

# Historic Salem incorporated

OFFICES AT 15 SUMMER STREET

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51 Summer Street  
Built for  
ISAAC NEEDHAM, baker  
1771

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June 1980

*"to preserve Historic Sites, Buildings and objects,  
and to work for the education of the community  
in the true value of the same."*

On April 5, 1771, Francis Cox, a fisherman, sold a parcel of land to Isaac Needham, a Salem baker, for 150 Pounds 13 Shillings and 4 Pence. The parcel itself was 124 feet square and was located between what is now High, Summer and Broad Streets and the Rider property.<sup>1</sup>

On July 19, 1771, Needham borrowed money from a wealthy Salem lawyer, Francis Cabot, so that he might construct a dwelling house and bakehouse on his newly acquired property. The house, which was built on the southwest corner of the property, and bakehouse believed to be on the southeast end of the premises, was completed in 1772.<sup>2</sup>

The baking business appears to have thrived after the revolution, since Isaac Needham undertook to purchase five additional parcels of land (four of which appear to be contiguous to his original property) between 1781 and 1798.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Needham's lust for land began to outrun his pocketbook and in April of 1798 he mortgaged his dwelling house, bakehouse and surrounding property (as sold to him by Francis Cox) to Edward Southwick (a tanner from Danvers), Peter Brooks, and Ebenezer Beckford.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Needham's next land purchased thus financed, he bought the missing parcel from his land holdings, a piece that bordered on the west and north by his own land, on the south by High Street and on the east by a "new street" now known as Gedney Court.

On December 13, 1809, Jonathan B. Smith, a merchant from Philadelphia, who had successfully recovered a judgment against Isaac Needham, sued on the judgment and in satisfaction of a debt of \$1790.00 took for his own home, the northerly end of the dwelling house of Needham. From that date, until his death in 1830, Isaac Needham lived in the southern half of his massive dwelling house, and it is believed that the difference in the house's interior design was due to Mr. Smith's taking of everything north of the "great doorway on Summer Street" in 1809.<sup>5</sup>

Upon his death in 1830, Isaac Needham owed over \$2500.00 to various and sundry creditors, not the least of which was Edward Southwick.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Southwick was paid out of Needham's estate by the transfer of the land (124 foot square as sold to Needham by Cox) and buildings thereon.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Southwick was simultaneously approached by Robert Brookhouse, a wealthy merchant who purchased the southern half of the dwelling house, the bakehouse and remaining 124 square feet of land on December 5, 1833, granting back to Southwick and Leverett Saltonstall a mortgage to the premises.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Brookhouse purchased the northern half of the dwelling house from the heirs of Jonathan B. Smith in June of 1833.<sup>9</sup>

On March 7, 1839, Brookhouse subdivided the property on which the dwelling house stood, conveying the house and a parcel that was 54' x 79' x 47' x 78' to Edwin W. Morse and Josiah Crocker (sailmakers) as tenants in common.<sup>10</sup> Edwin Morse died two years later, leaving his interest in the premises to his daughter, Lydia, and his minor children.<sup>11</sup> On June 22, 1850, Josiah Crocker and Lydia Morse filed a petition to partition the real estate, the whole of the property being transferred to Lydia and Edwin's other children to set off a debt owed by Crocker to her late father.<sup>12</sup>

Although the loan from Edward Southwick to Robert Brookhouse was discharged on April 30, 1838<sup>13</sup>, it was not clear if Saltonstall joined in the discharge, and thus to clear title, the heirs of Leverett Saltonstall discharged the outstanding mortgage on the property on June 9, 1896, leaving Lydia Morse as free and clear owner.<sup>14</sup> Lydia Morse died in 1905 and left all of the dwelling house to her nephews, George E. and Frank P. Morse, and the minor children of her brother, George W. Morse.<sup>15</sup>

In August of 1919, Lydia's heirs petitioned to partition the real estate<sup>16</sup>, and the property was sold at public auction to a strawman, Walter Pratt, who immediately transferred all of the property back to two of the original co-tenants, George E. and Frank P. Morse.<sup>17</sup>

On October 10, 1957, George Morse sold the property to Wayne M. O'Neill who lived there until July of 1973. During his tenure, Mr. O'Neill's antique fell into substantial disrepair until it was purchased in 1973 for investment purposes by two lawyers - Lawrence Post and Donald Koleman.<sup>18</sup> In 1976, Post and Koleman sold the property to a well-known renovator Robert C. Bramble.<sup>19</sup> With only one intermediate transfer for financing reasons<sup>20</sup>, Mr. Bramble renovated the house and in 1977 sold it to its present owners, Lane and Kathryn Nielsen.<sup>21</sup>

- 1 Book 129, Page 54
- 2 Book 132, Page 139 Discharged on same page, Nov. 10, 1792
- 3 Book 139, Page 115; Book 139, Page 116; Book 156, Page 240;  
Book 160, Page 97
- 4 Book 164, Page 61; Book 164, Page 200; Book 165, Page 115
- 5 Book 167, Page 146
- 6 Estate of Isaac Needham, Essex Probate No. 19207
- 7 Deed of Estate, James O'Dell as Administrator of Estate  
of Isaac Needham Dec. 9, 1830
- 8 Book 270, Page 161 and 162
- 9 Book 270, Pages 158, 159, 160 and 161
- 10 Book 312, Page 141
- 11 Estate of Edwin W. Morse, April 7, 1841, No. 47530
- 12 Book 430, Page 192
- 13 Book 270, Page 162
- 14 Book 1481, Page 125
- 15 Estate of Lydia A. Morse, No. 95921
- 16 Book 2424, Page 278
- 17 Book 2474, Page 327
- 18 Book 5993, Page 152
- 19 Book 6268, Page 560
- 20 Book 6320, Page 425; Book 6397, Page 327
- 21 Book 6418, Page 134

51 Summer Street

Since Isaac Needham's house is listed on the "List of Houses Built in Salem, 1750-1773" (Curwen's list, Essex Institute) as 1771 (appendix A) and the mortgage (book 132 page 139) between Isaac Needham and Francis Cabot, July 19, 1771, mentions "land and building" it seems fitting to give 1771 as the date of construction.

The tax records for the dates involved are not available. The earliest date is 1777:

Isaac Needham - house, bake house and land \$400

Mr. Needham's death record reads:

"Feb. 19, 1830 - Isaac Needham age 84, residence Summer St. - buried P(ickering) H(ill). Chronic Bronchitis."

It might be worth noting that in the letters written by George Phippen (Essex Institute) he mentions "I can not remember any three story dwelling houses built before the revolution." The original house may have been remodeled after the revolution into the three story hipped roof style so popular in Salem at that time.

Joyce King

June 1980

new wharf), Joseph Sprague (distill house), David Calum (on Mill Hill back of Palmer's), Jona. Neale (near the pound), David Masury, Joseph Symonds, jr. (under the same roof with B. H. sepd. by a br. P. wall), W. & T. M., large store on Long wharff, Miles Ward, jr.

1768.

John George, Trantretter, bey<sup>d</sup> Sym<sup>d</sup> Tavern on the road to Lynn, Wm. Lander, jr., Edmund Needham, jr. (new Addition), Jonathan Mason (O. F.), Miles Ward (distill house), Robert Byard (So. Field), Joseph Churchill (on Neale's land), Josiah Gould (near the church), Edward Allen.

1769.

Jona. Frothingham, Josiah Woodberry (near Back St.), Stephen Cook (near Back St.), Robert Peele, jr. (near Back St.), John Cloutman (Schoolhouse lane), John Gardner, jr. (brick), Abram Watson (br. ends), John Ward, 3d, joiner, Richard Masury (in lower parish), Benja. Browne (on Neale's Land), Eben. Phelps (in No. Field), Wm. Browne, Esq. (turned into a dwelling of 2 tenements), Joseph Gavet, Benja. Daland (new Assembly House with tenement for a family), Thomas Safford (at Wharf lane), Saml. West, jr. (barn into a tenement), Benja. Daniels (on So. Creek), Tho. Frye (new addition), Saml. Cheever, Saml. Blyth (new addition), Israel Ober (new addition), John Turner, Esq. (on hired Land for his father's Negroes), Jno. Bullock (near the spot of the old house blown down).

1770.

James Gould (near No. Street), Jona. Phelps (on Hathorne's farm), Jona. Mansfield (barn into a dwelling house for himself), Abijah Northey (on east pt. of Mr. Nutting's garden), Thomas Needham (on So. side of So. Creek), David Ropes, cooper (on Turner's lot, E. Parish), Joseph Nurse, tanner (further down), — Peale (on Lane from Main Str. to Blaney's wharf), Nathan Kimball (upper part of new North Street), Eben Tosier (E. Parish, between J. H. & J. W. Lane), James Symonds (No. Field, West side, near Br.), Workhouse (in the common

Training Field), Jona. Harraden (opposite J. M<sup>da</sup> new House), Jos. Hood (barn now made a tenement in Lowder's Lane).

1771.

Ephraim Symonds (No. Field, E. side high up), Robert Foster (No. Field, E. side near Br.), Penn Townsend (near Col. Turner's old man<sup>sn</sup>), Joseph Hilliard (new No. Street), Peggy Mansfield (below the gate), Isaac, ye late Mr. Gardner's negro (in So. Field), Jona. Ropes, jr. (distill house near Deacon Ward's tanyard), Col. Pickman (near Burying point for his sister Thomas), Capt. Mottey (on So. side ditto), James Collins (in Lambert's lane, E. parish), George Peale (opposite ye Common, E. Parish), James Buffington (O. F. near Town Br.), David Ropes (near Derby's new wharf), Isaac Needham (near new Workhouse), Miles Ward, 3d (So. side of the Creek), Daniel Needham, Jno. Browne, carpenter (in a So. Lane, E. Parish), John Cook (O. F. in Bickford's lane), David Britton (new addition, North St., late Jno. Dampney's), Joseph Ross (new North St.), Ebenr. Pearce (E. Parish, corner of lane to Col. Turner), Jno. Macgraw (Palfray's lane, O. F.), Benja. Abbot (O. F. near Clark's Wharf), Charles Worthen (beyond Buffum's Corner), Charles Browne (on G. T. land, So. Field), — Barker (new addition, E. P. Lane), Jos. Janes (new No. Street), Wm. Hunt (shop turned into a tenement for Molly Gill).

1772.

North meeting house in Curwen's Lane, Ichabod Glover (in new No. Street), John Appleton (Brick Main Str.), Thomas Mason (Brick), Saml. Phippen (near late Mr. Fisk's), Wm. Young (near Blaney's wharf), Joseph Millet (new addition), Josiah Orne (new addition, Sch. House Lane), John Bray (E. Parish, O. F.), Saml. Barton (addition, Main St.), Elijah Haskell (on Silsbee's land, E. P.), Wm. Northey (new addition, Sch. House Lane), Nathl. Richardson (on Ives tanyard, E. P.), Thomas Hutchinson (on Turner lane, E. P.), Wm. Williams (near