

## *History of House & Occupants at 16 Conant Street, Salem*

By Robert Booth, for Historic Salem Inc., 26 Jan. 2006

According to available evidence, this house was built for Josiah Fitz, Jr., baker, in 1833. For many years afterward, 1835-1918, it was the home of the Collier family and of Asa A. Wiggin; and it was the birthplace of Perry Collier, a mayor of Beverly.

On Jan. 16, 1833, for \$125 John Young sold to Josiah Fitz, Jr., a Salem baker, a lot of land bounded northerly 83' 2" on land of said John & Elizabeth Young, westerly 36' on "the street leading to Webb's house," southerly 83' on land of Richard Stickney, easterly 36' on land of Moses Wells (ED 267:248). On this lot, Mr. Fitz had this house built, probably in 1833 and certainly by the spring of 1834.

On June 9 and 10, 1834, Mr. Fitz mortgaged the premises, "with all buildings thereon", to Isaac Cushing, housewright, for \$259.60 and to his brother, Daniel P. Fitz, carpenter, for \$550 (ED 277:16, 21). The mortgages reflect the presence of a new house on the lot; and the two mortgagees may well have been the contractors who had built the house.

Today, the major evidence for the original construction is in the cellar, which shows that the house was built with dimensional stock and large joists. A large chimney arch (later bricked in) is found in the cellar, with a summer kitchen firebox there, and a bubble-style back oven adjoining it but now bricked off. Upstairs, the house was thoroughly remodeled over the years.

Josiah Fitz, Jr., baker, was the son of the Josiah Fitz, carpenter, who resided on Curtis Street, Salem, in 1831, in a house owned by Penn Townsend (per 1831 valuations). This was likely then-10 Curtis Street, and Daniel Fitz lived there too, as did, probably, Josiah Jr.

Josiah Fitz (Sr.) married Mary Poland in 1807 in Ipswich, which was likely Josiah and Mary's home town. The family likely came to Salem in the 1820s, with at least two sons, Josiah Jr. and Daniel P. (born in 1808).

Salem's general maritime foreign commerce fell off sharply in the late 1820s. Imports in Salem ships were supplanted by the goods that were now being produced in great quantities in America. The interior of the

country was being settled by new arrivals and by people leaving places like Salem, which was economically stagnating. To the north, the falls of the Merrimack River powered large new textile mills (Lowell was founded in 1823) which created great wealth for their investors; and in general it seemed that the tide of opportunity was ebbing away from Salem. To stem the flow of talent from the town and to harness its potential water power for manufacturing, Salem's rich men banded together in 1826 to raise the money to dam the North River for industrial power, but the effort failed, and caused several leading citizens to move to Boston, the hub of investment in the new economy.

In 1830 occurred a horrifying crime that brought disgrace to Salem. Old Capt. Joseph White, a wealthy merchant, resided in the house now called the Gardner-Pingree house, on Essex Street. One night, intruders broke into his mansion and stabbed him to death. All of Salem buzzed with rumors; the fact was that the murderer was a Crowninshield (he killed himself). He had been hired by his friends, Capt. White's own relatives, Capt. Joseph Knapp and his brother Frank (they would be executed). The results of the investigation and trial having uncovered much that was lurid, more of the respectable families quit the now-notorious town.

Salem had not prepared for the industrial age, and had few natural advantages. The North River served not to power factories but mainly to flush the waste from the 25 tanneries that had set up along its banks. As the decade wore on, and the new railroads and canals, all running and flowing to Boston from points north, west, and south, diverted both capital and trade away from the coast. Salem's remaining merchants took their equity out of local wharves and warehouses and ships and put it into the stock of manufacturing and transportation companies. Some merchants did not make the transition, and were ruined. Old-line areas of work, like rope-making, sail-making, and ship chandleries, gradually declined and disappeared. Salem slumped badly, but, despite all, the voters decided to charter their town as a city in 1836—the third city to be formed in the state, behind Boston and Lowell. City Hall was built 1837-8 and the city seal was adopted with an already-anachronistic Latin motto of “to the farthest port of the rich East”—a far cry from “Go West, young man!” The Panic of 1837, a brief, sharp, nationwide economic depression, caused even more Salem families to head west in search of fortune and a better future.

Throughout the 1830s, the leaders of Salem scrambled to re-invent an economy for their fellow citizens, many of whom were mariners without much sea-faring to do. Ingenuity, ambition, and hard work would have to

carry the day. One inspiration was the Salem Laboratory, Salem's first science-based manufacturing enterprise, founded in 1813 to produce chemicals. At the plant built in 1818 in North Salem on the North River, the production of alum and blue vitriol was a specialty; and it proved a very successful business. Salem's whale-fishery led to the manufacturing of high-quality candles at Stage Point, along with machine oils. The candles proved very popular. Lead-manufacturing began in the 1820s, and grew large after 1830, when Wyman's gristmills on the Forest River, at the head of Salem Harbor, were retooled for making high-quality white lead and sheet lead. These enterprises were a start toward taking Salem in a new direction.

As mentioned, Josiah Fitz Jr. (his wife was Sarah) had this house built in 1833, and he may have had his bakery on premises. In 1833 and 1834 valuations, he was listed as residing in ward two, with "house & bakery, \$400". On 22 Aug. 1835 Josiah Fitz Jr., having moved to Boston, sold the premises for \$548.54 to John Colyer, Salem rope-maker, subject to a \$226.46 mortgage (ED 281:279). Josiah Fitz Jr. returned to Salem by 1836, when he resided at 10 Cross Street (per 1837 directory); but he left soon after, and seems to have finally settled at Lynn, then a burgeoning center of the shoe trade. It seems that he never again resided in Salem.

The new owner, John Collier (also, Colyer, Collyer), was identified in the 1834 valuations as residing in ward two and working as a "ropemaker at Whittemore's." The business of rope-making had long been carried on in Salem: in long, low buildings called ropewalks, men made all sorts of cordage and rope, primarily for ship-rigging and hawsers. Rope-making had long been conducted in the "lower end" of town (East Parish); however, about 1800 some rope-makers had set up their ropewalks on Bridge Street, one of them being the Whittemore Ropewalk, at which Mr. Collier worked in 1834, then operated by Stephen Whittemore and his son Stephen Jr.

John Collyer was a native of Salem, born here in 1792, the son of a ropemaker, Isaac Collyer, and his wife Lois Kane/Keene, who had married in Salem in 1772. Lois may have been the sister of Thomas Keene, of Salem's East Parish, who came from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Isaac Collyer was a native of Marblehead; and he probably fought in the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783. In 1792 he purchased a homestead on Ash Street, near the banks of the North River; and there John grew up. John had six older siblings, a brother Isaac Jr. and five sisters. By the 1790s, Salem was in the midst of a remarkable period of commercial growth: new foreign-trade markets—and the coffee trade, which would be

opened in 1798 with Mocha, Arabia—brought great riches to the Salem merchants, and raised the level of wealth throughout the town: new ships were bought and built, more crews were formed with more shipmasters, new shops and stores opened, new partnerships were formed, and new people moved to town. In 1792 Salem's first bank, the Essex Bank, was founded, although it "existed in experiment a long time before it was incorporated," per Rev. William Bentley. From a population of 7921 in 1790, the town would grow by 1500 persons in a decade. At the same time, thanks to the economic policies of Alexander Hamilton, Salem vessels were able to transport foreign cargoes tax-free and essentially to serve as the neutral carrying fleet for both Britain and France, which were at war with each other.

In the late 1790s, there was agitation in Congress to go to war with France, which was at war with England. After Pres. Adams' negotiators were rebuffed by the French leaders in 1797, a quasi-war with France began in summer, 1798, much to the horror of Salem's George Crowninshield family (father and five shipmaster sons), which Hamilton and Salem's Timothy Pickering (the U.S. Secretary of State). These included most of the had an extensive trade with the French, and whose ships and cargoes in French ports were susceptible to seizure. The quasi-war brought about a political split within the Salem population. Those who favored war with France (and detente with England) aligned themselves with the national Federalist party, led by merchants, led locally by the Derby family. Those who favored peace with republican France were the Anti-Federalists, who later became aligned with Pres. Jefferson and his Democratic-Republican party; they were led locally by the Crowninshields. For the first few years of this rivalry, the Federalists prevailed; but after the death of Hasket "King" Derby in 1799 his family's power weakened.

In 1800, Adams negotiated peace with France and fired Pickering, his oppositional Secretary of State. Salem's Federalists merchants erupted in anger, expressed through their newspaper, the *Salem Gazette*. At the same time, British vessels began to harass American shipping. Salem owners bought more cannon and shot, and kept pushing their trade to the farthest ports of the rich East, while also maintaining trade with the Caribbean and Europe. Salem cargoes were exceedingly valuable, and Salem was a major center for distribution of merchandise throughout New England: "the streets about the wharves were alive with teams loaded with goods for all parts of the country. It was a busy scene with the coming and going of vehicles, some from long distances, for railroads were then unknown and all transportation must be carried on in wagons

and drays. In the taverns could be seen teamsters from all quarters sitting around the open fire in the chilly evenings, discussing the news of the day or making merry over potations of New England rum, which Salem manufactured in abundance.” (from Hurd’s History of Essex County, 1888, p.65).

The Crowninshields, led by brother Jacob, were especially successful, as their holdings rose from three vessels in 1800 to several in 1803. Their bailiwick, the Derby Street district, seemed almost to be itself imported from some foreign country: in the stores, parrots chattered and monkeys cavorted, and from the warehouses wafted the exotic aromas of Sumatran spices and Arabian coffee beans and Caribbean molasses. From the wharves were carted all manner of strange fruits, and crates of patterned china in red and blue, and piles of gorgeous silks and figured cloths, English leather goods, and hundreds of barrels of miscellaneous objects drawn from all of the ports and workshops of the world. It was in this atmosphere that John Collyer grew up (he was ten in 1802), playing on the wharves, visiting at the ropewalk where his father worked at the job of making long lengths of cordage.

The greatest of the Salem merchants at this time was William “Billy” Gray, who owned 36 large vessels—15 ships, 7 barks, 13 brigs, 1 schooner—by 1808. Salem was then still a town, and a small one by our standards, with a total population of about 9,500 in 1800. Its politics were fierce, and polarized everything. The two factions attended separate churches, held separate parades, and supported separate schools, military companies, and newspapers. The town’s merchants were among the wealthiest in the country, and, in Samuel McIntire, they had a local architect who could help them realize their desires for large and beautiful homes in the latest style. While a few of the many new houses went up in the old Essex-Washington Street axis, most were erected on or near Washington Square or in the Federalist “west end” (Chestnut, Federal, and upper Essex Streets). The architectural style (called “Federal” today) had been developed by the Adam brothers in England and featured fanlight doorways, palladian windows, elongated pilasters and columns, and large windows. It was introduced to New England by Charles Bulfinch in 1790. The State House in Boston was his first institutional composition; and soon Beacon Hill was being built up with handsome residences in the Bulfinch manner.

In 1806 the Derbys extended their wharf far out into the harbor, tripling its previous length. This they did to create more space for warehouses and ship-berths in the deeper water, at just about the time that the

Crowninshields had built their great India Wharf at the foot of now-Webb Street. The other important wharves were Forrester's (now Central, just west of Derby Wharf), and Union Wharf at the foot of Union Street; and then, farther to the west, a number of smaller wharves extended into the South River (filled in during the late 1800s), all the way to the foot of Washington Street. Each had a warehouse or two, and shops for artisans (coopers, blockmakers, joiners, etc.). The waterfront between Union Street and Washington Street also had lumber yards and several ship chandleries and distilleries, with a Market House at the foot of Central Street, below the Custom House. The wharves and streets were crowded with shoppers, gawkers, hawkers, sailors, artisans ("mechanics"), storekeepers, and teamsters; and just across the way, on Stage Point along the south bank of the South River, wooden barks and brigs and ships were being built in the shipyards.

Salem's boom came to an end with a crash in January, 1808, when Jefferson and the Congress imposed an embargo on all shipping in hopes of forestalling war with Britain. The Embargo, which was widely opposed in New England, proved futile and nearly ruinous in Salem, where commerce ceased. As a hotbed of Democratic-Republicanism, Salem's East Parish and its seafarers, led by the Crowninshields, loyally supported the Embargo until it was lifted in spring, 1809. Shunned by the other Salem merchants for his support of the Embargo, the eminent Billy Gray took his large fleet of ships—fully one-third of Salem's tonnage—and moved to Boston, whose commerce was thereby much augmented. Gray's removal eliminated a huge amount of Salem wealth, shipping, import-export cargos, and local employment. Gray soon switched from the Federalist party, and was elected Lt. Governor under Gov. Elbridge Gerry, a native of Marblehead.

It was at about this time, evidently, that Isaac and Lois Collyer met with disaster. Rev. William Bentley noted in his diary on 2 April 1811, "We have had something of an alarm. Three active men in middle life have died of a fever within a few days from a ropewalk in which they have been employed upon damaged hemp. The wife of one of them has also soon followed her husband and several have been and are sick in the same families." The March 30 newspaper noted Isaac Collyer's death, and the issue of two days later noted his wife's death. At the same time, Bentley identifies one "Mrs. Calley" (Dorcas Kane Eden-Calley, of Summer Street) as "sister of Mrs. Collier, who, with her husband, died of a fever which carried off three men who worked in a ropewalk..." Thus ended the lives of John Collyer's parents. He was twenty at the time.

Salem resumed its seafaring commerce for three years, but still the British preyed on American shipping; and in June, 1812, war was declared against Britain. Although the merchants had tried to prevent the war, when it came, Salem swiftly fitted out 40 privateers manned by Marblehead and Salem crews, who also served on U.S. Navy vessels, including the frigate *Constitution*. Many more local vessels could have been sent against the British, but some of the Federalist merchants held them back. In addition, Salem fielded companies of infantry and artillery. Salem and Marblehead privateers were largely successful in making prizes of British supply vessels. While many of the town's men were wounded in engagements, and some were killed, the possible riches of privateering kept the men returning to sea as often as possible. The first prizes were captured by a 30-ton converted fishing schooner, the *Fame*, and by a 14-ton luxury yacht fitted with one gun, the *Jefferson*. Of all Salem privateers, the Crowninshields' 350-ton ship *America* was most successful: she captured 30-plus prizes worth more than \$1,100,000.

John Collyer may have participated as a soldier or sailor in the war. In August, 1813, John Collyer, Salem ropemaker, and his siblings for \$31.50 sold a small piece of land on Rowlands Hill, Marblehead (ED 225:110). John, then 21, and four of his sisters signed the deed with their mark (+) rather than with a signature, so it would seem that he had not received any schooling.

Salem erected forts and batteries on its Neck, to discourage the British warships that cruised these waters. On land, the war went poorly for the United States, as the British captured Washington, DC, and burned the Capitol and the White House. Along the western frontier, U.S. forces were successful against the weak English forces; and, as predicted by many, the western expansionists had their day. At sea, as time wore on, Salem vessels were captured, and its men imprisoned or killed. After almost three years, the war was bleeding the town dry. Hundreds of Salem men and boys were in British prison-ships and at Dartmoor Prison in England. At the Hartford Convention in 1814, New England Federalist delegates met to consider what they could do to bring the war to a close and to restore the region's commerce. Following the lead of Sen. Timothy Pickering of Salem (who did not attend), the extreme Federalists nearly threatened secession from the United States; but the Pickering faction was countered by Harrison G. Otis of Boston and the moderate Federalists, who prevailed in sending a milder message to Congress.

At last, in February, 1815, peace was restored.

Post-war, Salem merchants rebuilt their fleets and resumed their worldwide trade, slowly at first, and then to great effect. Many new partnerships were formed. The pre-war partisan politics of the town were not resumed post-war, as the middle-class “mechanics” (artisans) became more powerful and brought about civic harmony, largely through the Salem Charitable Mechanic Association (founded 1817).

In August, 1818, John Collyer, 26, (described as being “of Marblehead”) married Hannah Trofatter of Salem, nineteen, a woman who probably grew up on Andover Street and whose paternal grandfather had come from Germany. Her father, Samuel Trofatter, had married her mother, Mary (Perry) Curtis in 1795. John Collyer must have been spending time in his father’s birthplace, Marblehead, for in the wedding intentions he was listed as being “of Marblehead”, but he was also residing in Boston and working as a ropemaker (see ED 261:304); and he may have moved to Salem shortly after.

Rev. William Bentley, keen observer and active citizen during Salem’s time of greatest prosperity and fiercest political divisions, died in 1819, the year in which a new U.S. Custom House was built on the site of the George Crowninshield mansion, at the head of Derby Wharf. Despite the opening of new markets with Madagascar (1820), which supplied tallow and ivory, and Zanzibar (1825), whence came coffee, ivory, and gum copal, used to make varnish, Salem’s foreign commerce faltered badly in the early 1820s. Maritime-related businesses like rope-making suffered. Like many other Salem tradesmen, John Collyer moved away from the fading seaport and settled in Boston, where he continued in his occupation. In November, 1826, in Salem, Hannah’s father, Samuel Trofatter died of the effects of intemperance at the age of fifty-seven. By 1831 John Collier and his family resided in Roxbury, where he worked as a rope-maker (ED 261:304).

As has been mentioned, John Collier was again a Salem ropemaker when he purchased this Conant Street homestead in August, 1835. He and Hannah then had five surviving children, with another on the way (Edward would be born in 1836). Six of their children had died young. In 1838 a 13<sup>th</sup> and last child, a boy whom they named Perry, was born, probably in this house. Perry was the maiden surname of Mrs. Hannah Collier’s mother, Mary Perry Trofatter.

In 1838 the Eastern Rail Road, headquartered in Salem, began operating between Boston and Salem, which gave the local people a direct route to the region’s largest market. The new railroad tracks ran right over the



middle of the Mill Pond; the tunnel under Washington Street was built in 1839; and the line was extended to Newburyport in 1840.

**John Collyer (1792-1853), born 17 Aug. 1792, son of Isaac Collier & Lois Keene of Salem, died 13 Nov. 1853 (SVR), m. 27 Aug. 1818**

**Hannah Trofatter (1799-1886), b. 8 June 1799, dtr. of Samuel Trofatter & Mary Perry, died 1886. Known issue:**

1. **three children, unknown names**
2. **Caroline, 8 March 1821, died young.**
3. **Charles Henry, 1823, died young.**
4. **Mary Jane, 1826, m. James Crawford.**
5. **Charles Henry, 1827, died young.**
6. **Augusta, 1828, m. Asa A. Wiggin; died by 1870; had four children.**
7. **Hannah Maria, 25 Dec. 1830, d. 13 March 1912.**
8. **John Henry, 1832, unm'd 1874.**
9. **Charles Dexter, 1834, m. Martha J.**
10. **Edward Trofatter, 1836, died in Civil War.**
11. **Perry, 28 Oct. 1838, married and had issue; died 1903.**

Some members of Salem's waning merchant class continued to pursue their sea-borne businesses into the 1840s; but it was an ebb tide, with unfavorable winds. Boston, transformed into a modern mega-port with efficient railroad and highway distribution to all markets, had subsumed virtually all foreign trade other than Salem's continuing commerce with Zanzibar. The sleepy waterfront at Derby Wharf, with an occasional arrival from Africa and regular visits from schooners carrying wood from Nova Scotia, is depicted in 1850 by Hawthorne in his mean-spirited "introductory section" to **The Scarlet Letter**, which he began while working in the Custom House.

Although Hawthorne had no interest in describing it, Salem's transformation did occur in the 1840s, as more industrial methods and machines were introduced, and many new companies in new lines of business arose. The Gothic symbol of Salem's new industrial economy was the large twin-towered granite train station—the "stone depot"—smoking and growling with idling locomotives. It stood on filled-in land at the foot of Washington Street, where the merchants' wharves had been; and from it the trains carried many valuable products as well as passengers. The tanning and curing of leather was very important in Salem by the mid-1800s. On and near Boston Street, along the upper North River, there were 41 tanneries in 1844, and 85 in 1850, employing

550 hands. The leather business would continue to grow in importance throughout the 1800s. In 1846 the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company completed the construction at Stage Point of the largest factory building in the United States, 60' wide by 400' long. It was an immediate success, and hundreds of people found employment there, many of them living in tenements built nearby. It too benefited from the Zanzibar and Africa trade, as it produced light cotton cloth for use in the tropics. Also in the 1840s, a new method was introduced to make possible high-volume industrial shoe production. In Lynn, the factory system was perfected, and that city became the nation's leading shoe producer. Salem had shoe factories too, and attracted shoe workers from outlying towns and the countryside. Even the nature of population began to transform, as hundreds of Irish families, fleeing the Famine, settled in Salem and gave the industrialists a big pool of cheap labor.

In 1850 (per census, ward two, house 79), the household here was headed by John Collier, 55, who owned \$1000 in real estate, with wife Hannah, 50, and children Mary Jane, 23, Augusta, 22, Hannah M, 19, Charles D., 15, Edward T., 13, and Perry, eleven. Shortly afterward, Augusta Collier married Asa A. Wiggin, 23.

John Collyer died here on November 13, 1853, of a blood disorder, in his 61<sup>st</sup> year.

In June, 1857, three of the John Collier heirs, his sons Charles D., Edward T., and Perry, for \$1 conveyed their rights in the house and land to their mother, John's widow, Hannah (Trofatter) Collier (ED 556:4)

In 1855 (per census, house 40, ward two) the house was occupied as a two-family, with households headed by Hannah Collier, 55, and by her son-in-law, Asa A. Wiggin, 27, a cabinet maker (wife Augusta, 27, and child Charles or Francis, a baby). The Colliers living at home with Hannah were Mary Jane, 28, Hannah M., 24, Charles, 21, a painter, Edward, 18, a carpenter, and Perry, 16, working as a clerk.

Salem's growth continued through the 1850s, as business and industries expanded, population swelled, new churches (e.g. Immaculate Conception, 1857) started, new working-class neighborhoods arose (especially in North Salem and South Salem, off Boston Street, and along the Mill Pond behind the Broad Street graveyard), and new schools, factories, and stores were built. A second, larger, factory building for the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company was added in 1859, down at Stage Point, where a new Methodist Church went up, and many neat homes,

boarding-houses, and stores were erected along the streets between Lafayette and Congress. The tanning business continued to boom, as better and larger tanneries were built along Boston Street and Mason Street; and subsidiary industries sprang up as well, most notably the J.M. Anderson glue-works on the Turnpike (Highland Avenue).

As it re-established itself as an economic powerhouse, Salem took a strong interest in national politics. It was primarily Republican, and strongly anti-slavery, with its share of outspoken abolitionists, led by Charles Remond, a passionate speaker who came from one of the city's notable black families. At its Lyceum (on Church Street) and in other venues, plays and shows were put on, but cultural lectures and political speeches were given too.

By 1860, with the election of Abraham Lincoln, it was clear that the Southern states would secede from the union; and Salem, which had done so much to win the independence of the nation, was ready to go to war to force others to remain a part of it. In that year (census, house 1864, ward two), this house was occupied by Hannah Collyer, 60, and her remaining at-home family (Mary J., 32, tailoress, Hannah M., 28, tailoress, and Perry, 21, working as a varnisher, probably in a cabinetmaker's shop). Hannah's daughter Augusta, 31, lived nearby with her husband Asa Wiggin, 31, a cabinetmaker, and their sons Francis, five, and John C., two (house 1854). It seems likely that Perry Collier was working with Mr. Wiggin in the cabinetmaker's shop of Israel Fellows, the premier cabinetmaker of his day.

The Civil War began in April, 1861, and went on for four years, during which hundreds of Salem men served in the army and navy, and many were killed or died of disease or abusive treatment while imprisoned. Hundreds more suffered wounds, or broken health.

From this house, Edward T. Collier and Charles D. Collier both served in the Union forces. Edward enlisted on July 3, 1861, for three years' service and was a private in Company B of the 29<sup>th</sup> Mass. Regiment of Volunteer Infantry, under Col. Ebenezer Pierce. This unit was sent to Fort Monroe, in Virginia, and there Edward died, probably of disease, evidently on September 9, 1861 (see MSSMCW III:284). It should be noted that the 29<sup>th</sup>'s regimental history notes that he died of disease in 1863 in Washington, DC.

Charles D. Collier, 27, enlisted in the Salem Cadets upon the outbreak of war, and drilled at first at the fort at Winter Island under their captain,

Seth Buxton. On July 5, 1861, C.D. Collier and his mates were mustered into the forces of the United States for three years, and eventually became Company D of the First Regiment of Heavy Artillery, Mass. Volunteers, the "First Heavies." The appended pages, taken from the regimental history, describe some of the service of that regiment. Through to the spring of 1864, the men were assigned to garrison duties and fort-building, and saw no battle action. On May 19, the regiment fought gallantly at Harris Farm and lost its Major Rolfe and 54 other men killed, with 27 missing and 312 wounded. The regiment then moved on to the battles of Totopotomy and Cold Harbor from late May into June, with light casualties—but one of them was Charles D. Collier, wounded in action at Cold Harbor on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. That was the end of the war for him; he was sent behind the lines to a hospital, and his enlistment expired one month later. Charles came back to Salem, recovered from his wounds—no doubt he was tended, in part, by his mother and sisters; and he would live on for another 41 years (see MSSMCW V:585).

The people of Salem contributed greatly to efforts to alleviate the suffering of the soldiers, sailors, and their families; and there was great celebration when the war finally ended in the spring of 1865, just as President Lincoln was assassinated. The four years of bloodshed and warfare were over; the slaves were free; a million men were dead; the union was preserved and the South was under martial rule. Salem, with many wounded soldiers and grieving families, welcomed the coming of peace.

Through the 1860s, Salem pursued manufacturing, especially of leather and shoes and textiles. The managers and capitalists tended to build their new, grand houses along Lafayette Street (these houses may still be seen, south of Roslyn Street; many are in the French Second Empire style, with mansard roofs). A third factory building for the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company was built in 1865.

In 1870 the house was occupied by four family members: Mrs. Hannah Collier, 70, her daughter, Hannah Maria Collier, 35, a tailoress, her son, Perry Collier, 30, an upholsterer, and her son-in-law, Asa A. Wiggin, 42, a cabinet maker. Both Perry and Asa had personal property valued at \$5000, a large sum in those days. Asa Wiggin, who would reside here for another 47 years, had suffered terrible personal tragedy. His wife, Augusta, had died in the 1860s, and all four of their children had died young, two of them when they were little boys (not infants). He appears to have been very close to his Collier relatives, and perhaps was a father-

figure to Perry Collier, twelve years younger and fatherless since the age of fifteen.

Asa Augustus Wiggin was born in Salem on Dec. 5, 1827, one of the many children of Asa Wiggin, a leading tailor (he had come to Salem from new Hampshire), and his wife Abigail Boardman, a native of Ipswich. Asa A. was among the younger children in the family, which resided at the corner of Federal and St. Peter Streets, not far from the Collier family house on Ash Street. When Asa was twelve, his father died, in 1840, aged 55, of consumption (tuberculosis). The boy Asa was educated through high school, and then was apprenticed, in about 1844, to Francis Choate, who kept a well-known dry goods store. Asa next worked for Goldthwait & Ide, carpet dealers and upholsterers, and by 1847 or so he was working for cabinet-makers Henderson & Allen (shop at 25 Washington Street), after which, about 1850, he entered the workshop of Israel Fellows, who “made only the best and most expensive household furniture, and employed only the most skillful workmen” (per Mr. Wiggin’s obituary). Asa would work for him until about 1879. Israel Fellows resided on Andrew Street and had his furniture warehouse at 199 Essex Street in the 1850s and later. Asa resided with his mother until about 1853, when he married Augusta Collier and they went to live on Lemon Street and later on Skerry Street.

Hannah Maria Collier, Perry’s older sister, was a dressmaker who amassed a good nest-egg, and in 1859 purchased land on Skerry Street, next to the house of Asa A. Wiggin. On some of that land, she allowed her brother Perry to build a house; and she sold the house-lot to Perry in 1869 (ED 767:106). Hannah Maria evidently continued to live here with her mother.

In 1870 Salem received its last cargo from Zanzibar, thus ending a once-important trade. By then, a new Salem & New York freight steamboat line was in operation. Seven years later, with the arrival of a vessel from Cayenne, Salem’s foreign trade came to an end. After that, “the merchandise warehouses on the wharves no longer contained silks from India, tea from China, pepper from Sumatra, coffee from Arabia, spices from Batavia, gum-copal from Zanzibar, hides from Africa, and the various other products of far-away countries. The boys have ceased to watch on the Neck for the incoming vessels, hoping to earn a reward by being the first to announce to the expectant merchant the safe return of his looked-for vessel. The foreign commerce of Salem, once her pride and glory, has spread its white wings and sailed away forever” (per Rev. George Bachelder in Hurd’s *History of Essex County*, II: 65).

Salem was now so densely built-up that a general conflagration was always a possibility, as in Boston, when, on Nov. 9, 1872, the financial and manufacturing district of the city burned up. Salem continued to prosper in the 1870s, carried forward by the leather-making business. In 1874 the city was visited by a tornado and shaken by a minor earthquake. In the following year, the large Pennsylvania Pier (site of the present coal-fired harborside electrical generating plant) was completed to begin receiving large shipments of coal. Beyond it, at Juniper Point, a new owner began subdividing the old Allen farmlands into a new development called Salem Willows and Juniper Point. In the U.S. centennial year, 1876, A.G. Bell of Salem announced that he had discovered a way to transmit voices over telegraph wires.

In this decade, French-Canadian families began coming to work in Salem's mills and factories, and more houses and tenements were built. The better-off workers bought portions of older houses or built small homes for their families in the outlying sections of the city; and by 1879 the Naumkeag Steam Cotton mills would employ 1200 people and produce annually nearly 15 million yards of cloth. Shoe-manufacturing businesses expanded in the 1870s, and 40 shoe factories were employing 600-plus operatives. Tanning, in both Salem and Peabody, remained a very important industry, and employed hundreds of breadwinners. On Boston Street in 1879, the Arnold tannery caught fire and burned down.

By the late 1870s, Perry Collier had moved on. In 1865, aged 25, he had worked as an upholsterer at 12 Sewall Street; and by 1871, residing here still, he was working in the same trade at 25 Washington Street. At some point, perhaps in developing the Skerry Street parcel with his sister, he took an interest in real estate projects, and he became an auctioneer as well. In the 1880s he married and moved to Beverly, although he had his office, as auctioneer and real estate broker, at 243 Essex Street in Salem (per 1886 directory). By that time his brother-in-law, Asa Wiggin, had begun working as a carpenter for the B&M Railroad at its car repairing facility on Bridge Street.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Salem kept building infrastructure; and new businesses arose, and established businesses expanded. Retail stores prospered; horse-drawn trolleys ran every which-way; and machinists, carpenters, millwrights, and other specialists all thrived. In 1880, Salem's manufactured goods were valued at about \$8.4 million, of which leather accounted for nearly half. In the summer of 1886, the Knights of Labor brought a strike against the manufacturers for a ten-hour day and other

concessions; but the manufacturers imported labor from Maine and Canada, and kept going. The strikers held out, and there was violence in the streets, and even rioting; but the owners prevailed, and many of the defeated workers lost their jobs and suffered, with their families, through a bitter winter.

By the mid-1880s, Salem's cotton-cloth mills at the Point employed 1400 people who produced about 19 million yards annually, worth about \$1.5 million. The city's large shoe factories stood downtown behind the stone depot and on Dodge and Lafayette Streets. A jute bagging company prospered with plants on Skerry Street and English Street; its products were sent south to be used in cotton-baling. Salem factories also produced lead, paint, and oil. At the B&M (formerly Eastern) Railroad yard on Bridge Street, where Asa Wiggin worked, cars were repaired and even built new. In 1887 the streets were first lit with electricity, replacing gas-light. The gas works, which had stood on Northey Street since 1850, was moved to a larger site on Bridge Street in 1888, opposite the Beverly Shore (site of Keystone facility today).

In 1886, Mrs. Hannah Trofatter Collier died, probably here on Conant Street, at the age of eighty-seven. She had survived her husband John by some 33 years. Evidently she devised the homestead to the two children of her son Perry, with life estates for her unmarried daughter and lifelong companion, Hannah Maria Collier, who would live here for many years more, along with her brother-in-law, Asa A. Wiggin, who evidently also was devised a life estate.

More factories and more people required more space for buildings, more roads, and more storage areas. This space was created by filling in rivers, harbors, and ponds. The once-broad North River was filled from both shores, and became a canal along Bridge Street above the North Bridge. The large and beautiful Mill Pond, which occupied the whole area between the present Jefferson Avenue, Canal Street, and Loring Avenue, finally vanished beneath streets, storage areas, junk-yards, rail-yards, and parking lots. The South River, too, with its epicenter at Central Street (that's why there was a Custom House built there in 1805) disappeared under the pavement, and some of its old wharves were joined together with much in-fill and turned into coal-yards and lumber-yards. Only a canal was left, running in from Derby and Central Wharves to Lafayette Street.

Perry Collier, a resident of Beverly, prospered in his Salem-based real-estate and auction business, and participated as a leader of fraternal

organizations in Salem and Beverly. He owned much commercial and income property in Beverly, including the Collier Block at the corner of Cabot Street and Highland Avenue. In 1893 and 1894 he was elected a selectman of Beverly; then, after it became a city, he was elected mayor in 1898. He resided at 118 Cabot Street, Beverly, until moving to Wenham late in life.

Perry Collier died in 1903, on Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>, at home in Wenham. He was about sixty-five and left his wife and two grown children, Franklin P. Collier and A. Gertrude Collier. He was survived also by his brother-in-law Wiggin and by his sister Hannah M., both still living at 16 Conant Street. Hannah Maria Collier survived her brother Charles (the Civil War veteran), who died in 1905; and she died on March 13, 1912, in her 82<sup>nd</sup> year. At that time, her house-mates were Mr. Wiggin, 85, and their nephew, Charles H. Collier, a clerk who worked in Lynn, and his family.

Salem kept growing. The Canadians were followed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by large numbers of Polish and Ukrainian families, who settled primarily in the Derby Street neighborhood. By the eve of World War One, Salem was a bustling, polyglot city that supported large department stores and large factories of every description. People from the surrounding towns, and Marblehead in particular, came to Salem to do their shopping; and its handsome government buildings, as befit the county seat, were busy with conveyances of land, lawsuits, and probate proceedings. The city's politics were lively, and its economy was strong.

On June 25, 1914, in the morning, in Blubber Hollow (Boston Street opposite Federal), a fire started in one of Salem's fire-prone wooden tanneries. This fire soon consumed the building and raced out of control, for the west wind was high and the season had been dry. The next building caught fire, and the next, and out of Blubber Hollow the fire roared easterly, a monstrous front of flame and smoke, wiping out the houses of Boston Street, Essex Street, and upper Broad Street, and then sweeping through Hathorne, Winthrop, Endicott, and other residential streets. Men and machines could not stop it: the enormous fire crossed over into South Salem and destroyed the neighborhoods west of Lafayette Street, then devoured the mansions of Lafayette Street itself, and raged onward into the tenement district. Despite the combined efforts of heroic fire crews from many towns and cities, the fire overwhelmed everything in its path: it smashed into the large factory buildings of the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company (Congress Street), which exploded in an inferno; and it rolled down Lafayette Street and across the water to Derby Street. There, just beyond Union Street, after a 13-hour rampage, the monster



died, having consumed 250 acres, 1600 houses, and 41 factories, and leaving three dead and thousands homeless. Some people had insurance, some did not; all received much support and generous donations from all over the country and the world. It was one of the greatest urban disasters in U.S. history, and the people of Salem would take years to recover from it. Eventually, they did, and many of the former houses and businesses were rebuilt; and several urban-renewal projects (including Hawthorne Boulevard, which involved removing old houses and widening old streets) were put into effect.

Asa A. Wiggin had retired as a railroad-car carpenter in 1905, when he was almost eighty. He lived here at #16 with his sister-in-law Hannah and then with his nephew Charles Collier, and attended the First Church, where he had been a member of the choir for many years. Presumably he still attended the meetings of his fraternal organizations, at which he had once been a leader. No doubt he reminisced about the old days, including the hand-tub fire engine, Constitution No. Nine, of which he had been foreman. In his thoughts and memories were some of the oldest eye-witness impressions of the Salem-that-was and its people. A month before his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, after a brief period of illness, Mr. Wiggin died here at home, on November 9<sup>th</sup> (see appended obituary).

In January, 1918, the Perry Collier heirs sold the property to the occupant, Charles H. Collier and his wife Carrie (ED 2384:239). The lot fronted 36' on the street. The Charles Colliers sold the premises in March, 1919, to Thomas F. Cronan, who sold it within a month to James J. Cummings of Salem (ED 2408:353, 2410:113). He evidently leased the place to John J. Heffernan, 58, foreman of the Board of Health, who resided here in 1920 (per census) with wife Agnes, 50, son John E., 26, railroad lineman, and son Arthur, 19, chauffeur.

By the 1920s, Salem was once again a thriving city; and its tercentenary in 1926 was a time of great celebration. The Depression hit in 1929, and continued through the 1930s. Salem, the county seat and regional retail center, gradually rebounded, and prospered after World War II through the 1950s and into the 1960s. General Electric, Parker Brothers, Pequot Mills (formerly Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co.), Almy's department store, various other large-scale retailers, and Beverly's United Shoe Machinery Company were all major local employers. Then the arrival of suburban shopping malls and the relocation of manufacturing businesses took their toll, as they have with many other cities. More than most, Salem has navigated its way forward into the present with success, trading on its share of notoriety arising from the witch trials, but also from its history as

a great seaport and as the home of Bowditch, McIntire, Bentley, Story, and Hawthorne. Most of all, it remains a city where the homes of the old-time merchants, mariners, rope-makers, cabinet-makers, and mill-operatives are all honored as a large part of what makes Salem different from any other place.

Date: October 20, 2007

Please find enclosed a check for membership renewal. I am also inquiring about a Plaque for our property. We received a copy of the research document which was completed by Mr. Booth. We received this document around February 3, 2006 but never received a plaque. I did place a telephone call to Historic Salem but never received a reply. The plaque would read:

Built for

Josiah Fitz, Jr., Baker

1833

The property is located at 16 Conant street in Salem. My telephone number is 978-745-5018 or e-mail address is [elebrun54@verizon.net](mailto:elebrun54@verizon.net).

Thank you

Ed LeBrun

**2008 PLAQUE PROGRAM**

**TO:** Bob Leonard, Ould Colony Artisans  
**FAX:** 207-779-0707

**FROM:** Dick Thompson, Historic Salem, Inc.

**DATE:** January 2, 2008

**New Plaque order as follows:**

Built for  
Josiah Fitz, Jr., Baker  
1833

Please ship to:

Edward LeBrun  
16 Conant Street  
Salem, MA 01970