

## History of House & Occupants 41 Forrester Street, Salem

*by Robert Booth for Historic Salem Inc, Jan. 2009*

According to available evidence, this house was built in 1882 for Annie Sweetser, storekeeper.

On 11 May 1882 James A. Gillis for \$700 sold to Annie Sweetser, Salem singlewoman, a parcel of land running west 33' on Forrester Street, running southwest 15' 6" on a "new street" (Forrester, extended), and running about 100' to Emerton Street, where it fronted 45'.<sup>1</sup> On this lot, Miss Sweetser proceeded to have this house built. She would soon add more land to the lot, as she paid \$483 in January, 1883, to Captain Gillis for a triangular piece starting at a point on the new street (Forrester) and running north 94' by Miss Sweetser's land, running east 96' by Emerton Street, and running southwest 132' back to the point begun at.<sup>2</sup>

The 1882 book of valuation (p. 114, ward two) of the city of Salem lists Annie Sweetser (in pencil; most entries are in ink), for house "14 Forrester"<sup>3</sup> worth \$3500 and land 9635 sq. ft. worth \$4000. This probably indicates that, after the initial valuations were made, the assessors noticed that this house had just been built. The valuation on the land is high, but reflects the desirability of property in this neighborhood. The 1883 tax book (p.244) lists "Ann Sweetser" at "14 Forrester."

It should be noted that Annie Sweetser, 39, in 1882, may have been engaged to marry when she had this house built. If not, she soon did become engaged; and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1883, aged forty, she took Benjamin F. (Frank) Hill, thirty-one, as her husband (per Salem Vital Records). At that time, Annie Sweetser was listed as a storekeeper, the daughter of Ephraim & Nancy Sweetser. Mr. Hill is listed as a carpenter, born in York, Maine, son of Benjamin A. & Hannah (Moore) Hill (born July 4, 1852). Overnight, he went from being a carpenter to proprietor of a hardware store, probably bankrolled by his bride.

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<sup>1</sup> ED 1102:200.

<sup>2</sup> ED 1102:200.

<sup>3</sup> Forrester Street was originally called East Street; the original Forrester Street was what is now the section of Bridge Street between the jail and Winter Street. Forrester Street was renumbered over the years and as new houses were built; this house was initially numbered #12 and sometimes #14.

Annie was Anna Sweetser, born December 14, 1842, in Lynn. Her father, Ephraim Sweetser, was of an old Lynn family. He moved to Salem in the 1850s, and went into business as a shoe and boot dealer on Essex Street. Annie thus grew up in a family of retailers. At that time the city was building a manufacturing base and was taking a strong interest in national politics. Annie Sweetser graduated in 1858 from Salem High School, aged fifteen. Salem 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.

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. 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; 800,000 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 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" (Rev. George Batchelor in *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.

Benjamin Franklin Hill, Maine carpenter, was a fairly recent arrival in Salem when he, just turning 31, married Miss Annie Sweetser, 40, on his birthday in 1883. In the following year he bought the hardware business of Charles M. Buffum at then-222 Essex Street; and he would run it for years, dealing in all sorts of hardware, guns, etc., including bicycles.

In 1883, this new house was occupied as a two-family: the Hills resided here, as did Charles I. Sanborn (and family), he working as a clerk at the Richard C. Manning & Co. coal and wood business at 189 Derby Street

(see 1884 directory). By the fall of the year, Mrs. Annie S. Hill was pregnant; and in April, 1884, she gave birth to a healthy daughter, whom they named Lillian—she would be their only child. They were members of the Wesleyan (Methodist) Church.

In 1885 (per 1886 directory) this house (then-12 Forrester) was occupied by Benjamin F. Hill, hardware dealer at the Price Block, 222 Essex Street, with telephone, and family. Also residing here was Charles L. Whipple, a clerk at the coal & wood dealership of Stephen Whipple at then-125 Derby 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 Eastern Railroad yard on Bridge Street, 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.

By 1890, Mr. Whipple had moved on. The Hills resided here, and the tenants were Benjamin H.P. Gilbert, a clerk at 188 Essex Street (Almy, Bigelow & Washburn department store—known as Almy's), and Thomas G. Gilbert, foreman at the city stables (per 1890/1 directory).

Mr. Hill was known as B. Frank Hill by the mid-1890s. By 1897 the street had been renumbered and this house was given #41. The Hills lived here,

and so did B.P.H. Gilbert (still clerking at 188 Essex) and Mrs. Sarah J. Getchell, widow of William H. (per 1897/8 directory). These remained the occupants through 1899, and Miss Annie E. Getchell was also listed (see 1899/1900 directory). Mr. Hill placed advertisements for his business in the papers and directories of the time: in the 1899-1900 Salem directory his ad featured "Builders' Hardware and Mechanics' Tools" as well as bicycles, cutlery, guns, fishing tackle, brushes and brooms, wooden ware, and ploughs and other farming utensils (see copy of ad, appended).

In 1900 (per census, house 238, ward two), this house was a two family, occupied by the Hills and the Gilberts. In one unit resided Annie S. Hill, 57, husband Benjamin F., 47, hardware dealer, and daughter Lillian S. Hill, sixteen. In the other apartment resided Annie Gilbert, 38, husband Benjamin, 36, a carpet salesman, and daughters Eleanor B., ten, and Mildred N., five.

The B. Frank Hills resided here as before through 1905 with the Gilberts (see directories for 1903/4 and 1905). By 1907 the house was home to the Hills, to the B.P.H. Gilberts, to Mrs. Mary H. Gilbert (now widow of Thomas G.), and to seamstress Mrs. R. Augusta Smith (per 1908 directory). By 1909 and 1910 the Gilberts and Mrs. Smith had moved on, and the tenants were Margaret Mills, 49, a seamstress, and Dr. Charles H. Harwood, 68, a dentist, and his family: wife Clara A., 67, son George W., 47, insurance agent, and son Harrison, 35, bookkeeper at a bank. They had one other grown child living elsewhere. Mr. Hill, 57, was running his hardware store, Mrs. Hill, 67, was at home, and Lillian Hill, 26, was working as a teacher at the old Derby School and later at the Phillips School (see 1910 census, ward two). Dr. Harwood and Mrs. Mills remained here for some years.

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 of Riley Plaza and New Derby Street, 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.

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. No doubt the residents of Forrester Street feared that their homes would be lost too; but on Derby Street and up Herbert 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 the history of the United States, 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.

In 1914, Frank Hill moved his hardware business from Essex Street to a store at 78 Washington Street, opposite City Hall.

By the 1920s, Salem was once again a thriving city; and its tercentenary in 1926 was a time of great celebration. In 1928 the occupants here were the Hill family, the widow Lucy Rust, and Fred Fisk, a sheet-metal worker, wife Mona, and any children they may have had (per 1929 directory). The Depression hit in 1929, and would continue through the 1930s.

By 1929 Frank Hill, 77, was still working at the hardware store and employing his brother Charles A. Hill as a salesman (per directory). Also residing here were Lillian Hill, teacher; Walter Lewis, driver for Essex Flower Shop, wife Lucy (and any children they may have had); Lucy, the widow of William A. Rust; and Mrs. Rena F. Webber, wife of Moses D. Webber, a North Salem hat bleacher from whom she was estranged (per 1930 and 1933-4 directories).

In the winter of 1929, in mid-December, Frank Hill contracted pneumonia, and within a week he was dead: he died here at home, on Sunday morning, December 15<sup>th</sup>, the day after Annie's 87<sup>th</sup> birthday. He left his wife and their daughter Miss Lillian Hill, 45, a teacher at the Phillips School. He also left two brothers and four sisters, of whom Charles, Mrs. Albert Locke, and Miss Adelaide resided in Salem.

Mrs. Annie Sweetser Hill, 87, had been in poor health for some time; and she was brought low by her husband's sudden death. Immediately, she too contracted pneumonia; and she died four days later, on the morning of Thursday, Dec. 19, 1929, here at the home she had built 46 years before.

Miss Lillian S. Hill had lost both parents within a week. She remained a teacher for many years, residing here, probably with tenants.<sup>4</sup>

Salem, the county seat and regional retail center, gradually rebounded, and prospered after World War II through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Sylvania, Parker Brothers, Pequot Mills (formerly Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co.), Almy's department store, various other large-scale retailers, big tanneries, 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

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<sup>4</sup> After Lillian Hill's death, the homestead was sold in August, 1979, for \$45,000 to John & Kathleen Simons, then of Allston (ED 6623:472); and they owned the premises through the year 1997.

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, and mill-operatives are all honored as a large part of what makes Salem different from any other place.



## Glossary & Sources (Salem)

A figure like (ED 123:45) refers to book 123, page 45, Essex South Registry of Deeds.

A figure like (#12345) refers to Essex Probate case 12345, on file at the Essex Probate Court, Federal Street, Salem, or on microfilm at Mass. Archives, Boston, or at the Peabody Essex Museum's Phillips Library, Salem.

MSSRW refers to the multi-volume compendium, *Mass. Soldiers & Sailors in the Revolutionary War*, available at the Salem Public Library among other places.

MSSCRW refers to the multi-volume compendium, *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, & Marines in the Civil War*, available at the Salem Public Library among other places.

EIHC refers to the Essex Institute Historical Collections (discontinued), a multi-volume set (first volume published in 1859) of data and articles about Essex County. The indices of the EIHC have been consulted regarding many of the people associated with this house.

The six-volume published Salem Vital records (marriages, births, and deaths through 1849) have been consulted, as have the Salem Directory and later Naumkeag Directory, which have information about residents and their addresses, etc.

Sidney Perley's three-volume *History of Salem, 1626-1716* has been consulted, as has the four-volume *William Bentley's Diary*, J. Duncan Phillips' books, some newspaper obituaries, and other sources.

Salem real estate valuations, and, where applicable, Salem Street Books, have also been consulted, as have genealogies.

There is much more material available about Salem and its history; and the reader is encouraged to make his or her own discoveries.

--Robert Booth

1899-1900

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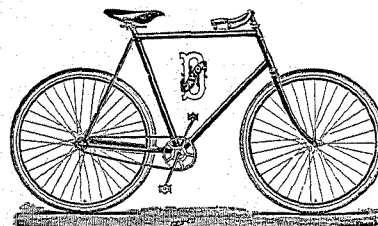
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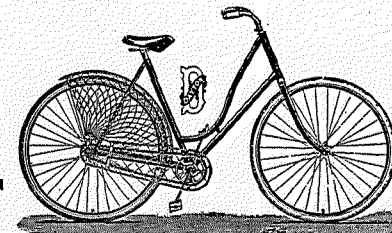
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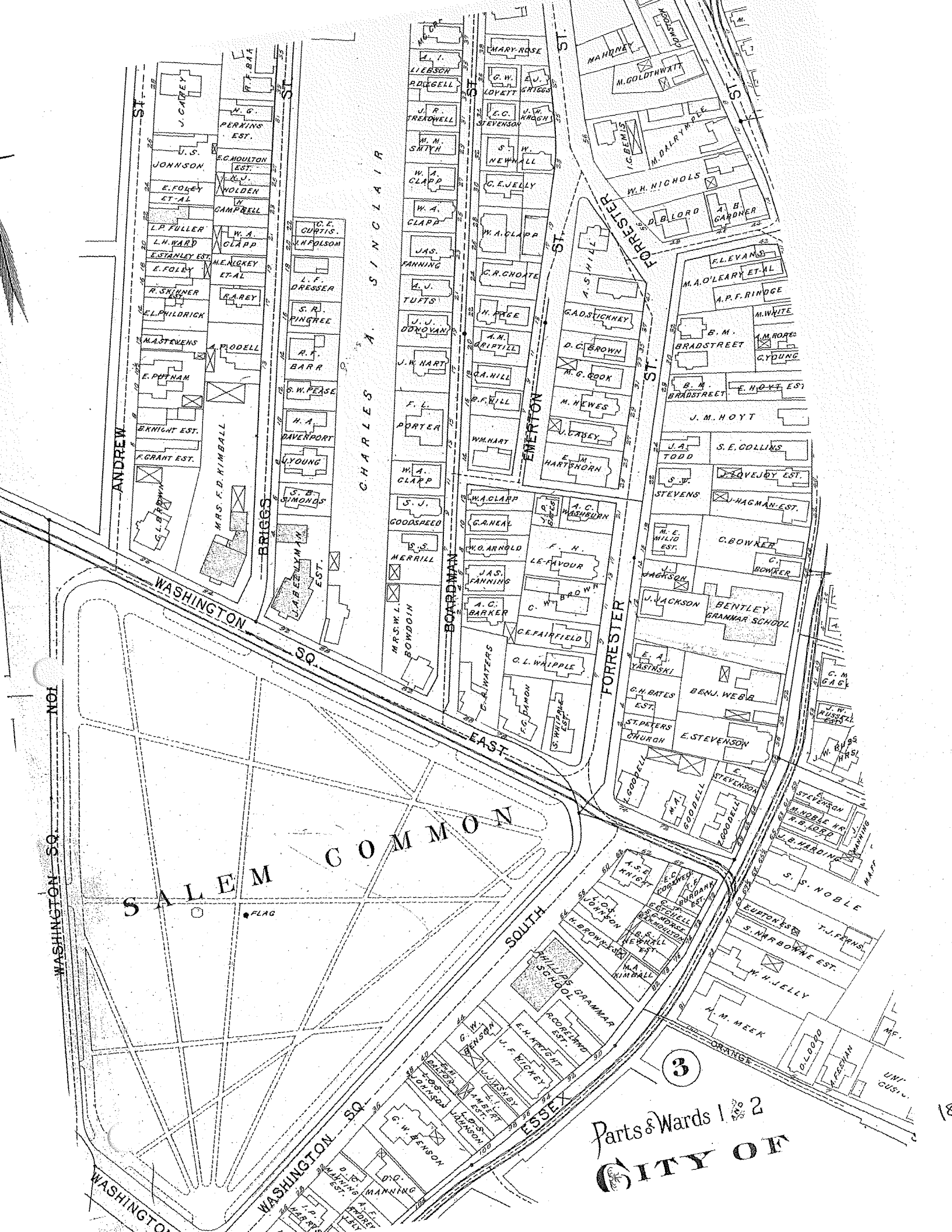
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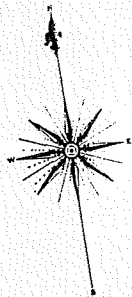
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BELLEAU RD.

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Salem Harbor

FOREST RIVER PARK



8

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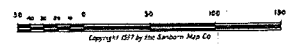
WASHINGTON

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S. D.

ARTS

BENTLEY SCHOOL



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