

Two Newly Identified American Views on Historical Blue Staffordshire

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Credits

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BY HAYDEN GOLDBERG

FOR NEARLY HALF a century collectors and scholars have puzzled over the identity of the buildings depicted in the scenes transfer printed on the teapot shown in Figure 1, and on various other parts of the tea set to which it belongs. Until now, the maker of the set had also not been documented.

The question of the buildings' identity first arose when the views, transfer printed on another teapot, were illustrated in *ANTIQUES* in September 1938.¹ There the similarity was noted between the building in the view at the left in Figure 1 and the Exchange Coffee House in Boston, but the scene on the right was not identified. The following year, a cup bearing the two views and its saucer, bearing a view easily identifiable as the Boston statehouse, came to light.² The latter was derived from a watercolor sketch by Dobbins of the Boston Common in 1804, which was used by three of the many Staffordshire potters who produced wares decorated with scenes of the Boston statehouse—Enoch Wood and Sons, Joseph Stubbs, and John Rogers and Sons. However, none of those potters were known to have employed the flower-and-leaf design used as a border on the cup and saucer and around the pictorial reserves on the teapot. In the ensuing years a coffeepot, and a slop bowl with the unidentified scenes and a nine-inch plate with the Boston statehouse have been recorded, all with the distinctive flower-and-leaf border.³ Then, in 1981, the plate shown in Figure 2 surfaced. It bears the Dobbins view of the statehouse, has the same border found on all the pieces discussed thus far, and, most importantly, bears the impressed mark of Enoch Wood and Sons (see Fig. 2a).

Of the thirteen Staffordshire potters who are known to have produced American scenes in dark blue, Enoch Wood was by far the most prolific. He is known to have turned out at least fifty American views, making it not unlikely that the scenes on the teapot were also American. Now they have been identified. Both views are of Boston, although none of the principal buildings depicted still stands. As suggested in *ANTIQUES* in 1938, the domed structure in the view at the left in Figure 1 is the Exchange Coffee House, completed in 1808 to the designs of Asher Benjamin (1773–1845). The building in the view at the right in Figure 1 is India Wharf, designed by Charles Bulfinch and completed in 1807.

At the time, the Exchange Coffee House was almost surely the largest building in Boston. It was considerably larger than the statehouse, which had been completed in 1797 to Bulfinch's plans, and it cost more than four times as much as the statehouse. Indeed, the builder and other investors went bankrupt before the Coffee House was completed.

Quoting a source of 1809, Caleb Snow described the exterior of the Coffee House in his *History of Boston* of 1825 as follows:

"The front in Congress-street was highly ornamented. Six marble pilasters, of the Ionic order, upon a rustic base-ment supported an architrave and cornice of the same; and the whole front, which had an arched door way, was crowned with a Corinthian pediment." [Snow continues] On this side there were 48 superb Venetian windows. There was another entrance towards State-street, through an Ionick porch or vestibule, and this front was ornamented with ten Ionick pilasters, and lighted by 58 windows. There was also an entrance, for the lodgers in the hotel, on Salter's Court, having a passage for the ingress and egress of carriages.⁴

The grandiose interior of the enormous structure was designed by Solomon Willard (1783–1861), who later designed the Bunker Hill Monument. The plan

Fig. 1. Teapot made by Enoch Wood and Sons, Burslem, c. 1819. Transfer-printed earthenware; height 6, length 11 ¼ inches. The top is a replacement. *Except as noted, the objects illustrated are in the collection of the author and photographs are by Helga Photo Studio.*



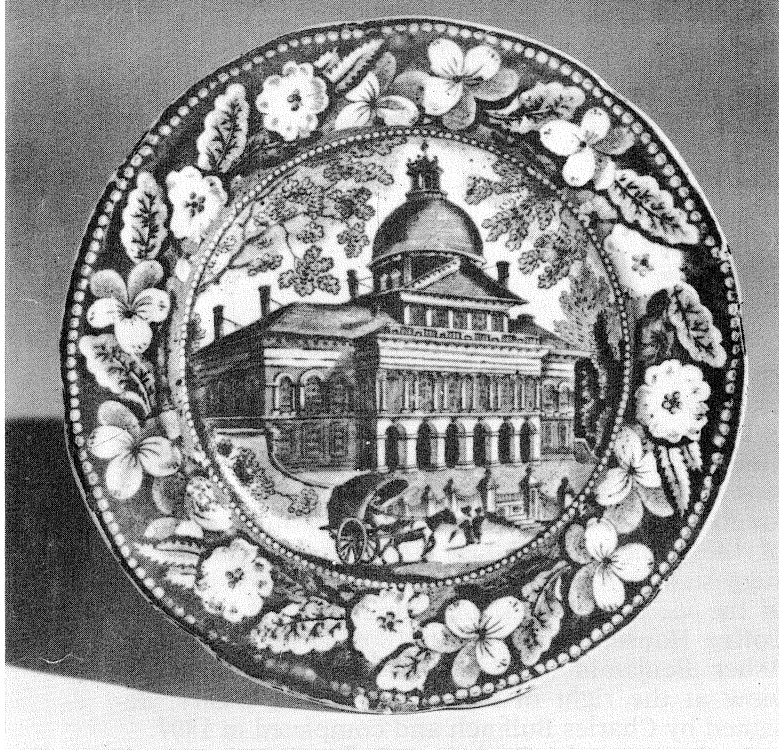


Fig. 2. Plate made by Enoch Wood and Sons, c. 1819. Transfer-printed earthenware; diameter 5½ inches. An impressed mark identical to that shown in Fig. 2a appears on the back.

Fig. 2a. Impressed mark of Enoch Wood and Sons on the back of a plate.



included space on the main floor for the first indoor stock or commodities exchange, but this was never used "as the merchants from long habit, prefer to stand in the street, even during the inclement winter months."⁵ Above what was to have been the exchange rose a giant atrium that extended six stories to the observatory in the great dome. Surrounding it were five ascending balconies, proceeding from the Corinthian to the Doric order, all connected by a spiral staircase, from which radiated more than two hundred rooms, including shops, a reading room, a Masonic hall, and the hotel, which had a dining room seating three hundred, and a two-story ball-room.

The new Coffee House took the usually staid town by storm. It superseded venerable Faneuil Hall as the site of official celebrations and became the principal music auditorium in the city, replacing the Concert Hall of 1756.⁶ In July 1817, for example, the Democratic-Republican president, James Monroe, paid a five-day visit to Boston, and the official ban-

quet in his honor was held in the elegant dining room of the Coffee House on July 2. During his stay, Monroe occupied "superb apartments" at the Coffee House, selected by Charles Bulfinch.⁷

The days of the Exchange, though brilliant, were brief. On November 3, 1818, a mere ten years after it was completed, a fire broke out; three hours later the great glass dome crashed to the ground, and the walls of the burned-out shell collapsed.⁸ One of the few reminders of the building's glory is the view preserved on the Enoch Wood tea set. The fire may explain the extreme rarity of pieces bearing this view. It seems likely that the drawings of the building were sent to Wood before the Coffee House burned, and the first pieces made before word of the fire reached England. Perhaps production of the Coffee House view was then halted. If this is the case, the tea set dates from 1818 and 1819, and thus is one of the earliest examples of historical blue Staffordshire recorded.⁹

More than any other person, Charles Bulfinch was responsible for the architectural transformation of Boston in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when Massachusetts was the shipping capital of America. Of the many buildings he designed the least known today are his banks, insurance companies, markets, and other commercial buildings, in which was generated the wealth that was spent on the beautiful houses for which Bulfinch is best remembered. None of his commercial buildings survives.

The India Wharf and India Stores, which Bulfinch designed, were, like the Exchange Coffee House, the most ambitious commercial undertakings of their kind in America at the time. Comprised of about sixty warehouses and stores along Broad and India streets and an additional thirty-two on India Wharf, this unified industrial complex stretched from the Long Wharf for half a mile along the Boston waterfront.¹⁰ The developers, Harrison Gray Otis,¹¹ Francis Cabot Lowell, James Lloyd, and Uriah Cotting, paid Bulfinch \$40 for the plans in 1803.¹² In 1807 the investors sold thirty of the completed stores for \$206,000.¹³ Soon thereafter, however, Jefferson imposed the Embargo Act, ending all American shipping to foreign countries and thus crippling Boston. Along India Wharf ships rotted at their berths, and goods piled up in the warehouses. Agitation for secession was rampant, armed mobs roamed the streets, and Federalism became more ingrained in Boston. But prosperity resumed along India Wharf with the lifting of the embargo in 1809. Although President Madison declared war on England in 1812, the wealthy Boston merchants along India Wharf continued to ship supplies to Britain for her war against Napoleon in Spain, beef to the English army in Canada, and provisions to the British fleet off the coast of Massachusetts. In 1813, when Madison reimposed an embargo on trade with England, Harrison Gray Otis summoned New England Federalists to the Hartford Convention, where they threatened once again to secede if their demands were not met for Constitutional amendments limiting the war-making and embargo powers of the president. The end of the war mooted those issues, and nowhere



Fig. 3. *Boston Exchange Coffee House, Built 1808... Burnt 1818*, engraved by Abel Bowen (1790–1850), c. 1825. Signed at lower right, *A Bowen Sc.* 5¼ by 9¼ inches. The print is taken from Caleb Snow's *History of Boston* (Boston, 1825), opposite p. 330. Snow devoted more than two pages of text and this illustration to the Exchange Coffee House, although the building had burned seven years before the book was published.

was the jubilation greater for the Treaty of Ghent than in the native city of John Quincy Adams, one of those who negotiated it. A great peace celebration was held at the Exchange Coffee House.¹⁴

In the decades that followed, Boston's most prosperous era, an India Wharf address was to maritime trade what Wall Street is to finance today. But eventually the glamorous stores and warehouses became outmoded, eclipsed by more modern facilities. The half mile of buildings along the shore were torn down in the 1860's to make way for Atlantic Avenue. The great India Wharf building, of warm red brick and gleaming white marble with its great arched cart entrance along the south side, was shortened from its approximately 425-foot length and lingered on in shabby obscurity until it was demolished in 1962.

The views used by Enoch Wood as sources for the tea set have not yet come to light. None of the three known early nineteenth-century views of the Exchange Coffee House (see Fig. 3)¹⁵ shows the building from the same angle as it is shown on the teapot, which appears to be a view of the south side of the building, facing Salter's Court (now Congress Square). No early engravings or drawings of India Wharf are known, but fortunately photographs exist that show it from the same perspective as the teapot (see Fig. 4). Perhaps the most important feature of the view Wood used is the right background, which depicts several of the India Stores. It has been believed that no pictures of that part of the commercial complex existed, although what is presumed to be Bulfinch's original elevation of some of the stores does survive.¹⁶

Enoch Wood's tea set adds two previously unknown views to the select group of American historical blue Staffordshire. It also preserves unique views of two significant buildings in the cultural and economic life of the early republic.

¹ P. 162.

² *ANTIQUES*, November 1939, p. 244.

³ The coffeepot was recorded in Ellouise Baker Larsen, *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1975), p. 235, No. 635; the slop bowl was brought to my attention by Richard Marden; and the plate was recorded in David Arman, "Historical Staffordshire—Recent Discoveries," *Maine Antique Digest*, March 1977, p. 25C, No. 9. Arman described the plate as "Boston State House by Wood. Variet [sic] border previously unrecorded," but he did not note whether the plate was marked.

⁴ Caleb Snow, *History of Boston*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1828), p. 330. The first part of the passage is from *Omnium Gatherum* of November 1809.

⁵ Snow, *History of Boston*, p. 330.

⁶ Harold Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), p. 277.

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 227.

⁸ Snow, *History of Boston*, pp. 329–330. John Ritto Penniman (1782–1841) painted a picture of the fire, which is illustrated in *ANTIQUES* for July 1981, p. 156. A second, more modest, Exchange Coffee House was built on the site of the first.

⁹ The only earlier recorded piece of American historical blue Staffordshire is a plate bearing a portrait of George Washington made by Joshua Heath about 1791 (see *ANTIQUES* for July 1981, pp. 178–182).

¹⁰ Bulfinch's over-all plan for the project is illustrated in Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, p. 192.

¹¹ Coincidentally, Harrison Gray Otis was also one of the developers who built the Exchange Coffee House.

¹² Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, p. 188.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁴ *The American Heritage History of the Making of the Nation: 1783–1860* (New York, 1968), p. 88.

¹⁵ Besides the engraving shown in Fig. 3, there is an engraved view of the Coffee House by a Wightman, which appeared in *Omnium Gatherum* in 1809 as well as on stock certificates for shareholders in the enterprise. (Copies of both are in the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.) Wightman's view, like that shown in Fig. 3, depicts the Congress Street and State Street façades of the Coffee House. John Ritto Penniman's painting of the burning of the Coffee House (see n. 8) is a view from the southeast, showing the Congress Street side and, at right angles, part of the side that faced Salter's Court, also known as Quaker Lane.

¹⁶ Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, p. 241. Bulfinch's scheme for the wharf itself does not survive.

Fig. 4. India Wharf, designed by Charles Bulfinch (1763–1841), built 1803–1807, destroyed 1962, in a photograph taken before 1868. *Bostonian Society*; photograph by courtesy of the society.

