

17 Bentley Street Salem

According to available evidence, this house was built for George Bowditch Jr., Salem mason, in 1843.

On 18 July 1840, George Bowditch Jr., Salem bricklayer, for \$393.75 purchased a piece of land that fronted westerly 35' on "the way recently laid open," and bounded southerly 80' on J.D. Green's land, easterly 35' on Hardy Street, and northerly 80' on land of J.D. Green "now occupied by George Bowditch Sr." (ED 319:236). The seller of the land was James Diman Green of Cambridge, a grandson of Rev. James Diman, who had owned the land in the 1700s. Mr. Bowditch's lot was but a piece of Mr. Green's property in this vicinity. Mr. Bowditch had this house built in 1843.

On 26 June 1843 for \$500 George Bowditch Jr., Salem mason, mortgaged the property to Epes Cogswell, a Salem carpenter (ED 337:280). Mr. Cogswell may have been the building contractor for this house, whose foundation and chimneys were almost certainly the work of Mr. Bowditch himself. In the mortgage deed, Mr. Bowditch recited that it was the same land that he had purchased on 18 July 1840 but with the addition since then of "the new building thereon." This mortgage would be discharged in January, 1852 (ED 337:280, margin).

George Bowditch Jr. was born in Salem on 20 June 1812, the son of a mariner, George Bowditch, and Sarah (Stodder) Bowditch. The Bowditch family had deep roots in Salem, being descended from William Bowditch, a West-of-England man who came to Salem in the 1630s. George Bowditch Sr., who evidently resided on Hardy Street, was a first cousin of Nathaniel Bowditch, the mathematical genius. At the time of George Jr.'s birth, the War of 1812 was just beginning. Later, George Sr. would become a grocer ("trader") and superintendent of Salem's hearses.

George Jr. had five siblings. When he reached the age of 12 or so, in 1824, he was evidently apprenticed to learn the trade of a mason or bricklayer. Typically, he would have gone to live in his master's house, with another apprentice or two; and for several years he would work in exchange for room, board, clothing, and knowledge of his trade. At a certain point, he would be paid somewhat for his work, and by the age of twenty or so he would become a journeyman, free to work for himself or whomever he chose. A bricklayer built foundations and chimneys, while a mason did the same but also plastered walls. He probably became a journeyman in 1832. He would remain a bachelor for another 11 years, residing in the family home on Hardy Street.

In 1832, Salem was losing its luster as a great seaport. After the War of 1812, Salem merchants had rebuilt their merchant fleet and prosecuted a worldwide trade, to great effect. A new custom house was built in 1819, at the head of Derby Wharf. Through the 1820s the foreign trade continued prosperous; but at the end of that decade, Salem's maritime commerce sank rapidly.

The new railroads and canals in the 1830s diverted both capital and trade away from the coast. American goods were now being produced at a level where imports were not so much needed as in the past, and the interior of the country was being opened for settlement. People moved west, including some from Salem, and the economic attention of the merchants turned westward with them. Manufacturing and the railroads now attracted Salem's capital, and many of the more notable merchants moved to Boston, the center of investment in these non-maritime industries. The Eastern Rail Road (a Salem-based enterprise) began operating between Salem and Boston in 1838; the tracks ran right over the middle of the Mill Pond. Salem did engage in some manufacturing—leather, shoes, textiles—but not on the scale of the factory towns of Lowell, Lawrence, and Haverhill, with their mills driven by the powerful waters of the Merrimack.

George Bowditch Jr. evidently found plenty of work in the “declining” Salem of his adulthood. Factories and shops were being built, and houses as well, and all needed chimneys and foundations. While great fortunes were no longer being made in Salem, a contractor like Mr. Bowditch could make a good living. George Bowditch Jr. married Margaret S. Brown in July, 1843; and, between 1844 and 1861, they would have four children, only one of whom, Thomas, born in 1849, survived to adulthood.

The Salem Directories show George Bowditch Jr., “mason,” residing on Hardy Street in 1836 and 1842, and on Bentley Street in 1846. In the 1860s and 1870s this house was numbered 9 Bentley; in 1888 it was renumbered 17. Bentley Street was named for the Rev. William Bentley, the long-time beloved pastor of Salem's North Church (in this neighborhood on Essex Street; now gone), whose diary (published) gives a portrait of life in Salem from the 1790s into the 1820s.

In May, 1844, Mr. Bowditch purchased a strip of land to the south of the homestead. It was 5' wide and ran from street to street.

Somewhat stubbornly, Salem's waning merchant class pursued their business on the sea; but as the years went by the conditions of shipping changed, and Salem was left on the ebb tide. In the late 1840s, giant clipper ships replaced the smaller ships that Salem men had sailed around the world; and the clippers, with their deep drafts and large holds, were usually too large for Salem and its harbor. The town's shipping soon consisted of little more than visits from Down East coasters with cargoes of fuel wood and building timber. By 1850 Salem was finished as a working port; and its glory days were over. An excellent picture of Salem's waterfront, during its period of decline from glory, is given by Hawthorne in his

“introductory section” (really a sketch of Salem) to **The Scarlet Letter**, which he began while working in the nearby Custom House and completed at home on Mall Street off the Common.

In 1850 (per census, house 127) George Bowditch, 33 (really 37), mason, resided here with his wife, Margaret, 28, and their son, Thomas, two. Their nearest neighbors were families also headed by carpenters and masons.

In October, 1853, Mr. Bowditch purchased another piece of land, to the south of the homestead. It was 16' wide and ran from street to street. On this new piece of land, he soon built a new house (#19 Bentley) by moving in an older building and adding a new section. He turned the new house over to his aged parents, who lived on until 1862 (death of George) and 1867 (death of Sarah). Therefore, the families of George Bowditch Sr. and George Bowditch Jr. lived side-by-side (see 1860 census, houses 1175 and 1176; in it, GB Jr. is mistakenly listed as “master mariner,” a slip-up for “master mason”).

In the early 1860s, while the Civil War (1861-1865) was being fought, Mr. Bowditch began instructing his only son, Thomas Bowditch, in the mason's trade.

After the Civil War, Salem fully re-tooled as an industrial center, with good success. The symbol of its new economy was the large twin-towered granite train station, which stood at the foot of Washington Street, where it had joined the inner harbor. Beginning in the 1840s, the Salem capitalists had built factories that soon filled with Irish immigrant workers as well as the native-born. Salem's water-oriented downtown area remained intact, or nearly so, for most of the 19th century, although no more did square-rigged ships visit the wharves along the inner harbor (the South River, which ran from Derby Wharf to where the Post Office now is). The railroad had been built across the middle of the beautiful Mill Pond, which extended, from the inner harbor all the way to Loring Avenue, in a broad sheet of water between what are now called Canal Street and Jefferson Avenue. In the early 20th century, both of these ancient bodies of water would vanish, as they were filled in and buried beneath streets, storage areas, junk-yards, rail-yards, and parking lots.

As late as 1869 Thomas Bowditch, mason, resided here with his parents. By the 1870s he had moved to the old family house on Hardy Street, where he and his family would remain for many years. George Bowditch continued in the mason business for the rest of his life, with his mason's shop behind this house, on the part of his land that fronted on Hardy Street (14 ½ Hardy Street).

George and Margaret Bowditch grew old here. Mrs. Bowditch died in the 1880s, evidently. Mr. Bowditch, at the very end of life, evidently moved in with his son Thomas & family at 6 Hardy Street, where he died on June 2, 1893, in the 79th year of life. From his obituary: “George Bowditch Jr., one of the oldest and best-known ‘down-town residents,’ so called, died at his home on Hardy Street last

evening. Mr. B. was in his 78th year. He was a mason by trade, and had always lived and been closely identified with the lower part of the city. He was a thoroughly good man, straightforward in all his dealings and unusually respected by all who knew him. His wife died some years ago." His remains were interred at Harmony Grove cemetery with Rev. O.A. Hillard officiating and with a wreath from the Salem Veteran Fireman's Association, of which he had doubtless been a member.

The property was inherited by Thomas Bowditch of Hardy Street. He did not reside here, but used this house for rental income. In 1897 it was occupied by John Greene, a gardener, and family: wife Ellen, and sons Frank (laborer) and David (clerk). John Greene died on 1 May 1898, aged 57 years. His wife and son Frank continued to reside here in 1900 and beyond. The Great Fire of June, 1914, which destroyed much of south part of the City of Salem, did not affect this neighborhood, although it burned down everything in sight just across the canal from Derby Wharf at the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company (now called Shetland Park).

Thomas Bowditch died by 1916. He devised his property to his wife Annie, daughter Mrs. May Johnson, and son George S. Bowditch. On 12 June 1916 these devisees sold the land and buildings, 17-19 Bentley Street, to Martin & Antonina Witkos (ED 2334:65). The Witkoses resided in #17 and rented out #19. Mr. Witkos ran a grocery store at 126 Derby Street, which he conducted until his death in 1932. The property remained in the Witkos family until 1978, when this house and its lot were set off as Lot E in a partition of property.

--Robert Booth, 23 Oct. 2000, for Historic Salem Inc.

Know all Men by these Presents, That I ,

James D. Green of Cambridge

in the County of ^{Middle}Essex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Clerk,
in consideration of *three hundred ninety three* dollars and *seventy five* cents
paid by *George Bourditch Jr.* of Salem in the County of Essex,
Bricklayer,

the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, do hereby give, grant, bargain, sell and convey unto
the said *George Bourditch Jr.* a certain piece or parcel of land, situated
in said Salem, and bounded and described as follows, viz. begin-
ning on *Hardy Street* at the *northeast* corner of the lot now
occupied by *George Bourditch, senior*, and thence running
southerly *thirty five* feet, - bounding Easterly on *Har-
dy Street*; then turning a right angle and running
westerly upon a line parallel to *Derby Street* and bound-
ing southerly by land of me the said *James D. Green*,
about *eighty* feet until it comes to a way recently
laid open from *Derby Street* to *Essex Street*, then
turning and running northerly *thirty five* feet;
and bounding westerly by said way; then turning
and running Easterly and bounding northerly
by land of me the said *James D. Green* about *eighty*
feet till it comes to *Hardy Street* to the corner first
mentioned. - Said piece of land being a portion
of the estate of the late *Rev. James Diman* of
Salem, which was bequeathed by the late *Mary*
Diman and *Lois Green*, daughters of the said
James Diman to *Ezra Green* and me the
said *James D. Green*; and the portion of *Ezra*
Green having been conveyed to me the said
James D. Green by Deed bearing date *June 25,*
1817 and recorded in the *Essex Registry,*
Book 214 Leaf 100.

To Have and to Hold the above granted premises, with the privileges and appurtenances
thereto belonging, to the said *George Bourditch Jr.* his
heirs and assigns, to his _____ and their use and behoof forever. And I the said *James*
D. Green for myself and my heirs, executors, and administrators, do covenant with the
said *George Bourditch Jr.* his heirs and
assigns, that I _____ lawfully seized in fee of the afore-granted premises; that
they are free from all encumbrances
That I _____ have good right to sell and convey the same to the said *George Bourditch Jr.*,
as aforesaid; and that I will and my heirs, executors,
and administrators, shall WARRANT AND DEFEND the same to the said *George*
Bourditch Jr. his _____ heirs and assigns forever, against the lawful claims
and demands of all persons.

In Witness Whereof, I the said *James D. Green* and my wife
Sarah Adeline, in token of the relinquish ment of all right to
Saver in the above granted premises

have hereunto set our hands and seals this *eighteenth* day of *July* _____
in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and *forty*.

Executed and delivered in presence of us,
Dora Schultze }
Mary Ann Blake }
James D. Green _____
Sarah A. Green _____

Middlesex, ss. July 18th A. D. 1840.
Then personally appeared the above named *James Diman Green* and acknowledged
the above instrument to be his free act and deed. - Before me *Ephraim Buttrick* Justice of the Peace.
Essex, ss. Received *July 22, 1840* m. before *11* o'clock, A.M. Recorded and examined,
by *A. S. French* Register.

Know all Men by these Presents, That I ,

George Bouditch junior, of Salem, in the County of Essex.

in consideration of five hundred dollars to me paid by

Epes Cogswell, of said Salem, Carpenter.

the receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge, do hereby give, grant, sell and convey unto the said

Epes Cogswell a certain parcel of land situate in said Salem and bounded and described as follows, to wit, beginning on Hardy Street at the Northeast corner of the lot now occupied by George Bouditch senior, and thence running Southerly thirty five feet, bounding Easterly on said Hardy Street then turning a right angle and running Westerly upon a line parallel to Derby Street and bounding Southerly by James D. Green about eighty feet till it comes to a way recently laid out from said Derby Street to Epes Street, then turning and running Northerly thirty five feet and bounding Westerly by said way, then turning and running Easterly and bounding Northerly by land of James D. Green about eighty feet till it comes to said Hardy Street to the corner first mentioned, the above granted premises being the same which were conveyed to me by James D. Green by his deed dated the eighteenth day of July, eighteen hundred and forty, together with the new building thereon:

To Have and to Hold the afore-granted premises to the said *Epes Cogswell* his heirs and assigns, to his and their use and behoof forever.

And I do covenant with the said *Epes Cogswell* his heirs and assigns, that I am lawfully seized in fee of the afore-granted premises, that they are free of all incumbrances; that I have good right to sell and convey the same to the said *Epes Cogswell*.

And that I will warrant and defend the same premises to the said *Epes Cogswell* his heirs and assigns, forever, against the lawful claims and demands of all persons.

Provided Nevertheless, That if the said *George Bouditch jr.* his heirs, executors, or administrators, pay to the said *Epes Cogswell* his heirs, executors, administrators, or assigns, the sum of

Five hundred dollars, in one year, from date hereof

then this Deed, as also a certain note bearing even date with these presents, given by the said *George Bouditch junior* to the said *Epes Cogswell* to pay the same sum with lawful interest at the time aforesaid, shall both be void; otherwise shall remain in full force.

In Witnes Whereof, I the said George Bouditch junior,

have hereunto set my hand and seal this *twenty sixth* day of *June* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight *forty three*.

Signed, sealed and delivered in presence of us,
J. Hardy Prince.
N. L. Rogers.

George Bouditch jr. seal.

ESSEX, ss. June 26. 1843. —Then the above-named

George Bouditch jr.

acknowledged the above Instrument to be his free act and deed.

before me, *J. Hardy Prince.* Justice of the Peace.

ESSEX, ss. Received *June 26. 1843.* At *m* before *11* o'clock, A.M. Recorded and examined, by *N. H. Smith* Register.

Essex ss. 14 Jan. 1852. The mortgage here named having received satisfaction for this mortgage, do hereby fully discharge the same.

Epes Cogswell
Attest Epes Cogswell
Attest Epes Cogswell