

# The Province House Demolition

By THOMAS T. WATERMAN

WHEN it was decided, in 1922, that the site of the Province House must be cleared for the erection of modern buildings, it was little suspected that the remains of the 1679 building were as many or as important as investigation proved them to be. The accompanying drawings of the east and north walls will give some idea of the condition of the original fabric at the time of the demolition (Figs. 4, 5), but it is the purpose of this article to supplement these drawings with a comprehensive description. The remaining east and north walls of the 1679 building were found generally in good condition. Red water-struck brick laid in English bond was used throughout the building and was laid in clay. The exterior pointing was with lime mortar, quite certainly not original. The exterior facing was of selected hard burned brick of even dark colors, painted red in some places, and on the main facade plastered, neither of these finishes being considered original. Below the level of the molded brick water table, the walls were constructed of uncoursed rubble with wide flush joints with a narrow incised tooling in the center. The inside surface of the wall was brick faced.

For many years the vast chimney, visible from an adjacent narrow alley, was familiar to architects and antiquarians, but its beauty and significance were not obvious under a covering of clapboarding. (Fig. 7.) It was found that on the removal of this veneer that the brickwork was in perfect condition, free from any indication of settlement or structural instability. The main feature

of interest in the face of the chimney was the arch breaking through the water table and foundation wall and rising the full height of the first floor. The depth of this aperture was 44 inches and that of the exterior reveal of the chimney was 39 inches. The arched head extended the full depth of the reveal, forming a segmental barrel vault which sprang from a projecting impost course. (Fig. 8.) The vaulting was a stretcher and header in thickness, was laid with the greatest skill and in no place showed any sign of failure. Thin red tiles, which were also used in the formation of the string course of the east front, were used to form the angle at the spring line of the vault. (Fig. 8.) Modern brickwork filled in the interior opening of the arch, making it impossible to obtain evidence of the original apertures, if any, that occurred here. The same difficulty was experienced in determining the precise size or location of any of the window openings in the north wall, and in all cases the jambs were considered to be modern and in no case satisfactory to establish the exact original fenestration. A feature of striking interest in the then existing part of the chimney was of course the daring offsets and washes of the reveal. These were supported by the thickness of the brick work over the stepped fireplace flues and were faced with brick cut on the exposed face to conform to the angle of the wash. To some of these offsets was applied a coat of lime plaster for waterproofing purposes, but it could not be determined that this was original. The eastern offsets were somewhat damaged but the

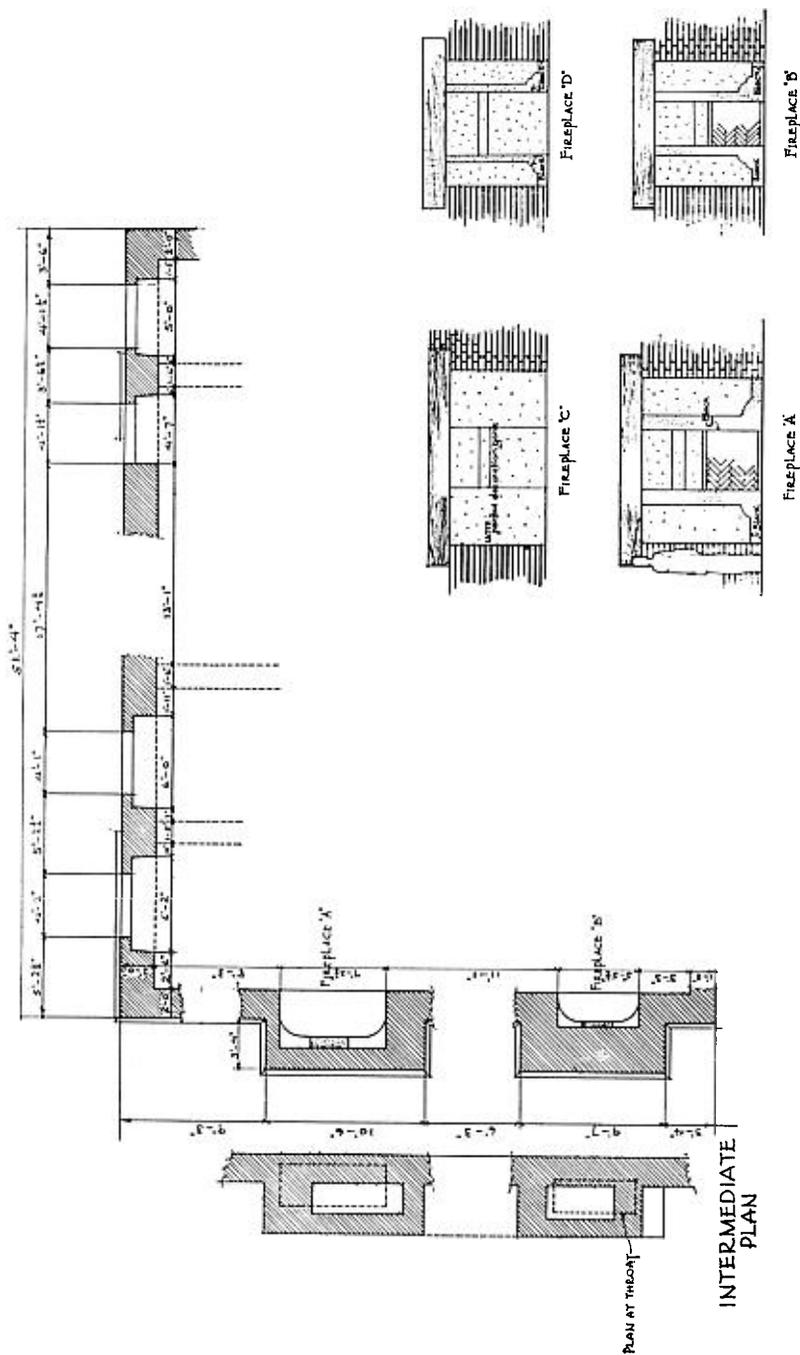


FIG. 6. THOMAS T. WATERMAN; MEASURED DRAWING OF FIRST FLOOR  
Fragmentary, recorded 1922.

western offsets were all in excellent condition before the work of demolition began. The drawings indicate the location and ascent of the flues from the six fireplaces and show them to be of usual stepped construction. As shown, the six flues gather above the grade of the third floor forming a stack fourteen feet six inches by three feet nine inches, and for the first time a longitudinal offset occurred. This extended the entire length of the chimney, was four courses in height and of similar construction to latitudinal washes. This weathering was taken by a projecting course of stretchers and was surmounted by two projecting courses separated by two normal courses. (Fig. 9.) All evidence as to the termination of the stack was removed, perhaps when the modern flat roof was constructed, but fortunately some ten courses below this level was found the longitudinal offset just mentioned, near the point at which the chimney stack separated itself from the gable wall, ascending independently the remainder of its height. It will be seen on the photograph (Fig. 10) that the string courses at the line of the second and third and fourth floors were cut back flush to allow for the application of the clapboards, without leaving trace of their profiles.

The east wall existed in comparative completeness save for the great aperture riven through the center for the entrance to the theater. The original window openings survived in reasonably good condition. The basement windows had stone jambs and nearly semicircular segmental arch brick heads. Both the first- and second-story windows were crowned by 8-inch segmental arches, the arch brick of which were not ground to a radius but the rise taken in the joints. The grades of the sills were not conclusively

established. It is very fortunate that the beautiful main string course survived in excellent condition. It was composed of a frieze of three courses defined at the bottom by a projecting course and capped by a cyma recta molded member with the lower file formed by a 1-inch tile and the wash by a normal height beveled course. The upper string course was simply three projecting courses laid in Flemish bond. Above the level of this string course, and perhaps including it, was the brick work of the third-story addition. But since the purpose of the measured drawings was to record the Province House as built by Peter Sergeant in 1679, no effort was made to record this later work, other than by means of careful photographs. The south wall existed in so fragmentary a form that it was impossible to make drawings of it. The great chimney was absolutely gone and only small regions of original brick work remained at the eastern corner. The houses facing west in Province Court were built on the site of the south wing of the Province House and it is to this wing, that we owe the preservation of the most important piece of evidence that has been found in the history of New England brickwork. A photograph of this is herewith reproduced and shows a section of the curvilinear gable of 1679 house. (Fig. 3.) The molding of this coping was three courses deep. The two lower courses were simply beveled while the capping brick was beveled on the inside, topped by a wide file and molded with a quarter round on the outside. At the demolition, this cap was found inverted to support the modern wall above. Below this point it was impossible to obtain further information on account of the alterations to the wall and the abutting walls. The west wall was entirely re-

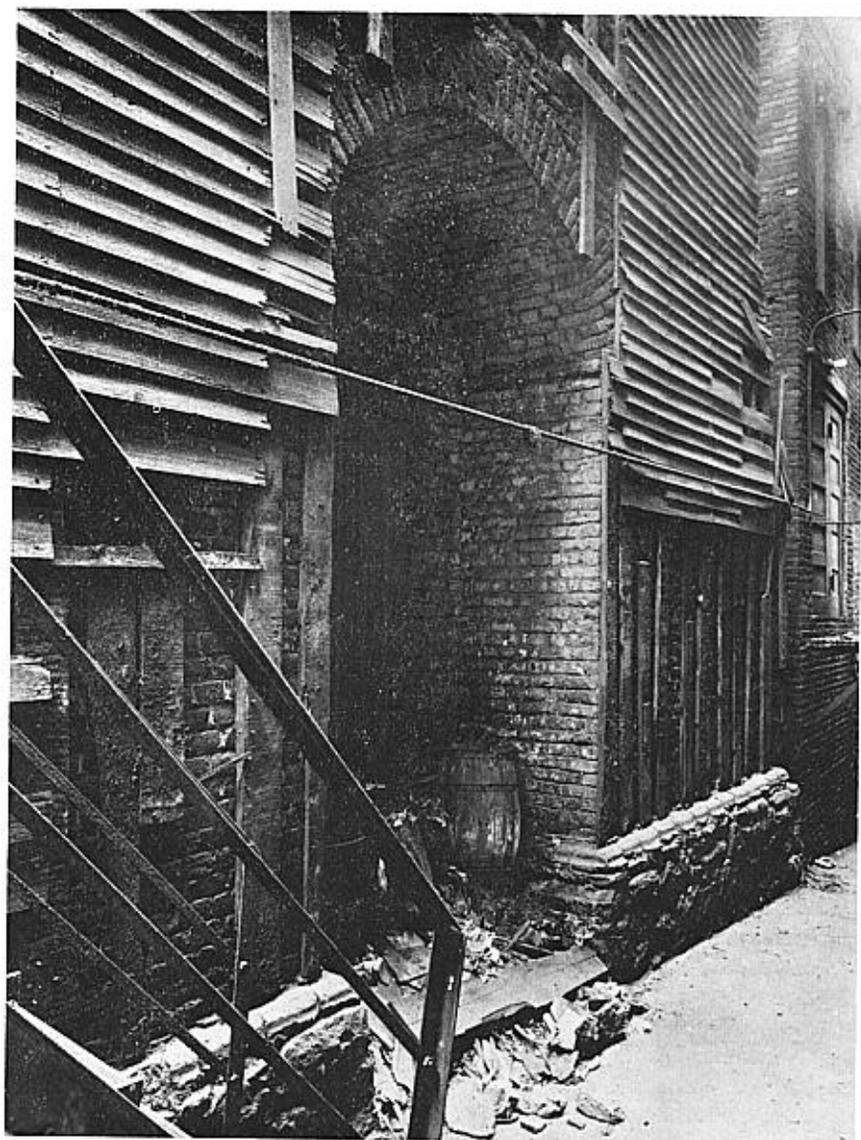


FIG. 7. DETAIL OF THE NORTH WALL VIEWED FROM THE EAST  
Photograph from the Society's collection, 1920.

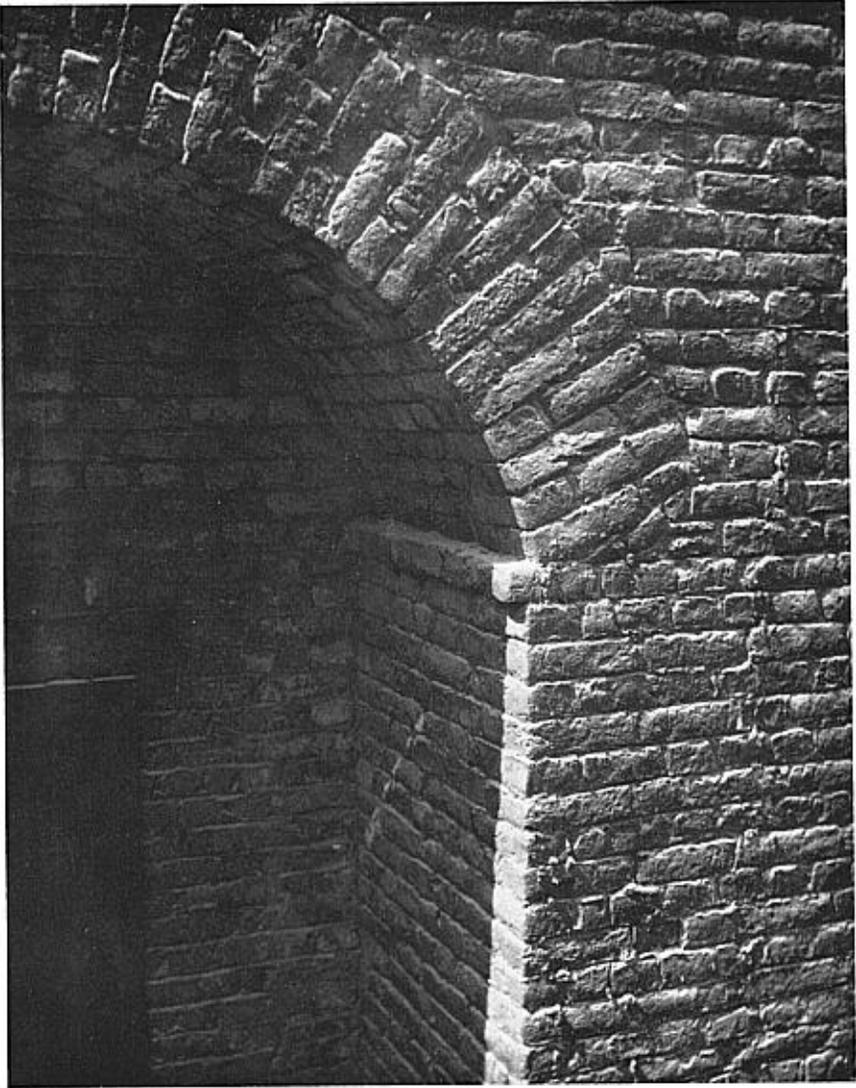


FIG. 8. DETAIL OF THE NORTH WALL ARCH AND IMPOST  
Photograph from the Society's collection, 1922.

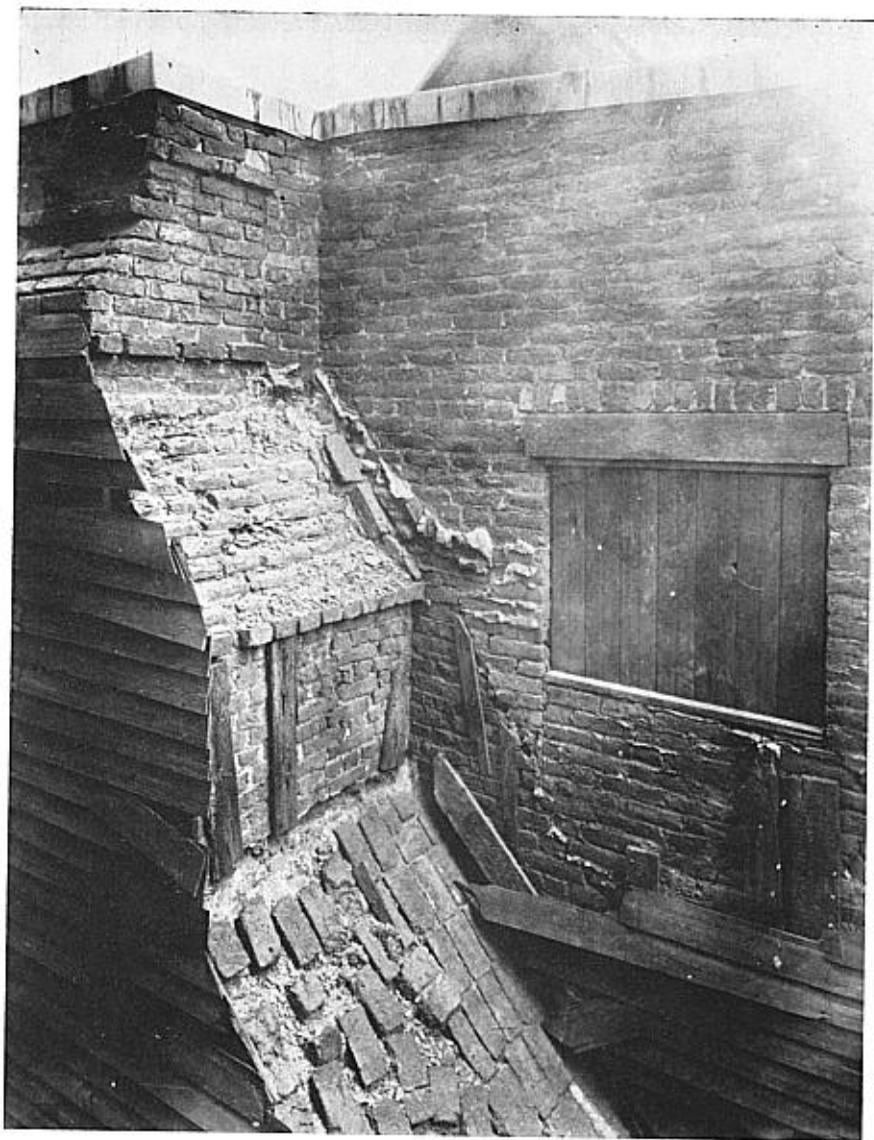


FIG. 9. DETAIL OF THE CHIMNEY SHOWING OFFSETS  
Photograph from the Society's collection, 1920.

moved years ago, when the building was altered into a theater.

It is amazing that, contained in the thickness of the chimney, five of the original seventeenth-century fireplaces remained practically intact through all the Province House vicissitudes. The great fireplace of the first floor front room was in perfect condition, save where the oak lintel was superficially channeled for the steel column supporting the balcony of the Old South Theatre. The jambs of this fireplace were plastered quadrants, painted next to the fire floor with a black stripe which continued up the side of the herringbone panel in the back and was slightly elaborated at the turn. A sample of this plaster and painting is in the Society's museum. The smoke channel, which had been heightened a few courses at some early date, probably to improve the draft, was also plastered. Close to the left-hand jamb of this fireplace on the under side of the wall was found an iron reinforcing strip, probably for securing a stone or marble facing. The lintel was scored for plastering. The rear fireplace on this floor was in substantially the same condition and of the same design, though smaller. A brick niche, probably of the Minstrel Hall period, broke through the fire floor and the right jamb but did little damage. Just to the right of this rear fireplace was found the evidence of the butting of a partition. Under both of these fireplaces were great arched recesses without flues. The east fireplace of the second floor was also found in good condition, though the lintel had failed and had been replaced by a segmental brick arch. The bearing of the lintel was found however. This fireplace was evidently early altered. The left jamb was brought in sixteen inches for a width of 6 feet 3 inches and a new smoke channel

and herringbone panel built. The jambs showed the impress and small fragments of blue and white tile from the line of the facing to the herringbone panel and from the throat to the fire floor. The rear fireplace was also found in good condition with plastered and painted decorations. The east third-floor fireplace was remaining but it was impossible to clear it out on account of the weakness of the lintel, nearly charred through, so nothing could be obtained other than the general dimensions. The rear fireplace was entirely rebuilt at a recent date and the inside flue had been partially removed to allow a large window opening in the north chimney wall.

Various fragments of interior plaster were found in place applied directly to the brick with no furring or lath throughout the building. The east wall was formed of a series of brick piers between the wide splayed window openings and on these piers rested a system of approximately 18 inches square summer beams, bearing for a similar summer was found over the first-floor front fireplace. Just under the spring of the exterior arches was found a series of oak bearings, with lintels superimposed over the window openings. Above these lintels was found a course of filling of large molded brick 12 by 8 by 8 inches roughly laid. In the right jamb of the first-floor north window of the east front was found, though lost in the subsequent wrecking, a small section of what was considered a casement rebate possibly 2 feet by 4 feet, molded on the outside and rebated halfway in its depth. Above the second-floor windows were found fragments of the plate badly decayed, but showing evidences of what were probably mortises for the front gable wall rafters. The interior of the south wall showed only the arched recess under the front fireplace.



FIG. 10. NORTH WALL VIEWED FROM THE EAST DURING DEMOLITION  
Photograph from the Society's collection, 1922.