

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

REMARKS OF THE HISTORIAN
OF THE
MASSACHUSETTS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JOSEPH R. GALLITANO
OF
PLYMOUTH
DURING A SESSION
OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
JANUARY 11, 1998

[Ordered printed by the House of Representatives
on motion of Representative
Mary Jeanette Murray of Cohasset.]

THE THIRD OF PERIODIC PRESENTATIONS ON
THE HISTORY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES DURING A SESSION OF THE HOUSE
ON JANUARY 11, 1998.

"This Is The Way It Was In This Great House."

by Representative Joseph R. Gallitano.

“THIS IS THE WAY IT WAS IN THIS GREAT HOUSE”

Mr. Speaker, my fellow Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen. Today we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Bulfinch State House, which predates this wonderful chamber, which has recently been refurbished, by almost 100 years. This great house has so much beauty, so much history, so many stories to tell, I urge you all, members and visitors alike, to tour this building and stop to breathe in the history and the grandeur of this amazing structure.

Mr. Speaker, it is my intention, today, in this third presentation of the continuous series of “The Way It Was In This Great House” to transport us back 200 years, then forward 100 years, and finally to bring us back to this very moment — all in five minutes’ time. So away we go. It is January 11, 1798, Governor Increase Sumner is about to lead a procession of dignitaries to the new State House on Beacon Hill. Many of the members of this gathering are veterans of the American Revolution, which we must remember had only been brought to a conclusion 17 years prior. And now they were about to march to the grandest building ever constructed in this nation. At this time there was no Washington Capitol Building. In fact, it would be some years later that the architect of this great house, Charles Bulfinch would be called upon to not only complete the nation’s capitol building in 1818, but would design and build from his plans the now famous rotunda of the Capitol Building. It is no coincidence that the Capitol in Washington bears a marked resemblance to our beloved golden domed State House.

But more importantly this building stood for the legitimacy and success of the Revolution in the place where Freedom, the Commonwealth, and a Nation were conceived. This was indeed a special place. For in its earliest days the people of the Town of Boston called it Beacon Hill, this most center hill of three hills known as the “Tremount”. It was on this most center and highest hill of the three, that a pole was erected, 65 feet high with a cross bar to hold a pot of tar, that when lit served as a warning beacon to the surrounding settlements of Indian raids.

And on this day in 1798 the honored gathering must have remembered their fellow patriot from the Revolution. That man, who signed his name first and so large on the declaration to be sent to King George and who would become the first Governor of Massachusetts

under its new Constitution. For it was John Hancock's dream that a grand State House be placed here, so much so that his homestead, which originally occupied this site, was moved, and his estate conveyed the land for this structure and the commons for the benefit of the people. Hancock did not live to see his dream come to fruition, but he is nonetheless very much alive in spirit within this building.

Within the Bulfinch Chamber some 97 years after that opening day, a Speaker of the House would take a final look around that Chamber, for the next day, the House of Representatives would move into a new Chamber, the one in which we are gathered today. Speaker George von L. Meyer described the State House as a "beacon for the mariner and landmark for the townships surrounding it, as the Parthenon and the great statue of Athena stood upon the Acropolis of Athens."

Referring to this building as a noble structure, he suggested that the time had come when the State House should be regarded not alone for purposes of utility, but as a valuable historical monument, to be cherished by the people as one of its priceless possessions. For this great House, with all of its astonishing craftsmanship in Italian marble and tiles and splendid works of art, possesses something far more precious that enriches these treasures, the words and deeds of the immortals who served in these chambers: John Adams, Bowdoin, John Quincy Adams, Webster and Mann. Among so many others, some of whom have their names listed in the Ring of Fame surrounding this Chamber.

This structure I would respectfully submit to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the members and our guests here today, is not just a place of government, but one of education, heritage and destiny. Great events, actions and debates have occurred here and as a result great people have emerged in service to the people of this Commonwealth. When you walk the halls today, feel the history and you will believe and know that the dreams of freedom of those patriots who marched to this civic temple, are alive and well. And we as members of this historic governing body will always keep that spirit alive, provided we keep in mind those words of advice given to the members of the House by Speaker Meyer on the day before taking occupancy in this beautiful chamber, when he said:

"Let us not forget the responsibility of man as a member of society. In all our acts remember that the public good is paramount to every private consideration."

And in 1798 and in 1895, that's the way it was in this great House.
Respectfully submitted this 11th day of January, 1998.