



CHARLES BULFINCH HOUSE (LATER THE HOTEL WATERSTON),
8 BULFINCH PLACE, BOSTON, 1793-1794
From a photograph taken in January, 1918.

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Charles Bulfinch and Boston's Vanishing West End

By ABBOTT LOWELL CUMMINGS

TWO large-scale land clearance projects in Boston's early West End during 1960 and 1961 have created a devastation here unmatched since that of the fire of 1872 in the downtown area. It is true that the two most important local monuments, Asher Benjamin's West End Church of 1806 and the Harrison Gray Otis House, designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1795, have been spared. Beyond these, however, whole blocks of buildings have been indiscriminately leveled.

Clearance north of Cambridge Street, a project under urban renewal, has been aimed at replacing blighted structures with modern housing units in a thoroughly redesigned environment. Some of the buildings swept away were obviously beyond reclamation, but the ancient street pattern, the eighteenth-century street names, and many pleasant small brick town houses of the period between 1800 and 1850 had survived in only partially run-down condition. Though not neces-

sarily historic landmarks these houses were nevertheless distinguished by their good lines, many original features, and a patina which only time and associations can create. It must always be a source of regret that a policy of "spot" renewal was not established here—removing the hopelessly decayed while saving those buildings which could be rehabilitated—thereby preserving the basic character of this picturesque part of the City. Instead just that much more has been lost of Boston's individual character and quality which have so long attracted tourists from all over the country. For these many Americans Boston represents a tangible link with the past. The present and future are elsewhere all about them. Will they not think it something of a paradox in a nation whose architects from coast to coast design countless imitations of New England's Colonial- and Federal-style houses that here in her most historic city we busily stave down the genuine article—whole streets at a time? Later generations who

examine our twentieth-century protestations of interest in an American heritage will find such raids on cultural capital totally incomprehensible.

While for the most part the many early houses, now demolished, were without important historic associations there was one near-tragic exception in the house designed by Boston's famed architect, Charles Bulfinch, presumably for his own residence in 1793 or 1794. Standing as it did just west of Bowdoin Square in the second of the two clearance areas on land earmarked for a new State office building, and having been altered almost beyond recognition, there was little possibility from the outset of its being saved. Several remaining original features, however, made this building well worth careful study, particularly in light of its documented association with the man described by Asher Benjamin as New England's first "professed Architect,"¹—one whose consummate skill drew him finally to Washington as architect of the Nation's capitol.

Our study of this house and land begins in the second quarter of the eighteenth century when Bowdoin Square was a quiet aristocratic neighborhood whose fine mansions with their gardens contrast sharply with the fire station and macadam of today. Along the east side of the Square, where now stands the telephone building, was the three-story frame house with gambrel roof belonging to Dr. Thomas Bulfinch. Here the future architect was born on August 8, 1763. Although, as he later writes, his earliest recollections in life centered around the disturbances leading up to the Revolution and the British occupation of Boston, the Bulfinch home, one gathers, was nevertheless one in which could be found both ease of circumstance and reflective calm.

With this background young Charles Bulfinch, having graduated from Harvard and recently returned from a grand tour of England and the Continent, appeared, quite normally, in the first Boston Directory of 1789 as "gentleman." He had married Miss Hannah Apthorp a year earlier on November 20, 1788, and their residence as listed in the Directory was on Marlborough Street, the name then given to that part of the present Washington Street which extended from Summer to School Street. They returned shortly to the West End and the vicinity of Bowdoin Square, however, and aside from the years in Washington continued to live in this neighborhood for the rest of their lives.

The first of these West End residences was in Southack's Court, the modern Howard Street, where Bulfinch is located by the Boston City Assessors in 1790. The house itself, owned by Dr. Thomas Bulfinch, was shortly to become the home of George and Anna (Bulfinch) Storer, the architect's sister and brother-in-law. Bulfinch was still here, however, as late as May 4-5, 1795, when the Assessors made their rounds for that year.² In the meantime he had purchased the land on which he planned to build. The site had originally been part of a "Tract of Pasture Land" belonging to Richard Middlecot which comprised some four acres, extending along Cambridge Street from the middle of the block bounded now by Bulfinch and Bowdoin Streets nearly to Temple Street, and stretching south up the Hill almost to Ashburton Place. On December 12, 1727, following Mr. Middlecot's death, the "Pasture" was broken up into "four Dividends each Dividend containing five parcells of Land" which were then apportioned amongst four surviving heirs. Each of



FIG. 1. BOWDOIN SQUARE AND VICINITY

Detail of John G. Hale's Map of Boston, 1814 (from a facsimile). (1) Charles Bulfinch House, (2) Joseph Coolidge, Sr., House, (3) Blake-Tuckerman House, (4) Dr. Thomas Bulfinch House, (5) Joseph Coolidge, Jr., House, (6) Kirk Boott House, (7) George Storer House (or site), (8) Clap-Bulfinch-Watson House, (9) Stephen Codman House. "Brick or Stone Buildings are etch'd parallel to their sides." "Wood Buildings are etch'd diagonally."

these dividends, we are told in the record, was assigned a letter, "which Letters being wrote Separately on a distinct peice of Paper were folded up and put into a hatt," and a "disinterested" person was instructed to pick them out at random. Before these parcels were "Surveyed measured and platted," however, the representatives appointed by the General Court reported that they "first laid out away of forty feet wide in the Middle of the s^d Pasture thro the depth of the . . . Land from the front thereof in Cam-

bridge street . . . Extending Southerly to the Rear of the s^d pasture Land . . . to lay open free & unincumbered forever. . . ."³ The twenty parcels were ranged on either side of the forty-foot "way" which became known as Middlecot (now Bowdoin) Street.

During the years which followed these lots were gradually sold by Richard Middlecot's heirs, and some of them had been built upon before the middle of the century. A second tract of pasture land, lying along the eastern line of Middlecot's

pasture and belonging to the heirs of Samuel Lynde, remained undivided and virtually undeveloped. On July 22, 1754, this land was sold to the first Dr. Thomas Bulfinch, the architect's grandfather,⁴ and was known locally throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century as "Bulfinch's pasture." In the inventory of the Doctor's estate, presented April 3, 1761, it is described as "a large Pasture wth Wooden Coach House thereon . . . ab^t 3 acres" and appraised at £300.⁵ The frontage was narrow, only one hundred and forty-eight feet along Bowdoin Square opposite the Doctor's house, but in depth the land extended to Ashburton Place. The eastern boundary corresponded roughly with the modern Bulfinch Street and Allston Place.

When Bulfinch prepared to build on his lot there were several older dwellings already standing in the neighborhood in what had been Middlecot's pasture. Immediately to the south was a house on the eastern side of Middlecot Street which Daniel Jent Tuckerman of Boston, "Taylor," sold on September 2, 1756, to Duncan Ingraham of Boston, "Mariner."⁶ Below, and closer to Cambridge Street, was another house belonging to the baker, Richard Sircomb, purchased on January 9, 1749, from Cord Cordis, "Sugar-Baker." A later deed of February 28, 1791, refers to a "Bake house" on the property, while the Direct Tax of 1798 describes the house itself as a wooden dwelling of two stories.⁷

Within a stone's throw, in the middle of the block between the present Bulfinch and Bowdoin Streets, and within the bounds of the Middlecot pasture, there stood on Cambridge Street what must have been a substantial house occupied by Samuel Allyne Otis. The land had been sold by one of the Middlecot

heirs on March 31, 1729, to Jacob Parker of Boston, "Bricklayer," and there was a "Dwelling House" on the property by March 11, 1735, when Parker executed a mortgage for £250. On January 1, 1757, one John Adams, administrator of Parker's estate, sold it to Otis' father-in-law. An unusually interesting deed for this property is on file, drawn by the Loyalist Harrison Gray in London on July 13, 1784. "Whereas since the marriage of Samuel Allyne Otis Esquire with my Daughter Elizabeth," he begins, "to wit in the year One thousand seven hundred and Sixty four. I permitted the said Otis to live in my house . . . which . . . I purchased of John Adams . . . [and] Whereas the said Otis has ever since occupied said house and lands and is now in actual possession of them . . . [and] in Consideration of the love I bear him & in Consideration of the love and affection I bear his dear Children by my late daughter Elizabeth . . . I do hereby . . . forever quit Claim . . . all my right . . . to the same dwelling house and Lands . . . to the said Samuel Allyne Otis during his natural life and to the said [children] . . . after the death of their father. . . ." This house, though we know little about its appearance, takes on added interest as being almost without question the birthplace and certainly the childhood home of Harrison Gray Otis.⁸

The tract which Charles Bulfinch purchased comprised two of the twenty "parcels" divided among the Middlecot heirs in 1727. The division specified the exact dimensions of each lot along the forty-foot "way" and the distance from Cambridge Street, so there can be no question about the size and location. The first of these two lots had been sold by Edward Middlecot, then of Warminster in England, to Gershom Flagg of Boston,

"Housewright," on February 19, 1754. It was described as a "certain peice or parcel of land" bounded west on the "forty feet way," seventy-eight feet, south on Joseph Callender's land, one hundred and seven feet, east on land "now or late . . . [of] Samuel Valentine" (later the Bulfinch pasture), seventy-nine feet, and

two from those given in Middlecot's original deed. Five years later, on June 2, 1791, Mamay Mason, for £150 "lawful money," sold the identical property, "with All the Buildings thereon," to Charles Bulfinch of Boston, "Gentleman."⁹

The second of the two adjoining tracts

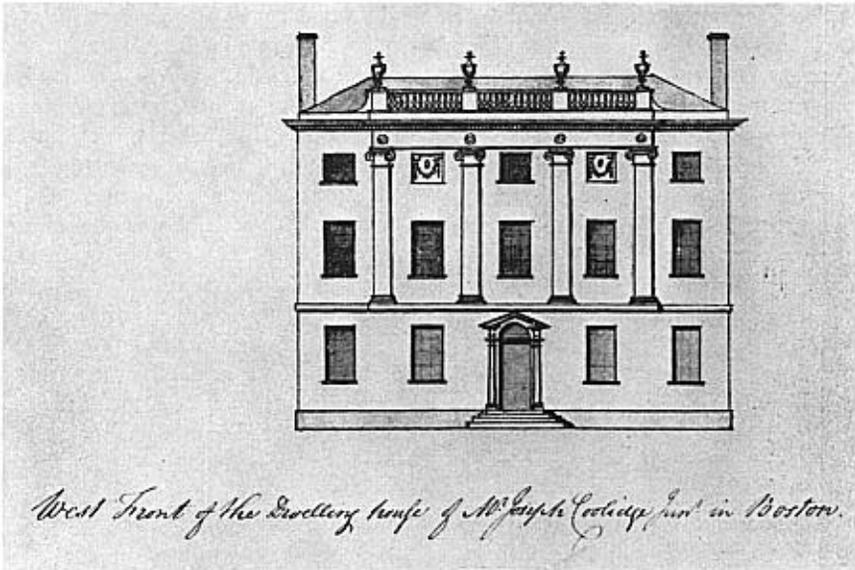


FIG. 2. DESIGN FOR THE HOUSE OF JOSEPH COOLIDGE, JR., BULFINCH (CORNER OF CAMBRIDGE) STREET, BOSTON, 1794-1795

From the original drawing by Charles Bulfinch.
Courtesy of the Boston Athenæum.

north on the land of Daniel Jent Tuckerman, one hundred and fourteen feet. Gershom Flagg of Lancaster, Massachusetts, administrator on the estate of Gershom Flagg "late of Harvard . . . Yeoman," sold this tract several years later on May 10, 1786, to "Mama" Mason of Boston, "Baker," for £110, described now as "A Certain peice of Land . . . with all the buildings thereon." The dimensions vary only by inches or a foot or

was part of a larger lot belonging to Joseph Callender. The Callender holdings consisted of two of the original parcels which had been set off to Sarah Boucher as one of the Middlecot heirs. Curiously, however, no means can be found by which the title passed eventually to Joseph Callender, Sr., "Baker." In any event, his children and heirs conveyed their interest in this property to Joseph Callender, Jr., on October 2, 1784. In-

cluded were a "Dwelling house, Ware house, & Bake house and all other Buildings standing on said land. . . ." The whole tract was bounded west "on Middlecott's Street," one hundred and fifty-six feet (representing the combined frontage of two seventy-eight-foot parcels), south on Mrs. Jane Boucher, ninety-five feet, east on the land of "Doct^r Bulfinch," one hundred and fifty-four feet, and north on land "belonging to the heirs of Gershom Flagg deçed," one hundred and seven feet. In this conveyance Joseph Callender, Jr., is called "Merchant." When he was appointed administrator of his father's estate on December 4, 1767, he is called "Baker," and Stauffer reports that in association with Paul Revere he engraved the line plates for the *Royal American Magazine* in 1774!

On July 21, 1791, a little over a month after he had acquired the adjoining lot to the north from Mamay Mason, Charles Bulfinch purchased from Joseph Callender, Jr., for £320 that portion of the Callender lot bounded seventy-one feet and six inches "on Middlecot Street," south on Callender's own land, one hundred and two feet, east on the land of Dr. Thomas Bulfinch, seventy-seven feet and six inches, and north "on the Land of said Charles Bulfinch," one hundred and seven feet, described as "A Certain peice of Land . . . together with All the Buildings thereon. . . ." ¹⁰ The north-west corner of the property represented at this date, as it had in the original division of 1727, a point three hundred and thirty-five feet south of Cambridge Street. There is little indication of what the "Buildings" may have been in either case. Presumably they were simple. The value of buildings and land for the combined tracts, representing now a total frontage

of one hundred and forty-nine feet and four inches on Middlecot Street, was very much below that later placed on the single brick dwelling house which Bulfinch erected here.

At the time he acquired this land Charles Bulfinch was only twenty-eight years old. He did not build at once, and of course we have no assurance that he bought the land with any such idea immediately in mind. On April 2, 1792, he conveyed the property to his father for £420 "lawful money," and a year later Dr. Thomas Bulfinch returned it to him under date of March 20, 1793. ¹¹ The house was standing, however, by December 18, 1794, when the architect mortgaged the whole property to David Sears, "Merchant," and Harrison Gray Otis, "Esq^r," described as a "certain peice of land" on Middlecot Street "with the brick house and all other buildings thereon situated." The value of the mortgage (redeemed on November 11 and 12, 1795) was fixed at \$16,440. ¹² Presumably the house was more or less complete by May of that year (1794), for the Assessors were apt to make their rounds about that time and we find record of an "empty House" in this location. The following year, 1795, the Assessors found George Storer here "in Bulfinch's H." Their "takings" were made on May 4-5, just a few weeks before his marriage on May 26 to the architect's sister, Anna. Six months later, on October 24, a deed of mortgage describes the house as in the "present occupation of the said Charles Bulfinch. . . ." ¹³

"Thus tranquilly passed our time until 1796," Bulfinch wrote, in describing the events of that period during which the Franklin Street houses were under construction. ¹⁴ The tragic outcome of this tontine scheme has been discussed more

at large by his biographers, and is described by the architect himself in those autobiographical notes published by his granddaughter. The ruinous crash involved Mrs. Bulfinch's property as well as his own—all of which was sacrificed to meet the demands of creditors. The

Assessors made their annual visit it was listed once more as an "Empty house."¹⁶

The young couple's next home is mentioned briefly by Mrs. Bulfinch, writing on September 1 of that same year: "We are at this date in a small dwelling, the rent of which is paid by our attentive and



FIG. 3. DETAIL OF SWAG PANEL BETWEEN SECOND AND THIRD STORY WINDOWS, CHARLES BULFINCH HOUSE, 8 BULFINCH PLACE, BOSTON, 1793-1794

From a photograph taken in January, 1918.

deed by which Bulfinch resigned the brick house so recently built, and identified in the conveyance as "that certain land and dwelling house situated in . . . Middlecot Street wherein the said Charles Bulfinch now resides," is dated January 21, 1796.¹⁵ His own occupancy of this house, as one can see, had been unhappily short. A few months later when the

affectionate Brother Apthorp.' " Within ten months, however, they had moved again. "We have accepted the friendly invitation of Mr. B——'s Sister Storer," she writes on May 10, 1797, "to join them in unitedly supporting our families, living with them in their house;" later she adds, on October 7, 1798, "We still continue in the house of our friends Anna

and George Storer, whose unremitted kindness has restor'd our cheerfulness. . . ."¹⁷ The Storer House, mentioned earlier, stood on a tract of land adjoining the Bulfinch pasture and from the description in the deeds was located on or very near the northeast corner of Howard and Bulfinch Streets.¹⁸ In the Direct Tax of 1798 it is described as a "brick & wooden dwelling" of three stories which covered 1,354 square feet; the Boston Assessors in 1801 call it an "Elegant H^o"¹⁹

It might be well to mention here an important neighboring house which Bulfinch designed at about this same period for his brother-in-law, Joseph Coolidge, Jr., and for which an original plan and elevation exist (Fig. 2).²⁰ The elevation is endorsed in the architect's own hand "West Front of the Dwelling house of M^r Joseph Coolidge Jun^r in Boston," and shows a handsome three-story dwelling embellished with two-story pilasters, swag panels, roof balustrade and urns. The land upon which this house stood belonged to Mrs. Coolidge's father, Dr. Thomas Bulfinch, and while the property was acquired by Joseph Coolidge, Jr., on July 9, 1797, it is clear that the house had been built a year or two earlier. The entire lot comprised parts of three separate tracts which the Bulfinches had purchased beginning in 1784. Straddling two of these lots was a double house which stood here as late as April 30, 1794, as we know from the deeds.²¹ The Coolidge House was assessed for the first time in 1795, and was then occupied, curiously, not by Joseph Coolidge, Jr., for whom it had been designed, but by Mrs. Bulfinch's brother-in-law, Charles Vaughan, who had earlier been associated with Charles Bulfinch in the plans for the Tontine Crescent. The Assessors found Charles

Vaughan here again the following year in 1796,²² but by this time Joseph Coolidge, Jr., about to marry Elizabeth Bulfinch on September 20, 1796, was naturally in want of a suitable dwelling for himself. On January 19, 1796, the elder Joseph Coolidge had purchased from Dr. Thomas Bulfinch the old family mansion in Bowdoin Square, "Bulfinch's pasture" opposite, and an adjoining tract of land on which stood both the house in question and that in which the Storer lived.²³ By January 6, 1797, Joseph Coolidge, Jr., had taken up residence in this house, as we are informed in a deed.²⁴ Here he lived until 1800, in which year the Assessors entered against Dr. Thomas Bulfinch's name the notation: "Old Physician H^o repairing," while Joseph Coolidge, Jr., we are told, was "just going into D^r Bulfinches."²⁵ All this accords well with the architect's own statement, penned later in life, that following his failure in 1796 Joseph Coolidge, Sr., "purchased the mansion house in Bowdoin Square, and enlarged and repaired it for his son, and I had the gratification to see my good father and mother living for the remainder of their lives under the roof of their own home, tenderly attended to by their daughter and her worthy and liberal husband."²⁶

Joseph Coolidge, Jr., sold his fine house at the corner of Cambridge and Bulfinch Streets to Elizabeth Sherburne Bowers of Somerset on March 20, 1800.²⁷ Having passed through a number of hands it was standing as late as January 21, 1846, and is shown in the drawing of Kirk Boott's House executed about that time (Fig. 5). The west front (facing Bulfinch Street) had undergone very little change during the forty odd years of its existence, the only noticeable addition being a new roof balustrade,



FIG. 4. STEPHEN CODMAN HOUSE, HOWARD (CORNER OF SOMERSET) STREET,
BOSTON, 1804

From a photograph taken between 1858 and 1862.

lower than the original. The house was taken down in the early months of 1846, and by August 24 of that year a plan on file at the Registry of Deeds shows the site "improved" with a row of connected dwellings.²⁸

The house on Bulfinch Place, similar in several respects to that of Joseph Coolidge, Jr., was important as the only ambitious house designed by Bulfinch for his own occupancy and in a period of affluence and promise. While he was able within a few years to maintain his family comfortably they never again enjoyed the estate which had been theirs before the failure of the Tontine Crescent. When their fortunes began to mend Mrs. Bulfinch recorded on August 10, 1799, "Left the hospitable mansion of our dear Brother and Sister Storer to occupy a small neat house in their neighborhood, Providence so far favouring the industry of my Husband as to enable us to support our family separately." Within six months, on January 23, 1800, she wrote with evident relief, "At last we find ourselves established in a comfortable house, with a moderate income, in which state we hope to remain for several years, as the house is agreed for, and we have every reason to expect a resting place at least for that time."²⁹ Presumably the "small neat house" and the house "agreed for" were not the same building. Charles Bulfinch was located in Middlecot Street by the City Directory in 1800 and in Southack's Court by the Assessors in 1801 where he occupied a "decent new H"³⁰ It is difficult to make these facts coincide perfectly with the dates in Mrs. Bulfinch's account, but in any event the family was shortly to be established at a more permanent address.

Bulfinch Street, described as "a New Street" in 1801,³¹ had been laid out

through the Bulfinch pasture (from which it took its name), and here the architect was located from 1802 until 1814 by the Assessors. The family does not seem to have preserved any tradition of the exact location on Bulfinch Street as they had for the earlier home on Bulfinch Place,³² but we can suggest that it may well have been a house which Bulfinch purchased from William Clap on February 25, 1801, for \$4,800, described as a "Certain piece or portion of Land, with the Buildings thereon . . . being part of the land lately known by the Name of Bulfinch's pasture." This tract lay on the southeast corner of the present Howard and Bulfinch Streets, directly across from the Storer House. The frontage on Bulfinch Street was ninety-two feet and ten inches, and the wooden dwelling house, according to John G. Hale's map of Boston in 1814, was at the south end of the lot. Also at the south, or upper end, was a "piece of land" stretching for some thirty feet along Bulfinch Street which, according to the deed, could not be built upon for "the term of Twenty Years from this date; but the same shall remain open, or be improved as a grass plat Garden or Nursery of Trees."³³

Mr. Clap had purchased this property from the Bulfinch assignees on December 23, 1797, then unimproved, and he presumably erected the "Buildings" which are mentioned in the deed to Charles Bulfinch. On February 17, 1804, the architect executed a mortgage of the property which was ultimately assigned to one Lucy Watson of Boston, "widow," on March 12, 1805. A "Memorandum" filed at the Registry of Deeds under date of December 23, 1813, tells us that on January 10, 1811, Benjamin Marston Watson "as the attorney

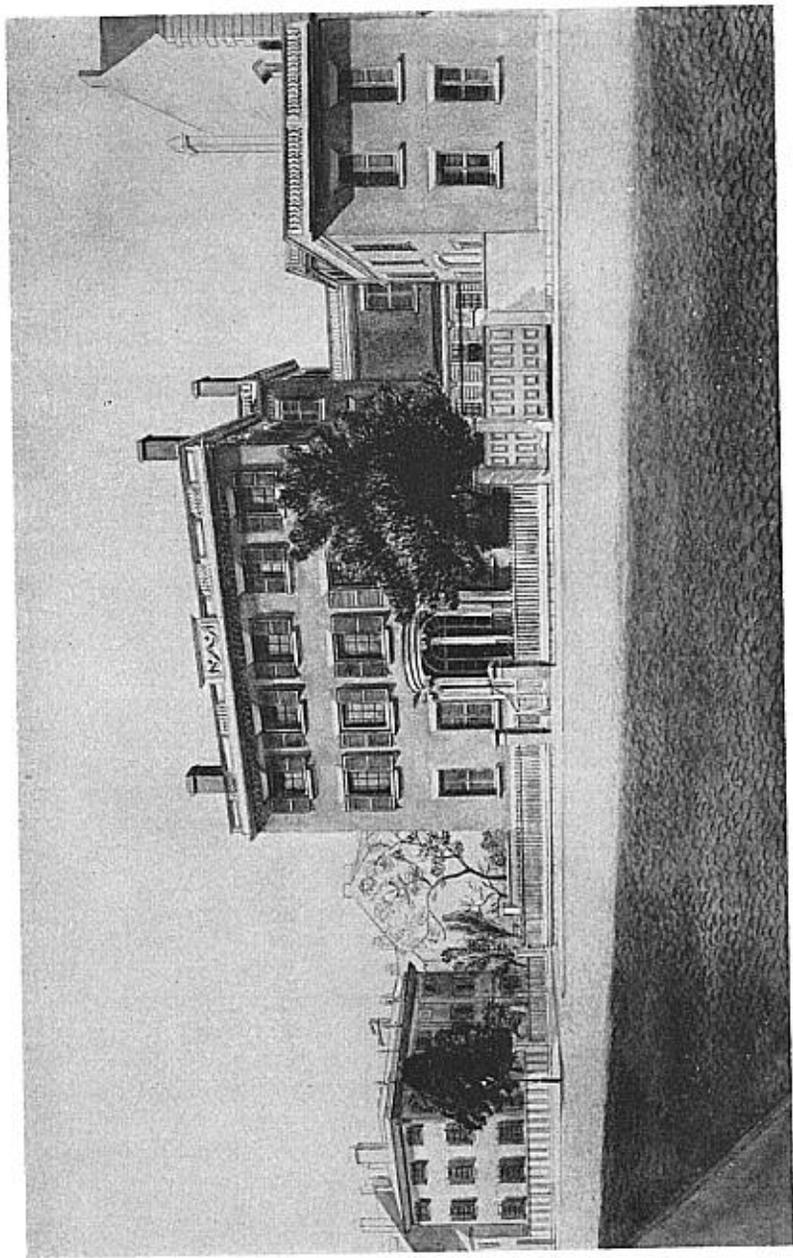


FIG. 5. KIRK BOOTT HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE (CORNER OF BULFINCH) STREET, BOSTON, 1804
From a drawing made before 1846.

of Lucy Watson by open and peaceable entry took actual possession" of the premises. Legal complications had arisen and Watson declares "that he came upon the land for the purpose of making an entry for the breach of the condition in said [mortgage] deed and said Bulfinch in token of his willingness to give the said Watson open and peaceable possession . . . delivered to the said Watson the key of the dwelling house thereon standing."³⁴ This memorandum is of considerable interest in light of certain other contemporary evidence described by Charles A. Place in his biography of the architect. In 1925, he reports, some papers of Mrs. Lucy Watson were given to Captain William B. Clarke of the Bostonian Society, containing lease agreements with Charles Bulfinch during the period 1810-1813 for occupancy of a house which she owned. "The earliest dated of these agreements indicates," says Mr. Place, "that the rental had been running previous to the date of the paper."³⁵ This evidence would point strongly to the house on the east side of Bulfinch Street as that in which the architect had been living both as owner and tenant. His aged mother, who passed her last days in the old Bulfinch mansion on Bowdoin Square, facing south up Beacon Hill more or less in a straight line with this house, writes in 1803 that "I look from the window upon the houses of my other two children," meaning Charles Bulfinch and Anna Storer.³⁶

Finally, there was to be yet another change following still further business reverses. In October, 1815, Mrs. Bulfinch writes that "The pressure of creditors has oblig'd us to remove into a smaller house. . . ." This was at Number 3 Tremont Street, writes the architect's granddaughter in 1896, "and is remem-

bered by a relative still living as 'a small house with a green front door, standing next to the old Museum building.'"³⁷

* * *

Returning now to trace the later history of the Bulfinch House on Bulfinch Place, we find that one year after the assignment of the property by Bulfinch to Joseph Coolidge, Jr., his brother-in-law, it was conveyed on July 14, 1797, by Coolidge to John Trecothick Apthorp of Cambridge and Charles Vaughan of Boston, "Merchants." The "Dwelling House" was then "Occupied by W^m Clap," to whom on the following day, July 15, 1797, Apthorp and Vaughan conveyed the whole property for \$16,495.³⁸ William Clap, called "Merchant" in this deed, was listed as both "owner and occupier" of the building when the Direct Tax of 1798 was levied by the Federal Government. The house was described as a "brick dwelling" of three stories covering 2,100 square feet, with a "Kitchen" of wood covering 350 square feet, and a "Barn" covering 800 square feet. The total valuation was \$16,000.³⁹ According to the Assessors' records Clap lived here at least until 1808, a few years before his death.

On October 13, 1806, the property was mortgaged by Clap for \$20,000 to Thomas Kilby Jones and William Dehon of Boston, "merchants," including the "brick dwelling house, now improved by myself situate on Bulfinch place. . . ." The property had until this time, since its initial purchase by Bulfinch, consistently measured one hundred and forty-nine feet and four inches on Middlecot Street. William Clap acquired much of the surrounding land, however, and his mortgage deed described a tract which encompassed the better part of the block

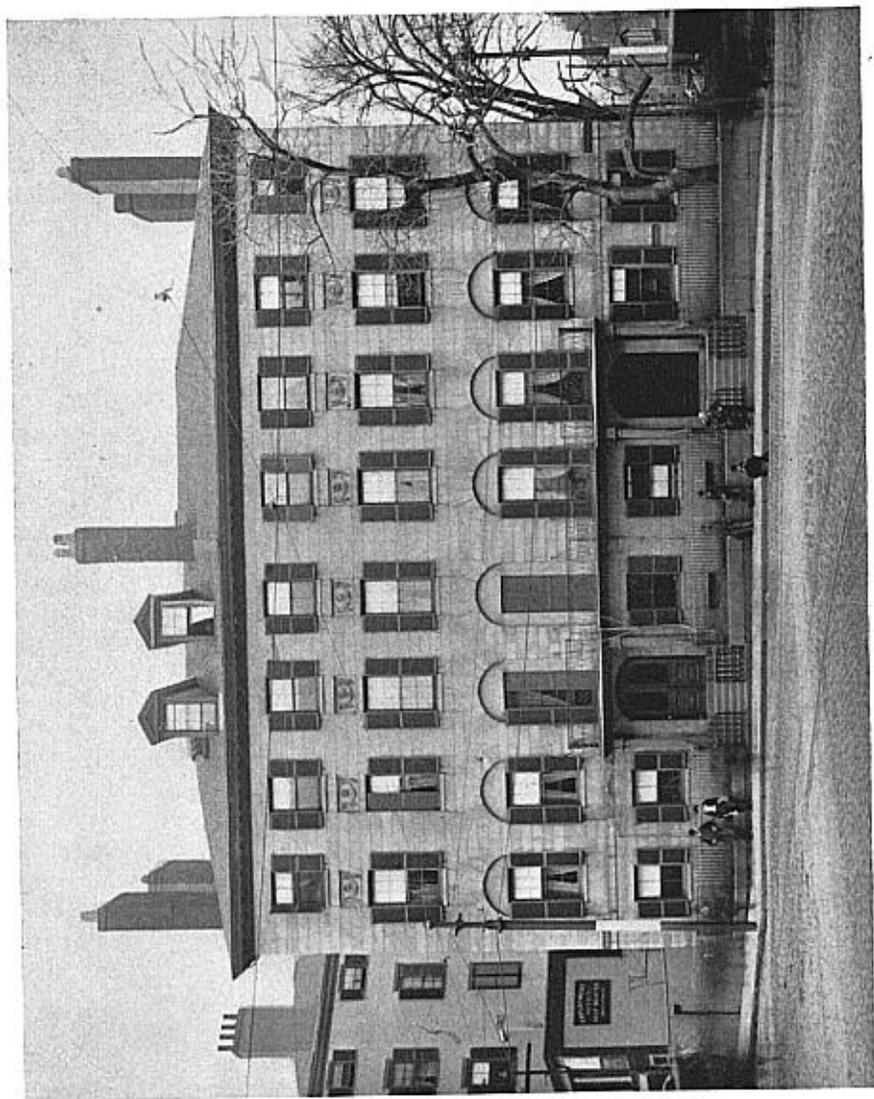


FIG. 6. BLAKE-TUCKERMAN HOUSE, BOWDOIN SQUARE (BETWEEN CAMBRIDGE AND GREEN STREETS), BOSTON, *ca.* 1815
From a photograph taken about 1890.

bounded by Bulfinch Street and Place, Middlecot Street and Somerset Place (the modern Allston Street).⁴⁰ It should also be noted that the front of the house, as we know from the building itself, faced toward the north, with the west end turned toward Middlecot Street. In the mortgage deed of October 13, 1806, the house faces for the first time upon Bulfinch Place, as it has ever since. This change is explained in a deed executed by Clap a month before on September 5, 1806, for land just to the north of the Bulfinch House, the boundary between being "a Way laid out by Said Clap over his own land and to be always kept open as a public Street."⁴¹ As late as 1819, incidentally, John G. Hale's map of Boston for that year shows this as the only house on the south side of Bulfinch Place.

The mortgage of 1806 was unredeemed, and the property passed to Jones and Dehon, subject only to a mortgage dated December 6, 1811, from Jones to Clap's widow to secure her an annual annuity of \$300. Jones and Dehon, "Auctioneers," sold the property on October 20, 1821, to Henry Rice, comprising again most of the block on which the house stood, and subject to the same complications of Sally Clap's annuity. Actually, the house seems to have been withheld "as security for the payment of said annuity" which was "to be paid out of the rents and profits of . . . [the] brick dwelling House. . ."⁴² Henry Rice, "Merchant," took up his residence in the Bulfinch House and is listed in the City Directories at 8 Bulfinch Place (as we now find it numbered) from 1825 to 1840 and again in 1843. One of his daughters later noted that she had been born in this house in 1833.⁴³

The title became increasingly complicated in the years that lay ahead, but the

changes in ownership can be summarized briefly as follows: Henry Rice conveyed the house and a reduced tract of land on November 5, 1841, to Robert Waterston, Isaac C. Pray, and John W. Hall of Boston, "Merchants," subject to at least four mortgages.⁴⁴ The three grantees are described in the deed as "Copartners, doing business under the firm or style of Waterston Pray and Company." By November 15, 1850, Waterston had acquired sole ownership of the property and here he lived, as the Directories indicate, from 1851 until his death in 1869. His executors sold the property on April 1, 1870, to David L. Webster for \$21,050.⁴⁵

At Robert Waterston's death the house was apparently more or less in its original condition. A plan of the property, dated March 15, 1870, shows the "Mansion House" covering 2,100 square feet, as it had in 1798 according to the records of the Direct Tax. Miss Bulfinch describes the building as "a large brick house, painted white, with a very handsome spiral staircase and a good-size garden in the rear."⁴⁶ At the hands of the new owner, however, it underwent the radical alterations which are shown in the frontispiece. These changes, by which the dwelling was transformed into a "Hotel," were accomplished apparently by 1874, for G. M. Hopkins' Atlas of Suffolk County, published in that year, shows the enlarged and altered ground plan. Another three and a half stories were added to the original house, window openings were modified, and a new entrance with superimposed bay windows was introduced. Within doors there was not a shred of original material left though the arrangement of the rooms may have borne some relationship to the original plan. As demolition proceeded a

careful watch was kept to be sure that original interior detail had not been hidden by the later changes. Such was not the case, and one is left with the impression that the building as it had been known to recent generations of Bostonians was largely the work of the 1870's, retaining,

scured by later window pediments and a Victorian cornice. Above, in the third story, the window openings, once square in size, had been enlarged. Between these windows there remained clearly visible up and down the face of the building the marks of the pilasters which had em-

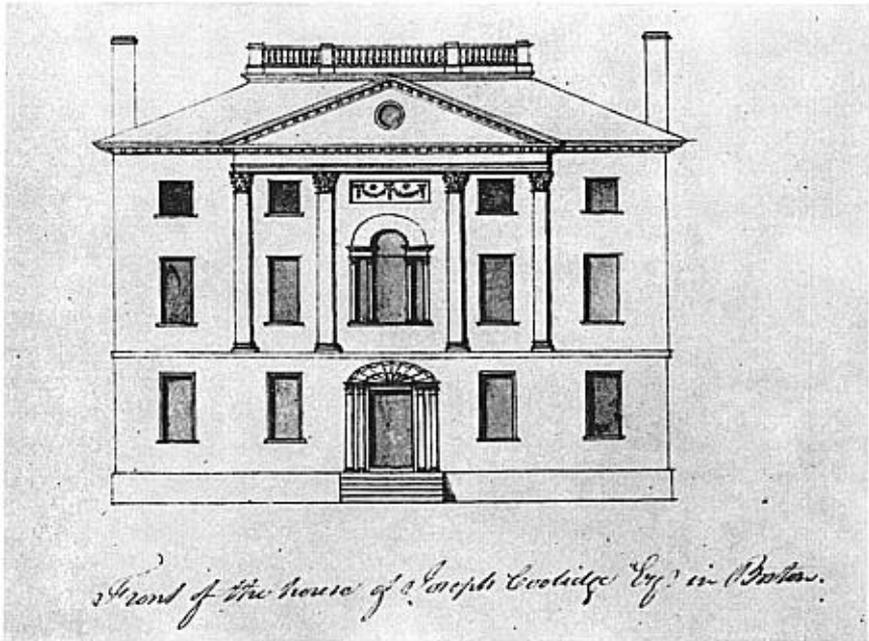


FIG. 7. DESIGN FOR THE HOUSE OF JOSEPH COOLIDGE, SR., CAMBRIDGE (CORNER OF BOWDOIN) STREET, BOSTON, 1792

From the original drawing by Charles Bulfinch.
Courtesy of The New York Public Library (Phelps Stokes Collection).

however, portions of the original façade of the Bulfinch House.

Although hemmed in on either side by later buildings the width of the façade was unaltered and most of its brickwork intact. In the first story the outer windows were located in blind arcades whose original reeded impost blocks (of wood) remained in place, though the lines of the segmental arches were somewhat ob-

braced the two stories above the blind arcade. This evidence took the form of a paint line for the brickwork had been painted several times before the pilasters were removed, probably between 1870 and 1874 (see frontispiece). At the top the indications of Ionic volutes were clearly to be seen.

Most important of all, however, were the two swag panels between the outer

windows of the second and third stories. These had undergone no change whatsoever since the eighteenth century beyond receiving an occasional coat of paint. The ornamental swag panel, a device borrowed from the work of Robert Adam which Bulfinch had observed in England, was popular with the architect as we know both from his original drawings and the buildings which he designed. These which had survived on the façade of the "Hotel Waterston" at 8 Bulfinch Place were the only examples left in Boston. One other set of swags was still in existence as late as 1912 on a house which stood upon the southeast corner of nearby Howard and Somerset Streets, next door to the Howard Athenaeum (Fig. 4). The land on which this double house stood was sold for \$2,220 to Stephen Codman of Boston, "Merchant," on September 7, 1802,⁴⁷ and the Assessors noted the presence of a "New House" here in 1804.⁴⁸ The property is described in a mortgage deed of September 28, 1810, as "all that certain parcel of land with the two brick tenements. . . ."⁴⁹ We have no proof that Bulfinch designed these matching "tenements." If he did not they surely reflect his influence upon some contemporary architect or builder in Boston.

The final chapter in the history of the Bulfinch House on Bulfinch Place is quickly told. After standing empty for some three months or more the work of demolition began towards the end of the week of September 4, 1961. Within ten days the building had been leveled, leaving nothing behind but the record. Late in May John Obed Curtis and the writer took complete measurements of all surviving original elements of the façade which are on file in the Society's library, together with a series of detailed photographs and a unique reconstruction of

the original floor plan drafted by George B. Brigham, Jr., on April 10, 1920, after having visited the house with members of the Waterston family who remembered its original appearance. As the work of demolition progressed a few representative bricks, together with portions of one of the reeded impost blocks, were secured for the Society's architectural study reference collection, and it is particularly pleasing to report that through the courtesy of the Malden Equipment Corporation, which held the wrecking contract, the Society has secured for its architectural museum one of the two swag panels. Behind many later layers of paint can be found the original "stone" color, so often mentioned in eighteenth-century documents, and attached to the bottom of the panel by hand-wrought nails is a strip of the original lead flashing.

The Harrison Gray Otis House is now the lone survivor in an area which once boasted several imposing mansions, among them Joseph Coolidge, Sr.'s, on the west corner of Bowdoin and Cambridge Streets, Kirk Boott's on the west corner of Bulfinch and Cambridge Streets (Fig. 5),⁵⁰ Joseph Coolidge, Jr.'s, opposite, and the Blake-Tuckerman House in Bowdoin Square (Fig. 6).⁵¹ A century of grinding change has robbed this neighborhood utterly of its once pretentious character. The house which Bulfinch designed for Joseph Coolidge, Sr., was probably the most ambitious ever built in the West End (Fig. 7). The land on which it stood, stretching along Cambridge Street from Bowdoin to Temple Streets, was purchased by the great merchant on April 29, 1791.⁵² A year and a half later, on September 4, 1792, the diarist, Nathaniel Cutting, noted that the house was then "not finished," but it must have been nearing completion. Three weeks later,

on September 25, he wrote that he "Went with Mr. J. Coolidge, Jr., to visit the new mansion-house which is erected by his father. In it elegance & convenience strive for preference, but its site is not pleasant or advantageous." ⁵³ This was certainly its only limitation. Assessed fully for the first time in 1793 the house alone was valued at £2,000. It was called a "Superb H^o" by the Assessors in 1798, ⁵⁴ and is described in the Direct Tax of that same year as a "brick dwelling" of three stories covering 2,518 square feet—a prodigious figure. ⁵⁵

On June 12, 1843, one year before his death, Bulfinch wrote, "I have this

morning viewed those [alterations] going on in Bowdoin street. Mr. Coolidge's noble mansion, trees and all, are swept away, and 5 new brick houses are now building on the spot." ⁵⁶ The comment is without rancor, and yet one wonders what went through the elderly architect's mind on that morning more than a century ago as he surveyed the leveled site of this house which he had created and which, in turn, had helped to create following the American Revolution a new and brilliant architectural style that made Boston in the nineteenth century one of the most attractive cities on the eastern coast.

NOTES

¹ Asher Benjamin, *The Practice of Architecture* (Boston, 1833), Preface.

² These statements are based on information found in the "Taking" books of the Boston Assessors, City Hall, for the years in question, 1790-1795, Ward 7. No specific locations are given, nor do the Assessors tell us that Dr. Thomas Bulfinch was owner of the house in which his son, the architect, lived. The "takings" were geographical, however, and Bulfinch's name appears consistently throughout these five years between the names of John Southack and Elisha Sigourney, as does George Storer's from 1796 on. The Storer House, as we know from the deeds, belonged to Dr. Thomas Bulfinch after 1784 (Suffolk Deeds, 158: 152).

³ Suffolk Deeds, 42: 173, 174.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 85: 192.

⁵ Suffolk Probate Records, 58: 249.

⁶ Suffolk Deeds, 89: 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77: 226; 169: 105; *A Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, Containing the Statistics of the United States' Direct Tax of 1798, as Assessed on Boston . . .* (Boston, 1890), p. 273. (Hereafter cited as Record Commissioners Report, No. 22.)

⁸ Suffolk Deeds, 44: 29; 52: 112; 89: 251; 147: 261. This house had disappeared by 1798 when the records of the Direct Tax indicate that the original tract had been divided into two separate lots of 3,420 square feet which were then owned by Harrison Gray Otis. Each lot had a wooden dwelling of 800 square feet valued at \$3,500. (Record Commissioners Report, No. 22, p. 272.)

⁹ Suffolk Deeds, 107: 127; 157: 249; 170: 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 159: 51; Suffolk Probate Records, 66: 233; Suffolk Deeds, 170: 56.

¹¹ Suffolk Deeds, 173: 1; 179: 183.

¹² *Ibid.*, 179: 172. The bounds are described as follows: west, Middlecot St., 149' 4"; south, Joseph Callender, 102'; east, Dr. Thomas Bulfinch, 145' 2" (recorded as 155' 2" in all other deeds); north, Duncan Ingraham, 118'. These measurements remain constant until the property is enlarged by a later owner.

¹³ Board of Assessors, City Hall, Boston, "Taking" Books, 1794, 1795, Ward 7; Suffolk Deeds, 181: 255.

¹⁴ Ellen Susan Bulfinch, *The Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch Architect . . .* (Boston & New York, 1896), p. 98.

¹⁵ Suffolk Deeds, 182: 90.

¹⁶ Board of Assessors, "Taking" Books, 1796, Ward 7.

¹⁷ Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, pp. 107, 108 and 109.

¹⁸ Suffolk Deeds, 182: 90; 186: 268, from which the location can be quite accurately reconstructed. The Storer House, it will be remembered, had earlier been occupied by Charles Bulfinch himself.

¹⁹ Record Commissioners Report, No. 22, p. 278; Board of Assessors, "Taking" Books, 1801, Ward 7.

²⁰ This drawing has been reproduced as Fig. 27 of Walter M. Whitehill's *Boston / A Topographical History* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 51, where it is incorrectly assumed to be the house of the elder Joseph Coolidge.

²¹ Suffolk Deeds, 186: 268; 158: 152; 147: 48; 178: 100.

²² Board of Assessors, "Taking" Books, 1795, 1796, Ward 7.

²³ Suffolk Deeds, 182: 90.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 185: 83. Not until July 9, 1797, however, did he purchase the property outright from his father's assignees (Suffolk Deeds, 186: 268).

²⁵ Board of Assessors, "Taking" Books, 1800, Ward 7.

²⁶ Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

²⁷ Suffolk Deeds, 194: 96. The bounds described in the deed are as follows: east, Elisha Sigourney, 91'; south, George Storer, 7' 2"; west, Storer, 14'; south, Storer, 63'; west, "a new [Bulfinch] Street," 99' 6"; "Bowdoin Square," 71'. Elizabeth Sherburne Bowers, the grantee, was married on Mar. 11, 1800, to Dr. Thomas Danforth who is assessed for this property later in 1800 and entered in the "Taking" Books as "Physician just began Housekeeping" (Ward 7). Elizabeth Sherburne Danforth sold the house and land on Aug. 14, 1817, to Samuel T. Armstrong who was in possession until Sept. 3, 1835 (Suffolk Deeds, 265: 15; 395: 221).

²⁸ Suffolk Deeds, 556: 205; 574: 161 (plan).

²⁹ Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, pp. 142, 143.

³⁰ Board of Assessors, "Taking" Books, 1801, Ward 7.

³¹ Suffolk Deeds, 196: 286.

³² Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, p. 142. Miss Bulfinch confuses the Bulfinch Place and Bulfinch Street houses and the periods of occupancy.

³³ Suffolk Deeds, 196: 286. The property was bounded on the east by Cyprian Southack's heirs, 104' 10"; north, William Clap, 26' 2"; north, Southack's Court (Howard Street), 21' 6".

³⁴ Suffolk Deeds, 189: 47; 208: 26; 211: 104; 243: 107.

³⁵ Charles A. Place, *Charles Bulfinch / Architect and Citizen* (Boston & New York, 1925), p. 175. Lucy Watson resigned these premises on Jan. 5, 1814 (Suffolk Deeds, 243: 151). Bulfinch presumably remained here until the family moved to 3 Tremont St. in 1815.

³⁶ Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 147.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 190.

³⁸ Suffolk Deeds, 186: 241, 242. In 1797 Clap is assessed at \$7,000 for a "Large New House" at this location, the figure 7,000 representing a jump from 4,000 in 1796. The assessment was presumably made before Clap acquired title on July 15, 1797, and the jump is perhaps best explained as an upward revision of the valuation by the Assessors in light of the figure for which the property sold in 1796 (\$16,000). Since in the deeds the property is consistently valued at some \$16,000 from the time of the mortgage of 1794 it is virtually certain that the houses of 1797 and 1794 are the same. Consequently the description "New" must be general in intent, not specific.

³⁹ Record Commissioners Report, No. 22, p. 254.

⁴⁰ Suffolk Deeds, 217: 185. The description of the bounds is as follows: north, Bulfinch Place, 192'; east, Bulfinch St., 203' 6"; south, "a new [Allston] Street," 56' 6"; then B. P. Homer and John West; west, Middlecot St., 100'.

⁴¹ Suffolk Deeds, 217: 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 218: 65; 239: 62; 273: 266, 269, 270.

⁴³ Place, *op. cit.*, pp. 172, 175.

⁴⁴ Suffolk Deeds, 476: 130. The bounds are described as follows: east, Thompson, 94'; south, Parsons, 76' 9"; west, Bowdoin St., 26'; north, Samuel Dana, 27' 9"; west, Dana, 68' 10"; north, Bulfinch Place.

⁴⁵ Suffolk Deeds, 521: 141; 612: 245; 615: 112; 996: 193 (with plan).

⁴⁶ Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, p. 142. Only one pictorial representation of the house before alteration is known to exist. This can be found in a copy (in the Society's files) of a photograph taken before 1870 showing the Bulfinch Chapel, so-called, at the corner of Bulfinch Street and Place. At the far right is a glimpse of the Bulfinch House with its blind arcades, pilasters, swag panels and square windows in the third story. Most important of all, the three central windows of the second story are shown, each with a frieze and cornice, details for which no other evidence exists. A similar window treatment can be found in the study by Bulfinch for the Derby House in Salem in 1795.

⁴⁷ Suffolk Deeds, 202: 163.

⁴⁸ Board of Assessors, "Transfer" Books, 1804, Ward 7.

⁴⁹ Suffolk Deeds, 234: 88. The bounds are described as follows: Southack's Court, 63'; east, Elam and Francis, 190'; south, Francis, 90'; west, Somerset St., 190'. Stephen Codman occupied at least part of this house, for he is listed here in the Directories from 1805 onwards. The *Boston Globe* for Aug. 5, 1912, announces that the business establishments had been "banished from the premises, preparatory to gutting the building and transforming it into an apartment house." In this much-altered form it still survives.

⁵⁰ The lot on which this house stood was purchased by Kirk Boott and William Pratt for \$7,000 on Jan. 5, 1797, bounded west on Harrison Gray Otis, 184'; south, 89'; east on a "passage-way" (the modern Bulfinch St.), 144', and on "Bowdoin Square," 117'. (Suffolk Deeds, 185: 82.) In 1803 Kirk Boott was assessed \$4,000 on a "Cellar & Lott," and the following year, 1804, \$6,000 on a "New house" (Board of Assessors, "Transfer" Books, 1803, 1804, Ward 7).

⁵¹ This double house of stone was built by Samuel Parkman of Boston, apparently for his daughters. On Feb. 10, 1810, he acquired the southern half of the lot with "buildings" from Joseph Newell of Worcester for \$12,500; Samuel Parkman's own "land and house" accounted for the remaining half of the property (Suffolk Deeds, 232: 46). The original design for the building, a story less in height, is preserved among Bulfinch's drawings now on deposit at the Library of Congress. The paper is watermarked 1806, though the house could not have been constructed before 1810, and is traditionally dated 1815. On Jan. 6, 1818, Samuel Parkman deeded the northern half of the new house and land to his son-in-law, Edward Tuckerman, Jr., for \$24,000. The southern half, as Parkman tells us in the deed, was "Occupied by my daughter Blake. . ." (Suffolk Deeds, 257: 22). The building was taken down in 1902.

⁵² Suffolk Deeds, 170: 16. The bounds are described as follows: north, Cambridge St., 182' 3"; east, Middlecot St., 179' 6"; south and east, Joseph Callender, 119' and 140'; south, William Homer, 52'; west, Temple St., 309'.

⁵³ "Extracts from Diary of Nathaniel Cutting," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1871-1873), XII, 61, 63.

⁵⁴ Board of Assessors, "Taking" Books, 1793, 1798, Ward 7.

⁵⁵ Record Commissioners Report, No. 22, p. 254. There is a ground plan of the building on file at the Suffolk Registry of Deeds, dated Oct. 6, 1834 (383: 39). The dimensions as noted for the "Mansion H." are as follows: 47.6 feet wide at the front, 54.6 feet wide at the east end, and 52.4 feet wide at the west end.

⁵⁶ Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, p. 301.