

SAMA.047 10
000766
373/132927

CRSIB # 000766

His Rescued File

DERBY WHARF, SALEM MASS.

BY EDWIN SMALL

1936

BRANCH OF RECREATIONAL PLANNING AND STATE
COOPERATION
211 Congress Street,
Boston, Massachusetts.

McTague
Return to Applicant

N.P.S. DIVISION
RICHMOND, VA
NOV 11 1936

November 6, 1936.

Acting Assistant Director
Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings,
National Park Service,
Washington, D. C.

Subject: Derby Wharf
Salem, Mass.

Dear Sir:

We take this occasion to report upon the present status of activities in connection with the proposed Derby Wharf National Historic Site and to make some observations upon the course to be followed in the development of the same.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph H. Peterson
Assistant Regional Officer
Region One, District A

JHP/am
cc: Washington

By:

cc: Richmond ✓
cc: W. Small
cc: File

Edwin W. Small
Assistant Historian.

LAND ACQUISITION - After four months of negotiations between Assessors of the City of Salem and property-owners, the Mayor has decided that terms as favorable as possible to the City have been reached and that the matter should be cleared up at once. November 5 has been set as the final date for reaching an agreement with the Polish-American Veterans, an association it has been wise not to antagonize on account of the influence of this body with property-owners. In spite of the effort expended by the Assessors in bringing unreasonable holders to terms, Mayor Bates has advised us that the right of eminent domain will without doubt have to be used in three cases. It is our opinion that the negotiations have been intelligently conducted by the City Assessors and in spite of a tendency, recurring now and then, on the part of keenly interested parties to believe there was needless delay, we feel that the matter has been deferred no longer than necessary to bring prices to a level that the City can accept. Moreover, we believe it has been wise for the National Park Service to leave the City with a free hand and, unless action does not follow presently, to show no sign of impatience.

ENGINEERING SURVEY - Indication that Mayor Bates is ready to close negotiations is evidenced by his approval on November 4 of an engineering survey to be begun on Monday, November 9. On November 2 Mayor Bates refused to give his consent to start

this survey on Wednesday, November 4, on the ground that the presence of field workers during the present week would handicap the City in its final negotiations. District Office "B", Region One, was notified of the postponement on November 2. On November 5 District Office "B" will be requested to send Assistant Engineer Sweeney to begin the survey on November 9. Assistant Regional Officer Borgeson advised this office on November 3 that on account of the resignation of an engineer in his office Sweeney would probably be needed in District "B" very soon. It is hoped that it may be possible for Sweeney to come on November 9 and that he may be able to map the entire area before being recalled. Regional Engineer Gray, who visited the proposed site on October 28 with Assistant Regional Officers Roberts and Peterson and the Assistant Historian, has estimated that about one month will be needed to take soundings on Derby Wharf, survey the entire area and prepare maps. On the basis of this work it should be possible to go ahead with plans for the development of the site.

Preservation vs Restoration - Any attempt to present Derby Wharf to the public in a manner historically real is going to require a great deal of restoration. It has, doubtless, been assumed that Derby and Central Wharves would be soundly repaired so that buildings and objects reminiscent of shipping

days can be revived in their proper position. We take no exception to this plan, but we feel the question of whether to restore or simply to preserve is bound to be discussed before final plans are made, and that a minimum of what should be done and a maximum of what could be done should be pointed out.

At the least the Wharves should be built up and protected against washing by the sea. Once this basic undertaking is finished the writer can conceive of simply surfacing the entire area of the Wharves and planting it into vast stretches of greensward. Under such a plan Derby Wharf could be used as a public landing for harbor craft and pleasure boats. The Wharf would be open to the public at all times, the cost of administration and maintenance would be small, and to a limited degree the large open space could be used for monumentation - such as the memorial the First Baptist Church of Salem wishes to erect to the memory of her pioneering missionary son, the Reverend Adironam Judson. Following this scheme Derby and Central Wharves and Salem Harbor would present an appearance very attractive and more scenic from the Custom House and "Little Red Brick House" than if the Wharves were loaded with warehouses. For if the Wharves are to be realistically restored they would need a number of large barn-like structures smelling of exotic cargoes, tar, hemp, and fish and affording a degree of human abandon and unkemptness inconceivable on a public reservation.

The first point to be made against restoration in this case, we believe, then, is that it is impossible and perhaps undesirable

to achieve even at great expense. Secondly, it should be pointed out that the Derby Wharf area unlike some historic sites possesses original structures, -the Custom House, the Derby House, the Derby Counting House, and a three-story house of the Federalist period, which in themselves offer a great deal of historical interest and which furnished with original material that may be secured on loan from the vast stores of the Essex Institute, the Peabody Museum, and individuals affords the opportunity to show just the thing and not the thing just like it. From the educational standpoint this generous supply of original objects may be effectively supplemented by using the devices now employed by the National Park Service to illustrate what is not explained by originals or reproductions, namely - the model, the diorama, the chart and pictures. For instance, wouldn't a model of the original Derby Wharf with warehouses be as useful for educational purposes as an elaborate restoration in situ? Wouldn't models of sailing ships properly grouped tell more than could be told in one or two replicas?

The writer has no intention of discrediting any plans for an uncompromising restoration. He has wished simply to call attention to the enormous difference between saving what is left or partly left and attempting to replace what is gone forever. We expect the question is one that the Advisory Board may have under discussion at some of its

*This appeals
to man as
dramatic
treatment*

meetings and that some general policy may be established.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH - The Essex Institute and Peabody Museum possess material that should be thoroughly explored in advance of the evolution of plans for development of the site. To date our researches have covered only portions of the published matter and some of the early maps. We have yet to find a map showing Derby Wharf prior to the erection of the lighthouse.

[The Diary of Reverend William Bentley published by the Essex Institute, 4 volumes 1905, 1911, 1914, is a magnificent social document of Salem for the twenty-five years following the American Revolution. It contains several references to Derby Wharf, the most significant appearing in the entry for October 16, 1807.

A collection which should be invaluable and to which considerable time should be devoted are the Derby Papers, 1742 - 1845, consisting of thirty-four bound volumes and four boxes of letters ranging from the early shipping papers of Captain Richard Derby down to narratives on the growth of the Derby mercantile business by the local historians,--William Oliver and Jonathan Felt. The papers in this large collection are not arranged strictly in chronological order, but the separate resume of each volume and the indices in a Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Essex Institute should provide likely leads to important data. With the assistance of occasional loans of library workers from the Essex County Historical

Records Survey the writer hopes to comb this important source for material relating to the construction of Derby Wharf and the several Derby buildings.

A monograph that is indispensable as an introduction to the whole problem is James Duncan Phillips, The Life and Times of Richard Derby, Merchant of Salem, Cambridge, 1929. As an appendix to this slender volume, Mr. Phillips has published the deeds on property to which the Derbys were a party. A study comparable to this on Richard Derby's son, Elias Hasket Derby, is needed.

THE DERBY HOUSE - The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities is anxious to have the Derby House taken off its hands. Mr. Appleton has inquired if he can count upon the House being taken over before the advent of winter. The position of the National Park Service was explained to him and we recommended that the Society be prepared to continue the maintenance of the House until the end of the fiscal year. We were disappointed to learn that the furnishings in the House would not be included in the transfer. Mr. Appleton has indicated that the pieces belonging to the Society can be used to advantage in other houses owned by the Society. About one-half of the items in the Derby House, including some of the best pieces, are there on loan from the Essex Institute.

It may be desirable to retain these items on the same basis, and eventually to secure additional pieces, especially of Hawthorne material for the Custom House.

Custom House - The Deputy Collector of Customs has made no move to change his quarters to the Post Office Building. As a result of Acting Director Demaray's letter of October 19 to the Commissioner of Customs, it is hoped that an understanding may be reached to cover the remainder of the fiscal year. The Deputy Collector is providing us with one room in the Custom House for the use of the Assistant Engineer in conducting the engineering survey on Derby Wharf.