

**MYTH AND MEMORY:
THE LEGACY OF THE JOHN HANCOCK HOUSE**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in American Material Culture

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ABSTRACT

John Hancock, a man of Revolutionary-era national fame and Massachusetts state prominence, lived in the Hancock house on Beacon Hill in Boston for the majority of his adult life. This house, constructed in 1737 by John Hancock's uncle, the prominent Boston merchant Thomas Hancock, stood until 1863. The memory and legacy of John Hancock persists through the commemoration of his possessions and the efforts to recreate the demolished building. Both Hancock's possessions and the reinventions of his home serve as iconic impressions of colonial Massachusetts, and tangible connections to a Founding Father.

This thesis traces the creation of the Hancock house, with an emphasis upon its architectural significance and its interior furnishings. After the house's demolition, several attempts were made to recreate the structure. These efforts, both successful and unsuccessful, are analyzed for their significance in sustaining the memory of the Hancock legacy. Furniture from the Hancock house further commemorates John Hancock; these objects are venerated for their provenance in public and private collections and have served as "Revolutionary Relics" since their earliest organized display in 1876. Evaluating connections to colonial history and the reinterpretation of the Hancock house, this thesis demonstrates John Hancock's understudied but persistent legacy throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since 1860 when Mount Vernon, the Virginia home of George Washington, was saved from demolition and converted into a museum, Americans have paid homage to the lives and memories of the Founding Fathers by visiting their homes. Today, the former residences of Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams are maintained by caring preservation organizations that perpetuate and continue the legacies of these venerated individuals. Yet, how can the legacy of the life and times of an historical figure survive after his residence has been lost to the wrecking ball? After the demolition of an historic personage's home, the scattering of its interiors and the dispersal of its furnishings into collections far and wide, what is left to preserve? Examining the rise and fall of the Hancock house, in Boston, Massachusetts, this thesis will explore the public commemoration of a Founding Father through failed preservation efforts, architectural recreations and widely dispersed furnishings carefully preserved as relics.

Built in 1737 for the wealthy merchant Thomas Hancock (1703-1764), the Hancock house was the residence of generations of Hancocks, including the Revolutionary patriot John Hancock (1737-1793). Sited atop Beacon Hill, overlooking Boston Common, the Hancock house occupied one of the most impressive locations in Massachusetts (Figure 1). When built, the house represented

the ultimate in taste and discernment for its times. Its Georgian architectural form was expressed in expensive materials, such as a stone exterior, rarely used in colonial American residences. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the house was viewed as outdated. After two attempts by Hancock heirs to give the house to the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the structure was demolished in 1863 to make way for two fashionable townhouses.¹

John Hancock held several prominent political positions throughout his life. He served as Boston selectman, member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, Massachusetts governor and delegate and President of the Second Continental Congress, where he performed his most memorable act as the first signer of the Declaration of Independence. Although not a talented politician, the wealthy and socially prominent Hancock lent credibility to the cause of the American Revolution. As first and third Governor of Massachusetts, Hancock received favor from the lower classes by donating much of his fortune to the poor. Upon Governor Hancock's death on October 8, 1793, the state of Massachusetts mourned with an elaborate state funeral. Elegies lamented, "For him a Nation's grateful Tears are shed;/This vast Republic weeps the Man they lov'd/Wide human Nature mourns the glorious dead/By present & by future Worlds approv'd."² Despite the accolades lavished upon him at

¹ "Bostonians! Save the Old John Hancock Mansion," Broadside, Historic New England, Boston.

² "Elegy to Governor John Hancock," in *The Bostonian Society Publications 2* (Boston: Old State House, 1914), 111.

his grand funeral, however, Hancock was often unfavorably regarded during his lifetime, and his reputation diminished after his death. Criticisms of Hancock are largely based upon his lack of political skill and his widely known lavish taste in material goods.³

Despite John Hancock's critics, great interest in his home and his possessions persist. Although the Hancock house was erased from the Boston landscape in 1863, its memory, as well as John Hancock's legacy, live on through architectural recreations and preserved objects. Each reproduction of the house reflected the cultural values of a given time period. Architectural recreation efforts sought to mitigate the loss represented by the demolition of the Hancock house, which at its time was dubbed "an act of modern vandalism."⁴ While the original house was a significant example of Georgian architecture, its recreations were themselves prominent examples of the Colonial Revival movement. Hancock possessions were dispersed by a variety of auction sales held between the Governor's death in 1793 and the 1863 razing of the house. Family relations, antiquarians and interested individuals purchased objects from these sales as a means of memorializing the life and times of

³ Criticisms of Hancock in his lifetime include Stephen Higginson's February 1789 statements published in the *Massachusetts Centinel* that he was full of "vanity and caprice" with a "love of flattery...that detached him from his colleagues." Stephen Higginson, *Ten Chapters in the Life of John Hancock, Now First Published Since 1789* (New York: 1857), 10. Twentieth-century criticisms were prompted by James Truslow Adams, "Portrait of an Empty Barrel," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 61 (Sept. 1930): 425-434, rebutted in 1977 by Donald J. Proctor, "John Hancock: New Soundings on an Old Barrel," *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 3 (Dec. 1977): 652-677.

the Patriot and Governor, John Hancock. The story of the fate of the Hancock house, although a narrative of failed preservation efforts, clearly articulates an instinct to commemorate the past.

Previous scholarship has explored the construction of the Hancock house by Thomas Hancock and the influence of its demolition upon the local and national historic preservation movements. Few have studied the efforts to recreate the structure; little analysis of the original furnishings has been done. This thesis will first address the historiography related to the Hancock house. Next, it will trace the rise and fall of the house and will explore attempts at architectural recreation. Turning to the interiors, the thesis will address the major furnishings of the house acquired by successive generations. Afterwards, the Hancock house auction sales will be discussed in depth, with complete auction sale listings and surviving examples of items currently preserved in public and private collections. In conclusion, commemorative efforts displaying “Revolutionary Relics” from the Hancock house will be compared to those of other Founding Fathers. An appendix follows the text and includes a catalog of the sixty-eight pieces of located furniture possessing a provenance that places them at one time in the Hancock house.

⁴ “Bostonians!” Broadside. Historic New England.

Chapter 2

HISTORIOGRAPHY

In 1737 Thomas Hancock (1703-1784), a prominent Boston merchant, erected a family home atop Beacon Hill, at the highest point in the city of Boston, Massachusetts (Figure 2). Designed in the fashionable Georgian style, the Hancock house was built of hewn stone, a lavish, unprecedented building material in colonial Massachusetts. Thomas Hancock left the house to his widow Lydia, who passed the estate to her nephew, the President of the Second Continental Congress, first signer of the Declaration of Independence and first and third governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, John Hancock (1737-1793). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hancock house had passed through generations of Hancock descendents and was seen as an antiquated anachronism in the burgeoning industrial city of Boston. After attempts in 1859 to sell the house to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and later efforts in 1863 to offer the home to the City of Boston, the Hancock house was demolished. On its site real estate developers James Beebe and Gardner Brewer constructed a double brownstone (Figure 3). It stood until 1917, when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the land and eventually placed the West Wing of the Massachusetts State House on the site. Today all that remains of the Hancock house is an historical marker (Figure 4).

The story of the Hancock house moved through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a cautionary tale for antiquarians, historians and preservationists alike. Despite the importance of the Hancock house, a definitive history of the structure has never been undertaken. The legacy of the house has cast a considerable shadow: it is remembered for its architecture, its association with the patriot John Hancock and its importance in advancing the historic preservation movement. In texts on architecture, historic preservation and writings on the development of the City of Boston, the Hancock house receives scattered references. Neglected by nearly all scholars are the contents of the Hancock house. A review of the literature related to the house reveals these gaps in its historiography.

Architectural Significance

The Hancock house has been studied as a prime example of Georgian architecture in colonial Boston. As early as 1863, the year of the house's demolition, architect Arthur Gilman published an article on the structure in *Atlantic Monthly*. Gilman chronicled the house's evolution with a focus on its construction. Transcribed in the article are sections of Thomas Hancock's letterbook related to materials imported to build the house and the trees and plants included in his elaborate garden landscape design. Gilman cursorily addresses the interior and contents of the house, documenting the purchases of wallpapers, glassware, and a tall clock. Gilman pays

particular attention to family portraiture, including the portraits of Thomas, Lydia and John Hancock by John Singleton Copley.⁵

During the twentieth century, there was a resurgence of interest in the architectural significance of the house. Between 1922 and 1952 Fiske Kimball, John Mead Howells, Donald Millar, Hugh Morrison and Walter Kendall Watkins included the Hancock House in architectural surveys.⁶ Kimball, published in 1922, Howells, published in 1931, and Morrison, published in 1952, highlight the Hancock House as an important example of Georgian architecture in New England. With the exception of Walter Kendall Watkins, writing in 1926, all authors focus solely on the exterior of the structure and direct little attention to its interior. The works of Arthur Gilman and Donald Millar analyze architectural elements from the house. In his article, “The Hancock House and its Builder,” published in *Old-Time New England*, Watkins focuses on Thomas Hancock and the house construction.⁷ Watkins provides a

⁵ Arthur Gilman, “The Hancock House and its Founder,” *Atlantic Monthly* 11 (1863): 692-707.

⁶ Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1922, reprint 1950) 65, 70, 268; Donald Millar, “Notes on the Hancock House, Boston,” *Old-Time New England* 17, no. 3, (1927): 121-124; Walter Kendall Watkins, “The Hancock House and its Builder,” *Old-Time New England* 17, no. 1, (July 1926): 3-19; John Mead Howells, *Lost Examples of Colonial Architecture* (New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1931), 69; Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 480-484.

⁷ Despite Gilman’s article, Watkins begins his study by stating, “very little has been said or written about the first owner of the Hancock house, which formerly stood on Beacon Hill.” Watkins, “Builder,” 3.

biography of Thomas Hancock and addresses the purchase of land for his estate and the acquisition of materials to build the house. He illustrates the interior through woodcuts prepared in 1859 for the *Atlantic Monthly* and incorporates photographs of architectural elements from the house, such as balusters and stair rails. In addition, Watkins publishes stereoviews of the Hancock House parlor taken before the house's demolition. Relying on John Hancock's estate inventory of 1794, Watkins describes the contents of each room in the house. However, these interior furnishings are not illustrated or associated with items in private or public collections.

In 1987, Charles Hammond, curator of a loan exhibition of items associated with John Hancock, published "The Hancock House: 250 Years of Changing Views" in the *Ellis Memorial Antiques Show* catalog.⁸ The article provides a history of the Hancock house through the photographs, prints, architectural drawings and paintings created between 1789, when the *View of the Seat of His Excellency John Hancock, Esq., Boston* appeared in *Massachusetts Magazine*, and 1863 when John Hubbard Sturgis produced architectural drawings of the house. Although accompanying an exhibition of Hancock family objects, the article focuses largely on the exterior and architectural elements of the house that were purchased at auction sales in 1863 and dispersed during the "golden age of antiquarianism."⁹

⁸ Charles A. Hammond, "The Hancock House: 250 Years of Changing Views," *Ellis Memorial Antiques Show* (1981): 29-36.

⁹ Hammond, "250 Years," 36.

Architectural Significance to the Colonial Revival

Shortly before the demolition of the Hancock house in 1863, a young architect, John Hubbard Sturgis, faithfully recorded the architectural details of the house in what are today considered the first measured architectural drawings in the United States. Sturgis' drawings made features from the house accessible to Colonial Revival architects. Architectural historian Margaret Henderson Floyd studied the impact of the Sturgis drawings in her 1979 article, "Measured Drawings of the Hancock House by John Hubbard Sturgis: A Legacy to the Colonial Revival."¹⁰ Floyd first analyzes the exterior and interior architecture as represented in the seven drawings. She then explores the impact that the Hancock house had upon Sturgis' later architectural projects in Massachusetts, including the incorporation of salvaged architectural elements from the house. In her 1994 publication *Architecture After Richardson: Regionalism before Modernism—Longfellow, Alden, and Harlow in Boston and Pittsburgh*, Floyd documents the wider use of the Hancock drawings in Colonial Revival design throughout the country.¹¹

¹⁰ Margaret Henderson Floyd, "Measured Drawings of the Hancock House by John Hubbard Sturgis: A Legacy to the Colonial Revival," in *Architecture in Colonial Massachusetts: A Conference Held by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts September 19 and 20, 1974* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1979), 87-112.

¹¹ Floyd, *Architecture After Richardson: Regionalism before Modernism—Longfellow, Alden, and Harlow in Boston and Pittsburgh* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

The Hancock house's architectural legacy is often cited as an illustration of patriotism in the Colonial Revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As referenced by William B. Rhoads in his 1976 article "The Colonial Revival and American Patriotism," images of the Hancock house proliferated during the time period.¹² Reproductions of colonial era houses, such as the Massachusetts State Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and a replica of the Hancock house produced in 1926 by the New York State Historical Association, recalled America's fascination with its Revolutionary roots.

Hancock Estate's Significance in Boston's Development

The Hancock house has also been studied for its importance to the development of Beacon Hill in Boston. Located north of Boston Common, the hilltop had long been considered "a favored seat of Boston respectability."¹³ Hancock owned between six and seven acres of highly desirable land on the hill.¹⁴ The subdivisions of Hancock estate property were first recorded in 1855 and reprinted in 1887 as "Houses on Hancock Estate" in the *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners*

¹² William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism," *The Journal of Architectural Historians* 35, no. 4 (December 1976): 239-254.

¹³ Edwin M. Bacon, *Rambles Around Old Boston* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1914), 118.

¹⁴ Beaudry, et. al., "History and Site Archaeology of the West Lawn of the Massachusetts State House," Timelines, Inc. 1989, 17.

of the City of Boston. The report, referred to as the “Gleaner” articles, addresses how Hancock’s estate was dispersed after his death without a will.¹⁵ Allen Chamberlain’s 1924 book *Beacon Hill: Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions* further explores the complicated dispersal of Hancock’s land because of the absence of heirs.¹⁶ In 1795 former Hancock pasturelands were purchased to build the Massachusetts State House.¹⁷ In the early nineteenth century, the city of Boston cut down Beacon Hill to make way for development, largely altering sections of land that formerly had belonged to the Hancock estate.¹⁸ Scholars studying the development of the City of Boston in the twentieth century have addressed the dispersal of Hancock’s estate. Walter Muir Whitehill’s *Boston: A Topographical History* touches upon the dispersal without addressing the house itself.¹⁹ A thorough site history is provided in a 1989 archaeological survey of the West Lawn of the Massachusetts State House.²⁰

¹⁵ “Gleaner Articles,” City Document No. 103, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners 1880*, Rev. Ed. (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1887), 159-162.

¹⁶ Allan Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill: Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 146-160.

¹⁷ Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History* (1959; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 81.

¹⁸ Whitehill, *Topographical*, 82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰ Mary Beaudry, et. al, “Site Archaeology,” 1. The study began after a granite feature was uncovered during 1988 renovations to the Massachusetts State House. The resulting report indicates that the stone feature was not a part of the Hancock House,

The Hancock House's Significance to the Historic Preservation Movement

After the house's demolition in 1863, many Bostonians became increasingly concerned with issues of preservation throughout the city. The loss of the house helped engender a national historic preservation movement raising awareness of the importance of preserving the history of the United States, particularly at sites with Revolutionary associations.²¹ The timing of its razing, only a few years before the United States centennial celebration in 1876, presented further opportunities to reflect upon the future of historic structures in the country. In 1965, Charles B. Hosmer first acknowledged the importance of the house to the historic preservation movement in *The Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*. He described its demolition as “the most significant failure in the early days of the preservation movement.”²² Hosmer portrays the story

as originally speculated, rather it was a fragment of a retaining wall for the formal gardens that were located at the rear of the house. As a result of the determination that the stone feature was likely part of the garden, most of the report relates to the garden design at the site. The study does, however, provide thorough documentation of the site, including detailed maps of the house and estate. Few archaeological materials uncovered at the site relate to the period of Hancock's residency; a majority of the items have a TPQ date range associated with the Brewer and Beebe townhouses.

²¹ The attempt to save the Hancock House was concurrent with the work of Ann Pamela Cunningham and the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the first organized historic preservation effort in the country. The MVLA had successfully raised the funds to save Mount Vernon by 1859.

of the Hancock house as a catalyst not only for future Boston and New England preservation efforts, but also for a national movement. He states, “in ‘dying’ the Hancock house contributed more to the preservation movement than it ever could have by remaining intact.”²³

After the demolition of the Hancock house, individuals in New England grew more committed to preserving historic structures in danger of destruction. The Hancock house provided a touch point for efforts to preserve Boston’s Old South Church, Old State House and Paul Revere House in the years immediately following its demolition. In an 1863 address at the Old South Meeting House, Wendell Phillips cited the failure to save the Hancock house as motivation to preserve structures with connections to Revolutionary Boston.²⁴ In efforts to save the Old State House, newspapers reported, “the State House is not entirely safe in the hands of a people who could let the old Hancock House go.”²⁵

In *Boston’s Changeful Times: Origins of Preservation and Planning in America*, Michael Holleran treats the Hancock house as a case study. After discussing

²² Charles Hosmer, *The Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1965), 38.

²³ Hosmer, *Presence*, 40.

²⁴ Wendell Phillips, *Speeches, Lectures and Letters, Second Series* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1905), 238-9.

²⁵ *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 27, 1886, quoted in Michael Holleran, *Boston’s Changeful Times: Origins of Preservation and Planning in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 301n.

the Mount Vernon Ladies Association efforts to save George Washington's home, Holleran contrasts its success to the failures in Boston with the Hancock house. Holleran states that the Hancock house was, in part, not successfully preserved because of its urban setting. Architecturally, by 1863, the structure seemed outdated, and was sited on a prime piece of real estate in the city. Holleran argues that the Hancock house was demolished because it stood in the way of Boston's progress in an increasingly industrial urban area. Holleran states that in the early nineteenth century, the most successful preservation occurred in rural areas and smaller communities, as those places could more easily organize to take action to save an historic structure.²⁶ Holleran, like Hosmer, relates the importance of the demolition to the beginnings of the national and local preservation movements.

As noted by several scholars, the fate of the Hancock house motivated the formation of organizations like Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA).²⁷ James M. Lindgren's 1995 study *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism and the Remaking of History* evaluates the evolution of SPNEA, focusing on the role of its founder William Sumner Appleton. SPNEA was founded on the basis that "our New England antiquities are fast disappearing because no society has made their preservation its exclusive object."²⁸

²⁶ The early urban preservation exception is the preservation of Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, saved due to its purchase by the state of Pennsylvania in 1816. Holleran, *Changeful Times*, 90-91.

²⁷ Hosmer, *Presence*, 120.

The first *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities* (May 1910) featured the Hancock house as its cover story. Appleton dubbed the failure, “a classic in the annals of vandalism.”²⁹ In the 1906 efforts to save the Paul Revere House, Appleton referenced the failed attempts to save the Hancock house in an effort to stimulate support for the Revere house restoration. Marc Callis cited the Hancock house as a martyr to the advancement of the historic preservation movement in his 2004 article “The Beginning of the Past: Boston and the Early Historic Preservation Movement, 1863-1918.”³⁰ In an assessment of later Boston preservation efforts in the early twentieth century, Callis reiterates the central role that the house played in future public and private preservation efforts.

The most recent scholarly study of the Hancock house was published in the summer 2005 *Historic New England* magazine article entitled “A Classic in the Annals of Vandalism: The Battle to Save the John Hancock Mansion Ignites Boston’s Preservation Movement.”³¹ Written by Historic New England senior curator Richard

²⁸ *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities* 1, no. 1 (May 1910).

²⁹ As quoted in James M. Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50-51.

³⁰ Marc Callis, “The Beginning of the Past: Boston and the Early Historic Preservation Movement, 1863-1918,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 118-137.

³¹ Lorna Condon and Richard C. Nylander, “A Classic in the Annals of Vandalism: The Battle to Save the John Hancock Mansion Ignites Boston’s Preservation Movement,” *Historic New England* 6, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 2-8.

Nylander and curator of library and archives Lorna Condon, the article explores the history of the house from its building to demolition, the salvage architectural elements from the house and the impact of the house on the formation of SPNEA.³²

Hancock House Contents

Despite interest in the house, little scholarly attention has been paid to its furnishings and their context. The lack of documentary evidence from the period helps explain this lack of interest. It is difficult to determine with authority what items came from the Hancock house and how they were dispersed. Although a thorough inventory was taken of the house in 1793 when John Hancock died, one was not taken at the death of his uncle, Thomas Hancock in 1764. It is therefore difficult to assess which items from the house were purchased by Thomas Hancock or by his nephew. Additionally, the dispersal of items from the house occurred in a number of auction sales between 1793 and 1863. Advertisements listing items for sales did not always include the name of John Hancock, his estate, or address. Evaluating the authenticity of an item's association with the Hancock house proves difficult. The veracity of an item's origin in the Hancock house is determined by an analysis of the piece's provenance through family history and genealogy.

³² The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) changed its name in June 2004 to Historic New England.

Decorative arts scholar Mabel Swan's 1937 article "The Furniture of His Excellency, John Hancock" is the only publication that focuses exclusively on Hancock house contents.³³ Her article located furniture from the estate, but it lacks citations and analyzes only a selection of items located in museum collections. A 1961-1962 exhibition of Hancock objects curated by Harry Schnabel was created for the John Hancock Insurance Company (Figures 5-8). While photographs of this exhibit are in the collection of Historic New England (SPNEA), no published work accompanied the exhibition.³⁴ In 1987 independent curator Charles Hammond assembled an exhibition entitled "John Hancock: A Glimpse of the Patriot Statesman and his Possessions" for the Ellis Memorial Antiques Show.³⁵ The exhibition, whose pieces were derived from private and museum collections, was accompanied by an article published in the show catalog, "The Hancock House: 250 Years of Changing Views," that makes little reference to the items in the exhibit.³⁶

While many scholars have briefly addressed the significance of the Hancock house, few have focused their attentions to the legacy of the structure. The house has

³³ Mabel Swan, "The Furniture of His Excellency, John Hancock," *The Magazine Antiques* 31, no. 3 (March 1937): 119-121.

³⁴ Photographs of 1961-1962 Hancock Insurance Company Exhibition, Hancock House File, Historic New England.

³⁵ 1987 Ellis Memorial Antiques Show Catalog. A list of items included in the Ellis Antiques Show exhibition was published in the show catalog. No images of the exhibit were included in the catalog.

³⁶ Hammond, "250 Years," 29-36.

previously been studied as one of several examples of Georgian or Colonial Revival architecture or a motivator for the preservation movement. By analyzing recreation efforts, the interior furnishings and their dispersal from the structure, this thesis seeks to fill a void in scholarship and address the wider memory cast by the house on the historical consciousness.

Chapter 3

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HOUSE

Standing on “the most commanding site in Boston” the impressive Hancock house was recorded in 1855 as being in “excellent preservation...so thoroughly built, that it will probably remain in its present condition for another hundred years (Figure 9).”³⁷ Erected by Thomas Hancock, the structure housed four generations of Hancock family members before its final demolition in 1863. Itself a relic of Revolutionary Boston, the house’s history included occupation by British troops and the residency of the first signer of the Declaration of Independence, making it a first-hand witness to the American struggle for independence and the new nation’s beginnings. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the house’s importance was noted. Although its “hosts and guest have all gone...the old house stands, a stalwort [sic] and time-honored memory of the past.”³⁸

Thomas Hancock’s stately Georgian home, constructed in 1737, represented the latest tastes in architecture. As befitted the residence of a prominent Boston

³⁷ “The Hancock House, Beacon Street, Boston,” *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, January 27, 1855, 56. Later published in “Local Scenes,” *Ballou’s Dollar Monthly Magazine*, October 1860, 310.

³⁸ “View of Beacon Street,” *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, June 30, 1855, 401.

merchant, the house was conspicuously situated with a view over the city, atop Beacon Hill on Beacon Street.³⁹ At the time of its construction, no more than six houses stood in the area. Of this grouping, Thomas Hancock's house was the grandest; the estate comprised between six and seven acres of land and an extensive English-style formal garden.⁴⁰ The two-and-a-half story house had a hipped roof with three distinctive dormers and balustraded balcony over the center entrance. The dwelling was constructed of hewn ashlar with rusticated quoins, window and door surrounds of Connecticut sandstone (Figure 10).⁴¹

At Thomas Hancock's death in 1764, the house passed to his widow, Lydia (Henchman) Hancock (1714-1776) who signed the property over to his adopted nephew, the future patriot, John Hancock in the same year.⁴² There is no surviving inventory of Thomas Hancock's property; the house and all of its contents were passed

³⁹ The Hancock house eventually would be numbered 30 Beacon Street. Thomas Hancock worked as a bookseller and stationer, in a thirty-year partnership with Daniel Henchman that began in 1728. Hancock married Daniel Henchman's daughter, Lydia in 1730. Later in life he became an importer and exporter to England, and rose in station to become one of the wealthiest individuals in the colony. Watkins, "Builder," 3-19.

⁴⁰ Beaudry, et. al., "Site Archaeology," 17.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11. Residences in colonial America were rarely built of stone; most post-dated the construction of the Hancock house. Similarly prominent stone houses include: Cliveden in Philadelphia, built 1763-1767, for Benjamin Chew and Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia, built 1751, for John Carlyle.

⁴² William M. Fowler, *The Baron of Beacon Hill: A Biography of John Hancock* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 48-49.

to his widow and John Hancock.⁴³ It was in the Hancock house on Beacon Hill that John Hancock courted Dorothy Quincy (1747-1830), his future wife. Married in 1775, John and Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock resided at the house on Beacon Hill.⁴⁴ The house served as the site for prominent entertaining and political activity during the American Revolution.⁴⁵ With the exception of the period of occupation by British troops, the Beacon Hill home was the primary of residence of John Hancock and his wife throughout his political career, which included two terms as Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (from 1780 to 1785 and 1787 to 1793).⁴⁶

John Hancock died intestate in 1793 with no living children as heirs. At his death he left stated intentions to offer his home to the Commonwealth of

⁴³ Fowler, *Baron*, 281. Fowler compared John Hancock's estate to that of his uncle. Without an inventory taken of Thomas Hancock's property it is a near impossible task, yet he indicates that John Hancock left half as much fortune and land as Thomas Hancock left at his death.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 253. John and Dorothy Hancock were married in Fairfield, Connecticut at the Thaddeus Burr mansion. The Beacon Hill home was their primary residence with summer homes just outside of Boston in Jamaica Plain and Point Shirley; during the Second Continental Congress, the Hancocks resided in Philadelphia.

⁴⁵ References to Hancock's entertaining during early days of the American Revolution in Arthur Gilman. *The Story of Boston: A Study of Independency* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1889), 289.

⁴⁶ The Hancock House was occupied beginning April 19, 1775 and ending before December 1776. An inventory of damages to the house was taken in December 1776 and noted repairs costing over 345 pounds. "John Hancock House Inventory," Mss. 255, Boston Public Library Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston.

Massachusetts.⁴⁷ No legal documents were drafted, however, and the house remained in the hands of Hancock descendants. On July 28, 1796, Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock was remarried to her deceased husband's friend and adviser, Captain James Scott (1742-1809). Together Dorothy and Captain James Scott lived in the Hancock house on Beacon Hill. After the death of James Scott in 1809, an inventory of the house's contents was taken and included few additions to the items left by John Hancock in 1793. Twice a widow, in 1817, Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott relocated to a smaller home on Central Court in Boston. Sometime before her death in 1830, she moved again, this time to Federal Street, where her estate included furnishings from the Beacon Street home.⁴⁸

Between 1820 and 1863, the grandnieces and nephews of John and Dorothy Hancock (who died with no surviving children) occupied the Hancock house. At this time the residence may also have been used as a rental property.⁴⁹ The Hancock heirs

⁴⁷ Ellen C. D. Q. Woodbury, *Dorothy Quincy: Wife of John Hancock, With Events of Her Time* (Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1905), 226-227.

⁴⁸ Items listed for sale at No. 55 Federal Street, the final address of Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott, include items from the Hancock House, including Van Dyck paintings and a Copley portrait of Gov. John Hancock. "Advertisements," *The Columbian Centinel*, February 20, 1830. The sale is further identified as a sale of Hancock estate items by Mabel Swan, "Excellency" 120. Items listed in Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott's will and inventory dated February 15, 1830 were taken for the smaller residence at No. 55 Federal Street. Massachusetts Registry of Probate, Suffolk County, Docket No. 29160, estate inventory of Dorothy Scott, (February 15, 1830).

underwent extensive legal battles to divide the Beacon Hill estate. The value of the mansion house, as recorded in an 1828 lawsuit between Hancock's heirs, was over one hundred and ten thousand dollars.⁵⁰ By 1859, at the death of John Hancock, the nephew of the patriot, the future of the house became uncertain. In his will, he stated, "I hope the estate may not be sold, but retained in the family." He further wished that the house "not be sold till four years after my decease."⁵¹ Instead of following these wishes, the family offered it to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for \$100,000, \$25,000 below its market value.⁵² A Legislative Committee led by the Honorable Edward G. Parker encouraged the acquisition of the property for use by the state.⁵³ The governor of the state, Nathaniel P. Banks, recommended that the house serve as a residence for Massachusetts governors.⁵⁴

The potential purchase of the Hancock House was a widely contested issue in Boston and across the nation. Locally, the purchase spurred discussion in counties

⁴⁹ "Hancock House, Boston," *The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, 1, no. 2 (October 1, 1834): 81.

⁵⁰ *Thomas Hancock v. William Minot, Executor*, 25 MA 29 (1828).

⁵¹ John Hancock Will, 1859, quoted in Holleran, *Changeful Times*, 92.

⁵² "Purchase of the Hancock Estate," *Boston Weekly Messenger*, March 9, 1859, 2.

⁵³ Report submitted by Hon. Edward G. Parker to the Massachusetts State Senate, February 10, 1859, quoted in "Hancock House." *The Liberator*, March 18, 1859.

across the state. A March 10, 1859 report of a Middlesex County debate supported the purchase as a “fair indication of the sense of the people.”⁵⁵ Across the nation, newspapers reported “waiting with impatience for the action of the House of Representatives in Massachusetts” on the purchase. The *Newark Daily Advertiser* urged, “buy it people of Massachusetts, buy it!” stating that “no other object... attracts, has attracted, and will attract to it so many eyes, both old and young, as this curious piece of antiquity.”⁵⁶ It was hoped that a wealthy Boston citizen would purchase the lot, “for the sake of its historical associations,” if it were not purchased by the state. It was further noted that the site would “be sought for a hotel site also, as it is in the most aristocratic quarter, and commands a view of our beautiful Common and lovely country adjacent.”⁵⁷ Despite interest from Massachusetts citizens and politicians to purchase the house, the efforts failed. The State approved purchase of the house, but difficulty finalizing the title of the property severely delayed the sale. As a result, the home remained in the Hancock family until 1863.

In May 1863, James Madison Beebe and Gardner Brewer, real estate developers, offered the Hancock Family \$125,000 for the land. For this sum, Beebe and Brewer purchased only the land on which the Hancock estate stood, but not the

⁵⁴ Holleran, *Changeful Times*, 92.

⁵⁵ “A Straw for Hancock House,” *Boston Atlas and Bee*, March 10, 1859, 4.

⁵⁶ “The Hancock House,” *Boston Weekly Messenger*, March 16, 1859, 2.

⁵⁷ “Gov. Hancock’s House,” *Gleason’s Weekly Line-of-Battle Ship*, March 12, 1859, 1.

house itself. The developers' "two first class modern homes" proposed for the site would integrate well with the emerging streetscape of Beacon Street (Figure 3).⁵⁸ It was noted in 1834 that:

...since the demise of that eminent man, the hand of time and improvement has been constantly contending around it and against it. It cannot long resist such attacks; and, before many years elapse, this famous mansion will probably be razed to the ground, 'and its place supplied by others.'⁵⁹

Stylistically, the Hancock House was viewed as outdated to Victorian Bostonians. An 1855 engraving, *A View of Beacon Street, Boston*, published in *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, aptly illustrates the changing architectural fashions of the city before the Hancock house was razed (Figure 11). Depicting Beacon Street before it was widened, the image illustrates the Hancock house's outmoded architectural style.⁶⁰ The house sits back from the street while all other newly-built townhouses sit flush to the sidewalk. The view shows the two-and-a-half story Hancock house as dwarfed by neighboring three-story townhouses.⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Local" *The Boston Recorder*, May 29, 1863, 3.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Holleran, *Changeful Times*, 82.

⁶⁰ The widening of Beacon Street altered the appearance of the Hancock House. Depictions of the Hancock house later in the nineteenth century show the house flush against the sidewalk, with the Hancock house architecturally out of place. A long legal battle ensued after Beacon Street was widened. It was settled with Hancock heirs in the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts in March 1840. *John Hancock & Others v. City of Boston*, 1840 WL 3053 (1840).

⁶¹ "View of Beacon Street, Boston," *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, June 30, 1855, 401.

Although the land beneath the Hancock House was sold to Beebe and Brewer, efforts continued to save the house itself. Urged by Charles L. Hancock, administrator of the estate of John Hancock the nephew, the City of Boston in 1863 planned to move the house to a different site. Charles Hancock offered to donate the structure, along with its the remaining furnishings and portraits, as a gift to the City of Boston. Stereoviews of the house's interior taken at this time document items intended for donation to the City of Boston (Figure 12-14).⁶² He urged the City Commissioners to accept the gift as, "the house should be preserved as a memento of our colonial and revolutionary history."⁶³ In consideration of this gift, the City Commissioners proposed that the site become a museum to contain items that descended from John Hancock as well as "other Revolutionary relics which from time to time may be contributed to from other sources, to keep in remembrance of our heroic epoch."⁶⁴ The house was projected as a museum, with open hours for the general public. Several locations were proposed as the new site for the Hancock house, including the corner of Newbury and Clarendon Streets in the Back Bay of Boston and other suburban locations.⁶⁵ Newspapers across the country reported that the Hancock house would be relocated to "some suburban spot which has interesting associations with the

⁶² Hancock House Stereographs, Historic New England Archives.

⁶³ Charles L. Hancock to Thomas C. Amory, May 23, 1863 quoted in Boston City Council, *City Document No. 56* (Boston: 1863), 6.

⁶⁴ Boston City Council, *Document No. 56*, 10.

⁶⁵ "The Old Hancock House," *Boston Post*, June 1, 1863, 4.

revolutionary period.”⁶⁶ Plans for the recreation of the house were to be carried out by the Boston architect Arthur Gilman.⁶⁷ However, the city of Boston failed to raise the \$12,000 necessary to move it and, eventually, the Hancock house was scheduled for demolition.⁶⁸

In June 1863, public outcry against the demolition spread throughout the city. A broadside published by Thomas Oliver Hazard Perry Burnham on June 6, 1863 exclaimed, “Bostonians! Save the Old John Hancock Mansion/There is time yet, although the work of Demolition Has Commenced (Figure 15).” The proposed razing of the structure was decried “an act of modern vandalism.”⁶⁹ *The Boston Evening Journal* lamented, “the demolition of this relic of the past, and of some of its proudest historical associations cannot fail to cause regret in many minds.”⁷⁰ By August 1863, the Hancock house was demolished and seemed destined to be forgotten by the citizens of Boston.

Before the destruction of the house, however, architect John Hubbard Sturgis completed a set of architectural measured drawings that detailed the house with

⁶⁶ “The Hancock Mansion in Boston,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 23, 1863, 1.

⁶⁷ “The Hancock House,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, June 9, 1863, 1.

⁶⁸ Boston City Council, *Document No. 56*, 13.

⁶⁹ “Bostonians!” Broadside, Historic New England Archives.

⁷⁰ “Sale of the Hancock Mansion,” *Boston Evening Journal*, May 12, 1863, 4.

precision (Figure 16-22).⁷¹ The creation of these measured drawings allowed for the possibility of an accurate and exact recreation of the house at a later date.

Erected on the site of the Hancock house were two “first class dwelling houses” for Beebe and Brewer (Figure 3).⁷² Interior images of the townhouses illustrate that the new homes drew little association from the colonial site on which they stood (Figure 23).⁷³ They served as private residences until at least 1902 when the Gardner Brewer residence was adapted for business purposes by publishers Messrs. Ginn & Company.

A description of the interior includes an intriguing memorial to the Hancock house. A March 22, 1902 newspaper article, “On the Site of the Hancock House,” includes a full description of the interior of the new Messrs. Ginn & Company’s publishing offices. The article begins, “To publish books on Beacon Hill in an historic old mansion on the spot where John Hancock lived seems to the visitor to Messrs. Ginn & Co.’s new quarters a very desirable occupation.” The company transformed Gardner Brewer’s townhouse into an office, converting the library into a reception

⁷¹ The Sturgis measured drawings are the first known set of measured drawings in the country, and thus mark a significant milestone in the history of historic preservation. Floyd, “Measured Drawings,” 87.

⁷² “Sale of the Hancock Mansion, Beacon Street,” *The Pittsfield Sun*, May 21, 1863, 2.

⁷³ “Gardner Brewer Parlor,” illustrated in Nylander and Condon, “Vandalism,” 8.

room for customers. The company published textbooks and in the back corner of the former library “has been started a collection of Hancock relics.”⁷⁴ While it is not known exactly what this collection included, it is apparent that by 1902 an early attempt to commemorate the Hancock House by drawing together items associated with the house’s history had begun.

In 1917, plans were developed to expand the Massachusetts State House, including two projecting wings to the west and the east. To do so, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the Beebe and Brewer townhouses that sat atop the old Hancock house lot. The two townhouses were razed. The demolition was recorded by William Sumner Appleton in a series of photographs (Figures 24-26). The West Wing of the Massachusetts State House was built over the vacant lot (Figure 27).⁷⁵ Today only a bronze plaque marks the site of the Hancock House (Figure 4). It reads:

Here stood the residence of John Hancock/A Prominent and Patriotic/Merchant of Boston, The First/Signer of the Declaration of/American Independence, And/First Governor of Massachusetts Under the State Constitution./Erected 1737 Removed 1863.

Between 1737 and 1917 the Hancock house site underwent dramatic alterations. From Thomas Hancock’s creation of a high-style Georgian home to the attempts to preserve the house in the late 1850s, to the eventual demolition in 1863, to the ultimate construction of Brewer and Beebe townhouses, the Hancock house site proved emblematic of changing architectural fashions in Boston.

⁷⁴ “On the Site of the Hancock House,” *Congregationalist and Christian World*, March 22, 1902, 423.

⁷⁵ Sinclair Hitchins, *A New Guide to the Massachusetts State House* (Boston: John Hancock Insurance Company, 1964).

Chapter 4

THE ARCHITECTURAL MEMORY OF THE HANCOCK HOUSE

Beginning in 1893 and continuing into the twentieth century, a number of attempts were made to recreate the Hancock house, both on its original site and in locations outside of Massachusetts. Each arose from the desire to recreate a symbol of colonial Boston. In 1893, 1917 and 1926 recreation efforts launched to remember and recreate the Hancock house met with varying degrees of success.

Visitors to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago viewed cultures from around the world, as well as innovative products and designs. The Columbian Exposition, titled the "White City," was an opportunity to view and to experience, in 600 acres, romantic, idealized visions of a world through explorations of its nations and cultures. The created vignettes were ripe with imagery and symbolism that could speak to individuals from across the world. The United States' contribution to the World's Fair included a structure representative of the people and places of each state. The Massachusetts Board of World's Fair Managers, chaired by General Francis A. Walker, selected the Boston architectural firm of Robert Swain Peabody (1845-1917) and John Goddard Stearns (1843-1917) to design the Massachusetts State Building as representative of the Commonwealth.

After suggestions from the Massachusetts Board of World's Fairs Managers, the firm studied "models that might fitly recall New England surroundings."⁷⁶ Peabody & Stearns considered both the Hancock house and the Massachusetts Old State House. Eventually, Peabody & Stearns selected the Hancock house as it was "the most picturesque as well as the most architectural of the two buildings."⁷⁷ The structure was planned to stand out "in the midst of the medieval towers and castles which we hear talked of for other State buildings," as an appropriate interpretation of Massachusetts.⁷⁸ Electing not to use John Hubbard Sturgis' measured drawings of the house from 1863, the firm created a romanticized vision of the house in what is now known as the Colonial Revival style. Peabody & Stearns' Massachusetts State Building reflected current architectural trends (Figure 28).⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Francis A. Walker, et al., *Report of the Massachusetts Board of World's Fair Managers, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1894), 31-33.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁸ Quoted from the plans submitted by Peabody & Stearns, "Massachusetts at the World's Fair" in *Harper's Weekly*, October 24, 1891. Massachusetts was not alone in reinterpreting the residences of notable state citizens; Virginia recreated Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington. The Virginia and Massachusetts State Buildings differ, however, as Virginia recreated Mount Vernon accurately, including interiors. Lydia Mattice Brandt, "Re-creating Mount Vernon: The Virginia Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," *Winterthur Portfolio* 43 (March 2009): 85-86.

⁷⁹ Floyd, *Architecture After Richardson*, 98.

At a cost of \$40,000, the Massachusetts State Building was constructed from an imitation of Massachusetts granite.⁸⁰ Alterations made to the original Hancock house design included elongation of the roofline and the addition of the seal of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to the pediment above the balcony.⁸¹ New England flowers planted around the house were evocative of the original garden at the rear of the Hancock house. In its interior, the Massachusetts State Building included a parlor furnished with items from the Essex Institute's collection, as well as a post office, registration room, smoking parlors and a reading room for men (Figure 29).⁸² The Building's exhibits displayed paintings of important figures from Massachusetts history along with other "art, relics and curiosities, particularly of the Colonial and Revolutionary period."⁸³ Inside the imagined Hancock house, the Massachusetts

⁸⁰ Richard J. Murphy, *Authentic Visitor's Guide to the Columbian World's Exposition and Chicago, May 1 to October 30, 1893* (Chicago: Union News Co., 1893), 30; Henry Davenport Northrop, *The World's Fair As Seen in One Hundred Days: Containing a Complete History of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Philadelphia: Ariel Book Co., 1893), 402.

⁸¹ Moses P. Handy, ed., *The Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Co., 1893), 87.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 87; Northrop, *Hundred Days*, 403; Susan P. Schoewler indicates that the exhibit included "at least forty-one pieces of furniture and ten glass cases that must literally have been stuffed full of manuscripts, graphics, printed documents, and small artifacts." Susan Prendergast Schoelwer, "Curious Relics and Quaint Scenes: The Colonial Revival at Chicago's Great Fair" in Alan Axelrod, ed., *The Colonial Revival in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1985), 195.

⁸³ John Flinn, Jr., *Guide to the World's Fair Grounds, Buildings* (Chicago: Standard Guide Co., 1893), 20, 22-23.

Board of World's Fair Managers recreated John Hancock bedchamber, a room with furnishings as romanticized as the exterior architecture (Figure 30).⁸⁴

A memory of an iconic house generated by Peabody & Stearns, the Massachusetts State Building served as an 1893 interpretation of the Hancock house. Despite the romanticized design, the State Building was noted in the *Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition* to "follow the lines of the old house sufficiently faithful to recall the original to the minds of those who have seen it."⁸⁵ The success of Peabody & Stearns' design as an evocation of the original house is further noted:

The spirit of the old John Hancock house is seen and felt when one looks upon the building finally decided upon. It breathes of the Revolution, and its very walls seem to echo back the patriotic words of those loyal men who, a century since, held within their grasp the destiny and fortune of the good old State. As one looks upon it, or as one walks through its many rooms, he will not find it necessary to ask, "What State erected this building?" It will surely be a source of pride and pleasure to every son and daughter of New England who, during the summer of 1893, will journey from the furthest corners of the country to visit the World's Columbian Exposition.⁸⁶

The Massachusetts State Building, though not an exact recreation of the Hancock house, suggested the image and the spirit of colonial Boston.

At the time of the 1893 World's Fair, the memory of the Hancock house was adapted as emblematic of the people and culture of colonial Massachusetts to visitors at the World's Columbian Exposition. Through its selection as the model for the State

⁸⁴ Hubert H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* vol. 2 (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Co., 1893), 782.

⁸⁵ Hardy, *Official Directory*, 87-88.

⁸⁶ Daniel P. Toomey and Thomas C. Quinn, *Massachusetts of To-day: A Memorial of the State, Historical and Biographical* (Boston: Columbia Publishing Co., 1892), 13-14.

Building, the Hancock house solidified and modified its significance in architectural history. Before Peabody & Stearns' recreation, the house was important as an example of Georgian architecture. After the World's Columbian Exposition and the prominence of the house on a world stage, the Hancock house gained significance to architects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century attempting to capture architectural elements of a colonial past.

Architectural historian Margaret Henderson Floyd wrote that the Massachusetts State Building promoted the image of the Hancock house so successfully that the house became a prototype for Colonial Revival design. In Peabody & Stearns' own later work, several patrons requested direct references to the Columbian Exposition design. When creating Wyndhurst in Lenox, Massachusetts, the patron, John Sloane requested "white in [the] Colonial Style with cornice and a stucco wreath ceiling, like [the] Hancock House" for his dining room.⁸⁷ Peabody & Stearns also recreated the State Building design at Greene Acres in Dartmouth, Massachusetts in 1902.⁸⁸ Stimulated by the World's Columbian Exposition, the Hancock house came to "symbolize the 'colonial' house for the nation."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ As referenced from Robert Peabody's diary by Ann Swallow in "The Eclecticism of Peabody and Stearns in Lenox, MA, 1881-1885" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1984), and Annie Robinson, *Peabody & Stearns: Country Houses and Seaside Cottages* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 118.

⁸⁸ Robinson, *Peabody & Stearns*, 130.

⁸⁹ Floyd, "Measured Drawings," 110. Floyd, *After Richardson*, 98. Floyd writes at length about the influence of the John Hubbard Sturgis drawings in her 1979 article, "Measured Drawings" and in the 1994 *After Richardson*. References on

Furthering the architectural legacy of the Hancock house, architect John Hubbard Sturgis incorporated both stylistic elements and salvaged architectural pieces from the house into many of his plans. At its final auction on July 26, 1863, architectural fragments from the house were sold. Advertised items include the house's "oak joists, hard wood finish, doors, paintings, carvings, windows blinds, floorings, &c. comprising many antique curiosities and materials to be manufactured into many useful and ornamental parlor mementoes [sic] (Figure 31)."⁹⁰ Among the items sold was the house's main staircase, purchased by Sturgis. For seven years the staircase remained in storage in Boston before being sold to Greeley Curtis for the house to be built in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts, designed by Curtis and architect Henry van Brunt.⁹¹ Sturgis' own commissions in the 1870s and 1880s included stylistic elements derived from the Hancock house. Most notable of these designs are the Edward W. Hooper house built in 1872 and the Arthur Astor Carey house of 1882, both in Cambridge, Massachusetts.⁹² The houses utilized both exterior and interior elements of the Hancock house, derived from Sturgis' 1863 drawings

buildings designed with influences from the Hancock House in Floyd, "Measured Drawings": John G. Jennings' House, 1898, Pittsburgh, designed by Alden and Harlow, 287-288; Penrose, the Thomas M. Armstrong House, 1900, Pittsburgh, designed by Alden and Harlow, 290.

⁹⁰ "Auction Sale," *Boston Post*, June 26, 1863.

⁹¹ Floyd, "Measured Drawings," 97-99.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 99, 102-105.

(Figure 16-22). These measured drawings played an important role in the continuing architectural legacy of the structure.

To make way for the West Wing of the Massachusetts State House, the Beebe and Brewer townhouses built on the Hancock house site were demolished in 1917. Aided by the Sturgis architectural drawings, architects, preservationists and historians attempted to use the demolition as an opportunity to rebuild the iconic structure. In an annual address to the Legislature of Massachusetts, Governor Samuel W. McCall called the demolition of the Hancock house an event that “was lamented almost as a piece of vandalism.”⁹³ At the encouragement of Governor McCall, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the land on which the Hancock house once stood. McCall proposed that a “faithful copy” of the house be made using Sturgis’ plans.⁹⁴ It was the hope of Governor McCall that the recreated Hancock house would serve as a residence for Massachusetts governors, aligning with the stated intentions of the Commonwealth in 1859. With the support of the Governor and the State Legislature, plans for reconstruction began to take shape.

Spearheading the efforts to reconstruct the house on its original site was a group of Boston individuals, including Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities founder William Sumner Appleton, and architects R. Clipston Sturgis (the nephew of John Hubbard Sturgis) and Robert D. Andrews. Sturgis’ plans were

⁹³ “Reproduction of the John Hancock House Proposed,” *Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society* (1917): 347.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

created in accordance with Governor McCall's intentions. Andrews' proposal correlated to the 1859 design to open the house as a museum and memorial to colonial Boston.⁹⁵ Appleton projected that the site serve as "a mecca for tourists," presenting an exterior that was an exact replica of the house with wings added as museum space.⁹⁶ Plans for the reconstruction even included recreating the house's terraced gardens.

Interest in reconstructing the house on the empty Beacon Street lot resonated throughout Massachusetts. Concurrent with the plans of Appleton, Sturgis and Andrews, Henry Ayling Phillips (1852-1926) introduced another proposal to rebuild the house. Educated in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, Phillips was a practicing architect in Boston until 1923.⁹⁷ He developed an avid interest in history and genealogy, especially that of the Hancock family. With a keen interest in the Hancock house, Phillips researched and transcribed select references to purchases of materials for the original construction of the house in the Hancock papers, then held at the New England Historic Genealogical Society. His research notes and the chapter drafts of an unpublished book titled, "The Hancock House on Beacon Hill at Boston in New England, The Seat of John Hancock,

⁹⁵ Lindgren, *Preserving*, 132, 212n; Nylander and Condon, "Vandalism," 8.

⁹⁶ William Sumner Appleton to Donald Millar, January 23, 1917, Historic New England, Boston, quoted in Lindgren, *Preserving*, 132.

⁹⁷ "Memoirs: Henry Ayling Phillips," *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 82 (January 1928): 113-114.

with some account of its Occupants, Contents and Furnishings” are currently housed at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.⁹⁸

Phillips’ reconstruction proposal was firmly grounded in historical research and emphasized accuracy in design. Relying on references to purchases of construction materials made between 1736 and 1737 by Thomas Hancock, Phillips aligned these to the Sturgis plans to determine the amount of materials necessary to rebuild the house. Phillips also analyzed additions to the house during John Hancock’s ownership, including the dining room. He corresponded with Appleton in 1917 about his own conclusions and discoveries about the house.⁹⁹ Phillips’ research on the house, encouraging its reconstruction, was presented in an exhibition to the American Society of Architects.¹⁰⁰

Despite the numerous 1917 recreation plans, the Boston architects and preservationists faced several difficult challenges. These ambitious proposals would have required the demolition of homes on Joy and Beacon Streets. As individuals interested in preservation, it was contradictory to promote razing an entire neighborhood that may one day be considered architecturally or historically significant to recreate the house. The prospect of destroying a neighborhood and disagreement

⁹⁸ Phillips, Hancock Papers.

⁹⁹ Appleton to Phillips, March 22, 1917. Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 4, Folder 4, “Hancock House: Materials.”

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

over the use and accuracy of the “new” Hancock house proved to be insurmountable obstacles; plans to reconstruct the house were dropped.¹⁰¹

At an unlikely location a “faithful copy” of the Hancock house, first promoted in 1917 by the Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society and attempted in Boston, was achieved (Figure 32).¹⁰² In 1926, in Ticonderoga, New York, the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) recreated the Hancock House as their headquarters. Horace A. Moses (1862-1947), a native of Ticonderoga who had made his fortune in the Strathmore Paper Company, funded the construction.¹⁰³ Moses sought to “help perpetuate American traditions in History and the Fine Arts,” through his endowment of the NYSHA headquarters.¹⁰⁴ He stated that, “in placing this building here, it is my belief that it is the most historical place on the American Continent, and it should be a source of education and

¹⁰¹ Lindgren, *Preserving*, 133.

¹⁰² “Reproduction of the John Hancock House Proposed,” *Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society* (1917): 347. For additional information on the origins of NYSHA see Walter Muir Whitehill’s *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry into their Research and Publication Functions and their Financial Future* (Lunenburg, VT: The Stinehour Press, 1962), 331-2.

¹⁰³ Dorothy Barck, ed. “New York State Historical Association,” *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 60 (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1962), 327. Moses financed the building of the structure and also created an endowment to pay a curator. The NYSHA Headquarters was one among many of Moses’ philanthropic activities. For more information related to Moses’ donations, see his Biographical Sketch, *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 23 (New York State Historical Association, 1925), 251-252.

¹⁰⁴ As quoted in Elizabeth Tower, “The John Hancock House,” 1926. New York Public Library, New York.

inspiration to future generations.”¹⁰⁵ The building was constructed as a museum and headquarters for the New York State Historical Association.¹⁰⁶

Designs for the building were first conceived in 1923. Although Moses initially wanted an Italian-inspired design, the NYSHA Building Committee encouraged the replication of an American colonial structure. The Building Committee, with support from R.T.H. Halsey of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, recommended the creation of an extensively documented, fireproof version of a colonial building that was no longer standing. No building in New York met the criteria, and the committee looked elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ Largely based on Halsey’s recommendation, the New York State Historical Association set out to create a full-scale reproduction of the Hancock house.

Following the John Sturgis measured drawings of the house, the Ticonderoga headquarters was constructed between 1925 and 1926. After the cornerstone for the building was laid in 1925, Dr. James Sullivan, second Vice President of NYSHA, stated that the Hancock house was so accurate to the Sturgis plans that it would “stand

¹⁰⁵ As quoted in Edward P. Alexander, “The Association Reaches Sixty,” *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 57 (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1959), 420.

¹⁰⁶ Horace A. Moses, *Achievement is My Goal: The Story of a Great Industrialist Horace A. Moses* (New York: Horace A. Moses Incorporated, 1956), 77.

¹⁰⁷ Erik A. Mason, “The History of the New York State Historical Association, 1899-1964,” (master’s thesis, State University of New York Oneonta, 1995), 20-21.

as a tribute to the truth.”¹⁰⁸ The replicated Hancock house contained the main museum, research library, office and meeting space for the Association.¹⁰⁹ In a dedicatory article, Elizabeth Tower noted that the construction of the Headquarters “was an excellent opportunity to restore to the public something that had been lost.”¹¹⁰ The Sturgis drawings allowed the accurate construction of a replica of the original house.

Unlike other architectural projects referencing the Hancock house with salvaged pieces, the Ticonderoga recreation used all new building materials. NYSHA acquired Weymouth granite to replicate the original fabric of the house. The attention to detail in its exterior was so exact that in 1952, when writing about the features of the original Hancock house in *Early American Architecture*, architectural historian Hugh Morrison illustrated the Ticonderoga reconstruction.¹¹¹

Architecturally, the exterior and interior plan matched the original design of the Beacon Hill house. Writing about the recreation in 1943, Clifford Lord indicated that “the same care and faithful attention to correct detail in reproducing the original house has been used in the interior, especially in the main hall and stairway and in the two rooms to the right of the hall, which are exact duplicates of those in the earlier

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Alexander, “Sixty,” 414-425.

¹⁰⁹ Mason, “History of NYSHA,” 22.

¹¹⁰ Tower, “Hancock House,” 3.

¹¹¹ Morrison, *Early American Architecture*, 482.

Hancock house.”¹¹² In commemoration of John Hancock, one of these rooms was titled “The Governor Hancock Room” and is photographed in NYSHA publications (Figure 33).¹¹³ Although architecturally the interior spaces related to their original structure, the function of the rooms had no correlation to the original Boston house. The building was not designed to be period rooms of the Hancock house during his ownership, but used instead as galleries, offices and a library for NYSHA.

Despite the architectural accuracy of the house, there is no indication that the furnishings were selected with a knowledge of what was inside the original Hancock house. The first floor gallery spaces included reproduction pieces copied from Metropolitan Museum of Art collection objects made by the Company of Master Craftsmen of Flushing, New York.¹¹⁴ Although it was recorded in 1926 that “such pieces of furniture with similar covering undoubtedly stood in John Hancock’s splendid mansion one hundred and fifty years ago,” R.T.H. Halsey made the selection because of his affiliation with the Metropolitan.¹¹⁵ The reproduction pieces were upholstered with materials that gave the appearance of age. Over the years, as the New

¹¹² Clifford Lord and Jane Lape, “The Headquarters House of the New York State Historical Association, Ticonderoga, New York” (unpublished pamphlet New-York State Historical Society, New York, 1943), 9.

¹¹³ The Ticonderoga Historical Society, “The Hancock House: A Brief History,” <http://www.thehancockhouse.org/history.htm> (accessed November 9, 2009).

¹¹⁴ Hosmer, *Presence*, 277-278. Ticonderoga Historical Society, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Tower, “Hancock House,” 3.

York State Historical Association acquired more collection objects, the reproduction items were replaced.

The New York State Historical Association remained at Ticonderoga until 1939 when it moved to Cooperstown, New York. Today, the Hancock house reproduction serves as the museum, library and offices for the Ticonderoga Historical Society. When NYSHA relinquished ownership of the property, the Company of Master Craftsmen furniture also was transferred to the Historical Society.¹¹⁶ The Society continues the architectural legacy of John Hancock's residence by referring to their site today as the Hancock House.

In Boston, only a bronze marker indicates the former site of the Hancock house (Figure 3). Despite the house's demolition, the architectural legacy of the site persists as a tribute to the enduring impact of the house on the American built environment. The architectural memory of the Hancock house remained strong through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and lives on today through the survival of salvage architecture, designs inspired by the original house and the Ticonderoga Historical Society site.

¹¹⁶ Ticonderoga Historical Society, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2009.

Chapter 5

CHRONOLOGY OF HANCOCK HOUSE FURNISHINGS

Widely recognized as a building of architectural importance, the Hancock house also stands out for the sophistication and worldliness of its furnishings and interior finish. The house followed a double-pile central passage plan, typical of high-style Georgian homes of the period. Twentieth-century architect and Thomas Hancock historian Henry Ayling Phillips described the paneled entry stair hall as the most prominent space in the house (Figure 35). Its “broad stairway, classical stair window and lofty stair hall were the dominating features of the interior of the mansion.”¹¹⁷ At the end of the hall, a back entrance to the house led to extensive gardens of imported plants and flowers.

The Hancock house was exquisitely furnished. English wallpapers, including a crimson, flocked paper, covered the walls of the first floor hall.¹¹⁸ Family portraits by

¹¹⁷ Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, 25.

¹¹⁸ A section of crimson, flocked wallpaper, which likely hung in the room to the left of the entrance of the house, survives in the collections of Historic New England. Richard C. Nylander et al., *Wallpaper in New England* (Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1986), 40-41. A receipt for one such purchase of additional wallpaper is documented by a January 23, 1738/9 letter stating “the paper hangings for my room...I think very dear & well done & executed.” Thomas Hancock Letterbook, Thomas Hancock Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, microfilm copy. This paper is likely the “Landskip” paper,

John Smibert, paintings ascribed to Anthony van Dyck and dozens of prints and engravings hung on the hall walls. Expensive Wilton carpets graced the floors and Dutch tiles and English marble surrounds adorned the fireplaces.¹¹⁹ Imported furniture of the highest styles filled the house. Thomas Hancock made many of these purchases through his London agent, Francis Wilks, and recorded them in his letterbook.¹²⁰

Over time, succeeding owners made minor changes in the interior of the house. John Hancock, his widow Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott, and later nieces and nephews all altered the house in subtle ways. Waves of new furniture in the latest fashion came into the house. This chapter focuses on the furniture of the Hancock house and its impact on the legacy of the house, with references to key items such as paintings and wallpapers that also served as defining items in the spaces.

1737-1764: Thomas Hancock's Ownership

Through its interior and exterior design, Thomas Hancock's home represented his high social status in Boston. Thomas Hancock sometimes specified furnishings for

imported from England by Hancock in 1738. Abbott Lowell Cummings, "The Use and Manufacture of Wallpaper in New England 1700-1820," in *Wallpaper*, 3.

¹¹⁹ Transcribed from Thomas Hancock's letterbook, order placed January 23, 1737, Henry Ayling Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2 Folder 5.

¹²⁰ Significant purchases for the Hancock House from Thomas Hancock's letterbook were transcribed by Henry Ayling Phillips. Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2 Folders 5-6.

particular rooms in the house and on occasion ordered them from a maker who had already achieved prestige among upper class Boston citizens. On December 20, 1738, Hancock asked Francis Wilks to procure a tall clock in London. Hancock sought:

A Handsome Chiming Clock of the newest fashion—the work neat & Good with a good black Walnut Tree Case, Veneer'd work with Dark lively branches on the Top instead of Balls let three handsome Carv'd figures, Gilt with Burnished Gold. I'd have the Case without the Figures to be 10 feet long, the price is not to exceed 20 Guineas as its for my own use and I beg your particular care in buying of it at the Cheapest Sale. I'm advised to apply to one Mr. Marmaduke Storr at the foot of the Londⁿ Bridge.¹²¹

When the clock arrived in Boston a year later, Hancock was not satisfied with the purchase. He requested that Wilks “please to Exchange the figures I have Sent per Capt. Morris for 3 figures vizt Fame, Peace & Plenty, to be ten inches Long, let them be handsomely Cutt in Wood Well proportioned & Gilt with burnish'd Gold.”¹²² Hancock likely placed this clock in the Great Entry of his house, a place of prominence.¹²³ Despite the documentation for a 1738-1789 order placed with Marmaduke Storr, the present location of the Storr clock is not known. Francis Clary

¹²¹ Thomas Hancock to Francis Wilks, December 20, 1738, quoted in Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2 Folder 5.

¹²² Thomas Hancock to Francis Wilks, December 20, 1738, quoted in American Antiquarian Society Object Files, F.1838.1. Tall Clock from William T. Baxter, *House of Hancock: Business in Boston, 1724-1775* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945), 68.

¹²³ A clock is listed in the 1794 of Governor John Hancock in the Great Entry. No other tall clocks are mentioned in the inventory. Massachusetts Registry of Probate, Suffolk County, Docket 20125, estate inventory of John Hancock (January 28, 1794).

Morse published a photograph of the Storr clock in 1910 in *Furniture of the Olden Time* alongside another tall clock with a Hancock provenance (cat. no. 32).¹²⁴

Hancock looked to Europe for many of his furnishings.¹²⁵ One prominent item, a large Queen Anne looking glass, 1720-1725, made in England (cat. no. 29), may be the one displayed in the 1859 *Harper's Weekly* woodcuts of the "Front Hall and Staircase (Figure 35)."¹²⁶ Continental pieces of furniture also filled Hancock's new home. A walnut "great settee" of French or Dutch origin, upholstered in leather was

¹²⁴ Francis Clary Morse identifies two Hancock clocks. Confusion exists between a known clock with a Hancock provenance in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) in Worcester, Massachusetts made by London clockmaker Devereaux Bowley (cat. no. 32) and the clock requested from Storr. The AAS clock has an oak case with a burl-walnut veneer and brass dial but is missing its finials from the crown of the hood; Wendell Garrett, "Furniture of the American Antiquarian Society," *The Magazine Antiques* 97, no. 3 (March 1970): 403. Although many writing about the house reference the Storr clock as the same one in the collection of the AAS, this is misleading. Morse describes the AAS clock as well as another Hancock clock on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1910 owned by Miss Lucy Gray Swett. Both clocks are dated 1738. Swett's clock is marked by Storr and has a japanned case. However, this clock does not fit the description of the Storr order written by Hancock. The Bowley clock more properly fits this description. John Hancock's inventory in 1794 refers to a veneered clock (the Bowley clock). Phillips proposed in 1917 that the AAS clock was acquired in some other way by Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott and that the Storr clock, owned by Miss Swett was a gift of her father, Lt. Governor William Gray, who purchased it from Scott. Phillips contends that the Storr clock is the one described in Hancock's 1738 order.

¹²⁵ Although most furniture in the Hancock House was imported from England, bills survive for the purchase of desks from Boston cabinetmaker Nathaniel Holmes dated September 14, 1741, and a chest of drawers from Patrick Fitzpatrick, dated November 8, 1751. Thomas Hancock Bills, Ms Am 712 and Ms. Am 707, Boston Public Library Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, Boston.

¹²⁶ Queen Anne Looking Glass, 1720-1725, made in England. Peabody Essex Museum Collection, 101271.A. Woodcut depicted *Harper's Weekly* 1859, republished in *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, January 27, 1855, 56.

one of the original furnishings of the Hancock house and likely stood in the “Great Entry” (cat. no. 3).¹²⁷ Hancock’s purchase of the settee is not recorded, but the piece came to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston with a history of coming from a Hancock family auction. Captain Josiah Sturgis donated the settee to Pilgrim Hall in 1846. In 1957, the piece was transferred to the Museum of Fine Arts. Another Continental object with a history of Hancock ownership is a Dutch marquetry inlaid Queen Anne chair (cat. no. 5). The floral decoration inset into the back rail, splat and seat rail was made in panels and veneered to the surface of the chair. Light-wood inlays colored with dyes and mordants form a small bird and green leaves, while mother-of-pearl is used to create flowers on the splat.¹²⁸

One of Thomas Hancock’s most impressive pieces of European furniture was a six-legged mahogany settee probably made in London and upholstered with a red damask seat, 1740-1745 (cat. no. 4).¹²⁹ The settee has pierced tripart splats, elaborate

¹²⁷ Swan, “Excellency,” 119. Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 1957.99. Estate inventory of John Hancock, 1794. The sofa also may be referenced in the April 1, 1776 letter from Captain Isaac Cazneau to John Hancock related to items damaged by the British occupation of the Hancock House.

¹²⁸ Based upon other Dutch Queen Anne chairs sold at European auctions and dated to the first half of the eighteenth century, the mother-of-pearl inlay that was once suspected to be a later addition to the chair is likely original. A similar pair of chairs with mother-of-pearl and marquetry inlay was sold on December 9, 2009 in lot 1355 by Gorrings Auction house in England.

¹²⁹ Cooper, “Chippendale Settees: Some Sources and Related Examples,” *American Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (November 1977): 35. American Antiquarian Society Catalog Sheet, F. 1838.3. The settee is commonly attributed to an English maker. In 1970 in Wendell Garrett’s “American Antiquarian Society,” the settee is listed as English or Irish in origin. Garrett, “American Antiquarian Society,” 404. Wendy

foliate and animal head carving and rests on cabriole legs with hairy paw feet. It may well be the “settee crimson bottom” listed in the “Great Parlor” of the home in John Hancock’s inventory of 1794.¹³⁰ A similar settee belonged to a prominent Boston merchant and Hancock contemporary, Josiah Quincy (1709-1784). According to Quincy’s estate inventory, his settee was likely also upholstered in crimson damask.¹³¹ Hancock’s purchase may have inspired Quincy to purchase his own. The presence of two imported examples in Boston-area homes no doubt led to locally made versions of the form. Seven Massachusetts settees document the continued popularity of this stylish pattern in the area.¹³²

Thomas Hancock’s furnishings included inherited family pieces. A seventeenth-century court cupboard, made in Essex County, Massachusetts (cat. no. 22), and an English cane chair, 1680-1690 (cat no. 1), are purported to have been present in the Hancock house, and supposedly both were later purchased at an auction

Cooper discredits this origin in 1977 in “Chairback Settees,” 35. The settee may have been part of a set, with two chairs, based upon April 1981 correspondence with a private collector and the American Antiquarian Society. The collector purchased two identical chairs from a Massachusetts dealer and believed they may be from a set. American Antiquarian Society Object Files.

¹³⁰ Estate inventory of John Hancock, 1794.

¹³¹ Cooper, “Chairback Settees,” 36.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 40-45.

of Hancock furnishings.¹³³ Additionally, family furniture such as the desk and bookcase made for Thomas Hancock's wife Lydia (Henchman) Hancock's father once stood in the Hancock house (cat. no. 21).¹³⁴ Job Coit made the walnut desk and bookcase in Boston in 1738 for Daniel Henchman. The desk then passed through Lydia (Henchman) Hancock's mother to the widow of Thomas Hancock in 1765. John Hancock inherited this item as part of the Hancock estate. Writing about this desk in 1974, Nancy Goyne Evans states that it is "reasonable to assume that the desk was inherited by John Hancock and stood in his Boston home throughout the exciting events of the Revolution."¹³⁵ Two desks and bookcases are listed in the John Hancock inventory, one in the back parlor, and one, specifically noted as walnut, in the southwest garret. Evans proposes that the latter desk and bookcase, which by 1794 was no longer fashionable, is the one made by Job Coit.¹³⁶

1764-1793: John Hancock's Ownership

Under John Hancock's ownership, the house's furnishings were supplemented with additional items. Although this period is associated with the house's most

¹³³ Court Cupboard, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 51.53; English chair, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 17.1630. Both pieces descended through the Sargent family and were reportedly taken from the Hancock house in 1863.

¹³⁴ Desk and Bookcase, 1738, Winterthur Museum, 1962.0087.

¹³⁵ Nancy Goyne Evans, "Genealogy of a Bookcase Desk," *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974): 218.

¹³⁶ Evans, "Bookcase," 219.

prominent owner, few contemporary descriptions or artistic renderings exist. The surviving narrative descriptions from the period relate to John and Dorothy Hancock's entertaining in the house. John Hancock added a "spacious hall" to the east side which served as the site for many elegant Boston social events. The dining hall was built to accommodate fifty or sixty guests.¹³⁷ It was noted that in 1778, the Hancocks served breakfast to over one hundred and twenty of Count D'Estaing's French officers and midshipmen in the house.¹³⁸

Hancock further adapted the interior of his uncle's home by designating one space as "the Washington Chamber," a room that remained largely unchanged until the nineteenth century.¹³⁹ Listed in Hancock's 1794 inventory as the "Best Chamber," it was furnished with a suite of yellow damask bed and window curtains and matching upholstery for a "sopha"[sic], ten side chairs and one easy chair.¹⁴⁰ The easy chair, made in London, 1760-1770, retains its original upholstery and is now in the New

¹³⁷ "Hancock House, Boston," *The Youth's Companion*, August 27, 1846, 65. M.A. Howe de Wolfe, *Boston: The Place and the People* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 335-6.

¹³⁸ William H. Sumner, *Reminiscences* 4 (1822). Boston Athenaeum, Boston. The dining room was removed in 1818 when the land was used to build the Massachusetts General Hospital. Watkins, "Builder," 19.

¹³⁹ The "Washington Chamber" became one of the most vividly described rooms of the Hancock house. It was visually documented by a woodcut that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in 1859 and is one of the few interior images of the house (Figure 36).

¹⁴⁰ Estate Inventory of John Hancock, 1794.

England Historic Genealogical Society collections (cat. no. 6).¹⁴¹ The date of the chair's manufacture indicates that it, and likely the entire yellow damask suite in the room, was added after the death of Thomas Hancock, under John Hancock's ownership.

An evaluation of the stylistic features of furniture with a Hancock provenance indicates that John Hancock purchased items to supplement the house's original furnishings. Among these are many pieces of furniture made in Boston. A set of mahogany Chippendale chairs, 1760-1785, purchased by Marshall Gould at an 1837 estate auction sale may be among items bought by John Hancock during this period. The set has since been split into pairs and are in private collections and at the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design in Pendleton House (cat. nos. 7 and 8).¹⁴²

During the siege of Boston, between April 1775 and December 1776, the Hancock house, like many homes of prominent Boston individuals, was occupied. General Henry Clinton occupied the Hancock house while British General John Burgoyne resided in Governor James Bowdoin's Beacon Street home and Lord Percy

¹⁴¹ Brock Jobe, "The Boston Upholstery Trade," in Edward S. Cooke Jr., ed., *Upholstery in America from the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), 68.

¹⁴² Christopher Monkhouse and Thomas S. Michie, *American Furniture in Pendleton House* (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1986), 171.

inhabited Gardiner Greene's Pemberton Hill house.¹⁴³ As a result of the occupation, many of Hancock's furnishings were damaged. The value of these damages, recorded February 26, 1777 by attorney William Bank, totaled £4,732, 2 s., and 8 ¼ p. The mansion house, fences and garden needed repairs costing £345, 10 s. and 6 ¾ p.¹⁴⁴ The 1777 inventory lists only one damaged piece of furniture—a “back gammon table with its furniture” valued at £7.¹⁴⁵ The inventory also includes costly textiles representative of Hancock's station, including “six yards rais'd suits Velvets, crimson, being part of the lining of the Chariot which was torn out & carried away,” valued at £9. Additionally, the inventory documents two broken globe lamps and “delf [sic] Glass & China Ware, broke while the House was occupied by Officers of the Army.” To conclude his inventory, Bank records that many damaged items will likely be added to the list in the future, including further pieces of furniture from the Hancock

¹⁴³ Justin Winsor, ed., *The Memorial History of Boston: Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts 1630-1880, Vol. III: The Revolutionary Period* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1882), 155.

¹⁴⁴ Other damages include: compensation for food and drink consumed, such as six puncheons of cider, valued at £28, 16 s., and a half gross of wine “drank & destroyed by the Soldiers,” valued at £6. Weapons such as a brass sword valued at £4, and six muskets “given in to Gen. Gage by his Arbitrary order,” valued at £24 were also removed from the house. Utilitarian items damaged during the occupation include eight leather buckets, numerous garden tools, one large iron crane, bushels of charcoal and coal, and a large coach whip. John Hancock House Inventory, 1777, Ms. 255, Boston Public Library Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston.

¹⁴⁵ John Hancock's 1794 inventory lists a backgammon board as one of the contents of the “Little Room.” It is possible that this is the replaced board mentioned in the 1777 inventory. Estate inventory of John Hancock, 1794; John Hancock House Inventory, 1777.

house.¹⁴⁶ The 1777 inventory of damaged goods serves as one of the only documents of the house interiors from this period.

It is likely that furniture and family possessions did not receive as much damage as anticipated due to Hancock's request to Captain Isaac Cazneau that items be removed from the house or stored elsewhere during the occupation. Cazneau writes to Hancock in April 1776 after the evacuation of Boston that "the Mansion House was thought by most people a Place devoted to Destruction, has escaped a Scowering in more than one sence [sic]. The Best Furniture I put into the Chamber back of the Great Chamber & kept the Key till about three weeks before Gen Clinton left the House."¹⁴⁷ One item specifically listed by Cazneau as missing from the house was the "Great Settee."¹⁴⁸ General Clinton had the settee removed from the house, but returned it after the occupation. Cazneau records that "some Kitchen Furniture, a Servant's Bed, or two with Blankets are missing."¹⁴⁹ He further documents that

¹⁴⁶ John Hancock House Inventory, 1777.

¹⁴⁷ Captain Isaac Cazneau to John Hancock, April 4, 1776, quoted in Swan, "Excellency," 119.

¹⁴⁸ Swan, "Excellency," 119; Mabel Swan believes this is the French settee/sofa previously mentioned and presently in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

¹⁴⁹ Cazneau to Hancock, April 4, 1776, quoted in full in Swan, "Excellency," 119-120.

various outbuildings, such as the stable and Coach House on the Hancock estate, were used as a hospital during the occupation.¹⁵⁰

After the Revolution, Hancock made additional changes to the interior, including the purchase of two sets of federal chairs. John Hancock acquired a mahogany set of shield back chairs made in Boston, 1788-1793 (cat. no. 14).¹⁵¹ Additional items added to the Hancock house include another set of mahogany shield back chairs by William Fiske, 1788-1793 (cat. nos. 11-13). Three chairs stamped “WF” survive in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Historic New England and a private collection, sold at auction in 1983.¹⁵² The addition of newly fashionable furniture indicates that even at the end of his life, Hancock sought to maintain a cosmopolitan home to match his elite status in Boston.

Although Hancock left no will, the probate inventory of his possessions is lengthy and bears witness to the lavish tastes of both Thomas and John Hancock. This 1794 inventory remains the principal evidence of items in the house during the residency of the patriot, John Hancock. The items represented in the inventory are the combination of possessions purchased by Thomas Hancock and his nephew.¹⁵³ The

¹⁵⁰ Cazneau to Hancock, April 4, 1776, quoted in full in Swan, “Excellency,” 119-120.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 120; Marblehead Historical Society 1901.125.LOAN.

¹⁵² Side Chair, Neoclassical, 1788-1793, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 30.113. Historic New England, 1958.59; “Thanksgiving Auction at Bourne’s” *Maine Antique Digest* (February 1983). Historic New England Files.

¹⁵³ Estate inventory of John Hancock, 1794.

Hancock house consisted of eleven rooms with eleven separate service spaces, including garret chambers. The inventory records ninety-five chairs, with five additional pieces of seating furniture, nineteen tables, eight bedsteads, eight looking glasses and one clock among the contents of the house. Over seventy prints “with and without frames large and small, Historical, fancy, Portraits & Views” hung in the Great Entry with twenty-four paintings “landscapes, fruit & Kitchen pieces and persons.” An additional twenty-one paintings hung throughout the house.¹⁵⁴ These included family portraits by John Singleton Copley and John Smibert (cat. nos. 38-41, 43). At John Hancock’s death, his widow, named administrator of his estate, intended to keep several spaces in the house intact: “the chamber where Lafayette remained as when he slept in it...the audience hall was left as when all the distinguished men had been present: Washington, D’Estainge [sic], Brissot, Percy, etc.”¹⁵⁵

Both Thomas and John Hancock acquired impressive paintings for their Beacon Hill home. During John Smibert’s residence in Boston (1728 until his death in 1751), Thomas Hancock purchased portraits of his father and mother, the Reverend John Hancock of Lexington and his wife Elizabeth.¹⁵⁶ Hancock also had a Smibert

¹⁵⁴ Estate inventory of John Hancock, 1794.

¹⁵⁵ *King’s Handbook of Boston* quoted in Woodbury, *Dorothy Quincy*, 227.

¹⁵⁶ John Hancock and Elizabeth Hancock, Lexington Historical Society Collections. Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, 1. The Smibert paintings of Rev. John Hancock and Mrs. John Hancock passed through Hancock descendants to the Lexington Historical Society and presently hang in the Hancock-Clarke House. For complete genealogical descent of the paintings, see cat. nos. 40, 41.

painting of his friend Christopher Kilby, which he references in correspondence to Kilby in 1739/1740. The painting of Kilby, lost in the dispersal of items from the Hancock house, was hung in “a Frame in the fashion of my other Pictures” in the Keeping-Room during Thomas Hancock’s ownership of the house.¹⁵⁷ Recording observations about the Hancock house in 1917, Henry Ayling Phillips stated that the other paintings by Smibert likely hung in the Keeping-Room, also referred to as the Large Drawing Room or Great Parlor.¹⁵⁸

John Hancock supplemented these paintings with portraits of himself and friend Samuel Adams painted by Hancock’s neighbor, John Singleton Copley between 1765 and 1772 (cat. nos. 43, 44). Hancock commissioned the paintings to hang in the Large Drawing Room. In 1863 Arthur Gilman records that these paintings hung on the east wall, over the chimneypiece.¹⁵⁹ In 1917 Phillips records ten paintings in the Drawing Room, though the inventory of the space after John Hancock’s death records sixteen portraits in the room.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Hancock to Christopher Kilby, March 22, 1739/1740, quoted in Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.

¹⁵⁸ Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, 7-9.

¹⁵⁹ Arthur Gilman quoted in Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 4, Folder 11.

1793-1817: Captain James Scott and Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott's Ownership

Many furnishings appear in both the John Hancock and Captain James Scott inventories, with most in the same room or location. The most unchanged space in the house was the Great Entry. Of the eleven separate entries for the room in Scott's inventory, eight entries corresponded with those in the room in 1794.¹⁶⁰ The decision not to refurnish the entire house likely represent a conservative economic decision as well as Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott's desire to preserve spaces in the house.

As recorded by Scott's 1809 inventory, many furnishings in the house during John Hancock's lifetime remained unchanged. An exception is the addition of a set of bird's eye maple chairs made between 1795 and 1805 (cat. no. 15).¹⁶¹ Made by John and Thomas Seymour in Boston, this set of twelve side chairs and two armchairs are made of bird's eye maple and curly maple with bird's eye maple veneers. A fragment of red damask, currently framed and in the collections of the Isaac Davenport house in Milton, Massachusetts, is likely the original upholstery for the chairs (Figure 37). Again, the Hancock house displayed the height of contemporary fashion, as indicated

¹⁶⁰ "Massachusetts Registry of Probate, Suffolk County, Docket No. 23366, estate inventory of James Scott (November 27, 1809).

¹⁶¹ Entries for chairs from this set are published in the catalogs of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and the Kaufman Collection. Richard H. Randall, Jr., *American Furniture in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1965), cat. no. 173. J. Michael Flanigan, et al., *American Furniture from the Kaufman Collection* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1986), cat. no. 35.

by the Seymour chairs. These stylish chairs were among the last furnishings added into the house during the Scotts' ownership.

1817-1863: Ownership by Hancock Descendents

In 1817, Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott granted ownership of the property to her nieces and nephews when she relocated to Central Court in Boston. Detailed descriptions of its interior as well as woodcuts created for *Harper's Weekly* document this period of the house's history but are often misinterpreted as portraying the house during John Hancock's lifetime (Figure 5, 35 and 36). The most vivid portrayal of the Hancock house's interior is given by Miss Eliza G. Gardner, a grandniece of Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott.¹⁶² Gardner lived in the house in the middle of the nineteenth century and records the interior as she remembered it when owned by Dorothy Scott:

As you entered the governor's mansion, to the right was the drawing or reception room, with furniture of bird's-eye maple covered with rich damask. Out of this opened the dining hall referred to, in which Hancock gave the famous breakfast to Admiral d'Estaing and his officers. Opposite this was a smaller apartment, the usual dining-hall of the family; next adjoining were the china-room and offices, with coach-house and barn behind. At the left of the entrance was a second saloon, or family drawing-room, the walls covered with crimson paper. The upper and lower halls were hung with pictures of game-hunting scenes, and other subjects.¹⁶³

¹⁶² The residents of the home at this time include Elizabeth Hancock Wood and her grandparents, Eliza Gardner and Charles L. Hancock. Elizabeth Wood is photographed on the porch of the Hancock house (Figure 38).

¹⁶³ Quoted in Samuel Adams Drake, *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), 339-340.

Eliza Gardner's account is the most frequently cited depiction of the house's interior.¹⁶⁴ Many of the items described by Gardner survive, including the bird's eye maple chairs, fragments of the damask upholstery and a fragment of crimson flocked wallpaper. The "game-hunting scenes and other subjects" noted by Gardner may have been some of the seventy prints detailed in the inventory of John Hancock. This description was not published until 1873, eighty years after the death of the former governor.¹⁶⁵ Gardner's comments paired with wood cut images of the house published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1859, document the interiors of the house. The woodcuts illustrate two rooms in the interior of the house: the Entry Hall and Washington Chamber.

Stereographic views of the Hancock house in the collections of Historic New England illustrate the house during the 1850s (Figures 12-15). Three of these views capture images of the staircase, upper landing and reception room. The William Fiske shield back chairs can be seen in the image of the stairway lower landing (Figure 12). A notation on the reverse side of the stereoviews states "the chairs were in the possession of Gov. Hancock. A variety of patterns to the balustrade may be noticed.

¹⁶⁴ Many nineteenth century Boston viewbooks and histories cite the Eliza Gardner description, including: Edward Abbott, *Revolutionary Times: Sketches of Our Country, Its People and Their Ways* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876), 39 and Lucius Morris Beebe, *Boston and the Boston Legend* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1935), 79.

¹⁶⁵ This description comprises the majority of the discussion of the house in Abram English Brown, *John Hancock: His Book* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1898), 239.

This hall has been greatly admired for its architectural beauty.”¹⁶⁶ The view of the upper landing, listed as stereoview number three, includes a caption stating that the sleeping room where Hancock died is to the right, and that a guest room or “Washington Chamber” is to the left. Neither room is shown (Figure 13).¹⁶⁷ In the reception room, view number four, a Copley painting of Hancock is visible, with two small oval paintings of the Reverend John Hancock and Elizabeth Hancock, also by Copley (Figure 14). Its caption also identifies a family bible and John Hancock’s walking stick. The furniture shown in the final view includes a lyre-base table, marble topped circular table and an Empire style footstool (Figure 15).¹⁶⁸ With the notable exception of the shield back chairs, lyre-base table, marble topped table and footstool, the stereoviews document rooms fashionably furnished in the style of the mid nineteenth century, showing few items with direct association to John Hancock.

In 1863 as the time for demolition approached, auctioneers Sprague & Tappan advertised the sale of architectural elements from the house. The June 26, 1863 advertisement also referenced the sale of the remaining contents of the house, “comprising many antique curiosities and materials to be manufactured into many

¹⁶⁶ “Stairway-Lower Landing Photograph,” verso. Historic New England.

¹⁶⁷ “The Hancock House No. 3. Upper Landing of Hall,” Historic New England.

¹⁶⁸ “Reception Room No 4” and “Reception Room-Second View,” Historic New England.

useful and ornamental parlor mementoes (Figure 32).¹⁶⁹ Despite the family's 1863 offer to donate the remaining items related to John Hancock to the City of Boston, it seems that many of the furnishings directly associated with the Patriot had already been dispersed from the house.

During the Hancock house's existence from 1737 to 1863, its furnishings and interiors changed with the passage of time. These interiors consistently represented the height of Boston fashion. After the patriot's death, and the subsequent death of his widow, auction sales dispersed the furnishings and personal items from the Beacon Hill house. The dispersal of these items allowed them to find reinterpreted meaning as Hancock relics.

¹⁶⁹ "Auction Sale," *Boston Post*, June 26, 1863, 3.

Chapter 6

DISPERSAL OF FURNISHINGS FROM THE HANCOCK HOUSE

On October 8, 1793, at the age of fifty-five, Governor John Hancock died at his home on Beacon Hill. He left no will, and over the next seventy years his possessions were dispersed through a series of auctions. The first occurred in 1793, three weeks after Hancock's death; the last took place in 1863, shortly before developers demolished the stately residence. The auctions attracted widespread attention—from family and non-relations alike. After purchase, some objects descended from generation to generation as cherished private mementoes of John Hancock. But in other cases, buyers almost immediately presented items to museums or historical societies. John Hancock captured the historical imagination. These relics provided a tangible legacy of the President of the Second Continental Congress, first signer of the Declaration of Independence and first and third Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This study was formulated to track the dispersal of furniture from the Hancock house and identified sixty-eight pieces of furniture with a Hancock provenance.¹⁷⁰ Despite the complicated dispersal of items from the house, a large portion of its

¹⁷⁰ A large amount of silver and paintings from the Hancock house and clothing owned by John and Dorothy Hancock survive in museum collections. A similar study could be conducted relating to other objects from the house.

furniture survives. Although several pieces stylistically post-date John Hancock's life, his actual ownership of an object is less significant to its owners than the object's association with the individual, his family and the Hancock house.

The Hancock auction sales drew a wide audience. Descendants and other relations of Hancock were likely motivated to purchase these items to maintain a connection to their lineage. Items sold at auction sales that correspond to objects in later inventories of the house may have been purchased back by members of the family to remain in the house. Collectors with no relation to Hancocks also purchased many of these items due to the family's prominence.

Although many of the pieces of furniture are well studied by scholars, the examination of the dispersal of items from the Hancock house is a neglected area. Auction sales for furnishings and other objects from the Hancock house were often held off-site and newspaper advertisements for the sales did not always indicate that the items came from the estate of John Hancock.¹⁷¹ To confirm the validity of advertisements for Hancock auction sales, cross-references to the records associated with furniture were made. In many cases, the myth of association with items from the Hancock house begins with their dispersal at these sales.

¹⁷¹ Swan, "Excellency," 120-121. The 1795 and 1837 auction sales were referenced in Mabel Swan's 1937 article but Swan does not include specific details such as where the sales were advertised or their exact dates.

Auction Sale: 1793

The first auction sale was held on October 23, 1793.¹⁷² Lewis Hayt advertised “a variety of genteel House hold furniture” for sale at his office on State Street in Boston. The announcement listed:

Elegant mahogany Chairs, nail over seats stuffed and covered with satin hair, 2 arm do. to match, mahogany 4 post Bedsteads, fluted feet pillars, 2 easy Chairs, covered with silk damask, pier and other Looking Glasses, desk and Bookcase, mahogany side Board 4 capital blue silk damask window Curtains, complete, 1 suit yellow silk do. bed Curtains, with squabs, to answer, plated Candlesticks, &c.¹⁷³

Mabel Swan, when writing about the sale in 1937, may have identified the Hancock house as the source of the sale’s materials by the reference to a yellow damask bed curtains and squabs, detailed in Hancock’s inventory in the great chamber of the house.¹⁷⁴ Swan also notes that the yellow set did not sell at the first sale and appears in an auction advertisement dated two weeks later.¹⁷⁵ The set may have been purchased back by Hancock family members and returned to the house, as it appears in the great parlor in Captain James Scott’s 1809 inventory and again in 1830 in the inventory of Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² “Advertisement,” *Massachusetts Mercury*, October 22, 1793. Also advertised in *Columbian Centinel*, October 23, 1793.

¹⁷³ “Advertisement,” *Massachusetts Mercury*, October 22, 1793.

¹⁷⁴ Estate inventory of John Hancock, 1794.

¹⁷⁵ Swan, “Excellency,” 120. The reference does not include the date of the sale and the listing has not been located.

The 1793 auction listing includes identifiable pieces of furniture from several rooms in the Hancock house. The interior spaces represented with the highest quantity of items at the sale are the great parlor and great chamber. The haircloth “elegant mahogany Chairs” with matching arm chairs may have been the twelve chairs with hair bottoms and valued at sixteen pounds four shillings and fifteen shillings, respectively, listed in Hancock’s inventory. These chairs were in the great parlor, along with a set of “4 Damask Window Curtains,” valued at one pound, four shillings. The window curtains are the only set in Hancock’s inventory that is not described in reference to matching bed curtains. These window curtains may be the “4 capital blue silk damask window Curtains, complete” listed in the 1793 advertisement. The sideboard listed at the sale may be one of three from the house- one of which was located in the great parlor. Along with the set of yellow damask bed curtains and squabs, the “4 post bedstead” with “fluted feet pillars” may also be from the great chamber.

A London easy chair produced sometime between 1760 and 1770 from the great chamber may correspond to one of the “2 easy chairs” listed for sale (cat. no. 6). The chair is presently in the collections of the New England Historic Genealogical Society with a history stating it was a gift from the estate of Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott to Mary Davis in 1830. It then descended to a future corresponding secretary and president of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, who

¹⁷⁶ Estate inventory of James Scott Inventory, 1809; estate inventory of Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott, 1830.

presented it to the Society in 1883.¹⁷⁷ Scott's will, however, does not bequeath any items to Mary Davis.¹⁷⁸ John Hancock's estate inventory includes only two easy chairs -- one in the great chamber, covered in yellow damask, and one in the bed chamber, possibly in crimson upholstery to match the room's bed curtains. It is more likely that a member of the Davis family purchased this yellow damask upholstered chair at the 1793 auction.¹⁷⁹

Although the twelve side and two arm chairs sold in 1793 are not firmly attributed to any set, it is likely associated with the set of six mahogany shield back chairs owned by the Town of Marblehead, Massachusetts, on long-term loan to the Marblehead Historical Society. Lewis Hayt's auction advertisement lists twelve chairs with "nail over seats stuffed and covered with satin hair." Applying this description to John Hancock's inventory, only one set of chairs corresponds: the set of twelve chairs in the great parlor.

According to tradition, Ephraim Chambers, a fisherman of Marblehead, purchased the six shield back chairs at an auction purportedly held in 1795. In 1937, Mabel Swan writes about the chairs, using a 1906 letter from Marblehead Historical Society President Nathan P. Sanborn as her principal evidence. Sanborn states that

¹⁷⁷ Timothy Salls, e-mail message to author. November 2, 2009.

¹⁷⁸ Last Will and Testament of Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott, 1830.

¹⁷⁹ This chair may also have been sold at the 1830 auction sale, when the yellow damask set of upholstery last was advertised. See page 70-71 for the contents of the 1830 auction sale.

Chambers landed his schooner in Boston and while waiting for the tide to change, he viewed a sign for a “vendue sale of John Hancock’s household goods.” Sanborn notes that Chambers encouraged his crew to go to the sale and “went up the hill, passed the ‘beacon’ and [went] into the Hancock house. Soon after they arrived six of the dining room chairs were put for sale. The bidding was slow. Mr. Chambers did not want the chairs, but impatiently bid on them. They were struck off to him.”¹⁸⁰ The chairs descended to his only living daughter, Elizabeth Chambers. She eventually was forced to live in an almshouse, run by the Town of Marblehead, where she brought her family furniture and stored it in the attic. Upon her death, the town acquired possession of the chairs, and later placed them in the care of the Historical Society. Sanborn concludes that “there is no doubt about their [the chair’s] authenticity.”¹⁸¹

It is more likely that this set of six chairs was sold at the 1793 sale at Lewis Hayt’s office and not in a 1795 sale at the Hancock house. Excepting the reference by Swan and the 1906 letter from Nathan Sanborn (from which Swan’s research is based), there is little documentation to suggest that a 1795 sale occurred. A newspaper advertisement for the auction sale has not yet been located, nor has the date been associated with other items of furniture dispersed from the Hancock house. Further, the Marblehead chairs match the description in the 1793 Hayt advertisement and Hancock estate inventory. The chairs are mahogany with upholstery over the rail and

¹⁸⁰ Nathan P Sanborn to Harriet M. Forbes, May 23, 1906. Phillips, Hancock Papers, Folder 4, Box 5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

brass nails, made in Boston in about 1790. Currently upholstered in leather, the chairs may originally have had haircloth seats. Additionally, the only haircloth chairs in Hancock's inventory are the twelve chairs in the great parlor. Made around 1790, these chairs would have been considered elegant at the time, as the advertisement suggests. If the set of twelve were divided in two groups, as Sanborn's letter suggests, these chairs represent one half of the set.

Auction Sale: 1817

The elegant contents of the Hancock house again reached the auction market in 1817. Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott, twice a widow after the death of Captain James Scott in 1809, downsized her belongings to move to Central Court in Boston. The Hancocks' extensive collection of fine art was dispersed at a special "paintings and engravings" sale on August 13. An 1817 advertisement for an auction sale of prints and paintings from the Hancock house details the scale and range of paintings owned.¹⁸² The sale included "a valuable collection of engravings by some of the most distinguished artists" at the "residence of Mrs. Scott, Beacon Street, late Mansion of Gov. Hancock." The 1817 art auction is the only sale that directly references Hancock or the Hancock house address.

The sale consisted exclusively of fine art. Its advertisement lists eighteen paintings and eight lots totaling fifty-two separate engravings. The painting collection

¹⁸² "Sales by Auction," *The Columbian Centinel*, August 9, 1817.

included portraits of Pierre Paul Rubens [sic] and Cardinal Bentivoglio by van Dyck, and numerous other Dutch paintings. Most notable is the inclusion of the “original portraits” of General Amherst by Joseph Blackburn and Samuel Adams and General Warren by John Singleton Copley (cat. nos. 44 and 42).¹⁸³ Many of these paintings have made their way into museum collections since their dispersal from the house.¹⁸⁴

Auction Sale: 1830

After Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott’s death in 1830 an auction of her possessions was held. This sale, an administrator’s sale to raise funds for Mrs. Scott’s estate, occurred in February 1830 at No. 55 Federal Street. Auctioneer F.E. White advertised a sale of “Furniture, Silver ware, Valuable Paintings, &c.” at Scott’s former home. The advertisement announced:

The FURNITURE of said House, consisting in part of Dining and Pembroke Tables; Carpets; Looking Glasses; 1 set bird’s eye maple Chairs, with damask seatings; 1 pair do. do. Card Tables; Couch; Fire Sets; China and Glass Ware; 1 Chiming Clock; 1 elegant suit of yellow Damask Bed and Window Curtains; do. Cushions; 1 dozen Chairs, to match high post and other Bedsteads; Feather Beds, Mattresses, &c.

The following articles of SILVER WARE: 2 pair Candlesticks; 1 large Waiter; 2 doz. Desert Spoons; 2 doz. Forks; 16 Desert Knives; 1 doz. Tea Spoons; 1 pair Chafing Dishes; 1 pair Asparagrus [sic] Tongs; 1 Spout Cup; 1 Strainer; 1 Cream Bucket; 1 Can; 2 pair Butter Boats; 1 doz. Table Spoons; 1 Snuffer Dish; 4 large Gravy Spoons; 1 Ladle; 1 pair Tea Caddies.

¹⁸³ “Sales by Auction,” *Columbian Centinel*, August 9, 1817.

¹⁸⁴ See Appendix for further information related to paintings from the Hancock house in public collections. “Lt. General Jeffrey Amherst,” Joseph Blackburn, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, AC1972.1; “Samuel Adams,” John Singleton Copley, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, L-R 30.76c; “John Hancock,” John Singleton Copley, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, L-R 30.76d.

Also, an elegant Gold Snuff Box; 1 pair Gold Shoe Buckles; 1 Gold Watch; valuable diamond Rings, &c.

A few Paintings, by old masters, Ruebens, Van Dycke [sic], and others; an original Portrait of Gov. Hancock, by Copley; do. do. Washington; also, a fine Likeness in Wax, from life; sundry other Portraits and distinguished men, and a variety of ancient Engravings.

Also, usual assortment of Kitchen Furniture.¹⁸⁵

The majority of the furniture listed at this sale came from the front parlor and chambers of Scott's Federal Street home.¹⁸⁶ The items in the front parlor at the sale include the set of bird's eye maple chairs with damask seatings with matching card tables and couch (cat. no. 15). From the front chamber of the house, the auction sold a suite of yellow damask bed and window curtains, cushions, bedstead and mahogany chairs.¹⁸⁷ Following the auction listing is an advertisement for the sale of Dorothy Scott's pew at the Brattle Street Church. "Pew No. 32" was offered for sale and listed as "one of the best situation Pews in the House."¹⁸⁸

While it is possible that the sale included objects not from the house on Beacon Hill, the majority of the items advertised were furnishings for the Hancock house. Several items described in the advertisement correspond to entries in the inventories of John Hancock, Captain Scott and Dorothy Scott. The set of yellow bed and window curtains that came from the front parlor on Federal Street may be the same suite last documented in the best chamber of the Hancock house in the 1809 inventory of

¹⁸⁵ "Administrator's Sale," *Columbian Centinel*, February 20, 1830.

¹⁸⁶ Estate inventory of Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott, 1830.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ "Administrator's Sale--Pew in Brattle-Street Church," *Columbian Centinel*, February 20, 1830.

Captain James Scott.¹⁸⁹ The couch advertised in the 1830 sale may have been one of two sofas listed in the great entry of the Hancock house in 1809. Paintings, including the painting of John Hancock by Copley, hung in the Hancock house, and the van Dyck painting may have been one of the “5 Dutch Paintings” in the great parlor in 1809.

A well-documented item originating in the Hancock house and sold in 1830 is the set of fourteen bird’s eye maple chairs, 1795-1805, by John and Thomas Seymour of Boston (cat. no. 15).¹⁹⁰ The description of the house interior by Miss Eliza Gardner includes “furniture of bird’s-eye maple covered with rich damask” in the drawing or reception room to the right of the entry.¹⁹¹ In Scott’s 1809 inventory, these fourteen chairs valued at one hundred and twenty dollars, were situated in the great parlor, as Gardner described.¹⁹² In Dorothy Scott’s 1830 inventory, the chairs were valued at twenty-five dollars and in the front parlor of her Federal Street home. Jabez Bullard (1773-1852) attended the 1830 auction sale and purchased the set of chairs, likely because his second wife, Dorothy (Quincy) Clement Bullard (1775-1865) was the

¹⁸⁹ The yellow damask bed and window curtains appear in the 1793 auction sale listing, 1794 inventory of John Hancock’s estate, Captain James Scott’s 1809 inventory, D. Scott’s 1830 inventory and estate auction sale.

¹⁹⁰ See cat. no. 15 for complete provenance.

¹⁹¹ Drake, *Landmarks and Personages*, 339.

¹⁹² Estate inventory of James Scott, 1809.

niece of Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott. Familial relations, like Bullard's, motivated many purchases at Hancock estate auction sales.

Auction Sale: 1837

It is generally believed that the next auction sale of objects from the Hancock estate occurred in 1837. Evidence for the sale rests in the documented provenances associated with several objects in public and private collections and a newspaper advertisement dated October 12, 1837. Auctioneer J. L. Cunningham advertises for sale “at the House corner of Beacon and Belknap Streets”¹⁹³:

The furniture of the House, comprising a large quantity of rich and valuable articles, viz: Brussels carpets—suits of rich curtains for the drawing rooms, with settees, lounges, chairs and divan to match—splendid centre and mantel lamps—bronze and gilt candelabras and candlesticks—very large looking glasses, two of which are 90 by 66—several of other sizes—French andirons—bronze and steel fire sets—sets of mahogany and hair cloth chairs, with sofas to match—12 Genoese chairs—elegant mahogany sideboard—centre tables with marble tops—2 sets of lacquered tea pots or small tables—ditto centre tables—set of dining tables—rich cut glass ware—blue dinner set of nankin stone china—French ditto of white china—an elegant and gilt French dessert set—knives and forks—sorts of waiters—French timepiece with glass shade—marble bust of Sir Walter Scott—ditto of Napoleon—2 marble busts—a beautiful statue of Cupid sleeping—large hall lamp—oil cloth carpets—an elegant large Psyche dressing glass, in mahogany frame—large wardrobes—superior feather beds and mattresses—French bedsteads—bed-steps—dressing table and glass—washstands with marble tops—commodes—night cabinets—[illegible]—bathing tub—first rate mangle—large library table with drawers—French secretary—Canton lolling chair—very large camphor wood trunk—fancy and common chairs—beds—high post and other bedsteads—quantity of bedding—table cloths, and a variety of kitchen furniture, &c, &c.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Until 1855 Joy Street was known as Belknap Street. The Hancock house was located at what is presently the corner of Joy and Beacon Street. Thwing, *Crooked & Narrow*, 209-210. The property inherited by John Hancock in 1764 is described in 1880 as “all the State House and lands west of it to Belknap Street.” Bowditch, ed., *Gleaner Articles*, 107.

¹⁹⁴ “Advertisements,” *Columbian Centinel*, October 12, 1837.

The advertisement concludes with the statement that “the above Furniture is all quite new and of the most costly description. The following week, another sale at the same property is advertised. The sale featured the silver and silver plate of the house, “4000 bottles of Wine of various kinds” and cooking implements.¹⁹⁵

It cannot be positively confirmed that the 1837 sale advertised by J. L. Cunningham occurred at the Hancock house. According to the archaeological report compiled by Timelines Inc. in 1989, the Hancock house lot that extended to Belknap (presently Joy) Street was divided into parcels of land sold to real estate developer Israel Thorndike in the 1820s. By 1825, it is noted that Nos. 32, 33 and 34 Beacon Street were built between the Hancock house and Belknap Street. Therefore, it cannot be firmly documented that the 1837 sale occurred at the Hancock house and not at Nos. 32, 33 or 34 Beacon Street.¹⁹⁶ Publishing research queries about the Hancock house auction sales in newspapers in the early twentieth century, Harriette Merrifield Forbes, an historian and researcher, attempted to find validation for the 1837 auction sale. Her research queries identify October 12, 1837 as the date of a sale of Hancock house contents.

The majority of contents sold in the sale likely relate to items purchased by later Hancock generations. Furniture in older styles and purchased by Thomas or John

¹⁹⁵ “Advertisements,” *Columbian Centinel*, October 12, 1837.

¹⁹⁶ Beaudry, et al., “Site Archaeology,” 22.

Hancock were also sold in 1837. The 1837 sale therefore reflects an amalgam of items belonging to several generations of Hancock house owners.

In an undated letter from Mrs. L. M. Willis of New York, a looking glass measuring five feet in length and two feet two inches in width traces its purchase to the 1837 auction sale (cat. no. 30). This looking glass may be one of the “very large looking glasses” advertised by J. L. Cunningham.¹⁹⁷ Willis received the looking glass from a friend whose father purchased it from a Lewiston, Maine native who attended the 1837 sale in Boston. Willis believed that the original purchase of the mirror was by Governor Dingley of Maine.¹⁹⁸ The looking glass, made between 1815 and 1825, is representative of purchases by later Hancock generations.

In 1838, John Chandler of Petersham, Massachusetts donated a tall clock, chairback settee, set of Chippendale chairs and countinghouse desk to the American Antiquarian Society (cat. no. 4, 10, 23 and 32).¹⁹⁹ The items were purportedly purchased at an 1837 Boston sale of Hancock house contents. John Chandler descended from a wealthy and distinguished colonial family that was highly prominent in Worcester County, Massachusetts.²⁰⁰ The clock, settee and desk each have typed notes attached to the objects recording their donation from Chandler in 1838. The

¹⁹⁷ “Advertisements” *Columbian Centinel*, October 12, 1837.

¹⁹⁸ Mrs. L.M. Willis to Phillips, undated. Hancock Papers, Box 5, Folder 5.

¹⁹⁹ *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 43, no. 3:2 (1933): 226.

²⁰⁰ Mrs. Lucretia Chandler Bancroft to Mrs. Cherardi, October 1900.

American Antiquarian Society objects are among some of the earliest published pieces of Hancock furniture.²⁰¹ Brass plaques on the clock case door and the settee back rail commemorate John Hancock's association to the piece, though it is more likely that they were purchases made by Thomas Hancock.

Although the 1837 sale cannot be positively confirmed, the pairing of the auction advertisement with the American Antiquarian Society's furniture and other items in private collections support their probable association with the Hancock house. Of the pieces of furniture identified with a Hancock association, five objects in different collections and a set of eight chairs trace their dispersal from the house to this auction. Writing about these items in the early twentieth century, their owners associate objects with John Hancock himself. Despite the accuracy of the claim of later owners, it is not reminiscences of the Hancock house that are conveyed through these objects, but connections to the Patriot John Hancock.

Auction Sale: 1863

In 1863, a final auction sale was held at the Hancock house. On June 26, 1863 the auctioneers Sprague & Tappan sold the architectural elements and remaining contents of "The Old Hancock House."²⁰² Held at the site of the house, the sale included:

²⁰¹ Swan, "Excellency," 120.

All the materials of the Old Hancock House of Revolutionary fame, on Beacon Street, consisting of red cedar, oak joists, hard wood finish, doors, paintings, carvings, windows, blinds, floorings, &c. comprising many antique curiosities and materials to be manufactured into many useful and ornamental parlor mementoes. Also- the stone and brick work masonry.²⁰³

During the 1863 efforts to save the Hancock house, Charles L. Hancock, the estate administrator of John Hancock, Governor Hancock's nephew, offered the City of Boston the house as well as its remaining furnishings and portraits.²⁰⁴ It is possible that the furnishings remaining in the house were sold at this 1863 auction sale.

Inheritance of Hancock Objects

It is difficult to document the direct inheritance of furnishings from the Hancock house. Many family histories associated with objects emphatically state that a particular item was inherited from the estate of John Hancock or Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott. However, few of these claims can be validated. John Hancock died without a will, so inheritance from his estate was unlikely. In her will, Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott bequeathed a small number of her possessions to only nine individuals, mostly nieces and nephews. Scott's most valuable possessions, her silver, comprised most of the stated intentions. Martha A. Quincy, the daughter of John W. Quincy, received the only furniture in her will. Quincy is granted furniture for one room, which

²⁰² "Auction Sale," *Boston Post*, June 26, 1863.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Charles L. Hancock to Thomas C. Amory, May 23, 1863, quoted in Boston City Council, *Document No. 56*, 6.

included carpets, chairs, looking glasses, a small mahogany table from the back sitting parlor, the bedstead, bed and bedding that Scott personally used, and a bureau from the front chamber.²⁰⁵

Family members likely attended the Hancock auctions to purchase items from the estate. An English looking glass, c. 1740, and among one of the original furnishings of the Hancock house, was purchased at auction by a Hancock relation. The looking glass descended through generations of the family as a tangible link to their family. Until 2004 it remained in the possession of family members at the Isaac Davenport House in Milton, Massachusetts.²⁰⁶ Prudently affixed to the back of the mirror is a tag which reads, “Do not destroy this label, Preserve carefully.” In the late nineteenth century, the looking glass’ owner, Josephine Binney Bullard, recorded the line of its descent: “This looking glass belonged to Governor Hancock to whom the Whitney family of Shirley were related- to them it came to Mary D. Whitney (my sister) at her death to come [sic] to me.”²⁰⁷ Although the label does not document

²⁰⁵ Last Will and Testament of Dorothy (Quincy) Hancock Scott, 1830.

²⁰⁶ In 2004, at the death of Mary M.B. Wakefield, a charitable trust was formed that now maintains the Davenport-Wakefield house and its contents. See catalog entry 29 for complete line of descent of looking glass and connection to the Hancock family.

²⁰⁷ Claire Dempsey, Davenport-Wakefield Family Genealogy Chart, Wakefield Estate Archives, Milton. The looking glass became the property of Josephine Binney Bullard sometime after 1886, when her sister Mary Whitney died.

how the looking glass was acquired, it likely was purchased at auction.²⁰⁸ Bullard was greatly interested in family history, and recorded the provenance of many items in the house. In all nineteenth and twentieth century documents and furniture inventories of the Isaac Davenport property, the looking glass is always associated with Governor John Hancock.

Despite the difficulty of validating the inheritance of an item directly from John or Dorothy Hancock, the creation of family heirlooms remains an important facet in preserving the memory of the Hancock house to objects in public and private collections. Auctions held between 1793 and 1863 dispersed objects once owned, or believed to have been owned, by John Hancock. The modes of commemoration of these objects will be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁰⁸ Last will and testament of Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott, 1830; Dorothy Scott's will does not include items left to a member of the Whitney family.

Chapter 7

MODES OF COMMEMORATION

Objects dispersed through inheritance or Hancock house auction sales have long inspired curiosity and provoked legend. Whether through long association with a family or display in public collections, items from the house have spurred commemorative acts since the first dispersal sale of 1793. Materials from the Hancock house were reappropriated, transformed and modified to find new meanings for each successive generation of owners. However, not every object purchased from the Hancock house received years of care by an owner. The misinterpretation of objects and loss of provenance illustrates a counter-example of commemoration.

Reappropriated Materials

The transformation and reinvention of structural materials from the Hancock house became one method through which John Hancock's memory was preserved. Many of the architectural elements sold at the final auction of Hancock house material were reused in newly designed buildings. The most frequently cited reinvention of the Hancock house architecture is the incorporation of its stairway in his design for the home of Greeley Curtis in Manchester-by-the-Sea.²⁰⁹ Many antiquarians and

²⁰⁹ Floyd, "Drawings," 97-99.

interested collectors such as Ben. Perley Poore and Reverend L. B. Schwartz innovatively utilized materials from the Hancock house in their homes.²¹⁰

Reverend L. B. Schwartz, a collector from Greenfield, Massachusetts, included two doors from the Hancock house along with yellow cedar interior paneling in the construction of his stone farm (Figure 39). Schwartz's Hancock house collection was displayed alongside other architectural reinventions: two windows from old King's Chapel in Boston, the columns that supported the front door to Boston's first City Hall, and a silver plated bar from Boston's old City Hall (Figure 40).²¹¹ Writing about the Schwartz house in *House Beautiful* in 1900, Madelene Y. Wynne chronicled the development of the house with astonishment. Wynne asked the owners about the acquisition of the architectural elements and the owner responded that they were "bought on the spot when the house was being demolished."²¹² The article documents the locations from which the architecture originated, remarking that the presence of this architectural salvage in Greenfield is "a constant reminder of the ceremonious yet hearty living in the early days of Boston."²¹³ Although the architectural elements are

²¹⁰ Paneling from the Hancock house appeared in Poore's home Indian Hill. Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 29.

²¹¹ Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 4, Folder 4. Francis M. Thompson, *History of Greenfield: Shire Town of Franklin County*, Vol. II, (Greenfield, MA: T. Morey & Son, 1904). Madeline Wynne, "Time and Chance," *The House Beautiful*, (January 1900): 72-80.

²¹² Wynne, "Time," 73.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

displaced from their original context, the memory of the original house and its association to the Patriot John Hancock remains preserved for posterity by a branded “John Hancock” on the door.

A little more than a month after the demolition of the Hancock house and the sale of its architectural fragments, the raw materials were transformed into functional, displayable items that maintained connections to the Revolutionary figure John Hancock. On August 1, 1863, Palmers & Bachelder’s, a jewelry company in Boston advertised, “Old Hancock House Canes For Sale. Also Other Articles Made to Order From this Wood.”²¹⁴ Canes were constructed from fragments of other structures with Revolutionary ties, including the Winthrop House in Concord and the Old South Bridge in Concord.²¹⁵ Hancock house canes served as presentation pieces to contemporary Boston city politicians. A cane with an ivory knob inscribed “Hancock House” was in 1863 gifted to Joseph Richardson, a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, State Senate and United States Congress (Figure 41).²¹⁶ Similar canes were frequently displayed in “Revolutionary Relics” exhibitions hosted throughout New England. In the “Hancock case” at the Bostonian Society, an 1893

²¹⁴ “Old Hancock House Canes,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 1 August 1863.

²¹⁵ *Old South Loan Collection: Relics of Ye Olden Time: Catalogue of the Loan Collection of Revolutionary Relics exhibited at the Old South Church, November 1876, For the Benefit of the Old South Purchase Fund*, 7th Ed. (Boston: Press of George H. Ellis, 1876), cat. no. 57, 58 and 6.

²¹⁶ “Ivory and Silver Presentation Cane to Joseph Richardson,” Spring Historic Americana Sale, Cowan’s Auctions, Cincinnati, Ohio, June 5, 2008.

catalog listed two such canes on loan from Sarah B. Otis.²¹⁷ A third cane was donated to the Society in 1920 from Miss Edith Andrew.²¹⁸ Collecting souvenirs from the house and donating the items to institutions for public display became a method for nineteenth century New Englanders to memorialize a tangible piece of the past.

Modified Objects

A London chariot that descended from Thomas Hancock to John Hancock was sold at auction in 1793 and descended to Hancock relations in Portland, Maine (cat. no. 34). Similar to the installation of architectural salvage by Schwartz or the creation of presentation canes, the Hancock chariot received alterations and shifts in ownership and meaning throughout its history. Thomas Hancock, John Hancock's uncle, purchased the chariot through his London agent, Christopher Kilby in 1750. Kilby began to receive elaborate specifications for the chariot from Hancock as early as 1744. Hancock desired a coach with the coat of arms of both his family and the Henchman family on its exterior door. On February 28, 1748/9 he requested "A neat Roomey [sic], Genteel Chariot or Machine (not heavy), with a Pack of Carriages, the doors to have Double Slides for Glass and Canvas Sashes. The lining of a good light cloth or Scarlet which [ever] is most fashionable." Hancock recommended that his

²¹⁷ Samuel Arthur Bent, *Catalogue of the Collections of the Bostonian Society in the Memorial Hall of the Old State House*, (Boston: Bostonian Society, 1893), 10.

²¹⁸ *Proceedings of the Bostonian Society, Annual Meeting 18 January 1921* (Boston: Old State House, 1921), 16.

coach resemble one purchased by Harry Frankland, and asked that it come from the same maker, Earlington & Hutchinson of London. In December 1749, Hancock lamented to Kilby about poorly designed vehicles, such as those owned by “Pitts, Bowdoin & Flenker...the worse I ever saw.” The coach that Hancock received did not entirely meet his standards.²¹⁹

Now preserved by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America at the Quincy Homestead in Quincy, Massachusetts, the chariot retains the following history: “bequeathed by Miss Mary J.E. Clapp of Portland, Maine, who inherited it in descent from Jacob Quincy, brother of Dorothy Quincy.” While this history may be accurate, Jacob Quincy’s daughter Eliza Wendell Quincy (niece of Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott) and her husband Asa Clapp (1762-1848) of Mansfield, Massachusetts may have purchased it at auction in 1793.²²⁰ The purchasers of the coach are the same individuals who purchased a set of chairs from the Hancock house, one of which is in the collection of the New-York Historical Society. Asa and Eliza Clapp moved to Portland, Maine in 1789 and passed the chariot to their son, Honorable Asa William

²¹⁹ Quoted in Phillips, Hancock Papers. Box 2. Folder 12. Mss. XVI “A Chariot, A Chaise, etc. Ordered”; Phillips transcribed entries from Thomas Hancock’s letterbook regarding the purchase of the chariot.

²²⁰ The coach appears listed in the inventory of John Hancock after his death in 1793, yet does not appear in Dorothy Quincy Hancock Scott’s 1830 inventory.

H. Clapp, also of Portland. It descended to his daughter Mary J.E. Clapp, who donated it to the Quincy Homestead.²²¹

Unlike pieces of furniture purchased from the Hancock house that received careful preservation, the chariot was greatly altered. It was converted from a wheeled chariot to a sleigh in the nineteenth century. Emerson Brooks, a Clapp descendent, noted in 1917 that the coach first was modified under the ownership of Asa W.H. Clapp. Clapp is noted to have “used it somewhat, and the wheels going to pieces, he had it mounted on heavy runners.”²²² *The Portland Transcript* on January 6, 1892, while describing the Clapp home, indicates that the chariot, “is on runners now, and still in use in the winter, although it was on wheels when the property of John Hancock.”²²³ *The Portland Transcript* continues to state that Captain Asa Clapp’s servant took the coach to be painted black, unaware of the significance of the Henchman and Hancock coat of arms on the door. This corroborates Emerson

²²¹ Emerson Brooks to Henry Ayling Phillips in 1917 corroborates this line of descent. Phillips, Hancock Papers, Box 4, Folder 4.

²²² Ibid. The object has been studied by Ken Wheeling in an article on the booby hut, titled “Mr. Hancock’s Booby Sleigh” for the January 2006 *Carriage Journal*. Wheeling dates the structure of the sleigh to c. 1820. He does not find a connection between the date of the sleigh parts and the sleigh’s use during Hancock’s lifetime.

²²³ “The Clapp Mansion,” *Portland Evening Transcript*, January 6, 1892. Ken Wheeling’s date of c. 1820 is corroborated by newspaper accounts and Brooks’ correspondence, which indicate that the sleigh structure was likely added by the Clapp family.

Brooks' 1917 observation that the coat of arms is still faintly visible under another coat of paint.

The Hancock chariot is evidence of a hybrid form of commemorating the Hancock house. While the interior sections of the chariot maintain the original material and date to the chariot's association with John Hancock, its lower sleigh rails demonstrate change over time, as the object was transformed into a useful item. Though painted black, the Hancock and Henschman coat of arms is still visible, despite its alterations. Still in use by the Clapp family in 1892, the Hancock chariot acted as a lasting representation of the Hancock legacy and enhanced the Clapp family's tangible connection to the Hancocks.²²⁴

Modes of Commemoration: Forgotten Provenance

An item with important historical associations may not always be viewed as such to successive generations of family members. Through time the history of an object may become disconnected from the piece itself or later generations may not have an interest in family heirlooms. Evidence of the impact of an object's loss of importance of provenance is seen with the set of chairs made by John and Thomas Seymour at the Isaac Davenport house (cat. no. 15).

In the nineteenth century, it is evident that great care was taken to conserve the Hancock chairs (Figure 42). Brass braces were fashioned to repair breaks in the

²²⁴ "The Clapp Mansion," *Portland Evening Transcript*, January 6, 1892.

back splat of the chair, likely sometime in the later nineteenth century. Though the chairs lacked great monetary value at the time, these conservation efforts indicated a desire on the family's part to prolong the memory evoked by the furniture's association to John Hancock.

By the twentieth century, however, these associations did not seem to hold the same measure of importance to the family. Despite documentation for other items of furniture in the Isaac Davenport house (including cat. no. 29), the estate's archives do not include specific references to an association to John Hancock through these chairs. A typed paper label affixed to the inner seat rail of a chair by a relation, Alfred M. Bullard (1845-1925) reads:

This chair was originally the property of Governor John Hancock and was in use by him and his house on Beacon Street, Boston. Mrs. Hancock, who was my Grandmother Bullard's aunt, inherited from her husband the furniture in the house and upon marrying her second husband, Captain Scott, sold the chairs (of which this is one) to my Grandfather, Jabez Bullard, and [missing] descended to me.²²⁵

Although the label lists inaccurate information, as the chairs were actually purchased after Hancock's death and sold in 1830 at auction after the death of her Dorothy Hancock Scott, the label documents the association to the Hancock house.

Residents of the estate in Milton were extremely conscious of their family's history and the items that they deemed valuable. Two Isaac Davenport house property owners made efforts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to record the history of their family's possessions. In 1937 Arthur Haskell photographed the interiors. The

²²⁵ While its exact date is unknown, the label on the chair must have been applied sometime before 1925, at the death of Alfred Monson Bullard.

Haskell photographs feature prominent placement of significant family heirlooms. One parlor photograph focuses on an armorial needlework with the coat of arms of the Davenport family, the original builders of the home. The Seymour chair is only present in one view. It is identifiable only by its crest rail and is not central to the photograph. The arrangement of furniture in these photographs appears to have been staged by Haskell, as numerous views were taken with different items in place. The insignificant placement of the Hancock chairs may reflect Haskell's preferences, but more likely indicates that at this time their associations to the Hancock house were either not known or were not of great importance to their owners.

In addition to documenting objects in the house through photography, written inventories carefully noted the contents. In these twentieth century inventories, the Hancock chairs are not identified as such until a 1965 "Posterity List." When located at the estate in 2004, the chairs had not been in use and were stored in the attic.

The loss of a provenance, reappropriation or modification of a Hancock house relic speaks to the characteristics of commemorative objects. These modes of commemoration were manifested differently in distinct items with Hancock house associations. Objects that remain in use through generations are transformed into new forms, altered to suit the needs and aesthetics of a time and can be disconnected from their original history.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

The Hancock house in Boston, Massachusetts was hailed from the time of its construction in 1737 to its demolition in 1863 as a structure rich in architectural, historical and cultural significance. Its demolition not only left a physical gap in the Massachusetts landscape; it cast a considerable impression upon the national historic consciousness. Significant objects with association to John Hancock, an historic personage, were frequently displayed in public and private collections. Items from the house, from furnishings to architectural fragments, were sold at public auction, developing new identities as relics from the home of the Revolutionary Patriot. As early as 1875, these objects from the John Hancock house, like those associated with other Founding Fathers, served a distinct public purpose as unifying agents; they were both symbols of national identity and material links to a colonial past.

Collecting Americana and historic “relics” became popular during the late nineteenth century, at the beginning of “the antiquarian disposition” in America.²²⁶ During this time of historicism, public commemoration of historic figures could be expressed through objects. Historians have noted that these objects “are imbued with a lasting sediment of their owners, one that can be kept in a box or encased behind

²²⁶ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 36.

glass.”²²⁷ These historic relics were desirable to collectors who were attempting to connect themselves to earlier stages in American history. Historic artifacts served as links with past owners, ennobling present owners with a sense of history.

The private and public displays of artifacts associated with Revolutionary individuals began in the nineteenth century, initially with collections of objects associated with George Washington. An 1853 visitor to the home of Martha Washington descendent George Washington Parke Custis noted that Custis was surrounded by objects owned by Washington. Adorning the home were Washington’s silver dinner service, furniture from Mount Vernon, the patriot’s military camp chest and tent and the bed in which he had died. Writing about the display, historian Seth Bruggeman remarks, “Custis’ objects functioned like modern relics by putting their beholders into visual contact with the great man himself.”²²⁸ In a June 1888 reception hosted by the Washington Association in Morristown, New Jersey, a collection of “Washington-related ‘relics’” served as the central attraction to the event. The patriotic display of these objects enabled a more personal and intimate veneration of a Founding Father.

In similar fashion, John Hancock’s memorialization continued through the exhibition of his possessions. Private individuals and family members collected

²²⁷ Judith Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

²²⁸ Seth Bruggeman, *Here George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 33-4.

objects as tributes to the legacy of the governor. In response to Miss Mary Hancock's gift of a porcelain dish from a dinner service at the Hancock House, Mrs. Mary E. Hewitt Stebbins penned a poem to express the significance of the plate's original ownership.²²⁹ Dated April 22, 1861 and inscribed in a booklet bound in red, white and blue ribbons (Figure 44), Mrs. Mary Stebbins wrote:

While I sing in wild vagary/This quaint dish of porcelain/Never fear nor county, my
Mary/That thy gift has crazed my brain/Antique dish! That, at the banquet/Ere our
land her need had won/Graced the board where bold/John Hancock/Feasted glorious
Washington/ Thou hath served, oh! Rare old platter!/Men whole hearts beat firm and
true/On the anvil of their strong will/Forging life's broad course anew./ Though hath
heard the deep revealing/of their purpose all divine/While they rocked young
Freedom's cradle/Seated there above the wine... To thou will not wonder, Mary,/That
I wake the lofty strain/While such stirring memories linger/Round this dish of
porcelain.²³⁰

Now in the collection of the New-York Historical Society, the Chinese export plate in the famille rose pattern, c. 1785-1790, is indistinguishable from other similar pieces of porcelain in this pattern (cat. no. 35). It is the association to an American patriot that gave this plate its importance to Stebbins. The plate provided a tangible connection to the Founding Father and, through him, to the American Revolution.

The first commemorative public display of items associated with John Hancock may have been in New England benefit exhibitions of the mid 1870s. At the 1875 New Haven, Connecticut exhibition, mounted in support of the National Centennial Fund of Philadelphia, Hancock objects such as game pieces, portraits and

²²⁹ Mrs. Mary E. Hewitt Stebbins (1807-1894) was a poet with many works published in the 1850s and 1860s in New York.

²³⁰ Mrs. Mary E. Hewitt Stebbins to Miss Mary Hancock, New-York Historical Society Library.

clothing fragments were displayed along with those of Washington, Benjamin Franklin and others.²³¹ In the same year, an exhibition of Revolutionary relics was held to promote the Ladies' Centennial Commission at No. 56 Beacon Street.²³² Mere blocks from the site of the Hancock house, the display featured photographs of the house and historic maps of Beacon Hill alongside the Hancock family sideboard, table and writing desk. Benefits held the next year in Boston raised funds for local preservation of the Old South Meeting House.²³³ Hancock family silver, a dining table, writing desk and other artifacts were presented. These revered items reminded visitors of the lost but not forgotten home of John Hancock.

Hancock relics ascended to a more prominent stage at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.²³⁴ The United States Government Building contained an exhibition of items of national significance. Titled "Revolutionary Relics," the show featured "Revolutionary relics and articles linked with the history of the early colonies

²³¹ *Hand-Book of the Centennial and Antiquarian Exhibition, New Haven, Conn. 1875* (New Haven, CT: Punderson & Crisand, 1875).

²³² *Catalog of the Revolutionary Relics Exhibited at No. 56 Beacon Street, June 1875*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Ladies' Centennial Commission, 1875).

²³³ *Old South Loan Collection: Relics of Ye Olden Time, Catalogue of the Loan Collection of Revolutionary Relics Exhibited at the Old South Church, November 1876*, 7th ed. (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1876).

²³⁴ Although it may seem that the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition would have held similar historic displays, the first recorded exhibits were at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Michael Kammen remarked that the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition consisted of very few historical displays. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 136.

before this country became the United States of America.” Objects from ten of the original thirteen colonies were represented. One account noted the exhibit’s “rare old laces, snuff-boxes, miniature letters, books, swords, shoe-buckles, and silver plate.”²³⁵ The Massachusetts Collection included John Hancock’s ring, “which he wore when he signed the Declaration of Independence,” as well as signed proclamations and “silver and glassware from his table.”²³⁶ The Hancock house inspired the design of the Massachusetts State Building and one interior recreated the Hancock bedchamber. Although highly romanticized and lacking items originally inside the Patriot’s home, the room had an associational value that proved memorable for World’s Fair visitors (Figure 31).²³⁷

Veneration of the site of the Hancock house did not persist much further into the twentieth century and likely corresponds to historians’ poor regard of John Hancock’s accomplishments. Paradoxically, though Hancock himself was not lauded by historians (biographers did not fully explore his life until the late twentieth century), objects that retain Hancock associations were treasured as lasting links to colonial Boston and the American Revolution.

²³⁵ Henry Davenport Northup, Nancy Banks, Mrs. Potter Palmer, *The World’s Fair as Seen in One Hundred Days Containing a Complete History of the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Philadelphia: Ariel Book Company, 1893), 356.

²³⁶ Northup et al., *One Hundred Days*, 367.

²³⁷ Hubert H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* vol. 2 (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Co., 1893), 782.

Following John Hancock's death in 1793, old New England families strove to capture a piece of the Hancock estate, commemorating it in very different ways. Purchasers communicated their colonial heritage through the acquisition of Hancock relics. The owners then gained both public and private agency by placing a label or fashioning a plaque that associated the individual or donor's name with the name of the Patriot, John Hancock.

Private collections of Hancock objects, like those created by Custis for Washington relics, reveal personal and often familial connections to a Revolutionary figure. Each item that passed through a family took on an amplified meaning for successive generations. Public commemorations ranged from the quiet donation of objects to public collections to bold and ostentatious displays. These exhibitions demonstrated an understanding of the public importance of objects associated with Hancock. In the 1870s, they graced "Revolutionary Relic" exhibitions designed to raise money for other commemorative activities, such as the World's Centennial Exhibition or the preservation of Old South Meeting House.

The legacy of the house lived on in architectural recreations and in the impact of its demolition upon the preservation movement. When the Hancock house's demolition became a catalyst for New England and national preservation efforts, it became more than a mere symbol of colonial Boston. Its associations with John Hancock and the struggle for American independence amplified its resonance as an iconic loss to America's collective historic heritage, becoming a touch point for the importance of preserving historic structures.

The Hancock house's didactic impression upon the collective historic consciousness was adapted and expanded upon by recreation efforts and by the veneration of objects from its interiors as relics. The structure grew from a mere site with an association to a great man to an iconic symbol, powerful to the preservationist cause, fascinating to individuals during the Colonial Revival, and of enduring interest to those forming genealogical connections to their colonial pasts through the collection of objects.