



THE PROVINCE HOUSE, NORTH WALL WITH CLAPBOARDS REMOVED,
EXPOSING THE ORIGINAL BRICKWORK OF 1679
Photograph taken during demolition, May, 1922.

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Special Province House Issue

Editorial Preface

By ABBOTT LOWELL CUMMINGS

THIS special issue devoted entirely to the history and architectural analysis of the Peter Sergeant House, known throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the Province House, is an idea nearly fifty years old. Even as the last remains of the famous brick landmark were being demolished in May, 1922, William Sumner Appleton planned to publish this all-important archeological evidence in the columns of OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND.

Appleton's interest in the remains of the Province House dated back to the first decade of the century. He and Joseph E. Chandler had made measured drawings of the building about 1900. By 1911, however, these drawings were lost. A decade later, as the house was about to come down, Mr. Appleton turned to Mr. W. W. Cordingley, architect and antiquarian to find someone to make new drawings. His recommendation was a young draftsman working in the office of Cram and Ferguson of Boston, Thomas

T. Waterman. As Appleton recalled the scene five years later, he and Waterman put in scores of hours of time in securing as full details as possible of the structure of the house at the time these remaining walls were taken down. . . . It was such an interesting structure that the true account of it will make a great impression, of that I am sure.¹

Despite plans to publish a complete account of the building and the voluminous correspondence which accumulated in the "Province House" files at the Society, the project languished for many years. Perhaps it was the "difference of opinion among specialists as to whether or not [the east wall] was the wall of the original house of the seventeenth century or an eighteenth century reconstruction" which made Appleton hesitate. While Waterman consistently and erroneously

¹ Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Corresp. Files, letter from Appleton to Charles Burrage, March 15, 1911; letter from Appleton to Kimball, May 19, 1922; letter from Appleton to Robert S. Gardner, January 21, 1927.

maintained that the third story was built about 1690 and Appleton initially assumed "about 1716," Fiske Kimball suggested that the Journals of the Massachusetts House of Representatives might provide an answer. His short article published here resulted from the initial response to Appleton's Annual Report of 1922.²

In the meantime Walter Kendall Watkins investigated the history of the house and its occupants, and in his article, written in 1927, provides both the social history and the first complete use of the documentary evidence in the Massachusetts Archives about the house. The original typescript was edited by George Francis Dow for intended publication in *OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND* and has now been reedited by Mr. Richard M. Candee for inclusion in this issue. Footnotes to the sources quoted have been added, and Watkins' original notes have been greatly shortened to include only the most important information.

² *Ibid.*, letters from Appleton to R. G. Hubby, December 9 and 18, 1929; letter from Fiske Kimball to Appleton, May 14, 1923.

Mrs. Nancy Halverson Schless' analysis of the origins of the stylistic features, which the Sergeant House shared with a number of English brick houses and at least one American one, stems from a larger study of Dutch influence in seventeenth-century Boston architecture originally presented at the 1969 Annual Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians.

It would be nice to report that the evidence recorded here is complete and consistent. Such, unfortunately, is not the case. It must be borne in mind that the much-publicized reconstructed front and side elevations by Mr. Waterman contain a number of conjectural elements. We have thought it wise, therefore, to concentrate largely on the known evidence as recorded by him in Figures 4-6.

Our readers will discover, in any event, that the surviving record is voluminous and the evidence for the most part explicit. Above all, it is hoped that a much more clear picture will emerge of an amazing house which must have been at the time of its completion one of the most ambitious houses erected in seventeenth-century New England.