

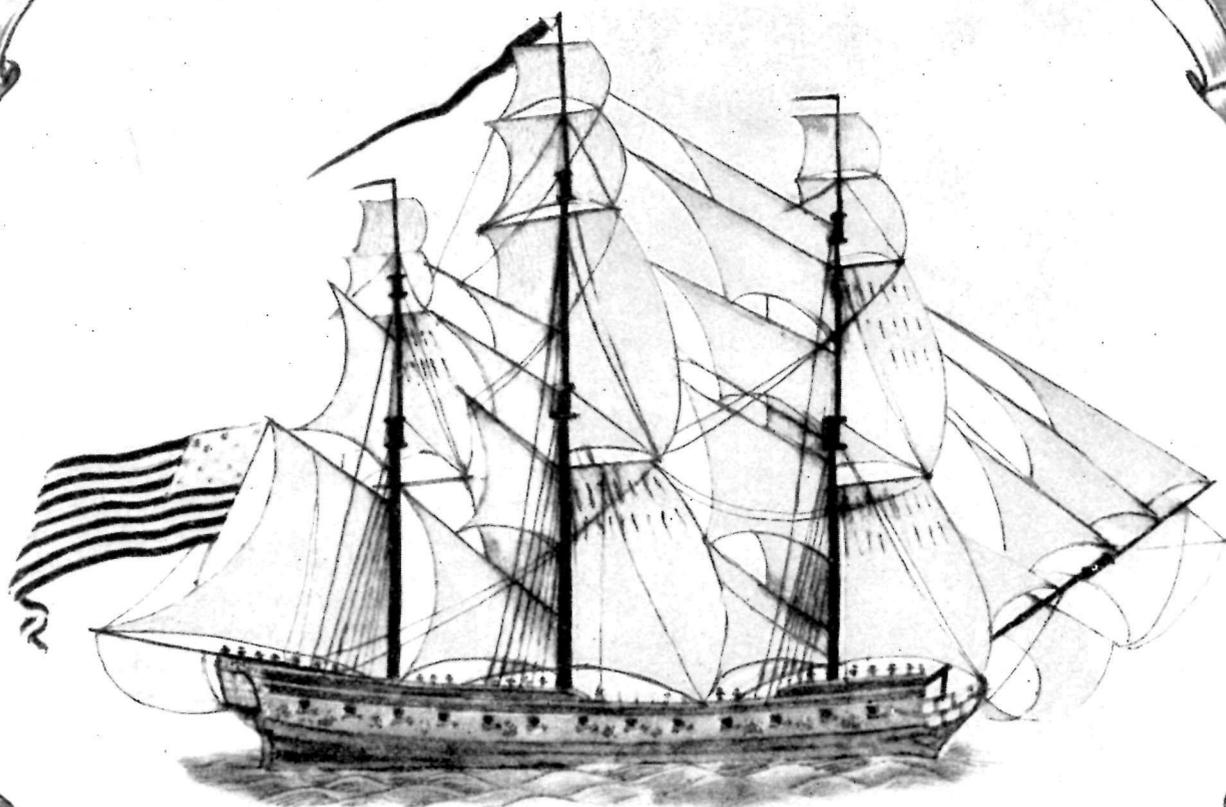
SALEM MARITIME

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

SALEM

MASS.

GRAND
SHIP TURK



AT

1786

CANTON



Richard Derby, 1712-83. Reproduced from a portrait by Henry Sargent. Courtesy of the Essex Institute

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THE COVER

The Grand Turk, a ship of 300 tons, was a Revolutionary privateer and the first American merchantman to reach the Cape of Good Hope. It was built for Elias Hasket Derby during the winter of 1780-81, and was one of the most famous vessels ever to sail from Salem. This photographic illustration is a reproduction of a painting made by a Chinese artist at Canton in 1786 on a punchbowl presented to the captain of the ship on his departure for Salem. The original punchbowl is in the Peabody Museum of Salem.



1940

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HAROLD L. ICKES, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE · NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director*

⚓ Salem Maritime National Historic Site ⚓

ESTABLISHMENT AND LOCATION OF THE SITE

THE SALEM MARITIME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE was established March 17, 1938, by order of the Secretary of the Interior to preserve a group of buildings and wharves which, for the greater part of a century after 1760, comprised one of the most important centers of American maritime activity. Establishment of the site was made possible through the cooperation of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the city of Salem, and various organizations and individuals in donating required property for the undertaking.

The site is situated on Derby Street, the former maritime center of the old seaport city of Salem, Mass., approximately 20 miles northeast of Boston, and embraces a rather compact area of slightly less than 9 acres. Including the boundaries of wharves and docks, the site covers over 1 mile of waterfront on Salem Harbor. By far the greater part of this frontage is absorbed by the long finger of Derby Wharf which extends nearly 2,000 feet into the harbor from the south side of Derby Street, and by Central Wharf, running parallel to Derby Wharf, but only one-third as long.

Five buildings—the Salem Custom House, the Hawkes House, Derby House, Rum Shop, and Forrester Warehouse, which also survive from the era of Salem's greatness on the sea, are a part of the site. All of them except the Forrester Warehouse, which is located at Central Wharf, stand in a row along the north side of Derby Street and provide an architectural background as much in character with the past as the wharves and docks that line the south or harbor side.

Historical Background

EARLY MARITIME SIGNIFICANCE OF SALEM

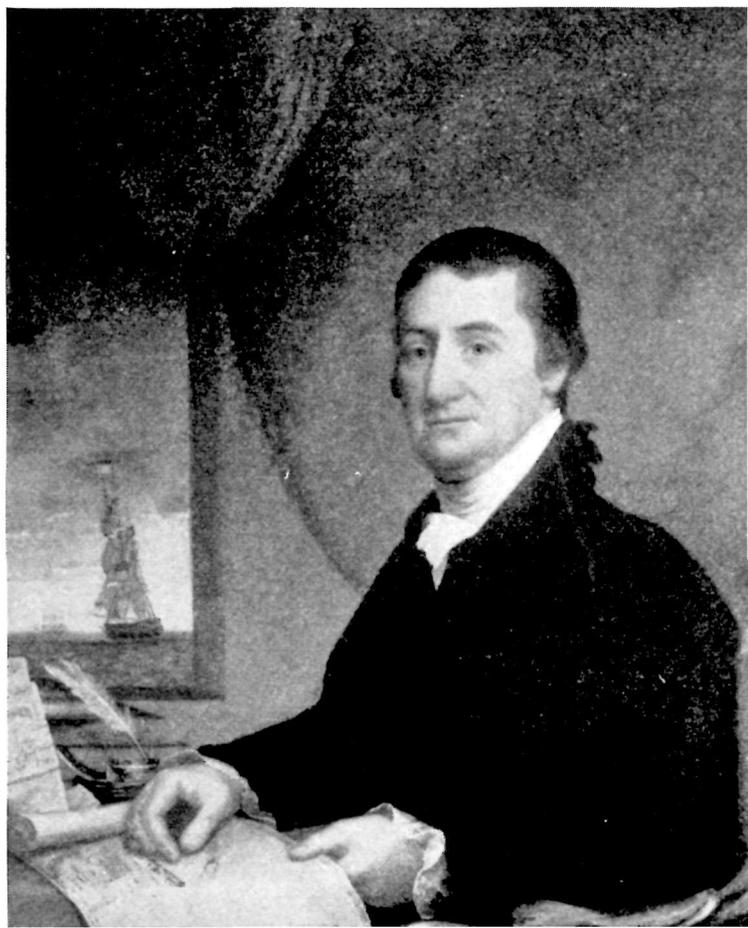
FOUNDED IN 1626 by Roger Conant as the plantation of Maumkeag, Salem became, with the arrival of Gov. John Endicott in 1628, the first town in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. Prior to the settlement of Boston, it was the point of debarkation for the great Puritan migration from England led by Gov. John Winthrop in 1630.

From the start, the English colonists of Salem turned to the sea for a livelihood. The land was rocky, and agricultural possibilities were meager; but the coastal waters yielded an abundance of fish, and the primeval forests afforded the best of materials for building ships. As a result of these conditions, fishing and shipping soon grew to be important industries, and Salem became predominantly a seafaring community. As early as 1643, merchants of Salem were trading with the West Indies, and from the West Indies trade was gradually extended to Europe.

From 1700 to 1763, Salem attained an eminent position in the Colonies as her fisheries steadily increased and her maritime trade continued to expand. After 1763, however, this normal development was interrupted as the government in England enacted and enforced legislation severely restricting the commercial intercourse of the Colonies.

During the Revolutionary War, privateering

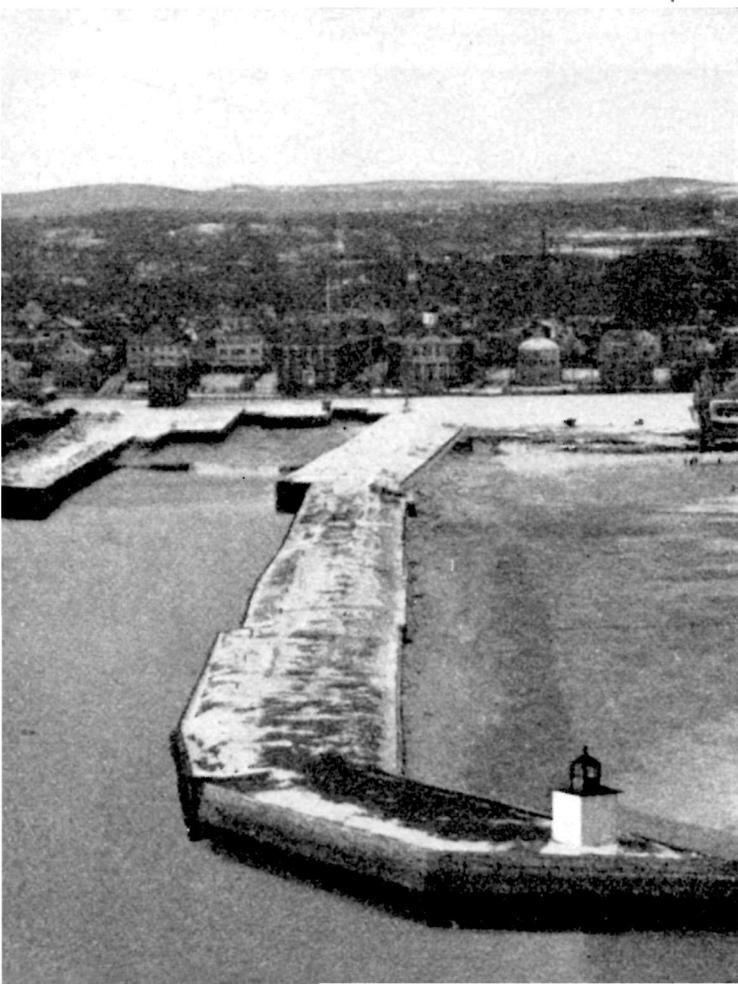
Elias Hasket Derby, 1739–99. Reproduced from a portrait by James Frothingham. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Salem



kept the maritime spirit alive and contributed to American success through the capture and destruction of British commerce. Of all the ports to supply men and ships for this form of warfare, Salem furnished the largest number. The capacity to render such creditable service was assisted by circumstances which left Salem as the one Continental port of significance not to fall into the hands of the British at one time or another during the course of the long conflict. From 1776 to 1783, the port had over 50 armed vessels continually at sea and offensively engaged against the enemy.

Between the Revolution and the War of 1812, Salem emerged as one of the most famous seaports of the Western Hemisphere, her vessels seeking out new and distant peoples and trading where commercial opportunities hitherto had gone unrecognized or unexploited. Not a large city, Salem gained wealth and fame from trade which was the work of a small, but very bold population of shipmasters and sailors sponsored by a smaller group of enterprising merchants.

Air view of the site, showing Derby Wharf, center, and Central Wharf, left. Both wharves have been extensively repaired since the site was established in 1938. The historic buildings are seen in the background



The Derbys and Their Maritime Pursuits

FOUNDING THE DERBY FORTUNE

AMONG THE merchants who gave Salem maritime distinction, none made a greater impression on the history of their time than the Derbys. Richard Derby, the first member of the family to achieve prominence, was born at Salem in 1712. First as master and then as part owner, Richard Derby made successful voyages to Spain, Portugal, and the West Indies. About 1757 he retired from the sea, set himself up as a merchant, and soon was the owner of a fleet of vessels carrying on a lucrative trade with the French West Indies and the Spanish Peninsula.

Richard Derby entered upon his mercantile career at a most turbulent time. In 1756, the Seven Years' War had broken out between France and England and it became extremely hazardous for the American Colonies, as subjects of the British Crown, to trade with the French West Indies. Despite the fact that the laws of France had always forbidden foreign vessels from trading with her colonies, these islands had long depended upon the products of the American Colonies for their existence, and the colonial merchants, by evading or contriving against the laws, had managed to supply their wants. Consequently, after the outbreak of hostilities, the merchants who had grown accustomed to the difficulties of the trade in time of peace were not deterred from seeking the larger profits occasioned by the additional risks of war. Although Richard Derby lost no less than three good vessels at the hands of British admiralty courts and French privateers, he successfully carried on commerce with the French West India islands throughout the struggle and, with the income derived from his wholesale and retail store and private banking business, was by 1763 recognized as one of the most prosperous merchants of Salem. The previous year he had erected for his son, Elias Hasket Derby, the red-brick house, now preserved in the site as an historic house museum, and had also acquired the uplands, beach, and mud flats on which the construction of Derby Wharf was shortly begun. With his wife, the former Elizabeth Crowninshield, Elias Hasket Derby lived for some years in the house built for him by his father.

THE DERBYS DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

UP TO 1763, the colonial merchants were but slightly affected by legislation enacted in England for the regulation and restriction of their trade. The famous Navigation Laws and the Molasses Act of 1733, which placed prohibitive duties on imports of foreign molasses, sugar, and rum, had been persistently violated. At the close of the Seven Years' War, however, Parliament was of the opinion that the British Colonies in America should defray some of the expenses recently incurred for their protection and defense and, therefore, soon passed new measures intended to raise revenue as well as to regulate trade. The Grenville and Townsend Acts, 1764-68, included provisions creating new impost duties and taxes which seriously hampered and inconvenienced the merchants in the Colonies. What was even more unwelcome, the customs system was reorganized, and capable officers were appointed with the authority to enforce the payment of duties. Merchants like Richard Derby were severely crippled by the burden of the new imposts, and the long-established trade with the West Indies languished.

As attempts were made to enforce the oppressive measures, resistance in the Colonies grew, and relations with the mother country were strained to the breaking point. Richard Derby staunchly supported the resolution adopted by the American Association in 1774, not to import into the Continental Colonies any goods from England or the British West Indies. His eldest son, Richard, was a member of the Provincial Congress in 1774 and 1775, and his name, furthermore, was connected with one of the dramatic incidents immediately leading up to the Revolution.

On February 26, 1775, 2 months before the opening of hostilities at Lexington and Concord, armed resistance was offered to a regiment of British soldiers at the North Bridge in Salem. They had been sent under Colonel Leslie from Boston by General Gage to seize a large amount of ammunition and 19 cannon which had been stored in the vicinity by the Provincial Congress. Arriving at the bridge after a march from Marblehead, Colonel Leslie and his regiment found the draw raised and an assemblage of armed militia and angry citizens, one of whom was the elderly Richard Derby. When the demand was made to lower the draw and deliver up the cannon, Mr.

Derby, who owned 8 of the cannon and had no intention of giving them up, roared in defiance, "Find them if you can! Take them if you can! They will never be surrendered!" Colonel Leslie, fearing the consequences of collision with the militia, prudently withdrew his troops.

One of Richard Derby's vessels, the swift little schooner *Quero* of 62 tons, carried to England the first news of the fight at Lexington and Concord. Five days after the fateful engagement, which occurred on April 19, 1775, General Gage dispatched his report of the affair to London in the packet *Sukey*. The Provincial Congress, not wishing the British people to get a prejudiced view of the action, decided to send a fast vessel to England with an account giving the colonial side. For this mission Richard Derby immediately volunteered the services of the *Quero*. His youngest son, Capt. John Derby, set sail with papers from the Provincial Congress on April 28, 1775, and 1 month later reached London, 2 weeks before the *Sukey* arrived with General Gage's dispatches.

Richard Derby lived to see the end of the Revolution, but long before this he had turned over the active management of his business to his second son, Elias Hasket Derby, destined to become the foremost American merchant of his time. Elias Hasket, who was born in 1739, had never gone to sea, but had grown up in his father's counting room. After his marriage in 1761, his father had built for him the present brick dwelling and had gradually entrusted him with a greater share of responsibility.

PRIVATEERS AND LETTERS-OF-MARQUE

DURING THE first year of the War, Elias Hasket Derby tried to carry on a peaceful trade with the West Indies, sending out New England products to be exchanged for commodities which had been shipped there from Europe, but were badly needed in the revolting Colonies. This trade, though profitable, was very hazardous. Early in 1776, the Derby schooner *Jamaica Packet*, bound for Salem, was seized by a British cruiser and taken into Boston where she was dismantled and eventually burned. Soon two more Derby vessels met a similar fate, and Mr. Derby realized that his ships could no longer hold their position at sea unless properly armed. Before the end of the year, Mr. Derby transformed two of his merchant vessels into privateers, and by the autumn of 1777 he



Colonel Leslie and his British troops being defied by patriots and militia at the North Bridge, Salem, February 26, 1775. This episode was one of the first instances of armed resistance to British soldiers in the American Colonies and preceded the outbreak of the Revolution at Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775. Reproduced from a painting by Lewis J. Bridgman. Courtesy of the Essex Institute

became actively engaged in fitting out ships to prey upon British commerce. Of the 158 privately owned armed vessels which incomplete records credit to the port of Salem during the Revolution, Elias Hasket Derby owned or was part owner of 25 and probably had an interest in twice as many more.

The privately owned armed vessels sent out fell into two classes, privateers and letters-of-marque. A privateer, as a rule, went to sea for no other purpose than to make reprisals on the enemy's shipping, and was laden with no cargo except a complete armament of guns and a crew large enough to man any prizes that might be captured on the cruise. A vessel with a Government commission known as a letter-of-marque, however, carried a cargo for a destined port, but was also fully armed and had authority to defend herself against the enemy or to take prizes if they came in her way.

THE *Grand Turk* AND THE *Astrea*

UP TO the closing years of the Revolution, much of the privateering was carried on in vessels of not much more than 100 tons, a size designed primarily for the traditional West Indian trade. As soon as the British, however, began to make effective retaliations and their men-of-war to sweep these small raiders off the sea, it became apparent that only larger ships, capable of outsailing or outshooting the enemy, could hope to survive in the dangerous occupation. To meet these requirements, Elias Hasket Derby constructed during the winter of 1780-81 the *Grand Turk*, a ship of 300 tons. On four cruises which took her into the North Atlantic, to the Irish coast, Spain, and the West Indies during the 20 months remaining before the declaration of peace, the *Grand Turk* made prizes of no less than 16 British vessels laden with cargoes, and paid for herself many times over.

In 1782, the *Astrea*, a full-rigged ship, even larger and faster than the *Grand Turk*, was built for Mr. Derby and commissioned as a letter-of-marque. On her maiden voyage to France under the command of Capt. John Derby, late in December 1782, the *Astrea* made the crossing in the remark-

A certificate of membership in the Salem Marine Society, showing a view of Salem Harbor in 1796. Part of Derby Wharf, with warehouses, at left, and the end of Central Wharf, then called Forrester's Wharf, at extreme left corner. The latter was built in 1791 by Simon Forrester, a merchant, who served as captain of one of the Derby privateers during the Revolution and in 1798 opened up American trade with the Russian port of Archangel on the White Sea. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Salem



able time of 18 days. On the homeward passage, bearing the first news of the signing of peace at Paris, she was only 22 days from Nantes to Salem.

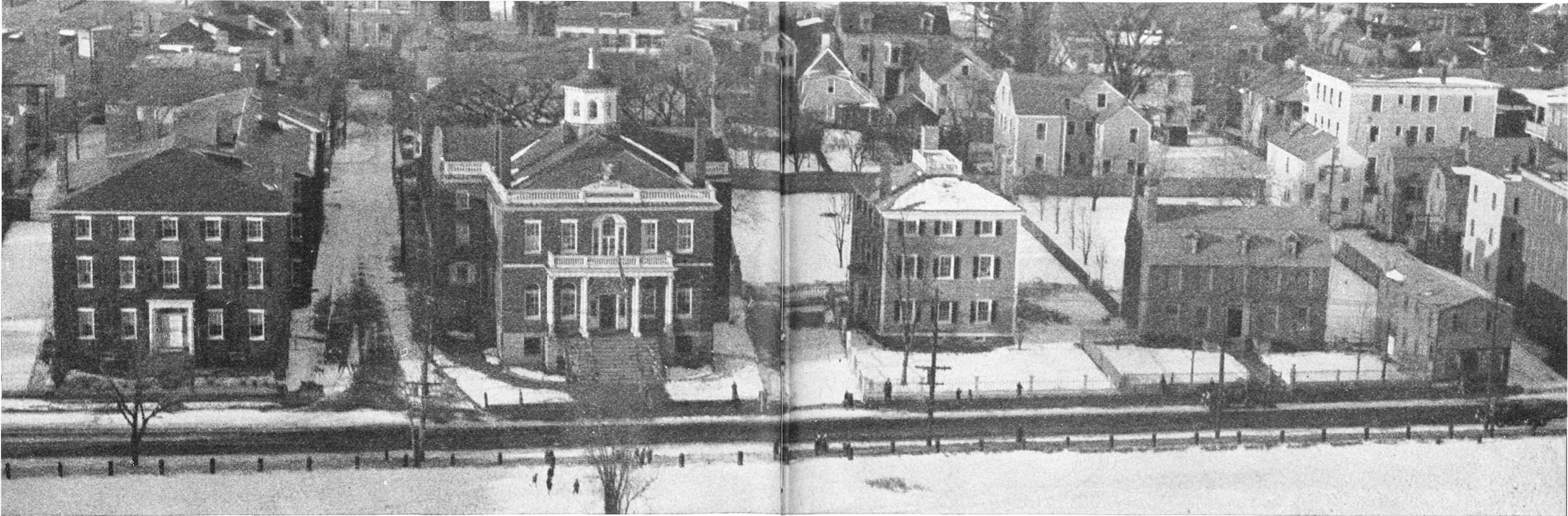
SEARCH FOR NEW TRADE ROUTES AND MARKETS

ELIAS HASKET DERBY prospered greatly as a result of his privateering ventures; but, with the return of peace, he was faced with the problem of seeking out new fields of commerce. Ships like the *Grand Turk* and *Astrea*, though only of some 300 tons burden, were too large for coastwise and West Indian trade. Moreover, as one of the prices of independence, American ships were now excluded from the commerce they had enjoyed as Colonials with the British West Indies. Accordingly, new trade routes and new markets were needed as outlets for the shipping interests of the new nation. No American merchant went to work more aggressively to find these outlets than Elias Hasket Derby. During the last two decades of the century he built up at Derby Wharf one of the leading mercantile establishments in the United States, and through the development of his extensive trade to Europe, the East Indies, and China did a great deal to promote the growth and prosperity of the country in the early years of national existence.

THE EAST INDIA AND CHINA TRADE

A SIGNIFICANT pioneering voyage was that undertaken by the *Grand Turk* in November 1784. The object of this voyage was to find out if an assorted cargo of American products could be bartered at the Cape of Good Hope for teas and other rich commodities on the stately merchantmen bound from the East Indies for Europe. The captain of the *Grand Turk* was disappointed to discover that the ships of the great companies trading to the East would not break up their cargoes in midpassage. He was able, however, to learn of prospects for trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope, prospects which the next year started the *Grand Turk* on a voyage into the Indian Ocean, and, before her return to Salem a year and a half later, took her through the Straits of Sunda and across the China Sea to the port of Canton. Although the *Grand Turk* was preceded at Canton by the *Empress of China*, which led the way there from New York in 1783, to the *Grand Turk* deservedly belongs the credit for introducing the house of Derby as the first of all American mercantile establishments in the East Indies.

The place where a connection was first made and where a large amount of Derby business to the East



Indies was subsequently transacted was the Isle of France, or Mauritius, a tropical island in the southern Indian Ocean about halfway between the Cape of Good Hope and India. When the *Grand Turk* arrived there in April 1786, on her first voyage beyond the Cape of Good Hope, the island was on the point of being transformed from a small agricultural colony into a flourishing center of oriental commerce. The occasion for this change was a decree issued by the French Government in 1784, which gave residents of the Isle of France the same privileges of trading in India as were enjoyed by the French East India Company, and which also allowed merchants of friendly nations to trade at the Isle of France. As soon as private French traders learned of this decree, they emigrated to the Isle of France in large numbers, and their presence immediately drew a throng of oriental merchants to trade with them. The rapid influx of population exhausted the natural resources of the island, and a great demand arose for the common necessities. Consequently, when the *Grand Turk* appeared with

her cargo of homely commodities from New England fisheries and farms, the island provided a ready market.

Upon receiving news of the sale of the *Grand Turk's* cargo and the very favorable conditions for further trade, Elias Hasket Derby loaded other vessels in his fleet with cargoes of provisions and dispatched them to the same destination. On the second voyage of the *Grand Turk* to the Isle of France, which began in December 1787, Mr. Derby sent along his eldest son, Elias Hasket Derby, Jr., a young man 21 years of age, to serve as his agent. This move proved to be a wise one, for, during the 3 years he spent in the East, the young man formed a large acquaintance with the leading merchants at Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, and participated in numerous and profitable business transactions at the moment the long monopoly of the British East India Company was being broken.

Shortly after American vessels were permitted to do business at the Isle of France, the Dutch and

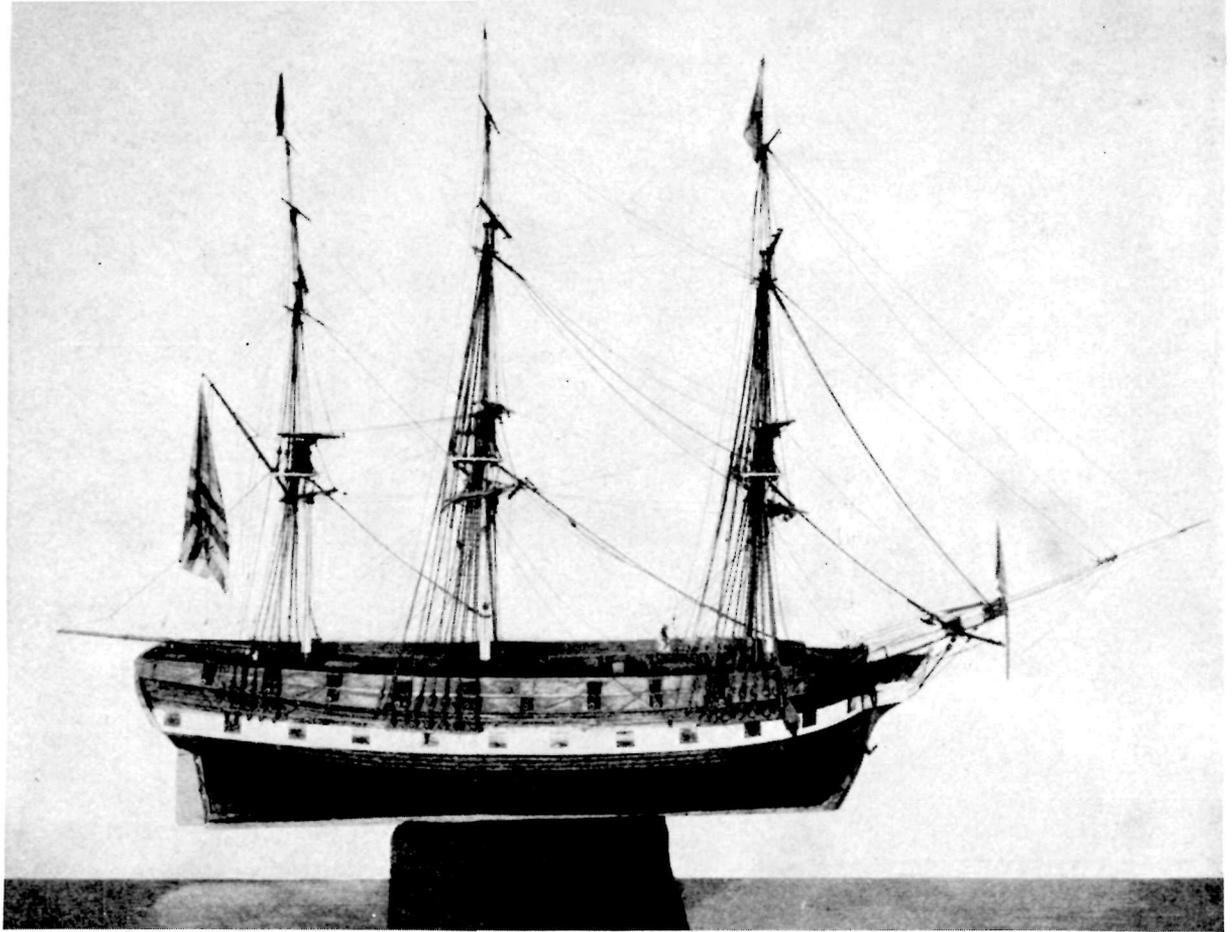
Portuguese threw open some of their eastern ports to American traders. To avoid loss of the American trade to their rivals, the British admitted American vessels to the ports of India on the basis of the most-favored foreigners. This decree went into effect about the time Elias Hasket, Jr., arrived at the Isle of France. Needless to say, he was not slow to take advantage of the opportunities it afforded. Derby vessels, which henceforth sailed with American foodstuffs to the Isle of France, no longer were restricted to loading return cargoes there, but proceeded to Madras, Bombay, or Calcutta for cotton and other India goods which were either purchased with specie or exchanged for general cargoes brought from the Isle of France.

When Elias Hasket Derby first engaged in trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope, he was obliged to conduct his business largely on a simple system of barter. Banks did not yet exist in Massachusetts, and with the hard times prevailing after the Revolution little capital was available for the promotion of enterprise on credit. Outward cargoes,

An aerial view of the historic buildings along the north side of Derby Street. From left to right: The Crowninshield Mansion, 1811, not included in the site; the Salem Custom House, 1819; the Hawkes House, 1801; the Derby House, 1762; and the Rum Shop, circa 1800

therefore, were generally exchanged for return cargoes which served as the basis for future ventures without incurring debts. While the larger Derby vessels were on voyages to the East or to Europe, the smaller brigs and schooners were occupied in collecting or distributing cargoes for the larger ships at New York, Philadelphia, Virginia, the Carolinas, or the West Indies. On the arrival of a ship from the East at Derby Wharf only a small part of her cargo would be sold in Salem. Most of it would be stored in the warehouses on the Wharf and eventually reloaded for Boston, New York, or Philadelphia, or often, when the American markets for imported goods were bad, for Europe in the hope of getting a better price.

After a few successful voyages to the East Indies, Mr. Derby's capital increased and he was able to finance his largest undertakings through the use of



letters of credit. Drafts on London were indispensable to Mr. Derby's captains and supercargoes in cases where it was impossible to return shipments at the same ports or from the same merchants that had received the inward cargoes. Letters of credit on London were acceptable in most parts of Europe, but, beyond the Cape of Good Hope, Spanish dollars were the principal medium of exchange for foreign merchants. Hence, on voyages to the East, it was a common practice for Derby ships to stop at ports in Spain or Portugal to secure Spanish dollars in exchange for drafts on London.

The Isle of France and India remained the chief centers of Elias Hasket Derby's eastern commerce until his death in 1799. The great merchant's contact, however, reached to even more distant markets. The *Grand Turk* had extended her first voyage to the Isle of France in 1786 as far as Canton, the only Chinese port then open to foreigners, and had brought back to Salem the next year a cargo of teas and chinaware which sold at a great profit. After this voyage, the number of American ships visiting China increased rapidly. During the autumn of 1789, while 4 of the Derby fleet were

*Model of the ship Friendship, 347 tons, built at Salem in 1797, a typical vessel of the era of Salem's expanding ocean commerce.
Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Salem*

lying at Whampoa, the anchorage for Canton, no less than 11 other vessels flying the Stars and Stripes appeared. In spite of the appeal of the China trade, direct trade relations were impractical because of the very few American articles that were suitable for the Canton market. Ginseng, an herb which grew wild in New England and was used by the Chinese for compounding most of their medicines, was the one native product that met with a ready sale. Vessels making voyages directly to Canton, therefore, carried all the ginseng that could be gathered in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania.

The arrival of a fleet of American merchantmen as large as that at Whampoa in 1789 at once depressed the market for ginseng and raised the price of tea. In 1790, a total of 2,601,852 pounds of tea was imported into the United States. Of this amount, 728,871 pounds came to Derby Wharf in the *Astrea* and the *Light Horse*, two of the vessels at Canton the previous autumn. As no

more than a million pounds were then consumed annually in the whole country, the market was glutted and the price of tea fell to a very low figure.

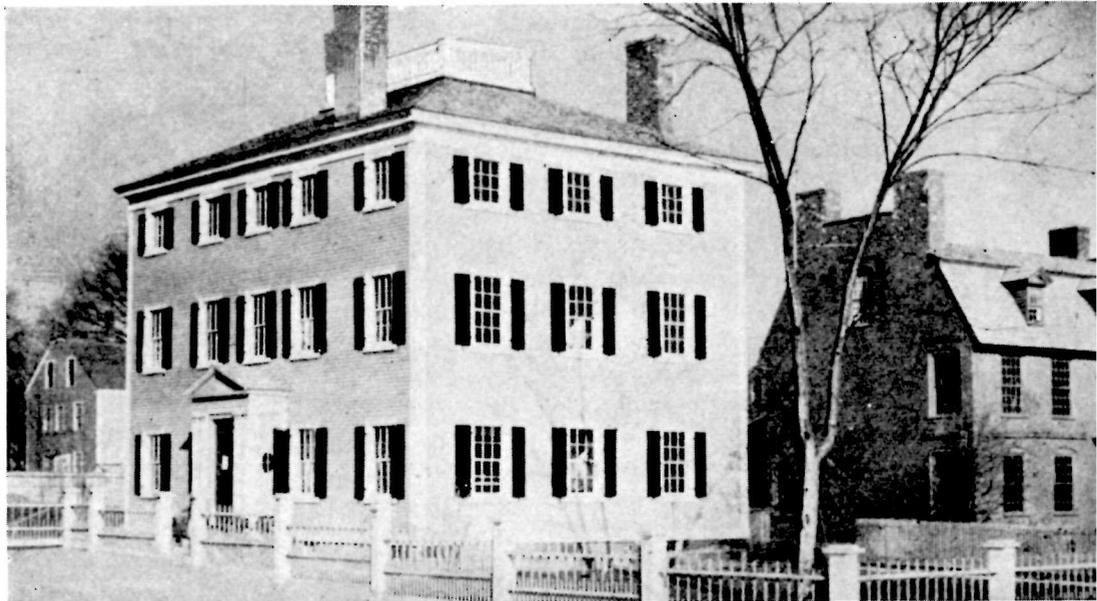
After 1790, Mr. Derby occasionally sent ships to China, but as a rule he preferred the India trade. The extensive commerce that grew up with Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta was accompanied at frequent intervals by voyages to new and untried ports. A voyage of particular significance, because of the relations that were to develop a century later, was that which sent the *Astrea II* to Manila in 1796 to open up American trade with the Philippines. The *Astrea II* was a newly constructed ship of 321 tons, and was in command of Capt. Henry Prince, who had just purchased the brick Derby House from his employer. Sailing as supercargo for Captain Prince was Nathaniel Bowditch, the mathematical genius and compiler of the "Practical Navigator," still used as the standard authority on navigation. While the *Astrea II* was anchored in Manila Bay, Prince and Bowditch took up their residence ashore and saw much of the city and its surroundings. From the pen of Bowditch has come down what is most likely the earliest account by an American of life in the Philippines. The commerce that evolved out of these pioneering voyages in eastern seas was the finest flowering in the early period of the American spirit in foreign enterprise. It brought both fame and prosperity to Salem and the United States.

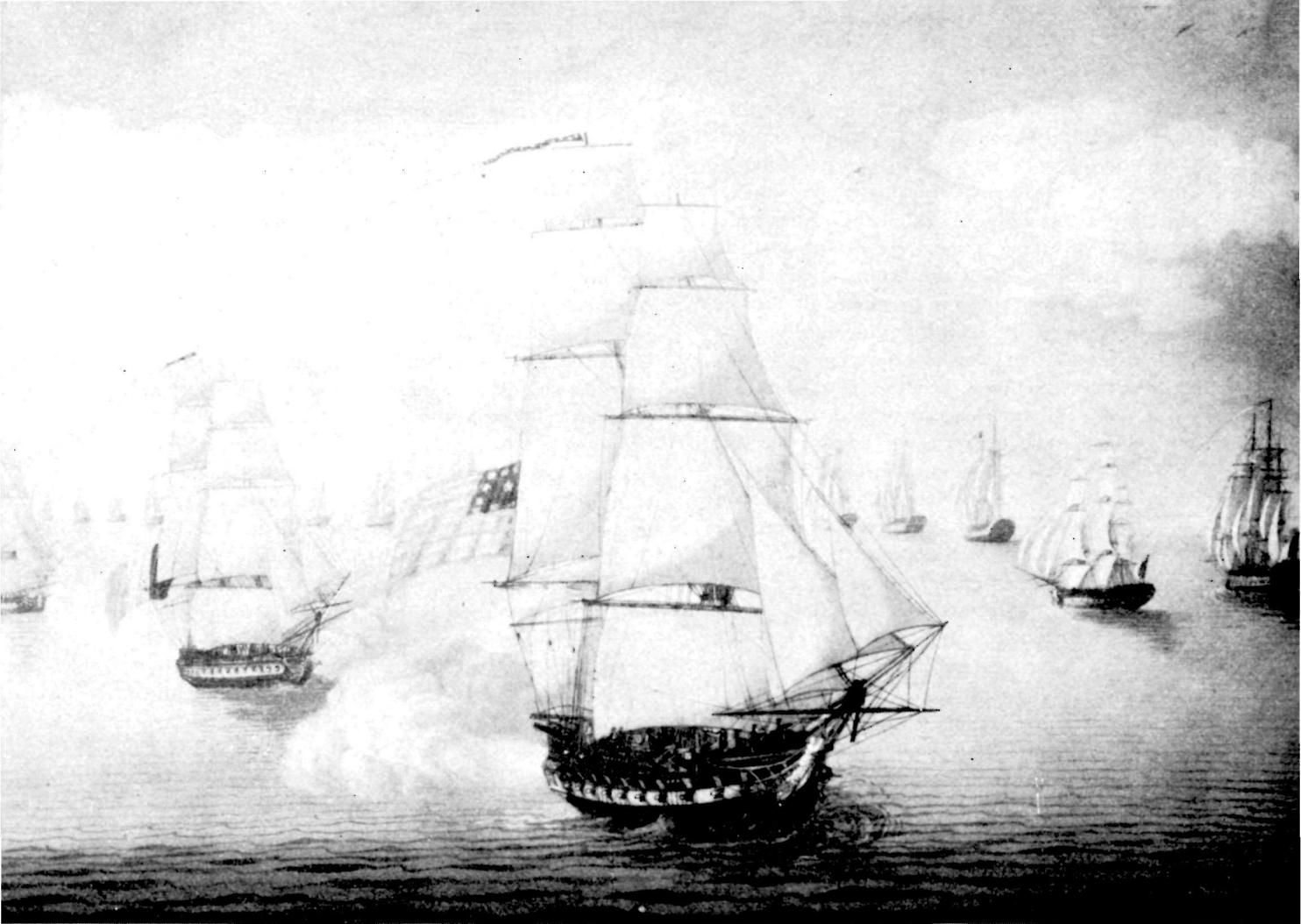
Salem Ships During the Napoleonic Wars

AFTER THE French Revolution brought on the general European war which broke out in 1793, it was not the markets of the East alone that lured American merchants. As France and England once again came to grips in a titanic struggle, the United States soon became the most important neutral carrier on the ocean and as such attempted to transport a large share of the commerce of both belligerents. American vessels engaged in this business were exposed to the constant danger of capture by privateers in quest of plunder, or by men-of-war who maintained the right to seize any shipping going in or out of enemy ports.

At first, aggressions by the British were the most serious, their cruisers taking every American vessel they found bound to or coming from the French West Indies. No less than three vessels owned by Elias Hasket Derby were captured, including the famous ship *Light Horse* which had made the first voyage to Russia. Negotiation of the unpopular Jay Treaty in 1794 somewhat reduced the friction between the United States and England occasioned by these ravages, but on the other hand it inflamed a bitter resentment on the part of the French revolutionary authorities, who accused the United States Government of repudiating the friendship

The Hawkes House, left, built 1801. The Derby House, right, built by Richard Derby between 1760 and 1762, was the residence of his son, Elias Hasket Derby, until about 1778. Capt. Henry Prince, one of the Derby shipmasters, later lived in the house until 1811. It was rescued from oblivion by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in 1927 and donated for the site in 1937





formed in the cause of American independence. The Republic showed its resentment by increasing its depredations on American shipping. More than 340 American ships were either destroyed or confiscated during 1796 and 1797. Continuation of these outrages with unrelenting fury finally forced Congress to take warlike measures for the protection of American trade. In 1798, the Navy Department was organized, the construction and purchase of warships authorized, and the existing treaties with France were abrogated.

The new Navy could not provide all the war vessels required for the defense of the country's shipping, so during the summer of 1798 citizens in each of the principal seaport towns were requested to build by subscription ships for the national service. At Salem \$74,700 was raised in a few weeks for the construction of the *Essex*, a frigate of 32 guns, which became one of the most distinguished vessels in the history of the Navy. Elias

The ship Mount Vernon, owned by Elias Hasket Derby, running away from frigates of the French Line off the coast of Spain, July 28, 1799. Reproduced from a painting by the Italian marine artist, Michael Felice Corné, who came to America on the Mount Vernon in 1800. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Salem

Hasket Derby headed the list of subscribers with a contribution of \$10,000.

As an added measure of protection to American commerce, letters-of-marque were issued to merchant vessels, giving them authority to carry men and guns to resist attacks by French privateers and men-of-war. By March 1, 1799, a total of 365 American merchantmen had been commissioned as letters-of-marque. Among these was the *Mount Vernon*, Elias Hasket Derby's new ship of 350 tons. This vessel of 28-foot beam and a length of only 100 feet was a remarkably fast sailer, and, with her armament of 20 six and nine pounders and crew of 34 men, was admirably suited for running

cargoes of urgently needed commodities into the ports of war-torn Europe.

On July 11, 1799, the *Mount Vernon* sailed from Derby Wharf on a voyage as thrilling and successful as any undertaken by an American vessel during the Napoleonic Wars. Her commander on this voyage was Elias Hasket Derby, Jr., then 33 years of age, and her cargo consisted of 800 boxes of Cuban sugar valued at \$43,275, which the great merchant proposed to sell at Gibraltar or any of the Mediterranean ports where the devastations of war had created a large demand for this commodity.

Sixteen days out from Salem, the *Mount Vernon* reached the Azores and entered a zone infested with Frenchmen through whom she was compelled to fight her way into Gibraltar. A fleet of upwards of 50 sails was sighted on the afternoon of July 28, which Captain Derby, mistaking for British, started to approach with confidence. He was completely surprised when two frigates and an 18-gun ship, sent out to meet him, hauled down

their false British ensigns and raised French colors. The *Mount Vernon*, faced with the heavier broadsides of her stronger opponents, seemingly had met her fate. Yet, by skillful maneuvering of his swift little vessel, Captain Derby soon drew the 18-gun ship away from the frigates and got his own stern chasers and broadsides into action. By nightfall the *Mount Vernon* had left the whole French fleet behind her and by midnight only their chasing rocket signals could be seen in the distance.

The rest of the way into Gibraltar, Captain Derby kept his men continually at the guns, for they were in constant brushes with French luggers and lateeners. Off the Point of Algeciras, the *Mount Vernon* was seriously threatened by a large lateener with over 100 men aboard. But, after a handsome shower of bars and grape from the *Mount Vernon's* guns had done execution, this formidable adversary was thrown into confusion and soon struck her colors. Unwilling to be bothered with prisoners, Captain Derby rejected the prize and proceeded to his port in safety.

Custom House, 1819. Large revenues were collected here on cargoes brought by Salem ships from the East Indies, China, and other parts of the world during the 1820's and 1830's.



Salem Maritime Activity *After 1800*

THE VENTURE of the *Mount Vernon* was the last undertaken by Elias Hasket Derby, for 2 months after his son and namesake had departed on the eventful Mediterranean voyage the great merchant died at Salem. The trade in distant seas, in which his enterprising spirit had led the way for his fellow countrymen, was continued for half a century longer by a notable succession of Salem merchants and shipmasters, many of whom had received their training in the great merchant's counting room or aboard his ships.

The years immediately following the great merchant's death were the heyday of Salem's ocean trade. The embargo enforced on American shipping by President Jefferson in 1807 and the War of 1812 were a severe blow to Salem and the first of several factors which led to the decline of her commerce. During the War of 1812, privateering again took the place of maritime trade as it had in the Revolution, and at the end of hostilities merchants were not lacking, possessed of the same pioneering instinct that Elias Hasket Derby had displayed at the close of the War of Independence. They explored new channels of trade to the continents of Africa, Australia, and South America, and to the islands of Madagascar, Zanzibar, and the South Seas. When the news of the discovery of gold in California swept through the country in 1848 and 1849, they were among the first shipowners to reap profits from the trade around Cape Horn to San Francisco. The increase in the size of vessels, however, which came with the clipper ship era from 1850 to 1860, spelled Salem's doom on salt water. Her shallow and landlocked harbor could not accommodate the new leviathans of the sea, and in consequence her seafaring talent was absorbed by the rapidly growing ports of Boston and New York.

The Salem Custom House and Nathaniel Hawthorne

THE SALEM CUSTOM HOUSE, which stands at the head of Derby Wharf, was built in 1819 to accommodate the collectors and officers of the customs

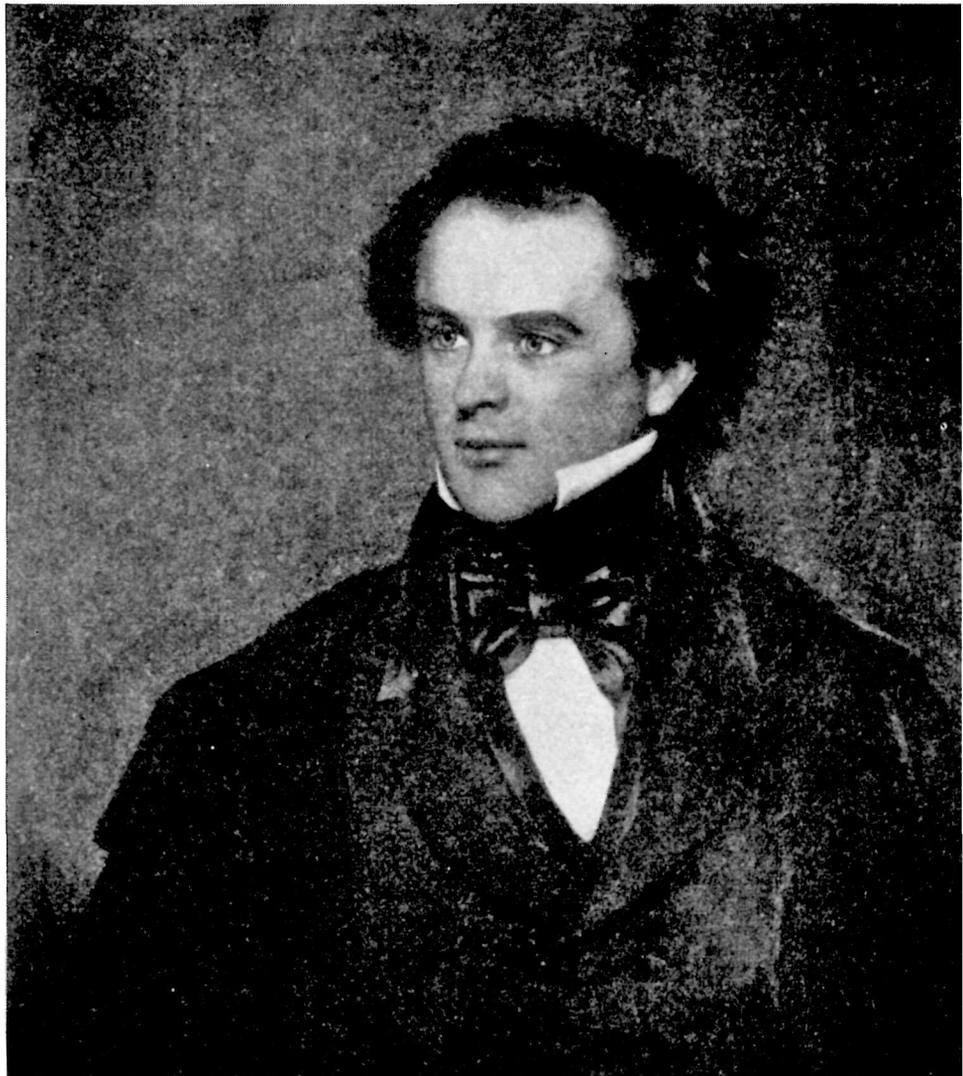
revenue. At the time the building was erected the trade of the port was still thriving, and a further increase in the volume of its foreign commerce was confidently expected. As a result the building was constructed much too large for a business which soon started to decline instead of to grow. Today, it remains one of the few elaborate examples in New England of public architecture from the Federal Period and has an especial interest derived from a prominent name that appeared on the list of customs officers to serve there.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of America's outstanding men-of-letters, was Surveyor of the Port of Salem from 1846 to 1849. For 3 years prior to the spring of 1846, Hawthorne had been living at the Old Manse in Concord where his financial condition had become serious, due to the uncertain income derived from his writing. Political friends, realizing the plight of the poverty-stricken writer, had succeeded in securing for him the post of Surveyor at the Salem Custom House.

Completely lacking any interest in business, Hawthorne found the surveyorship no more stimulating than previous ventures into the world of affairs. At the time he took up his duties the business of the port was decreasing rapidly. Seated at his crude pine desk in the southwest corner room on the first floor of the Custom House, the author could look out upon the decaying wharves and empty warehouses waiting for the cargoes that ships no longer brought. As he gazed upon this scene, Hawthorne probably conceived the plot for many a good story, yet his years as Surveyor were singularly devoid of any writings which foreshadowed his future greatness. For one thing, he found it impossible to combine the job of book-keeper with that of literary man, and for another, his associates seemed to lack the essential qualities to excite his pensive nature into action.

With no particular regrets, Hawthorne returned in the summer of 1849 to his study and forthwith turned out "The Scarlet Letter," "The House of Seven Gables," and "The Blithedale Romance"—works which established his reputation as an author and are still the basis of his claim to immortality. He thought the inactivity in the Custom House of his day had an enervating effect upon his creative powers, but it was there that he stored up the materials for his greatest novel, "The Scarlet Letter."

Nathaniel Hawthorne at about the age he held a position as a customs officer in the Salem Custom House. Reproduced from a painting by Charles Osgood. Courtesy of the Essex Institute



How to Reach the Site

FROM BOSTON and points south, Salem is reached by automobile over Massachusetts Routes 1A and 107, and by Route 128 from U. S. Route 1 at Lynnfield. From points west, Route 128 from U. S. Route 20 at Waltham conveniently avoids Boston. The site is located one-eighth of a mile east of the point where Route 1A enters Derby Street from the north. The site is also accessible by water, both Derby Wharf and Central Wharf bordering on the main channel of Salem Harbor. Trains via the eastern division of the Boston & Maine Railroad, a quarter of a mile away, provide frequent service to North Station in Boston.

Service to the Public

VISITORS are cordially welcomed to the historic site. Although development is incomplete, there are many features of interest. Among the buildings open to the public are the Old Custom House and the Derby House. A fee of 25 cents for admission to the Derby House is charged visitors over 16 years of age, with the exception of members of school groups who are admitted free up to 18 years of age. Organizations or groups will be given special service if arrangements are made in advance with the superintendent of the site.

Address all communications relative to the site to the Superintendent, Salem Maritime National Historic Site, Salem, Mass.

