Architecture in Salem
A Guide to Four Centuries of Design
The Seventeenth Century

Salem, originally founded by Roger Conant as a Puritan fishing community in 1626, rapidly became a thriving seaport of 1500 residents. Salted codfish was the earliest staple of the colony, but it was soon joined by imported molasses from the West Indies, which was distilled into rum for domestic consumption and export to England. Salem quickly became one of North America’s major mercantile ports, trading with British ports on the Atlantic Ocean.

Architecture in the Seventeenth Century

Architecture of the 17th century is commonly known as the First Period style. A First Period house is typically only one room deep with a prominent central chimney, an overhang on the front façade, and a lean-to in the rear. The timber framing of these buildings is usually visible in the interior of the house, and the exterior covered with unpainted clapboards and minimal decoration. Unlike later buildings, the doors and diamond-paned casement windows are often not placed symmetrically in the walls, although the front door is usually placed in front of the chimney. The doors are board-and-batten, made of vertical boards held together with smaller horizontal battens. The roof of a First Period house is steeply pitched and often has numerous gables.

Gedney House (1665), 21 High Street

The Gedney House is a mid-17th century house that has survived nearly 400 years despite significant changes to its surrounding urban landscape. It was built c. 1665 by Eleazer Gedney, a prominent and wealthy Salem shipwright who was related to John Turner, the builder of the House of the Seven Gables. Originally, the house had the central chimney, oblong shape, and peaked gables of First Period architecture, but like many 17th century homes, it was added to in the 18th and 19th centuries. The house is oriented to the east and originally overlooked Ruck’s Creek and the South River (the present municipal parking lot at the end of the street), where Gedney had a wharf and shipyard. Today, visitors can view the structural carpentry and early decorative painted finishes that were preserved when mid-18th century lath and plaster ceilings, beam casings, and paneled walls were installed. Gedney House is owned by Historic New England and is open by appointment June through October.

House of the Seven Gables (1668), 115 Derby Street

This house was built in 1668 by wealthy merchant John Turner, and it is recognized the world over because of the famous novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The house is also known by the names of its owners, the Turner and Ingersoll families, and it was lived in and renovated by three generations of Turners. For this reason, the Turner-Ingersoll mansion contains some of the earliest and most splendidly restored Georgian rooms north of Boston. The exterior is a 1912 Colonial Revival restoration that celebrates the mansion’s First Period splendor with a second-story overhang and carved pendant drops. The House of the Seven Gables is open for tours daily, and is closed in January.

Jonathan Corwin House (1642-1675), 310 Essex Street

Built sometime between 1642 and 1675, the so-called “Witch House” was bought by Jonathan Corwin in 1675 from Captain Nathaniel Davenport of Boston. Corwin was a wealthy merchant who served as one of the judges of the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, thus lending the house its nickname. The house is an excellent example of an opulent First Period home, and features a steeply pitched saltbox roof, large central chimney, projecting two-story porch, five steep gables, and triple-casement windows. The restored interior is furnished to the late 18th century. The Corwin House is owned by the City of Salem, and is open for tours daily from May through October.

Narbonne House (1675), 71 Essex Street

This house, built by butcher Thomas Ives, is a good example of a craftsman’s family home of the late seventeenth century. When it was first completed, the house consisted of single rooms on the first and second floor, with an attic under the tall peaked roof and a small root cellar. Most people in Salem would have lived in houses about this size. In the eighteenth century, a shorter addition was added to the side of the house away from Essex Street. The National Park Service administers the Narbonne House, and it is open for tours daily.

John Ward House (c. 1684), Brown Street

This house was built by a leather tanner of moderate wealth, more successful than the families living in the Narbonne house, but less than those in the Corwin and Turner houses, and was about equivalent to the Gedneys. It originally stood on a one-acre plot with a garden and outhouse on St. Peter Street opposite the jail used during the witchcraft trials. Like the Gedney and Narbonne Houses, the Ward House was built in stages between 1684 and 1730: first the left side, then the right, and last the lean-to addition at the rear. The house was moved to its current location in 1910, and was one of the earliest buildings to be relocated and restored for historic interpretation in the United States. The Ward House is owned by the Peabody Essex Museum and is open for tours daily.
The Eighteenth Century

Throughout the eighteenth century, Salem grew as the fishing industry and the West Indies trade expanded. During the American Revolution, the town prospered still further by privateering. After the Revolution, Salem reached the greatest heights of its wealth and influence as local merchants began to trade with China, India, and other countries around the world. Ships from Salem returned from their voyages filled with coffee, tea, silks, spices, and other exotic goods that filled the mansions in the town. By 1790, Salem was the sixth largest city in the United States, with a population of about 10,000.

Architecture in the Eighteenth Century

Between 1725 and 1775, the principle architectural style of 18th century America was Georgian, named after the three Kings George who ruled England and her colonies from 1714 to 1820. Balance and symmetry are the main features of Georgian architecture, and is reflected in the floor plans of homes of this period, and in the placement of widows and doors in the street façade. In addition, side or end chimneys often replaced the central chimney of First Period homes. Structures built at the beginning of the period typically have gambrel roofs, while later houses often feature a hipped roof. In New England, brick became a popular material for house construction in the mid-to-late 18th century, although wood was still the most common building material.

Crowninshield-Bentley House (c. 1727), 126 Essex Street

The Crowninshield-Bentley House was built for ship captain and merchant John Crowninshield, and is where the famous diarist Rev. William Bentley boarded with the Crowninshield family for many years. For most of the 18th century, the house was a duplex, because two members of the family each inherited half of the house. This was very common in New England, and explains the presence of multiple kitchens in many 18th century homes. Like most town houses at the time, it originally stood at the curb, but in 1959 it was moved down Essex Street to its present location. The house is owned by the Peabody Essex Museum and is currently closed for renovation.

Hawthorne Birthplace (1730-1745), 115 Derby Street

This house, purchased by author Nathaniel Hawthorne’s grandfather in 1772, is a typical house of the successful captain or small business owner of 18th century New England. The first floor contains a kitchen, parlor, and study; the second floor contains three bedrooms, and more bedrooms and storage are in the attic. Two staircases, at the front and the back of the chimney, provide access to the upper stories. Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in this house on July 4, 1804, and because of the association the house was moved from Union Street to the grounds of the House of the Seven Gables in 1957. It is owned by the House of the Seven Gables, open to the public daily for tours, and closed in January.

Hawkes House (1780), 174 Derby Street

About 1780, the Derby family hired Samuel McIntire to design a house to replace the brick home they had lived in for twenty years. The new house was in the late Georgian style, with tall ceilings, large windows, an imposing three story facade, and hipped roof. The Derbys did not, however, move into the house, and it was left unfinished until about 1800, when it was sold to Benjamin Hawkes, who completed the building. The Hawkes House is part of Salem Maritime National Historic Site, and is not open to the public.

Hawkes House (1780, 1800), 174 Derby Street

Map Number 18

Samuel McIntire (1757-1811) was one of the first American architects. These "designers" usually oversaw house construction and carved decorative work as well as drawing house plans. By the late 19th century, design and construction of homes were different professions.

Peirce-Nichols House (c. 1782), 80 Federal Street

Map Number 4

At about the same time McIntire was building a new house for the Derbys, he was also designing a similar house for Jerathmiel Peirce, co-owner of the merchant ship Friendship. McIntire returned to the Peirce house in 1801 to remodel the interior of the east side for the wedding of Sally Peirce to George Nichols. Behind the house are stables and a terraced garden extending back to a small arbor. The property originally swept down to the North River, where Peirce could dock his vessels. The house is owned by the Peabody Essex Museum, and will be open for tours in the fall of 2007.
Buildings are numbered west to east and north to south on the map.
1. Phillips House (1800, 1821, and 1911), 34 Chestnut Street
2. Salem Athenaeum (1907), 337 Essex Street
3. Ropes Mansion (1727 and 1894), 318 Essex Street
4. Peirce-Nichols House (c.1782), 80 Federal Street
5. First Church (1835), 316 Essex Street
6. Hamilton Hall (1805), 9 Chestnut Street
7. Corwin House (1642-1675), 310 Essex Street
8. Gedney House (1665), 25 High Street
9. U.S. Post Office (1932-1933), 2 Margin Street
10. Salem City Hall (1837), 93 Washington Street
11. Ward House (c. 1684), Brown Street
12. Daland House (1851) and Plummer Hall (1856), 132 Essex Street
13. Gardner-Pingree House (1805), 128 Essex Street
14. Crowninshield-Bentley House (c. 1727), 126 Essex Street
15. Hawthorne Hotel (1924-1925), 18 Washington Square West
16. Custom House (1819), 178 Derby Street
17. Narbonne House (1678), 71 Essex Street
18. Hawkes House (1780), 174 Derby Street
19. Derby House (1762), 168 Derby Street
20. Hawthorne Birthplace (1730-1745), 115 Derby Street
21. House of the Seven Gables (1668), 115 Derby Street
The Nineteenth Century

As the 19th century dawned, Salem ships going “to the farthest ports of the rich East,” as the city’s motto says, brought millions of dollars of goods into the city. However, the 1807 Embargo and the War of 1812 closed many American ports. As the economy recovered, Boston became the regional center for international trade. But Salem’s economy expanded again in the 1830s, as factories in the area processed raw goods like hides, cotton, and jute into cloth, shoes, and other products. Salem’s population grew as immigrants came to find jobs in the mills.

Architecture in the Nineteenth Century

The Federal style (c.1780–c.1830) dominated early 19th century architecture. Symmetry still ruled, but the hipped roof, often hidden by a balustrade, was the most prevalent. While Georgian homes were solid and masculine, the Federal style was light and feminine, with tall, slender chimneys and large fanlights over the entry, creating a feeling of delicacy.

The rest of the 19th century saw an explosion of revival styles. Some of the most popular styles in Salem were Greek, Gothic and Italianate. The Greek Revival (c.1830–c.1850), based on Greek temples, visually connected America with the ancient democracies of Greece and Rome. Its difference from British Georgian design made it a popular way for Americans to express their new independence. Around the same time, the Gothic Revival (c.1840–c.1870) developed as some argued that the cathedral, not a pagan temple should be the model for a Christian home. This style was not symmetrical, and houses often had peaked roofs decorated with verge boards, or “gingerbread trim.” The Italianate Revival (c.1860–c.1890), celebrated the robust, rambling, and informal forms of Italian farmhouses, and had heavy overhanging roofs supported by large brackets, rounded arch windows, and cupolas.

Architecture in Salem National Park Service

First Church (1835), 316 Essex Street

The home of the second oldest Protestant congregation in the U.S. (established in 1629), the First Church is one of New England’s best examples of Gothic Revival stone masonry, and is made of Quincy granite. The interior was originally plain white, but in 1848, the Gothic design was carried through the interior of the church in wood carvings on the walls, pews, and pulpit, as well as the stained glass that was placed in the pointed-arch windows.

City Hall (1837), 93 Washington Street

Salem City Hall, erected in 1836–37, is a good example of the Greek Revival style. The building was designed by Boston architect Richard Bond, and has a granite street facade, with brick walls on the other three sides. A replica of the eagle carved by Samuel McIntire is on the roof. The building was expanded in 1876, and again in 1978-1979.

Gardner-Pingree House (1805), 128 Essex Street

This elegant Federal-style mansion was built for John Gardner, a wealthy Salem merchant and nephew of Elias Hasket Derby. At the time it was built, the house was one of the most expensive buildings in Salem, and it is one of Samuel McIntire’s finest and best-preserved designs. The Gardner-Pingree House is owned by the Peabody Essex Museum and is open for daily tours.

Hamilton Hall (1805), 9 Chestnut Street

Samuel McIntire designed Hamilton Hall for a group of stockholders to serve as the gathering place for the local Federalist political party. For over 200 years, the Hall has hosted balls, auctions, plays, concerts, cotillions for local debutants, and weddings. The building exterior has many beautiful examples of the Federal style, including the evenly spaced arch-topped Palladian windows which light the ballroom and the delicately carved classical swags flanking the eagle. Many dignitaries, including the Marquis de Lafayette have been feted in the hall. Hamilton Hall is open by appointment.

Custom House (1819), 178 Derby Street

Built by the U.S. Customs Service in 1819, this Federal-style building served as a governmental office building from 1819 to 1937. The building was built in the most fashionable style of the period, featuring a flight of granite steps leading to the formal entrance on the second floor of the building. This building was designed to show that the Federal Government could build the type of monumental architecture that merchants and captains were used to seeing in Europe, and was a visual reminder of the strength and stability of the Federal Government. The Custom House is administered by the National Park Service, and is open daily by tour as part of Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

Plummer Hall and the Daland House are owned by the Peabody Essex Museum and house the Phillips Library, museum offices and collections storage.

The Gardner-Pingree House (to the right) was built for a wealthy Salem merchant.

Gardner-Pingree House

Plummer Hall (1856) and John Tucker Daland House (1851), 132 Essex Street

Plummer Hall, (to the left) was designed by Enoch Fuller in the Italianate style, and built for the Salem Athenaeum. It was purchased by the Essex Institute in 1906 and joined by a connector to the Daland House in 1907. The Daland House (to the right) was built for a wealthy Salem merchant. Designed by Boston architect Gridley J. F. Bryant, it is one of the finest Italianate houses in New England and was among the last great townhouses built in Salem. Both of these buildings have the tall, thin windows and heavy brackets supporting the roof that are typical of the Italianate style.

Plummer Hall and the Daland House are owned by the Peabody Essex Museum and house the Phillips Library, museum offices and collections storage.
The Colonial Revival

Salem’s golden era of international shipping was over by the late 19th century, eclipsed by larger ports like Boston and New York. However, manufacturing supported the local economy and the transportation of raw materials and finished goods continued by water and rail. Beginning in the early 20th century, Salem also began to employ its unique history and magnificent architecture to encourage tourism. In 1926, the 300th anniversary celebration of Salem’s founding was a landmark event that attracted visitors from all over the country.

One of the last architectural revival styles to come to Salem was the Colonial Revival, which began in the 1870s with the celebrations around the nation’s 100th birthday. As a style, Colonial Revival influenced architecture, interior decoration, clothing, crafts, landscape design, and literature, as Americans tried to recapture an idyllic past. However, the term “colonial” is misleading as many architects of the period did not worry about historical accuracy when reproducing 17th and 18th century styles.

As a reform movement, the Colonial Revival used educational and cultural institutions to “Americanize” new immigrants. Outdoor museums like Colonial Williamsburg, Greenfield Village in Michigan and Mystic Seaport in Connecticut reflected a new interest in America’s past. This fascination led to the beginning of the historic preservation movement, and Salem was the scene of some of the most important historic building restorations in the country. The earliest period rooms in the U.S. were assembled in 1907 by George Francis Dow, and are still housed in the Peabody Essex Museum’s Phillips Library. Dow also restored the 17th century John Ward House, the 1762 Derby House, and oversaw the construction of “Pioneer Village,” a replica of the c.1630 Salem village for the Salem Tercentenary. Joseph Chandler, the architect who restored the Paul Revere House in Boston, restored the House of the Seven Gables in 1917 at the behest of Caroline O. Emmerton. One of the last large-scale Colonial Revival restorations in Salem was the 1948 restoration of the 1642/75 Jonathan Corwin House, also known as the “Witch House,” which forever identified the City of Salem’s tourist image with the Witchcraft Trials of 1692.

Ropes Mansion (1727 and 1894), 318 Essex Street
This house was built in the Georgian period, and was home to three generations of the Ropes family. It was renovated in 1894 in the Colonial Revival style by the firm Stone, Carpenter & Wilson, and as part of that renovation, the house was moved back from the street to create a front yard. The Ropes Mansion is owned by the Peabody Essex Museum and is open for tours by appointment. The Colonial Revival Garden is open to the public daily.

Salem Athenæum (1907), 337 Essex Street
Architect William G. Rantoul designed this classically-inspired red brick structure for the Salem Athenæum, an independent membership library incorporated in 1810. Dedicated in 1907, the library building is modeled on Homewood, a Federal period mansion built by Charles Carroll of Baltimore. Tours of the building and exhibits are available during open hours year-round.

Phillips House (1800, 1821 and 1911), 34 Chestnut Street
The Phillips House is a mix of many of Salem’s popular architectural styles. The original section of the Phillips House is made up of four rooms from a Samuel McIntire-designed building that was moved to Chestnut Street. The exterior of the Phillips House - the evenly sloped roof, graduated three-stories, symmetrical facade, and corner quoins - is in the Federal style, but as the house was expanded throughout the 19th century, the room decorations and proportions contained both Federal and Victorian styles. The Phillipses, a Massachusetts family since 1630 and ship captains and merchants in Salem since the 1780s, purchased the house in 1911, stripped away the Victorian decor, and created traditional interiors in the Colonial Revival style that reflected the early 20th century nostalgia for the American past. The Phillips House is owned by Historic New England, and is open Tuesday through Saturday from June through October.

Hawthorne Hotel (1924-25), 18 Washington Square West
Opened in 1925, the Hawthorne Hotel was Salem’s first hotel, paid for by local citizens who raised $750,000 to build “[a] hotel to meet the needs of Salem, its guest and visitors…” For the city’s guests, Salem architect Philip Horton Smith created the largest Colonial Revival building in Salem. The hotel has many modified “antique” architectural elements that are hallmarks of the Colonial Revival style including corner quoins, Palladian windows, and recessed arched windows – designs found in actual Georgian and Federal buildings, yet exaggerated here for monumental effect. The Hawthorne Hotel lobby is open all year round.

United States Post Office (1932-33), 2 Margin Street
Salem’s Post Office building epitomizes the nostalgic appeal of the Colonial Revival architecture style. Philip Horton Smith once again looked to 18th and 19th century American building styles for his inspiration. The temple-like classical front with its double flight of stairs highlights the importance of the building, and the flatted columns, or pilasters, as well as the triple arched entrances with fan-light windows are architectural motifs found in many of Salem’s original Colonial and Federal domestic and public buildings. The Post Office is open Monday through Saturday.
Salem Maritime National Historic Site
174 Derby Street
Salem, MA 01970
978-740-1680
www.nps.gov/sama

On the cover, top to bottom: The House of the Seven Gables (1668), the Crowninshield-Bentley House (c. 1727), the US Custom House (1819), and the Salem Athenæum (1907).

For Further Reading:
Flibbert, Joseph et al, Salem: Cornerstones of a Historic City.
National Park Service, Salem: Maritime Salem in the Age of Sail.

All the structures in this guide are either individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or sit within a district listed on the National Register. For more information, visit the National Register web site: www.cr.nps.gov/nr

The National Park Service thanks our partners in this project. For more information on the institutions whose buildings are listed in this guide, please visit their web sites:

www.7gables.org
978-744-0991

www.pem.org
978-745-9500

www.salemathenaeum.net
978-744-2540

www.corwinhouse.org
978-744-8815

www.historicnewengland.org
978-744-0440

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