

## = Sacred Cod =

The Sacred Cod is a four foot , eleven inch carved wood effigy of an Atlantic codfish , " painted to the life " , hanging in the House of Representatives chamber of Boston 's Massachusetts State House ? ? ? " a memorial of the importance of the Cod Fishery to the welfare of this Commonwealth " ( i.e. Massachusetts , of which cod is officially the " historic and continuing symbol " ) . The Sacred Cod has gone through as many as three incarnations over three centuries : the first ( if it really existed ? ? ? the authoritative source calling it a " prehistoric creature of tradition " ) was lost in a 1747 fire , the second disappeared during the American Revolution , and the third is the one seen in the House today .

Sacred Cod is not a formal name but a nickname which appeared in 1895 , soon after the carving was termed " the sacred emblem " by a House committee appointed " to investigate the significance of the emblem [ which ] has kept its place under all administrations , and has looked upon outgoing and incoming legislative assemblies , for more than one hundred years . " Soon sacred cod was being used in reference to actual codfish as well , in recognition of the creature 's role in building Massachusetts ' prosperity and influence since early colonial times .

In 1933 the Sacred Cod was briefly " Cod napped " by editors of the Harvard Lampoon , prompting police to drag the Charles River and search an airplane landing in New Jersey . In 1968 it was taken briefly again , this time by students at the University of Massachusetts Boston .

A fish figure is displayed in the State House Senate chamber as well ? ? ? a brass casting ( sometimes called the Holy Mackerel ) above its central chandelier .

## = = Significance = =

Codfishing was the first industry practiced by Europeans in Massachusetts , and it is said that the colony 's first export was a cargo of fish . : 23 Thus the codfish has been an important New England symbol for centuries , its image appearing on many early coins , stamps , corporate and government seals , and insignia such as the early crest of the Salem Gazette . In 1743 a prominent Salem businessman built a mansion in which " the end of every stair in his spacious hall [ displayed ] a carved and gilded codfish . " ? : 34 @-@ 36

In the late 1920s an " amusing " ? codfish emblem appeared briefly , " totem @-@ like " , on Massachusetts license plates .

## = = History = =

What is now called the Sacred Cod has hung for three centuries ? ? ? though with interruptions , and in at least two ( and possibly three ) successive incarnations ? ? ? in the chamber of the Massachusetts House of Representatives ( or its predecessor , the House of Assembly of the Province of Massachusetts Bay ) .

## = = = First Cod = = =

Of the Cod 's first incarnation , the Committee on History of the Emblem of the Codfish ( appointed by the House in 1895 ) wrote :

There is a dim tradition that in the primitive House of Assembly of the Province there hung a codfish which was the gift of Judge Samuel Sewall [ a judge at the Salem witch trials who ] died in 1729 . [ But his ] published remains make no mention of this traditional fish , and it is difficult to imagine that a man of his loquacious verbosity would have omitted to chronicle his munificence . : 17

Assuming it existed and whatever its origin , when the State House burned in 1747 " this prehistoric creature of tradition ... doubtless went up in a whirl of smoke which still clouds its history to the peering vision of the antiquarian . " ? : 17

## = = = Second Cod = = =

A second Cod appeared sometime between 1748 ( when the State House was rebuilt ) and 1773 ( when Thomas Crafts , Jr. billed the Province of Massachu - setts Bay , " To painting Codfish , 15 shillings " ) . But within a few years , the Committee wrote , the second Cod

disap - peared from the State House and was doubtless destroyed , for the closest histor - i - cal research fails to shed any light upon the time , manner or cause of its disap - pear - ance , or to disclose any refer - ence to it whatever . Mayhap some burly British trooper , quart - ered in the improvised barracks of the old State House [ during the Siege of Boston ] , took umbrage at the spick and span elegance of the newly painted emblem of colonial inde - pend - ence and thrift . Such a one may have torn down the cherished symbol from the wall whence it had offered aid and comfort to the rebel patriots , with its assur - ance of the material wealth accessible to the embry - onic State , and , in spirit of vandalism so preva - lent at that age , used it to replenish his evening camp fire . : 17 @-@ 18

The Committee found " good reason to believe that this missing fish ... was carved by one John Welch , a Boston patriot " .

= = = Third Cod = = =

The third Cod was installed in 1784 , after Represen - ta - tive John Rowe ? ? ? namesake of Rowes Wharf , and " a leading spirit in the stirring scenes that led up to the famous ' Boston Tea Party ' " ? : 16 ? ? ? asked leave " to hang up the represen - ta - tion of a Cod Fish in the room where the House sit , as a memorial of the import - ance of the Cod @-@ Fishery to the welfare of this Common - wealth , as had been usual form - erly ... And so the emblem was suspended " in the old State House once again , and this Cod ( which Rowe may have under - writ - ten person - ally ) is the one extant today . : 20

In 1798 it was moved to the Representatives chamber in the new State House , : 12 @-@ 13 where it originally hung over the Speaker 's desk . In the 1850s it was moved to the rear of the chamber .

= = = Committee on History of the Emblem of the Codfish = = =

On January 2 , 1895 ? ? ? the House 's last day of business before relocating to a new chamber in the same building ?

[ t ] he question of taking with it the " represen - ta - tion of a codfish , " which for more than a hundred years had never missed a " roll call , " was brought up for consideration . It was , however , deemed wise to investigate the significance of the emblem before its removal ...

Accordingly , after " nearly two months of painstaking research and investigation " the three @-@ member Committee on History of the Emblem of the Codfish submitted its report , and after debating " at length " the House ordered " immediate removal of the ancient ' represen - ta - tion of a codfish ' from its present position in the chamber recently vacated by the House , and to cause it to be sus - pended ... in this cham - ber ... " ? : 4

The Sacred Cod was wrapped in an American flag , placed on a bier , and ? ? ? escorted by the Sergeant @-@ at @-@ Arms ? ? ? borne by House messen - gers to the new House chamber , where the assembled Represen - ta - tives rose in applause . : 7 After repainting by Walter M. Brackett , it was hung where it remains today : " between the two sets of central columns , and under the names ' Motley , ' and ' Parkman ' , " ? : 20 facing left as viewed from the floor of the chamber . ( It is some - times said that the Cod is turned to face the political party currently in power , but no such tradi - tion was mentioned by the Committee . ) ?

= = " Sacred Cod " nickname = =

The Committee 's report refers at one point to " the sacred emblem " , and while it was working an item appeared in the Boston Globe referring to the carving as " the Sacred Cod " . Within a few years authors , journalists , and advertisers ? ? ? even those far from New England ? ? ? were using

the term routinely . The phrase quickly came to refer not only to the wooden Cod in the State House but to flesh @-@ and @-@ blood cod from the sea as well , especially as an item of commerce . At the 1908 convention of the Retail Grocers of the United States , held in Boston , one delegate recalled

the first organized effort ... for the bettering of conditions in the grocery business . I refer to the Boston tea party . How could we get along without the Boston baked beans or the almost sacred cod ?

Two years later the New Hampshire Board of Agriculture , bemoaning the counterfeiting of foodstuffs " famous for their distinctive properties or superior quality " , warned that " haddock , hake , pollock , cusk , etc . , are substituted indiscriminantly in place of the sacred cod . " ? In 1912 President William Howard Taft , in Boston , addressed a journalists ' banquet in New York City " by long distance tele - phone from the home of the sacred cod " . And in 1922 historian Samuel Eliot Morison , emphasizing fishing 's vital role in the colonial economy , wrote that " Puritan Massachu - setts derived her ideals from a sacred book ; her wealth and power from the sacred cod . " ?

The famous doggerel poking fun at Boston 's Brahmins ?

? paraphrases an earlier poem now little remembered :

= = " Cod @-@ napping " and other incidents = =

= = = Harvard Lampoon = = =

In an incident now referred to as " The Cod @-@ napping " by State House officials , on April 26 , 1933 members of the Harvard Lampoon ( the Harvard College humor magazine ) entered the House of Represen - ta - tives gallery , cut down the Cod , and carried it away in an unusually large florist 's box equipped with protruding decoy lilies .

According to The New York Times ? ? ? which reckoned the Cod 's value to be " something less than nothing . As an object of art it is worthless " ? ? ? Massachu - setts officials were " shocked into a condition bordering on speech - less - ness " by the theft , " some legisla - tors holding that it would be sacrilege to transact business without the emblem of the Commonwealth looking down upon them . " ( Nonetheless , at the appointed time " [ House ] Speaker Saltonstall looked mournfully at the vacant place and then banged the gavel . The first act of the House fitted the occasion . It passed to be engrossed a bill allowing the cold storage of swordfish . " ) ?

Meanwhile , Boston mayor James Michael Curley received a tele - phone message : " Tell the Mayor that when the Sacred Cod is returned it will be wrapped in the municipal flag , now flying in front of City Hall . Try and catch us when we cop the flag . Lafayette Mulligan , we are here . " ? " Indignant " police went so far as to drag the Charles River and , learning that a Lampoon editor had flown to New Jersey , had the plane searched on landing .

Eventually a mysterious telephone call sent Harvard official Charles R. Apted to West Roxbury where two men , with collars up and hatbrims down , emerged from a car to hand over the Cod ( not wrapped in any flag ) before speeding away . In the early hours of April 29 , after repairs to three damaged fins , the Sacred Cod was re @-@ hung in the House chamber , " six inches [ 15 cm ] higher [ than ] the reach of any individ - ual . A stepladder will be needed to remove it in the future . " ?

= = = University of Massachusetts = = =

Using a stepladder , on November 14 , 1968 students at the new Boston campus of the University of Massachu - setts took the Sacred Cod in protest of perceived legislative indifference to their school . ( " Sacred Cod gone from House perch " , the Boston Globe reported . ) ? It was found days later in a little @-@ used State House hallway .

= = = Greyhound replacement proposal = = =

In 1937 Representative John B. Wenzler offered a facetious proposal " that the sacred cod be immediately removed [ from the House chamber ] , and a greyhound substituted in its place , as the 1937 Legislature has shown itself to be completely under the power of the dog track operators . " ? Apted ( whom the Boston Globe called " the superintendent of caretakers at Harvard and Harvard Cop No. 1 " ) wrote to Wenzler : " As one who is , and was , very much interested in preserving [ the Cod 's ] dignity , and furthermore having held it in my arms ... I most respectfully ask a favor , that is : If the greyhound be substituted , that I be presented with the cod in order that it may be preserved for the future of young Americans . " ?

= = = World War II = = =

After the House of Representatives ' move to its new chamber in 1895 the Massachu - setts Senate , which took over the old House chamber , incorporated a fish figure ( often dubbed the Holy Mackerel ) ? into the chandelier there , as a reminder of the Sacred Cod the Representatives had taken with them . When officials of the World War II aluminum @-@ for @-@ defense drive ? ? ? misinformed that the Sacred Cod was aluminum ? ? ? asked that it be donated to the war effort , House Speaker Christian Herter explained that the Cod had been created decades before aluminum 's discovery , and suggested that the Holy Mackerel be considered for sacrifice instead .