

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Salem Maritime National Historic Site
Salem, Massachusetts



Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions

Historical Musings from Salem Maritime NHS



One of the four storefront pieces is the door. Its original glass, wood, and hardware, as well as its paint history, offer many interesting research opportunities.

Windows to the Past: A Historic Storefront in the Salem Maritime NHS Collection

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At the end of 2002, curatorial staff members at Salem Maritime went through the regular process of adding four architectural pieces— two bay windows, a door and a sash—to its collection. The story behind these objects, however, is not quite so ordinary.

These pieces originated as the storefront of a warehouse on Front Street in Salem around the late 18th and early 19th centuries. At the time, the thriving waterfront extended from Derby Street to Front Street and the storefront undoubtedly came into contact with all the excitement of Salem’s golden age of trade from its waterfront location. However, it also witnessed the decline of Salem’s maritime activity, and around 1850, it faced a similar downsizing fate—the storefront was disassembled, placed in an attic, sealed over, and forgotten.

At the end of Salem’s golden age, the residents of Salem shifted their economic focus from maritime trade to industrialization. The warehouses along Front Street were either torn down or converted to more practical uses, and the waterfront there was filled in. Without any record of their existence, the warehouses became lost among the other structures on Front Street.

The storefront remained in that old warehouse attic, undisturbed, for about 125 years. In the mid-1970s, the City of Salem began to renovate the Derby Square downtown area and in their efforts they uncovered not only two early 19th century warehouses, but in the attic they uncovered the old storefront pieces as well. The significance of their discovery was immense. Storefronts of this nature are common in historic buildings—Salem Maritime has one in the West India Goods Store— but they are reproductions, seldom originals. The workers’ serendipitous find was a joy to historians all over New England.



Article from *The Salem Evening News*, October 18, 1975, regarding the future of the warehouses discovered on Front Street.

Salem Maritime purchased the two warehouses uncovered by the City of Salem for one dollar and moved them to Derby and Central wharves. One became the SAMA Orientation Center and the other, the original home of the storefront, burned down in the 1980s. The storefront pieces were placed in the care of the National Park Service soon after their finding, but did not reach Salem Maritime—their intended destination—until late last year. One hundred years of accumulated dirt was carefully removed and the pieces now reside in curatorial storage next to other architectural site treasures.



The author (Height 5 feet, 4 inches) with one of the two bay windows. These pieces are in great condition for their age; out of 22 panes of glass, only a few are missing.

ously. These artifacts with an exciting past also have a number of exciting possibilities in the future.

This warehouse storefront is another example of some priceless artifacts Salem Maritime NHS has welcomed into its museum collection.



A closer view of the door handle. When the storefront was in use on Front Street, this door handle opened a world of goods to merchants and shoppers during Salem's golden age of sail. Frequently reproduced, Salem Maritime NHS now has an original.

These four storefront sections are a wonderful enhancement of the site's already rich collection. With their original hinges, door handle, glass, wood and paint history, they offer unparalleled insight into waterfront activity in Salem in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Only one other storefront from this time period exists in New England; the storefront at Salem Maritime is important because of its rarity, but the fact that it is rare makes it an invaluable resource for researchers.

Through analysis, study and research these pieces could unlock Salem and New England history that had only been speculated about previ-

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