

# 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.

## 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

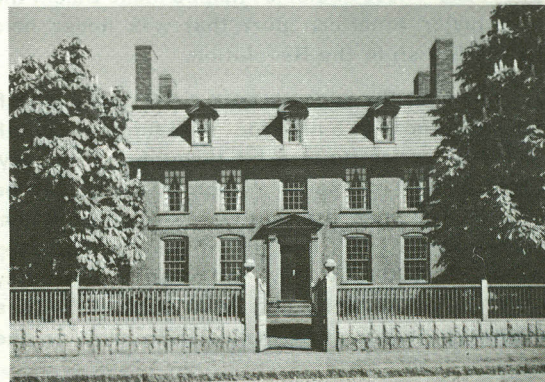
Salem Maritime National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 847, Salem, MA 01970, is in immediate charge.



CUSTOM HOUSE AND BONDED WAREHOUSE



THE LIGHTHOUSE ON DERBY WHARF



DERBY HOUSE

## A TOUR OF SALEM'S OLD WATERFRONT

This tour starts at the inshore end of Derby Wharf, directly across the street from the Custom House. Numbers correspond to tour markers.

1. You are standing on Derby Wharf, the longest and busiest of 45 wharves that lined the waterfront during Salem's heyday between the Revolution and the War of 1812. The red building on Central Wharf, to the west (your right), is an exterior copy of a typical warehouse. Even wharves as small as White's, between Derby and Central Wharves, provided berths for a couple of vessels and a warehouse for their cargoes.

2. At this warehouse in April 1791 the cargo of the brig *Henry* from India and the Cape of Good Hope was auctioned. Chintz, cottons, gingham, indigo, ostrich feathers, raisins, wine, China silks, and chests of tea drew local merchants and townspeople. During the Revolution, Salem had auctions of the British ships and cargoes that were captured by her privateers. Part of the profit went to the owners and crew, and part, often including vital war supplies, went to the Continental Congress.

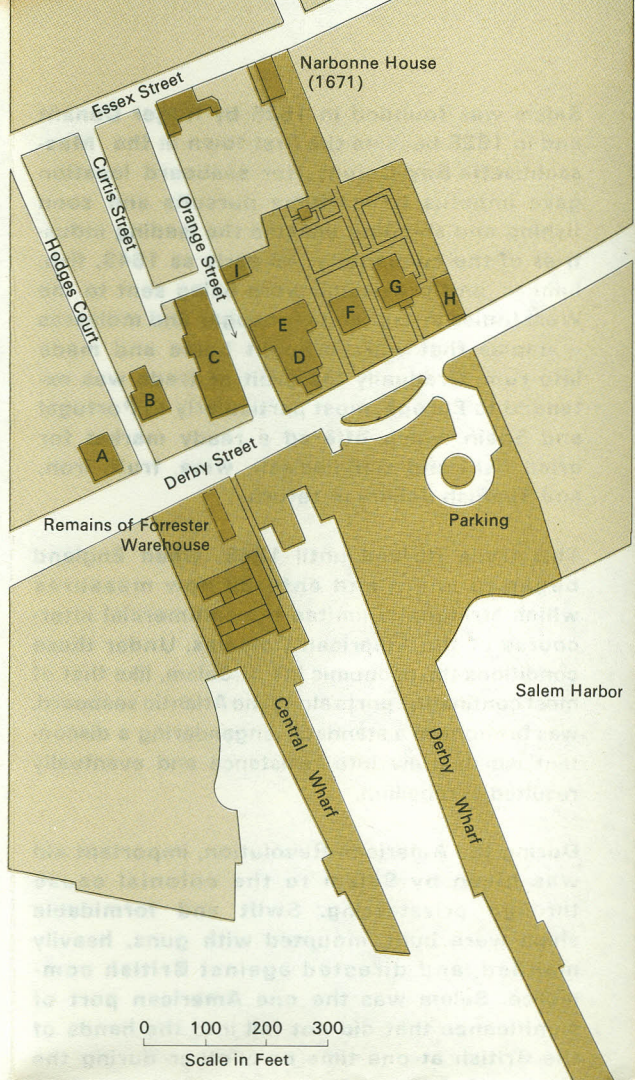
3. Until 1806, the wharf ended here. The narrow extension was added to provide more docking space in deeper water as shipping increased. Salem was about at its peak in tonnage, volume of trade, and number of ships when the embargo of 1807 idled 117 vessels at their berths.

4. Around the time this extension was built, more wharves were constructed near the mouth of the harbor to the eastward. Gradually the inner harbor was filled in. You can see what's left of it by looking to the west past the end of Central Wharf.

5. Wharves were built by floating timber rafts into position, then sinking them with stones. Repairs and reconstruction were constantly underway because of damage from high tides and storms. Some of the oldest stonework in Derby Wharf can be seen at the bottom of the east wall between the two modern small boat piers. These stones, dating probably from 1806, are irregularly shaped and cut compared to the granite blocks used in later repairs. Regardless of age, all of the rocks in the wharf came from towns within 20 miles of Salem.

6. Salem Harbor is an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. Beyond the islands to the east, you can see stretches of the horizon and the open sea about five miles away. The lighthouse on Baker's Island marks the channel entrance. In early years, there were no beacons to warn seafarers of the numerous rocks. These obstacles helped make Salem the only major American port that was never held by the British in the Revolution.

7. Look over the edge on both sides of the wharf. Salem Harbor has a nine-foot tidal range, so depth of water varies quite a bit throughout the day. Ships docked and sailed at high tide—and settled in the mud when the tide was low. Most Salem vessels were small and did not need very deep water. A 100-foot East Indiaman would only draw about 10 feet. Long wharves like this one made the harbor even shallower by slowing the



outgoing current and causing silt to pile up. You can see this happening today as a sand bank builds up against the west side of the wharf.

8. Although Salem never regained its prominence after the War of 1812, shipping did not die out entirely. This lighthouse, built in 1871, is still used. Vessels in the outer channel, where it swings inshore beyond the red lighthouse, can stay in deep water by keeping the two lights in line. Oil tankers docking near the mouth of the harbor are the only oceangoing vessels now using the port of Salem.

9. Walking back toward the original shoreline, the buildings you see along Derby Street appear about as they did to a seaman returning from a three-year voyage to China.

*The buildings to the left of the Custom House are privately owned and not open to visitors.*

A. At the far left, beyond Central Wharf, is the yellow, gambrel-roofed house where Capt. Richard Derby lived when he started his shipping fleet, his seagoing family, and his long wharf.

**B.** The big gray house belonged to Capt. Simon Forrester, a pioneer in the Baltic trade who built Central Wharf and the brick warehouse whose foundation is still visible on it.

**C.** Benjamin Crowninshield, captain of the brig *Henry*, merchant, and Secretary of the Navy during the War of 1812 lived in the 3-story brick house.

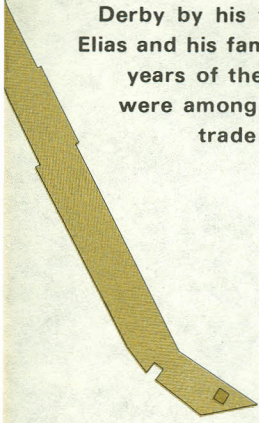
*Next are several buildings of Salem Maritime National Historic Site.*

**D.** The Custom House was built in 1819 for the officers of the customs revenue. The collector, surveyor, weighers, gaugers, measurers, inspectors, boatmen, and numerous clerks here handled the business of the port for the Federal Government. Several offices are restored, including one used by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the cupola atop the building is regularly open to visitors.

**E.** The Bonded Warehouse, looking like two wings at the back of the Custom House, was used for the storage of cargoes awaiting re-export or payment of customs duties. The original hoisting winch and other pieces of equipment are still in operation, and tea chests, rum barrels, and other typical cargoes can be seen.

**F.** Hawkes House, between the Custom House and Derby House, was originally designed by Samuel McIntire, Salem's great architect. Capt. Benjamin Hawkes, who operated a shipyard directly across the street, bought the house in 1801 and completed it in its present form.

**G.** Derby House, now the oldest brick dwelling in Salem, was erected in 1761-62 for Elias Hasket Derby by his father, Capt. Richard Derby. Elias and his family lived here until the early years of the Revolution. Later, his ships were among the first American vessels to trade with China, Russia, India, and the Philippines.



**H.** West India Goods Store was built in the early 1800s by Capt. Henry Prince, who lived in the Derby House next door. It was one of the many shops along the waterfront where imported goods were sold.

**I.** Scale House, not visible from the wharf, is directly behind the Custom House. Weighing and measuring devices used to determine value of cargoes were stored here. Some of the equipment is still in operation.

The City of Salem retains many other features from its heyday as a seaport. Streets, business blocks, public buildings, and houses built for merchants and shipmasters can be seen throughout the city, reminders of the era when its citizens all depended on shipping for their livelihood.

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.

**National Park Service**  
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**