



The Salem Armory



A Salem Landmark

For almost a century, the Salem Armory dominated Essex Street. It was the home of the Second Corps of Cadets and an important social gathering place for the citizens of Salem. Like most armories, it consisted of two parts: the head house, where the offices and social rooms were located, and the drill shed, where the cadets trained.

Building the Salem Armory

The Francis Peabody House

In 1890, the Second Corps of Cadets purchased the home and property of Colonel Francis Peabody for use as a head house. Peabody's father, Francis, had purchased the late federal-style mansion in 1839 and added an enormous gothic-style banquet hall to the house. The banquet hall had a tall fireplace decorated with carved medieval figures, lions, and leopards. Chandeliers made of antlers hung from the ceiling. The Second Corps added a drill shed to the back of the building to provide space for training and storage of equipment.

Top: Cadets gather at the entrance to the head house, c. 1915. Below: the Francis Peabody House, c. 1895. Right: The new head house, c. 1910.



The New Head House

In 1908, the Peabody home was demolished to make way for a new head house along Essex Street. The new building was designed by John C. Spofford, in the gothic, castle-like style that was a very popular design for late 19th- and early 20th-century armories. The 1890s drill shed and Francis Peabody's gothic banquet hall were incorporated into the new building, which also contained offices, a library, and gathering places for officers.



The Armory System

The Salem Armory is one among many armories built in cities throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A series of violent labor strikes in the late nineteenth century, as well as a fear of urban unrest, caused state and local governments to build armories in urban areas.

The armories were designed to be headquarters and training facilities for National Guard units, such as the Second Corps of Cadets, and they were

often located in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, where they were also used for social occasions. Because of their defensive role, the armories built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often looked like medieval castles, with towers, battlements, and small windows.

Today, a few surviving armories can be found in cities throughout the country. Most have been converted to civic uses.

The Second Corps of Cadets

The Second Corps of Cadets and Company H, 8th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, shared occupancy of the armory after 1908. Both of these military organizations had long and honorable traditions of service to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the nation.

The Second Corps of Cadets was formed in 1786. Company H had its beginnings in 1805 as the Salem Light Infantry. Members of both organizations participated in the Civil War and Spanish American War. In 1907, both units became part of the Massachusetts National Guard. During World Wars I and

II, they served as members of the 26th (Yankee) Division, Massachusetts National Guard. Members of the Second Corps have also served in Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia, and Iraq.

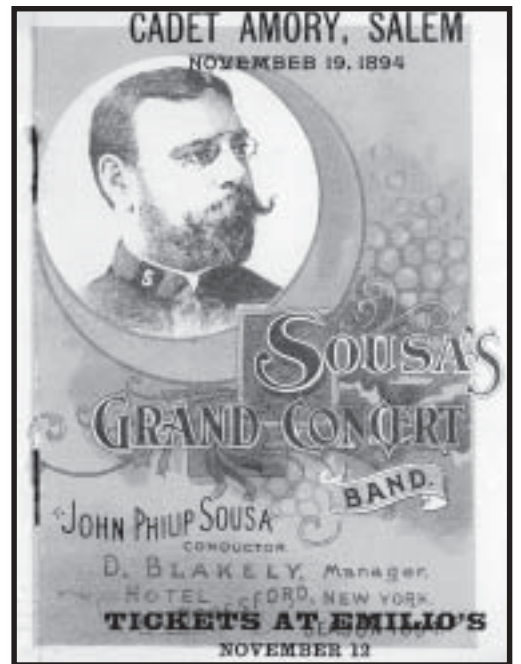
By the 1970s, the Second Corps was the First Battalion, 102nd Field Artillery, Massachusetts National Guard. In 1988, the 102nd was combined with the 101st Field Artillery, and headquartered in Lynn. In 1996, the 102nd was separated from the 101st, and today, the Corps is again the First Battalion, 102nd Field Artillery, Massachusetts National Guard, headquartered in Quincy, Massachusetts.

Social Activities

Because armories were often the largest halls built in urban areas, they quickly became popular places to host large gatherings. One of the most famous events in an armory was the Armory Show of 1913, which was held in the 69th Regiment Armory in New York and introduced such modern artists as Picasso and Matisse to the American public.

Like other armories, the Salem Armory frequently served as a civic function hall, hosting dinners, dances, fairs, and other gatherings. Shortly after the drill shed was constructed, John Philip Sousa and his band performed there for the citizens of Salem. Salem's own Cadet Band was well known, and its bandmaster, Jean Missaud, was a respected composer.

Right: handbill for "Sousa's Grand Concert Band," November 19, 1894. Below: the drill shed decorated for the third annual Salem Letter Carriers' Relief Association dance, c. 1900.



Disaster and Recovery

In 1982, the head house of the Salem Armory was destroyed by fire. Many of the records of the Second Corps were lost in the blaze. The drill shed survived, and in 1994 it was converted into the Salem Visitor Center, which is operated by the National Park Service. In 2002, the Peabody Essex Museum created Armory Park on the site of the head house to honor of the citizens of Essex County who have served their country since the organization of the volunteer militia in 1629.

Today, Armory Park provides visitors and Salem residents a place for rest and reflection, while in the old drill shed National Park Service rangers and volunteers welcome visitors to Salem. Through the exhibits, film, bookstore, and special programs in the Visitor Center, the National Park Service educates and informs visitors about the historical, cultural, and natural resources of Salem and the Essex National Heritage Area.

Sources and Further Reading

Sources: research files of the Salem Maritime National Historic Site; Gregory Bush, "Containing the Gilded Age Mob," *Reviews in American History* 19 (1991), 48-53; Arthur J. Krim, "Francis Peabody and Gothic Salem," Peabody Essex Museum Collections 130, no. 1 (1994), 18-35; Second Corps of Cadets records in the Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum.

For Further Reading: Fogelson, Robert. *America's Armories: Architecture, Society, and Public Order*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

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