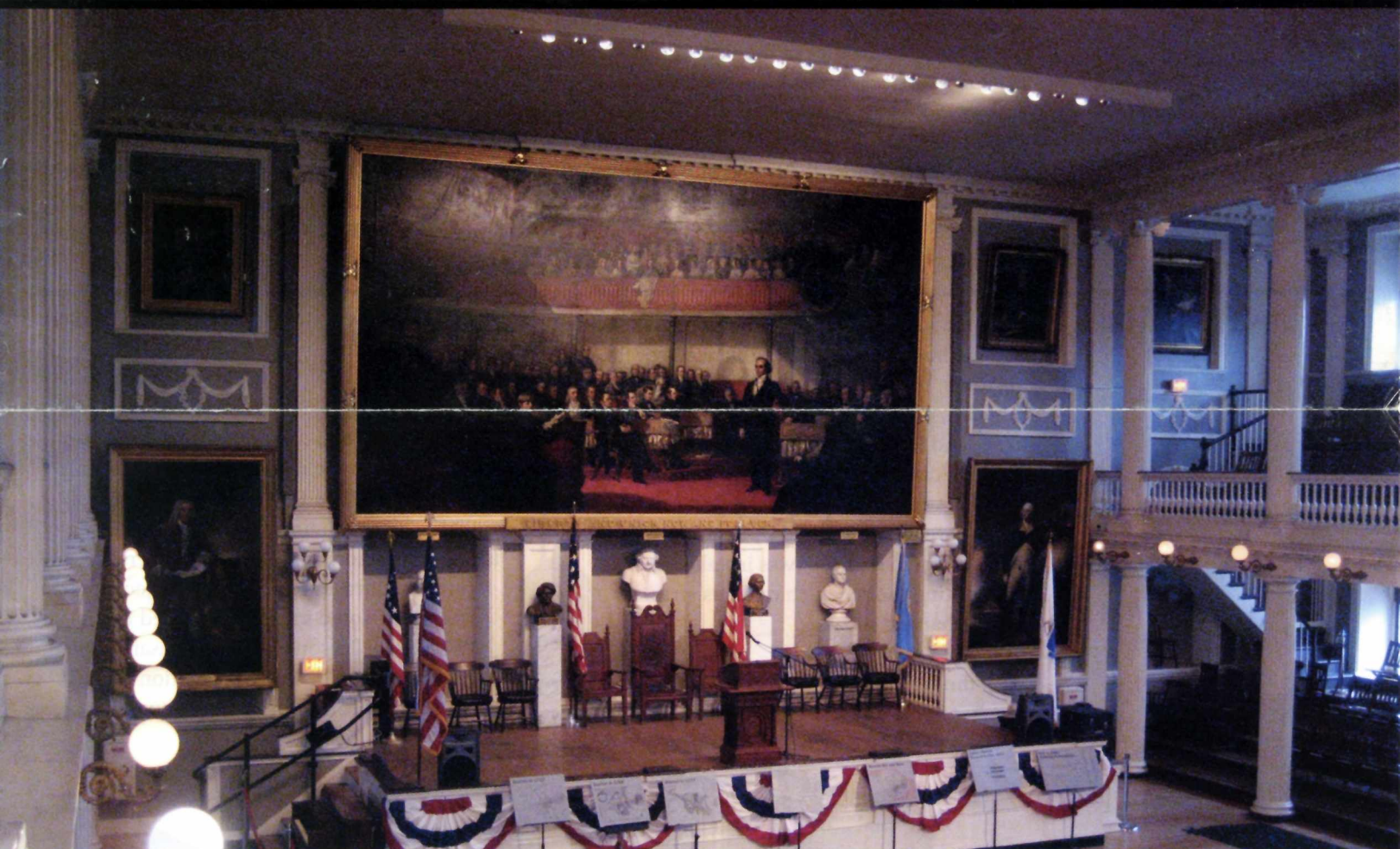


Faneuil Hall

The Cradle of Liberty

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Boston National Historical Park
Boston, MA



Introduction

Often referred to as the Cradle of Liberty, Faneuil Hall has served as a marketplace and meeting hall since it was built in 1742. The building became the first town hall in Boston and during the years leading up to the American Revolution the Great Hall on the second floor was the scene of many meetings where Bostonians voiced their dissent against the oppressive policies of the British Parliament. Faneuil Hall still provides a forum for debate on the issues of today.

Faneuil Hall 1742

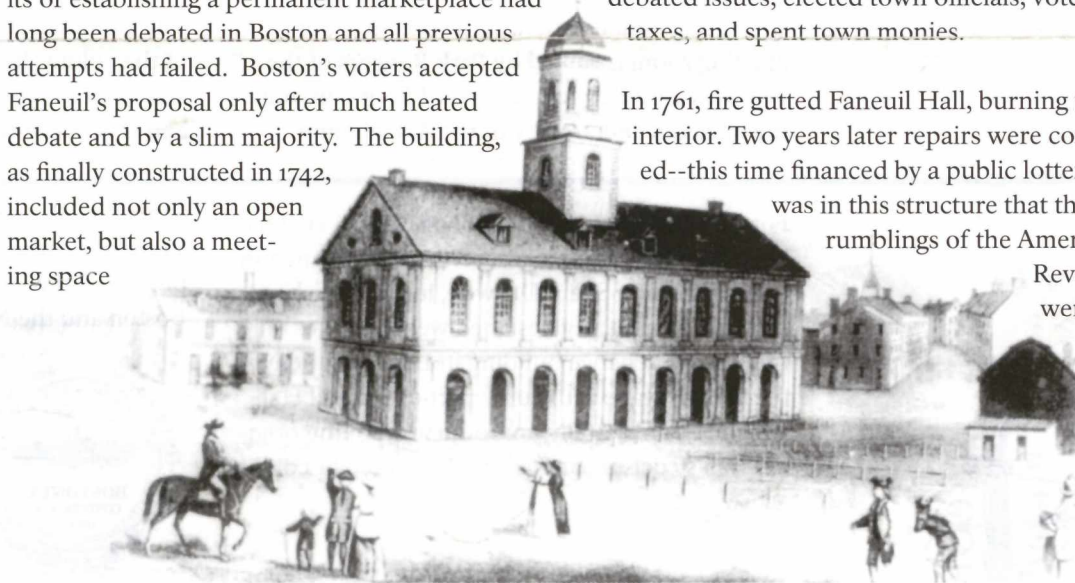
In early 18th century Boston a number of merchant families amassed great wealth through shipping and trade. Codfish, caught off the coast, were dried, salted, and traded in the West Indies for molasses and rum. These products were, in turn, exchanged in Europe for manufactured goods, or along the west coast of Africa, for slaves. One of the wealthiest Boston merchants of this era was Peter Faneuil.

Faneuil proposed to mark his success by building a central food market in his hometown. The merits of establishing a permanent marketplace had long been debated in Boston and all previous attempts had failed. Boston's voters accepted Faneuil's proposal only after much heated debate and by a slim majority. The building, as finally constructed in 1742, included not only an open market, but also a meeting space

for the town government. The hall, named for Faneuil, was built on land gained by the filling of the small cove near the ancient and dilapidated town dock.

The lower level of the hall was divided into "stalls" which were leased for market purposes. Meat, vegetables, and dairy products could be purchased there in convenient, regulated surroundings on a daily basis. The large meeting room on the second floor became Boston's official town hall. Here, in public session, Bostonians debated issues, elected town officials, voted local taxes, and spent town monies.

In 1761, fire gutted Faneuil Hall, burning the interior. Two years later repairs were completed--this time financed by a public lottery. It was in this structure that the first rumblings of the American Revolution were felt.



“The Cradle of Liberty”

The town meetings held in Faneuil Hall should only have concerned themselves with local issues. In the mid-1700s, however, the discussion turned to the taxation policies of the British Empire, and Faneuil Hall became the focus of revolutionary activity in Boston. At times protest meetings held at the hall spilled over into incidents of violence on the streets. Under the leadership of James Otis, Samuel Adams, Dr. Joseph Warren and other “Sons of Liberty,” debates led to opposition to the Sugar Tax of 1764, the Stamp Act of 1765, and

other British political maneuvers. In December of 1773, sessions took place here concerning a newly arrived consignment of tea and the tax to be paid on it.

Though the rhetoric expressed here concerned only one community, Boston, reports were carried throughout the colonies and led them together towards unity and independence. Activities here earned Faneuil Hall its name as America’s “Cradle of Liberty.”

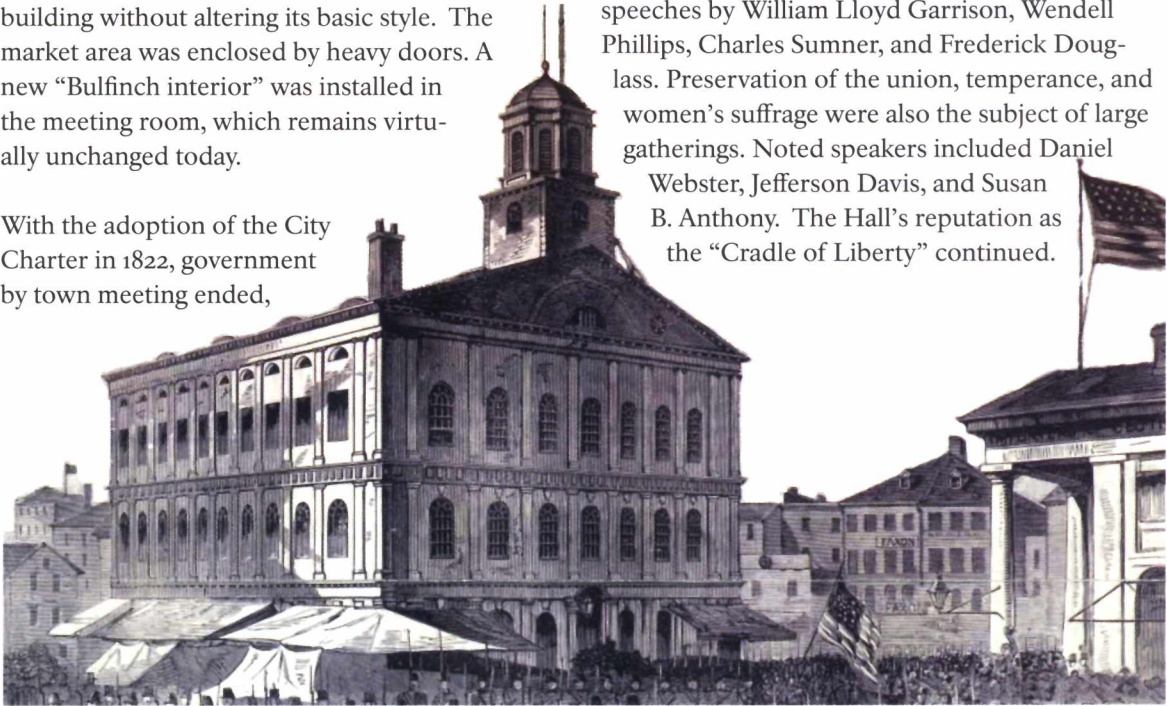
Bulfinch’s Faneuil Hall

After the Revolution, the size of Faneuil Hall became inadequate to meet the needs of the growing town. In 1805, Boston called upon Charles Bulfinch, one of America’s foremost architects, to expand Faneuil Hall. In a masterful design, Bulfinch doubled the width and height of the building without altering its basic style. The market area was enclosed by heavy doors. A new “Bulfinch interior” was installed in the meeting room, which remains virtually unchanged today.

With the adoption of the City Charter in 1822, government by town meeting ended,

and the Hall was no longer the center of local political activity.

However, it remained a forum for the debate of national issues. Anti-slavery advocates held numerous rallies in the 1840s and 1850s, featuring speeches by William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and Frederick Douglass. Preservation of the union, temperance, and women’s suffrage were also the subject of large gatherings. Noted speakers included Daniel Webster, Jefferson Davis, and Susan B. Anthony. The Hall’s reputation as the “Cradle of Liberty” continued.



Faneuil Hall Today

Into the 21st century, Faneuil Hall has remained an active and important place for Bostonians. In the early 19th century the three granite structures of the Quincy Market were built to the east of the Hall. These, along with Faneuil Hall’s market stalls, continued to be Boston’s wholesale food distribution center until the 1960s. During the 1970s, the entire Faneuil Hall area underwent a major renewal, and today the stalls purvey food to the thousands of visitors each day.

The meeting room at Faneuil Hall still serves the people of Boston as a public meeting place as well. National issues continue to be discussed from its stage, but more frequently, the Hall is the site of debates on community issues, high school graduations, and naturalization ceremonies for new Americans. Peter Faneuil’s original Hall was intended to serve Bostonians as a market place for food on one level, and a market place for ideas on the second. Today this tradition continues.

Visiting Faneuil Hall

The ground floor of Faneuil Hall contains shops and eating establishments. The second floor meeting room is staffed by Park Rangers of the National Park Service. The third floor contains the museum and armory of the Ancient and

Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts. The Company, founded in 1638 for the defense of the colony, has occupied space in Faneuil Hall since 1746. The Hall is open throughout the year and is accessible to persons who are disabled.



For two centuries, the symbol of Faneuil Hall has been the grasshopper weathervane. Fashioned in 1742 by Deacon Shem Drowne, it may have been inspired by similarly designed weathervanes on the Royal Exchange building in London. Today, the weathervane is the only part of Faneuil Hall which remains totally unmodified from the original 1742 structure, and is a fine example of colonial artistry.

Faneuil Hall, owned by the City of Boston, is a unit of Boston National Historical Park. It is preserved through the cooperation of the City of Boston and the National Park Service.

