

172 Federal Street
Built circa 1849 for George Nichols, Tanner

History of the property:

172 Federal Street was built at the peak of the Greek Revival era of American architecture in the 1840s by Salem tanner George Nichols for his son Nathan. The elder Nichols built the house and resided in it briefly before conveying it to Nathan Nichols, a clerk, who owned and occupied the property for the next fifteen years.

The western end of the present-day Federal Street, which was laid out across private lands after 1769 and referred to as the "new street" on or near the North River until its formal designation as "Federal Street" in 1794, was owned primarily by the Buffum family, who had purchased it from the original land grant recipient Robert Moulton in the later seventeenth century. Both the Moulton and Buffum families were Quakers, and they located their meeting house on the nearby "main street", or Essex Street.

The Buffum family retained their property on Federal Street until well into the nineteenth century, when it was divided into house lots and sold to several grantees, including Thomas Reynolds, a Salem laborer who purchased the lot on which the present-day 172 Federal Street now stands from Peace Buffum, a spinster, in 1847.¹ Reynolds purchased a lot of land bounded southerly by Federal Street, westerly by land of Miss Buffum extending to the high water mark of the North River, northerly by the river, and easterly by land of Daniel Haskell, "together with all the flats belonging to said lot". Less than a year later, he conveyed this lot to George Nichols, Jr., a Salem tanner, who erected 172 Federal Street.²

George Nichols did not transfer the deed to 172 Federal Street to his son in his lifetime, but Nathan Nichols and his wife Elizabeth took up exclusive residence in 1850 according to the Salem Directories. After his father's death and his subsequent inheritance of the property, the younger Nichols obtained a mortgage with which he expanded the original house in the early 1860s. The enlarged house was conveyed to Roderick A. MacKenzie,

¹ Essex Country (South) Registry of Deeds, Book 386, leaf 293; August 30, 1847.

² E.C.R.D. Book 392, leaf 242; January 26, 1848

a Salem tailor, in 1865.³ The MacKenzie family resided at 172 Federal Street for five years, after which they conveyed the property to Daniel Haskell, who owned an adjacent house as well as the Daniel C. Haskell & Company, Tanners and Curriers, on Mason Street. Haskell immediately conveyed 172 Federal Street to one of his employees, James Donaldson.⁴

The Donaldson family owned and occupied 172 Federal Street for over twenty-five years, and their ownership is illustrated on both the 1876 and 1897 Atlases of Salem (attached). In 1906 James Donaldson conveyed the property to the Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, and it became the rectory and residence of its pastor, the Reverend Thomas W. Fessenden.⁵ Six years later, the Church transferred the house and land to the four Cuffe sisters of Salem, who promptly took up residence.⁶

Alice, Nellie, and Sarah Cuffe were single "career women"; the former two were clerks and the latter was a factory forewoman. Their elder sister Katharine Cuffe is listed simply as a "boarder" in the Salem Directories. They apparently experienced difficulties maintaining their household, as they obtained several mortgage loans and took in a succession of boarders during their term of ownership of the property (1912-1946). Of course, the Depression coincided with several of these difficult years. In 1946 the surviving Cuffe sister, Sarah, conveyed the property to a nephew, John L. Cuffe, and his wife Marion.⁷ Though the Cuffes' property was reduced by the construction of the Sylvania plant along "West" Bridge Street, 172 Federal Street remained in the family for nearly forty years through the inheritance of their daughter, Marion Andrews. The latter sold the property to its present owners, Kenneth and Joyce Wallace, in 1984.

Transfers of title:

Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 386, leaf 293

Grantor: Peace Buffum of Salem, Singlewoman

Grantee: Thomas Reynolds of Salem, Laborer

Consideration: \$600

Conveyance of: "a lot of land in said Salem and bounded thus: Southerly on Federal Street thirty-six feet and six inches,

³ E.C.R.D. Book 694, leaves 252-253; December 6, 1865

⁴ E.C.R.D. Book 810, leaves 205-207; December 2, 1870

⁵ E.C.R.D. Book 1837, pages 196-197; August 7, 1906

⁶ E.C.R.D. Book 2144, pages 444-447; May 1, 1912

⁷ E.C.R.D. Book 3441, pages 473-474; February 13, 1946

Westerly by land conveyed by me Peace Buffum to Daniel Haskell one hundred and two feet and seven inches more or less to high water mark of North River, Northerly on the line of the high water mark thirty-six feet and six inches, Easterly by a line running Southerly to said Federal Street parallel to the Eastern line of said Haskell's land and thirty-six feet and six inches from the same, together with all the flats belonging to said lot."

Date recorded: August 30, 1847

E.C.R.D. Book 392, leaf 242

Grantor: Thomas Reynolds of Salem, Laborer
Grantee: George Nichols, Jr. of Salem, Tanner
Consideration: \$762
Conveyance of: the above lot
Date recorded: January 20, 1848

E.C.R.D. Book 694, leaf 252

Grantor: Nathan Nichols of Salem
Grantee: Roderick A. MacKenzie of Salem
Consideration: \$5050
Conveyance of: the above lot, in addition to "the dwelling house and other buildings now standing thereon."
Date recorded: December 6, 1865

E.C.R.D. Book 810, leaves 205-207

Grantor: Daniel Haskell of Salem
Grantee: James Donaldson of Salem
Consideration: \$6000
Conveyance of: "a lot of land situated in said Salem, bounded Southerly on Federal Street thirty-six feet and six inches, Westerly on land of said Haskell sixteen feet then Northerly on land of said Haskell seventeen feet then Southerly on said land four feet nine inches, then on a line coincident with the western line of sixteen feet first described bounding westerly on land of said Haskell sixty-nine feet seven inches more or less to high water mark on North River: Northerly on the line of said high water mark thirty-six feet six inches, Easterly on a straight line running from the North River to Federal Street and thirty-six feet six inches distant at each end from the line of the land of said Haskell which is the western boundary line of the above conveyed premises, together with all the flats thereto belonging and extending into the North River and the dwelling house and other buildings on said conveyed premises. Being the same estate which was conveyed this day to said Daniel Haskell by Roderick A. and Sarah A. MacKenzie."
Date recorded: December 2, 1870

E.C.R.D. Book 1837, pages 196-197

Grantor: James Donaldson of Salem

Grantee: the Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, "a religious society duly incorporated and having its home of worship in said Salem"

Consideration: \$1 and other considerations

Conveyance of: the above property, "with the exception of the flats named in said deed which flats have since been filled."

Date recorded: August 7, 1906

E.C.R.D. Book 2144, pages 445-446

Grantor: the Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church of Salem

Grantee: Nellie M. Cuffe, Sarah A. Cuffe, Alice M. Cuffe, and Katharine J. Cuffe, all of Salem

Consideration: \$1 and other valuable considerations

Conveyance of: the above property

Date recorded: May 1, 1912

E.C.R.D. Book 3441, pages 473-474

Grantor: Sarah A. Cuffe of Salem

Grantee: John L. Cuffe and Marion L. Cuffe of Salem

Consideration: paid

Conveyance of: the above property, "excepting therefrom and reserving to myself a life tenancy in the said demised premises during my natural life."

Date recorded: February 13, 1946

E.C.R.D. Book 7367, page 502

Grantor: Marion L. Andrews of Salem

Grantee: Kenneth S. Wallace of and Joyce E. Wallace of Salem

Consideration: paid

Conveyance of: 172 Federal Street

Date recorded: March 30, 1984

