

Chapter VIII

TOWN HOUSES AND CITY HALL

The first town house was erected at Steep Brook Corners. (See Fascicle I, page 89.) The location soon became undesirable and a number of attempts were made to have the building moved; however there was no change made for twenty years, when it was voted to build a new house on a part of the recently purchased burial ground, on the Main Road near Ferry Lane. In 1836, this building was moved to Town Avenue, a way leading north from Central Street, a short distance west of the Main Road. (See Fascicle I, pages 74 and 75.) For the town jail located in the same building, two cells were ordered built, "stone faced on 2 sides, stone floor and covering and an iron door." The town offices remained here until 1846.

Market Building City Hall

The land on which City Hall now stands was purchased from the Pocasset Manufacturing Company after the fire of 1843. The following description of the original building is recorded in the "Fall River Directory Embracing a Part of Tiverton; Containing the Names of the Citizens, a Business Directory, a Record of Town Officers, Companies, Schools, Churches, and Societies, with an Almanac for 1853." — "The market building, erected in 1844, just after the great fire which destroyed the heart of the town, is among the finest specimens of architecture in New England. It is of Fall River granite, in ashler and contains a public hall, tastily frescoed, exceeding in dimensions that of Faneuil Hall, besides rooms for the Post Office, Custom House, Atheneum, and apartments for the transaction of the town's business." The structure was known as the Market Building or Market Hall. A page from the report of the Auditing Committee of the town for 1846, which it seems worth while to reprint here, shows the immediate use made of the building.

Rents

ACTUAL AND ESTIMATED — FROM THE MARKET BUILDING

	Per Annum	Total
Russell Young, Room for Barber's Shop	\$231.00	
Caleb B. Vickery, Room for Post Office	200.00	
Phineas W. Leland, Room for Custom House	60.00	
Atheneum, Room for Library	50.00	
Edward P. Buffinton, ¹ Stall No. 1	131.00	
Dean & Smith, do No. 2	132.00	
Micah H. Ruggles, do No. 3	135.00	
Henry Cleveland, do No. 4	172.50	
Ebenezer Luther, Jr. do No. 5	100.00	
James Holt, do No. 6	122.50	
Edmund Buffinton, do No. 7	100.00	
William T. Wyatt, do No. 8	100.00	
John Southwick, do No. 9	90.00	
Luther & Buffinton, do No. 10	90.00	
Chester W. Greene, do No. 11	85.00	
Henry King, do No. 12	85.00	
Rufus Durfee, Cellar Room for Fish Market	52.50	
Thomas Sanford, Jr. do do do do	52.50	
Chace & Crapo, Room in Cellar	75.00	
Harvey Hernden, do do do	11.00	
Joseph C. Anthony, do do do	15.00	
Apollos Dean, do do do	10.00	
Rents actually accruing, per year		2,100.00
Estimated —		
Selectmen's Room	50.00	
Town Clerk's Room (corner)	60.00	
South Ante-Room	50.00	
Watchmen's and Rapid Engine Co's Room	100.00	
Cellar Rooms, unlet, at low estimate	200.00	460.00
Total		2,560.00

Assuming the whole Cost of the Market to be \$64,000 and that the income from the Hall will fully pay for taking care of the Building and meet all the incidental expenses, the above amount of Rent is equal to 4 per cent. per annum on the outlay.

Additional costs amounting to \$6,850.29 were reported by the auditing committee in their report for 1847. Warren Runnels was paid for "care of Market Building from May, 1846 to March 1, 1847, 282% ds. at 83½ c. per day, \$235.50. Oil, Fuel, &c \$232.96."

The lockup was for a time in the basement along with the fishmarkets. It is said that water for cleaning the fish was obtained from the stream flowing beneath the building. The large hall on the second floor was used for town and public meetings, lectures, concerts and theatricals. In 1862 there were three banks located on the first floor. See Fascicle II, pages 111 and 112.

¹ Edward P. Buffinton, who became the second mayor of Fall River, to distinguish him from the first mayor and others of the same name was dubbed "Butcher" Buffinton. In the seventies and eighties there were two William Durfees. Householders received monthly bills from each so one was called "Ice Bill," the other "Gas Bill". Mr. Phillips, in Fascicle II, mentions "Gas Bill Durfee" as "Gas-pipe Bill".

The main features of this building, with its really remarkable monolithic pillars, quarried from the ledge on North Quarry Street have been familiar to past generations and are likely to be for generations to come.

The town pump was located near the southeast corner of Town Hall and remained there until the introduction of city water. There was also a stone watering trough, which was the first place visited by the incoming farmers, to water their horses or oxen. Drinking water for the homes and places of business in the immediate vicinity was obtained from the pump. Homer Skinner, in his reminiscences² mentioned that one of his duties as an office boy for Brayton and Borden, cotton brokers, whose office was on Bedford Street, was to get a pail of water from the city pump each morning.

Market Hall or Town Hall, automatically became City Hall in 1854. It remained unchanged until 1873, when a mansard roof and a clock tower was added and the interior rearranged to accommodate the greatly increased work of the city departments. The public library occupied the larger part of the first floor, the executive offices and the legislative chambers the second and third floors. The building was gutted by fire in 1886 and rebuilt along the same general lines without altering very much the exterior appearance. No provision was made for the public library in the reconstructed building, thus providing much needed office room for important executive departments.

When the Salvation Army came to town, they held a street meeting every evening at the southwest corner of City Hall, and at the northwest corner, particularly on Saturday evenings, when the sidewalks were always crowded, itinerant peddlers would attract customers by county fair methods of salesmanship.

Before Third Street was extended to Bedford Street, it passed between the plot on which stood the city scales and an empty space to the east known as "City Lot", ending at the stream, just east of the old Central Fire Station, since demolished. This lot served as a parking place and here farm products were marketed, auctions held and itinerant peddlers disposed of their wares; the curious would gather and boys, safely out of reach, atop a high wooden fence on the Pleasant Street side would offer very high or ridiculously low bids for decrepit "nags" sold at auction, or amuse themselves by addling some bewhiskered fakir.

² "Fall River Herald-News" for April 2, 1940.

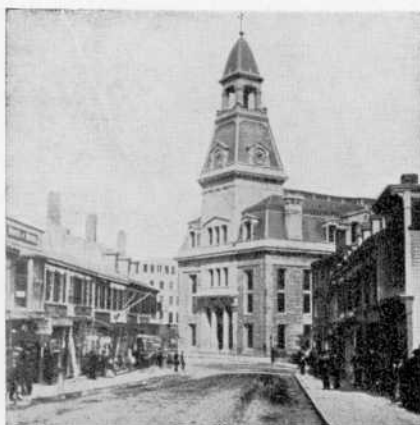
City Hall Annex

The water department maintained on the city lot, in charge of George E. Borden,³ a shedlike structure which was used for storage and a repair shop. This service station becoming inadequate, a brick building, two stories high, with "a basement 8 feet in the clear" under half the building was erected on the corner of Pocasset and Third Streets. This building was at first used only for storage and a repair shop but according to the records of the "Water Board", on the 23rd of July, 1900, the offices of this department were removed from City Hall to this building. The repair shop and mechanical department and the offices were then under one roof, giving many advantages and conveniences of communication. The offices occupied two floors of the western front and section of the building, the mechanical and repair departments being in the rear and eastern section.

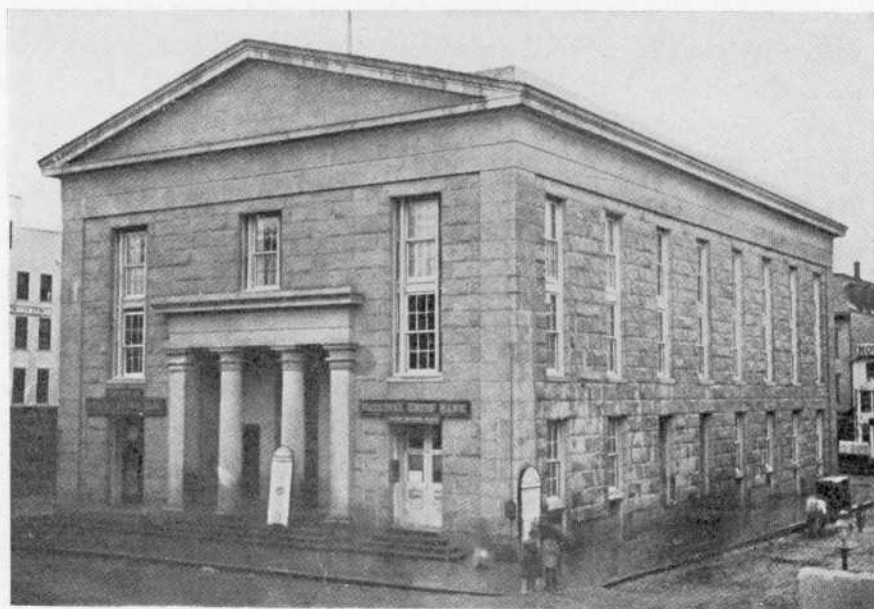
In 1922, a contract was awarded for the construction of a building on upper Bedford Street, within the Watuppa Reservation, to house the water works construction department, which was in operation in August, 1924. The Water Works Building on Third Street was remodeled, with the addition of two stories and became the City Hall Annex in 1925. The Water Registrar's office continued to occupy a portion of the first floor sharing it with the Sealer of Weights and Measures and the laboratory of the Board of Health. The Public Welfare Department now occupies the second floor; the agent of Soldiers and Sailors Relief has an office on the third floor and the "Department of Health" occupies the remainder of the building.⁴

³ Mr. Borden and Samuel Ogden, another foreman in the water department, answered the general alarms of fires and became as well known in the community as many of the higher officials.

⁴ Much of the information concerning the City Hall Annex was supplied by Mr. Peter M. Garity of the Water Registrar's office.



CITY HALL
1873 - 1886
"Asbestos Row" *Old Borden Block*



TOWN HALL AND MARKET BUILDING
1845 - 1873

