

from our collections

A Revolutionary Relic

At the time of the siege of Boston by the American forces the situation of Edward Tuckerman's house on the outskirts of the town brought it into the line of artillery fire. In consequence of this danger he removed his family, consisting of his wife, three little daughters, and his eldest son Edward, then an infant in arms, first to Cambridge and later to Dedham, where was born in 1776 the second son named George Washington.

This house, in which all the other children were born, stood on the west side of Washington Street, then called Orange Street, near where the corner of Dover Street now is. It was of the colonial style, clap-boarded, three stories high, with square windows and large chimneys. West of the house stretched a garden, and at the end of the garden stood a summer house looking out on the waters of the Back Bay. During the absence of the family, on the night of March 9, 1776, a cannon ball from the American battery on Nook's Hill, Dorchester Neck, struck the house near one of the third-story windows, was embedded in a beam and remained visible from the outside. Edward Tuckerman would not have it removed, and for more than a century this relic of the siege of Boston was a frequent object of observation.

—**Bayard Tuckerman, *Notes on the Tuckerman Family of Massachusetts and Some Allied Families* (1914), p. 39.**

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Tuckerman house, built in 1767, was in a sad state of disrepair. An 1899 *Boston Herald* article (subtitled "The Historic House on Harrison Avenue which Was Pierced by a Cannon Ball") lamented its decline, saying: "it stands like a poor but proud colonial dame among the newly rich, conscious even in misfortune of ancient dignity." The house was then being used as a carriage shop and conditions had greatly deteriorated. "Its small-paned windows look out upon a scene of desolation and confusion which would make its ancient denizens weep—a perfect inferno of scrap iron and abandoned dwellings."

The Tuckerman house was torn down before 1914. Just before the demolition, descendant Dr. Frederick Tuckerman removed the woodwork surrounding the indentation made by the cannon ball to preserve it. A tag affixed to the piece, perhaps by written Frederick Tuckerman, reads, "From Great-Grandfather Tuckerman's House. Hole made by a cannonball fired, probably from Nook's Hill, during the siege of Boston 1775–1776."

The fragment was passed down in the Tuckerman family to descendant Hugh Clark, who gave it to our president Brenton Simons, a cousin of his wife Nancy, on a family visit in western Massachusetts a few years ago. Realizing that it would make a wonderful addition to our collections, Simons donated it in honor of the Clarks to NEHGS. It remains not only a symbol of the siege of Boston but of a family's conscious desire to preserve its connection to the momentous events of the Revolution—thus, an artifact with significance for both national and family history.

— David A. Lambert

