

*House at  
17 Carlton Street, Salem*

Built c.1808 for Margaret Ellison Bray, widow  
Enlarged c.1831 for Benjamin Bray, coach-maker & inventor



**Francis P. Ashton, barber, in old age (from photo); he resided here from 1809-1821  
(source: Hadley's *History of Essex Lodge*)**

## *House at 17 Carlton Street, Salem*

According to available evidence, this house was built for Margaret (Ellison) Bray, widow, c.1808. It was enlarged to the rear c.1831 for Benjamin Bray, chaise- and coach-maker.

On 26 August 1808 Capt. Benjamin Crowninshield, a Danvers merchant who was formerly a Salem East India shipmaster, for \$600 sold to Margaret Bray of Salem, a widow, a lot of land in Salem bounded southwesterly 38' on "Carlton's Street", northwesterly 70' on land of Crowninshield, northeasterly 37' on land of Crowninshield and of Berry, southeasterly 70' on land of Ranson (ED 185:226). The evidence indicates that she had a modest house built: it probably had a central entrance and a room on either side, with chimneys running up the back walls to provide heat in all four rooms, and perhaps with kitchen rooms attached as ells. It was two stories high, likely with a pitch roof.

Margaret Hill Ellison was born in Salem and baptized in 1776 at St. Peter's (Episcopal) Church, the daughter of John Ellison and his wife Elizabeth Ulmer. John Ellison was an Englishman, born in London; he came as a young man to Salem, and in 1762 married Elizabeth Ulmer, the granddaughter of Rev. Mr. Ulmer, who had come as a preacher from Germany c. 1700 and settled in Maine. The Ellisons had several children, of whom those surviving infancy were Mary, Rebecca, George, Elizabeth, and Margaret, and John, Jr. John Ellison fought as a rebel in the War of the Revolution (1775-1783), both as a soldier and later as a sailor. By 1783 he was in business as a ship-rigger in the East Parish, and in 1798 became a town watchman (policeman). Mrs. Elizabeth (Ulmer) Ellison would live until October, 1808 (died at age 69) and Capt. Ellison, a watchman in his last years, lived until March, 1812. He would die at age 74, lamented by many and characterized by Rev. William Bentley as "a man of great integrity and good reputation."

In March, 1794, Margaret H. Ellison, 18, married Benjamin Bray, 19. Between 1795 and 1807 they would have seven children, mostly boys. The Brays resided on Hardy Street, in the old Diman house.

In 1800, Salem was still a town, and a small one by our standards, with a total population of about 9,500. Its politics were fierce, as the Federalists squared off against the Democratic Republicans (led by the Crowninshields and comprised of

the sailors and fishermen). The two factions attended separate churches, held separate parades, and supported separate schools, military companies, and newspapers (the Crowninshield-backed *Impartial Register* started in 1800). Salem's merchants resided mainly on two streets: Washington (which ended in a wharf on the Inner Harbor, and, above Essex, had the Town House in the middle) and Essex (particularly between what are now Hawthorne Boulevard and North Streets). 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, backlands for the Pickerings on Broad Street and the old estates of Essex Street. The Common, not yet Washington Square, had small ponds and swamps, and was covered with hillocks and utility buildings and the town alms-house. In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, Salem's manufacturing-based prosperity would sweep almost all of the great downtown houses away.

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 built in the next ten years 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). The architectural style (called "Federal" today) had been developed years before in the Adam brothers in England and featured fanlight doorways, palladian windows, elongated pilasters and columns, and large windows. It was introduced to New England by Charles Bulfinch upon his return from England in 1790. The State House in Boston was his first institutional composition; and soon Beacon Hill was being built up with handsome residences in the Bulfinch manner.

Samuel McIntire, carver and housewright, was quick to pick up on the style and adapt it to Salem's larger lots. McIntire's first local composition, the Jerathmeel Peirce house (on Federal Street), contrasts greatly with his later Adamesque compositions. The interiors of this Adam style differed from the "Georgian" and Post-Colonial: in place of walls of wood paneling, there now appeared plastered expanses painted in bright colors or covered in bold wallpapers. The Adam style put a premium on handsome casings and carvings of central interior features such door-caps and chimney-pieces (McIntire's specialty). On the exterior, the Adam style included elegant fences; and the houses were often built of brick, with attenuated porticoes and, in the high style, string courses, swagged panels, and even two-story pilasters. The best example of the new style was the Elias Hasket

Derby house, co-designed by Bulfinch and McIntire, and built on Essex Street in 1799 (demolished in 1815), on the site of today's Town House Square.

Salem's commerce created great wealth, which in turn attracted many newcomers from outlying towns and even other states. 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 (it stood on Essex Street, near Washington Square), and editor of the *Register* newspaper. Mr. Bentley's diary is full of references to the civic and commercial doings of the town, and to the lives and behaviors of all classes of society. On Union Street, not far from Mr. Bentley's church, on the fourth of July, 1804, was born a boy who would grow up to eclipse all sons of Salem in the eyes of the world: Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose father would die of fever while on a voyage to the Caribbean in 1808. This kind of untimely death was all too typical of Salem's young seafarers, who fell prey to malaria and other diseases of the Caribbean and Pacific tropics.

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 had built their great India Wharf at the foot of English Street. The other important wharves were Forrester's (now Central, just west of Derby Wharf), and Union Wharf (formerly Long Wharf), extending from the foot of Union Street, west of Forrester's Wharf. To the west of Union Wharf, 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. Among the most important of these were Ward's, Orne's, and Joseph Peabody's, which extended from the foot of what is now Hawthorne Boulevard. Each of the smaller wharves had a warehouse or two, shops for artisans (coopers, blockmakers, 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 Custom House. The wharves and streets were crowded with shoppers, hawkers, sailors, artisans ("mechanics"), storekeepers, and teamsters; and just across the way, on Stage Point along the south bank of the South River, wooden barks and brigs and ships were being built in the shipyards. Perhaps Benjamin Bray, a boatbuilder and shipwright, worked there, or perhaps he had his own small shipyard, or worked at Becket's, off Becket Street.

Salem's boom came to an end with a crash in January, 1808, when Jefferson and the Congress imposed an embargo on all American 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 and families began to wonder how they would survive. In the midst of this uncertainty, Benjamin Bray, 33, fell ill; and on June 3, 1808, he died of consumption (pneumonia or tuberculosis), "a worthy man" (per Rev. Wm. Bentley), leaving Margaret with the care of several young children, including infants. Joseph Lambert, gentleman, became guardian of some of the Bray children.

In August, 1808, Mrs. Margaret Bray bought the house-lot on Carlton Street. In the winter of 1808-9, Mrs. Bray, 30, was courted by a newcomer in Salem, Francisco Paolo Astranan, 26, a barber from Sicily who had arrived in Salem in September in the Salem ship *Traveller*, Capt. Richard Ward Jr. (see *Ship Registers of District of Salem & Beverly*). Mr. Astranan went by the "Englished" name of Francis P. Ashton, and started a successful barbering business in Salem. He and Margaret wed on 29 January 1809; and they would have at least two children, Lucy Ann and Micalah (born 1817; Francisco's mother's name; it was handed down in the family but was usually written Mickaler!). (Info on Mr. Ashton from 1 Dec. 1865 obituary, *Salem Gazette*, and from p. 106, H.P. Hadley's *200 Years of Masonry in Essex Lodge*; photo).

Other Italians had settled in Salem at about this time. Peter Barras, a mariner and shopkeeper, was here, as was Michele F. Corne, a noted painter of seascapes, who resided on Charter Street and taught painting, did decorative painting of houses interiors and ship-cabins, and sold his artworks. Joseph Monarch, a mariner, of Naples, also settled in Salem, and probably was a very close friend of Francis Ashton. Mr. Monarch named one of his sons Francis Ashton in his honor; that son later changed his name to Francis M. Ashton. In January, 1817, Mr. Ashton loaned \$200 to Joseph Monarch to help him buy a house (ED 212:206).

As a hotbed of Democratic-Republicanism, Salem's East Parish and its seafarers, led by the Crowninshields, loyally supported the Embargo until it was lifted in spring, 1809. Shunned by the other Salem merchants for his support of the Embargo, the eminent merchant William "Billy" Gray took his large fleet of ships—fully one-third of Salem's tonnage--and moved to Boston. Gray's move to Boston permanently eliminated much of Salem's wealth, shipping, import-export cargoes, and local employment. Gray soon switched from the Federalist

party and was elected Lt. Governor under Gov. Elbridge Gerry, a native of Marblehead.

In this new house (assuming it was standing by 1809), the Bray children were growing up, although it is possible that some were sent to live with relatives.

*Margaret Hill Ellison (1776-1819), d/o Capt. John Ellison & Elizabeth Ulmer, died "suddenly" 6 July 1819 and was buried at Charter Street Graveyard. She m. 2 March 1794 Benjamin Bray (1775-1808), son of John Bray & Eunice Becket, died of consumption on 3 June 1808. She m/2 29 Jan. 1809 Francisco P. Astranan (Francis P. Ashton) (1783-1865) born 5 Feb. 1783 Palermo, Sicily, s/o Thomas Astranan & Michela Campanella, died 26 Nov. 1865 in Salem. He m/2 5 Dec. 1819 Rachel (Gwinn) Hall (1789-1850+), d/o Thaddeus Gwinn & Mercy Beadle of Salem. Known issue of Margaret, surnames Bray and Ashton:*

1. *John Bray, 1795 (m. 1817 Margaret Roundy) Boston printer 1821.*
2. *Benjamin Bray, 1797, died of quinsy 20 Jan. 1799, aged 15 months*
3. *Margaret Bray, m. 1820 Jonathan C. Taylor, Salem boatbuilder 1821, pump & block-maker later*
4. *Eliza Bray, m. David Robinson, Boston horse-letter*
5. *Benjamin Bray, 1801, m. 8 Sept. 1825 Mary Lane*
6. *Daniel Bray, Salem mariner 1826 (m. 1828 Pheba Skidmore)*
7. *William Bray*
8. *Lucy Ann Ashton, m. William N. Nassau; issue*
  - a. *W.N. Nassau Jr.*
  - b. *Arethusa W. Nassau.*
9. *Micalah (Mickelar) Ashton, 1817, bp 1824, m. Mr. Snow; issue*
  - a. *Mickelar Ashton Snow (b. 1836) m. Jonathan Davis*
  - b. *Margaret Ellison Snow*
  - c. *Francis P.A. Snow (b. 1846)*
  - d. *James F. Snow m. Sophia E.*

The house was owned by Margaret alone, and not with her second husband Mr. Ashton, who was noted for his uprightness and high standards and may have refused to take an ownership interest in the house in order to ensure that his step-children received an inheritance. His barber shop was likely situated in this house. The 1812 real estate valuations are the first to note Mr. Ashton's presence in Salem (Mrs. Margaret Ashton, the owner, was not listed in the valuations of

1809-1811 either). In 1812 (ward one) he was listed as “Francis F.A. Ashton, barber,” and paid taxes on “part house & shop” worth \$300 and \$100 in income. In 1813 he was listed as Francis P. Ashton, with identical property and values.

Salem resumed its seafaring commerce for three years after the end of the Embargo, but still the British preyed on American shipping; and in June, 1812, war was declared against Britain. Although Salem had opposed the war as being potentially ruinous and primarily for the benefit of the southern and western war-hawk states, yet 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 *Constitution*. Many more could have been sent against the British, but some of the Federalist anti-war merchants held their vessels back. In addition, Salem fielded companies of infantry and artillery. Salem and Marblehead privateers were largely successful in making prizes of British supply vessels. While some were wounded in engagements, and some were killed, 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 the most successful. She captured 30-plus prizes worth more than \$1,100,000.

Salem erected forts and batteries on its Neck, to discourage the British warships that cruised these waters. In June, 1813, off Marblehead Neck, the British frigate *Shannon* defeated the U.S. Navy frigate *Chesapeake*. The Federalists would not allow their churches to be used for the funeral of the *Chesapeake*’s slain commander, James Lawrence (“Don’t give up the ship!”). Almost a year later, in April, 1814, the people gathered along the shores of Salem Neck as three sails appeared on the horizon and came sailing on for Salem Bay. These vessels proved to be the mighty *Constitution* in the lead, pursued by the smaller British frigates *Tenedos* and *Endymion*. The breeze was light, and the British vessels gained, but Old Ironsides made it safely into Marblehead Harbor, to the cheers of thousands.

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’s vessels often were captured, and its men imprisoned or killed. After almost three years, the war was bleeding the town dry, and the menfolk were disappearing. 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 what they could do to bring the war to a close and to restore the region's commerce. Sen. Timothy Pickering of Salem led the extreme Federalists in proposing a series of demands which, if not met by the federal government, could lead to New England's seceding from the United States; but the Pickering faction was countered by Harrison G. Otis of Boston and his moderates, who prevailed in sending a conciliatory message to Congress.

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

Post-war, the Salem merchants rebuilt their fleets and resumed their worldwide trade, slowly at first, and then to great effect. The eldest Bray son, John, may have fought, as a teenager, on privateers. After the war he became a printer, and in 1817 married Margaret Roundy. They soon had a first child, a daughter; and at just that time John's mother, Margaret Ashton, 42, had her last child, a daughter named Micalah. Mr. Ashton had continued to prosper in his work as barber and hair-dresser. In February, 1818, he joined Essex Lodge of Masons.

In July, 1819, at the age of 44, Mrs. Margaret H. (Ellison) Bray Ashton died, probably at home. The effect on her children, some of them quite young, may be imagined. Like most men of that time, Mr. Ashton sought a new wife to help him raise the children; and on 5 December 1819 he married Rachel (Gwinn) Hall. In 1809 she had married Spence Hall, who had died in 1816. Evidently the Halls had had no children. Rachel now became step-mother to the Bray and Ashton children. In 1820 the house was occupied as a duplex, with families headed by Francis Ashton and his step-son John Bray (1820 census, p. 40). Mr. Ashton's family consisted of himself, his new wife, and two little girls, probably Lucy Ann and Micalah. Mr. Bray's family consisted of himself, his wife, and a little girl. The other Bray children were living elsewhere, perhaps as apprentices or in the family of their sister, Margaret, who married Jonathan Taylor in 1820.

In March, 1821, the Probate Court set off to the little Ashton girls the north front room and the north kitchen and a small piece of land at the northwest part of the house lot, with certain rights to pass to and fro over the other land (ED 227:46). This left the rest of the property in the ownership of the Bray siblings. It is likely that Mr. Ashton and his new wife and his two daughters moved elsewhere in 1820-1. In November, 1820, he (through a trustee) purchased for \$180 a plot of land on Bridge Street, near Pleasant, and he moved a building onto there to serve as his house and barber shop (ED 224:221). It seems likely that the two Ashton



rooms were rented out to John Bullock (1781-1854), a laborer who lived here with his wife Elizabeth (Cloutman) Bullock, and their daughters Elizabeth and Mary Ann.

Into the 1820s the foreign trade continued prosperous; and new markets were opened with Madagascar (1820), which supplied tallow and ivory, and Zanzibar (1825), whence came 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. 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). Salem’s general maritime foreign commerce fell off sharply in the late 1820s. Imports, which were the cargoes in Salem ships, were supplanted by American goods, now being produced in great quantities. The interior of the country was being opened for settlement, and many Salemites moved away to these new lands of opportunity. 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. In an ingenious attempt 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. The project, which began with much promise, was suspended (just before construction began) in 1827, which demoralized the town even more, and caused several Salemites to move to Boston, the hub of investment in the new economy. Mr. Ashton was among them, as were John Bray and his sister Mrs. Eliza Bray Robinson; but most of the Brays stayed in Salem.

On 1 Sept. 1821 Jonathan C. Taylor, Salem pump- and block-maker, paid \$200 to John Bray, printer, and David Robinson, horse-letter, and wife Eliza, all of Boston, for their 2/6 interest in a half-house and its lot of land on Carlton Street (ED 236:260). This gave the Taylors a half-interest in the homestead; they probably resided here for a few years, in the southwest end of the house (which seems to have been set off to them), and then purchased and moved into a house on nearby Neptune Street (part of Charter Street nearest Derby Street). On 22 February 1825 the Taylors for \$300 sold to Benjamin Bray, a Salem coach- and chaise-body maker, their 3/6 undivided interest in the dwelling house and other buildings on a lot in Carlton Street. The lot fronted 25’ on the street and ran back about 70’ deep, where it made an ell. Certain parts of the house and land were

still reserved to the Ashton girls (ED 236:259). The lot was bounded on the northwest on the other half of the house and on the southeast by land of Ranson.

On 15 May 1826 Daniel Bray 3d, Salem mariner, for \$100 sold his one-sixth of the premises to Benjamin Bray, who also bought (on 8 July 1826 for \$100) the 1/6 right of William Bray, Salem mariner (ED 240:232, 243: 93). Thus Benjamin Bray, Salem coach and chaise-body maker, acquired the last outstanding shares in the homestead (other than the Ashtons'), which he now owned.

The younger Brays, William and Daniel, who grew up here, had interesting careers as sailors. Daniel, a mariner, married Pheba Skidmore in 1828 and resided at 21 Becket Street in 1836 and 1841, and at 104 Essex Street in 1845. His brother, William Bray, had been involved in one of the most notorious episodes in Salem's long seafaring history. In May, 1830, William Bray, aged about 25, sailed as ship's carpenter on board the Silsbee, Pickman & Stone ship *Friendship*, Capt. Charles M. Endicott and a crew of 16, bound to Sumatra to trade for pepper. Having arrived on the west coast of their destination, they kept guard against the often-hostile Malays as the pepper (300,000 lbs. for William Silsbee) was loaded on the ship, anchored about ¾ mile off the port of Quallah Battoo. One hot morning, while the captain and a few of the crew were on shore, a boatload Malays came alongside with pepper and were allowed to come on board the *Friendship* to help in loading. The mate did not heed his crewmen's alarm at the number of natives on the decks. Suddenly they attacked, using their razor-sharp "creese" swords to kill and wound several of the Salem men. Cut off from guns and handspikes on board, four of the crew jumped overboard. William Bray and his three companions swam two miles to a remote point, and hid, naked, in the jungle. Traveling by night and enduring scorching sunburns as they hid in low brush by day, they spent four days without food and with little drink, and finally arrived at the house of a friendly rajah, Po Adam, who joyfully informed them that the *Friendship* had been re-taken by Captain Endicott and a group from two other American vessels. Four other crewmen had also escaped to the shore, one of them badly hurt: Charles Converse, grievously wounded in the initial assault, had pulled himself up the anchor chains at night and dragged himself on board the vessel, where he was thought to be dead and left undisturbed until the Americans re-took the *Friendship*. The others (five) had been slain. In the next year, the frigate *Potomac* was dispatched to Quallah Battoo, whose forts were taken and destroyed and many Malays killed. For more information about this episode, see G.G. Putnam's article in EIHC 57, among other sources.

In 1830 (census, p. 374) the Benjamin Brays and John Bullocks resided here. In that year a horrifying crime brought disgrace to Salem. Old Capt. Joseph White, a wealthy merchant, owned and 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 local crime-boss who killed himself at the Salem Jail), hired by his friends, Capt. White's own relatives, Capt. Joseph Knapp and his brother Frank (they were executed by hanging). The results of the investigation and trial uncovered much that was lurid about Salem, and more of the respectable families quit the notorious town.

15 March 1831 Benjamin Bray, Salem coach and chaisebody maker for \$1500 mortgaged to Peter E. Webster, Salem trader, the dwelling house and land on Carlton Street (excepting Lucy Ann & Merchaler Ashton's portion) (ED 259:106). With the mortgage money, Mr. Bray evidently enlarged the house by raising the roofline in front and extending it as a two-story lean-to toward the rear, thus adding three or four new small rooms in back. It is likely that the chimneys (as indicated by the brick foundation arches in the cellar), which had once run up the end wall of the original house, remained in place and had fireplaces facing back into the new rooms as well forward into the old rooms.

Benjamin Bray was thirty in 1831, and operated a coach-making business with a workshop (by 1836) at 15 Union Street. In 1825 he had married Mary Lane; and they had three daughters by 1835. Mary (Lane) Bray was born in Salem in 1801, the daughter of shipmaster Capt. William Lane and his wife Elizabeth Brown of Derby Street. Mary had two older sisters and four younger brothers. Her grandfather, Nicholas Lane, a sailmaker, had come to Salem from Gloucester.

By 1836, the house was occupied by the Benjamin Brays and by the John Bullocks (see 1837 Salem Directory). Artisans and laborers like Messrs. Bray and Bullock looked on with concern as Salem's remaining merchants moved quickly to take their equity out of wharves and warehouses and ships and put it into manufacturing and transportation, as the advent of railroads and canals in the 1830s diverted both capital and trade away from the coast. 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. Well into the 1830s, Salem slumped badly.

Despite all, Salem was chartered as a city in 1836. 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. 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 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.

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, active for many years in the early 1800s, led, in the 1830s, 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 were retooled for making high-quality white lead and sheet lead (the approach to Marblehead is still called Lead Mills Hill, although the empty mill buildings burned down in 1960s).

These enterprises were a start toward taking Salem in a new direction. In 1838 the Eastern Rail Road began operating between Boston and Salem, which gave the people of Salem and environs 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. Mr. Bray’s coach-making business was hurt by the railroad, for the stagcoach lines to Boston and other places were rendered all but unnecessary. Mr. Bray could not repay the Webster mortgage; and Mr. Webster foreclosed. In July, 1839, Mr. Webster agreed to convey the premises to Mrs. Mary L. Bray for Mr. Bray’s payment of unpaid balance, \$450, in monthly \$20 installments (ED 452:196). The Bullocks remained the tenants in the house, and were joined there by Mrs. Bullock’s sister, Sarah Cloutman, a tailoress.

In the 1840s, new companies in new lines of business arose in Salem. The tanning and curing of leather was a very important industry by the mid-1800s. It was conducted 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 industrial 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 country areas. Even the population changed, as hundreds of Irish families, fleeing the Famine, settled in Salem; and the men went to work in the factories and as laborers.

During the 1840s, with a family of six children to support, Benjamin Bray drew on his considerable ingenuity to modernize his coach-building business. He was a talented designer, and applied himself to improving the functioning of windows and window curtains. Two of his creations were clever enough to earn him patents. He participated in the first Exhibition of the Salem Charitable Mechanic Association at the Mechanic Hall, on Essex Street at Crombie Street, in September, 1849; and there was awarded a diploma in the category of New Inventions. The diploma was accompanied by the following appraisal by the judges:

“Car Window Spring and Curtain Fixtures, by Benjamin Bray of Salem. This is an ingenious application of springs and rollers to window sashes, to prevent the friction which sometimes occurs, and to allow them to be elevated or depressed with ease, at the same time, by a simple contrivance, the window remains suspended at any point of elevation. Something of this kind would be of very obvious utility in the construction of our car windows, which are often obstinately fixed at a point, in spite of the efforts of the conductors and passengers to open or close them. The objection that the rattling of the cars would continually tend to close the window is theoretically removed by a contrivance which puts the window in equilibrium with the spring, and thus produces the same condition as of the weights and pulleys in the common house window.

“The arrangement of the curtain, though not altogether new in principle, is, so far as the knowledge of the Committee extends, new in its application to window curtains, and seems to possess decided advantages over those in common use. By closing completely at the sides, it not only excludes the sun, but also operates favorably as a double window to exclude the cold air, thus contributing materially to comfort of our parlors.”

The talented Mr. Bray also exhibited “a machine for cutting tapered plugs of any size.” These inventions evidently raised the Bray family out of their financial difficulties, and gave the family a good level of comfort.

***Benjamin Bray (born 1801, son of Benjamin Bray & Margaret Hill Ellison) m. 1825 Mary Lane (born 1801, d/o William Lane & Elizabeth Brown). Known issue, surname Bray:***

- 1. Mary E., 1826***
- 2. Sarah E., 1831***
- 3. Micalar, 1834***
- 4. Edward L., 1837, mariner 1860***
- 5. William M., 1839, mariner 1860***
- 6. George, 1844***

In 1850, the house was occupied by the Benjamin Bray family in  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the rooms, and by the Bullock sisters, Elizabeth, 38, and Mary Ann, 36, seamstresses, in one unit, and, in another unit, by the Bullocks' aunt, Miss Sarah Cloutman, 59, a tailoress (1850 census, ward one, house 192). In 1851, Mr. & Mrs. Bray paid off the money owed (\$375) to Mr. Webster, who had died (ED 452:197, 458:30). Mr. Bray had made the transition from a coach-builder to a manufacturer of curtain fixtures. He continued to prosper in the 1850s. In August, 1859, for \$100 he purchased from Lucy Ann (Ashton) Nassau her right in the property, and the right of one of the heirs of her sister, Merchalor (Ashton) Snow (ED 591:299). He evidently purchased the other three Ashton-Snow rights, and thus came into ownership of the Ashton rooms and land, and so owned the whole house and its lot. With this purchase and the Bray take-over of the Ashton rooms, the Misses Bullock and their aunt Cloutman moved elsewhere. In 1860 the Benjamin Bray family resided here, including the three sons, Edward, William, and George, of whom the first two were sailors (1860 census, house 1247).

Mr. Francis P. Ashton, who had left for Boston about 1825 with his wife Rachel and little daughters, had prospered in the metropolis, and had saved a good deal of money. In September, 1834, he had sold his Bridge Street house and shop for \$1100 (ED 278:54). By 1845 he was ready to retire from hair-dressing in Boston, and he looked to Salem. In March, 1845, he paid \$1200 for a house and land on Dearborn Street, North Salem, and moved back to the town where he had first arrived from Sicily in 1808. By 1850 he and his wife Rachel were caring for two of his grandchildren, Mickler Ashton Snow, 13, and Francis P. Ashton Snow,

four, who lived in their home (1850 census, ward four, house 96). Mr. Ashton had enough money at that time that he was loaning it out at interest (ED 437:266) and was “dispensing great sums of money in acts of private charity” (per his obituary).

Salem continued to change in the 1850s. Some members of Salem’s waning 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 town’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 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.

During the war years, the Bray family moved to Boston. By 1865, the house was occupied by one Parker Bray and by Charles Fillebrown, 29, a varnisher & polisher, wife Mary E., 28, and son Charles H., seven (1865 census, Ward One, house 469). Charles Fillebrown had been a brave soldier during the war, and had served as a private, from Salem, in July, 1862, in Co. G, First Regiment, Mass. Volunteer Heavy Artillery. The Regiment was assigned to ordinary duty in forts near Washington, DC, for a year and more. The outfit saw its first action in the spring of 1864. At the Battle of Harris Farm, in Virginia, on May 19, the Regiment lost 54 men killed (Major Rolfe included) and 312 wounded, with 27 missing. The outfit remained in the campaign against Petersburg, and on June 16, lost 25 killed and 132 wounded in an ill-fated assault on the entrenchments. Charles Fillebrown was one of those wounded. His wounds were evidently severe, and he was mustered out in July, 1864. (see *Mass. Soldiers, Sailors, Marines in Civil War*, 5:610). He resided at One Carlton Street by 1870.

Francis P. Ashton, 82, survived to see the end of the Civil War. He died in November, 1865. In his obituary (1 Dec. 1865 *Salem Gazette*) it was satted that he retired from business in the 1840s and lived in retirement on Dearborn Street, making many charitable donations so that “many a poor family now sincerely mourns his loss. He was guided through life by a strict, stern, unbending moral principle, and for this he was honored and respected by all.”

Through the 1860s and 1870s, Salem continued to pursue a manufacturing course. The managers and capitalists tended to build their new, grand houses along Lafayette Street (these houses may still be seen, south of Roslyn Street). For the workers, they built more and more tenements near the mills of Stage Point. A second, larger, factory building for the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company would be added in 1859, and a third in 1865; and by 1879 the mills would employ 1200 people and produce annually 14,700,000 yards of cloth. Shoe-manufacturing also continued to expand, and by 1880 Salem would have 40 shoe factories employing 600-plus operatives. More factories and more people required more space for buildings, more roads, and more storage areas.

In 1870 this was the residence of the Stickneys and Mearas. Charles Stickney, 21, a currier in the leather industry, and his new bride Minnie, 20, born in New Brunswick. Sherman T. Meara, 35, born in Ireland, was a shoe-factory worker; he lived here with his wife Eugenia E., 32 (born in Mass.), son Frank S., four, and William Jones, 22, a boarder, born in Maine and working as a teamster (1870 census, ward one, house 139). Mr. Meara was a veteran of the Civil War. In 1862, a bootmaker residing at Tisbury, he had enlisted as a private in the 43d Regiment, Mass. Volunteer Infantry, for nine months' service, which occurred in and around Newbern, North Carolina. His regiment saw some skirmishing but mainly did guard duty. He (a bootmaker of North Bridgewater) enlisted again, in November, 1863, in the Second Regiment, Mass. Volunteer Heavy Artillery. This regiment had some Salem officers: Major Samuel C. Oliver (later Lt. Col.) and Surgeon, Dr. James A. Emmerton. Mr. Meara's Company H was posted to Fort Monroe, North Carolina, in December, 1863, and in April, 1864, was engaged in a battle with Gen. Hoke's rebels. After brave resistance, Co. G and Co. H, 275 men, were captured by the Rebels, and the men sent off to Confederate prisons, where most of the men died in sub-human conditions. Mr. Meara escaped from prison on Feb. 22 and made his way back to his regiment, where he was promoted to sergeant and served out the war at Newbern. He was mustered out on 8 July 1865, and soon after came to Salem (see MSSMCW, 4:268, 5:732).



On 17 September 1874 Mrs. Mary Lane Bray, widow of Benjamin Bray, of Boston, for \$1825 sold to John Collins of Salem, the house and land here fronting 38' on Carlton Street (ED 912:226). Thus, after more than 60 years, the homestead passed out of the family ownership.

The new owner, Mr. Collins, 44, was a laborer, born in Ireland. He and his wife Catherine, 54, had a daughter, Mary Ann, 20. They made the house a duplex, and rented out one unit to tenants. By 1880 the Collins family lived here in one unit (Mary Ann, 26, was working as a cigar maker); while in the other lived a widower, William Kane, 45, tinsmith, born in Ireland (he had come to Mass. by 1856), and his children William Jr., 23, a barber, daughter Nellie, 21, a dressmaker, and sons John, 18, cigar maker, James, 11, and Thomas, 7 (1880 census). The Kanes were still here in 1884, when Mr. Kane had his tinsmith's shop at 31 Central Street, on the inner harbor.

About 1882 Mary Ann Collins married Bartholomew N. Flynn, a laborer; but Mr. Flynn died on 12 April 1885 leaving her a young widow. In 1885-6 the house was occupied by the Collinses, Mrs. Flynn, and William Martin, who worked at the gas works off Bridge Street (Salem Directory). John Collins, the owner, died in the late 1880s; and by 1890 the residents here were his widow Catherine, his widowed daughter Mary Ann Flynn, cigar maker, and Henry Randall, a "yachtsman" probably meaning a crewman on a yacht (see Directory).

After withstanding the pressures of the new industrial city for about 50 years, Salem's rivers began to disappear. 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 its old wharves (even the mighty Union Wharf, formerly Long Wharf, at the foot of Union Street) 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.

By 1893 William G. Dodge, shoemaker, and family, were the tenants, while Mrs. Collins and Mrs. Flynn occupied the other unit. In March, 1895, Mrs. Catherine Collins conveyed the premises to her daughter, Mrs. Mary Ann Flynn (ED 1437:294). Mrs. Collins evidently died in the next two years. Mrs. Flynn would

continue to live here for another 50 years, with various tenants moving in and out. By 1897 the tenants were Michael E. Tivnan, a morocco dresser (leather-worker) and Miss Clara J. Tivnan, a shoe-stitcher, probably with their mother, Marie, a nurse, widow of Michael Tivnan. Mrs. Tivnan lived here through 1906, and by 1908 had moved to 4 Messervy Street with her children (Charles, Clara, and Joseph, a police officer).

Salem kept building infrastructure; and new businesses arose, and established businesses expanded. Retail stores prospered, and machinists, carpenters, millwrights, and other specialists all thrived. Starting in the 1870s, French-Canadian families began coming to work in Salem's mills and factories, and more houses and tenements were built in what had been open areas of the city. The Canadians were followed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> 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. Its politics were lively, and its economy was strong.

The owner, Mrs. Flynn, lived here alone in 1907-8. By 1911 her tenant was Mrs. Joanna Leahy, widow of James. In 1913-1914 Mrs. Mary Ann Collins Flynn was alone here again. 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. Mrs. Mary Ann (Collins) Flynn lived here through 1942, with various tenants (in 1920, Emma & Wladislaw Zawacki, a shoemaker, & family; in 1942 Edward N. Tripp and wife Lillian, who ran the Salem Recreation Craft Shop in the rear of the house). In 1943 the Salem Savings Bank took possession of the premises; Mrs. Flynn moved out but the Tripps stayed on.

Salem boomed right through to the 1960s, but 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, barbers, and coach-builders are all honored as a large part of what makes Salem different from any other place.

--Robert Booth, 13 Oct. 2002 for Historic Salem Inc.



Benjamin Crowmshield  
to  
Margaret Bray

Knowe all men by these Presents That I Benjamin Crowmshield of Danvers in  
the County of Essex merchant in consideration of six hundred dollars paid me by Margt<sup>e</sup>  
Bray of Salem in the County of Essex widow the receipt whereof I do hereby acknow-  
ledge do hereby give grant sell and convey unto the said Margaret Bray her heirs  
assigns forever a lot of land lying in Salem aforesaid and is bounded as follows viz  
beginning at the northwest corner of late Brauns's land, thence running northwesterly  
thirty eight feet and bounded southwesterly on Curtlans street thence running by my  
other land northwesterly seventy feet, thence southwesterly thirty seven feet and bounded  
east northerly partly by my other land and partly by Berry's land, thence running south-  
westerly seventy feet to Curtlans street and bounded first mentioned, and bounded  
southeasterly on said Brauns's land with the privileges and appurtenances thereto  
belonging. To have and to hold the granted premises with the appurtenances to the  
said Margaret Bray and her heirs and assigns to her and their use and benefit forever  
and I the said Benjamin Crowmshield for myself my heirs executors & Adms<sup>r</sup>  
do hereby covenant with the said Margaret Bray and her heirs and assigns that  
I am lawfully seized in fee of the premises, that they are free of all incumbrances  
that I have good right to sell and convey the same to the said Margaret Bray  
and that I will and my heirs executors and administrators shall warrant and defend  
the same to the said Margaret Bray and her heirs and assigns forever against the  
lawful claim and demands of any persons and As Witness the case of the seal  
Benjamin Crowmshield for the execution aforesaid and for ten cents more for  
me by the said Margaret Bray do I have all my right to give or to give in a  
granted premises to her the said Margaret Bray and her assigns *In witness*  
whereof we the said Benjamin Crowmshield and Mary his wife have hereunto  
set our hands & seals this twenty sixth day of August in the year of our Lord one  
thousand eight hundred and eight

Benjamin Crowmshield  
Mary Crowmshield  
in presence of us  
Bernard B. Mearns  
Benjamin Crowmshield  
Essex ss. Salem Aug 26<sup>th</sup> 1808. Then the above named Benj<sup>a</sup>  
Crowmshield personally appeared and acknowledged the above instrument  
to be his free act & deed before Nathl<sup>l</sup> Manning Just. Peace  
Essex ss. Decem<sup>r</sup> 5. 1808. recorded & examined by Thos<sup>s</sup> Chasle Reg<sup>r</sup>