

Salem Maritime

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Photograph by Ross Chapple

National Historic Site, Massachusetts

Elias Hasket Derby, 47 years old and well on his way to becoming America's first millionaire, thrust the brass telescope through the second-story window of his counting house, looked past the bustle and the ships berthed along the family wharf, and scanned the horizon beyond Naugus Head. The horizon remained clear of sail, and eventually he put aside his glass. Sighting *Grand Turk*, a favorite vessel he had dispatched to the Far East almost 2 years earlier in 1785, would have given him a measure of relief. A New York sloop had returned from China earlier that month, bringing news that *Grand Turk's* captain planned to sail from Canton on New Year's Day of 1787. Derby had work to do, and so reluctantly he left the sighting to the boys who lay on the rocks at The Neck, each one hoping to be first back to town with the news that would earn him a Spanish silver dollar from the vessel's owner. Derby, and his father before him, had dispensed many such rewards in the 30 years since the seagoing family had established themselves as Salem merchants. Now, the war years over, the Derbys and other New England merchant-shipowners were about to cross into an age of trade golden beyond their expectations.

Richard Derby, who had turned over control of the business to his second son, Elías, in the 1770's, died in 1783 at the age of 71, but not before seeing his youngest son, John, sail into port from Europe with the Nation's first news of the end of the Revolutionary War—the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Elias never went to sea, but Salem families like the Derbys played an important part in the war, and many reaped a profit from privateering ventures; at war's end, they had the resources and the will to help their town, State, and Nation gain economic stability and their townsmen renown as merchant-seamen

of the world. Salem's 150 privateering vessels would not remain idle in years to come. Independence meant losing foreign markets; Great Britain naturally closed her ports—and those of her West Indian and other colonies—to American vessels. So Salem shipowners, seeking new markets, sent vessels flying their house flags to the far corners of the world. They manned their ships with venturesome sailors, many mere boys. And the merchants empowered their captains, some still in their teens, to act for them as buying and selling agents.

The fame of Salem mariners dated back to the early 1700's, when the town gained a reputation for having the New World's most able and daring captains. And no wonder; many of her sons went to sea at an early age. A Salem boy breathed salt air from the day of his birth, fell asleep to snatches of sea chanteys blowing in on the onshore winds. A youth might ship as a cabin boy at the age of 14, captain a merchant vessel at 20, and by 40 retire from the sea to begin a career as a merchant as well as shipowner.

In 1768 Richard Derby financed the *Essex Gazette*, a newspaper that would become an organ of the Revolution. Friction between England and her American colonies was increasing. In Salem, as elsewhere, British acts affecting commerce and shipping were felt to be intolerable. In February 1775, after 5 years of *worsening relations*, Thomas Gage, governor-general of Massachusetts, ordered soldiers to seize ammunition and cannons in Salem. Some belonged to Richard Derby, who refused to give them up. Two months later a similar order to British soldiers sent them marching to Concord and led to the firing of the shot "heard 'round the world." John Derby immediately sailed for England in *Quero* and reached London in late May, providing the British with the colonies' side of the April 19 skirmish and the first news of the war—copies of the *Essex Gazette*.

The task of carrying the war to the British merchant marine fell to America's merchant seamen, sailing in private ships, the State navies, and the Continental Navy. At the beginning of 1776, the Continental Navy had only four ships to put to sea, and was far too small to damage the Royal Navy. Congress, therefore, issued letters of marque and reprisal to individuals authorizing privately owned and operated vessels to capture enemy shipping for profit.

Early in the war privateers started to take their toll. By the summer of 1776, faced with the doubly rewarding prospect of taking enemy shipping out of action and realizing prize money from the sale of captured goods, many owners had outfitted cargo and coastal craft with 6- or 9-pounder cannon and sent them to sea. These first privateers, mostly small sloops and schooners, were well armed and carried large crews so they could man any prize. Other privateers were larger and better armed, but they were few at the outset of hostilities.

The martial music of fife and drum had become commonplace by 1777 in coastal towns such as Salem. A youth heading through twisted streets toward the sound would round one last corner and come upon a knot of men listening to a smartly dressed ship's officer extolling the benefits of serving aboard a privateer—particularly the trim craft tied up to the wharf behind him. A lad who stayed to listen might join others in accepting his invitation to step over to the tavern for free food and drink. And most, after the fellowship that followed, thought it only right to sign the articles of service that the officer promised would certainly bring them adventure and possibly wealth beyond their imaginings. A privateer's officers and crew, as well as her owner, stood to gain from capture of a rich prize, for each got a percentage of the total prize money.

Throughout the war, sailors preferred to serve aboard privateers because their percentage of prize money—as well as their wages—were higher than on Navy ships: privateers paid seamen \$12 to \$16 per month, and one 14-year-old cabin boy's share of a month's prizes was said to total \$700 in cash, a ton of sugar, 35 gallons of rum, and 20 pounds each of cotton, ginger, logwood and allspice.

In June 1778, with the news that France had entered the war, shipowners, following the example of the Derbys of Salem, began to build vessels especially for privateering—big enough to carry more than 20 guns and crews of 150, and fast enough to run when outmatched. Such a ship was the 180-ton *General Pickering*, built in Salem and granted a letter of marque. She carried 16 six-pounder guns and a crew of 45 men and boys. What gave her a special place in privateering annals was the courage of her commander, 35-year-old Jonathan Haraden of Salem, and his ability to pass that courage on to his crew.

A tall man, handsome with a high forehead, a prominent nose, and close-cropped sandy hair, Haraden endeared himself to his men by tempering his courage in battle with cool deliberation, maintaining an easy-going air at other times, and showing a readiness to take advantage of anything luck brought his way.

In May 1780 Haraden set out on a voyage common to many letters of marque: he sailed for Bilboa, Spain, with a cargo of sugar, and planned to hunt enemy shipping on his return voyage, filling his empty hold with captured cargo. After an uneventful trip across the North Atlantic, the ship encountered a British cutter of 22 guns but fought her off in a 2-hour running battle. In the Bay of Biscay a few nights later Haraden closed unobserved with another vessel his lookout thought to be more heavily



“To the farthest port of the rich East.” As fishing village, haven for privateers, and mercantile center, the port of Salem was the embodiment of its exotic motto. Merchants like Elias Hasket Derby (above) sent their ships to sea in war and peace, seeking the world's wealth. Luxuries like Canton tea and china, staples like Russian iron and canvas flowed into Salem and became in turn cargoes for ships embarking on new mercantile ventures.

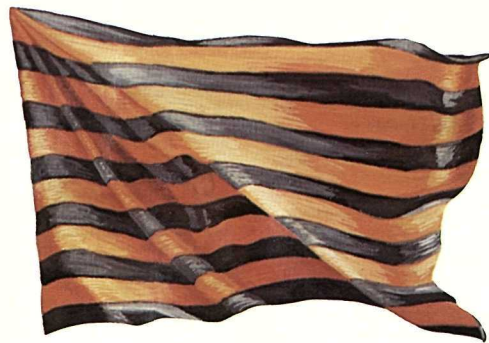


Jonathan Haraden

armed than *General Pickering*. Without hesitating, Haraden brought his blacked-out ship alongside, took a deep breath, and bellowed a bluff through his speaking trumpet: he identified his ship as "an American frigate of the largest class." Taken by surprise and unable to verify the statement in the dark, the captain of the 22-gun British privateer *Golden Eagle* struck her colors within minutes. When he came aboard *General Pickering* as a prisoner of war and learned that his ship carried more guns—and crewmen—he was furious.

Several days later as *General Pickering* and her prize neared the Spanish harbor, Haraden's lookouts spotted a vessel coming out under heavy sail to meet them. The captain of *Golden Eagle* cheerfully informed Haraden that the vessel was the British privateer *Achilles*, mounting 42 guns and carrying 140 men. Haraden replied simply: "I shan't run from her." He was determined to deliver both his sugar and his prize to Bilboa.

As the wind subsided, *Achilles* closed and recaptured *Golden Eagle*, while Haraden, alert to every breath of wind remaining, maneuvered to the position from which he had chosen to



Privateer Ensign

fight—inside a line of shoals that the heavier enemy could not cross. After ordering the men to be ready for battle in the morning, Haraden retired for a sound night's sleep. When finished with their tasks, those Salem boys who could not sleep took to the rigging to watch the scene ashore, where thousands of Spaniards spent the night before bonfires, dancing, carousing, and shouting insults at *Achilles*—the representative of a nation that had dealt defeat to Spain upon the seas since the days of the Spanish Armada.

On a light dawn breeze, *Achilles*, whose guns and men outnumbered *General Pickering's* by 3 to 1, crept toward the shoals. Ashore, Spaniards shouted defiance. Haraden kept his broadside to the approaching *Achilles* and maintained a raking fire upon the British privateer. Since *Achilles* could not fire directly ahead, she was practically defenseless. For 2 hours shot struck hull, deck, sails, and rigging of the British vessel. Then with his ammunition running low Haraden ordered his sweating gunners to load with crowbars, cargo from a previous prize. After receiving this terrible volley, *Achilles* ran for sea on a fresh breeze. Haraden gave chase under full sail, retook *Golden Eagle*, but could not catch the fleeing *Achilles*, and returned to a hero's welcome in Bilboa. Later, with cargo and prize sold, Haraden and his men sailed for home. Along the

way, off Sandy Hook on the New Jersey coast, they met three armed British merchantmen that split up and ran. *General Pickering* fought and captured each one singly, then brought them into Salem—ending a voyage as profitable as it was adventurous.

One of the most successful of New England's Revolutionary War privateersmen, Haraden is said to have captured more than 60 ships, mounting 1,000 guns. Other Salem captains did well, too. By the time John Derby brought home the Nation's first news of the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the privateers that the town of less than 6,000 had put to sea had captured almost 450 vessels and had brought most of them into port. However, the British fleet had captured more than 50 of Salem's privateers, and many other Salem ships were lost at sea.

The American merchant marine now was about to come of age. An independent America was not permitted by Britain to continue the pre-war practice of buying Chinese teas from Britain's East India Company, which had an absolute monopoly on trade between Canton and England and her colonies. So practical men decided to send their own ships to Canton. A New York financier renamed a privateer *Empress of China* and dispatched her the year after the signing of the Treaty of Paris. A Salem ship was not far behind. Manned by a crew of 13 under Capt. Ebenezer West, *Grand Turk* sailed for the Isle of France (Mauritius) in the Indian Ocean in December 1785, carrying a varied cargo that Derby had been accumulating—as was his method—over a number of months. Finding the market there depressed, Captain West went on to Canton.

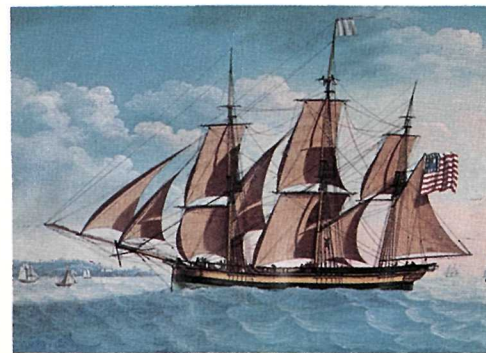
As a privateer the 300-ton *Grand Turk*, carrying 28 guns and 128 men, had captured 16 prizes in her four voyages. But on her first trip out as a merchant vessel she got off to a poor start. Buffeted by winter gales in the North Atlantic, then becalmed in the doldrums farther south, she put into Table Bay at the Cape of Good Hope after 82 days at sea. Captain West reported sails split and rotted, spars sprung, and "Considerable Loss in the Cargo by Heads of Cask Swelling out." Three weeks later, after making major repairs and selling cargo to lighten the ship, the captain sailed across the Indian Ocean toward the Isle of France and, within 5 weeks, dropped anchor in the open roadstead off Port Louis. There he got his second setback, finding money scarce, local buying power low, and little opportunity to refill his hold with an outbound cargo. By July 1, after 2 months in port, he had sold some of the goods—among them, 50 boxes of spermaceti candles and 22 boxes of prunes—and had chartered the space in his hold to a French trader who wanted to ship ebony, gold thread and betel nuts to Canton to exchange for teas. Outbound under tropic skies, the lookout raised Java Head in 3

weeks. *Grand Turk* navigated the treacherous Sunda Straits and entered the balmy, archipelago-studded Java Sea before passing into the South China Sea. In early September she stood into the mouth of the Pearl River and picked up a Chinese pilot at the Portuguese colony of Macao. Passing the dark, narrow peak of Lintin Island, she beat 60 miles up the Pearl River under the guidance of the pilot. Rounding a final bend, *Grand Turk* came upon the river's deepwater anchorage at Whampoa, where foreign ships anchored in a line that sometimes stretched for 3 miles.

Grand Turk nosed through the sampans, their cooking fires burning astern and wafting strange smells over the teeming river. The Salem trader passed large, ocean-going junks with eyes painted on their sharp prows to spy out devils and smaller river junks manned by naked coolies. She berthed among vessels from Holland, Spain, France, Britain, Denmark and Sweden, all veterans of the China trade.

There she would lie for more than 3 months as Captain West awaited the arrival of the best teas and went through the complex process of selling, buying, and dealing with Chinese merchants through government officials. The crew, meantime, overhauled and repainted the ship. When not working they took in the sights of Canton, marvelling at a world where birds sang in gilded cages, where hauntingly strange strains of Oriental music floated over the dark waters alight with flares of flaming joss paper, where jugglers, cobblers, barbers and beggars vied with merchants of fireworks, ivory, herbs and gold for the attention—and the money—of gawking sailors. When *Grand Turk* finally sailed for home on January 1, she carried, in addition to sundry goods and wiser crewmen, her main cargo of 400 chests of Bohea tea that Massachusetts ladies soon would be sampling from the china services also stowed belowdecks.

The sight of the *Grand Turk* off Bakers Island on May 22, 1787, gladdened the heart of Elias Derby, for his ship, and investment, were safe. As she passed Naugus Head, Captain West



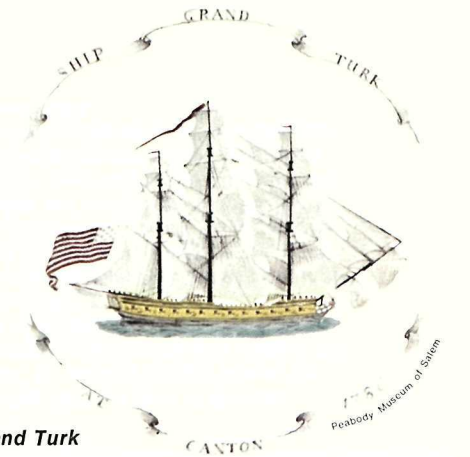
Derby Ship John

shortened sail and fired a salute. From throughout the town, people flocked to the waterfront. Ready hands took holds of hawsers and eased her into the wharf. Derby stepped aboard with other townspeople who were eager to greet the crew and admire the curios they had brought back. But after a few minutes Derby went below with his captain to review the manifest, join in a toast to successful completion of one venture, and just possibly talk of others to come.

For Derby, the wooing of the China market would be short and profitable. In 1789 his ship *Astrea* again carried a mixed cargo to Canton; he sometimes spent a year assembling goods for his eastern voyages—iron and hemp from the Baltic, wines from France, rum from the West Indies, and provisions such as flour and meat from American ports. He also invited townspeople to consign goods for sale in foreign ports. As a result, *Astrea* carried such odd items as 50 boxes of chocolates, two boxes of women's shoes, 228 handkerchiefs, and a buggy and harness. She arrived in Canton in 1789, a year that found four other Salem vessels—three of them Derby's—among the 15 American ships anchored at Whampoa. *Astrea*, as a latecomer, found little demand for American wares or for ginseng, the medicinal herb, highly prized by the Chinese, which Americans used to open the China trade.

Already Americans had begun to look for new wares to trade for the teas and silks in demand. A ship, *Columbia*, sailing from Boston but owned in part by Salem men, including John Derby, discovered in 1789 that the skin of sea otters found along America's northwest coast brought top value in the China trade. Boston men soon took over the business, sailing around Cape Horn, bartering with the Pacific Northwest Indians for skins. Some broke the voyage to hunt seals off Chile or trade for sandalwood in the Hawaiian Islands, both enterprises profiting them in the China trade.

As the China market began to overflow with American goods, so America's tea market became saturated. By 1790 Derby had all but dropped out of the China trade, seeking commerce in other areas, and other merchants had at least slacked off. Between 1785 and 1799 Derby's ships made only 4 voyages to China, but 35 to the East Indies and India. Many Salem ships continued to chart courses to the Far East. Derby sent his son Elias Jr. to India, where he opened American trade with Calcutta and Madras, making more money there for his father than the China trade did that year. Derby continued to do business in Russia, a market opened in 1784 when his bark *Light Horse* touched at Kronstadt, the port of St. Petersburg. In 1797 Salem's *Rajah* arrived with America's first shipment of pepper from its source, Sumatra, and established Salem as the world pepper emporium for a decade to come.

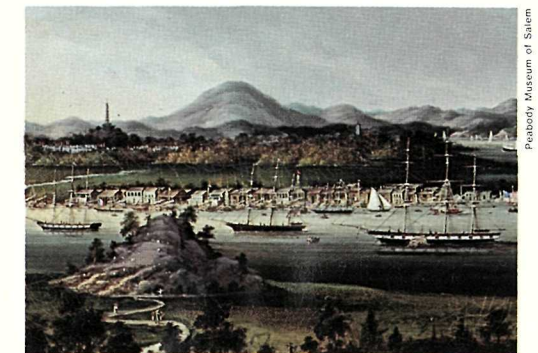


Grand Turk

Capt. Charles Derby entered port in 1795 with Arabian coffee, starting a Salem monopoly of the trade from Muscat and Mocha that lasted until 1807. In 1796 Capt. Henry Prince, in Derby's *Astrea II*, set out to open American trade with the Philippines—in sugar, pepper, indigo, and Manila hemp.

Through other wharves in Salem—Derby's was only one of 45 in 1801—and all along the Atlantic seaboard, foreign imports—as frivolous as jungle beasts, as essential as basic metals—flowed into the United States, while exports passed into the world economy. Coasters also loaded and unloaded at the same wharves. Some cargoes were sold locally, others warehoused for later overseas ventures. In many instances, foreign goods were stored right on the wharf, or just off it, in a warehouse; teas coming in from China in May might be shipped out to Europe in November.

The wharf came under the command of a wharfinger, or manager, appointed by its owners. From his small office, where often a coal fire burned to combat the waterfront damp, he tended his complex business: charging vessels for loading and unloading, buying and selling provisions and ballast for outward bound ships, auctioning incoming trade goods left on con-



Whampoa Anchorage, 1850

This 1797 view of Salem shows Derby Wharf with three warehouses that stored goods from the West Indies, Russia, or Canton.



Courtesy of Charles H. Phipps

signment, and protecting the wharf from fire and the dock from being shallowed by the dumping of ballast.

The wharfinger worked in the center of a town's commercial activity. In the Salem of 1807, for example, the man in charge of Derby Wharf might have five or six vessels docked on the westerly side, maintaining a brisk movement of goods between them and the five warehouses ranged along the easterly length of the wharf behind an array of cargo scales, booms, winches, tackle, and cordage. Other warehouses, owners' counting rooms, sailmakers' lofts, ship chandlers' stores and retail outlets for imported goods crowded the seaward side of Derby Street near the wharf, facing the houses of the gentry. From the back rooms of some of the waterfront buildings came the scream of parrots, the chatter of monkeys, brought back from distant shores. Sailors recently returned from the Indies, Russia, Australia or China, talked loudly on street corners, in front of boarding houses and taverns. Wagons creaked and horses clattered over the cobblestones, while the caulkers' mallet kept up its regular tattoo. But for all activity to come up short, a lad out of breath after his run from The Neck had only to shout: "An Indian! An Indian! Look to Naugus Head!"

Stratford C. Jones

Salem Maritime

About Your Visit

Salem Maritime National Historic Site is on Derby Street, Salem, 20 miles northeast of Boston.

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 Custom House, Derby Street, Salem, MA 01970, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Photograph by Ross Chapple

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National Historic Site, Massachusetts

A Tour of Salem's Old Waterfront

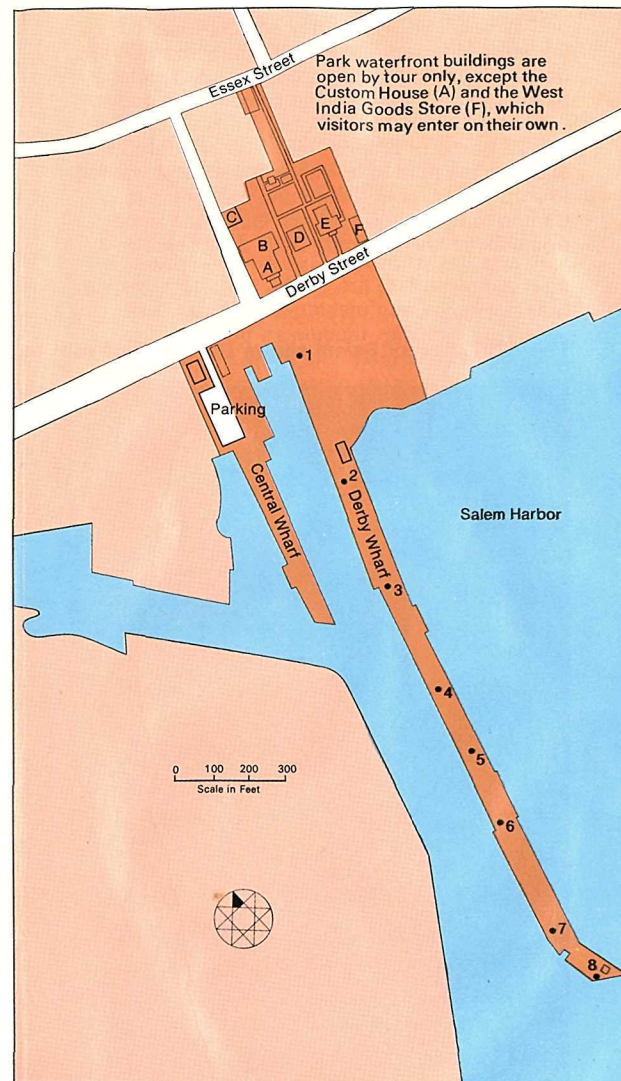
Derby Wharf

Salem was always a busy port, but especially so in the years between the Revolution and the War of 1812. On any day a dozen vessels—schooners, brigs, and ships—might be seen entering or leaving port. Derby Wharf was the center of this activity; ships alongside might be loading tea, fish, or timber for Boston, Kingston, or Savannah.

A ship standing in with the tide between Winter Island and Naugus Head, clews up her courses and topgallant sails, rounds to off Derby Wharf, and is warped in to the pier. In her hold might be silk, iron, or pepper from Bombay, Kronstadt, or Sumatra.

Derby Wharf was continually busy distributing the products of world commerce. In wartime trade was replaced by the martial preparations of privateers and auctions of their prizes and cargoes. War or peace, Salem's waterfront was a scene of maritime enterprise.

- 1 Derby Wharf was Salem's longest and busiest for many years. This section was built about 1764, when the water reached almost to the street at high tide.
- 2 This warehouse is one of two remaining in Salem and moved to this spot for preservation. At one time there were 14 warehouses on this wharf, and over 100 in Salem.
- 3 Until 1806, the wharf ended here. The extension was added to provide more deep water berths as the volume of shipping increased.
- 4 Around the time this extension was built, more wharves were being constructed near the mouth of the harbor to the eastward. Gradually the inner harbor was filled in. You can see what is left by looking west past Central Wharf.
- 5 Wharves were built by floating timber rafts into position, then sinking them with stones. Some of the oldest stonework in Derby Wharf, dating from 1806, can be seen at the bottom of the east wall between the two modern small boat piers.
- 6 Beyond the islands to the east, you can see the Atlantic about 5 miles away. The lighthouse on Baker's Island marks the channel entrance. The numerous rocks helped make Salem the only major American port never held by the British in the Revolution.
- 7 Salem Harbor has a 9-foot tidal range. Ships docked and sailed at high tide—and settled in the mud when the tide was out. Most Salem vessels were small and did not need very deep water. A 100-foot vessel would have a draft of about 10 feet.
- 8 This lighthouse, built in 1871, was used as a range. By keeping this light in line with the lighthouse further out vessels stayed in the channel. Oil tankers docking near the mouth of the harbor are the only oceangoing vessels now using the port.



Waterfront Buildings

In 1790 Salem was the sixth city of the United States, and the duties collected in the port on vessels entering from a foreign voyage furnished one-twentieth of all the Federal Government's revenues. Salem's economy, like the Nation's, depended on profits from shipping and trade. This in turn supported shipbuilding, coastwise voyages, sailmaking, ship chandlers, rope walks, and a host of other maritime pursuits.

Walking back toward the shore you will see the buildings along Derby Street appear about as they did to a seaman returning to port.



A The Custom House was built in 1819 for the officers of the customs revenue who handled the business of the port for the Federal Government. Several offices are restored, including one used by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Above

B The Bonded Warehouse 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 place, and tea chests, rum barrels, and other typical cargoes can be seen.

C In the Scale House were stored weighing and measuring devices used to determine value of cargoes. Some of the equipment is still in operation.

D Hawkes House was designed by Samuel McIntire, Salem's great architect. Benjamin Hawkes, who operated a shipyard directly across the street, bought the house in 1801 and completed it in its present form. The house is the only known privateer prize warehouse left in Salem and was used as such by Elias Hasket Derby during the Revolution.

E Derby House, the oldest brick dwelling in Salem, was erected in 1761-62 for Elias Hasket Derby, a merchant whose ships later opened U.S. trade with Russia, India, and the Philippines, making him a millionaire.



F West India Goods Store was built in the early 1800's, by Capt. Henry Prince, who lived in the Derby House next door. Spices and other imports are again sold here, and a coffeehouse serves varieties of coffees and teas. Above