

Historical Fact Sheet

The Old South Meeting House was built in 1729 as a Puritan meeting house. The congregation included famous colonists such as inventor and statesman Benjamin Franklin, patriot leader Samuel Adams, and the first African American to publish a book, Phillis Wheatley. Old South Meeting House was the largest building in colonial Boston. In the years leading to the American Revolution, colonists gathered at Old South Meeting House to challenge British rule.

Old South's Role in the Revolution

March 1770, after the Boston Massacre, where five colonists were killed by British soldiers, thousands of outraged citizens gathered at Old South to protest. Samuel Adams led the meeting and succeeded in obtaining Governor Hutchinson's promise to withdraw all British troops from Boston. From 1771 to 1775, rousing speeches were given by notable patriots such as John Hancock and Dr. Joseph Warren, to commemorate the Boston Massacre.

December 16, 1773, is a date that sealed Old South's place in history. On that cold December night, more than 5,000 colonists crowded into Old South, to participate in a fiery debate about the tax on tea. When final attempts at compromise failed, Samuel Adams cried, "This meeting can do no more to save the country!" Samuel Adam's cry served as a secret signal to the Sons of Liberty, who were sitting in the back of Old South Meeting House. They raced to Griffin's Wharf, and dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor. This event became known as the **Boston Tea Party**.

Old South's reputation as a patriot meeting place had dire consequences during the American Revolution. While the British occupied Boston in 1775, the "Redcoats" destroyed and vandalized visible symbols of the patriotic cause. Old South was turned into a riding school -- they tore out the pews, installed a bar in the upper gallery, and hauled in loads of dirt and practiced jumping their horses.

1782 - 1783 Old South was restored by patriot and mason Thomas Dawes, one of Boston's first architects.

Saved from Demolition

In 1872, Old South's congregation sold the building for the paltry sum of \$1,350 and moved to a new location in Boston's Back Bay. The Old South Meeting House seemed doomed to destruction, but at the final hour, Bostonians including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott, and Wendell Phillips, campaigned to save Old South from the wrecking ball. It was the first successful historic preservation effort in New England. In 1877, Old South was incorporated as a history museum and historic site.

Old South Meeting House Lives On

In 1929, Old South Meeting House created a free speech policy, opened its doors to controversial speakers denied a platform elsewhere. Sustaining the building's tradition as a community meeting place for the free exchange of ideas lies at the very heart of Old South's mission. For over 250 years, Old South has been in continuous use as a community gathering place.

The Life of Old South Meeting House

1729

Built as a Puritan Meeting House

1770

Town meeting to protest the Boston Massacre

1773

Mass meetings lead to Boston Tea Party

1775

Occupied by British as a riding school

1862

Union recruiting station during the Civil War

1872

Nearly destroyed by Great Fire of Boston

1873-75

Served as United States Post Office

1876

Saved from demolition in the first successful historical preservation effort in New England

1877

Incorporated as a museum and historic site

1929

Free speech policy established for building

1995-97

Comprehensive renovation of building

2000

Permanent exhibition *Voices of Protest* opens.