



Foundation Document Overview

Salem Maritime National Historic Site

Massachusetts



Contact Information

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Purpose



SALEM MARITIME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves and interprets New England's maritime history. The buildings and landscapes on the waterfront of Salem, Massachusetts, illustrate global maritime connections from the Colonial period through the 19th century.



Significance

Significance statements express why Salem Maritime National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Salem played a pioneering role in global trade from the Colonial era through the early republic, particularly to the Far East. These New England maritime connections contributed immensely to the foundation of many institutions and the expansion of American banking, insurance, and market systems.
- New England's prominent role in maritime commerce over three centuries is present in both the site's many historic structures and its influence on architecture and literature.
- Salem's waterfront served as a critical center of American resistance during the Revolutionary War; its active privateering fleets and its open port allowed trade throughout the war. The Port of Salem also represents one of the most significant generators of revenue for the new republic's federal treasury through customs duties collected at the U.S. Custom House.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Historic Structures**
- **Designed Cultural Landscape**
- **Museum Collections and Archives**
- **Archeological Resources**
- **Salem Harbor Viewshed and Waterfront**
- **The American Revolution at Sea**
- **Atlantic and Global Trade Networks**

Salem Maritime National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- ***Friendship of Salem, Derby Wharf***
- **Salem Regional Visitor Center (former Salem Armory), 2 New Liberty Street**
- **Maritime Industries**
- **Partnerships**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **New England's Presence in an Atlantic World.** The Port of Salem played an influential role in the development of global maritime trade, nationalism, capitalism, and the economy of the United States within the framework of complex cultural and economic relationships found in the Atlantic World.
- **Securing and Maintaining American Independence.** Privateering, taxation, and the U.S. Customs Service advanced the physical and fiscal security of the newly established country.
- **Living in a Globalized Society.** The globalized integration of industry, trade, financial capital, and communications shaped the lives of men and women in maritime New England's diverse communities, which included merchants, capital investors, workers, European immigrants, enslaved and free people of African descent, and native peoples.
- **New England's Coastal Culture.** The communities along New England's coast—their reliance on both inland resources as well as transport between distant points—has resulted in architectural, literary, governance, economic, industrial, and community experiences that are unique to this region.



Description

Salem Maritime National Historic Site is located in Salem, Massachusetts, only 15 miles north of downtown Boston. The park is situated along the waterfront in Salem Harbor at the northern extent of Massachusetts Bay and at the southern base of the Cape Ann peninsula in the southeastern corner of Essex County. The park is historically associated with the important role that Salem played in the development of international maritime trade from the late 17th century through the 19th century. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Salem controlled valuable trade markets, first with the West Indies and the Atlantic Coast of Europe and then with Asia and Indonesia, funneling wealth and influence into the small city.

The intact historic setting of the park allows visitors to experience multiple facets of American history, ranging from a Colonial-period dwelling to the stately home of one of America's first millionaires, Elias Hasket Derby, to the early-20th-century St. Joseph social hall that is reflective of the Polish immigrant population during a time of industrial development. The wharves and buildings of the park tell the story of the development of colonial port towns, the critical role of international trade in the early economic development of the United States, and the relationship between maritime trade and growing industrialization. The Friendship of Salem, a replica late-18th-century tall ship owned and operated by the National Park Service, reflects Salem's economic heyday from the 1790s through 1830s.

Designated in 1938, the property was the first to be preserved as a national historic site and is an important local manifestation of the early-20th-century Colonial Revival movement. National Park Service landscape architect Norman T. Newton developed a master plan for the park between 1938 and 1944.

The plan was reflective of National Park Service philosophies for preservation and interpretation of historic properties during the 1930s. The intent of the plan was to add visitor facilities and enhance the landscape setting with materials similar to those present during the historic period.

While the original management approach for the park was limited to the theme of maritime trade of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, subsequent legislation broadened the park's focus to include domestic life of colonial Salem, immigration and industrial history of Salem in the 19th and 20th centuries, and historic preservation and cultural landscapes associated with the National Park Service.

Today, Salem Maritime National Historic Site is an 8.93-acre historic district containing 10 historic buildings, nine archeological sites, four historic wharves, and a historic light station that date between 1675 and 1944. The park is also responsible for managing the Salem Regional Visitor Center in downtown Salem at the Salem Armory, which supports the National Park Service mission of supporting the Essex National Heritage Area. Salem Maritime National Historic Site is a key site and gateway to the Essex National Heritage Area, which encompasses 500 square miles along the coast and inland in Essex County, Massachusetts.

Salem Maritime National Historic Site is open year-round and welcomed 371,000 visitors during 2016.

