

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Massachusetts State House

AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts State House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Beacon Hill

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Boston

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8 th

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

25

COUNTY

Suffolk

CODE

025

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

\_\_\_ DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

\_\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_\_ SITE

\_\_\_ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

PUBLIC

\_\_\_ PRIVATE

\_\_\_ BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_\_ IN PROCESS

\_\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

OCCUPIED

\_\_\_ UNOCCUPIED

\_\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_\_ YES UNRESTRICTED

\_\_\_ NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_\_ COMMERCIAL

\_\_\_ EDUCATIONAL

GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_\_ MUSEUM

\_\_\_ PARK

\_\_\_ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_\_ RELIGIOUS

\_\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_ OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

STREET & NUMBER

Beacon Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Suffolk County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Somerset Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey (Gates and Steps, 10 sheets, 6 photos)

DATE

1938, 1941

FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The following description from the Columbian Centinel, January 10, 1798 is reproduced in Harold Kinken's The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch,

The New State-House is an oblong building, 173 feet front, and 61 deep, it consists externally of a basement story, 20 feet high, and a principal story 30 feet. This in the center of the front south is crowned with an Attic 60 feet wide, 20 feet high, which is covered with a pediment: Immediately above this rises a dome 50 feet diameter and 30 feet high, the whole terminated with an elegant circular lanthorn, supporting a gilt pine cone, an emblem of one of our principal staples.

The basement story is finished plain on the wings with square windows. The centre (portico of the south front) is 94 feet in length, and formed of arches which project 14 feet; they form a covered wall below, and support a Colonnade of Corinthian columns of the same extent above. The outside walls are of large patent bricks, with white marble fascias, impostes and key stones.

The lower story is divided into a large hall or public walk in the centre, 55 feet square and 20 high, supported by Doric columns--two entries, each 16 feet wide, with two flights of stairs in each, and at the ends Offices for the Treasurer and Secretary of the Commonwealth.

The rooms above are-- The Representatives Room (now used as the Senate Chamber), in the center 55 feet square, the corners formed into niches for fire places; this room is finished with Doric Columns on the sides, at 12 feet from the floor, forming a gallery; the Doric entablature surrounds the whole, from this spring four flat arches on the side, which being united by a circular cornice above, form in the angles four large pendants to a bold and well proportioned dome. The pendants are ornamented with Trophies of Commerce, Agriculture, Peace and War. The Dome is finished in Compartments of stucco in a style of simple elegance. The center of the Dome is 50 feet from the floor. The seats for the Members are ranged semicircularly, and the Speaker's chair in face of the whole."

Doric Hall still remains, conveying much of the dignity of Bulfinch's original design. It is as stated in the above description approximately 55 feet square and takes its name from the two rows of Doric pillars. Wooden floors have long since been replaced by marble and the columns are iron and plaster copies of the original wooden ones.

The Council Chamber (now the Governor's Office) is on the opposite quarter of the building: it is 27 feet square, and 20 high, with a flat ceiling; the walls are finished with Corinthian pilasters and pannels of stucco, these panels are enriched with the State Arms, with emblems of Executive Power, the scale and sword of Justice, and the insignia of Arts and Freedom, the Caduceus and Cap of Liberty. The whole is decorated with wreaths of oak and laurel.

The four windows, two each in the south and west walls, are recessed and a

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1787-1795-98

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Charles Bulfinch

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1787 and erected by the noted architect in 1795-98, the Massachusetts State House is one of the supreme examples of Federal-period civic architecture in the United States; the structure is also the masterpiece of Bulfinch's many fine public buildings. Despite many exterior and interior changes made during the 19th century, the Old State House still reflects Bulfinch's genius and a large portion of the interior finish of its major rooms is still comprised of original material and workmanship.

### HISTORY

Beginning in June 1787 and continuing until January 1795 numerous committees met to consider the question of erecting a new State House. On November 5, 1787, the Boston architect Charles Bulfinch submitted a plan for the proposed building to the legislature. Postive actions, however, was not taken until February 16, 1795, when Governor Samuel Adams approved the Resolve of the General Court adopting Bulfinch's plan of 1787, with some revisions made in January 1795, and also appointing Bulfinch and two legislators as agents for the project. The cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1795, and the new State House was occupied on January 11, 1798.

Bulfinch did not design the State House for its present splendid postion atop Boston's highest hill. Indeed, until quite late in the story it was not even certain that Boston would continue as capital of the commonwealth. Worcester put in strong claims in 1793 and backed them up with a bond of £5,000. And earlier, Plymouth petitioned the General Court for location in that most ancient of Massachusetts towns. Nonetheless, shortly after Bulfinch's design was first submitted a legislative committee made public its preference for "William Foster's pasture" in the South End as the future seat of government. This land, on the north side of Boylston Street and since included in the Common, was acquired by the town on trade in 1787 and held for that purpose. Three years later, however, Bulfinch changed the direction of the town's growth when he erected the Memorial Column on the highest of Boston's three hills. At this time Beacon Hill was a steep and rugged eminence about twice the present height--a wilderness of rocks and brambles used for grazing. In 1791 Dr. John Joy commissioned Bulfinch to design the first of a succession of celebrated Beacon Hill houses and this was followed, in 1795, by the town's purchase of "Hancock's pasture" as the site of the projected capitol. The Massachusetts State House established the enduring character of Beacon Hill, and the Bulfinch building, with its great dome, became the signature of Boston.

In his letter of 1787 to the legislative committee Bulfinch gave the source of

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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 John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, The Architecture of America, A Social and Cultural History (Boston and Toronto, 1961).  
 James M. Fitch, American Building, The Forces that Shape It (Boston, 1948).  
 Wendell D. Garrett, Paul F. Norton, Alan Gowans, Joseph T. Butler, The Arts in America, The 19th Century (New York, 1969), 53-55.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY C 5.75

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	3,2,9	9,8,0	4,6	9,1	4,4,0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING	
C							D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the Massachusetts State House encloses the grounds of the entire building, beginning at the southeast corner at the intersection of Bowdoin and Beacon Street, continuing west along the north curb of Beacon Street about 565 feet; thence running northerly by land of the Unitarian Universalist Association 130.19 feet; thence running easterly along Joy Place 31.63 feet; thence running northerly by the easterly end of Joy Place, and by other land of the Unitarian

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project  
 original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1970.

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street NW

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington

D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

Designated: Dec. 19, 1960  
 date  
 Boundary Certified: George T. Erwin  
 date Jan. 11, 1960

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 4/21/79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
 LANDMARKS)

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CONTINUATION SHEET Mass. State House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

large fireplace with an elaborate marble mantel is located in the west wall between the windows. The wall decorations from Bulfinch's designs are largely intact.

The Senate Chamber is the central room in the State House as Bulfinch designed it. Considerably above the height of its domed ceiling rises the gilded dome of the State House itself. Arching down from the apex of the ceiling, widening rays carry a sunburst design through circle after circle of ornament. The four emblems at the four corners of the room, just below the lower edge of the dome, represent commerce, agriculture, war and peace. Each is framed by classical draperies and by two cornucopias holding fruit and leaves.

Designed as the Massachusetts House of Representatives, the room served its original purpose for almost a century after the State House was opened in 1798.

From 1798 to 1896 the Senate Reception Room was the Senate Chamber. Only the Governor's Office retains as much of the ornament chosen by Bulfinch for the important rooms of the State House.

Three high-arched windows on the south wall look down on Beacon Street and Boston Common; three along the east wall, which once overlooked Boston Harbor, now face one of the white marble State House wings built in 1914-17. Three more windows in the north wall survive simply as arches. They were closed when additions were made to the rear of the building in 1853-56.

The chamber is barrel-roofed with a small gallery at the west end. Bulfinch's decorations on the walls and ceiling show to full advantage in the spaciousness and openness of the room.

Blue and white borders divide the ceiling into panels. Where the borders intersect, sunburst patterns fill the corners. Within each panel, the sunburst patterns from the four corners frame an oval in which the central decorations are placed.

Around the fastening of the chandelier is the central ornament of the ceiling, a swirl of acanthus leaves. A ring of leaves and berries echoes the circular pattern and sets it off. In the panels to the right and left, identical circles of leaves and berries frame single blossoms with radiant leaves. Lower on the ceiling, grates are framed in ovals of oak leaves, and near the lower edge of the ceiling simple panels, containing classical draperies with leaves and ribbons, set off the more complex decorations above.

The broad shallow arch at the east end of the room holds the Massachusetts arms of 1780 set off by a leaf and ribbon border. In the shallow arch at

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the west end of the room, above the balustrade of the gallery, an identical border frames a clock surmounted by an American Eagle. The American motto, E Pluribus Unum--Out of Many, One--is below.

Rows of Ionic columns with octagonal bases border the central section of the chamber, which is thirty-six feet square. The bays at the north and south ends extend the depth of the room to fifty-six feet. Along all four walls are Ionic pilasters.

Four fireplaces, in the east and west walls within the bays, have not survived, being closed off in 1866. The room as it originally was should be visualized with fireplaces and with windows in the north as well as the east and south walls. Besides these principal rooms, there are about 20 smaller, plainly finished, for the use of committees.

The stairs (located in the two corridors that flank the east and west sides of the center room) are spacious, and two flights of them lead to the top of the outer Dome, 170 steps from the foundation. Second story windows of the two wings, on the south elevation, were arranged in three bays in each wing and consisted of a tall blind-arched window in each center bay flanked on either side by a lower but similar window. The 5 rectangular windows in the second story of the porch were topped by flat winged arches with keystones, with small rectangular windows located above each and the two bracketed doorways, located in the east bay, were crowned with lunettes. A balustrade extended around the roof of the portico and the third story, five bays wide, had a center door flanked by two rectangular windows, with lunettes in either end bay.

Additions and alteration to the exterior of the south (front) elevation include the following items; the wooden balustrade added to the roof of the main structure, the construction of a granite basement above the ground and the consequent removal of east and west porches; the elimination of chimneys when central heating was installed in 1866-67; the addition of pilasters between the windows in the second-story level of the south portico; the substitution of rectangular windows for two lunettes in the third story, and the addition of fan lights above the two doors opening on to the south porch.

So far as can be determined, sometime after 1825 the State House was painted yellow, remaining this color well into the present century.

The dome, originally shingled and whitewashed, was covered with copper by Paul Revere and Sons in 1802. For many years afterwards it was painted dark gray. In 1861 it was painted gold and since 1874 it has been covered

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CONTINUATION SHEET Mass. State House ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 4

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with gold leaf. The dome itself has been rebuilt twice, in 1859 and in 1897, when an effort was made to reproduce the lines of Bulfinch's original. At the end of the nineteenth century the building was carefully strengthened, fire-proofed and restored. In 1960 it became necessary to replace the columns on the facade with careful reproductions of iron with aluminum capitals.

The setting of the State House has a history of its own. The most important of all changes were the work of developers: the tearing down of the summit of Beacon Hill, behind the State House, in 1811-12, and the demolition of the Hancock House, on Beacon Street near the State House, in 1863.

The State House grounds have been repeatedly enlarged. One of the first major landscaping projects was carried out in 1826. Alexander Parris, a disciple of Bulfinch, designed a central double gate, with single gates at each side, leading to the front steps. The gates were set between massive granite posts. Parris and Solomon Willard at the same time replaced brick fences on the east and north with granite walls surmounted by an iron picket fence, and built a similar wall and fence in front of the building on either side of the new gateway.

Under the supervision of Stephen Fuller and Solomon Willard, the grounds were regraded in 1833 to make a more gradual slope to the State House. They have been altered many times since, and have accumulated a variety of relics and memorials. The two bronze fountains built in 1849 no longer survive, but Hiram Powers' statue of Daniel Webster, dedicated in 1859, and Emma Stebbins' statue of Horace Mann, dedicated in 1865, are prominent on the front grounds today, along with statues of later date.

Land-takings from 1881 to 1901 resulted in a great enlargement of the grounds. The present design of the grounds was carried out under the direction of William Chapman between 1914 and 1919.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Mass. State House ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

inspiration for his plan, writing: "It (the State House) is in the style of a building celebrated all over Europe." He was referring to Somerset House, London, the government building by Sir William Chambers, begun in 1778, and in particular to its central pavilion on the river front. This feature Bulfinch enlarged and elaborated for use on the State House, "with the dome inflated to a grand, dominating hemisphere.

The somber Neo-Palladian character of Somerset House was also softened, in Bulfinch's design, by Neoclassical touches, such as blind-arched windows in the second-story and bracketed doorways crowned with lunettes in the south colonnade. The use of brick in place of stone also lessens the grandeur and links it to the tradition of public buildings of the preceding colonial period such as Old State House in Newport and the State House (Independence Hall) in Philadelphia.

At the same time the essentially horizontal emphasis of the State House was accentuated by end pavilions (now gone) and the use of coupled columns in the south colonnade.

Except for a change in the highest series of chimneys, the completed south front follows exactly the design as given by Bulfinch in his plan. The architect received \$800 for his services as agent and an additional \$600.91 for his services as supervising architect. Total cost construction, including furnishings, was \$113,333.34. In 1802 an additional appropriation for \$4,000 was voted to Paul Revere and Son to cover the shingled roof with copper. The "smoke colored" dome was not gilded until 1861, and later, in 1874, covered with gold leaf.

Much of the splendid carpentry work, including the nearly three-foot Corithian capitals, was done by the firm of John and Simeon Skillin. These great columns, 25 feet long and of solid pine from Maine, have now been replaced by metal ones.

When the General Court voted to restore the Bulfinch State House in 1896, the long north elevation of the structure was totally obscured by an extension constructed in 1889-95 that was six times the size of the original building. This "wing" absorbed two earlier additions: a row of four fireproof rooms erected in 1831 from the design of Isaiah Rogers and a larger addition by Gridley Bryant put up in 1853-56. Recent research has revealed that the original north front did not have a projecting center colonnade as on the south facade, but rather that the center of the north elevation was decorated with giant pilasters. By 1812 the exterior brickwork of the State House had been painted white and from 1825 until early in the 20th century it was painted yellow.

In the 1896-98 restoration the State House was fireproofed by the addition of



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steel beams and the cupola or lantern on the dome was also carefully reconstructed.

Neither the south (front) elevation nor the interior escaped alterations in the 19th century. The other principal exterior changes include the construction of a granite basement above ground and the consequent removal of the east and west end porches; the elimination of chimneys when central heating was installed in 1867; the addition of pilasters between the windows in the second story level of the south portico; the continuance of the balustrade of the portico around the roof of the main structure; the substitution of rectangular windows for two lunettes in the third story, and the addition of fan lights above the two doors opening on to the south porch.

Between 1914 and 1917, the north side and a portion of the east and west ends of the Bulfinch building were enclosed by relatively inoffensive marble and granite wings, designed by William Chapman, R. Clipson Sturgis, and Robert D. Andrews.

The interior of the State House also underwent many changes during the 19th century. Nonetheless, the Doric Hall, located in the center of the first story, and the three chambers of the Council, Representatives, and Senate on the second floor are close to the original design and contain much original workmanship, although now serving different functions. The original Senate Chamber is now a reception room and includes a gallery not specified in Bulfinch's plan but which is known to have been finished in 1797. The original Representatives chamber now accommodates the Senate; and the former Council Chamber, which contains some handsome stucco work probably done by Daniel Raynerd, now serves as the Governor's office.

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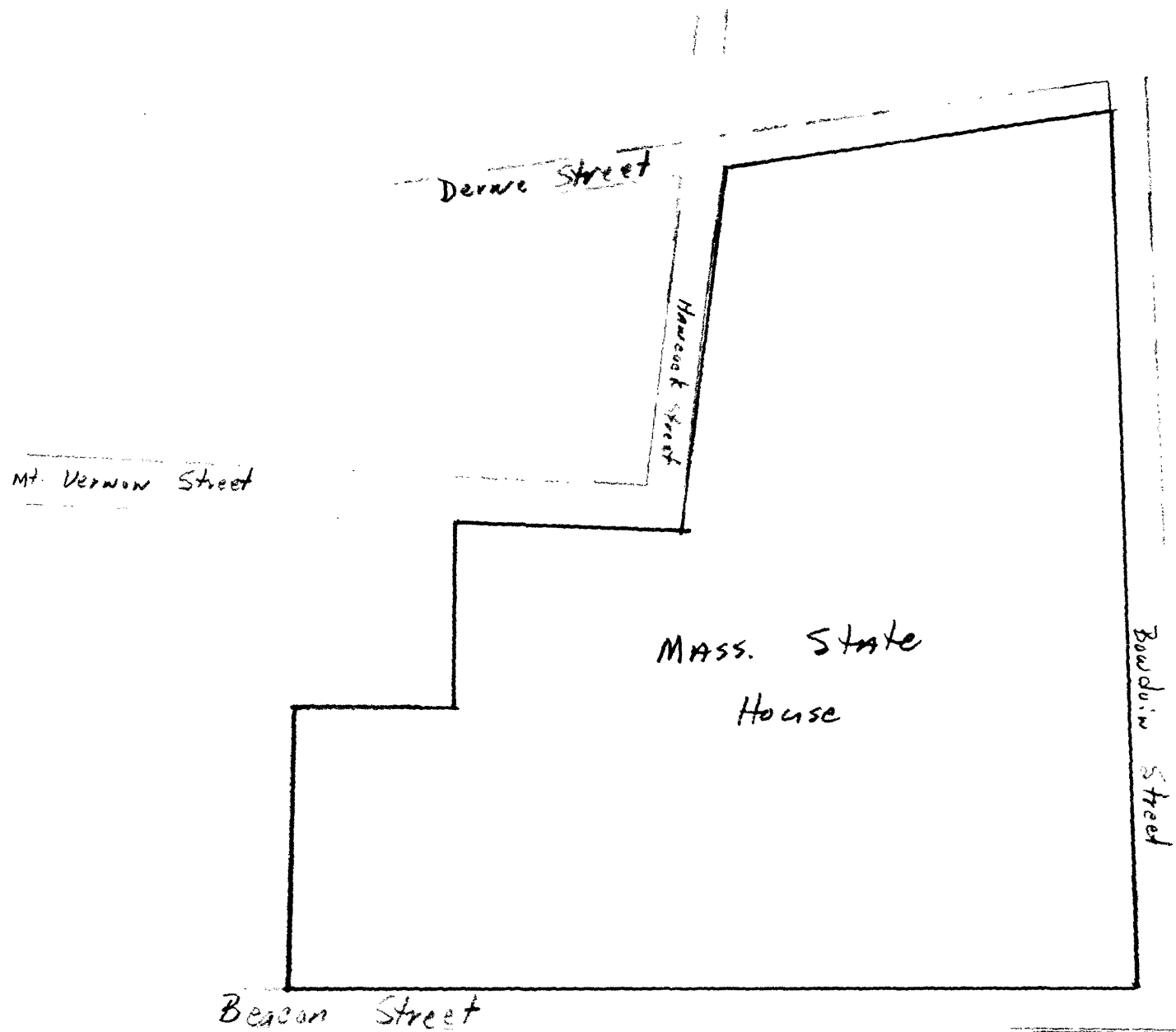
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Massachusetts State House  
CONTINUATION SHEET Boundary ITEM NUMBER *810* PAGE 2

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Universalist Association, and by the easterly end of Mount Vernon Place 148.12 feet; thence running easterly by land of Louis J. Binda about 3 feet; thence running northerly by the same 83.71 feet to Mount Vernon Street; thence running easterly along Mount Vernon Street about 115 feet to the southeast intersection of Mount Vernon Street and Hancock Street; thence running northerly across Mount Vernon Street and Hancock Street; thence running northerly across Mount Vernon Street and along Hancock Street about 351 feet to Derne Street; thence running easterly along Derne Street about 362 feet to Bowdoin Street; thence running southerly along Bowdoin Street about 531 feet to the point of beginning, as described in the Massachusetts Historical Commission Consent to Certification dated March 24, 1966.



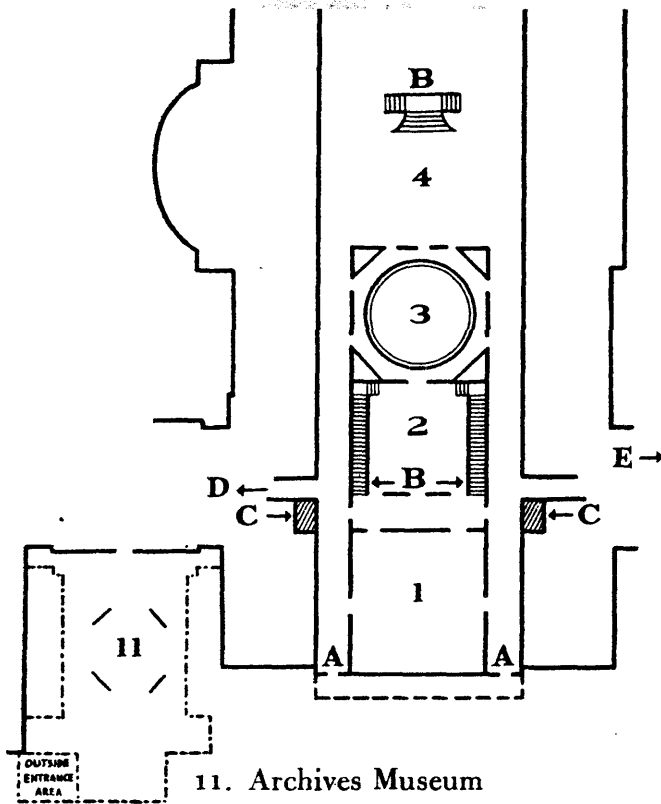
Boundary in green.  
Not drawn to  
scale

Second floor (including ground floor of the original Bulfinch building)

1. Doric Hall
2. Senate Staircase Hall
3. Hall of Flags (Memorial Hall)
4. Main Staircase Hall

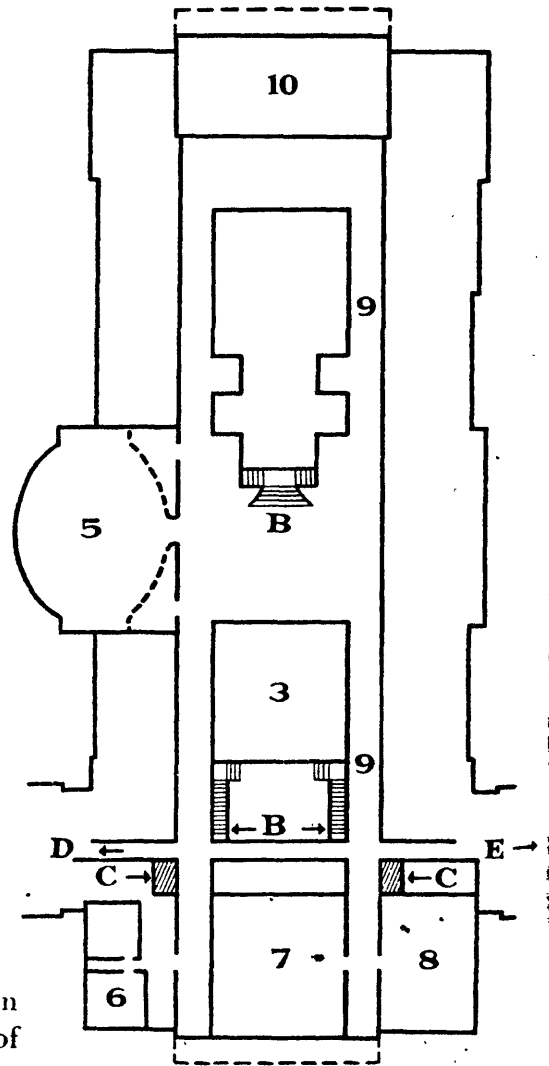
Third floor (including second floor of the original Bulfinch building)

5. House of Representatives
6. Governor's Office
7. Senate Chamber
8. Senate Reception Room
9. East Corridor
10. State Library



11. Archives Museum

- A. Main entrance
- B. Stairs
- C. Elevators
- D. Corridor, West Wing: elevators to Archives Museum
- E. East Wing. The main information desk is located on the first floor of the East Wing, at the entrance near the equestrian statue of General Joseph Hooker.



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AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts State House

**2 LOCATION**

CITY, TOWN

Boston

\_\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

COUNTY

Suffolk

STATE

Massachusetts

**3 MAP REFERENCE**

SOURCE

"A New Guide to the Massachusetts State House" page 28

SCALE

unscaled

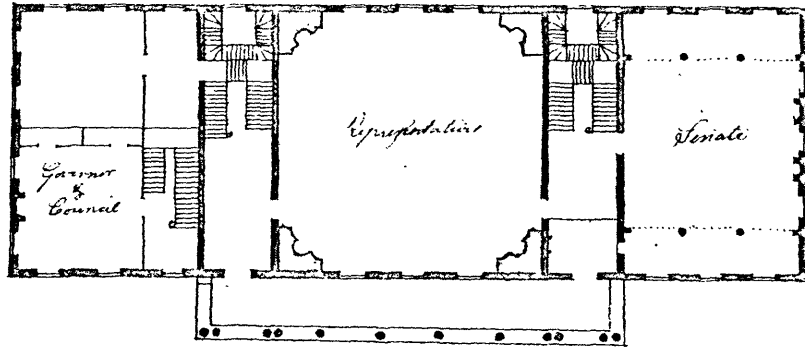
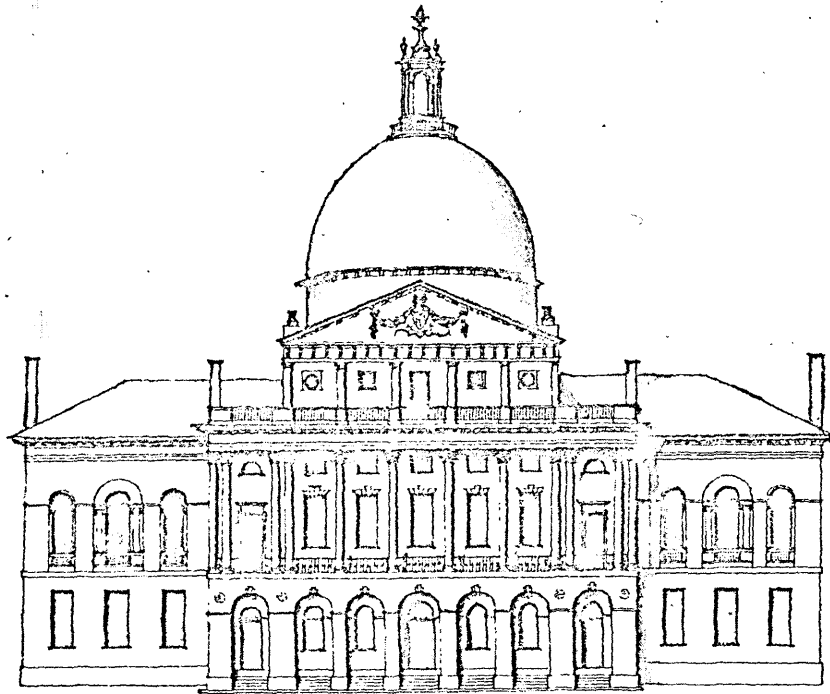
DATE

1964

**4 REQUIREMENTS**

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES



*Elevation and plan of the principal Story of the new State House in Providence.*  
*Edw. P. Moultrie.*

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COUNTY

Suffolk

STATE

Massachusetts

**3 MAP REFERENCE**

SOURCE

Bulfinch's Dug--Stokes Col., Prints Division, New York Public Library

SCALE

no scale indicated

DATE

undated

**4 REQUIREMENTS**

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2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES