

Salem Maritime

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • MASSACHUSETTS

Salem was founded in 1626 by Roger Conant and in 1628 became the first town in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Her seaboard location gave impetus to maritime pursuits and soon fishing and shipping became the leading industries of the community. As early as 1643, fish, lumber, and provisions were being sent to the West Indies in exchange for sugar and molasses—staples that were brought home and made into rum. Gradually the orbit of trade was extended to Europe, most particularly to Portugal and Spain which offered a ready market for dried fish, and supplied salt, wine, fruit, iron, and Spanish dollars in return.

This trade thrived until 1763, when England began to enact and enforce new measures which stringently limited the commercial intercourse of the American Colonies. Under these conditions the economic life of Salem, like that of most continental ports along the Atlantic seaboard, was brought to a standstill, engendering a discontent which grew into resistance and eventually resulted in rebellion.

During the American Revolution, important aid was given by Salem to the colonial cause through privateering. Swift and formidable ships were built, mounted with guns, heavily manned, and directed against British commerce. Salem was the one American port of significance that did not fall into the hands of the British at one time or another during the course of the war. Consequently, it was possible for Salem to keep an average of 50 vessels continually at sea and in search of the enemy.

At the end of the war, the energy that had been shown in privateering found an outlet in a worldwide search for new markets. Pioneering voyages were made by Salem ships into the Baltic and beyond the Cape of Good Hope to the fabulous East Indies and China—voyages which helped to usher in the first golden age of American foreign trade and achieved for Salem a reputation as one of the world's famous ports.

The embargo imposed on American shipping by President Thomas Jefferson in 1807 and the War of 1812 were severe blows to Salem and were the first of several factors which led to the decline of her commerce. During the War of 1812, however, privateering took the place of trade as it had in the Revolution, and at the end of hostilities the pioneering instinct that had been shown at the close of the War of Independence was again in evidence. New channels of trade to Africa, Australia, and South America were explored. After the discovery of gold in California, Salem shipowners were among the first to reap profits from the trade around Cape Horn to San Francisco. Salem's landlocked harbor was too shallow to accommodate large new ships, however, and as a result, her commerce was rapidly absorbed by the deepwater ports of Boston and New York.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Salem Maritime National Historic Site is on Derby Street, Salem, about 20 miles northeast of Boston. From Boston and points south, Salem is reached by Mass. 1A and 107 through Lynn and also by Mass. 129 along the shore from Lynn through Marblehead. From a westerly direction, Mass. 114 brings traffic from Mass. 128 in Peabody and U.S. 1 in Danvers.

Groups may receive special service if advance arrangements are made at the site.

ADMINISTRATION

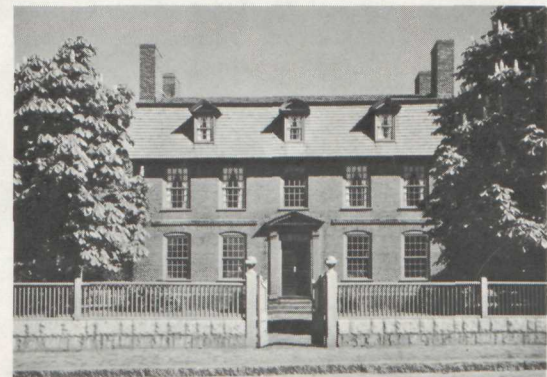
Salem Maritime National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 847, Salem, MA 01970, is in immediate charge.



CUSTOM HOUSE



INTERIOR, DERBY HOUSE



DERBY HOUSE

POINTS OF INTEREST

Derby Wharf, which extends nearly 2,000 feet into Salem Harbor, was begun by Capt. Richard Derby soon after 1762, and during the Revolution was used by his son, Elias Hasket Derby, as a base for outfitting privateers. After the war, the wharf became one of the great mercantile centers for the young republic. Warehouses for the storage of cargoes from overseas formerly stood in a long row on the wharf.

The Custom House, located directly opposite Derby Wharf, was built in 1819 for the officers of the customs revenue. Nathaniel Hawthorne worked here as Surveyor of the Port of Salem from 1846 to 1849. During these years he gathered material for his greatest novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, that includes the famous introduction in which the Custom House and its occupants and surroundings are inimitably described. The desk and other objects used by Hawthorne as a cus-

toms officer have been preserved. In the southeast room are exhibits and panels which illustrate and explain the fascinating history of Salem's oceangoing commerce.

The Derby House, now the oldest brick dwelling in Salem, was erected in 1761-62 for Elias Hasket Derby. Derby, Salem's most successful merchant, lived here until the early years of the Revolutionary War. The original paint colors of the rooms and the ornate staircase in the front hall are of unusual interest. Among the furnishings are objects associated with the Derbys, including some family portraits.

The Scale House, directly behind the Custom House, was an important adjunct to the collection of customs. Here the indispensable weighing and measuring devices were kept safe from the elements. Some of the devices are still here.

The Rum Shop, a building probably erected in 1800 or soon after, stands on the corner east of the Derby House.

The Hawkes House, between the Derby House and the Custom House, was originally designed about 1780 by Samuel McIntire, Salem's great architect, as a mansion for Elias Hasket Derby. Capt. Benjamin Hawkes, a shipbuilder and merchant, bought the structure in 1801, and completed it in its present form.

Central Wharf, extending into the harbor parallel to and west of Derby Wharf, but only one third as long, was first constructed in 1791-92 by Simon Forrester, captain of a Derby privateer in the Revolution and subsequently a prominent merchant.

The city of Salem has a rich heritage of fine houses, many of them built for merchants and shipmasters. Several are open to the public. The Essex Institute and the Peabody Museum are excellent museums containing much material about Salem and its trade. Information about these and other points of interest can be obtained at the site.

