

**1 CHESTNUT STREET**

built

ca. 1850

for

**Francis Cox**

commission merchant

**Researched by: John V. Goff**

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**Historic Salem, Inc.**

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1. Site

1 Chestnut Street is located on the east end of Chestnut Street, within walking distance of the heart of the commercial center of the city. The property is located on the south west corner of Summer and Chestnut Streets. Originally, the property extended south along Summer Street to Broad Street. It was the "back" side of a Broad Street property before the Francis Cox house was built circa 1850. Across Summer Street lies Norman Street, which is where Francis Cox's family resided for generations before Francis moved into his new house at 1 Chestnut Street. To understand Francis Cox's achievements in building this house and improving this neighborhood, it is necessary to first consider how this area looked before this house was built.

2. Earliest Neighborhood Appearances

The 1700 and 1780 maps of Salem reveal that Salem's South River used to be an impressive 300-foot wide waterway which took a sharp bend near the present intersection of Norman and Washington Streets, one block east of the 1 Chestnut Street property. Before it was largely filled in, the South River swept a mighty course which defined the entire working waterfront of Salem. It supported numerous wharves where sailing vessels brought commerce to the city from all corners of the planet. To the east and south of the present Dunkin' Donuts property, the land was prime waterfront, with "Town House Cove" forming the first of the important locations of maritime trade. "Norman's Lane" (today's Norman Street) was a residential lane down to the waterfront. Ruck's Creek, a tributary to the South River, was spanned by "Ruck's Bridge" (a drawbridge) near the present Post Office property. During the 18th century, the neighborhood near 1 Chestnut Street was valued as an important location in Salem's maritime commercial center.

In the early 19th century, Norman Street and downtown Salem near 1 Chestnut Street became radically changed by the introduction of the railroad. Much of the South River was filled in to support railroad tracks to connect the city to Boston and points south. (These tracks survive and are still used beneath Riley Plaza, and south of the city today.) A new urban landmark--the Salem Railroad Depot--was built at the intersection of Norman and Washington Streets (and survived here as a massive stone building until 1954). Two large freight depot buildings were built southwest of the depot, near the old site of Ruck's Creek. The creek was filled in to create "Creek Street" (later renamed Gedney Street, between

Steve's Market and the Post Office.)

The railroad made it possible for Salem residents to be able to commute to Boston on a daily basis. Undeveloped areas near the railroad depot became ripe for residential development as never before. By 1851, Norman Street and Creek Street supported 42 buildings, many built on new land created by the filling in of Ruck's Creek. Additional houses filled out the block on Summer Street and between Norman and Creek Streets facing the railroad freight buildings. Many of the new houses were occupied (for the first time in Salem's history) by a population of businessmen who took the train daily to commute to jobs in Boston. The railroad was a miraculous technical achievement in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s which redefined the pattern of Salem residents' lifestyles, and made possible the creation of new "bedroom" communities in Salem.

### 3. Earliest Site Appearances

According to historian Richard Wiswell, an "Aiken's Bakery" existed on the 1 Chestnut Street site, and was removed circa 1825 for Deacon John Stone's vegetable garden, which existed here before Francis Cox built his house. [Wiswell, Notes on the Building of Chestnut Street, page 23.] Wiswell appears to have missed one owner of the property; according to the deed history, John Perkins owned the property between 1839 and 1845. He bought from the Stones, and sold to the Cox's; during Perkins's ownership, the site continued to serve as a back yard (and possibly garden) for his house property immediately south on Summer and Broad Streets. [Registry of Deeds, Book 313, Page 61, also Book 357, Page 196.]

### 4. The Cox Family

One of the earliest residents on Salem's Norman Street was the Cox family. In 1741, a Cox Homestead was built at 21 (later 31) Norman Street; here Francis Cox was born on July 27, 1817. Francis Cox was one of 5 sons and 4 daughters born to Benjamin Cox and Sarah (Smith) Cox. Francis's father Benjamin ran a West India grocery and dry goods store in part of his house, and was "financially interested in vessels" which sailed to the West Indies and Fiji Islands from Salem. In this environment, Francis became stimulated to follow a mercantile and maritime career like his father. Francis's career is of special interest because he was the one who financed the building of 1 Chestnut Street circa 1850.

### 5. Francis Cox: early life

One of Francis Cox's earliest memories was his family's moving of the so-called Judge Story office from Winter Street to Norman Street in 1829. The Judge Story office was a small wood frame building, and was dragged by oxen or horses on dirt roads from the present site of 24-1/2 Winter Street, around the Salem Common, to a new site adjacent to his family's

## 6. The Ship Chandler's and Commission Merchants' Business

To understand Francis Cox's life in the early 19th century, it is necessary to look at the ship chandler's and commission merchant's businesses, for these were his initial pursuits. Both of these professions were apparently responsible for procuring goods for vessels to ship. In Salem in 1850, two of the most prominent commission merchants were George Nichols, and the firm of Phillips, Goodhue & Bowker. Francis Cox knew the first (George Nichols) from his youth, for he was the auctioneer who sold his family the Judge Story Office building in 1829.. In 1850, Nichols advertised his services as Auctioneer; Commission Merchant, Broker of Stock, Real Estate & Insurance; Dealer; and Agent [1850 Salem Directory, advertisement page 209]--this early capitalist wore many hats!

Phillips, Goodhue & Bowker advertised their services as "Commission & Forwarding Merchants...Have for sale...Coal...Lumber...Lime ...Plaster ...Cement...Flour & Grain...Beef, Pork, Lard, Hams...Salt...Sugars, Coffees, Teas, Molasses, Rice, Groceries...Oils...Fish...White Lead...Cotton Duck...Cordage ...Twine...Naval Stores & Ship Chandlery...suited to the country or coasting trade." [1851 Salem Directory, advertisement p. 201]

It seems likely that Cox's business involved many of these same items, and required him to offer services for an equal diversity of products for maritime commerce. This was an important position when Salem and Boston nautical trade was extensive. [1851 Salem Directory advertisement, page 201]

## 7. Building the House at 1 Chestnut Street

In Bryant Tolles' Salem architectural history (Architecture in Salem, 1983) 1 Chestnut Street is said to have been built "ca. 1846" for Francis Cox. Tolles appears to have based this construction date on Richard Henry Wiswall's 1939 research, which proposed a circa 1846 construction date because 1846 was the year Francis Cox got married. It was romantic, and thought justifiable to speculate that the house was built to coincide with Francis Cox's year of marriage. As Wiswell postulated:

"The house was built by Francis Cox, probably in 1846 or immediately prior to that year...He had married Ellen Barr on July 2, 1846, and may have taken his bride to live in the house, which presumably had just been finished." [Wiswell, Notes on the Building of Chestnut Street, 1939, p. 23.]

The 1846 date was speculative on Wiswell's part, and is probably in error. A "circa 1850" date is historically more justifiable because of two facts: 1) 1 Chestnut Street first appears as a residential address listed in the Salem City Directories in 1851 (and often directories are a year late in the data they publish); 2) Architecturally, the building is a magnificent Italian

Villa style house--and the Villa style house appears to have been first promoted nationally by Andrew Jackson Downing in 1850. Although further research should be done to locate contemporary accounts of the building of Francis Cox's Chestnut Street villa, it is clear that the house was built by 1851, for Francis Cox, and that the house is important architecturally as one of the earliest Italianate style houses in the United States.

#### 8. The Architectural Style of the 1 Chestnut Street house

Bryant Tolles has noted that 1 Chestnut Street is "one of Salem's earliest Italianate buildings" [Architecture in Salem, 1983, page 187]; most of its features are early Italianate, designed to portray an American villa in the Italianate or Roman style of the mid-19th century. However, at least two features--the prevalent 6-over-6 windows, and the simple, broad pilasters flanking the Chestnut Street entrance--are Greek Revival carry-overs, elements borrowed from the majestic Greek Revival style which was popular all across the United States between ca. 1830 and ca. 1860. An excellent reference book on the Greek Revival style is Talbot Hamlin's Greek Revival Architecture in America.

"Italian Villa" elements dominate the composition of 1 Chestnut Street, and include the apparent L-shaped massing (as seen from the major street corner), the narrow and tall 2-1/2 story proportions of the gable ends, and the use of brackets under the eaves, flush-board siding, arcaded windows, balconies, round-top windows, and windows similar to the "Italian Window-enriched" design as shown in Figure 123 of Andrew Jackson Downing's 1850 The Architecture of Country Houses. During the later 1850s and 1860s, hundreds of "Italianate" style buildings were built across America with cupolas, piazzas, etc. on L-shaped, square and rectangular plans. All of these structures followed the bold and beautiful precedent set by Italian Villa houses like 1 Chestnut Street in Salem.

#### 9. Francis Cox's life at 1 Chestnut Street

The Salem City directories indicate that Francis Cox spent his first years in his new house commuting [by railroad] to work at his commission merchant business in Boston. In 1898, it was recalled "On the opening of the Cunard line of steamers between Boston and Liverpool, the firm [Cox & Cox] did a large business supplying the ships." [Salem Gazette obituary of Francis Cox, November 17, 1898, p.1] By the early 1850s, however, Francis Cox dissolved his business association with his brother Edward, and started a new company, Gregerson & Cox. He retired in the late 19th century, and became associated with "large business enterprises" in Salem. Francis Cox served as President of the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company, Vice President of the Salem 5c Savings Bank, Director of the Naumkeag National Bank, and Trustee of the Plummer Farm School. For three years, Francis Cox

was a member of the Salem Water Board. He was also associated with the Second Corps Cadets in Salem, the First Corps Cadets in Boston, and St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Salem. It was noted that he "possessed an ample fortune and gave generously to the poor. He delighted in deeds of charity...He was a man of fine physique and a gentleman in every sense of the word." In 1898, Francis Cox died at 1 Chestnut Street, following a long illness. He was remembered as a "respected and honored citizen of Salem." [obituary, op. cit.]

Ellen Augusta Cox (Francis's wife) was a daughter of Salem shipmaster Captain Henry Barr. [Francis Cox obituary op. cit.] She married Francis Cox on July 2, 1846. [EHC Volume 7, page 161.] She inherited six properties with numerous houses from John L. Russell's Estate in 1853, including property on Liberty Street, Harbor Street, and Lafayette Street in Salem; (--see Registry of Deeds Book 271:276; 300:31; 302:144; 336:31; 337:4; 345:276; 479:141-142.) Ellen was a "woman of great worth." Her father's fortune helped establish the Salem Marine Society. Ellen bore no children, and died on May 26, 1888 [Francis Cox obituary, op. cit.]

#### 10. Ownership after the Coxes: the Brownes

As noted above in section 5, one of Francis Cox's sisters married Albert G. Browne, who was both Francis's brother-in-law and mercantile partner in the 1840s. Albert's genealogy is not yet known, but it seems likely that he had both a sister named Alice, and a brother named Edward C. Browne. Francis Cox named Edward C. Browne to be Executor of his Estate in his will which was proved on December 19, 1898. Fulfilling his obligations after Francis's death, Edward Browne sold the Cox homestead to Alice Browne (an unmarried woman) in 1899. Alice sold half interest of the property back to Edward C. Browne in April, 1899. (Registry of Deeds, Book 1572, Page 345, also 1575:341.) The Brownes owned the property from 1899 until 1909. During this period, the Brownes leased the property to two other families: that of artist Isaac H. Caliga (1901 - 1902); and Francis A. Seamans (1903-1909) Caliga was an artist who maintained a business address at 12 St. Botolph Street in Boston. Seamans was a member of the Perrin, Seamans & Co. firm at 57 Oliver Street in Boston; he also was a founding member of both the Salem Club (29 Washington Square North, Salem, 1895) and of the Corinthian Yacht Club in Marblehead. [Salem City Directories, Registry of Deeds Book 1575, Page 341, also 1965: 546, 1444: 241, 1900: 77].

#### 11. Ownership after the Brownes: the Fabens

In April, 1909, the Brownes commissioned a survey of the 1 Chestnut Street property to be produced by civil engineer Guy W. Ricker. In May, they sold the property to Frank P. Fabens. Fabens was a real estate broker whose office was in Lynn. He shared the house with his (brother?)

Benjamin F. Fabens, who was associated with him in the real estate business. Frank Fabens lived at 1 Chestnut Street for much of the 20th century; by the 1930s he was retired from his business, and shared the property with another retiree, William S. Fenollosa. Fabens died circa 1953-1954. Immediately after his death, the only occupant of the house was Pearl W. Miller, a maid.[Registry of Deeds Book 1965, Page 546 and 4085:248 ; Salem City Directories.]

#### 12. Ownership after the Fabens: the Mekelatos family

On July 15, 1954, Alfred P. Putnam, Executor of Frank Fabens's estate, sold the 1 Chestnut Street property to Constantine J. and Rosyln E. Mekalatos. Mr. Mekalatos is a medical doctor who still owns the house and lands as of January, 1991. [Registry of Deeds Book 4085, Page 248; Historic Salem house research and plaque application form dated Jaanuary 15, 1991.]

## ABSTRACT OF DEED

Book: 313

Page: 61

Grantor: John H. Stone of Calais...Maine, Lucy P. Stone and  
Henry O. Stone...both of Salem...

Grantee: John Perkins of Salem...housewright

Price: \$935

Description: A lot of land in Salem...bounded...beginning at the  
northwest corner of it by land now sold to Luther Upton  
25 feet 2 inches, easterly of the underpinning of his  
house on Chestnut Street; thence running easterly on  
Chestnut Street 72 feet and 5 inches to Summer Street,  
90 feet to land now sold to Nathaniel Frothingham  
Junr...thence running westerly by his land as the fence  
now stands 65 feet 10 inches to land now sold to Luther  
Upton and thence running northerly by his land as the  
fence stands 78 feet 6 inches to the corner begun at...

Source: None stated

Date: April 9. 1839

Note: At this time, the property had 90 foot frontage on Summer  
Street. By 1909, the frontage was reduced to 55.21 feet,  
eliminating some property on the south. Housewright John  
Perkins is believed to have built a house on the south piece of  
land between 1839 and 1845;--see also deed Book 357, Page  
196.

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## ABSTRACT OF DEED

Book: 357                      Page: 196

Grantor:     John Perkins of Salem, Gentleman  
Grantee:     Benjamin Cox and Francis Cox of Salem, Gentlemen  
Price:        \$4000

Description: [similar legal description to that in deed 313:61]  
                 ..."together with the dwelling house and all buildings  
                 which I have since erected and now standing thereon"

Source:      Book 313, Page 61

Date:         August 12, 1845

Note: The property was still larger at this time, and, on the south  
piece, included Perkins's [Greek Revival style?] house described  
above.

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ABSTRACT OF DEED

Book: 1572

Page: 345

Grantor: Joseph B.F. Osgood, John Pickering and Edward C. Browne,  
executors of will of Francis Cox

Grantee: Alice Browne

Price: \$10,100

Description: [similar legal description to that in deed 313:61]  
..."land with two dwelling houses and other buildings  
adjacent"

Source: Book 313, Page 61 and Book 357, Page 196.

Date: March 18, 1899

Note: The property was still larger at this time, and, on the south  
piece, apparently included Perkins's [Greek Revival style?]  
house listed as one of the "two dwelling houses" on the  
property.

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## ABSTRACT OF DEED

Book: 1575            Page: 341

Grantor:     Alice Browne, not married  
Grantee:     Edward C. Browne  
Price:        \$5,050

Description:

1/2 undivided interest...  
[similar legal description to that in deed 313:61]  
..."1/2 of lot with two dwelling houses and other buildings  
adjacent"

Source:       Book 1572, Page 345

Date:         April 17, 1899

Note: The property was still larger at this time, and, on the south  
piece, apparently included Perkins's [Greek Revival style?]  
house listed as one of the "two dwelling houses" on the  
property. Alice Browne remained a partial owner of the  
property until 1909.

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ABSTRACT OF DEED

Book: 1965          Page: 546

Grantor:     Edward C. Browne and Charlotte C. Browne [husband and wife] and Alice Browne, unmarried...

Grantee:     Frank P. Fabens

Price:       \$1

Description: "Beginning at the northwesterly corner of the premises at a point on Chestnut Street measuring 25-17/100 (25.17) feet from northeasterly corner of the underpinning of the house late of Luther Upton now of Fenollossa, thence running northeasterly on said Chestnut Street 72-71/100 (72.71) feet to Summer Street; thence turning and running southerly on Summer Street 55-21/100 (55.21) feet to southerly side of stone post; thence turning and running at right angles westerly by other land of the grantors 34-56/100 (34.56) feet to the capstone of the bulkhead of the dwelling house on the granted premises...[continues on a confusing, but lengthily described path fully decribed in deed cited.]

Source:      "formerly the Cox Estate..."

Date:        May 10, 1909

Note: This deed makes mention of a plan of the property produced April 24, 1909 by Guy W. Ricker, C.E., entitled "A plan of land of Edward C. Browne formerly the Cox Estate." This deed also makes mention of a lease to Francis A. Seamans which expired May 10, 1910.

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ABSTRACT OF DEED

Book: 4085      Page: 248

Grantor:      Alfred P. Putnam, Executor under will of Frank P. Fabens,  
late of said Salem...

Grantee:      Constantine J. Mekelatos and Rosyln E. Mekelatos,  
husband and wife as tenants by the entirety both of said  
Salem...

Price:        \$15,000

Description: "Beginning at the northwesterly corner of the premises at  
a point on Chestnut Street measuring 25-17/100 (25.17)  
feet from northeasterly corner of the underpinning of the  
house late of Luther Upton now of Fenollossa, thence  
running northeasterly on said Chestnut Street 72-71/100  
(72.71) feet to Summer Street; thence turning and  
running southerly on Summer Street 55-21/100 (55.21)  
feet to southerly side of stone post; thence turning and  
running at right angles westerly by other land of the  
grantors 34-56/100 (34.56) feet to the capstone of the  
bulkhead of the dwelling house on the granted  
premises...[continues on a confusing, but lengthily  
described path fully decribed in deed cited.]

Source:      Book 1965, Page 546

Date:        July 20, 1954

Note: The Mekelatos family still owns the 1 Chestnut Street property  
as of January 1991. In 1954, this sale was approved by the Chestnut Street  
Association, who made public their approval by recording a deed  
ammendment on Book 4085, Page 249!

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