

MONROE STREET BEGINS

#370 Essex Street.      RATING: ONE.      PERIOD: MID-19TH CENTURY.

The Public Library was built as a residence by Captain John Bertram in 1855 and designed by Joseph C. Foster. His heirs gave it to the city for a library in 1887, after which it was enlarged. It is a three-story, brick building with a hip roof and freestone trim, set back from and higher than the street. A large circular iron fountain cools the air in summer in the large yard to the west, which is enclosed with a cast iron fence. The, so-called "Bertram elm" which used to be in the yard was 16½ feet in circumference.

## 370 ESSEX STREET

How many of us, patrons of the Main Branch of the Salem Public Library, ever stop and think about the origin of the building that serves us so well? All of us have heard the name John Bertram but do we know who he was? Or do we realize that every time we enter the building at 370 Essex Street we enter what was the mansion house of this great man.

Capt. John Bertram one of Salem's greatest benefactors, was born on the Isle of Jersey, Feb. 11, 1796. His family came to America in 1807 and settled in Salem. John was described as a poor boy who went around with a basket peddling apples, candies and turn-overs and later went to sea as a cabin boy, before the mast, as mate, captain and still later became the merchant prince and beloved benefactor of his fellow citizens.

Captain Bertram was married three times. His first wife Mary C. Smith died in 1837. He married second Clarissa Mc Intire and in 1845 moved with Clarissa and family into a new house at 24 Winter St. Clarissa died in childbirth in June 1847. A year later Capt. Bertram married Mary Ann Ropes.

Mary Ann Ropes was the daughter of Timothy and Sarah (Holmes) Ropes. She was born in the house on the east corner of Essex and Monroe Sts. which her father had purchased from his father. (Mary Ann later owned and reconstructed this house 364 Essex St.) Her family moved into a house on the opposite side of Essex St. (375 Essex St.) In 1844 Miss Mary Ann Ropes had the house at 373 Essex St. built next to her parents. This is where Mary Ann was living with her sister Elizabeth at the time John Bertram was in search of a school for his children. "After the children had been at her school a short time I married Miss Mary Ann Ropes in June 1848. Besides getting them a good mother I got a good wife that took the whole charge of the house and family leaving me all my time to devote to business." (John Bertram edited by Rosamond De Laittre)

Mary Ann was undoubtedly the motivating force in the plan to build a new mansion on the Plummer estate, back in her old neighborhood.

Miss Caroline Plummer died May 13, 1854. She left bequests to the city of Salem for the founding of a Farm School of Reform for boys; funds for the building of Plummer Hall (now part of the Essex Institute) and the establishment of the Athenaeum.

On Dec. 4, 1854 John Bertram purchased the land and dwelling house thereon lately occupied by Caroline Plummer for \$8,000. (Registry of Deeds book 505 page 203)

On Dec. 12, 1854 Mr. Bertram purchased the land and building, next east of the Plummer lot, from Augustus Dickson for \$2,500. (Registry of Deeds book 504 page 299)

On April 23, 1855 James Brown moved two buildings from "Bertram's land Essex St. to Danvers." (It is not known for sure that one of these buildings was the Plummer house.)

After the removal of these buildings, the way was clear for the building of the High Style Italianate brick dwelling house, designed by Joseph C. Foster. On May 19, 1855 the Bertrams sold their house at 24 Winter St. and probably moved into heir new home at 370 Essex St. shortly after.

On Nov. 17, 1855 the estate was enlarged by the purchase of the land and buildings on the corner of Monroe and Essex Sts. from Stephen Fogg for \$1,500. (Registry of Deeds book 522 page 107) It was enlarged further on Oct. 29, 1859 when Charles Williams sold a portion of his land to the Bertrams for \$800. (Registry of Deeds book 596 page 237)

"Captain Bertram in the desire to make his mansion more sightly in the approach from down town, removed two small houses that stood at the corner of Monroe and Essex Sts. to "Vinegar Hill" that stood as we knew Phelps Ct. at the top of Broad St. thus giving the captain a spacious lawn and immensely improving the outlook of Captain Charles F. Williams' home on Monroe St. One of these two story houses held the small store of Mrs. Allen, who sold insertions and edgings, also ribbons and laces." (Charles Archer's scrapbook at the Essex Institute) This quote is confirmed by the records of the Salem City Council for Sept. 1866 "John Bertram and William Looney moved two buildings from the corner of Essex and Monroe St. to Broad St."

John Bertram Esq., bequeathed \$5,000 each to Salem Hospital, Old Ladies' Home, Seaman's Widow and Orphan Association, East India Marine Society, South Church; \$108,000 to Old Men's Home; \$41,000 to Seamen's Orphan and Children's Friend Society; \$36,000 to Plummer Farm School; also after his widow's decease, about \$120,000 to Salem Hospital, and \$60,000 to Old Ladies Home.

Some years after his death, his heirs, on December 1, 1887, offered the estate to the city for a public library and the offer was accepted. Scarcely any alterations were made in the exterior of the building, but the first, second and third floors were entirely removed and rebuilt in a much stronger manner. The library was opened to the public for the delivery of books, July 8, 1889. In 1911-12 a large addition was built in the rear, containing a fireproof stack room and new reference and work rooms.

Since that time many modern improvements have been made, making a very efficient and pleasant environment for people of all ages.

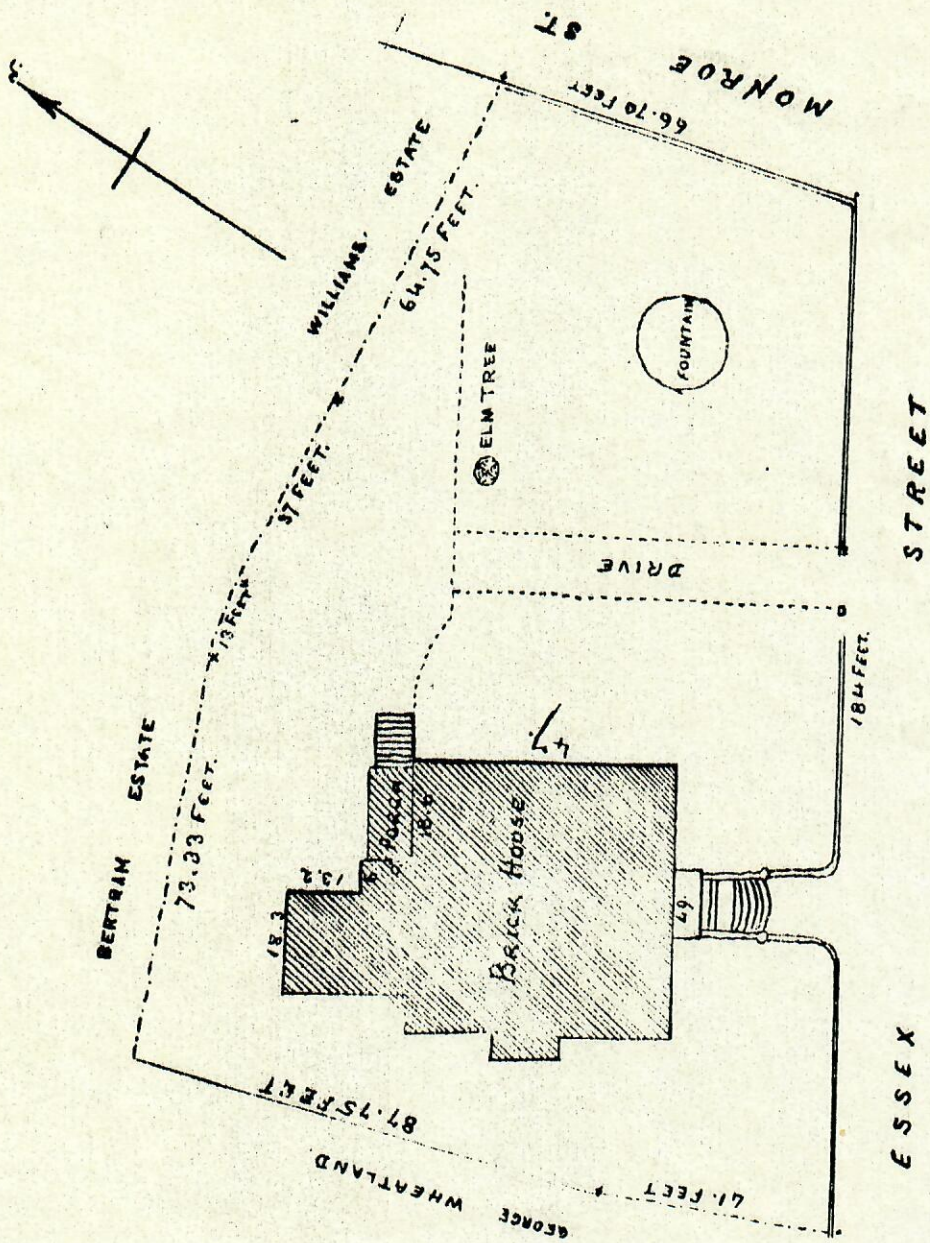
The federal census taken every ten years gives an insight of the Bertram family while in residence at 370 Essex St.

Name	Age	Occupation	Born
1860			
John Bertram	63	merchant	England
Mary A. Bertram	49		Mass.
Margaret Bertram	23		Mass.
Ann P. Bertram	15		Mass.
J. H. M. Bertram	26	clerk	Mass.
Catherine Collins	40	servant	Ire.
Ann Clark	20	servant	Ire.
Hannah Foley	17	servant	Mass.

1870			
John Bertram	74	merchant	Jersey Isle, England
Mary A. Bertram	59	keeping house	Mass.
Mary Strain	35	servant	Ire.
Mary Murphy	25	servant	Ire.
Kate Riley	25	servant	Ire.

1880			
John Bertram	84	ret. merchant	Isle Jersey
Mary A. Bertram	69	keeping house	Mass.
Margaret Murphy	30	servant	Ire.
Hannah Gill	30	servant	Ire.
Mary Strain	45	servant	Ire.

During his last years Captain Bertram enjoyed sitting at the window on the second floor watching the passing traffic. He kept a list of needy families to whom he annually sent supplies of fuel, and he left in trust to the city a large amount, the income of which was to be used year by year in providing wood and coal for the poor. On March 22, 1882 Salem lost it's loved benefactor, at the age of 86.



PLAN OF PORTION OF BERTRAM ESTATE, SALEM.

GIVEN FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY.

C.H.S.A. PUTNAM C.E.

SCALE 1/8" = 1 FOOT TO AN INCH.

Salem March 7, 1888.

Rec'd int. in Cur Reg. Deeds

So. Dist. with deed from M.A.

Bertram is ad. to City of Salem.

B 1217 & 490 -

Wm. Charles Wood

Ref.