

The First Remodeling of the Province House, 1728

By FISKE KIMBALL

SINCE the examination of the Province House in 1922 at the time of its demolition, it has been realized that the house, originally built by Peter Sergeant in 1679 (the date appearing on the iron balcony rail over the door) owed the form familiar to us in the earliest surviving views [see Cover] to some remodeling in the early eighteenth century. The date of the alterations was revealed to us in documents published by the Massachusetts Historical Society and in Volumes I and VIII of the *Journal of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts*.

The first volume of these recorded the purchase of the house by the Colony in 1715, but made clear that no great changes were made in it at that time. June 18, 1716, the Treasurer was directed "to purchase the hangings of Two Rooms," and on December 4, there was an appropriation of £33 for these and for "Two large Looking Glasses remaining in the House." In the years following, bills were paid for what must have been small repairs and improvements, since none of them exceeded £25 or so.¹

With the coming of Governor William Burnet, however, improvements were undertaken on an entirely different scale. December 26, 1727, it was:

Ordered to propose that the Province House be forthwith repaired, and put into suitable Condition for the Reception of His Excellency and His Family, which he hath signified to His

Honour the Lieutenant Governor will be very acceptable to him.

(On January 8, there followed:) Resolved, That Mr. Speaker, Mr. Cooke and Mr. Cushing be a Committee to have the Care of the Effecting the Repairs of the Province House for the Reception and Accommodation of His Excellency William Burnet Esq; (and his Family) who may speedily be expected to take upon him the Charge of this Government, The Repairs to be Effectuated being as followeth viz, That the Great lower Room in the Front be wainscotted; after the best and newest Fashion, that the Ceiling in that Room be lowred, and the doors altered, That the windows be altered and sash Lights made throughout the House, the Windows to be Cased several of them with Seats, That there be a Landry built where the Outkitchen stands upon that, by raising a Story thereon; That the Brick Wall in the Front being now very much out of Repair, be taken down and Rebuilt with new Bricks as it now stands, or with a Pallisado Fence on the Top thereof as hereafter may be thought adviseable; That the Lanthorn or Cupola on the Top of the House, being grown very weak, be well and sufficiently repared and made strong with New Doors and sash Windows. The Paved Walk from the Gate to the Steps entring the House, to be taken up and a-new laid, and that the said Committee be Impowred, to Cause such other Repairs to be Effectuated, as they in their best prudence and discretion shall Judge Necessary to be done.²

On October 24, 1728, an account signed by Thomas Cushing was presented, "amounting to £2299, 18s, 6d, 3q, for sundry repairs on the Province-House where his Excellency dwells,"³ and on December 18, a further account for £1,155, 17s, 6d.⁴

² *Ibid.*, VIII, 100.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 359.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 387.

¹ *Journal of The House of Representatives* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1919), I, 16, 105, 167.

From these amounts and from the prescriptions of the first resolution it is evident that the Province House then took on substantially the aspect it retained until the early nineteenth century. As the cupola was rebuilt it will have been at this time that the front and rear walls were raised a story to make three in all. At this time, too, the columns on either

side of the doorway, may well have been inserted below the balcony, so difficult to imagine in 1679. Even in 1728 they would have constituted the oldest example we know of such a feature in the Colonies. It is clear that the original, stepped-gable house had casement windows, since the committee was instructed to replace them with sash.