in fashion at the time, the Old South Association hired Bigelow and Wadsworth to continue restoring the meeting house to its colonial appearance based on physical and documentary evidence. The Association was able to purchase the 1857 pulpit back from a dealer and the 1808 ("wine glass") portion of the pulpit was removed from their new church in Back Bay and returned to the meeting house, where the two portions were rejoined and reinstalled in 1910. This configuration is still present today. New windows were created based on the windows at King's Chapel and the Old North Church. New exterior doors were also created based on examples from buildings of the same era.

In 1947, the main floor pews were reconstructed based on the original pew plan from 1730, which had box pews filling much of the floor and six rows of benches in front of the pulpit. However, the architect mistakenly thought that the benches were slip pews, so that is what we see today in front of the pulpit. In another departure from the original plan, space around the perimeter of the meeting house was left open for exhibits.

More recently, the Old South Association, and subsequently Revolutionary Spaces, have undertaken significant work to protect and preserve the Old South Meeting House, including the following projects:

- 2009: Restoration of the 1766 tower clock.
- 2011: Installation of a replacement bell forged in 1801 by Paul Revere & Sons Bell and Cannon Foundry in the North End (one of only 46 surviving bells made during Paul Revere's life).
- 2014: Painting, preservation, and restoration of the steeple and exterior windows.

- 2022: Revitalization of the Washington St. entrance, including the restoration of the plaster walls, painting of the staircase spindles and skirt board, restoration of three sets of double doors, re-fabrication of the hinges, and replacement of lighting.

## 4.2 Exterior

The exterior of the Old South Meeting House looks much like it did in 1730. The brick masonry walls are laid in Flemish bond resting on a brick watertable. Belt courses demarcate floor levels around all sides of the main block and the tower, except between the first and second stories at the central door on the face of the tower.

The front of the Meeting House is five bays wide with a gable end, and is surmounted by a square tower centered on the gable. All five bays on the front facade, including the one on the tower, contain semicircular arched windows with fanlights at the first and second stories. The sides of the Meeting House are seven bays wide, with the same semicircular arched windows with fanlights at the first and second stories. The first-floor windows are fifteen-over-fifteen, while the second-floor windows are fifteen-over-twenty and are about a foot taller. There are two exceptions to the rhythm of windows along the sides of the building:

- There is a single window at mid-floor height at the center bay of the north elevation, which marks the location of the pulpit on the interior.
- There is an enclosed pedimented porch at street level in the center bay of the south elevation.

At the street level, there are entrances on all three sides of the tower, although the southern-most door is currently blocked by an attached retail kiosk. These entrances have simple molded surrounds and contain double-leaf paneled doors with semicircular fanlights. The same style of door is found at the enclosed pedimented porch on the south side. The extant exterior doors were installed in 1913.<sup>1</sup>

At the second and third floors of the tower, there are semicircular arched windows on the west (front) side and ox-eye windows with radiating muntins on the north and south faces. Above this, there are clocks set on the north and south faces of the tower, with a larger ox-eye window with radiating muntins on the west (front) side. Above this, there are arched openings inset with louvers on all four sides of the tower. The brick portion of the tower rises eighty feet from the street level to a denticulated cornice and balustrade. This is surmounted by an octagonal, wooden, balustraded steeple with a 20-foot-tall copper-clad octagonal spire that is surmounted by a gilded weathervane.

A one-story, one-bay by one-bay stair tower is located in the center of the east elevation and provides an additional entrance to the building. This stair was a later addition in 1838-39; access to the main gallery had previously been possible via staircases located within the main hall at the northwest and southwest corners.

Also found on the east side of the building is a cornerstone carved with “JB 1729;” these are the initials of Joshua Blanchard, the master mason who constructed the meeting house. This stone is located below a part of the corner of the facade that appears to have been carved out and capped with granite to make room for alterations at the adjacent MBTA State Street T station in the 1980s (see Photo 4).

The site slopes down from west to east, with basement windows on the south side of the building gradually increasing in height. The meeting house also has a basement entrance on the south side.

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<sup>1</sup> Scofield et al, *National Register Nomination – Boston National Historical Park*.

The slate-shingled roof is supported by six interior steel trusses installed in 1899.<sup>2</sup> The roof is gabled at the west end and hipped at the east end. Copper gutters line the lower roof edge.

At the time this study report is being written, there are two structures attached to the Old South Meeting House. A kiosk constructed of metal poles, wood enclosure panels, and an awning is attached on the southwest corner. This structure is considered part of the Landmark designation and changes would be reviewed by the Commission. There is also a one-story brick retail building built in the 1880s attached at the southeast corner.

The exterior elements that are present today from each era are:

**1729-1730**

- Exterior brick walls
- Weather vane
- Wooden elements of the steeple

**1770**

- Tower clock

**1857**

- Rebuilt steeple structure and exterior wooden trim of the steeple

**1898-99**

- Roof trusses

**1910s**

- Windows
- Doors

**1937-38**

- Roof slates

### **4.3 Interior**

The interior of the Old South Meeting House has undergone some changes since the building was initially constructed, but these alterations reflect the evolution of changing forms of worship, architectural fashions, and changes to the building's use that are all part of its story, and thus many elements of the current interior of the meeting house can be considered "later contributing features."

The interior of the Old South Meeting House still follows its original layout, with the main entrance (the tower doors) located on the short side of the building and the pulpit oriented on axis with the Milk Street entrance on the long, south side of the building. The main floor contains slip pews in front of the pulpit, surrounded by box pews along the sides and back of the seating area. A central aisle runs from the pulpit to a secondary entrance at the center of the south wall. The pulpit is semi-circular in plan and ornamented with Corinthian columns, carved paneling with decorative arches, and an entablature with a deep cornice, modillions, dentils, and a frieze with a carved arabesque pattern. Incorporated at the center front of the pulpit is an 1808 mahogany "wine glass" portion. Behind the pulpit, an arch with Corinthian columns on either side and decorative carved molding and paneling is recessed into the wall surrounding a window set between the first and second floor levels. Above the pulpit is an 1808 octagonal sounding board suspended from the ceiling.

The meeting house features a continuous gallery along the east, south, and west walls, with additional upper galleries on the east and west walls. The lower gallery rests on Doric columns and supports risers with fixed chair seating. The upper galleries are supported by thin cast iron columns

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<sup>2</sup> Scofield et al, *National Register Nomination – Boston National Historical Park*.

and are half the depth of the gallery below. Access to the upper gallery on the west side is provided by the tower stair and on the east side by a wood staircase in the southeast corner.

The windows are recessed into the walls, with window seats on the first floor. Most of the windows, except the one above the pulpit, contain interior louvered shutters.

The ceiling is coved and has a broad cornice where it meets the wall. At the center of the ceiling is a cast plaster medallion from which hangs an electrified chandelier.

The basement was excavated and remodeled in 1996-97 for offices, a store, and an education center. The current basement is excluded from the list of interior spaces proposed for designation, although any new digging or excavation is required to be reviewed. Also excluded from the designation is the interior of the entry vestibule (reception area) behind the tower and the interior of the entry vestibule at the south wall.

The interior elements that are present today from each era are:

**1729-1730**

- Plaster walls (replastered in 1828)
- Structural parts of the east galleries
- Southeast stairs between the east galleries

**1782-1783**

- Most of the main floor wainscoting
- Columns supporting the lower gallery
- Structure of the south and west galleries
- All gallery woodwork

**1808**

- Mahogany “wine glass” portion of pulpit
- Octagonal sounding board

**1857**

- Pulpit (except for the 1808 portion)
- Arch and plaster moldings behind the pulpit
- Cast iron columns supporting the upper galleries
- Half depth of upper galleries (compared to the original)

**1880s**

- Uncovered pulpit window

**1898-99**

- Supporting structure for floor
- Ceiling
- Reproduction of 1857 central cast plaster rosette

**1930s**

- Willard clock on south gallery (reproduction of 1805 clock)

**1947**

- Pews

**1970**

- Finished wood flooring

## 5. IMAGES



**Photo 1.** Old South Meeting House, looking southeast (G. Pineo, photographer).





**Photo 2.** Old South Meeting House, looking south (G. Pineo, photographer).



**Photo 3.** Old South Meeting House, looking northwest (G. Pineo, photographer).





**Photo 4.** The northeast corner of the Old South Meeting House, where part of the brick facade was removed and capped with granite to make room for alterations at the adjacent MBTA State Street T station in the 1980s. The cornerstone carved with “JB 1729” is indicated by the red arrow (J. Gaugler, photographer, April 2025).

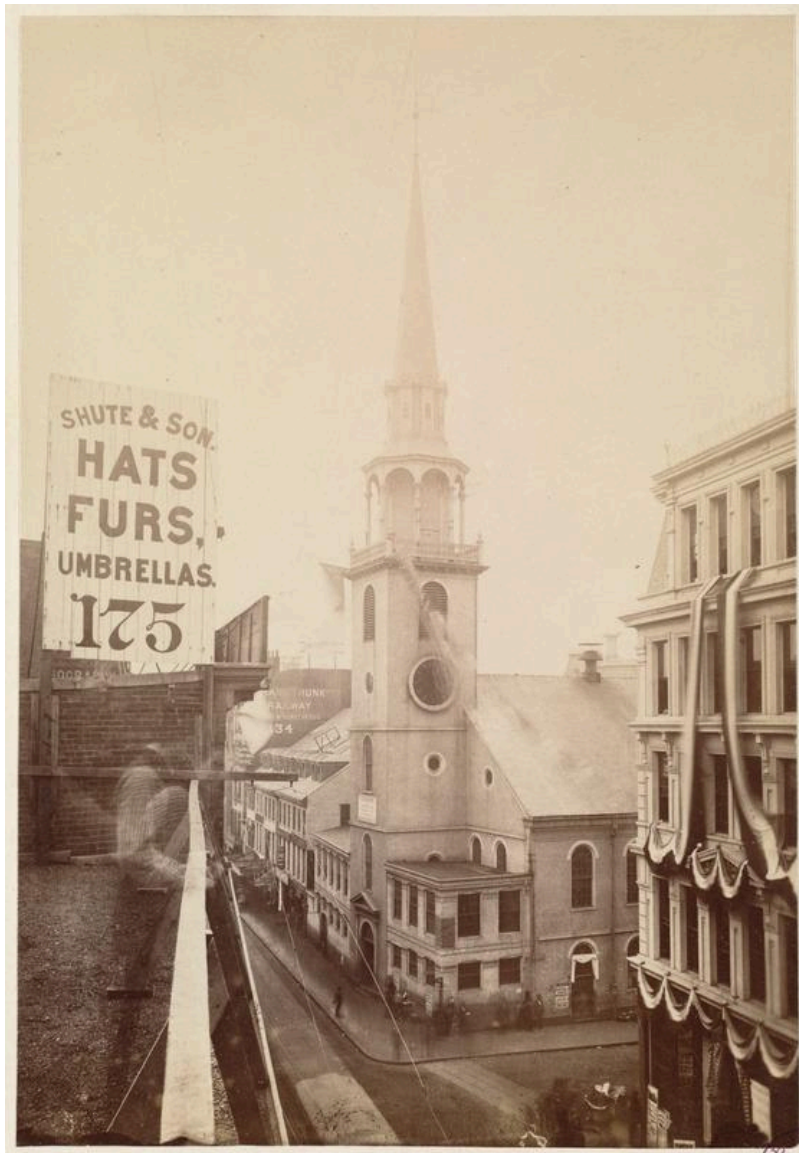


## Historic Images



**Figure 1.** Old South Meeting House (background, right) one of the only surviving buildings in the area following the Great Boston Fire of 1872.

Source: James Wallace Black, photographer, Boston Public Library Arts Department, 1872, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/c821gq796>, accessed May 2024.



**Figure 2.** Old South Meeting House while in use as a post office, 1874–1876.

Source: James Wallace Black, photographer, Boston Public Library Arts Department, ca. 1874–1876, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/cf95jh763>, accessed May 2024.



**Figure 3.** Interior of Old South Meeting House, ca. 1880–1920.

Source: Baldwin Coolidge, Photographer, Boston Public Library Arts Department, ca. 1880–1920, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/3f463d39f>, accessed May 2024.

## 6. HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

### 6.1 Historic Significance

Old South Meeting House is nationally significant for its association with events in Boston that led to the American colonies' revolt in 1775. Most notably, the building was the site of large public meetings following the altercation on March 5, 1770, that became known as the Boston Massacre, and as the staging ground for the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773. Additionally, Old South Meeting House is nationally significant for its association with the history of historic preservation.

The Old South Meeting House is actually the second house of worship built on this site. Constructed in 1669 on this same site, the "Cedar Meeting House" served as home to the Third Church of Boston. By the eighteenth century, the growing congregation decided to replace the original meeting house due to the church's increasing attendance and the deterioration of the structure. In 1728, the congregation voted to build a new, larger meeting house, which is currently the brick meeting house that is still standing.<sup>3</sup>

Attending religious services at Old South Church played an important role in the daily life of residents within colonial Boston. Members and attendees of the Old South Church included sailors, merchants, business owners, and leading citizens of Boston, including Samuel Adams, William Dawes, and Benjamin Franklin.

African American poet and activist Phillis Wheatley was also a church member who was baptized and married within the Old South Church. Old South Church was among many churches in New England that baptized and had Black and Indigenous Bostonians as attendees in the church. Although these patrons were allowed to be baptized at Old South Church, they were not automatically deemed church members. Black and Indigenous attendees were permitted within the galleries of Old South Meeting House. While attending religious services, enslaved Bostonians used their church time to foster community and build relationships among the enslaved and free Black community in Boston. Abolitionists and community activists used church services as an opportunity to coordinate actions and petitions that called for the abolition of slavery in Boston. In addition to the Old South Meeting House being used to fight for America's independence, it was also used as a meeting space in the struggles for civil rights and racial equality.

### Town Meetings, Assembly and Public Expression

Old South Meeting House, along with other large spaces in Boston like Faneuil Hall and the Old State House, was the nexus of growing insurrection during the tumultuous events that occurred from 1764 to 1775 that placed Great Britain on the brink of war with the American colonies. Old South Meeting House became a momentous symbol of liberty, free speech, and assembly in the years leading up to the Revolution because of its function as a venue for influential town meetings. The Town of Boston held semi-annual meetings to elect town officers and representatives to the General Court, and to discuss financial issues, but additional meetings convened as necessary in response to public petitions. Although voter eligibility requirements were not inclusive of the whole adult population, the format of the town meeting fostered democracy and placed value on public opinion. Legal voters consisted of male residents with taxable property, known as freemen, and approximately ten percent of eligible voters served in town offices. Poor and non-freemen, however, could attend the town meetings during which decisions were often made by voice votes. Patriot organizations that formed prior to the war adopted structural frameworks similar to town meetings and larger, more inclusive meetings of the "Body of the People" occurred in responsive outrage to British policies. Mobs of people consisting of the general population and, specifically the poorer class, expressed

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn Betlock, Emily Curran, Jane Schwerdtfeger, and Ellen Weiner, *Old South: An Architectural History of the Old South Meeting House*, (Boston, MA: Old South Association in Boston, 1995), 26–27; Scofield et al., Boston National Historical Park.



their views through less orderly but highly effective local protests, riots, and raids. The mobs occasionally included children and women. Mob tactics originated from English tradition in which crowds of people stood outside government meetings and used their combined force to influence the decisions of elected or appointed officials. While wealthy Bostonians did not outwardly support the more violent activities of such crowds, mobs were recognized as an influential and legitimate means of public expression that presented a balance to executive power. Select Boston women such as Mercy Otis Warren, the sister of James Otis and wife of James Warren, conveyed their patriotic opinions through private correspondence and highly public propaganda writing.<sup>4</sup>

Old South Meeting House, one of the largest indoor gathering spaces in Boston, was a primary location for meetings, notably serving as the assembly point after the Liberty Riots in 1768. This riot, was a response to the impressment of New England sailors to serve within the British Navy and the seizure of John Hancock's vessel the "Liberty" and served as a significant event that further fueled resentment toward British authority. The Old South Meeting House continues to host the annual orations to commemorate the anniversary of the Boston Massacre, an event led in 1775 by prominent leaders such as Dr. Joseph Warren before the start of the Revolutionary War.

In Fall 1768, the British army was sent to Boston to quell colonial protests of the Townshend Acts, a series of taxes on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea levied on the American colonies to defray the costs associated with their governing. The presence of the military infuriated residents and contributed to the mounting disruption of daily life. The troops were not authorized to react without direct orders and could often not control outbreaks of mob violence. By the end of 1768, British troops numbered 4,000 men and comprised more than one-quarter of Boston's population. The military occupation during a time of so-called peace fostered colonial resentment toward the crown, and tensions between residents and the troops escalated. The loss of local jobs to off-duty soldiers struck another blow to Boston's economy and instigated scuffles between residents and British officers. Rage over this issue culminated in the Boston Massacre on the night of March 5, 1770, which occurred outside of the Old State House.<sup>5</sup> Crispus Attucks, a former enslaved man and seaman, is reported to have led a group of 40 to 50 men to confront British soldiers on King Street. The attack resulted in the death of five civilians after a small British guard of eight men haphazardly fired upon the crowd in an attempt to rescue the sentry at the Custom House across the street. John Adams, then serving as a lawyer for the crown, called the event a "massacre" of innocent citizens and the attack since bears the name. The five men who died (Crispus Attucks, James Caldwell, Patrick Carr, Samuel Gray, and Samuel Maverick) were employed as sailors or in local trades. In response to the demands of the colonists and their leaders, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson placed the British soldiers responsible in custody that night; six were acquitted and two were convicted, but received reduced sentences, with John Adams serving as their attorney.<sup>6</sup>

The Boston Massacre constituted the first deaths caused by the political unrest in the American colonies and alarmed both colonists and British officials. Bostonians crowded into Faneuil Hall the next morning to take action against the British occupation, filling the building beyond capacity. The

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<sup>4</sup> Boston National Historic Sites Commission (BNHSC), *Final Report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 77-81; National Park Service (NPS), *Boston and the American Revolution (Park Handbook)*, (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Division of Publications, 1998), 44-45; Paul Weinbaum, *Town Meeting Democracy, A Special History Study*, (Boston, MA: Boston National Historical Park, 1989), 4-6; Jenny Fields Scofield, Virginia H. Adams, Stephen Olausen, Kristen Heitert, Quinn R. Stuart, Kathleen Miller, Jennifer Elam, Allison Cahoon, and Gretchen Pineo, *National Register Nomination - Boston National Historical Park*, Suffolk Co., Massachusetts, NRIS 74002222, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> The Boston Massacre site, marked by a stone surrounded by a segmented bronze ring in front of the Old State House, is interpreted as part of the Freedom Trail, but is not part of Boston National Historical Park.

<sup>6</sup> BNHSC, *Final Report of the BNHSC*, 97-98; Sidney Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), 7-10; NPS, *Boston and the American Revolution*, 37-39; Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, (New York: The Modern Library, Random House Publishing Group, 2002), 34; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

meeting of about 3,000 moved to the larger space of the Old South Meeting House later in the day. The day-long meeting ultimately forced the British garrison to Castle William (later Fort Independence) on Castle Island in Boston Harbor. Meanwhile, the selectmen awaited Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson in the council chamber of the Old State House, and a committee of 15 representatives led by Samuel Adams formed at the Old South Meeting House to demand that Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson remove British troops from Boston. During six additional meetings held at Faneuil Hall between March 12 and 26, 1770, colonists made plans to use the massacre to advertise the patriot cause, and thereby try to ensure the departure of the British military and continued non-importation of British goods. British officials recognized the risk of losing all American loyalties to the crown and swiftly recalled the military. The Townshend Acts had generated only a trifle of income for the British government and were repealed, with the exception of the duty on tea, on April 12, 1770. Reactionary town meetings at Faneuil Hall subsided in the fall of that year.<sup>7</sup>

After a brief period of calm, colonial opposition erupted again over the dispute that American affairs should be handled locally or with local representation, rather than from overseas by an increasingly punitive British government. On June 9, 1772, a group of Rhode Islanders irritated over the hardships caused by the British Navigation Acts that had been in place since the mid-seventeenth century burned HMS *Gaspee*, which had run aground in Narragansett Bay. When royal officials ignored provincial procedures and sought to bring members of the group to trial in England, the colonies accelerated plans to unify American responses to British policies. By this time, the colonies were unwilling to accept any act by the crown they judged as an infringement on liberty and had begun serious discussion of American independence. On November 2, 1772, Bostonians published a summary of British violations of American rights, known as *The Votes and Proceedings*, which was based on discussions that occurred during town meetings. At a town meeting in Faneuil Hall on November 22, 1772, on a motion by Samuel Adams, the Massachusetts Assembly established the first Committee of Correspondence. Composed of 21 persons, the committee was appointed as an extralegal body primarily to foster communication and harmony among the widely scattered and diverse patriots. As Massachusetts province towns and then provincial assemblies in six other colonies created similar organizations, a crucial network formed that fostered and embodied the ideas of the Revolution and the union of America. The colonies were now coalescing in a cohesive identity and had strong local and regional networks for disseminating information.<sup>8</sup>

In this unified and outwardly defiant atmosphere, Boston again became the focus of pivotal colonial insurgence leading up to the Revolutionary War. Parliament furthered the uprising when it made a critical oversight with the passage of the Tea Act on May 10, 1773. The act was primarily intended to save the British East India Company from bankruptcy by creating a British monopoly on tea sales. It allowed company agents to sell tea in America directly to consumers at cheaper rates than American merchants could offer, especially in light of the import levy on tea remaining from the Townshend Acts. While the act lowered the price of tea in the colonies, it also undersold the colonial merchants, instigating a strong negative reaction. The colonies issued a coordinated response to the Tea Act by convincing the crews of vessels carrying East India Company tea not to unload their shipments. However, when three such vessels landed at Griffin's Wharf in Boston, then Governor Hutchinson, whose merchant sons stood to profit from the imports, required the crews to unload the tea before leaving the harbor. As the vessels remained anchored in the harbor, Bostonians rallied at Faneuil Hall and Old South Meeting House. On November 29, 1773, a meeting of the "Body of the People" from Boston and the surrounding vicinity convened at Faneuil Hall in protest of the Tea Act. The meeting

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<sup>7</sup> BNHSC, *Final Report of the BNHSC*, 97–98; Paul Weinbaum, *Faneuil Hall, Statement of Significance, Historical Uses [draft]*, (Report on file, Boston National Historical Park, Boston, MA, 1987), 32; Wood, *The American Revolution*, 34–36; Polly M. Rettig and Charles W. Snell, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination – Old South Meeting House*, Suffolk Co., Massachusetts, NRIS 66000778, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas R. Adams, *American Independence, the Growth of an Idea*, *Transactions of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. 43, (Boston, MA: the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1965), 66; BNHSC, *Final Report of the BNHSC*, 110; Wood, *The American Revolution*, 36–37; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

moved to Old South Meeting House after Faneuil Hall reached its capacity of about 1,200. The inclusive nature of the populace who attended represented the increasing democratization of American society. After two weeks of attempted negotiations with Governor Hutchinson led by Samuel Adams, the people of Boston resorted to mob protest.<sup>9</sup>

When the meeting adjourned on December 16, 1773, a mob of more than 100 men, disguised with coal dust and costumes resembling Narragansett Indians, proceeded past Old South Meeting House to Griffin's Wharf. The men ransacked the three vessels and dumped £10,000 worth of tea into the harbor, as onlookers who had been at the meeting watched from the shore. Known afterward as the Boston Tea Party, the event ended the political stalemate and accelerated actions leading to the Revolutionary War.

## **The Onset of War**

In the wake of the April 19, 1775, Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Boston Committee of Safety concentrated on raising and supplying an army. The first call for enlistments was sent out to neighboring states in hopes of raising a force of 10,000 for the Siege of Boston, which remained occupied by British troops. Recognizing themselves as a nation at war, representatives from the 13 colonies convened the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, only a few weeks after the battle in Lexington and Concord. Bostonian John Hancock served as president of the Congress, which by June 1775, had voted to form the Continental Army under Virginian George Washington, who was sent to Cambridge, Massachusetts to take command of the army. The forces that had assembled voluntarily to fight the British at Lexington and Concord formed the backbone of the army that ultimately secured American independence.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, thousands of pro-patriot residents in Boston fled the town for nearby communities. General Gage briefly allowed safe passage out of Boston to residents who turned in their weapons, and the town's population fell sharply from approximately 15,000 to 3,500. In the following months, the British military desecrated patriot property and symbols of autonomy. They vandalized Boston Common, cut down the Liberty Tree and transformed churches on Brattle and Hollis streets into barracks. The Old North Church closed for three years after the hanging of the lanterns on April 18, 1775, because its congregation had consisted of a mix of patriot and Tory members.<sup>11</sup> The British purposely abused icons of democracy and American liberty through incompatible uses, using Faneuil Hall as a theater and Old South Meeting House as a riding school.<sup>12</sup>

Following the Revolutionary War, the new interior of the Old South Meeting House was designed in 1782-83 by the patriot and mason Thomas Dawes. He is considered to be one of Boston's first architects, working from 1746-1795. Dawes was a member of the Old South Congregation and served as a deacon from 1786 until his death in 1809. On March 2, 1783 the Old South congregation once again took possession of the Meeting House. Old South Meeting House continued to serve as a public meeting venue. Thousands of people came to the Old South Meeting House to participate in debates and lectures about civil rights and government. In the early twentieth century, when Boston became embroiled in controversies about the First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, Old South Meeting House hosted some of the public gatherings.

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<sup>9</sup> NPS, *Boston and the American Revolution*, 49; Weinbaum, *Town Meeting Democracy*, 6-9; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Olausen, Mary Kate Harrington, Emily Paulus, and Duncan Ritchie, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination – Minute Man National Historical Park*, Middlesex Co., Massachusetts, NRIS 66000935, 2001, 8-12; ; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>11</sup> The church's rector, Reverend Mather Byles, was later exiled to Canada because of his Tory affiliations.

<sup>12</sup> NPS, *Boston and the American Revolution*, 60-65; ; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

## Saving Old South Meeting House

The successful saving of Old South Meeting House, built in 1729, against great odds in the Revolutionary War centennial year of 1876, marked a watershed in the nascent preservation movement and is considered by some scholars as Boston's single most important contribution to the nation's history of protecting historic resources. The campaign demonstrated for the first time that a building valued primarily for its historical associations with Revolutionary War events and the settlement of Boston, rather than with a heroic figure, warranted attention and could be saved. Many Boston-area and American citizens revered Old South Meeting House for its role as the scene of numerous pre-Revolutionary War protest meetings, including the one that led to the Boston Tea Party. Locally, the building was secondarily valued as a rare early settlement survivor of the Great Boston Fire of 1872 that destroyed much of the downtown and financial district (Figure 1). Old South Meeting House was the first major building in an urban setting that was deliberately saved from imminent threat of demolition in the United States. The preservation of Old South Meeting House further showed that a coalition of determined private and vocal forces could raise sufficient money and save such a building as an authentic relic and monument to the past. The success of Old South Meeting House preservation efforts confirmed the wisdom of establishing an organization to spearhead the campaign and continue to steward restoration and long-term maintenance and programming. The preservation of Old South Meeting House also signaled a shift in how Americans perceived historic people and events – now they would be associated with the places that made them famous, rather than intangible ideas.<sup>13</sup>

A growing sense of Old South Meeting House's historical importance as a "sanctuary of freedom" was evident as early as the 1850s and guided changes to the building completed in 1857. Minister George Blagden articulated a reverence for the past, remarking "The rule by which we should be guided in all such changes [is that] we are to venerate the past, and preserve and cherish its hallowed associations. But not so to venerate it as to fail in the greatest efficiency of which we are capable in advancing religious truth".<sup>14</sup>

When the Civil War broke out, the Old South Meeting House became a "favorite rallying point" and in the 1860s, served as a recruiting station for the Union cause.<sup>15</sup> The neighborhood around Old South was being transformed by increasing commercial development, and residents were relocating to the new fashionable Back Bay section of Boston. Following the Great Fire of November 1872 that damaged the building, the congregation moved to the Back Bay, taking furnishings and selling part of the pulpit. They leased the building to the U.S. Post Office from 1873–1875 (Figure 2). Due to the increased land value, the congregation wanted to sell the land separate from the building and decided to offer to sell the building to the Massachusetts Historical Society, which declined because the organization could not afford it. Following three years of litigation, on May 31, 1876, the Massachusetts Supreme Court said the land could be sold. The building was put up for auction and sold for \$1,350, the value of the construction materials, and demolition activities began with the removal of the tower clock on June 9.<sup>16</sup>

Remembering the inexperienced and unsuccessful fight to save the Governor John Hancock House on Beacon Hill, which had been demolished in 1863 in order to add a wing to the State House, Bostonians quickly moved to save Old South Meeting House. The local firm George W. Simmons and

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Holleran, "Roots in Boston, Branches in Planning and Parks," in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, Max Page and Randall Mason, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2004), 81–86; James M. Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of Memory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>14</sup> Lynn Betlock, Emily Curran, Jane Schwerdtfeger, and Ellen Weiner, *Old South: An Architectural History of the Old South Meeting House*, (Boston, MA: Old South Association in Boston, 1995), 26–27; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>15</sup> Betlock et al., *Old South*; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>16</sup> DeMarco, Piety, *Preservation, and Public Trust*, 31; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.



Sons purchased a seven-day stay of demolition and raised a banner on the building proclaiming, “THE ELEVENTH HOUR: Men and Women of Massachusetts, Does Boston desire the humiliation which is today a part of her history since she has allowed this memorial to be sold under the hammer? Shall the Old South be Saved....”<sup>17</sup> Three days later on June 14, 1876, a newly formed citizen’s committee held a rally attended by many prominent Bostonians that filled the building to capacity. Attendees heard an impassioned speech by famed abolitionist Wendell Philips in which he admonished, “Shall we tear in pieces the roof that actually trembled to the words that made us a nation?” and “...think twice before you touch these walls. We are only the world’s trustees.... The saving of this landmark is the best monument you can erect to the men of the Revolution.”<sup>18</sup> Opponents of saving the building argued that it was an ugly and altered “barn,” and that the prime site was needed for commercial development. Demolition proposals included offers to reference the historic building through a plaque or a model on the front of the replacement building, or even to raise the meeting house up and set it on to the roof of the new construction.<sup>19</sup>

Before the stay of demolition week was over, a fundraising committee had collected several thousand dollars in donations. The saving of Old South Meeting House was insured by a major cash gift from the Women’s Centennial Committee of Boston, who bought the building for \$3,500 in the summer of 1876, but the group could not afford the land. The land was purchased by the Fall of 1876 for \$400,000 (\$225,000 in a mortgage and the rest from private donations, including \$100,000 from major Boston philanthropist Mary Hemenway). Other prominent people who supported the cause were Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Julia Ward Howe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier. Saved from demolition by public protest and a successful fund-raising drive in 1876, the building was turned over to the Old South Association, which has since merged with the Bostonian Society in 2020 to become Revolutionary Spaces, Inc and has since operated as a museum (Figure 3).<sup>20</sup>

The Old South Association (OSA) formed on May 11, 1877, to take ownership of the building when an “Act to incorporate the Old South Association in Boston, and to provide for the Preservation of the Old South Meeting House” passed into law. No serious damage was done by the attempted demolition of 1876, although some repair was necessary. The OSA decided to restore the building to its colonial appearance, a difficult goal because of drastic interior changes that had been made over the preceding century. However, some original building materials were found in the basement that provided evidence used in the restoration. Major structural floor issues were addressed, and new steel roof trusses were installed. The building became one of the nation’s earliest history museums and centers for history education open to the public.<sup>21</sup>

Between 1898 and 1914, a major historic restoration campaign of Old South Meeting House was completed by the architectural firm Bigelow and Wadsworth. Henry Forbes Bigelow (1867–1929), one of Boston’s leading architects in the second half of the nineteenth century was born and raised near Worcester. He attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and traveled in Europe to complete his architectural training. Bigelow’s practice focused on the design of new residential, commercial, and institutional buildings and on renovations, including the addition of two floors to the 1849 Boston Athenaeum in 1913–1914 (National Historic Landmark, 1966). He was also known for

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<sup>17</sup> quoted in Betlock et al., *Old South*, 37 ; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>18</sup> Wendell Phillips, *Oration Delivered in the Old South Meeting-House by Wendell Phillips, June 14, 1876*, (Boston, MA: Sold at the Old South, 1884); Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>19</sup> Betlock et al., *Old South*, 37; Wendell Phillips, *Speech of the Honorable Wendell Phillips for Aid in the Preservation of Old South Meeting House*, Massachusetts Legislature, Committee on Federal Relations (Boston, MA: Alfred Mudge and Son, 1878); Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>20</sup> Batcheler, *Old South Meeting House*; Rettig and Snell, *Old South Meeting House*; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>21</sup> Betlock et al., *Old South*, 31–49; Rettig and Snell, *Old South Meeting House*; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

his “charming and distinguished” house interiors. At the time of his death, he was a senior member of what was then Bigelow, Wadsworth, Hubbard & Smith.<sup>22</sup>

Bigelow’s approach at Old South Meeting House was the first time that restoration efforts for the building were based in part on physical and documentary research. As stated in the firm’s 1914 report, when material evidence was lacking, the architects relied on comparative examples or traditional methods and materials that were “in the spirit of the old work.” The program required numerous decisions on what features to preserve, restore, or reproduce and resulted in a building that reflected the Colonial Revival period sensibilities of the time. The Old South Meeting House exhibits aspects of its entire history in its overlay of features from the Colonial, Victorian, and Colonial Revival periods.<sup>23</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the Old South Association’s (OSA) membership shifted from an older, more conservative member-base linked by tradition to its founding in 1877 to a more progressive one with several younger elected members. This organizational change, along with the heightened social tension in Boston surrounding the First Amendment, pushed the OSA away from the organization’s typical topics, which had been restricted to non-controversial and/or memorializing events to participate in discussions of First Amendment rights for freedom of speech. One such occasion was the 1916 Old South Forum, a sponsored event of the larger Open Forum Movement, organized in 1908 by Boston progressive George Coleman to encourage public discussion. Until 1925, the OSA accepted requests for use of the building on a case-by-case basis and avoided the most controversial subjects. Due to increased outside pressure to hold more varied events, Richard Hale, who handled inquiries about the use of the meeting house, met with the board in 1926 and came up with two new principles: “Permission will be granted when the meeting is held in the interests of free speech only” and “If the issue is controversial, both sides should preferably be represented.” In 2020, OSA merged with the Bostonian Society to create RSI. These two principles continue to guide RSI within the tradition of free speech and assembly established in the infancy of American democracy.<sup>24</sup>

## 6.2 Architectural Significance

Old South Meeting House, originally constructed in 1729-1730, is nationally significant as a rare example of a colonial church that combines an early Georgian exterior influenced by Christopher Wren’s work with the traditional interior proportions and seating plan of the seventeenth-century four-square meeting house. It replaced the Cedar Meeting House built in Boston in 1669 which had become overcrowded. In 1728, the congregation voted to build a new meetinghouse and appointed a building committee.<sup>25</sup>

The design of Old South Meeting House is credited to Robert Twelves, and it was constructed by Joshua Blanchard (1692-1748), a master mason who later erected Faneuil Hall in 1740-1742. The main mass of Old South is a traditional seventeenth-century meeting house design, with an almost square plan, two stories in height, and the south entrance on the long side. It was a large building for its day and could fit 5,000 people on the main floor and double galleries, far more than the original Faneuil Hall. Old South Meeting House stood as one of the most expansive indoor gathering spaces in

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<sup>22</sup> Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathbun Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, (Los Angeles, CA: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1956), 57; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>23</sup> Betlock et al., *Old South*, 44–45, 51; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>24</sup> William M. DeMarco, Piety, Preservation, and the Public Trust: A History of the Old South Meeting House, vol. 3/1872–1977, (Report on file, Northeast Museum Services Center, Boston, MA, undated), 3; Jonathan B. Vogels, “Put to Patriotic Use”: Negotiating Free Speech at Boston’s Old South Meeting House, 1925–1933, *The New England Quarterly*, 72(1), 1999, 3–11; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>25</sup> Penelope Hartshorne Batcheler, *Historic Structure Report: Old South Meeting House*, (Denver, CO: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, Mid-Atlantic/North Atlantic Team, Historic Preservation Branch, 1978), 4; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

colonial Boston and for this reason this historic building often served as the site of significant protests and meetings. Attached to the center of the west (short) side was a square tower, above which rose a three-stage octagonal spire 180 feet high.

Two buildings in Boston built in the 1720s may have exerted particular influence on the exterior form of Old South Meeting House. The New Brick Meeting House on Hanover Street, built in 1721 (demolished in 1844), and Old North Church (Christ Church) erected in 1723-1740 had similar exterior massing, notably in the two tiers of round-arched multi-pane windows and the location of the belt courses, tower, and spire. Old South Meeting House's spire with its open colonnaded belfry is similar to that of the New Brick Meetinghouse and reminiscent of Christopher Wren's Saint Mary-le-Bow of 1670-1677 in London. Two other Boston meeting houses featured similar steeples, the Old Brick (1712) and the Old West (1737), as well as at least six other New England churches, including the First Church of Christ, Congregation in Farmington, Connecticut (1771). The interior of Old South Meeting House reflected the layout of its predecessor, the Cedar Meeting House, with the main entrance at the side, served by the doorways in the west tower, and the high pulpit with suspended sounding board centered on the long north wall.<sup>26</sup>

The Old South Meeting House tower clock by Galen Brown was created in 1766 and installed by 1770. It is America's oldest American-made tower clock still operating in its original location.<sup>27</sup>

Old South Meeting House also contains the last remaining example of a two-tiered gallery in a New England meeting house.<sup>28</sup>

Alterations to the meeting house reflect the evolution of changing forms of worship, architectural fashions, and changes to the building's use that are all part of its story, and thus do not detract from the meeting house's architectural significance.

### **6.3 Archaeological Sensitivity**

Boston's Downtown is archaeologically sensitive for ancient Native American and historical archaeological sites. It is possible for ancient Native and historical archaeological sites to survive in the rare areas where development has not destroyed them. As the ancient and historical core of Shawmut, now Boston, any surviving archaeological deposits are likely significant. Archaeological evidence of ancient Native presence in the Boston area supports an occupation date as early as 12,000 years BP. Today, the Massachusetts tribe are considered to be the traditional landholders of Boston. Within a 1-mile radius of Old South Meeting House, there are 18 known ancient Native archaeological sites and 24 known historical archaeological sites.

Any historical sites that survive may document 17th-19th century history related to Boston's colonial, Revolutionary, early Republic history especially yard spaces where features including wells, cisterns, and privies may remain intact and contain significant archaeological deposits. These sites represent the histories of domestic life, artisans, industries, enslaved people, immigrants, and Native peoples spanning multiple centuries.

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<sup>26</sup> Batcheler, *Old South Meeting House*, 4-8; James D. Kornwolf, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial North America*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 971; Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlement to the National Period*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 430; William H. Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects, Volume 1: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 102-105; Rettig and Snell, *Old South Meeting House*; Scofield et al., *Boston National Historical Park*.

<sup>27</sup> <https://revolutionaryspaces.org/discover/old-south-meeting-house/>

<sup>28</sup> Betlock et al, *Old South: An Architectural History of the Old South Meeting House*.

Below-ground impacts to the buildings and landscape of Old South Meeting House shall be avoided if possible within the landmark-designated area. All proposed below-ground impacts to the landscape, temporary or permanent, shall be reviewed by the staff archaeologists of the City Archaeology Program and the City Archaeologist to determine if significant archaeological resources may or will be negatively impacted by below-ground work. If impacts may or do exist, and they can not be avoided, mitigation in the form of archaeological monitoring, excavations, or other documentation may be required based on the recommendations and consultation of the City Archaeologist.

All archaeological work on the property of Old South Meeting House and associated structures and landscape shall be conducted under a state-issued State Archaeological Permit by an archaeologist meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards for Archaeology.

## 6.4 Planning Context

The Old South Meeting House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960. This designation is recognized by the Secretary of the Interior for sites of national significance. However, this designation provides little protection for the building. According to the National Park Service:

*Listing of private property as a National Historic Landmark or in the National Register does not prohibit under Federal law or regulations any actions which may otherwise be taken by the property owner with respect to the property. The National Park Service may recommend to owners various preservation actions but owners are not obligated to carry out these recommendations. Property owners are free to make whatever changes they wish if Federal funding, licensing, or permits are not involved.<sup>29</sup>*

The Old South Meeting House is also part of the Boston National Historical Park, established by Congress on October 1, 1974, to preserve resources associated with the opening campaigns of the Revolutionary War and the founding of America. The park consists of eight discontinuous areas: Old South Meeting House, Bunker Hill Monument, Charlestown Navy Yard, the Old North Church complex, the Paul Revere House complex, Faneuil Hall, the Old State House, and the Dorchester Heights Monument. With the exception of the Dorchester Heights Monument, all of the sites are connected by the Freedom Trail. This designation, although it encourages public recognition of the importance of these sites, again does not carry significant regulatory weight toward protecting the included properties.

On the state level, the Old South Meeting House was designated a Massachusetts Historic Landmark in 1965. According to state law, this designation provides some protection against alterations that would impair the historical value of the landmark:

*The commission may establish standards for the care and management of such certified landmarks, and may withdraw such certification for failure to maintain such standards provided that a notice of such withdrawal is recorded as aforesaid. No certified historic landmark shall be altered in such a manner as would seriously impair its historical values without permission of the commission, except that persons having recorded interests who have not given written consent to the certification and those claiming under them shall not be required to obtain such permission. Before granting such permission the commission shall hold a public hearing.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/faqs.htm>, Feb. 18, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Mass General Laws, Ch. 9, Section 27.

At the time of the publication of this study report in 2025, proposed zoning changes are a potential new threat to the Old South Meeting House. The Boston Planning and Development Agency (now the Planning Department) adopted PLAN: Downtown in December of 2023. As of April 2025, the Planning Department released an updated draft Downtown zoning text amendment and a draft amendment to PLAN: Downtown. The draft Zoning Amendment has raised concerns among preservationists as it calls for including a “SKY-R” zone that would allow 500’ towers throughout the Ladder Blocks under certain circumstances as well as “SKY” zones that would permit structures to be built up to the ceiling allowed by the FAA. The block containing the Old South Meeting House is currently located in a “SKY” zone. Thus, the new zoning proposed by the City would remove the protection currently afforded by the Newspaper Row/Old South Protection Area and would allow structures up to the FAA limit to be built around the Old South Meeting House. While it is not anticipated that the Old South Meeting House would be demolished, new construction could have adverse view, shadow, or structural impacts on the historic meeting house.

Since becoming a pending Landmark, the Old South Meeting House has come for advisory review by the Boston Landmarks Commission three times. In July 2022 (application #23.0095 BLC), the Commission reviewed a proposal to restore and re-paint the three sets of double entrance doors at the Old South Meeting House; the proposal was approved. In December 2022 (application #23.0490 BLC), the Commission reviewed a proposal to install a new trench drain at the bottom of the stair on the south facade of the building and replace a plywood wall with a cement block wall as part of a storm water management program; this proposal was also approved. In March 2024 (application #24.0820 BLC), the Commission reviewed the replacement of the southeast alley door with a new replacement wood door milled to match the other paneled doors on the building. This application was marked exempt from Commission review.

## 7. STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

### 7.1 Introduction

Per sections 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the enabling statute (Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as amended) Standards and Criteria must be adopted for each Designation that shall be applied by the Commission in evaluating proposed changes to the historic resource. The Standards and Criteria both identify and establish guidelines for those features that must be preserved and/or enhanced to maintain the viability of the Designation. The Standards and Criteria are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.<sup>31</sup> Before a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of Exemption can be issued for such changes, the changes must be reviewed by the Commission with regard to their conformance to the purpose of the statute.

The intent of these guidelines is to help local officials, designers and individual property owners to identify the characteristics that have led to designation, and thus to identify the limitation to the changes that can be made to them. It should be emphasized that conformance to the Standards and Criteria alone does not necessarily ensure approval, nor are they absolute, but any request for variance from them must demonstrate the reason for, and advantages gained by, such variance. The Commission's Certificate of Design Approval is only granted after careful review of each application and public hearing, in accordance with the statute.

Proposed alterations related to zoning, building code, accessibility, safety, or other regulatory requirements shall require the prior review and approval of the Commission.

In these standards and criteria, the verb **Should** indicates a recommended course of action; the verb **Shall** indicates those actions that are specifically required.

### 7.2 Levels of Review

The Commission has no desire to interfere with the normal maintenance procedures for the property. In order to provide some guidance for property owners, managers or developers, and the Commission, the activities that might be construed as causing an alteration to the physical character of the exterior have been categorized to indicate the level of review required, based on the potential impact of the proposed work.

- A. Routine activities that are not subject to review by the Commission:
  - 1. Activities associated with normal cleaning and routine maintenance.
    - a. For building maintenance, such activities might include the following: normal cleaning (no power washing above 400 PSI, no chemical or abrasive cleaning), non-invasive inspections, in-kind repair of caulking, in-kind repainting, staining or refinishing of wood or metal elements, lighting bulb replacements or in-kind glass repair/replacement, etc.
    - b. For landscape maintenance, such activities might include the following: normal cleaning of paths and sidewalks, etc. (no power

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, et al. *THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR THE TREATMENT OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES WITH GUIDELINES FOR PRESERVING, REHABILITATING, RESTORING & RECONSTRUCTING HISTORIC BUILDINGS*, Secretary of the Interior, 2017, [www.nps.gov/tps/standards/treatment-guidelines-2017.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/treatment-guidelines-2017.pdf).

washing above 400 PSI, no chemical or abrasive cleaning), non-invasive inspections, in-kind repair of caulking, in-kind replacement of cracked or broken paving materials, in-kind repainting or refinishing of site furnishings, site lighting bulb replacements or in-kind glass repair/replacement, normal plant material maintenance, such as pruning, fertilizing, mowing and mulching, and in-kind replacement of existing plant materials, etc.

2. Activities associated with temporary installations or events or seasonal decorations that do not disturb the ground surface, do not damage the existing building fabric, and do not result in any permanent alteration or attached fixtures.

B. Activities that may be determined by the staff to be eligible for a Certificate of Exemption or Administrative Review, requiring an application to the Commission:

1. Maintenance and repairs involving no change in design, material, color, ground surface or outward appearance.
2. In-kind replacement or repair.
3. Phased restoration programs will require an application to the Commission and may require full Commission review of the entire project plan and specifications; subsequent detailed review of individual construction phases may be eligible for Administrative Review by BLC staff.
4. Repair projects of a repetitive nature will require an application to the Commission and may require full Commission review; subsequent review of these projects may be eligible for Administrative Review by BLC staff, where design, details, and specifications do not vary from those previously approved.
6. Emergency repairs that require temporary tarps, board-ups, etc. may be eligible for Certificate of Exemption or Administrative Review. In the case of emergencies, BLC staff should be notified as soon as possible to assist in evaluating the damage and to help expedite repair permits as necessary.

C. Activities requiring an application and full Commission review:

Reconstruction, restoration, replacement, demolition, or alteration involving change in design, material, color, location, or outward appearance, such as: New construction of any type, removal of existing features or elements, major planting or removal of trees or shrubs, or changes in landforms.

D. Activities not explicitly listed above:

In the case of any activity not explicitly covered in these Standards and Criteria, the Landmarks staff shall determine whether an application is required and if so, whether it shall be an application for a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of Exemption.

E. Concurrent Jurisdiction

In some cases, issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the Landmarks Commission may also fall under the jurisdiction of other city, state and federal boards and commissions such as the Boston Art Commission, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the National Park Service and others. All efforts will be made to

expedite the review process. Whenever possible and appropriate, a joint staff review or joint hearing will be arranged.

### **7.3 List of Character-defining Features**

Character-defining features are the significant observable and experiential aspects of a historic resource, whether a single building, landscape, or multi-property historic district, that define its architectural power and personality. These are the features that should be identified, retained, and preserved in any restoration or rehabilitation scheme in order to protect the resource's integrity.

Character-defining elements may include, for example, the overall shape of a building and its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details and features, as well as the various aspects of its site and environment. They are critically important considerations whenever preservation work is contemplated. Inappropriate changes to historic features can undermine the historical and architectural significance of the resource, sometimes irreparably.

Below is a list that identifies the physical elements that contribute to the unique character of the historic resource. The items listed in this section should be considered important aspects of the historic resource and changes to them should be approved by commissioners only after careful consideration.

The character-defining features for this historic resource include:

- Masonry:
  - Flemish bond brick walls with belt courses
  - Brick watertable
- Brick clock tower:
  - 80-foot tall brick tower surmounted by steeple
  - Ox-eye window with radiating muntins
  - Arched openings inset with louvers
  - Denticulated cornice and balustrade
  - Clock
- Steeple:
  - Octagonal wooden steeple
  - 20-foot-tall copper-clad spire
  - Gilded weather vane
- Windows:
  - Semicircular arched windows with fanlights
  - Window behind the pulpit at mid-floor height
- Doors
  - Double-leaf wooden paneled doors with semicircular fanlights
- Slate roof
- Interior features:
  - Interior plaster walls (replastered in 1828)
  - Galleries and supporting columns (excluding non-code-compliant modern railing)
  - Wainscoting
  - Willard clock on south gallery
  - Pulpit
  - Sounding board
  - Arch and plaster moldings behind the pulpit
  - Reproduction of 1857 central cast plaster rosette in ceiling
  - Pews



## 7.4 Landmark Standards and Criteria

The following Standards and Criteria are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.<sup>32</sup>

### **Note on the Application of Standards and Criteria for this Landmark:**

The following Standards and Criteria (from 7.4.1 to 7.4.18, inclusive) apply to alterations to the Old South Meeting House (parcel numbers 0303905000 and 0303905001; see Section 1 "Designation" for specific areas of jurisdiction) and to below-ground excavation on all of the parcels included in this designation.

The proposed Landmark designation also includes two additional parcels: the alley to the north of the Old South Meeting House (parcel numbers 0303906000 and 0303906001), and the retail building to the east of the Old South Meeting House (parcel number 0303904000). The purpose of including these parcels in the designation is to protect the Old South Meeting House, which has historical and architectural significance at a national level. Therefore, at these parcels, Commission review shall focus on preventing adverse effects to the Old South Meeting House and shall be limited to:

- Any permanent new construction, paving, or fencing.
- Any physical attachment to or contact between the Old South Meeting House and any existing or new structures on the parcel.

The Standards and Criteria below (from 7.4.1 to 7.4.18, inclusive) do not apply to these parcels (0303906000, 0303906001, 0303904000). Rather, Commissioners should use their best judgement when reviewing proposed alterations to prevent adverse impacts on the Old South Meeting House.

### **7.4.1 General Standards**

Subject to review and approval under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property shall be avoided. See the list of Character-Defining Features in the previous section.
2. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, shall not be undertaken.
3. The period of significance is not determined by this study report. However, proposals for alterations to the property should be presented to the Commission with a clear argument for how they fit the most current understanding of the property's period or periods of significance and their impact on historic or existing fabric of the building.
4. Changes and additions to the landmark that have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and its context. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right; if so, that significance should be recognized and respected. (The term "later contributing features" will be used to convey this concept.)

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, et al. *THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR THE TREATMENT OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES WITH GUIDELINES FOR PRESERVING, REHABILITATING, RESTORING & RECONSTRUCTING HISTORIC BUILDINGS*, Secretary of the Interior, 2017, [www.nps.gov/tps/standards/treatment-guidelines-2017.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/treatment-guidelines-2017.pdf).

5. Distinctive or significant historic and architectural materials, features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature should match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. If the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Replacement of missing features should be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. The use of synthetic replacement materials is discouraged, except when substituted for perishable features exposed to the weather or when necessary to accommodate the effects of climate change.
8. Chemical and/or physical treatments (such as sandblasting) shall not be used in a manner that damages historic materials. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible and the results should preserve the patina that characterizes the age of the structure. Applications of paint or masonry preservative solutions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.
9. Demolition of a designated structure can be allowed only as a last resort after all practicable measures have been taken to ensure preservation, or unless required to comply with requirements certified by a duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition.
10. Creating new openings in exterior walls should be avoided when possible. Where necessary to accommodate new uses or for achieving accessibility, new openings or changes to existing openings will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
11. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize a property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of a property and its environment.
12. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.
13. Original or later contributing signs, marquees, and canopies integral to the building ornamentation or architectural detailing shall be preserved, excluding references to building ownership, operations, tenants.
14. New signs, banners, marquees, canopies, and awnings shall be compatible in size, design, material, location, and number with the character of the building, allowing for contemporary expression. New signs shall not detract from the essential form of the building nor obscure its architectural features. New signs may attach to the building if approved by the Commission. The method of attachment shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and should cause the least damage possible to the building. (See the next section for guidelines on penetrating masonry.)
15. Property owners shall take necessary precautions to prevent demolition by neglect of maintenance and repairs. Demolition of protected buildings in violation of Chapter 772 of

the Acts of 1975, as amended, is subject to penalty as cited in Section 10 of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended.

#### **7.4.2 Masonry at exterior walls (including but not limited to stone, brick, terra-cotta, concrete, adobe, stucco, and mortar)**

1. All original or later contributing masonry materials shall be preserved.
2. Original or later contributing masonry materials, features, details, surfaces and ornamentation shall be repaired, if necessary, by patching, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing the masonry using recognized preservation methods.
3. Deteriorated masonry materials, features, details, surfaces, and ornamentation or missing components of masonry features shall be replaced with materials and elements which match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, and detail of installation. If the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement of existing materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. Sound original mortar shall be retained.
6. Deteriorated mortar shall be carefully removed by hand raking the joints.
7. Use of mechanical hammers shall not be allowed. Use of mechanical saws may be allowed on a case-by-case basis.
8. Repointing mortar shall duplicate the original mortar in strength, composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile, and method of application.
9. Sample panels of raking the joints and repointing shall be reviewed and approved by the staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission.
10. If the building is to be cleaned, the masonry shall be cleaned with the gentlest method possible.
11. A test patch of the cleaning method(s) shall be reviewed and approved on site by staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission to ensure that no damage has resulted. Test patches shall be carried out well in advance. Ideally, the test patch should be monitored over a sufficient period of time to allow long-range effects to be predicted (including exposure to all seasons if possible).
12. Sandblasting (wet or dry), wire brushing, or other similar abrasive cleaning methods shall not be permitted. Doing so can change the visual quality of the material and damage the surface of the masonry and mortar joints.
13. Waterproofing or water repellents are strongly discouraged. These treatments are generally not effective in preserving masonry and can cause permanent damage. The Commission does recognize that in extraordinary circumstances their use may be required to solve a specific problem. Samples of any proposed treatment shall be reviewed by the Commission before application.
14. In general, painting masonry surfaces shall not be allowed. Painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some significant point in the history of the property.

15. New penetrations for attachments through masonry are strongly discouraged. When necessary, attachment details shall be located in mortar joints, rather than through masonry material; stainless steel hardware is recommended to prevent rust jacking. New attachments to cast concrete are discouraged and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
16. Deteriorated stucco shall be repaired by removing the damaged material and patching with new stucco that duplicates the old in strength, composition, color, and texture.
17. Deteriorated adobe shall be repaired by using mud plaster or a compatible lime-plaster adobe render, when appropriate.
18. Deteriorated concrete shall be repaired by cutting damaged concrete back to remove the source of deterioration, such as corrosion on metal reinforcement bars. The new patch shall be applied carefully so that it will bond satisfactorily with and match the historic concrete.
19. Joints in concrete shall be sealed with appropriate flexible sealants and backer rods, when necessary.

#### **7.4.3 Wood at exterior walls**

1. All original or later contributing wood materials shall be preserved.
2. Original or later contributing wood surfaces, features, details, and ornamentation shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired by patching, piecing-in, consolidating, or reinforcing the wood using recognized preservation methods.
3. Deteriorated wood materials, features, details, surfaces, and ornamentation or missing components of wood features shall be replaced with materials and elements which match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, and detail of installation. If the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement of materials is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. Cleaning of wood elements shall use the gentlest method possible.
6. Paint removal should be considered only where there is paint surface deterioration or excessive layers of paint have coarsened profile details and as part of an overall maintenance program that involves repainting or applying other appropriate protective coatings. Coatings such as paint help protect the wood from moisture and ultraviolet light; stripping the wood bare will expose the surface to the effects of weathering.
7. Damaged or deteriorated paint should be removed to the next sound layer using the mildest method possible.
8. Propane or butane torches, sandblasting, water blasting, or other abrasive cleaning and/or paint removal methods shall not be permitted. Doing so changes the visual quality of the wood and accelerates deterioration.
9. Repainting should be based on paint seriation studies. If an adequate record does not exist, repainting shall be done with colors that are appropriate to the style and period of the building.

#### **7.4.4 Architectural metals at exterior walls (including but not limited to wrought and cast iron, steel, pressed metal, terneplate, copper, aluminum, and zinc)**

1. All original or later contributing architectural metals shall be preserved.
2. Original or later contributing metal materials, features, details, and ornamentation shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired by patching, splicing, or reinforcing the metal using recognized preservation methods.
3. Deteriorated metal materials, features, details, surfaces, and ornamentation or missing components of metal features shall be replaced with materials and elements which match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, and detail of installation. If the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. Cleaning of metal elements either to remove corrosion or deteriorated paint shall use the gentlest method possible.
6. The type of metal shall be identified prior to any cleaning procedure because each metal has its own properties and may require a different treatment.
7. Non-corrosive chemical methods shall be used to clean soft metals (such as lead, tinplate, terneplate, copper, and zinc) whose finishes can be easily damaged by abrasive methods.
8. If gentler methods have proven ineffective, then abrasive cleaning methods, such as low pressure dry grit blasting, may be allowed for hard metals (such as cast iron, wrought iron, and steel) as long as it does not abrade or damage the surface.
9. A test patch of the cleaning method(s) shall be reviewed and approved on site by staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission to ensure that no damage has resulted. Test patches shall be carried out well in advance. Ideally, the test patch should be monitored over a sufficient period of time to allow long-range effects to be predicted (including exposure to all seasons if possible).
10. Cleaning to remove corrosion and paint removal should be considered only where there is deterioration and as part of an overall maintenance program that involves repainting or applying other appropriate protective coatings. Paint or other coatings help retard the corrosion rate of the metal. Leaving the metal bare will expose the surface to accelerated corrosion.
11. Repainting should be based on paint seriation studies. If an adequate record does not exist, repainting shall be done with colors that are appropriate to the style and period of the building.

#### **7.4.5 Windows (also refer to Masonry, Wood, and Architectural Metals)**

1. The original or later contributing arrangement of window openings shall be retained.
2. Enlarging or reducing window openings for the purpose of fitting stock (larger or smaller) window sash or air conditioners shall not be allowed.
3. Removal of window sash and the installation of permanent fixed panels to accommodate air conditioners shall not be allowed.

4. Original or later contributing window sash, elements, features (functional and decorative), details, and ornamentation shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired by patching, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing using recognized preservation methods.
5. Deteriorated window sash, elements, features (functional and decorative), details, and ornamentation or missing components of window features should be replaced with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration, and detail of installation. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
6. When replacement of sash, elements, features (functional and decorative), details, or ornamentation is necessary, it shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
7. Tinted or reflective-coated glass shall be allowed for new interior storm windows, but shall not be allowed for original or later contributing windows. Photochromic film shall be allowed on new interior storm windows.
8. Exterior or interior combination storm windows shall have a narrow perimeter framing that does not obscure the glazing of the primary window. In addition, the meeting rail of the combination storm window shall align with that of the primary window. All new storm windows shall be reviewed by the Commission with drawings showing existing and new conditions. The addition of new storm windows shall be reversible and shall minimize damage to existing building material.
9. Storm window sashes and frames shall have a painted finish that matches the primary window sash and frame color.
10. Repainting of window frames, sashes, and, if appropriate, shutters, should be of a color based on paint seriation studies. If an adequate record does not exist, repainting shall be done with colors that are appropriate to the style and period of the building.

#### **7.4.6 Entrances/Doors (also refer to Masonry, Wood, Architectural Metals, and Porches/Stoops)**

1. All original or later contributing entrance elements shall be preserved.
2. The original or later contributing entrance design and arrangement of the door openings shall be retained.
3. Creating new entrance openings should be avoided when possible. Where necessary to accommodate new uses or for achieving accessibility, new entrance openings will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
4. Enlarging or reducing entrance/door openings for the purpose of fitting stock (larger or smaller) doors shall not be allowed.
5. Original or later contributing entrance materials, elements, details and features (functional and decorative) shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired by patching, splicing, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing using recognized preservation methods.
6. Deteriorated entrance elements, materials, features (functional and decorative), details, and ornamentation or missing components of entrance features should be replaced with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration and detail of installation. If using the same material is not

technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

7. When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
8. Original or later contributing entrance materials, elements, features (functional and decorative) and details shall not be sheathed or otherwise obscured by other materials.
9. Storm doors (aluminum or wood-framed) shall not be allowed on the primary entrance unless evidence shows that they had been used. They may be allowed on secondary entrances. Where allowed, storm doors shall be painted to match the color of the primary door.
10. Unfinished aluminum storm doors shall not be allowed.
11. Replacement door hardware should replicate the original or be appropriate to the style and period of the building.
12. Buzzers, alarms and intercom panels, where allowed, shall be flush mounted and appropriately located.
13. Entrance elements should be of a color based on paint seriation studies. If an adequate record does not exist, repainting shall be done with colors that are appropriate to the style and period of the building/entrance.

#### **7.4.7 Porches/Stoops (also refer to Masonry, Wood, Architectural Metals, Entrances/Doors, Roofs, and Accessibility)**

1. All original or later contributing porch elements shall be preserved.
2. Original or later contributing porch and stoop materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details, and ornamentation shall be retained if possible and, if necessary, repaired using recognized preservation methods.
3. Existing porch and stoop materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation that become deteriorated or missing should be replaced with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration and detail of installation. Alternative materials will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. Original or later contributing porch and stoop materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation shall not be sheathed or otherwise obscured by other materials.
6. Porch and stoop elements should be of a color based on paint seriation studies. If an adequate record does not exist repainting shall be done with colors that are appropriate to the style and period of the building/porch and stoop.

#### **7.4.8 Lighting**

1. There are several aspects of lighting related to the exterior of the building and landscape:

- a. Lighting fixtures as appurtenances to the building or elements of architectural ornamentation.
  - b. Quality of illumination on building exterior.
  - c. Security lighting.
2. Wherever integral to the building, original or later contributing lighting fixtures shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired by patching, piercing in or reinforcing the lighting fixture using recognized preservation methods.
3. Deteriorated lighting fixture materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details, and ornamentation or missing components of lighting fixtures should be replaced with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration, and detail of installation. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. Original or later contributing lighting fixture materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details, and ornamentation shall not be sheathed or otherwise obscured by other materials.
6. Supplementary illumination may be added where appropriate to the current use of the building.
7. New lighting shall conform to any of the following approaches as appropriate to the building and to the current or projected use:
  - a. Reproductions of original or later contributing fixtures, based on physical or documentary evidence.
  - b. Accurate representation of the original period, based on physical or documentary evidence.
  - c. Retention or restoration of fixtures that date from an interim installation and that are considered to be appropriate to the building and use.
  - d. New lighting fixtures that are differentiated from the original or later contributing fixture in design and that illuminate the exterior of the building in a way that renders it visible at night and compatible with its environment.
8. The location of new exterior lighting shall fulfill the functional intent of the current use without obscuring the building form or architectural detailing.
9. No exposed conduit shall be allowed on the building.
10. Architectural night lighting is encouraged, provided the lighting installations minimize night sky light pollution. High efficiency fixtures, lamps and automatic timers are recommended.
11. On-site mock-ups of proposed architectural night lighting may be required.

#### **7.4.9 Storefronts (also refer to Masonry, Wood, Architectural Metals, Windows, Entrances/Doors, Porches/Stoops, Lighting, and Accessibility)**

1. Refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (Storefront section).



#### **7.4.10 Roofs (also refer to Masonry, Wood, Architectural Metals, and Roof Projections)**

1. The roof shapes and contributing roof elements (visible from public ways) of the existing building shall be preserved.
2. Original or later contributing roofing materials such as slate, wood trim, elements, features (decorative and functional), details and ornamentation, such as cresting, shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired by patching or reinforcing using recognized preservation methods.
3. Deteriorated roofing materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation or missing components of roof features should be replaced with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration and detail of installation. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. Original or later contributing roofing materials, elements, features (functional and decorative), details and ornamentation shall not be sheathed or otherwise obscured by other materials.
6. Unpainted mill-finished aluminum shall not be allowed for flashing, gutters and downspouts. All replacement flashing and gutters should be copper or match the original material and design (integral gutters shall not be replaced with surface-mounted).
7. External gutters and downspouts should not be allowed unless based on physical or documentary evidence.

#### **7.4.11 Roof Projections (includes satellite dishes, antennas and other communication devices, louvers, vents, chimneys, and chimney caps; also refer to Masonry, Wood, Architectural Metals, and Roofs)**

1. New roof projections shall not be visible from the public way.
2. New mechanical equipment should be reviewed to confirm that it is no more visible than the existing.

#### **7.4.12 Additions (also refer to General Standards above)**

1. Additions can significantly alter the historic appearance of the buildings. An exterior addition should only be considered after it has been determined that the existing building cannot meet the new space requirements.
2. New additions shall be designed so that the character-defining features of the building are not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed.
3. New additions should be designed so that they are compatible with the existing building, although they should not necessarily be imitative of an earlier style or period.
4. New additions shall not obscure the front of the building.
5. New additions shall be of a size, scale, and materials that are in harmony with the existing building.

#### **7.4.13 Accessibility**

1. Alterations to existing buildings for the purposes of providing accessibility shall provide persons with disabilities the level of physical access to historic properties that is required under applicable law, consistent with the preservation of each property's significant historical features, with the goal of providing the highest level of access with the lowest level of impact. Access modifications for persons with disabilities shall be designed and installed to least affect the character-defining features of the property; modifications should be reversible when possible and preserve as much of the original materials as possible. Modifications to some features may be allowed in providing access, once a review of options for the highest level of access has been completed.
2. A three-step approach is recommended to identify and implement accessibility modifications that will protect the integrity and historic character of the property:
  - a. Review the historical significance of the property and identify character-defining features;
  - b. Assess the property's existing and proposed level of accessibility;
  - c. Evaluate accessibility options within a preservation context.
3. Because of the complex nature of accessibility, the Commission will review proposals on a case-by-case basis. The Commission recommends consulting with the following document, which is available from the Commission office: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Preservation Assistance Division; Preservation Brief 32 "Making Historic Properties Accessible" by Thomas C. Jester and Sharon C. Park, AIA.

#### **7.4.14 Renewable Energy Sources**

1. Renewable energy sources, including but not limited to solar energy, are encouraged for the site.
2. Proposals for new renewable energy sources shall be reviewed by the Commission on a case-by-case basis for potential physical and visual impacts on the building and site.
3. Refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings for general guidelines.

#### **7.4.15 Building Site**

1. The general intent is to preserve the existing or later contributing site and landscape features that enhance the property.
2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has character, scale and street pattern quite different from what existed when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition between the historic property and its newer surroundings.
3. All original or later contributing features of the building site that are important in defining its overall historic character shall be retained and, if necessary, repaired using recognized preservation methods. This may include but is not limited to walls, fences, steps, walkways, paths, furnishings, fixtures, and decorative elements.
4. Deteriorated or missing site features should be replaced with material and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, configuration and detail of installation. Alternative materials will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5. When replacement is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
6. The existing landforms of the site shall not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the designated property's structure or site.
7. If there are areas where the terrain is to be altered, these areas shall be surveyed and documented to determine the potential impact to important landscape features.
8. The historic relationship between buildings and the landscape shall be retained. Grade levels should not be changed if it would alter the historic appearance of the building and its relation to the site.
9. Buildings should not be relocated if it would diminish the historic character of the site.
10. When they are required by a new use, new site features (such as parking areas, driveways, or access ramps) should be as unobtrusive as possible, retain the historic relationship between the building or buildings and the landscape, and be compatible with the historic character of the property.
11. Original or later contributing layout and materials of the walks, steps, and paved areas shall be maintained. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that better site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will improve this without altering the integrity of the designated property.
12. When they are necessary for security, protective fencing, bollards, and stanchions should be as unobtrusive as possible.
13. The Boston Landmarks Commission encourages removal of non-historic fencing as documentary evidence indicates.
14. The Boston Landmarks Commission recognizes that the designated property must continue to meet city, state, and federal goals and requirements for resiliency and safety within an ever-changing coastal flood zone and environment.

#### **7.4.16 Archaeology**

1. Staff archaeologists shall review proposed changes to a property that may impact known and potential archaeological sites. All below-ground work within the property shall be reviewed by the Boston Landmarks Commission and City Archaeologist to determine if work may impact known or potential archaeological resources. An archaeological survey may be required to determine if significant archaeological deposits are present within the area of impact of the proposed work. An archaeological survey shall be conducted if archaeological sensitivity exists and if impacts to known or potential archaeological resources cannot be mitigated after consultation with the City Archaeologist.
2. Significant archaeological resources shall be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be required before the proposed work can commence. All archaeological mitigation (monitoring, survey, excavation, etc.) shall be conducted by a professional archaeologist. The professional archaeologist should meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards for Archaeology.

#### **7.4.17 Interior Spaces, Features, and Finishes**

1. The floor plan and interior spaces, features, and finishes that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building shall be retained and preserved.

2. Original or later contributing interior materials, features, details, surfaces and ornamentation shall be repaired, if necessary, by patching, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing the materials using recognized preservation methods.
3. Interior materials, features, details, surfaces, and ornamentation that become deteriorated or missing should be replaced with materials and elements that match the original in material, color, texture, size, shape, profile, and detail of installation. Alternative materials will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
4. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. When necessary, appropriate surface treatments such as cleaning, paint removal, and reapplication of protective coating systems shall be applied to historic materials (including plaster, masonry, wood, and metals) that comprise interior spaces.
6. Damaged or deteriorated paint and finishes shall be removed only to the next sound layer using the gentlest method possible prior to repainting or refinishing using compatible paint or other coating systems.
7. New material that is installed shall not damage character-defining interior features or finishes. If unavoidable, the installation of temporary materials for special events or temporary exhibits may obscure character-defining interior features or finishes if the temporary materials are fully removable without causing any damage.
8. New or additional systems required for a new use for the building, such as bathrooms and mechanical equipment, should be installed in secondary spaces to preserve the historic character of the most significant interior spaces.
9. New mechanical and electrical wiring, ducts, pipes, and cables should be installed in closets, service areas, and wall cavities whenever possible to preserve the historic character of interior spaces, features, and finishes.
10. New, code-required stairways or elevators should be located in secondary and service areas of the historic building.

#### **7.4.18 Guidelines**

The following are additional Guidelines for the treatment of the historic property:

1. Should any major restoration or construction activity be considered for a property, the Boston Landmarks Commission recommends that the proponents prepare a historic building conservation study and/or consult a materials conservator early in the planning process.
  - a. The Boston Landmarks Commission specifically recommends that any work on masonry, wood, metals, or windows be executed with the guidance of a professional building materials conservator.
2. Should any major restoration or construction activity be considered for a property's landscape, the Boston Landmarks Commission recommends that the proponents prepare a historic landscape report and/or consult a landscape historian early in the planning process.
3. When reviewing an application for proposed alterations, the Commission will consider whether later addition(s) and/or alteration(s) to the features or elements proposed for alteration can, or should, be removed on a case-by-case basis. Since it is not possible to

provide one general guideline, the following factors will be considered in determining whether a later addition(s) and/or alteration(s) can, or should, be removed include:

- a. Compatibility with the existing property's integrity in scale, materials and character.
- b. Historic association with the property.
- c. Quality in the design and execution of the addition/alteration.
- d. Functional usefulness.

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