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HISTORICAL CONSERVATION
and the
SALEM MARITIME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
BY
EDWIN W. SMALL
March 9, 1939

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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----- NATIONAL PARK

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ARNO T. CAMMERER,

Director.

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An address before the
Lynn (Mass.) Historical Society

March 9, 1939

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I welcome the opportunity to appear before your society this evening to discuss the work of historical conservation under the National Park Service and at the Salem Maritime National Historic Site in particular. I was asked to speak especially about the latter, but before taking up the historical project at Derby Wharf and its immediate environs, I would like to say something about the National Park Service itself, its background and its growth as a governmental agency and institution for the preservation of national scenic and historic values.

Most of you probably think of the National Park Service in connection with the mountain and wilderness wonderlands of the western states. Yellowstone National Park, the first national park to be established, comprising some 2,200,000 acres, was created out of the public domain in 1872. The act authorizing the Yellowstone National Park recognized the fundamental truth that the wonders of nature have definite inspirational and recreational value and that exceptional scenic and scientific areas should be set aside as national shrines for the benefit and enjoyment of the people. After the establishment of Yellowstone, it was twenty years before any other national parks came into existence. Then in the 1890's, three areas in California - Yosemite, Sequoia and General Grant National Parks - were established, and just before the turn of the century Mount Rainier National Park in the State of Washington.

It was also during the nineties that the attention of the Federal Government was first directed to the field of historical conservation. The field, indeed, was a narrow one at first, devoted mainly to the establishment of national military parks under the War Department to commemorate the great battles of the Civil War. The famous battlefields of Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Shiloh and Chickamauga-Chattanooga were set aside as national military parks at that time.

The next type of federal area to come into existence was the national monument. In 1906 legislation known as the act for the Preservation of American Antiquities gave authority to the President to set aside as national monuments any lands owned or controlled by the United States containing "historic landmarks, historic or prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest." Administration of the national monuments was given to the Department of the Interior, and thus the precedent for a general program of historical conservation in the Department of the Interior and for its later agency, the National Park Service, was set.

The National Park Service in the Department of the Interior was established in 1916 to administer the national parks and monuments which had increased in number as public interest in the preservation of scenic, scientific, historic and prehistoric areas had gained headway and the need of a departmental agency devoting its entire attention to the national parks and monuments became apparent. At the time the National Park Service was created there were eight national monuments of historic and prehistoric interest. Today, the National Park Service administers a system of over one hundred historic and prehistoric areas. Over sixty per cent of all the areas now under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service are primarily of historic or prehistoric worth.

(To account for this great increase in historical areas is the rapid growth of the last decade.) This began in 1930 when Colonial National Historical Monument, including Jamestown Island and Yorktown, was established, and also the George Washington Birthplace National Monument at Wakefield, Virginia. The establishment of these historical areas was inspired to a large extent by that full-scale outdoor historical museum, the Williamsburg Restoration of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., taking place in the immediate vicinity of Jamestown and Yorktown. The Williamsburg Restoration was a stimulus not only for these undertakings nearby, but I believe is responsible as well for much of the widespread present day interest in historical conservation, including the serious program of historical work outlined by the National Park Service.

The responsibility of the National Park Service for historical areas was greatly added to in 1933 with the transfer of the national military parks and battlefields from the War Department. The number of military areas administered by the War Department had increased over a forty years period from the half dozen or fewer military parks in the 1890's to the total of at least fifty-nine areas transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. Jurisdiction over this greatly increased number of historical areas required the National Park Service to give further attention to the organization and means for the pursuit of historical work. Technically trained personnel was first employed by the Service in 1931, and in 1932 a Division of History was established. Of great assistance to the National Park Service in the work of preserving, developing and interpreting the features of its historic and prehistoric areas has been the CCC, established in 1933. The CCC has operated on state-owned as well as federal areas, in parks as well as forests, and in parks in some parts of the country where history as well as nature have had a hand. The CCC has made available to the Service not only the labor and equipment to perform certain forms of work, but also the historians, archaeologists and architects necessary to guide all technical phases of the work.

A combination of factors - the Williamsburg Restoration, the sustained efforts of historical and patriotic societies, and most of all, perhaps, the inroads and the destructive tendencies of our modern

civilization - has awakened a consciousness of the need to preserve representative and important features of the American scene while they can still be saved. As a result attention has been directed to legislation to achieve this end. In 1935 a step of unprecedented and far-reaching importance was the passage of legislation called the Historic Sites Act. By this act Congress declared it to be a national policy to preserve historic sites of national significance for the pleasure and benefit of the people. By this act the National Park Service is charged with the responsibility to work out a program for the conservation of the country's historic and prehistoric resources. Broad powers are granted to accomplish this purpose. The Service is authorized to acquire in the name of the United States and to restore, preserve, and maintain historic sites and buildings of national significance. It is also authorized to enter into cooperative agreement with states, municipalities, corporations, associations and even with individuals, to preserve sites not owned by the Federal Government. Surveys and inventories of historic sites, requiring field investigations and the assembly of historical data, are, furthermore, authorized as an essential prerequisite to the selection of areas for national recognition and protection.

Two kinds of surveys are now in operation making inventories and records of our historic sites and buildings. The one which you most likely have heard about in this locality is the Historic American Buildings Survey, which was well under way before the Historic Sites Act itself was passed. This survey is the outcome of an agreement between the National Park Service, the Library of Congress and the American Institute of Architects to measure and make drawings of outstanding and characteristic specimens of domestic and public architecture throughout the land. Massachusetts and New England in general have been fruitful fields of investigation for the Historic American Buildings Survey. Since the inception of the survey over 300 historic structures in Massachusetts alone have been measured and recorded. The other survey I refer to is called the Historic Sites Survey. The Historic Sites Survey embraces more than the Historic American Buildings Survey. It is basically a survey of the historical facts and physical conditions of both sites and buildings to determine which warrant national recognition. The Historic Sites Survey was initiated in 1936. It is progressing slowly, but along the right track. At its conclusion we should have a fairly complete picture of the historical assets of the country and a scheme for the preservation of the most significant.

The Salem Maritime National Historic Site has the distinction of being the first area established under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. With Derby Wharf and Central Wharf, the Site covers over six acres in the heart of the old maritime quarter of Salem. This site has been recognized and acquired because, in the history of Salem, perhaps, more than in any other place are to be found examples of all that is most typical of the American maritime story from the period preceding the Revolution through the War of 1812. During the era of the nation's struggle for very existence the daring and resourcefulness of Salem shipmasters and sailors won for their country a commanding share of the world's trade and made Salem the most famous port of the New World. As late as 1833, the

the wealthiest merchant of an Oriental port, "believed Salem to be a country by itself, and one of the richest and most important sections of the globe." In war as well as peace the port of Salem made valuable contributions to the survival and success of the Republic. Throughout the Revolution the Salem Custom House district, comprising Salem, Beverly and Danvers, probably kept more vessels at sea than did any other port in the United Colonies. Salem was the most important Continental port that was not occupied by the British at one time or another during the course of the War. Her privateers, one hundred and fifty-eight in number, roamed the high seas harrying the British merchantmen and brought into port those commodities which were needed to supply the army and to keep up the morale of the people.

No family of Salem merchant-shipowners contributed more to the development and importance of Salem as a seaport than the Derbys. In Derby Wharf we have the most important survival associated with the foundations of American foreign trade. From this wharf sailed the swift and heavily manned Salem privateers during the last years of the Revolution, and after the War the same ships departed from here on pioneering voyages to the Baltic, the Orient and India in search of new trade. The story of Salem shipping and privateering is a large order and I will not attempt to elaborate on its details. Less has been said about the facts of the physical site from which the ships, cargoes and men originated. I will, therefore, from this point dwell on the history of the physical site of Derby Wharf and its immediate surroundings which comprise the Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

Development of the waterfront of Salem Harbor in the vicinity of Derby Wharf did not occur until the colonial period was almost at an end. A map of the Town of Salem in 1760 reveals a harborfront almost devoid of wharves. Fishing and trading vessels were docked at that time further up the South River where the present Salem Depot stands or at Winter Island near the Harbor's mouth. The beach and mud flats on which Derby Wharf was built were purchased by Captain Richard Derby in 1762. Captain Derby may have been influenced in the selection of this location for his wharf because it was almost directly in front of the red brick gambrel-roof house he had just built for his son, Elias Hasket Derby, later the great merchant of Salem.

The exact time when the wharf was constructed on the newly acquired property is uncertain. Local historians have shown no unanimity of opinion in the matter. Most of them have had nothing to say at all. A conveyance of the property now occupied by the Custom House in 1783 refers to it as "opposite to the northern end of the Long Wharf of Richard Derby, Esq." The Valuation Records of the Town of Salem offer evidence which enables us to push the date back of the year 1783. In 1778 Richard Derby was taxed for a "Long Wharf" and his son, Elias Hasket Derby, had the taxable item, "Warehouse on Father's Long Wharf." If this "Warehouse on Father's Long Wharf" is the same warehouse which was listed in 1767 as a "new warehouse", the date of the original construction of Derby Wharf is pushed still further back. It is not unlikely that Richard Derby had some kind of wharf in the location of the present Derby Wharf soon after 1762. On the

basis of the evidence we have uncovered it is a fact that Derby Wharf was long enough in 1778 to be called a "Long Wharf."

At the death of Richard Derby in 1783 the "Long Wharf" with the two warehouses upon it passed to his son, Elias Hasket Derby, and remained in the latter's possession until his death in 1799. This period, 1783-1799, is the period of greatest business expansion and activity on the part of the Derbys. Entries made in the Valuation Book of the Town of Salem between 1793 and 1799 tell more than a thousand words about the growth and prosperity of the Derby maritime trade:

1793 - Long Wharf & stores	1,000 (pounds)
1795 - Long Wharf & stores	4,000
1796 - Long Wharf & stores (3)	6,000
1798 - Long Wharf & stores (3)	8,000
1799 - Long Wharf & stores (3)	10,000

An increase in values ^{of} tenfold within seven years!

The Derby Wharf of this period was only one-third as long as it is today. The last 1200 feet reaching into the Harbor were not added until after 1806 and Jefferson's Embargo at a cost of \$45,000. The Wharf during the 1790's was about 760 feet long. It was probably entirely of wood at first. But due to lack of durability and damages from storms, the objective of the Derbys in permanent construction was probably stone. In 1784 we find Derby employing Joshua Phippen to finish the eastern part of his wharf in stone at the bottom and five years later to lay a stone breastwork across the shoreline on the east side. Later replacements were made in stone so that eventually all of the foundation walls were stone. Timber cribbing or "cob work", as it was then called, was consequently largely eliminated and used exclusively to cap the stonework. In the work of restoration pursued during the past year the objective of the Derbys in the construction of their wharf has been rigidly followed. Stone has been used in the sea-walls wherever there was evidence of stone and timber cribbing has been replaced wherever vestiges of the old cob work remained. Because of the destructive evidences of marine borers in the waters of this part of the coast, all the timber cribbing and piling have been heavily treated with creosote.

On the death of Elias Hasket Derby in 1799, the Wharf and adjacent property came into the possession of his seven children. Each of the seven was given a seventh share of the Wharf and a store or a lot on which a store might be built. A plan of the lots on Derby Wharf drawn by Gideon Foster, a Salem surveyor, in 1805 indicates that five identical three-story warehouses, 60 feet long by 25 feet wide, stood in a row along the east wall of the Wharf. The last of these warehouses is probably recalled by some of you present here tonight as it was destroyed less than twenty years ago. It is a source of deep regret to us that all of these warehouses disappeared before Derby Wharf came into the possession of the Federal Government. As it is better to preserve than re-

store and is far less expensive, it is doubtful whether any restoration of the Derby warehouses will ever be attempted. The problem is at best remote because of the great amount of work that is required on the historic buildings in the Site which do survive.

The oldest of these buildings is the Derby House which I have already mentioned as antedating Derby Wharf. Elias Hasket Derby lived in this house from about 1762 to the time of the Revolution. It remained in the family until 1796 when it was conveyed to Captain Henry Prince. Captain Prince was an outstanding shipmaster in the Derby fleet and later followed the pursuits of a merchant until ruined by Jefferson's Embargo. To Captain Prince belongs the credit of opening American trade with the Philippine Islands, a fact of some historical interest and significance. Five days after Prince purchased the Derby House, he sailed for Derby in the ship Astrea on a voyage that was to take him to Manila Bay, from which he returned the next year with a large and valuable cargo of sugar, pepper and indigo. With Captain Prince on this voyage as supercargo went Nathaniel Bowditch, the mathematical genius and authority on navigation. On this voyage Bowditch had the opportunity to test his theories of practical navigation and to make some singular observations on life in the East. The Derby House is the oldest brick house remaining in Salem today. It was rescued from oblivion twelve years ago by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities which has obligingly donated the building as part of the Maritime Site. Despite neglect and abuse prior to its rescue by the Society, the Derby House has retained most of its features of architectural merit and requires less of restoration than repairs.

Of as great architectural excellence as the Derby House is the Salem Custom House erected in 1819. Those of you who are familiar with the works of Hawthorne know that this building has been immortalized ~~in~~ in the Scarlet Letter. Hawthorne worked here as Surveyor of the Port of Salem from 1848 to 1849 and consequently was in a good position to observe the declining glory of Salem on the sea.

Between the Custom House and Derby House we are restoring a three-story house of the usual Salem type, part of which dates back to 1780. Construction of this house was begun by Elias Hasket Derby but during his lifetime it remained a "great unfinished House." Some plans at the Essex Institute which are by Samuel McIntire, the great craftsman and architect of the time, indicate that Derby intended to build a large and elaborate mansion here for himself. But before the work was completed he moved to a commodious residence he had purchased from the Pickmans on Washington Street. On the occasion of the launching of Derby's second Grand Turk before a gathering of 9,000 people on May 21, 1791 the carpenters and workmen who had worked on the vessel, the largest built in Salem up to that time, were given a great feast in the "unfinished House." Although this structure was originally a Derby House we call it the Hawkes House in order to bring attention to its owner from 1801 to 1830, Benjamin Hawkes, who finished the House as it has survived to the present time. In partnership with John Babbidge, Hawkes for many

years ran a ship yard east of Derby Wharf from which many of Salem's most notable merchantmen were launched. Perhaps the best known of Hawkes' vessels was the coppered brig, Leander, built in 1821. On a cargo from Canton in April 1826, the Leander paid duties of \$92,392.94. This was the greatest sum that had ever been paid on the cargo of a single voyage at the Salem Custom House.

Last but not least the Salem Maritime National Historic Site includes Central or Forrester's Wharf and a brick warehouse which stands at the street end of it. Central or Forrester's Wharf was built originally in 1791 by Simon Forrester, one of the prominent Salem merchant-shipowners after Elias Baskett Derby. The brick warehouse was erected prior to 1832, probably by the Forresters. All except the brick walls of this building were burned out in the great Salem fire of 1914. It is our intention to restore this substantial three-story building to its original form. John Bertram, the last of the great Salem merchants, carried on his extensive maritime business here from 1840 to 1859. The rebuilding of Central Wharf has already been initiated. It is entirely a wooden wharf with timber planks and sheet piling supported by fender piles.

I will not burden you with further details as I believe I have said enough already to indicate that the historic site covers a good part of what was the maritime heart of old Salem. From what I have said here tonight I do not wish to leave with you the impression that I think the movement for historical conservation originated with the Williamsburg Restoration or even with the National Park Service. It was nearly one hundred years ago that Edward Everett, the Massachusetts statesman and orator, contributed his services as a lecturer to go up and down the land to raise funds to assure the preservation of George Washington's Mount Vernon estate. Even earlier, in 1833, Amos Lawrence, a Boston merchant, offered to purchase the whole battlefield of Bunker Hill for the Bunker Hill Association in order that it might be preserved and kept open forever as a battlefield park. The Monument Association accepted the offer, but shortly sold the battlefield and used the money to build the Monument. I do not say that the erection of the Bunker Hill Monument was not a creditable achievement, but I do say how much more creditably we could view the proceedings of that day if the Association had pursued the original plan of Amos Lawrence and preserved intact the battlefield of Bunker Hill!

But where one opportunity was missed, another was not lost in Boston half a century later. I refer to the preservation of the Old South Meeting house! In 1877, over \$400,000 was raised by public campaign and private subscription to prevent this highly important and venerable structure from being torn down to make way for an office building. The saving of the Old South Meeting House is perhaps the most notable instance of historical conservation for its day. During the last fifty years local historical societies like your own have stood out in the cause of preserving some fine old houses, in many cases using them

as headquarters or to house historical collections. In the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities we have the one example in the country of an organization devoted to the purpose of collecting and preserving historic structures and objects that are the heritage of a particular geographical and cultural region. The patriotic societies, notably the D.A.R. and the Colonial Dames, have also been actively engaged.

The program of historical conservation outlined for the National Park Service in accordance with the Historic Sites Act of 1935 is in no sense to be regarded as an attempt to replace the work that is being done by state and local organizations. The purpose is rather to supplement and to expand the work of agencies already active in the field. To appraise and select a coherent system of historic sites and buildings which will portray all major themes of American history is truly a great undertaking. State and local participation as well as national action are essential to achieve that end.

In closing, I would like to leave one thought with you about the future significance and opportunities of the local historical society. Local historical societies have as important work to do today as they had fifty years ago. Local historical societies are in the best situation to gather and preserve for the use of future historians the raw materials from which history is written. This is more true today than ever before because of the increasing interest and attention that is being directed to economic and social history. Our conception of history today is not simply a tale of battles, dates, presidential campaigns and past politics. History is also the chronicle of ordinary men and ordinary things. Those of you who are antiquarians as well as students of history know that it is much more difficult to find out about the everyday life of two hundred years ago than it is the extraordinary events. Everyday customs and devices seem so common that no thought is given to making a record of them. Consequently, when everyday things of one age are replaced by those of another, knowledge of the former thing is apt to die with the thing itself. Here in Lynn with your important industrial background, with your early origins and development in shoe-making and later in the manufacture and innovation of electrical equipment, it seems to me your society has a great opportunity to accumulate valuable records, records that will not only reflect your industries' past but which will also serve the historians of the future.

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(May 1929)

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