

64 BEACON STREET (HOUSE)
Beacon Hill National Historical Landmark District
Suffolk County — BOSTON
Massachusetts

HABS MA-1319
MA-1319

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

64 BEACON STREET (HOUSE)

HABS No. MA-1319

Location: 64 Beacon Street, Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts. The House is located within the Beacon Hill National Historic Landmark District.

Significance: The building was designed by Ephraim Marsh, an architect, and built in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston in 1821. It was historically associated with Elizabeth Boyer Coolidge and Taber H. Swett, but is commonly known as the King's Chapel Rectory and Church House today.¹

Materials: Field measurements from the May 29, 1933, site visit focus on the front porch and include a typescript entitled, "data concerning the brick house at 64 Beacon St. Boston Mass (given to the writer [R.P. Walsh] by the owner, May 29th, 1933)." A transcription of the data collected follows:

The owner of 64 Beacon Street is Col. Doctor L. Vernon Briggs. Dr. Briggs purchased the house in 1908. The last time before 1908 that papers had been passed on the house was in 1811, and the process of transfer involved some seventy-two (72) signatures. This work took time and in one instance much persuasion. Papers were sent [sic] to Italy and as far west as California. One lady, in 1908 a young widow, persistently held back the Doctor's plans to establish a clear title to his newly acquired property. A lawyer, Mr. Tudor friend of the young lady and employed in the final work of transfer prevailed on her to sign the papers. Her objection concerned motives deeper than and more lasting than finance. She was the wife of a signatory of the old deed, whose family had so strongly objected to his marriage that he was practically ostracized. Her young husband took the ban so much to heart that he committed suicide. The widow determined never to have anything to do with his family and so she refused to sign the transfer papers until finally persuaded by Mr. Tudor.

Twenty-five years ago (1908) the purchase price of 64 Beacon Street was \$50,000. It had no mortgage on it. To-day [sic] (1933) the house is assessed for \$75,000.

In 1825 a fire sweep [sic] away the porch and thus is perhaps accounted for the different orders on the porch of 64 and that of 63 which is the other half of a duplex house. Number 64 to-day has a Greek Doric column; number 63, a Greek Ionic.

The cast iron hand rail on the porch of 64 was set up by Dr. Briggs at the suggestion of his wife who was a Miss Cabot.

¹ Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), Inventory No. BOS.14905.

Many years ago when Dr. Briggs had the vestibule renovated, one of the two carved, square blocks at the head of the head of door entering the hall fell off. On the back of it was written in pencil the name of the carver (of Italian derivation), also the date and these words, "we had some rum punch this afternoon."

The windows of this house have many lights of a unique purple hue. These originals (for many of the old panes have been replaced by glass fired a slightly darker color) came from England in the 18th century and were not colored, they purpled later in place, and probably, as the Doctor said, from the New England atmosphere. He pointed out one light which was badly cracked and said it caused by the cannon fire set off on the Parade Ground on the Common just across the street. The day that glass was cracked the maids of the house had forgotten to open that window. All the windows have mahogany sash and frame.

25 years ago when the Doctor was having many improvements and restorations made he met an elderly lady at the door who said she once lived in that house and that she could give the Dr. a carved panel that came out of the house. This panel was brought around and was found to fit in exactly in the center of the frame of a double door on the 1st floor between the front and rear of the house. When the Dr. took the house this door was blocked up. The lady said her name was Mrs. Cary.

[hand-written, in pencil] By Walsh