

96 Washington Square East, Salem

This house was built in 1832 for Nathaniel Silsbee Jr., merchant, as his family residence. It stands on the site of the 18th century tannery first of Jonathan Andrew and later of William Browne & Son.

On 27 Nov. 1832, Nathaniel Silsbee Jr., 28, merchant, purchased, for \$1,000 (in a trust connected with a prenuptial agreement of 1829), from his father, the Hon. Nathaniel Silsbee, merchant, a lot of land, bounded northerly 77' on pleasant Street, 120' on Andrew Street, 95' on land of Ropes, westerly on Silsbee's land (ED 268:43). This lot was the setting for the new house built for the grantee, Nathaniel Silsbee Jr.

The land had formerly been part of the holdings of the Andrew family, who conducted a tannery on the exact site of this house, and may have done so for many years before 1800.

Joseph Andrew bought a field, evidently in the early 1700s, in this vicinity. It descended to his grandson, Jonathan Andrew, "who carried on the tanning and currying business there. It was sold in 1791 to Wm Browne & son, who continued the tannery until they opened Andrew Street and divided the land into building lots. The tannery was where the house of Charles H. Miller, Esq., now is." (B.F. Browne, *An Account of Salem Common*, EIHC 4: 4, 5)

Nathaniel Silsbee, Jr., born at the end of the year 1804, was the son of Capt. Nathaniel Silsbee, a prosperous young mariner and merchant, and his wife Mary Crowninshield Silsbee.

Capt. Nathaniel Silsbee's father, also Capt. Nathaniel, had sailed as a merchant shipmaster and Revolutionary War privateer commander for Hasket Derby, Salem's leading merchant. Silsbee had made and lost a fortune, and was intent on recouping when he died in 1791 in New York City. His son Nathaniel, a young sailor also employed by Derby, was soon given the opportunity to command one of the Derby vessels on a voyage to the orient. At the age of eighteen and a half, Nathaniel Silsbee sailed in command of a Derby merchant vessel, and made a very profitable voyage. Thereafter, he continued to sail in the East Indies trade, until he had made a fortune of his own, and was able to retire from the sea before the age of thirty. Two of his brothers (Zachariah and William)

were able to do the same, and went partners with Nathaniel as a merchant house, which prospered greatly (Nathaniel Silsbee Sr. wrote an autobiographical “memoir”, from which many facts in this report were drawn).

When a young shipmaster, Capt. Nathaniel Silsbee married Mary Crowninshield, the daughter of Capt. George Crowninshield, head of a merchant house comprised of the old captain and his five sons, one of whom, Capt. Jacob Crowninshield, had recently (1803) been re-elected Congressman as a Democratic-Republican, in a contest with the Federalist, Timothy Pickering.

At the time of Nathaniel’s birth (1804), Salem was booming as the capitol of a worldwide trading empire. Salem merchants and ship-owners kept pushing their trade to the farthest ports of the orient, while also maintaining trade with the Caribbean and Europe. Salem cargos 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 many in 1803. Their bailiwick, the East Parish (along Derby Street), seemed almost to be a foreign country: in the stores, parrots chattered and monkeys played, and from the warehouses wafted the exotic aromas of Sumatran spices and Arabian coffee beans. From the wharves were carted all manner of strange fruits, and patterned china in red and blue, and piles of gorgeous silks and figured cloths. The greatest of the Salem merchants at this time was William “Billy” Gray, who, by 1808, owned 36 large vessels—five ships, seven barks, 13 brigs, and one schooner. 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 (Federalist and Democratic-Republican) attended separate churches, held separate 4th of July parades, and supported their own schools, military companies, and newspapers.

Salem's merchants resided mainly on two streets: Washington (which ended in a wharf on the Inner Harbor) and Essex (particularly between now-Hawthorne Boulevard and North Street). The East Parish (Derby Street area) was for the seafaring families, shipmasters, sailors, and fishermen. In the 1790s, Federal Street, known as New Street, had more empty lots than fine houses. Chestnut Street did not exist: its site was a meadow. The Common had just been transformed (1802) into Washington Square, with the infill, removal, and landscaping of small ponds and swamps, hillocks, utility buildings, and the alms-house. As the 19th century advanced, Salem's commercial prosperity would sweep almost all of the great downtown houses away (the brick Joshua Ward house, built 1784, is a notable exception).

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).

A new bank, the Salem Bank, was formed in 1803, and there were two insurance companies and several societies and associations. The fierce politics and commercial rivalries continued. The ferment of the times is captured in the diary of Rev. William Bentley, bachelor minister of Salem's East Church and editor of the *Register* newspaper, who recorded the civic and commercial doings of the town. He had high hopes for the future of an America with well-educated citizens. He observed Salem as well as led it, and wrote in his diary (2 Dec. 1806), "While Salem was under the greatest aristocracy in New England, few men thought, and the few directed the many. Now the aristocracy is gone and the many govern. It is plain it must require considerable time to give common knowledge to the people."

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 built their great India Wharf at the foot of now-Webb Street. Other important wharves were Forrester's (now Central, just west of Derby Wharf) and Union Wharf at the foot of Union Street. 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, block-makers, 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 old 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, barks and brigs and ships were being built in the shipyards.

Salem’s boom ended 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, the East Parish and its seafarers, led by the Crowninshields, loyally supported the Embargo until it was lifted in spring, 1809. Shunned by the other Federalist 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. Gray’s removal eliminated a huge amount of Salem wealth, shipping, import-export cargos, and local employment. Gray switched from the Federalist party, and was elected Lt. Governor under Gov. Elbridge Gerry, a native of Marblehead.

Despite the suspension of commerce in 1808, Nathaniel Silsbee remained wealthy, and resumed his overseas commerce in 1809. His brother-in-law, Hon. Jacob Crowninshield, had died while in Congress in 1808, and Capt. Silsbee became more involved in politics as a leader of the Silsbee-Crowninshield family. In 1810, Silsbee, his wife, and two children (including Nathaniel Jr.) went to Saratoga Springs for a month, and then a passage, by steam-boat (a novelty), slowly down the Hudson, to New York City.

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 it, when war 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 had companies of infantry and artillery.

At that time, the Silsbee family lived at the foot of Daniel Street, almost on the harbor; and Captain Silsbee had a store there too. One Sunday in 1812, young Nathaniel Silsbee Jr., then eight, was at home when his

father's business partner, Robert Stone, brought the exciting news that a ship had been chased into Marblehead Harbor by the British blockading fleet, "and it would be well to know more about it." They hitched the family horse to the two-wheeled chaise, and off they went, with young Nathaniel in "a small cricket placed on its floor." They sped over the bridge and into South Salem when a hard-riding messenger pulled up to tell them that the chased-in vessel was the frigate *Constitution*, and that Marblehead meant to defend her with cannons, and needed both guns and men from Salem. The Silsbees turned around and went to Manning's stable on Union Street, to call out horses and wagons to go to the gun house on the Neck and fetch Salem's cannons. Then they went to get Capt. George Crowninshield Jr., the leader in most Salem adventures (his house was on the site of the Custom House on Derby Street), and young Nathaniel was dropped off at that point—to his disgust—with directions to go home and tell his mother the news. Half an hour later, with the gun-house door battered in, the cannons were rumbling through the streets, Capt. Crowninshield astride the first of them. The *Constitution*, under the protection of the guns of Salem and Marblehead at Fort Sewall and Bailey's Head, was brought around to the safety of Salem harbor, amid the cheering of a great crowd on Salem Neck, including the boy Nathaniel, who, when he was seventy-five, would write a memoir of that day (see EIHC 53:93-96).

Salem and Marblehead privateers were largely successful in making prizes of British supply vessels. Despite the possibility of maiming or death, 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. The news of the adventures of Salem's privateers must have been very exciting to boys like Nat Silsbee.

Salem erected forts and batteries on its Neck, to discourage the British warships that freely cruised local 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 how to bring the war to a close and to restore the region's commerce. Timothy Pickering of Salem led the extreme Federalists in proposing a series of demands which, if unmet by the federal government, could lead to New England's secession; but the Pickering faction was countered by Harrison G. Otis of Boston and the Federalist moderates, who prevailed in sending a conciliatory message to Congress.

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

In 1816 Nathaniel Silsbee was elected to Congress as a Republican (Pres. James Monroe, who had just visited Salem and had been entertained at the Silsbee house on Daniel Street). This seat in Congress had once been held by his old friend and brother-in-law, Jacob Crowninshield, as well as by the Federalist war-horse, Timothy Pickering. In November, 1817, the Silsbee family left Salem in their carriage to make the trip to Washington, DC. They arrived safely, and stayed in a boarding house on Pennsylvania Avenue with Mrs. Silsbee's brother, Benjamin W. Crowninshield, Secretary of the Navy, and his family. The Silsbees resided in Salem between sessions of Congress; and Mr. Silsbee was re-elected. The session of 1819-20 was very exciting, with the Missouri bill (to admit it as a non-slave state) and the tariff, cash-payment, and laying-duties bills. Nathaniel Jr. had been attending schools to be prepared for college, and in August, 1820, he "underwent the usual examination of candidates and was admitted a student in the university at Cambridge."

Post-war, the 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). 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. Into the 1820s foreign trade continued prosperous; and new markets were opened with Madagascar (1820), which supplied tallow and ivory, and Zanzibar (1825), whence came coffee, ivory, and gum copal, used to make varnish. This opened a huge and lucrative trade in which Salem dominated, and its vessels thus gained access to all of the east African ports.

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 opened for settlement, and some Salemites moved away. 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 merchants and capitalists 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.

Mr. Silsbee retired from politics in 1821 and resumed his full-time business as a merchant with his partners. By that time, he lived in a brick mansion overlooking the Common, on what was then 16 Pleasant Street (now Washington Square East). His admirers would not leave him in peace, however, and they arranged for him to be nominated for the state senate, to which he was elected in spring 1823 and became President of the Senate. In 1824, Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. was "graduated at Cambridge" and (per his father) "had a part in the public performances assigned to a portion of the graduates; and he thereafter entered the law office of Mr. David Cummins as a student, though rather with a view of gaining some knowledge of commercial law than with any expectation of pursuing that profession." David Cummins was a leading lawyer and jurist of that period in Salem. His daughter, Susan, would become a famous author.

Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. and his father took a long trip to various cities and then to Washington, DC, arriving in March, 1826. Shortly after, the elder Mr. Silsbee was appointed a U.S. Senator upon resignation of his predecessor. Nathaniel Silsbee Jr., who had chosen not to become a lawyer, was helped to begin a mercantile career: in May, 1827, he embarked at Boston for Holland with consignment of part of a cargo of merchandise shipped by his father "as the commencement of his engagement in commercial pursuits. After disposing of the business thus confided to him and after having visited different parts of Holland, France, and England, he returned in one of the New York packet ships from Liverpool and reached home" in November. Having proved his abilities as a merchant and commercial agent, Nathaniel Jr. was thereafter fully employed by his father "in my commercial business and concerns." At that time, the senior Silsbee was in business with his brothers William and Zachariah, Dudley L. Pickman, and Robert Stone.

With good prospects, Nathaniel Silsbee Jr., 25, married Mary Ann Devereux, 17, in 1829 (“quite acceptably to his parents”) and they honeymooned in Washington DC. The young couple was introduced to President Andrew Jackson, Sen. Daniel Webster, and other luminaries; and they spent time with Nathaniel Jr.’s uncle, now-U.S. Representative Benjamin W. Crowninshield.

Mary Ann Cabot Devereux was born on the eve of war, in Salem, on 6 Feb. 1812. She had an older brother, George H. Devereux, born in 1809. Her father, a merchant, Humphrey Devereux (1779-1867), was a native of Marblehead, a second-generation Harvard man (class of 1798), and a nephew of Elbridge Gerry, the Signer of the Declaration of Independence, Governor of Massachusetts, and (1813-1814) Vice President of the United States. Like some other ambitious Marbleheaders, Humphrey Devereux had settled in Salem about 1800. After college, he had studied law in Boston with Judge John Lowell, and then had sailed as supercargo on a voyage from Salem to the Orient. In 1809, he married Eliza Dodge, daughter of a merchant, Israel Dodge, and his wife Lucia Pickering Dodge, the sister of Col. Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State, Congressman, and U.S. Senator. The house at 26 Chestnut Street was built by Humphrey Devereux. His wife died in 1828, and thereafter Miss Elizabeth Fettyplace, his niece, lived there as housekeeper (R.H. Wiswall’s *Notes on the Building of Chestnut Street*, p. 21).

Mrs. Mary Ann Silsbee’s brother, George H. Devereux, was, by the 1830s, a Salem merchant who married Charlotte S. Forrester, the niece of Joseph Story, a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and a resident of Salem until 1829. George Devereux commanded the Salem Light Infantry and served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1835 (and would again in 1855 and 1856) (see *Register of New England Historic Genealogical Society*, vol. 74). He was an author, as well: he wrote *Translation of the Literary Fables of Yriarte* (1855) and *Sam Shirk, A Tale of the Woods of Maine* (1871).

The young Silsbees set up housekeeping on Chestnut Street in an apartment in the mansion of Mary Ann’s uncle, the merchant Pickering Dodge; and living with them were two girls, one a teenager and one aged between ten and fifteen (see 1830 census, p. 461). One door over lived the widow of Robert Stone, who had been brother-in-law to Capt. Joseph White, a wealthy merchant, who, in 1830, aged eighty-two, 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 the news of murderous thugs; but the killer was a Crowninshield (a fallen son of one of the five brothers; after he was put in jail 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.

Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. and his wife stayed in Salem and became parents of a son, Nathaniel Devereux Silsbee, in 1830; and in 1831 they decided to build a house on the lot adjoining that of the elder Silsbees. The house was to be a large one, designed in the new Greek Revival style. Sen. Silsbee wrote, "In the course of the summer of 1832, my son and his family became the occupants of a new house which he had built on a site immediately contiguous to my own homestead, thereby affording us the pleasure of having himself and family located near us." A new baby boy arrived in the year 1832, and was christened George Devereux Silsbee. The new house was a large one, very grand for its day, with marble fireplaces in each main room, very high ceilings, plain door and window casings, and an impressive plaster cornice in the main parlor. These features remain today, as the house is being renovated (February-March, 2005).

Nathaniel Silsbee (1804-1881) b. 28 Dec. 1804, son of Hon. Nathaniel Silsbee and Mary Crowninshield, died 9 July 1881, Milton, Mass. He m. 9 Nov. 1829 Mary Ann Cabot Devereux (1812-1889), b. 6 Dec. 1812, dtr. of Humphrey Devereux and Eliza Dodge, died at Milton, 4 Aug. 1889. Known issue:

- 1. Nathaniel D., 1830, HC 1852, m. 1856 Mary S. Hodges.*
- 2. George D., 1832, d. 18 Aug. 1843.*
- 3. Eliza D., 1835, d. 20 March 1837.*
- 4. Marianne D., 1837, d. 10 March 1838.*
- 5. Mary C., 1840, m. 1861 Fredk. A. Whitwell.*
- 6. William Edward, 1845, HC 1867, d. 16 July 1908.*

Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. was active in politics as well as business. A member of the Whig party, he was elected a state representative in 1833. His father retired from the U.S. Senate in 1835 and spent the rest of his life in Salem. Evidently Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. continued to work with him in the family business (the firm of Silsbees, Pickman, & Stone), which based many of their operations within their insurance company, the Salem Commercial Insurance Company, and their bank, the Merchants Bank.

In 1836 Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. (per 1837 Salem Directory) held several positions as an officer of companies: he was a director of the Merchants Bank, 156 Essex Street, Pres. John W. Treadwell, with fellow directors David Cummins, Benjamin Cox, Stephen C. Phillips, Z.F. Silsbee, Joseph Winn, and F.H. Silsbee (cashier). He was also a director of the Salem Turnpike & Chelsea Bridge Corp., whose president was Frederick Howes.

The Silsbees became the parents of two little girls, Eliza (1835) and Marianne (1837), and then had the horrifying experience of losing both of them within a year: Eliza died in March, 1837, aged two, and Marianne died at one in March, 1838. Their grief can only be imagined. They would have two more children: Mary, in 1840, and William E., in 1845. In 1843, tragedy would strike again, as the Silsbees' son George died at the age of eleven.

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. 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.

The 1840 census (p.251) shows that the Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. family resided here (Mr. & Mrs. Silsbee, two boys, a man in his twenties (probably Michael Foley, a hired man), a girl, a teenaged girl, a woman in her twenties). In 1841 (per 1842 Directory): Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. was listed as a merchant, with offices at the family insurance company offices, 174 Essex (along with his father and uncle Zachariah), and with house at 17 Pleasant. Michael Foley, an Irishman who worked for the Silsbees, also resided at 17 Pleasant, probably in a separate apartment. Mr. Silsbee was connected with the Salem Commercial Insurance Company, the Merchants Bank, Harmony Grove Cemetery, and the Salem Turnpike Company. His wife was involved in the Salem Children's Friend Society "for the purpose of rescuing from evil and improving the condition of such children as are in indigent and suffering circumstances and not otherwise provided for."

Per Marianne C. D. Silsbee (pp.131-2, *A Half Century in Salem*, 1888 ed., written in 1871) a torchlight procession of the Whig boys was held in the autumn of 1844 "to celebrate the anticipated election of Henry Clay to the Presidency. The organizers and marshals were 'Perk' Pingree, Ned Cheever, and Nathaniel D. Silsbee, the latter the chief marshal. The modest expectation was to get out perhaps a hundred boys with drum and fife; the proud result was a procession of a thousand torch-bearers, the full Salem brass band, a general illumination, and a salute on the Common from a battery of the two brass cannon that every Salem youngster of that period has often longed to own."

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 sardonic “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 population began to transform, as hundreds of Irish families, fleeing the Famine in Ireland, settled in Salem and gave the industrialists a big pool of cheap labor.

In 1846 and in 1848, Nathaniel Silsbee Jr. was elected state representative, and in the latter year he was chosen to cast the presidential vote of the state for Zachary Taylor. Nathaniel Jr. was much interested in municipal affairs; and, as the Whig party candidate, was elected Mayor of Salem in 1849, serving in 1850. In the spring of 1850, the house was occupied as the residence of Nathaniel Silsbee and family, and live-in helpers. The census-taker listed Nathaniel Silsbee, 45, merchant, with real estate worth \$5000, wife Mary D., 38, son Nathaniel D., 19, student at Harvard College, Mary C., 10, William Edward Silsbee, four; and Michael Foley, 36, a laborer born in Ireland, Lydia Massey, about thirty, born in Mass., and Ellen Tracy, 25, and Anne Tracy, 19, both born in

Ireland (1850 census, ward two, house 160). In that year, his father, the Senator, died in April. Shortly thereafter, the family of Nathaniel and Mary Ann Silsbee moved out of this house (then-17 Pleasant Street) and into the Silsbee house next door (then-16 Pleasant).

Nathaniel Silsbee was re-elected Mayor in 1850 and served his term in 1851, after which he declined re-election but did serve a year as alderman. He and his family then made an extended (years' long) trip to Europe. His son, Nathaniel D, graduated at Harvard in 1852 (see attached class report and photo). Immediately, the young man embarked as clerk of the ship *Sabine* on a voyage to Calcutta, returning via the Red Sea and meeting up with his family in Europe. Upon their return, Mr. Silsbee resumed his mercantile and financial activities, and his son studied law with William C. Endicott in the years 1853-4, after which he (the son, Nathaniel D. Silsbee) engaged in the Calcutta trade. In 1854, N. D. Silsbee was serving as 4th Lieutenant in the Salem Light Infantry, under Capt. J.A. Farless; and within five years young Mr. Silsbee was commanding the Light Infantry. He married Mary Stone Hodges of Salem, in 1856; and by 1860 they had moved to Boston, where he (NDS) began working as a merchandise broker. Later in his career, he was the founder and manager of a Texas-to-Missouri railroad company and manager of Texas timberlands (see Almon D. Hodges, *Hodges Genealogy*, p.59).

In this house, in the early 1850s, the occupants were, evidently, Nathaniel's sister, Georgiana, her husband, Francis H. Appleton, and their young son, Francis Jr., born in 1847. Francis Henry Appleton (1823-1854), was born 11 Sept. 1823, the son of William Appleton and Mary Cutler of Boston. On 30 March 1846 he married Georgiana Silsbee, and on June 17, 1847 she gave birth to a son. Mr. Appleton died on 28 May 1854 at Somerville, aged thirty years. Georgiana married, second, 12 Sept. 1855 (in Salem) Henry Saltonstall of Boston, and soon afterward, evidently, they moved to Boston to reside.

In *The Proper Bostonians*, a book by Cleveland Amory (p.41), Henry Saltonstall is described as follows: "First he married a widow who had inherited not one but three Boston fortunes—an Appleton fortune from her husband, a Silsbee fortune from her father, and Crowninshield fortune from her mother—then he went out and made a fourth fortune on his own as a mill man." Saltonstall's step-son, Francis H. Appleton, was a founder of the high-society Boston Supper Dances; and his encounters with the Turkey Trot and Bunny Hug are mentioned.

Mr. Nathaniel Silsbee was again elected Mayor of Salem, twice, serving in 1858 and 1859. By the end of the decade he was ready to sell the house he had built in 1832 (which he had not occupied since 1850), but had to get permission from the legislature, since the property was technically held in a prenuptial trust by the terms of his father's deed of the land to him. The legislature granted the Silsbees' petition; and on 4 April 1859 for just \$1000 they sold the house and land to Mrs. Isabella C. Miller, free of any ownership by her husband, Charles H. Miller, a Salem merchant (ED 585:90). This ended the connection of the Silsbees with this house. They would reside next door for three years more. During the Civil War, in 1862, Nathaniel was elected Treasurer of Harvard College (he retained that position until 1876) and they sold their house in 1863 to James P. Cook and moved to Boston. In 1869 they moved to Milton, but wintered in Boston (from EIHC 17). Mr. Silsbee died in Milton on 9 July 1881, and his wife Mary Ann died there in 1889.

Charles H. Miller came to Salem as a young man, from Maine. He worked as a merchant's clerk and finally became a shipping merchant, in business with Edward D. Kimball and trading with the west coast of Africa. Mr. Miller had married Mr. Kimball's sister, Isabelle, and so the two men were closely allied socially as well as in business. 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).

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, the Millers lived here, as follows: Charles H. Miller, 39, merchant, wife Elizabeth, 31, daughter Alice, 11; also Rachel Morison, 22, a domestic servant born in Nova Scotia, and John S. Kimball, 76, and Isabelle Kimball, 63, who were probably Mrs. Miller's parents, who had formerly resided at 12 Pickman Street, and who resided here (#96) at least as late as 1863 (per 1864 directory).

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; 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.

Charles Miller's office was in the building at 145 Essex Street in the 1860s. In June, 1863, Mr. Miller was elected a director of the Naumkeag Bank (Mr. E.D. Kimball was its president); and he was also a director of the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company and a trustee of the Salem Savings Bank.

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, 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.

After his partner Edward Kimball’s death, Mr. Miller formed a partnership with Thomas P. Pingree and prosecuted the African trade for some years. In 1880 (per census), Charles H. Miller, 60, retired merchant, occupied this house with his wife Isabella E., 53, daughter Alice T. Barker, 32, and her husband William G. Barker, 34, merchant; also helpers Mary McInnis, 29, born Scotland, and Maggie Comerford, 21, born Ireland (1880 census, ED 231, h.299).

Charles H. Miller died while on a trip with his wife in Washington, DC, on April 16, 1890 (per obit in Salem Observer, April 19, 1890). On 28 Feb. 1891 Isabella C. Miller, Salem widow, sold the homestead to Caroline L. (Pease) Brown, wife of Frank A. Brown of Salem (ED 1303:63). Mrs. Miller moved to Chestnut Street, where she resided with

the Phillipses at #17. The new owners, the Browns, resided here. Frank A. Brown was a commuter to Boston, employed as the assistant manager of the Salem Lead Company, with offices on Congress Street, Boston (per 1893/4 Directory).

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.

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

—Robert Booth, 21 March 2005 for Historic Salem Inc.