



NEW ADDITION TO THE NORTH WING, ASYLUM AT CHARLESTOWN  
From plans by Dr. Wyman submitted to the Trustees in September, 1825.  
Stereograph, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

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## Early Buildings of the Asylum at Charlestown, 1795-1846 Now McLean Hospital for the Mentally Ill, Belmont, Massachusetts

By NINA FLETCHER LITTLE

IN order to visualize the gracious brick mansion which was to become the central administration building of the Asylum, and the residence of its Superintendent and medical staff for the ensuing seventy-seven years, it is pertinent to review briefly here the early history of what has been called "the most outstanding private residence built in America during the last decade of the [eighteenth] century."<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Barrell, the builder, was a wealthy Boston merchant whose pastel portrait by John Singleton Copley now hangs in the Worcester Art Museum (Fig. 1). Following the Revolution, when he was still living in Boston in a

EDITORIAL NOTE: This article, forming the third part of a longer study, entitled *Journals of George William Folsom, Apothecary at the Asylum for the Insane, 1825*, is published here in recognition of the 150th Anniversary of the opening in Charlestown, Massachusetts, of the present McLean Hospital.

large house on Summer Street and enjoying the returns from a profitable import business, Barrell took into his counting house for a five-year term a young family friend named Charles Bulfinch. A graduate of Boston Latin School, Bulfinch was destined to become New England's foremost architect of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In the early 1790's Barrell purchased over two hundred acres of high land on Cobble Hill in Charlestown lying on the westerly side of the Charles River. There, in 1792, he proceeded to develop a country estate in the English manner, known variously as *Pleasant Hill* or *Poplar Grove*. The house is among Bulfinch's first designs for a private residence. One of the architect's own drawings illustrates the east front which overlooked terraced gardens and fruit trees that were later to provide pleasantly tranquil surroundings for the Asylum patients and medical staff

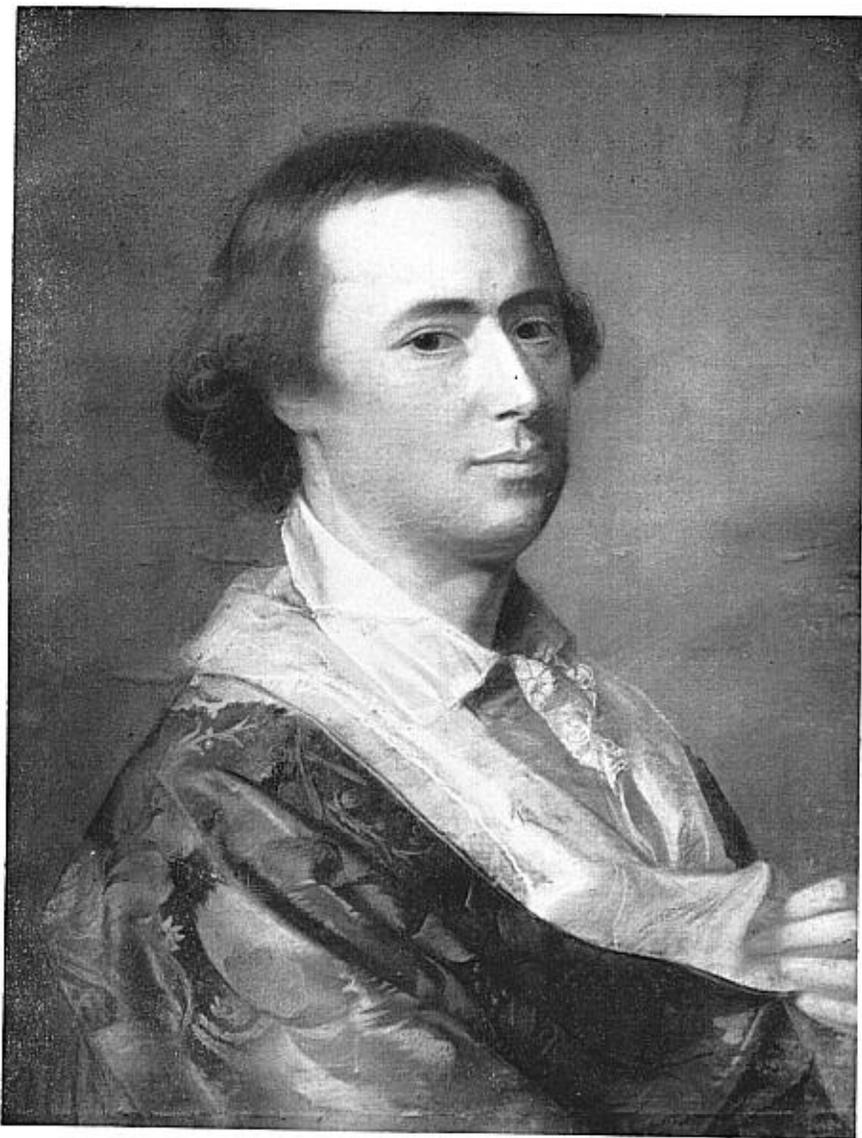


FIG. I. JOSEPH BARRELL

Pastel portrait by John Singleton Copley, 1761, when Barrell was twenty-one years of age.  
Courtesy of the Worcester Art Museum.

(Fig. 2). From his boathouse at the bottom of the garden on Miller's River (a small tributary of the Charles) Barrell was frequently rowed across to Boston by liveried boatmen.<sup>2</sup> The accessibility provided by this water route greatly facilitated travel between the Asylum and the Hospital during the years to come.

Barrell's *Letter Book*, preserved in the collections of the Massachusetts Historical

grounds were carried out on a grand scale as befitted a gentleman's country estate. The farm buildings included stables, a large barn, poultry yards and dovecotes, and there was also a two-hundred-foot greenhouse for which two heating stoves were ordered from England to warm the precious oleanders, and olive, orange, and lemon trees within. Ornamental terraces and fountains were laid out and many

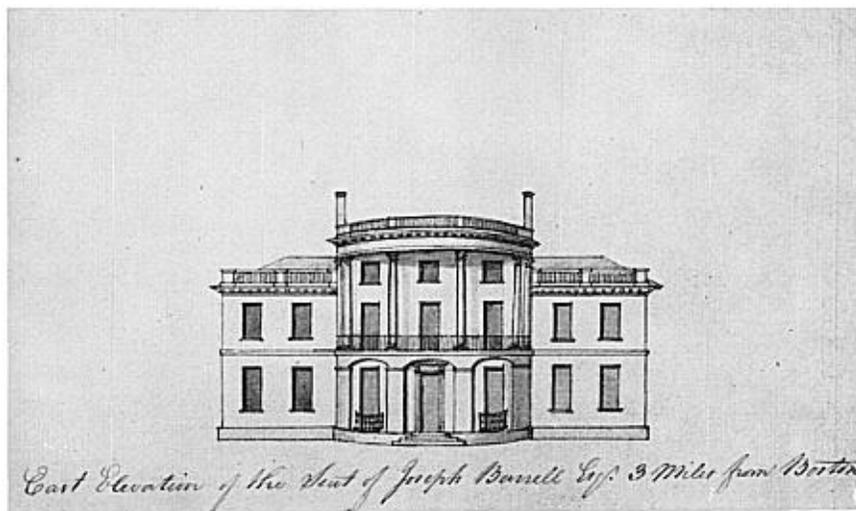


FIG. 2. BARRELL MANSION, EAST FAÇADE

Drawing by Charles Bulfinch, c. 1792.

Courtesy of the Boston Athenæum.

Society, provides many informative details about the original furniture and equipment of the mansion, much of which was imported from abroad. One ingenious contrivance was a shower bath of which there are several mentions in the *Folsom Diary*.<sup>3</sup> On January 1, 1795, Barrell wrote in reference to his famous oval parlor which still lacked carpentry and plaster work: "My house is entirely finished except my best room."<sup>4</sup>

Not only was the house furnished in a handsome manner but the surrounding

rare types of fruit trees imported.<sup>5</sup> Two special attractions featured a rose-embowered summerhouse located on the hill at the rear of the mansion, and an ornamental fish pond on the easterly slope which was effectively placed on axis with the center of the oval drawing room. It is probable that many of these features were not maintained after the owner's untimely death in 1804. However, a hand-drawn plot of a portion of the estate taken in 1817 at the time of its sale to the Massachusetts General Hospital, shows

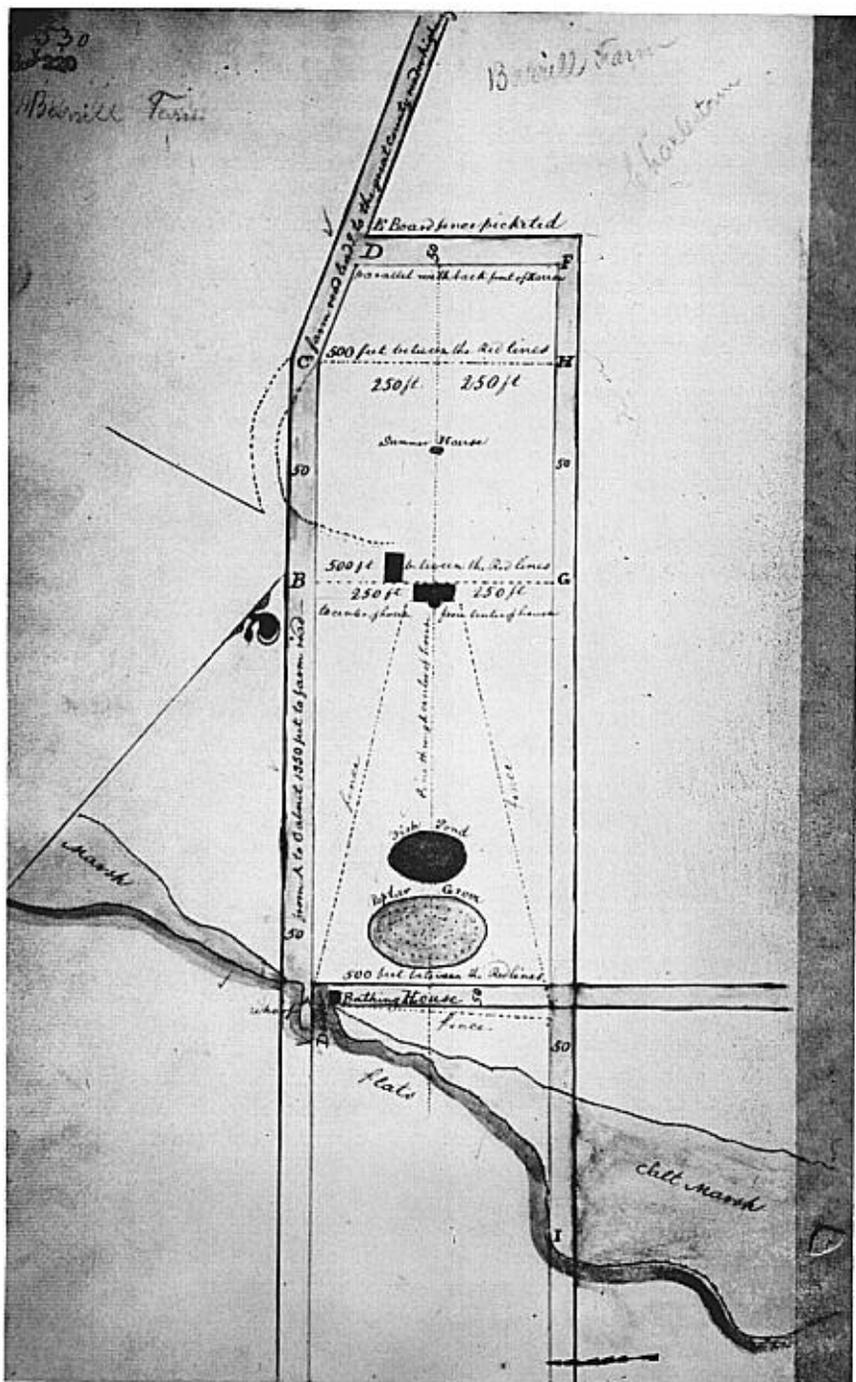


FIG. 3. PLOT OF BARRELL ESTATE, 1817  
Middlesex County Deeds, Book 220, p. 530.

the position of the house in relation to the then still existing barn, fish pond, dock and summerhouse (Fig. 3). The latter two at least, were still in use in 1825.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately following the initial purchase of Barrell property from the executor Benjamin Joy in 1816, the Trustees employed Charles Bulfinch to undertake a tour of several established hospitals outside of New England for the purpose of observing their operation and layout, with regard to enlarging the Barrell House for Asylum purposes. As the leading local architect he was well qualified for this important assignment through his previous designs for other public buildings in Boston, coupled with his especial interest in "domestic economy," or the science of heating and sanitation.

Bulfinch's own account of this particular commission is recorded in his *Memoirs* where he says in part: "At the close of the War [of 1812] a project was started for building 2 hospitals, one for insane subjects and the other with the title of 'General Hospital.' By the influence of my brother Coolidge I was sent by the board of agents to view the hospitals of New York, Philadelphia, & Baltimore, to observe their construction and to get a knowledge of the detail of their expenses and management. . . . I proceeded to execute it and made reports of my proceedings on my return that I believe were quite satisfactory."<sup>7</sup>

On March 16, 1817, the second of Bulfinch's two reports was presented to the Hospital Trustees. A thorough and well-reasoned document, it stated among other pertinent observations, his conviction that the Asylum should accept only paying patients, thereby reducing the need for necessary accommodation to one hundred persons which he believed "will be sufficient for a period of years."<sup>8</sup>

Regarding details of construction he

observed: "The public sentiment seems to require that all new buildings for general purposes should be of stone, this material is certainly to be preferred to brick. . . . It will be more costly in the beginning, but will be more durable and require fewer repairs. . . . Proceeding upon the opinion that provision for *one hundred* insane persons is all that is required at present, I offer a sketch of a ground plan for two wings to the main house purchased at Charlestown, they will be connected to the house by covered colonade or arches, and may be placed at nearer or greater distance from it, as the nature and fall of the ground, and other circumstances shall lead to decide, & which must depend on viewing and taking levels of the ground where the season shall be further advanced until this is done, no elevation or view of buildings can be given that would suit the situation"<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 4).

Bulfinch's "ground plan" was promptly accepted by the Hospital Trustees after certain modifications had been suggested by the Asylum Building Committee who, on May 4, recommended that there should be two wings, each measuring 76 by 40 feet, which should be three stories high instead of one, and of brick instead of stone.<sup>10</sup> Either economy or a desire to match the new wings to the existing brick mansion house must have been the deciding factor in changing the original specifications. If Bulfinch ever did submit a formal "elevation or view of buildings" I have found no reference to it. In fact, even his original ground plan has hitherto remained in comparative obscurity in the Rotch Memorial Library of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, now deposited in the Library of Congress.<sup>11</sup>

Because it had apparently rankled with Bulfinch that the initial opportunity to submit this plan for the Asylum had come

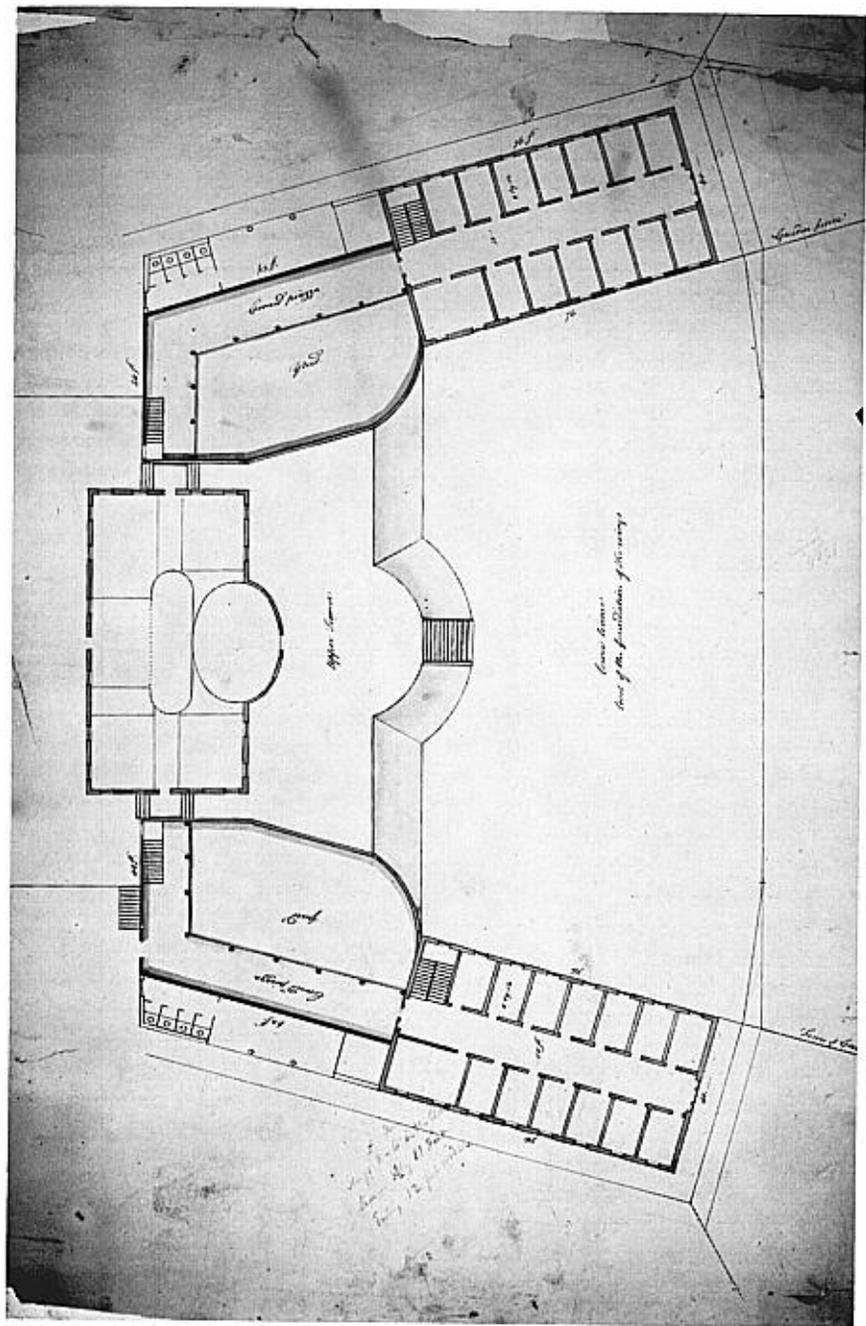


FIG. 4. GROUND PLAN OF THE ASYLUM, SKETCHED BY BULFINCH IN 1817

Shows the first addition of the two new wings, designed by him.

Courtesy of the Arthur Rotch Memorial Library, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.  
(On permanent deposit at the Library of Congress.)

to him through the influence of his brother-in-law, Joseph Coolidge, Jr. (a prominent Hospital Trustee), it may be of interest to quote a short portion of a letter written by him from Washington on February 1, 1818, in reply to one from his wife in Boston, announcing the acceptance of his plan for the General Hospital: "Thomas'es postscript really surprised me; and the acceptance of the plan for the hospital was quite beyond my expectation. I confess, however, that it gratifies me, but more on my children's account than on my own. They will feel pleasure that my last act for Boston is accepted under circumstances which preclude the possibility of personal influence."<sup>12</sup>

Work on the new construction was well under way by the summer of 1817. President Monroe was handsomely entertained in Boston on July 4 of that year, "after which" notes Bulfinch, "I proceeded in my usual course, making drawings and directing workmen at the Insane Hospital in Charlestown."<sup>13</sup>

The two wings designed to augment the former Barrell House required much time and thought on the part of the Asylum Building Committee. Because of a sharp decline in the terrain at the easterly side of the property the siting of these additions was particularly complex. The pair of new buildings were finally placed somewhat below, and to the north and south of the mansion, but at diverging angles to it. This necessitated entering them from the second floor when approaching from the main house. The exteriors were simple and functional as befitted their institutional character, but were of good proportions with low roof pediments incorporating lunette windows. These in turn surmounted façades lighted by tall, projecting three-part windows which took advantage of the slightly situa-

tion overlooking Boston and the distant bay.

We are fortunate in having a good representation of the Asylum as it appeared in its first form, showing the main house and the two Bulfinch wings before subsequent enlargement which began in 1826 (Fig. 5). Engraved by Abel Bowen this picture appears as an illustration in Snow's *History of Boston*, accompanied by the following descriptive comment: "The Massachusetts Insane Hospital is delightfully situated upon Pleasant Hill, on the west side of the town. It has an elegant house for the superintendent, with two buildings, one on each side, handsomely built of brick, three stories high."<sup>14</sup>

The wings as finally completed could accommodate only sixty patients in all—a considerable reduction from the total of one hundred originally projected by the architect. That the former figure considerably underestimated the potential need for space is proved by the recommendations of the superintendent for two additional buildings as early as the fall of 1824.

Owing to the apparent lack of final drawings for the Asylum (such as those fortunately extant for both the New York and Worcester lunatic hospitals)<sup>15</sup> we are dependant on contemporary descriptions by early visitors to the Asylum for documentation of actual space arrangements in the new wings. One of the earliest accounts, evidently written before the wings were even completed, survives in a fragment of a pamphlet on the care of the insane, now unfortunately lacking either title page or other identification, which says in part: "The main building [Barrell House] is 75 x 45, partition walls of brick. Sixty feet from each end of it, and joined to it by piazzas brick buildings are now erecting one [floor] for each six-

[teen inmates], 3 storeys 76 x 40, each storey having a gallery, day room, parlour, and lodging rooms, heated by air pipes from the cellar."<sup>16</sup>

Even William Folsom contributed his bit to our precise documentation of the interior plan. On the inner back cover of the second volume of his *Diary* he penciled the notation that the length of the day room was 18 feet 13 inches (*sic*),

panes, stiles and top rail 2 inches square, bottom rail  $2\frac{3}{4}$  x 2 inches, meeting rail  $1\frac{1}{2}$  x 2 inches, intermediate bars 2 x 1 inches. The sashes rise and fall 7 inches. The room doors are fastened by mortise or box lock, or bolt. The box is 3 inches square,  $\frac{2}{3}$  inches thick. The bolts and sash recommended by Eben Francis, Trustee, who especially superintended the erection of the buildings."<sup>17</sup> Despite these

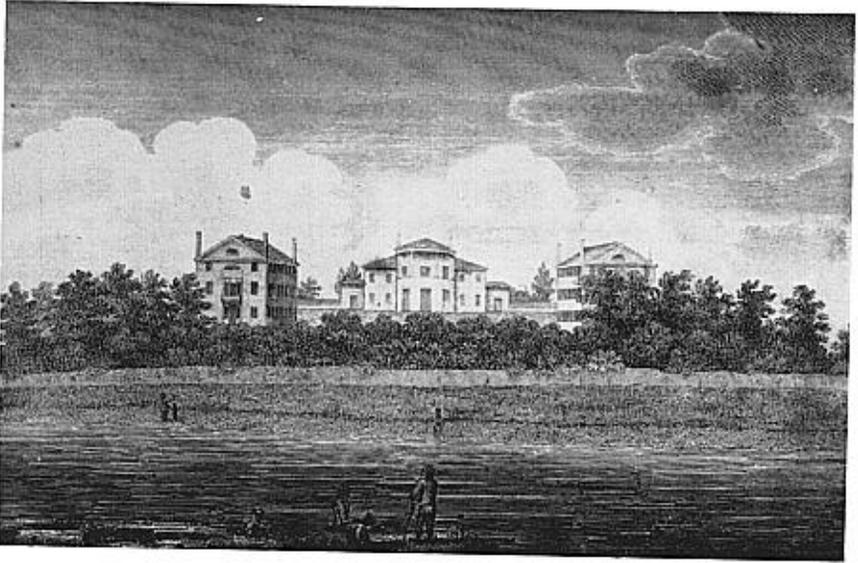


FIG. 5. THE ASYLUM AS IT APPEARED IN 1825

From an illustration in Caleb Snow's *History of Boston*, 1825.

breadth 13 feet 9 inches. This was a generously proportioned dining apartment for a building of this size.

In his "Remarks on Insanity," read before the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1818, Dr. George Parkman vouchsafed some enlightening information on the subject of security, a topic which was already becoming of considerable moment to the protagonists of moral management. "In the Massachusetts Asylum the window sash are ash, glass 6 x 8, 24

basic precautions patients did escape quite frequently. In the October 5 Board meeting it was reported that "several elopements from the Asylum had occurred" and a special committee was appointed to consider measures to prevent a recurrence.<sup>18</sup>

Justly proud as New Englanders were of their fine new Asylum, it remained for a foreign visitor to leave perhaps the most comprehensive description of its physical aspect during the earliest years. A well-

informed and impartial observer, his Highness Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Weimer Eisenbach, visited Boston in August of 1825 with the purpose of viewing the important local "sights." Included in his tour were such impressive landmarks as the Boston Athenæum, Bunker Hill, the Charlestown Prison and Navy Yard, Faneuil Hall, the State House, the Arsenal in Watertown, and last but not least he was ceremoniously escorted through the "civil hospital" and the "lunatic asylum." To his European eyes the elegant Barrell mansion appeared merely as a farmhouse, providing an effective shield from the less ingratiating institutional buildings in the rear. Following a formal visit to the Hospital the Duke wrote:

Mr. Coolidge, one of the directors, accompanied us, and conducted us also to the lunatic asylum, which is under the same directors. This building stands on an eminence between Cambridge and Charlestown. A farm-house has been purchased in the neighborhood, which serves as the dwelling of the steward and head physician, as well as for a kitchen and wash-house. Behind this house two very solid wings have been built, three stories high, one for males, and the other for females. They somewhat resemble prisons, but are concealed by the farm-house, which has a very pleasing aspect, and this prevents the unpleasant sensations which the institution would otherwise excite in the minds of the unhappy lunatics when they first approach it. A large garden, surrounded with a wall, is attached to each wing, serving as a place of recreation for the patients. A well-lighted corridor runs along each story, at each side of which are the doors of the cells; in these nothing is placed but a wooden bedstead, as in the hospital. Every story has an eating room and a common hall; in the latter of which the sick may pass the day, a table is placed with benches, which are nailed to the floor. The infuriated are placed in solitary cells, and when they cannot be subdued, are brought under a cold shower bath. The chambers are heated, as in the hospital, by means of flues. In this asylum also, in which there were forty patients, the

greatest cleanliness prevailed. . . . In returning home on an evening, the city, the bridges, and the Mill-dam are very well lighted, not indeed with gas, but with reflecting lamps, and none of that disorderly conduct is observed in the streets, which so often shocks the mind in the cities of England.<sup>19</sup>

Hardly had the Trustees voted on May 4, 1817, to go ahead with the new Asylum wings than a corporation meeting was held at which the first in a series of rules and regulations was adopted for the management of the new institution, and trustee Ebenezer Francis planned a personal trip to Philadelphia and New York to study their hospitals at first hand.<sup>20</sup>

Bulfinch's report presented on the previous March 16, 1817, had been a very comprehensive document, including not only architectural recommendations but also other observations which he deemed pertinent. Among these was an unequivocal statement of his personal opinion regarding the choice of a future superintendent: "It has been suggested to me by several persons," wrote Bulfinch, "that the resident superintendent should be a medical man; but this I think very objectionable, both for the hospital & the asylum. . . . the superintendent should be an active, diligent man, well acquainted with accounts, and distinguished for humanity: his duty is to execute the orders of the directors and of the physicians, in the discipline of the house, & in the treatment of the sick."<sup>21</sup>

This precept was carried out as regarded the Hospital, which, for many years employed a nonmedical couple as superintendent and matron, but it was not immediately followed at the Asylum where the positions of superintendent and resident physician were, in the beginning, united in the same person. This arrangement entailed too heavy a load upon one man as soon became apparent.

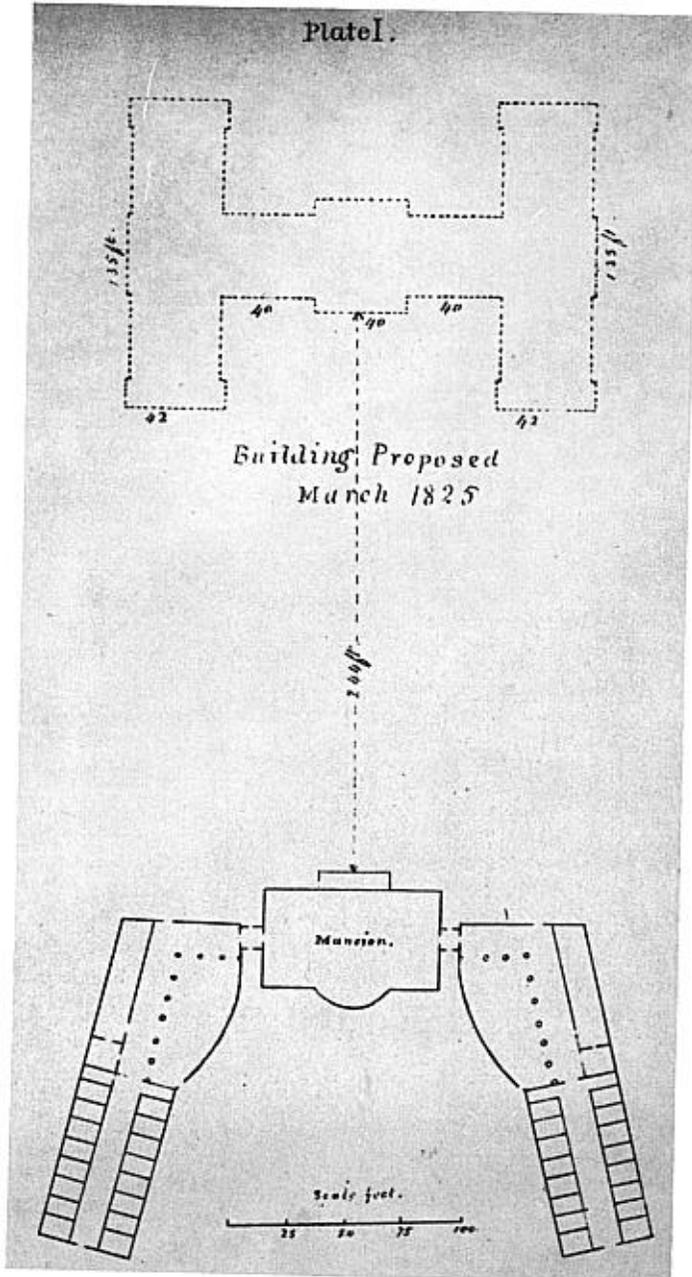


FIG. 6. NEW BUILDING PROPOSED BY DR. WYMAN IN 1825,  
FROM A SKETCH BY HIMSELF

This building was never constructed. Illustration from Morrill  
Wyman's *Early History of McLean's Asylum*.

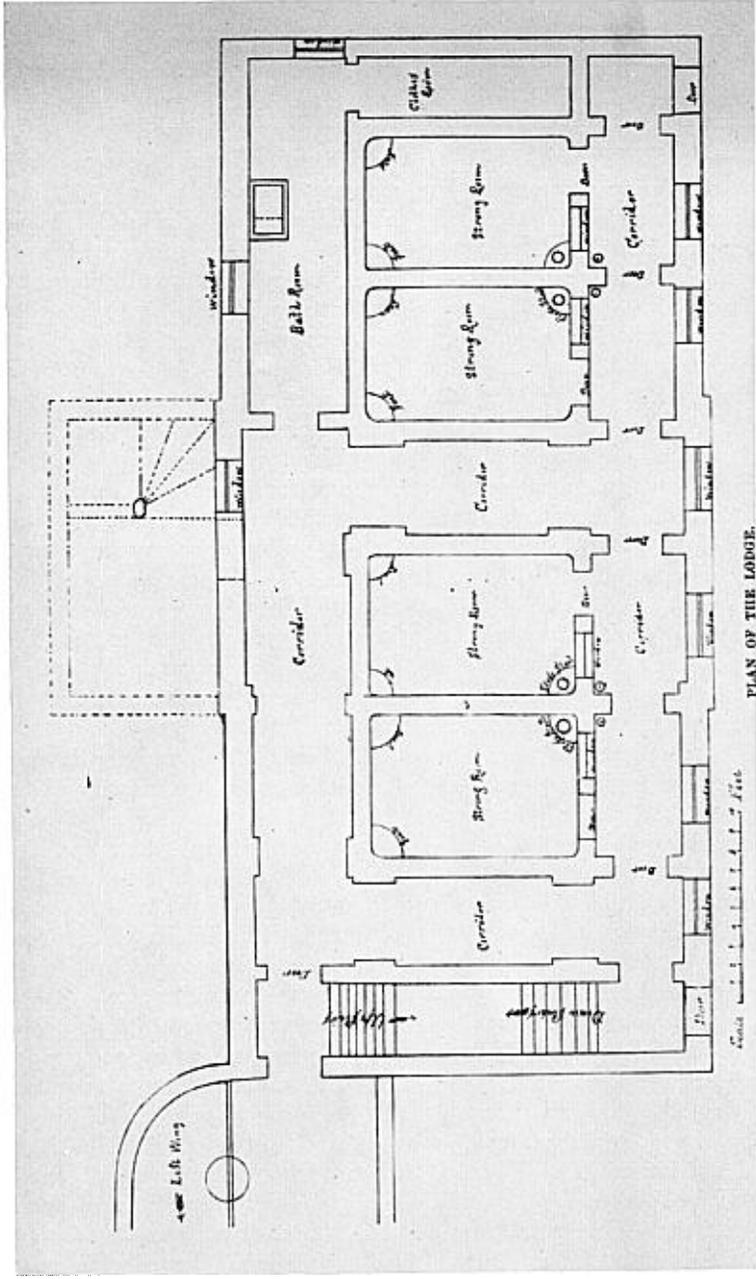


FIG. 7. FLOOR PLAN OF THE LODGE

This small building to accommodate violent male patients was planned by Dr. Wyman and constructed under his supervision in 1826. Illustration from Wyman's *Early History of McLean's Asylum*.

On January 26, 1817, about six weeks before receipt of the Bulfinch report, a letter had been received by the Trustees from the Honorable Benjamin Pickman recommending Rufus Wyman, M.D. as Physician of the future Asylum.<sup>22</sup> On March 9 public notice was ordered on the selection of a superintendent.<sup>23</sup> It was not until a year later, however, that the Physicians and Surgeons of the Hospital formally recommended Dr. Wyman as *both* Superintendent and Physician of the new institution, and he was unanimously elected on March 23, 1818.<sup>24</sup> His salary of \$1,500<sup>25</sup> evidently commenced immediately upon his appointment as evidenced by a meticulous entry in his personal *Ledger*: "To salary from March 23 incl. to October 1st, [1818] \$783.33 1/3."<sup>26</sup>

In company with Bulfinch and Trustee Ebenezer Francis, Dr. Wyman also was authorized to visit hospitals in New York and Pennsylvania. He made a verbal report of this trip to the Board on June 2,<sup>27</sup> and recorded it in his *Ledger* as follows: "May 18, To expences of journey to Phila. to visit hospital there, at Frankford, and at New York. \$146.00."<sup>28</sup>

At the time of assuming his duties in Charlestown Dr. Wyman was forty years of age. Although he had received his education at Harvard and his medical degree in Boston, he had been practicing for some years in the small town of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, where he was highly regarded as a capable physician although without special training in the care and treatment of the insane. The Wyman family, consisting of the doctor, his wife, and three young sons—Rufus Jr., Morrill, and Jeffries—moved into the Barrell House in July of 1818,<sup>29</sup> after which the Doctor proceeded to oversee the final details of purchasing equipment for the re-

ception of patients early in October. On November 23 the Visiting Committee reported that nine persons had so far been admitted to the Asylum.

When the Trustees elected Dr. Wyman they were undoubtedly cognizant of his medical and administrative ability, but they were perhaps unaware of his latent talent for institutional planning and design, attributes which were soon to prove of great service to the Asylum.

Unfortunately the Asylum buildings, open since 1818, were proving inadequate. Proper accommodations for secluding violent patients had not been included in the original plans and this oversight had to be remedied by the construction of five "strong rooms for raging femal patients" under Dr. Wyman's supervision in 1822.<sup>30</sup> These were the strong rooms frequently referred to in the *Folsom Diary*, and were in use until 1836 when a new "cottage" to serve a similar purpose was built.<sup>31</sup>

During 1824 a need for further accommodation became urgent and on December 19 of that year a special committee consisting of Ebenezer Francis, Daniel P. Parker, and Theodore Lyman, Jr., was appointed to discuss the problem of additional buildings at the Asylum. This consultation resulted in the consideration of two capital projects—the planning and construction of a second group of strong rooms for men, and the designing of a new building to augment the original north wing.

It was believed by Charles A. Place when writing his biography, *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen*, that Bulfinch himself was responsible for designing the handsome domed additions to his original brick wings, and also for remodeling and enlarging the Barrell House. The following statement appears

in Place's biography: "Bulfinch was engaged to design buildings for the new McLean Hospital which were ready for occupancy in 1818. Taking the mansion built in 1792 from his designs, Bulfinch added another story with a pediment to the middle section, continued the ends up to three stories, and built two wings. . . . Two other buildings 40 x 76 each were erected flanking the central one."<sup>32</sup>

The late Frank Chouteau Brown, himself a leading Boston architect, repeated the Bulfinch attribution, albeit more cautiously, in an article published in 1948 entitled, "The Joseph Barrell Estate, Somerville, Massachusetts," in which he says, "Mr. Bulfinch was engaged to make designs for the two new wings . . . and presumably also for the changes to the central residence. As first built the new wings were very simple brick structures . . . but shortly thereafter both had additions made at their western ends, taking the form of head houses, with flat domes, presumably also from Bulfinch's designs. . . . We may never know whether the domical head-house fronts added to the west ends of the detached wings built in 1817 were added from his designs or not—depending upon whether they were part of his first layout, but not constructed until later, or were both designed and built at a later time."<sup>33</sup>

Actually the dates of these various alterations can be determined with considerable accuracy, and it will be shown that the first enlargement to the center of the Barrell House was made in 1827 when Bulfinch was still absent in Washington, while the raising of the ends was not carried out until 1846, six years after his death. The domed "head houses" were not completed for some years, until 1828 and 1837 respectively, and then not from Bulfinch designs but from ar-

chitectural drawings prepared by Dr. Rufus Wyman.

In March, 1825, Dr. Wyman made a report to the Trustees in which he outlined definite specifications for the construction of a large new building which was to stand 244 feet from the entrance of the Barrell mansion, on the high ground west of it (Fig. 6). This structure was to be in the form of a central section with two projecting wings, and was designed to provide new facilities for medical officers, visitors, utility rooms, a kitchen, and a laundry or "wash house." Added accommodation was also planned for one hundred patients, also galleries (or corridors), dining rooms, parlors, and living quarters for attendants. Several "solitary" rooms were strategically placed at the ends of the wings where violent cases would not disturb the other inmates. Accompanying these recommendations were two floor plans drawn to scale in Dr. Wyman's hand, the details of which prove his ability to plan intelligently for hospital needs and also to present those needs by means of professional measured drawings.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately this free-standing building was never constructed, probably owing to the estimated expense, although subsequent experience was to prove that its layout would have been exceptionally well suited to the needs of the institution. However, the Doctor was not discouraged and "soon after made a second report with plans for additions to the two wings already built . . . in accordance with which the buildings were soon after erected."<sup>35</sup> These plans were accepted by the Trustees on September 30, 1825,<sup>36</sup> a building committee was named, and construction soon commenced.

Work also began on a small, detached "lodge" or "retreat" to the east of the

mansion which was planned and built under Dr. Wyman's direction during 1826.<sup>37</sup> Measuring 54 x 23 feet, this brick structure contained four "strong-rooms" for men to correspond with those for women constructed in 1822 (Fig. 7). In a letter to Morrill Wyman written in September, 1877, Dr. Isaac Ray, one-time Superintendent of Butler's Hospital in Providence, described the plan of this early security building as follows: "[The rooms] opened upon a common corridor, some four or five feet wide, which was lighted by ordinary windows in the wall. This light passed into the rooms through an unglazed window by the side of the door. The floors were made of stone slabs, which were heated by a fire beneath, and thus the air was warmed by heat radiated from the floors."<sup>38</sup> Dr. Ray regarded the requisites of a strong room as "freedom of movement, perfect cleanliness, good warmth, and ventilation."

The Lodge was built when Morrill Wyman, Rufus Wyman's second son, was a young man and still making his home at the Asylum, and in later years he remembered some rather interesting details: "The strong rooms are 10 feet in height, the ceiling an elliptic arch with a ventilating flue in the center. . . . The walls, like those of other rooms in the Asylum, are of brick plastered with Portland cement, made as smooth as possible; the corners are rounded for cleanliness. . . . In one corner is a close-stool communicating with the corridor through the side of the room; in two of the corners, seats properly fastened to the wall. . . . Adjoining the main corridor is the bath room near that the room for clothing. The interior of the rooms is as plain as possible, but in other parts there is as much of architectural ornamentation as the use of the building will allow. The

room for the attendants is at the head of the stairs directly over the strong rooms, where they can be within hearing of their charge and reach them at once either night or day. Notwithstanding the ample preparations for ventilation and warming the air of the rooms and corridors, it was deemed essential that the floor should be well warmed. To do this effectually and equitably is a matter of no little difficulty. . . . Below the floors of these rooms is the cellar, about seven feet deep, extending under the whole building. This cellar is well lighted with windows on the front end, paved with bricks, well ventilated and every part clean and whitened. Here is the furnace for heating the air for warming and ventilating the 'strong rooms' above, and also the especial arrangement for *warming their floors*. . . . The fuel was burned in a proper fireplace, and the heated gasses after circulating through the whole space beneath the floor of the rooms escaped by a chimney."<sup>39</sup> These floors were of granite slabs, eight or ten inches thick, smoothly hammered, and laid in cement.<sup>40</sup>

Central heating of public buildings, still augmented of course by fireplaces, was a prime subject for experimentation during the early nineteenth century, and Bulfinch had planned for its installation in both the Asylum wings and the Hospital. The new Massachusetts Medical College, built on Mason Street in 1816, had a stove in the cellar surrounded with brick chambers which burned Rhode Island coal and from which "rarified heat" was piped through flues to all parts of the building.<sup>41</sup> Morrill Wyman, however, has not only left us a description of its practical application, but also a unique sectional drawing of the Lodge showing the rooms with their heating and ventilating ducts, together with the flues running

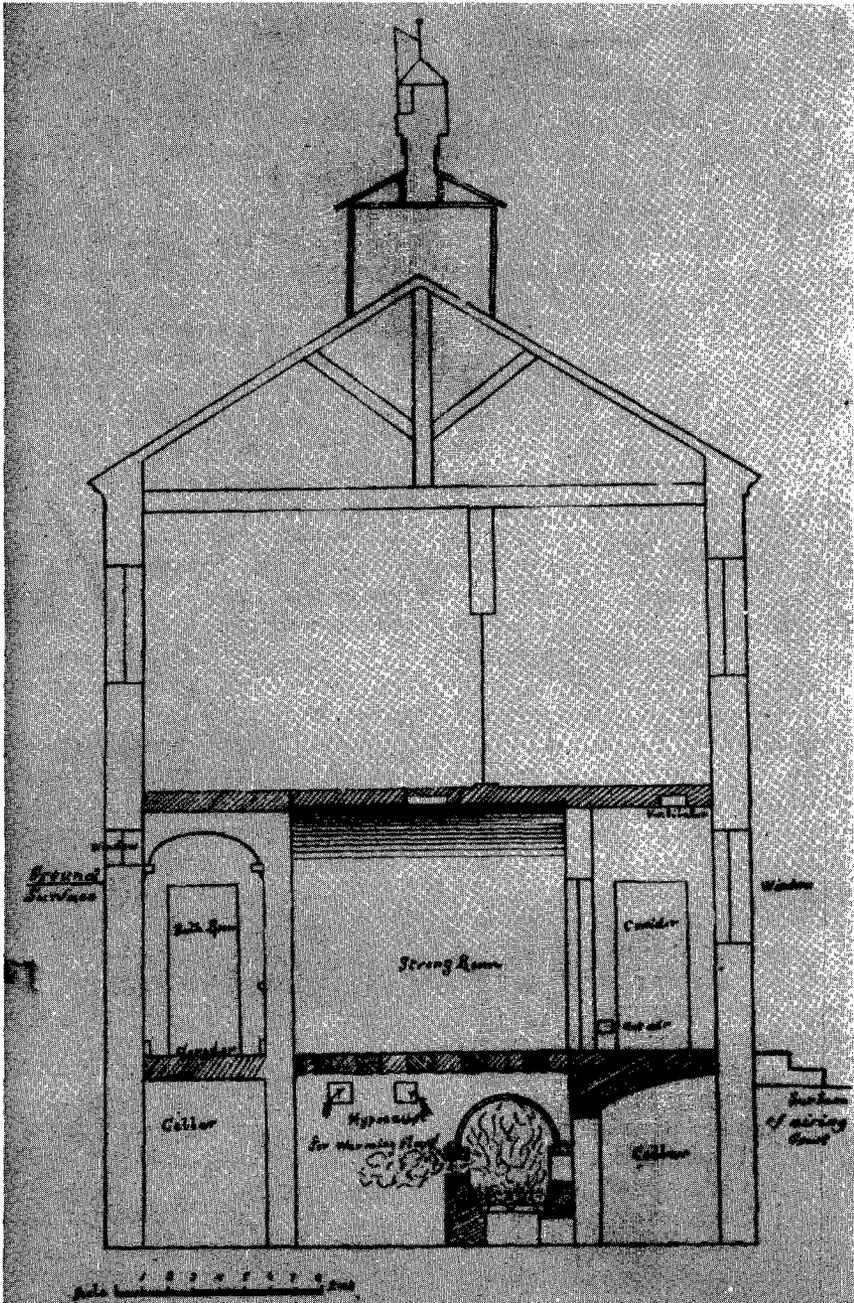


FIG. 8. SECTIONAL ELEVATION OF THE LODGE

Shows the heating system of 1826 with ventilation and heating ducts to warm the corridors and stone floors.

Illustration from Wyman's *Early History of McLean's Asylum*.

beneath the massive floors to carry hot air generated from the "hypocaust," or brick firebox, in the cellar below (Fig. 8).

On September 29, 1825, the very day previous to the Trustees' meeting, at which plans for the two large additions had been discussed at length,<sup>42</sup> William Folsom, the Apothecary, was summoned to assist Dr. Wyman "in running boundary lines for new Building." The following day definite construction orders were formally approved by the Board with Trustees Francis, Parker, and Lyman to be in charge of the work. A week later, on October 7, Folsom's *Diary* corroborates Dr. Wyman's basic role in the new project: "Dr. showed me plans of large building on hill." This undoubtedly referred to the three-story addition which was to lie across the westerly end of the old north wing, and would be adjacent to, but unconnected with, the central Barrell House. Known at first simply as the North Building, it was later named the Dix Ward in honor of Dorothea Lynde Dix and her devoted work for the insane.

Twelve-over-twelve light sash set in recessed arches on the second floor, a bold dentilled cornice, and an attractive side-lighted doorway were to provide dignity and character to this new addition (Frontispiece). Its most striking feature, although not the most practical, was the square central section surmounted by a handsome dome. This feature, topped by a small cupola, together with the recessed windows and the stone course between the first and second floors, no doubt played a part in suggesting the later erroneous Bulfinch attribution. When a matching dome was installed ten years later on the conforming south wing, the twin domes helped to create the impressive structural unit that has become famil-

iar through mid-nineteenth-century engravings.

Curiously enough the much-admired dome was not projected in the original plan. Dr. Wyman initially proposed to light the stairway and passages at the intersection of the old and new roofs by a large exterior lantern. This practical feature was opposed on architectural grounds and the dome was substituted, resulting in unfortunate lighting problems which eventually necessitated expensive alterations.<sup>43</sup>

Nathaniel I. Bowditch, author in 1851 of the first edition of the *History of the Massachusetts General Hospital*, had been closely connected with the Hospital as Secretary and Trustee since 1826. He was also the son-in-law of the Asylum's most active Trustee, Ebenezer Francis. Therefore, Mr. Bowditch's contemporary description of the interior of the old wings is of particular interest: "The ground falls off so rapidly that these wards are entered at the second story; and there are in them so many dark passages, so many ascents and descents, and so many turnings and twistings, that, should the oldest Trustee of the institution be suddenly left alone during a visit, he would probably be puzzled to know exactly where he was, or by what means he could best escape from the labyrinth around him."<sup>44</sup>

The work on the Lodge and the North Building proceeded slowly, but in February, 1826, a grant of \$500 was made to Dr. Wyman for his extra services in regard to these projects.<sup>45</sup> During 1827 the "large and expensive" addition was still in process,<sup>46</sup> but on March 23, 1828, Ebenezer Francis was able to report for the Building Committee that the Lodge was finished and occupied, and the addi-

tion to the north wing was partly occupied and nearly completed.<sup>47</sup>

Hardly three months were to pass, however, before enlargements and improvements were required to the mansion itself, and on June 8, 1828, it was voted that the house should be repaired even

observable changes had been made, at least before 1825.

When the house was razed seventy years later the original floor plans were reconstructed by the architectural firm of Little & Brown, and drawings were made by Ogden Codman, which were



FIG. 9. ORIGINAL STAIRCASE IN THE BARRELL HOUSE

As it appeared at time of demolition in 1892. Now preserved in the Somerville Historical Society. Photography by Little and Brown.

Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

though "at considerable expense."<sup>48</sup> Previous lack of requests for funds for this purpose suggests that few, if any, exterior alterations had taken place since the house was completed by Joseph Barrell in 1795. Comparison of Bulfinch's original drawing for the east façade (Fig. 2) with the illustration of the Asylum in Snow's *History of Boston* (Fig. 5) indicates that no

published with comments about the Barrell House by Fiske Kimball in his *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and Early Republic*. The reconstruction of the first-floor plan was based in part on the drawing which occurs as the central portion of Bulfinch's ground plan for the Asylum wings (Fig. 4) and Little & Brown offered the fol-

lowing suggestions for the original uses of the five ground-floor apartments: a sitting room, oval parlor, and dining room spanned the east front, overlooking sloping lawns with fish pond and poplar grove below. A den occupied the rear northwest corner, balanced by the kitchen which was located on the west front behind the

parently in unaltered form, was fortunately photographed in its original position even as demolition was proceeding (Fig. 9).

Until the enlargement of 1828, and for some years thereafter, the house was used as a home by Dr. Wyman and his family, with private rooms for the Stew-

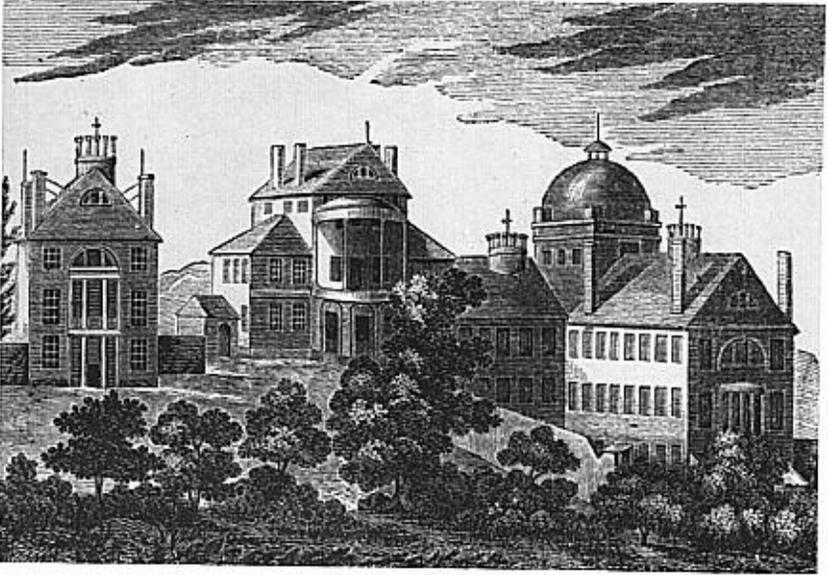


FIG. 10. THE ASYLUM AS IT APPEARED BETWEEN 1828 AND 1836  
Shown after completion of domed addition to the north wing at right, and the raising of central portion of the Barrell House in center. The south wing at left still retains its original form.

Courtesy of the Boston Athenæum.

dining room. On the second floor this whole area was divided into seven chambers. There was an additional story with bedrooms in the center, above the oval parlor.<sup>49</sup> The famous double staircase was rescued when the house was destroyed and is now preserved in the Somerville Historical Society. This feature was located within the large vestibule in the center of the west front which was the carriage entrance. The staircase, ap-

ard and Apothecary, and no doubt quarters for domestic servants. It also was expected to provide a noninstitutional environment for those patients who were either well enough to join the family circle or ill enough to require constant medical supervision by a member of the resident staff.

In the house also, noted the Duke of Saxe Weimer in 1825, was the central kitchen and laundry, apparently for the

entire institution. These facilities must have become seriously inadequate by 1828 when, in addition to the professional staff and retainers, there were a number of attendants plus sixty-nine patients, all to be regularly fed and cared for.<sup>50</sup>

In any case in 1828 the mansion, now more than thirty years old, needed "great

the new domed addition and the raised center section of the main house (Fig. 10). A much-needed new kitchen with extensive cooking apparatus, and a large wash room, or laundry, was added at this time, together with a convenient well at a cost of \$215.75. Other "general improvements" included a new roof for the

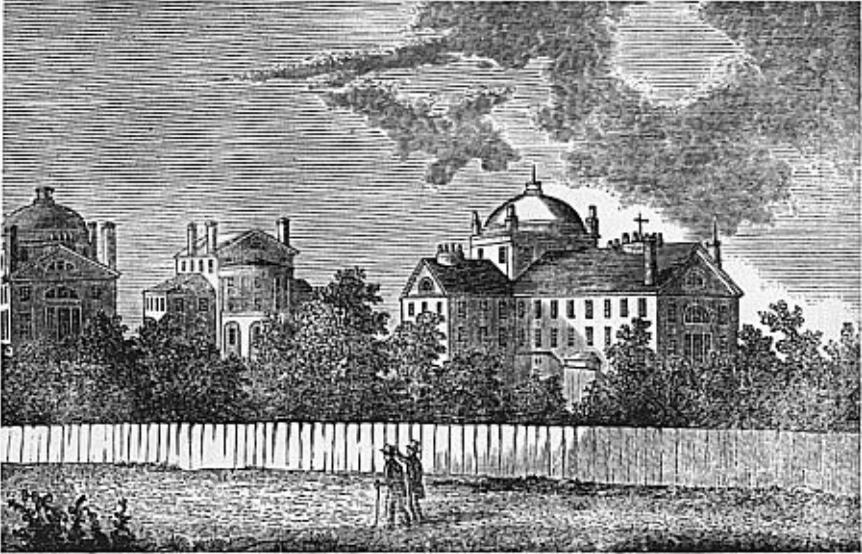


FIG. 11. THE ASYLUM EARLY IN 1837

At the left is the completed dome on the new extension to the south wing, the lateral addition was yet to be built.

*American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, 1839.

(The contents of this issue covered October, 1836, through September, 1837.)

repairs, even to the foundation wall.”<sup>51</sup> The first important alteration was the addition of another story to the central portion of the house. This created considerable extra space lighted by three good windows at the top on either side. Smaller windows were installed on the front, with a lunette under the new pediment to conform with those in the east gables of the two early brick wings. An engraving taken at this period shows both

house, new water closets and brick partitions in the old wing for men, better ventilation in all patients’ quarters, a new wharf on Miller’s River, and considerable renovation of fences and grounds. By the end of 1829, \$98,184 had been spent since the start of new construction in 1826. Of this sum approximately \$65,000 was applicable to the expenses of the new enlargement of the north wing.<sup>52</sup>



FIG. 12. THE ASYLUM TAKEN IN 1844

The buildings are shown as they appeared between 1837 and 1846. Both wings are completed in the final form which gave to the group its impressive architectural character.  
From a sketch by Edward Seager, reproduced as the frontispiece of Frothingham's *History of Charleston*.

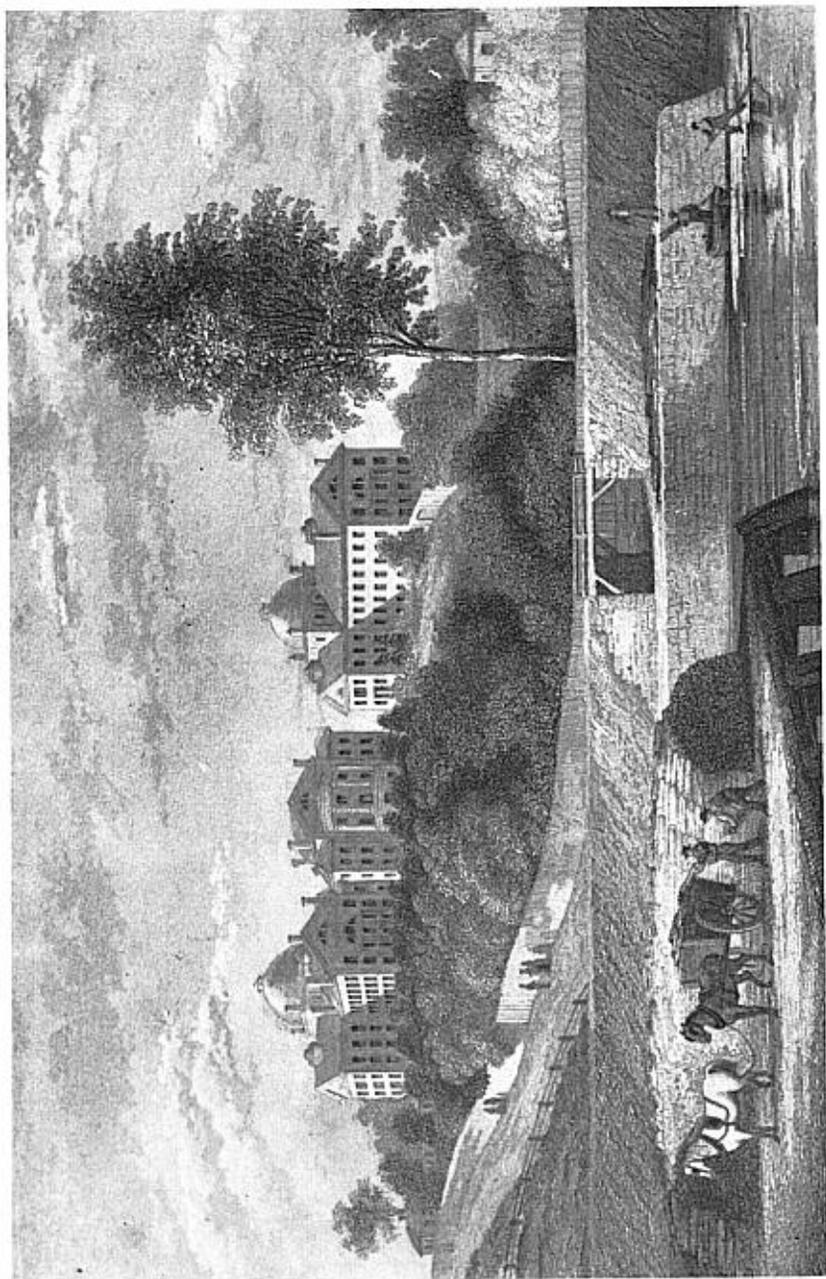


FIG. 13. THE ASYLUM IN 1846

This view appears to be an updated version of Fig. 12 which shows the ends of the Barrell House raised to three stories, and the fenestration corrected on the other buildings.  
Illustration in N. I. Bowditch's *History of the Massachusetts General Hospital*, 1851.

The Asylum continued to grow in usefulness. In 1833, one hundred three persons were admitted for treatment, and although forty-two were discharged from time to time during the year, larger quarters for women were urgently needed. Therefore, on December 15 of that year the Trustees faced the problem of yet another new building and requested the Visiting Committee to consider the matter further.<sup>53</sup>

Little more than a year later, on January 9, 1835, came Dr. Wyman's final resignation as Physician of the McLean Asylum.<sup>54</sup> Although not unexpected, this must have been a real blow to those contemplating the planning and supervision of further construction on a large scale. Nevertheless, during February renewed discussions were carried on<sup>55</sup> and early in October Trustee Samuel A. Eliot was asked to report on plans and estimates. A precisely similar addition to the south wing for women as that previously added to the north wing for men was now begun, but owing to previous experience the new work would fortunately cost only \$43,500 in contrast to the \$65,000 spent on the building completed in 1828.<sup>56</sup> The question of a second dome had to be resolved during the summer of 1836, and \$6,000 was finally appropriated for this balancing architectural feature.<sup>57</sup> The new building was appropriately named the Belknap Ward in honor of a generous benefactor, Miss Mary Belknap.<sup>58</sup>

A most interesting illustration which appeared in the *American Magazine of Useful & Entertaining Knowledge* pinpoints the aspect of the Asylum during 1837 when the new dome on the westerly end of the south wing was finished

but the lateral addition was not yet built (Fig. 11). On September 15, 1844, however, the Trustees decided the time had come to obtain a really good picture of the buildings as a whole and the best Boston artists were subsequently employed (Fig. 12). The delineator of this handsome view was Hammatt Billings—artist, designer, architect, illustrator, and watercolor painter—who exhibited at the Boston Athenæum and was known as a designer of monuments. The original view was sketched by Edward Seager, a portrait and landscape painter, and drawing master at the English High School where the sculptor John Rogers was one of his pupils. The engraver was George Girdler Smith—lithographer, portrait and banknote engraver—probably a pupil of Abel Bowen, who published Snow's *History of Boston* and had selected and engraved the illustrations.

One further alteration was in store for the exterior of the Barrell mansion. On August 30, 1846, to provide still more space, the ends of the main house were ordered to be raised one story. This final change in the east façade is shown in Fig. 13 which appears to be an updated version of Fig. 12, perhaps newly drawn for illustration in Bowditch's *History of the Massachusetts General* in which it appeared in 1851.

Further interior work and the construction of other detached units were soon to be recommended, but the buildings recorded above continued to form the central nucleus of the McLean Asylum for the Insane, the architectural aspect of which was to remain virtually unchanged until the final demolition in 1895.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Dean A. Fales, Jr., "Joseph Barrell's Pleasant Hill." *Publications of the Colonial Society of America*, Transactions, 1956-1962, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> Account of Dr. George T. Tuttle, as quoted in Washburn, p. 267; also in Rev. Edward G. Porter's *Demolition of the McLean Asylum in Somerville*, Mass. Hist. Soc. Proc., 2nd Series, X (April, 1896), 548-552; and in Fales, "Joseph Barrell's Pleasant Hill."

<sup>3</sup> George William Folsom, Apothecary at the Asylum, 1825. MS. Diary (N. F. Little Coll.).

<sup>4</sup> Fales, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Folsom *Diary*, MS., Little Collection.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Ellen Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch* (Boston, 1896), p. 191 et seq.

<sup>8</sup> This original report is in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, but it is reproduced in full in Leonard K. Eaton's "Charles Bulfinch and the Massachusetts General Hospital," *Isis*, Vol. 41, Part 1, No. 123 (March, 1950), pp. 8-11.

<sup>9</sup> Bulfinch, *Report*.

<sup>10</sup> N. I. Bowditch, *A History of the Massachusetts General Hospital*, 2nd Ed. (Boston, 1872), p. 28. Prepared by request, in a vote of the Trustees, chiefly from the Records and Annual Reports.

<sup>11</sup> For assistance in locating this plan I am indebted to Abbott Lowell Cummings, Asst. Director, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

<sup>12</sup> Bulfinch, *Life and Letters*, p. 217.

<sup>13</sup> Bulfinch, *Memoir*.

<sup>14</sup> Caleb H. Snow, M.D., *A History of Boston* (Boston, 1825), p. 388.

<sup>15</sup> These plans, together with those of the Massachusetts General Hospital are reproduced in Eaton, *New Eng. Hospitals*, Plates II, III, IV, V.

<sup>16</sup> This pamphlet is bound with other "Medical Tracts," Vol. 58, (9). Countway Library.

<sup>17</sup> George Parkman, M.D., "Remarks on Insanity," read before the Boston Medical Association, 1818. (In Countway Library.)

<sup>18</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> His Highness Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Weimer Eisenbach, *Travels Through North America during the years 1825 and 1826* (Philadelphia, 1827), Vol. 1, pp. 43-44.

<sup>20</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 and 32.

<sup>21</sup> Bulfinch report to the Trustees of the Mass. General Hospital, *Isis*, Bulfinch Report.

<sup>22</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> This sum was definitely fixed at the Board meeting of February 28, 1819.

<sup>26</sup> Wyman, *Ledger*, Countway Library.

<sup>27</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> The new Asylum at Frankford, Pa., founded by the Society of Friends, had just been opened in 1817, and was the fourth insane hospital in the United States to predate the Charlestown Asylum.

<sup>29</sup> These facts are recorded in Morrill Wyman's *A Brief Record of the Lives and Writings of Dr. Rufus Wyman and his Son Dr. Morrill Wyman* (Cambridge, 1913), and also appear in Dr. Wyman's obituary, printed in the *Boston Courier* of Tuesday morning, July 12, 1842.

<sup>30</sup> "Story of the McLean Hospital, 1811-1914," by Dr. George T. Tuttle, Medical Superintendent from 1903-1919, quoted in Washburn, Frederic A., *The Massachusetts General Hospital* (Boston, 1939), p. 267.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>32</sup> Charles A. Place, *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen* (Boston, 1925), p. 233.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Chouteau Brown, "The Joseph Barrell Estate, Somerville, Massachusetts," *Old-Time New England*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3 (January, 1948), pp. 58, 61. Unfortunately these errors have been perpetuated by subsequent writers, creating the unfortunate impression that the entire Asylum complex as shown in the familiar mid-nineteenth-century engraving was constructed from Bulfinch designs.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Morrill Wyman, *Early History of McLean Asylum for the Insane*. Privately printed (Cambridge, 1877), with 5 plates and frontispiece.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Morrill Wyman, M.D., "The Early History of the McLean Asylum for the Insane," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, Vol. XCVII, No. 24 (Thursday, December 13, 1877), p. 672.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 680.

<sup>39</sup> Wyman, *Early History*, pp. 674-676.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> From a description of the Medical College which appears in the *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery* for April, 1816, quoted in Stark's *Antique Views of Boston* (Boston, 1907), p. 352.

<sup>42</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> Wyman, *Early History*, privately printed, 1877, "Explanation of Plates."

<sup>44</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72. The carrying out of this well-intentioned gesture on the part of the Trustees was inadvertently overlooked until six years later when, upon the Doctor's preliminary retirement in 1832 on grounds of ill health, the

Treasurer was ordered to make the payment previously voted with interest, "he never yet received the same" (pp. 103-104).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and Early Republic* (New York, 1927), p. 160.

<sup>50</sup> Bowditch lists 69 patients remaining at the Asylum at the close of 1828 (p. 446).

<sup>51</sup> Bowditch, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>52</sup> These facts are contained in the Minutes of the Trustees of the Hospital, January 8, 1830, and are quoted in Bowditch, pp. 94-95.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.