6 Rawlins Street, Salem

According to available evidence, this house was built for James O'Connell, shopkeeper and currier, in 1868. The house was used as a combined residence and liquor store & saloon in the 1870s and 1880s.

On 16 May 1859 John Frost of Salem for \$198 purchased a lot, 40' on Rawlins Street and running back 90' (ED 588:264). This lot, sold to him by the Pickman heirs, had been part of a much larger tract of land that had been assembled in the 1700s and early 1800s by members of the merchant Pickman family. It had once been part of the undivided common land, known as the Great Pasture since the 1600s, when this part of town was called Trask's Plain or Johnson's Plain. In the 1850s the Pickman Estate was subdivided. New roads (like Rawlins Street) were laid out, as were house-lots. This lot was #31 in the subdivision.

John Frost was a tanner and currier of leather. He bought other land in the neighborhood, and built houses thereon. On Lot 31, he built a barn. In early 1868 he decided to sell off his property hereabouts. After selling two other houses, he sold a brand-new house and the 40' x 90' lot on Feb. 25, 1868, for \$1250 to James O'Connell, then of South Danvers (ED 740:271). South Danvers was soon re-incorporated as the city of Peabody.

James O'Connell was an Irishman, born c. 1824. In the 1840s, Ireland, a very poor country then under English rule, was hit with an epidemic of fungus that ruined the potato crop. More than half the population was dependent on potatoes as the staple of their diet as well as their main cash crop. The poorest people soon found themselves without money and with little to eat. The English government was slow to respond to the crisis, which soon became a widespread famine; and people died by the hundreds and then the thousands. Country people flooded into the cities to get relief, which was largely unavailable, and disease from overcrowding now added to Ireland's miseries. Massachusetts, among other places, sent over shiploads of free food to the starving people; but still they died. Among the country people and the poorer working people, America loomed as the promised land: if they could only get passage on a ship to the New World, they and their families would survive. By the thousands, Irish families sold off their possessions and booked passage for America. Boston was a main port of entry, and, virtually overnight, the Irish filled up parts of the city. Some moved on to places like Salem, Lowell, and other industrial towns and cities where they might

find work. Being country people, few of them had any skills that were useful in the cities, and so most men had to work as common laborers rather than factory operatives.

Some of the Irish families had settled in Salem in the late 1840s. By 1848, there were about 200 recently arrived Irish men in Salem, some of them heads of families. Salem was probably of interest to them because there was an extant Roman Catholic church, located at the foot of Mall Street; and there were a very few Irish families who had settled in Salem in the 1820s and 1830s, of whom Martin Connell, a trunk-maker of Williams Street (off the Common, near the church), was among the most notable.

In 1820-1, Salem's Catholics had built a church building at the foot of Mall Street, on Bridge Street, overlooking the waters of the North River, which, at that time, came right in there as a big cove. It was dedicated to Mary on October 14 by Bishop de Cheverus; in later years, a steeple and wings would be added; but early-on it was a plain pitch-roofed building, like a typical meeting house, easily holding 150-200 people (including those from neighboring towns). In 1826, several families came from Ireland and settled in Salem; and in that year Bishop Fenwick appointed an Irishman, Rev. John Mahoney, as the first Salem pastor. Among his parishioners was the Martin Connell family, the town's French-born umbrella-maker, Firmin Ottignon, Cornelius O'Donnell and family, and others, mainly Irish joined by a few of Salem's older French families. Father Mahoney had Lowell as a mission, along with other towns, and must have been traveling much of the time. In Salem, he boarded with a family on Williams Street, near the church (the above information from Louis S. Walsh, Origin of the Catholic Church in Salem, Boston, 1890, especially pages 24-27, 30-32).

In 1846 Rev. James Conway, became the new pastor of St. Mary's Church, and resided at 5 Mall Street from 1846 to 1848, when he moved to Winter Street. During these years, the famine-fleeing Irish families began to arrive in Salem; and most of them, if not all, became members of this congregation. James Conway (1796-1857) was raised in Ireland to be a land-surveyor. After he came to America as a young man, he found his religious calling, enrolled in a seminary, and was ordained a priest at Boston in 1831. From 1831 to 1835 he ran a mission in Maine on the Penobscot, serving the Indians and others. After another four years in Boston, he went back Down East in 1839, whence he went to Lowell, where, in 1841, he became pastor of brand-new St. Peter's. He started at St. Mary's in Salem on June 14, 1846. Over the years, he expanded the St. Mary's

church building, started up two more parishes, introduced the Sisters of Note Dame in the city, built a Catholic school-house, purchased and opened a Catholic cemetery, reorganized the Sunday-school and choir, and otherwise did all he could to meet the needs of the expanding Catholic population. After years of diligent service, Fr. James Conway would die of heart disease on 24 May 1857, much lamented.

The Salem Irish quickly formed neighborhoods in the Union-Water Street area (the men probably worked on the wharves and around the mills); High Street area (formerly Knocker's Hole, in the vicinity of the present US Post Office); and Harbor Street and environs. A few Irish families lived on upper Boston Street and Aborn Street; probably more lived across the boundary in South Danvers (Peabody). While most of the men worked as laborers, some worked as skilled curriers in Salem's booming leather industry. In general, the native Salem residents seem to have welcomed, or at least tolerated, the newly arrived Irish; however, at least two Salemites specified, in land records, that their houses would never be sold to Irish people.

The men did not find much work in the huge new Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company factory at Stage Point, which employed mainly young women who were recruited from country towns, on the model of the "Lowell mill-girls." A few of the Irishmen were given laboring jobs there, probably in the nature of loading and unloading shipments, and moving the cotton bales and finished cloth from place to place, as well as construction labor.

Salem in the 1840s was in transition from its maritime glory days to its future as a manufacturing center. Into the 1820s the town had conducted a large, successful coastal and overseas commerce; but trade fell off sharply, followed by depression in the opening years of the 1830s. The advent of railroads and canals in the 1830s diverted both capital and trade away from the coast, and Salem's import economy waned as American firms produced goods that once came from overseas. The interior of the country was being opened for settlement, and many Salemites moved away. Wharves and warehouses and ships plummeted in value, and the merchants had to shift their investments swiftly into manufacturing and transportation. Some did not, and were ruined; others moved to Boston, the hub of investment in the new economy.

Despite setbacks and uncertainty, Salem chartered itself in 1836 as a city. City Hall was built 1837-8 and a 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. Salem had not prepared for the industrial age, and had few natural advantages. Large-scale factory towns like Lowell, Lawrence, and Haverhill, drove the machinery of their huge textile factories on the falls of the mighty Merrimack, but Salem had only the sleepy North River, which served mainly to flush the waste from the many tanneries (23 by 1832) that had set up along its banks. 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.

In the 1840s, the tanning and curing of leather had become big business on and near Boston Street, along the upper North River, where there were 41 tanneries in 1844, and 85 in 1850, employing 550 hands. The leather business would continue to grow in importance. In 1846 the above-mentioned 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. 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.

In the face of all this change, some members of Salem's waning ship-owner merchant class continued to pursue their sea-borne businesses; but even the conditions of shipping changed, and Salem was left on the ebb tide. In the late 1840s, giant clipper ships replaced the smaller vessels 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 city's shipping soon consisted of little more than Zanzibar-trade vessels and visits from Down East coasters with cargoes of fuel wood and building timber. By 1850 Salem was about finished as a working port. A picture of Salem's sleepy waterfront is given by Hawthorne in his "introductory section" (really a sketch of Salem) to **The Scarlet Letter**, which he began while working in the Custom House.

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, standing on filled-in land at the foot of Washington Street, where before had been the merchants' wharves. The 1850s brought continued growth:

new churches (e.g. Immaculate Conception, 1857), schools, streets, factories, and stores. New housing was constructed in North Salem, Stage Point, and the Gallows Hill areas to accommodate the workers. As it re-established itself as an economic powerhouse with a sizable population, Salem took a strong interest in national politics. It was primarily Republican in politics, 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 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.

Salem's growth continued through the 1850s, as business and industries expanded, the population swelled, new churches (e.g. Immaculate Conception, 1857) were started, new working-class neighborhoods were developed (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).

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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.

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. It was in this overall context that James O'Connell moved his family from nearby South Danvers to Salem. It is likely that James had earned his living for years as a laborer, probably in the tanning industry; and at some point he was allowed to start work as a currier, meaning a worker in the finishing process of the overall tanning and curing of leather. He proved to be a good worker, and earned good wages. By early 1868 he had enough money to buy a homestead for himself and his family. As noted, on Feb. 25th, for \$1250, he bought from John Frost "a lot with buildings on Rawlins Street, fronting 40' on the street and running back 90' (ED 740:271). It would seem that the house was built just at the time that Mr. O'Connell purchased it, and it was probably built for him, even though Mr. Fost was the technical owner. It is possible that John Frost, who was in the tanning business in South Danvers, was James O'Connell's employer.

The Salem valuations show that in 1866 and 1867 this lot, Lot 31 in the division of the Pickman Farm, was owned by John Frost and had a barn on it. The land was valued at \$100, the barn at \$200. Between the 1867 valuation (taken in spring) and the 1868 valuation, things changed: the Lot 31 barn was gone, and now there was a house, worth \$600, owned by James "Connell" (O'Connell), who resided there as head of household, along with James Kelly. The lot was valued at \$200. Little is known about James Kelley: he may be the one who, in 1863, was listed as a currier residing on Prospect Street (see 1864 Salem Directory). James O'Connell had married Mary Reagan in 1860 or so; she had come from Ireland to America in 1857, when she was about 23.

In the 1870 census, this house is listed as a two-family (1870 census, ward 4, house 523). In one unit lived Michael Eagan, 45, a laborer, and Ellen Eagan, presumably his wife, keeping house. Both were Ireland-born. In the other unit lived James O'Connell, 46, currier, wife Mary, 40, both born in Ireland, and their children, all born in Massachusetts: James, 8, Mary, 6, Daniel, 3, and John, one. The O'Connells were lsited under the name "O'Conners", which is typical of the sloppy spelling of Irish names by census-takers at that time. From this, it may be

seen that James O'Connell was married and in Massachusetts by 1861; and he may have immigrated (much) earlier than that.

James O'Connell (1824-1880), b. 1824, Ireland, s/o James O'Connell & Ellen Hammond, died of consumption, Salem currier, 22 May 1880. He m. 1860? Mary Reagan (1834-1900), b. March, 1834, Ireland, d/o John Reagan & Mary Madden, died of brain disease, Salem, 6 June 1900. Issue, born in Mass.:

- 1. James F., 1862, m. 1888 Sarah J. _____ (b. July 1864). Four children, two surviving childhood:
 - a. Laura M., Jan. 1892
 - b. Alice M., Nov. 1893
- 2. Mary E., 1864, v. 1901.
- 3. Daniel P., 1867, died, unm'd, 12 June 1897.
- 4. John, 1869, probably died young.

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 Bachelder 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, the old Allen farmlands were being turned 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 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.

During the 1870s, the house was no longer a two-family, as James O'Connell got out of the tanneries and started a liquor business here at 6 Rawlins. The family continued to reside here in the upstairs rooms evidently. The downstairs was evidently a retail oiquor store and perhaps a saloon (as it later would be noted in the directories). In the 1876 and 1879 Salem Directories (for the years 1875 and 1878), 6 Rawlins was noted as James O'Connell, liquors & house.

James O'Connell died on 22 May 1880, aged about 55 years, of consumption (tuberculosis). At the time of death his occupation was listed as currier. He was survived by his wife Mary, 48, and their children James, 18, who worked in a morocco-leather shop, Mary, 16, and Daniel, 13, who all lived here in spring, 1880 (see census, ward 4, house 283). Mary continued to run the liquor store, and had a saloon here (1881 & 1884 Directories listed 6 Rawlins, Mrs. Mary O'Connell, liquors, saloon, house).

By 1885, it may be that the O'Connells had closed down the liquor business. In the 1886 Directory, the house was listed as belonging to widow Mary O'Connell, with boarders James, morocco dresser, and Daniel.

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.

In the 1896 valuation, 6 Rawlins Street house was valued at \$800, and the lot at \$300, owned by the estate of James O'Connell. Daniel P. O'Connell boarded at 6 Rawlins, and worked as a hair-dresser, with his own shop at 136 ½ Boston Street; but he died at the age of 30 on 12 June 1897, leaving his mother, Mary, and brother James F. and sister Mary E. James F. O'Connell, who worked as a baker and a teamster for the A.D. Buxton Bakery (130 Boston Street), in the 1890s resided first at 52 prospect Street and then at 131 Boston Street with his wife and children. 1900 census for 6 Rawlins: James F. O'Connell, Sarah J., 35, 4-2, b. Mass., parents b. Ireland, daughter Laura, 8, b. Jan. 1892, daughter Alice, 6, Nov. 1893; mother Mary O'C, b. March 1834, 66, widow, 4-2, came to U.S. in 1857.

On June 6, 1900, Mrs. Mary Reagan O'Connell died of brain disease. Her surviving heirs were James F. O'Connell, 37, and Mary E. O'Connell, 35.

In the summer of 1901, the 6 Rawlins Street homestead was sold by James and his sister Mary to James' wife, Sarah J. O'Connell (ED 1648:265). The James F. O'Connells continued to reside here, with their daughters, Laura, 9, and Alice, 7. Mr. O'Connell was employed as a laborer for the City; and the family was still here in 1910 (see census) and in 1925 (see 1926 Directory), when James was listed as a laborer and his daughter Alice as a shoe worker who boarded here.

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 20th 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 that 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 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.

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. Evidentily James F. O'Connell died between 1925 and 19331; and in September, 1931, Mrs. Sarah J. O'Connell sold the homestead to Frank and Lena Butler (ED 2895:168).

Salem, the county seat and regional retail center, gradually rebounded from the Depression, and prospered after World War II through the 1950s and into the 1960s. General Electric, Sylvania, Parker Brothers, Pequot Mills (formerly Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co.), Almy's department store, various other 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, and mill-operatives are all honored as a large part of what makes Salem different from any other place.

--12 August 2003, Robert Booth for Historic Salem Inc.

Glossary & Sources

A figure like (ED 123:45) refers to book 123, page 45, Essex South registry of Deeds, Federal Street, Salem.

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.

Census records (censes were taken every 10 years from 1790 on, and in 1855 and 1865) are available on microfilm; they list the heads of households 1790-1840, and then list family members from 1850 on.

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

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