

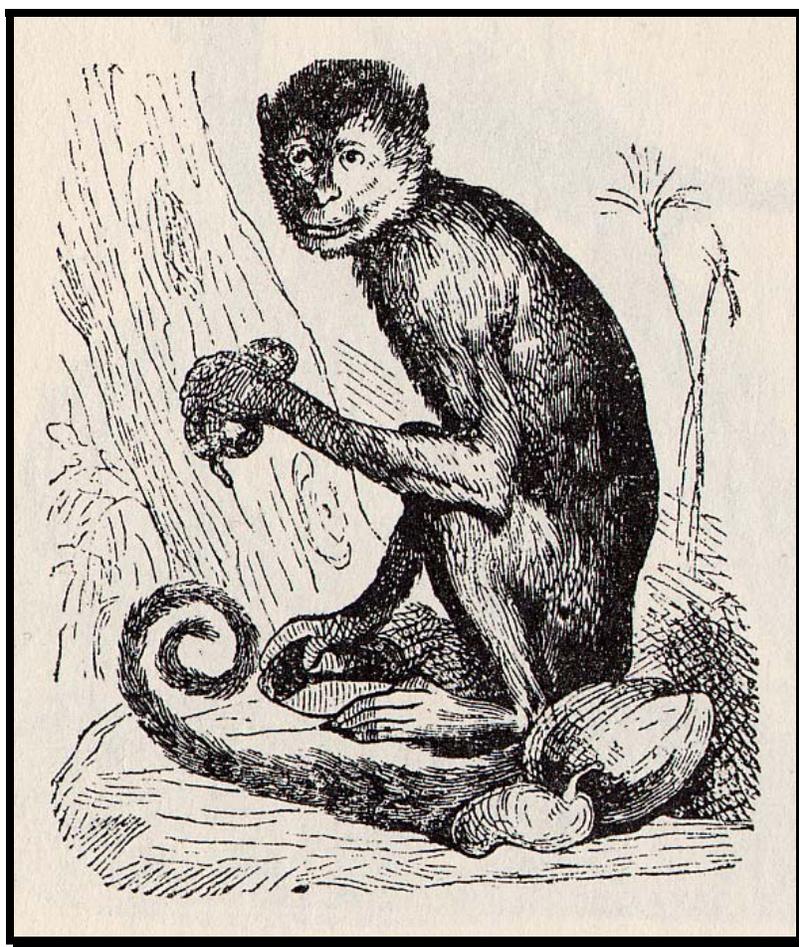
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Salem Maritime National Historic Site
Salem, Massachusetts



ANIMAL HOUSE

By John Frayler, Historian



∞ Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions ∞
Historical musings from Salem Maritime NHS
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During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Salem was well known for its enterprising merchants and seamen. Salem's prosperity grew as her ships reached the far corners of the earth, seeking markets only recently made available by American independence from the restraints of British mercantile policy.

Salem is, perhaps, best known for its world wide reputation as a spice and luxury goods entrepot, however, goods both common and exotic, passed before the ever watchful eyes of the inspectors at the Custom House.

Although not set down in minute detail, some interesting things were going on in the Customs storage facilities. Thanks to observations by the Honorable Robert S. Rantoul, Collector of the Port (1865- 1869) and later Mayor of Salem, we can imagine crowds of children and curious citizens gathered near the door of the Custom House basement. It seems that exotic birds and animals fascinated a predecessor

of Mr. Rantoul, Collector Ephraim Flint Miller. During Colonel Miller's tenure, trade with Africa and South America provided him ample opportunity to purchase, dockside, creatures of various kinds brought back by seamen as ventures, for resale to showmen and circuses.

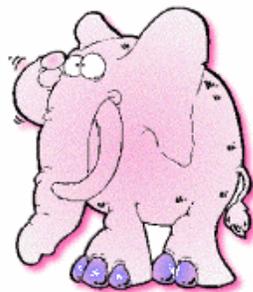
Naturally, Collector Miller had first choice of the offerings, which commonly included monkeys and cockatoos, and less frequently, larger animals such as panthers and leopards.

Apparently, the Customs officials, including Surveyor Nathaniel Hawthorne, did not find anything extraordinary about the appearance of exotic animals on ships' cargo manifests. A document dated May 8, 1848, signed by Mr. Hawthorne and two of his associates at the Custom House, advises the inspectors at Salem that the duties had been paid on the cargo imported aboard the brig Ceylon, recently

arrived from Africa. We find near the bottom of the entry "Two Lions, Six Bbls. Limes"

Mr. Rantoul found some humor in the practice of making the Custom House basement a temporary zoo.

He describes the situation as follows: "The noises which reached the ears of those having business at the Custom House, as well as the aroma which assailed their olfactories, from these warehoused captives, were sometimes trying indeed, but there was no escape so long as the living invoice was enjoying the "Courtesies of the Port."



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