

135 Federal Street
The Captain Benjamin Carpenter House
built in 1802

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History of the property:

The house which now bears the address 135 Federal Street was erected by Captain Benjamin Carpenter, Revolutionary War veteran, Salem sea captain and merchant, and namesake of the present-day Carpenter Street, shortly after he purchased a lot bounded by the relatively “new” Federal Street in late 1801.¹ Captain Carpenter apparently commissioned Salem’s renown architect and woodcarver Samuel McIntire to design the house, as an extant plan of the first floor exhibits the legend: “Sketch of ye plan of Capt. Carpenter’s House.”² Fiske Kimball confirms this commission in his authoritative survey of McIntire’s work and comments further that as the house was “much modified” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “little survives” of McIntire’s work.³ The Captain Benjamin Carpenter house has a connection to another illustrious Salem family: in the later part of the nineteenth century it was part of an expansive “Bertram Estate”, which included the present-day Salem Public Library and Assembly House, owned by the Bertram family.

Before he built his new Federal Street house, Captain Carpenter lived

¹ *Essex County (South) Registry of Deeds* (hereafter *ECRD*), Book 170, leaf 145 (recorded March 11, 1802).

² McIntire MSS., Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

³ Fiske Kimball, *Mr. Samuel McIntire, Carver. The Architect of Salem* (Portland, ME), 1940.

on Essex Street and owned several parcels of property in the adjacent area. He purchased part of the future “Bertram Estate” lot from Daniel Mackey in 1796, and conveyed the same to the Widow Fisk in 1800.⁴ This parcel was part of a much larger lot that belonged to the Ruck family for much of the eighteenth century and the Spooner family in the seventeenth century. Captain Carpenter’s fortunes appear to have fluctuated both dramatically and routinely if his many property transactions are any indication; a year after he sold his large Essex Street/Federal Street lot he bought back the northern, or Federal Street parcel and began construction on his new house.

Carpenter lived in his “homestead” for only eight years, perhaps another indication of plummeting fortunes. In 1809 he conveyed his Federal Street property, “with the dwelling house and all other buildings thereon standing” to Richard Wheatland, another Salem merchant.⁵ Wheatland owned and occupied the property for nearly two decades, until his debts, and the Court of Common Pleas in Newburyport, forced him to auction off the property in 1828.⁶ The buyer was Michael Shepard, another Salem merchant who maintained offices on Central Wharf. Shepard’s income was apparently more stable than that of his predecessors at 135 Federal Street (or 61 Federal Street, the property’s address until 1860), as his family owned and occupied the estate for over fifty years, during which both the house and the land were extended substantially.

Neither tax or property records indicate *precisely* when 135 Federal Street was enlarged and its exterior remodeled with Italian Revival elements, but it was certainly after 1847 and probably around 1860. Shepard began expanding his property soon after the acquisition of his new house with the purchase of adjacent land from the Buffington Estate, which extended from Essex to Federal Streets on his western boundary.⁷ In 1847 he expanded his

⁴ *ECRD* Book 160, leaf 275 (July 8, 1796); *ECRD* Book 166, leaf 252 (May 30, 1800).

⁵ *ECRD* Book 186, leaf 240 (September 6, 1809).

⁶ *ECRD* Book 249, leaf 97 (April 28, 1828).

⁷ *ECRD* Book 265, leaf 170 (June 7, 1832).

lot further with the acquisition of another adjacent Federal street property “bounded northerly on the street forty-six feet, more or less, [and] *easterly* on land of Shepard one hundred twenty feet more or less.”⁸ Later in that same year he procured an additional adjacent estate, bounded “*westerly* on land of Shepard, and northerly by Federal Street.”⁹ There was now considerable room for expansion and outbuildings. The fences separating the Shepard and Bertram estates on the former’s southern boundary were realigned in 1859, conveying Michael Shepard an additional fifteen feet of property.¹⁰ Tax assessments on the Shepard property increase noticeably after 1860, indicating both the increased size of buildings and lot.

The Shepard family conveyed 135 Federal Street to their neighbors, the Bertrams, in 1880, though the latter never occupied the house. At that time the Bertrams still lived in their adjacent homestead on Essex Street, now the Salem Public Library, and they owned several other properties in the immediate neighborhood and on Chestnut Street. Captain Carpenter’s house was leased to the Robson family, headed by Matthew Robson, a prominent Salem tanner and currier.¹¹ The house is commonly regarded as the “Robson House” in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, even though the family did not take legal possession of the property until 1910. According to Henry Oliver’s 1885 reminiscences of Federal Street, “the three-story large and convenient house [is] now occupied by Mr. Matthew Robson (currier) and family. It is no. 135. I do not learn the date of its erection. In general shape it is square with an addition on the westerly side of one story for a dining room. On this westerly side is also an ample fruit orchard.”¹²

⁸ *ECRD* Book 380, leaves 190-191 (April 13, 1847).

⁹ *ECRD* Book 389, leaves 233-234 (November 5, 1847).

¹⁰ *ECRD* Book 597, page 12 (November 9, 1859).

¹¹ *Salem City Directories*, 1880-1910.

¹² *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 82 (April, 1946): 179-185.

The Bertram heirs conveyed 135 Federal Street in its present form to Fidelia E. Robson, the wife of Matthew Robson, in 1910.¹³ The plans accompanying the partition of the Bertram estate at this time established and illustrate the present-day property.¹⁴ Members of the Robson family now owned, and continued to occupy, the house well into the twentieth century and brought about interior modifications which Fiske Kimball refers to as “in the direction of restoration.”¹⁵ John C. Robson, Treasurer of the William G. Webber Company, was primary householder until the late 1930s, after which Alice Robson, President of the Salem Seamen’s Orphan and Children’s Friend Society, resided in the house until her death in 1953.¹⁶ Richard Connelly, a Salem physician, took up residence in 1955, and the Connelly family purchased the Captain Benjamin Carpenter House at public auction in 1968.¹⁷ Its present (2000) owners, Richard A. Stevens and Victoria H.M. Stevens, came into possession of the property in 1996.¹⁸

¹³ *EIHC Book 2014*, page 558 (April 29, 1910).

¹⁴ See attached. The plans accompanying the above transaction could not be found in the Essex Country Registry of Deeds, but those corresponding to a later transaction illustrate 135 Federal Street as lying between the letters “BCDJ” and occupying 19,030 square feet.

¹⁵ Fiske Kimball, *Mr. Samuel McIntire, Carver*, p. 100.

¹⁶ *Salem City Directories, 1910-1960*

¹⁷ *EIHC Book 5540*, page 119 (July 2, 1968).

¹⁸ *EIHC Book 13710*, page 167 (August 15, 1996).

Transfers of title/property acquisitions:

Essex Country (South) Registry of Deeds (hereafter *ECRD*), Book 170, leaf 145

Grantor: Sarah Fisk of Salem, Widow

Grantee: Benjamin Carpenter of Salem, Merchant

Consideration: \$1150.00

Conveyance of: "a certain piece of land in said Salem bounded as follows: viz., northwardly by running westerly on Federal Street, there measuring one hundred and three feet, westerly running southerly on land of Nehemiah Buffington there measuring ninety-five feet two inches and a half an inch, southerly on land of the said Sarah Fisk running eastwardly seventy-six feet four inches and a half an inch, easterly on land of Ovid Dickerson, running northwardly one hundred and twelve feet and eleven inches to the first-mentioned bounds as the fences now stand."

Date recorded: March 11, 1802

ECRD Book 186, leaf 240

Grantor: Benjamin Carpenter of Salem, Merchant

Grantee: Richard Wheatland of Salem, Merchant

Consideration: \$6000

Conveyance of: "a certain lot of lands situated on Federal Street in said Salem bounded as follows...beginning at the northeasterly corner thereof on Federal Street by land of Ovid Dickerson, then running westerly bounds northerly on said street one hundred three feet to land of Nehemiah Buffington, then running southerly on said Buffington's land ninety-five feet, two inches and a half then running easterly on land of Mrs. Orne seventy-six feet four inches and a half, then running northerly on land of said Dickerson one hundred and twelve feet and eleven inches to the bounds first mentioned with the dwelling house and all other buildings thereon."

Date recorded: September 6, 1809

ECRD Book 249, leaf 97

Grantor: Robert W. Gould of Salem, Master Mariner

Grantee: Michael Shepard of Salem, Merchant

Consideration: \$3530

Conveyance of: "a certain messuage on the southerly side of Federal Street in Salem aforesaid consisting of a dwelling house and outbuildings and land under and adjoining the same having been formerly the homestead of Captain Benjamin Carpenter and by him sold and conveyed to Captain Richard Wheatland and taken from the said Wheatland on Execution against him in favor of the said Gould issued on a judgement recovered at the Court of Common Pleas at Newburyport...."

Date recorded: April 28, 1828

ECRD Book 380, leaves 190-191

Grantor: Ephraim Brown Jr. of Salem, Trustee and Executor of the last will of Ephraim Brown, late of Salem deceased

Grantee: Michael Shepard of Salem, Merchant

Consideration: \$1520

Conveyance of: "a certain parcel of land on Federal Street in said Salem bounded thus: northerly on the street forty-six feet, more or less, easterly on land of Shepard one hundred twenty feet more or less, southerly on land of Goodhue forty-four feet more or less, westerly on land of heirs of Ephraim Brown deceased one hundred twenty feet, more or less, with all the privileges thereto."

Date recorded: April 13, 1847

ECRD Book 389, leaves 233-234

Grantor: Michael Shepard of Salem, Merchant and Executor of the last will and testament of Ovid Dickerson late of Salem, Laborer, deceased intestate

Grantee: Michael Webb Shepard of Salem, Merchant

Consideration: \$1000

Conveyance of: "...having given public notice of the intended sale

by causing a notice thereof to be published in the *Salem Gazette*, and

having first given bonds and taken the oath by laws in such cases required....a small piece of land, with a dwelling house thereon, situated westerly by land of Shepard and northerly by Federal Street.”

Date recorded: November 5, 1847

ECRD Book 597, page 12

Agreement as to Bounds between John Bertram and Michael Shepard.

Date recorded: November 9, 1859

ECRD Book 1040, pages 68-69

Grantor: Michael W. Shepard of Salem

Grantee: John Bertram and Mary Ann Bertram, both of Salem

Consideration: \$12,000

Conveyance of: “the messuage in said Salem which is bounded and described as follows: beginning at the northwesterly corner thereof on Federal Street by land of Mrs. Walcott, thence running southeasterly one hundred and twenty feet to land of Wheatland, thence northeasterly by land of Wheatland forty-four feet, thence northwesterly fifteen feet and nine inches by land of Bertram, thence northeasterly by land of Bertram seventy-three feet eight inches, thence southeasterly by land of Bertram twenty-six feet and two inches, and northeasterly again by land of Bertram twenty feet and eight inches to land of Williams, thence northwesterly by land of William Ropes and Emery one hundred and forty-nine feet to Federal Street and thence southwestly by Federal Street about one hundred and seventy feet to the point begun at.”

Date recorded: June 25, 1880

ECRD Book 2014, page 558-559

Grantors: Jennie M. Emmerton, Widow and Annie B. Webb, Widow, both of Salem, and David P. Kimball and Clara B. Kimball, his wife in her right, of Boston, the residuary legatees under the will of John

Bertram

Grantee: Fidelia E. Robson, wife of Matthew Robson of Salem

Consideration: \$1 and other good and valuable considerations

Conveyance of: "a certain parcel of land with the buildings thereon situated on Federal Street in said Salem ...containing 19,030 square feet more or less, being part of the premises conveyed to John Bertram of Salem by Michael W. Shepard."

Date recorded: April 29, 1910

ECRD Book 5540, page 119

Grantor: Thomas F. Fitzgibbon of Wenham, Commissioner, "to make partition under Decree of the Essex County Probate Court Docket no. 295197"

Grantees: John J. Connelly, Jr. and Eleanor J. Connelly of Salem, husband and wife as tenants by the entirety of Salem

Consideration: \$27,100.00

Conveyance of: at public auction: "the land with the buildings thereon, situated in said Salem at 135 Federal Street...containing 19,030 square feet more or less...Said parcel is more particularly shown on a plan entitled "Land of Bertram Estate, Salem, by Guy Ricker, C.E., dated Jan. 1910 and recorded with deed from Jennie M. Emmerton, et al to Fidelia E. Robson in Essex South District Registry, Book 2014, page 558."

Date recorded: July 2, 1968

ECRD Book 7705, page 486-487

Grantor: Eleanor J. Connelly of 135 Federal Street, Salem

Grantees: Eleanor J. Connelly, Maureen Connelly, Kathleen A. Connelly, and Virginia Connelly, as joint tenants and not tenants in common

Consideration: less than \$100

Conveyance of: the above estate

Date recorded: March 28, 1985

ECRD Book 13710, page 167

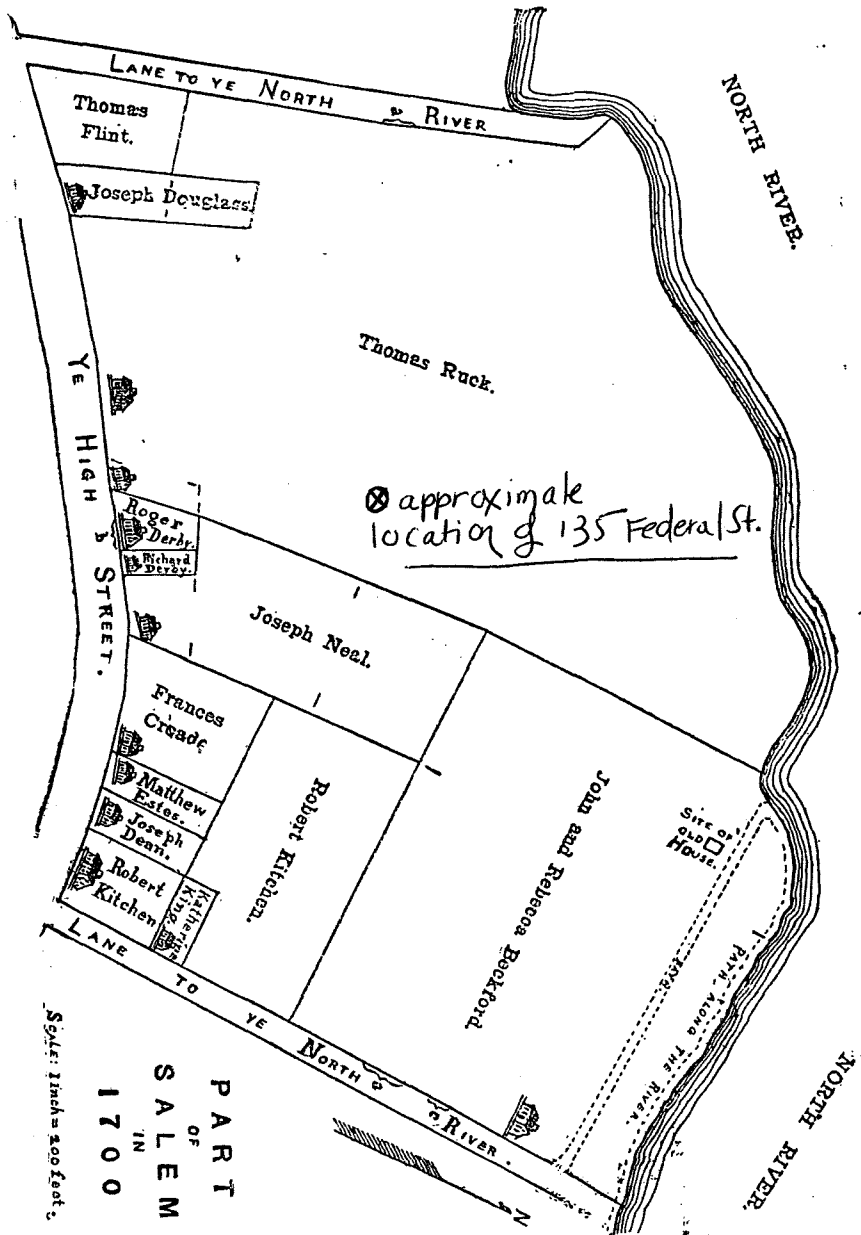
Grantors: Maureen Connelly, Kathleen A. Connelly and Virginia Connelly of Salem

Grantees: Richard A. Stevens and Victoria H.M. Stevens, husband and wife as tenants by the entirety

Consideration: paid

Conveyance of: "the land with the buildings thereon, situated in said Salem, at 135 Federal Street."

Date recorded: August 15, 1996



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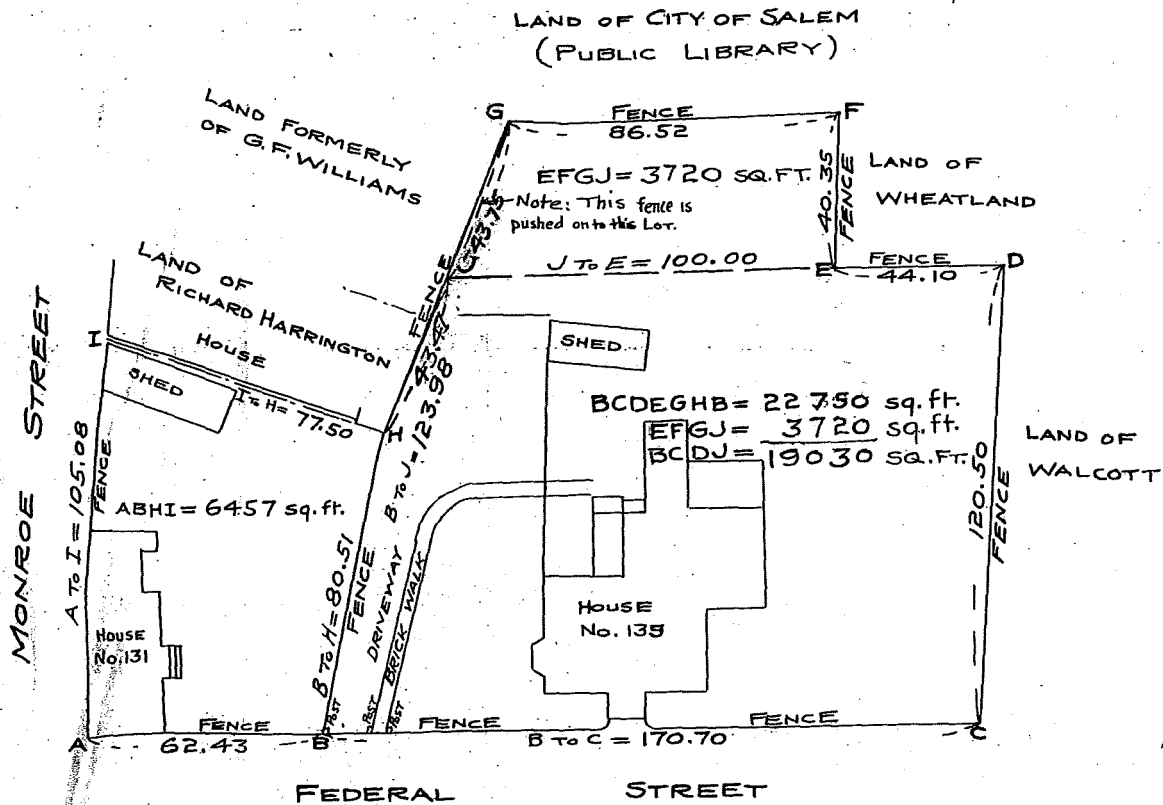
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Apr. 26. 1910. Rec. & Ent. in Essex Reg. Deeds
 et al) with Deed Jennie M. Emmerton, et al
 vid Pingree et al Jrs. et al.

b. 2013. P. 582.

et: Willard J. Agree. Reg -

LAND OF MRS. JENNIE M. EMMERTON
 SALEM.

SCALE 1 INCH = 40 FT.

Guy W. Picher C. E. JAN. 1910.