

THE ROLE OF THE SALEM CUSTOM HOUSE
IN EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

This Interactive Qualifying Project is a study of the duties and work of the men who worked for the U.S. Custom House in the town of Salem, Massachusetts in the early nineteenth century. The project was carried out in cooperation with the Salem Maritime National Historic Site, and finished with the text of an audio tape on the duties of a Custom House inspector, a posterboard describing "A Day's Work at the Port of Salem," a final report, and thoughts for possible topics for further research at the site.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Salem as a Seaport

Until 1790, Salem was merely an average seaport with an average amount of activity. It was similar to any of New England's other ports. All of these other ports, such as Portland, Portsmouth, New Bedford, Newport, Providence, New London, and New Haven, had better harbors and more natural advantages than Salem.¹ Yet, from 1790 to the mid 1800's, Salem was one of the best known ports of trade throughout the world.

As of the 1790 census, the first U.S. census taken, Salem was the sixth largest city in the United States. Only Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, South Carolina were larger than Salem.² Again, all of these cities were seaports and had natural advantages that were superior to Salem's. It seems that there is only one way to account for Salem's success. The factor that set Salem apart from other seaports was the type of men that worked there.

Salem had a greater number of intelligent, courageous, industrious people during that period than any other town in America.³ These people were Puritans and had gone through long, serious training for excellence in their professions. Merchants, captains, and seamen alike pushed themselves to the top because they realized that they would soon become rich for their efforts.

¹James Duncan Phillips, Salem and the Indies, (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1947) p. 2.

²Ibid, p.1.

³Ibid, p. 2.

Salem's boom did not actually start in the year 1790. It gradually occurred over the seven years between the official ending of the Revolutionary War and the period prior to 1790. When John Derby brought in the ship Astrea during the first week in April, 1793, with the first news to reach America of the signing of the peace treaty ending eight years of war with Britain, he led the procession of big privateers and letters of marque which were soon to return to their home port.⁴

With the return of these men and their vessels, the commerce of Salem was altered. Before this period (Pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary), the main industries of the area were shipbuilding and light trading among the colonies and European nations. During this boom, trading became the bulk of the commerce, and shipbuilding became a supportive industry. With the new emphasis on trading and shipping, the areas and routes of trade also changed. Merchants and captains would frequent regions that would be the most profitable to their businesses.

Prior to 1790, trade had been mainly with Britain, France, and Spain. Trade among the colonies also played a major role in this industry during this period. Now that merchants sought new lands for trade, the captains used their bolsters and centurion to the West Indies and the East Indies. This route of travel brought in many goods not often traded in the United States.

Some of the goods to be shipped to Salem were pepper, salt, rubber, molasses, rum, indigo, and tobacco. Along with the new goods came a system of taxation for duties on these goods by the U.S. government. With the imposition of taxes and duties the job of the Custom House assumed importance. The

⁴James Duncan Phillips, Salem and the Indies (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1947) p. 30.

sections which follow deal with the Custom House, its functions,
and its workers.

CHAPTER II

THE SALEM CUSTOM HOUSE

During its most active years, the Salem seaport was one of the most important trade centers in the world. Trade, which involved a vast assortment of commodities, was conducted with ports worldwide. Before any incoming goods could be sold to merchants and before any ships or sailors could leave or enter Salem, they all were overseen, inspected, and taxed by the Custom Service. The building housing the custom officials was known as the Custom House.

A. History of Buildings and Locations.

The original customs officers were, of course, British. The first building associated with these officials was known as the "Port House," which in 1636 was located in Salem, somewhere on South River. In 1645, the officials were removed to the "French House," located on Gedney Court, where they remained for the next 100 years; however, at some point during that time, the custom house was maintained at number 16 Essex Street and then later near the First Church.

From around 1771 until October 6, 1774, the custom house was located at 261 Essex Street. Here, at a shop owned by either Mrs. Eppes or Mrs. Gardiner, the officials worked until the "Salem Fire" forced destruction of the building. Incidentally, many records were scattered or destroyed during that catastrophic fire which leveled much of Salem.

Around this time, England sent several British officials to oversee commercial trading operations. England had restricted all trade to fuel and necessary goods and needed officials to enforce the laws. After the fire, custom officers worked in the rooms occupied by this new British board. They remained only a short while, as they were soon recalled to England.

During the Revolution and until 1798, any customs work

was carried out at "Wards Corner" near the junction of Essex and North Streets. The custom house was then moved to a building on the easterly side of Central Street, and then across the street in 1805 to a brick building owned by John J. Perkins.

In 1807, the custom house was again transferred to Essex Street, to a house built by Dr. Moses Little, a building opposite the Plummer Hall. Located where Washington Square is today, at the intersection of Essex and Newbury Streets, was the "Archer" building, which became known as the Custom House in 1811. Following one more move in 1813, the Custom House was to remain on Derby Street, across from the Derby Wharf, where it has been located from 1819 until today.⁵

B. Construction of a New Custom House.

At some time around 1817-1818, a committee of five of the most prominent merchants of Salem was chosen, at the request of the Federal government, to decide on a location for a new custom house. After considering five separate lots, which, incidentally, were also on Derby Street and adjacent to the present-day site, the committee bought the land for \$5000 after the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury.

The Federal government allotted \$10,000.00 for the construction of the Custom House and "suitable and durable warehouses," emphasizing that "the accommodation of the officers of the customs is a subordinate consideration."⁶ Perley Putnam and John Saunders, both custom employees, were appointed in charge of general building construction by William R. Lee. On July 1, 1818, they sent two plans for the building to the Federal government for approval; both exceeded their budget.

⁵The information regarding the history of the Custom House and locations was obtained from David Mason Little's "Documentary History of the Salem Custom House, with names of officials communicated by George Granville Putnam," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 67, January, 1931.

⁶Letter dated June 2, 1818 from W.H. Crawford, U.S. Treasury, taken from D.M. Little's "Documentary History of the Salem Custom House," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 57, January, 1931.

Building construction got under way after several compromises of budget and building size, and was due to be completed on the first of November, 1818. As things usually occur, final finishing and painting continued until the following summer. Incidental completion costs nearing \$5000.00 were incurred. They were picked up by the Federal government, but not without scolding.

The completed Custom House consisted of a basement, two upper floors, and a lookout for incoming vessels. The first floor incorporated the collector's, the deputy collector's, and surveyor's offices and a fireproof vault. The upstairs level contained the Naval officer's, weigher's and gauger's, inspector's, and boatmen's rooms as well as a private office for the collector. On the roof stands a proud eagle carved by Salem's Joseph True. Directly behind the Custom House, a warehouse was constructed.

C. Positions and Responsibilities.

When a ship was sighted coming into port, Custom House boatmen would row one or several inspectors out to meet the vessel. In 1837, the Custom House employed two boatmen and eleven inspectors.⁷ The average salary of an inspector at that time was \$600.00 per annum.⁸ Because of the possibility of disease, the ship had to remain anchored in a quarantined portion of the harbor until cargo and crew were deemed safe. Custom House inspectors were responsible for comparing the cargo with the ship's manifest: a record of what cargo should be on board. This was only a rough check to make sure that the manifest was approximately accurate. The inspectors also examined the crew for illness and reviewed other ship's documents.

⁷"A Century of the Salem Custom House," The Salem Register, May 8, 11, 15, 1876.

⁸Winfield S. Nevins, "Nathaniel Hawthorne's Removal from the Salem Custom House," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 53, April, 1917, pp 97-132.

If the cargo and crew checked out, the inspector issued a certificate of merchandise, marked the cargo, and sealed the ship's hatches.⁹ The ship was only then allowed to dock, at which time the weighers, measurers, and gaugers went to work. In 1837, one or more of the six weighers and gaugers calculated the amounts of cargo as it was unloaded, for which they were paid \$1500.00 per annum.¹⁰ The weighers calculated the amounts of cargoes valued by weight, using a six-man scale. Often, ships would carry their own sets of weights, to make sure that they were not cheated.¹¹ Using various rules and scales, the measurers were responsible for cargo valued by size. The gauger's job involved calculating amounts of cargo valued by volume, such as rum or molasses, and then issuing gauger's certificates. Gauger's, who were often coopers (barrelmakers), used dipsticks and calipers for measuring volume. Exchanging and overlapping jobs was quite common.¹²

Once the amount of cargo was calculated, the results were reported to the surveyor. His job included issuing measurement certificates to vessels, registering vessels, assessing tonnage duties, and overseeing all cargo measuring work. He also used hydrometers to measure the alcoholic content of distilled spirits. The surveyor issued spirit certificates and permits to proceed.

The highest ranking and highest paid official of the Custom House and the man in charge of collection of duties was the collector. This man issued outward manifests, certification

⁹Some of the information concerning Custom House jobs was obtained from the National Parks Service's "Custom House Officials and Employees."

¹⁰The National Parks Service's "Salem was a Busy Seaport," a typewritten unpublished report.

¹¹Interview with Mr. John Frayler, National Parks Service, Salem Maritime Historical Site, February 15, 1979.

¹²Ibid, February 15, 1979.

of crew lists, citizenship certificates, and certificates of importation. The collector was appointed by the U.S. President and was responsible for appointing Naval officers, inspectors, weighers, gaugers, and measurers.

Another employee of the Custom House and an assistant to the collector was the Naval officer. According to Brice's Revenue Laws, his duties were to:

receive copies of all manifests and entries, and shall, together with the collector, estimate the duties on all goods, wares, and merchandise subject to duty (and no duties shall be received without such estimate) and shall keep a separate record there of, and shall countersign all permits, clearances, certificates, debentures, and other documents, to be granted by the collector; he shall also examine the collector's abstracts of duties, and other accounts of receipts, bonds, and expenditures, and if found right, he shall certify the same.¹³

The Naval officer functioned as an accountant or comptroller assisting the collector. His job was abolished in 1865.

Other Custom House employees included deputy collectors who assisted the collector, deputy Naval officers who assisted the Naval officer, and clerks who kept copies of all records.

D. Employees.

In order to fully understand early nineteenth century Salem commerce and the role played by the Custom House, it was necessary to acquire as much information on the men who worked there as possible: place of birth; their education or training; organizations they belonged to; their roles as seamen or merchants; and income. In theory, answers to these questions should provide us with an understanding of Custom House employees. Unfortunately, only a modest amount of

¹³Brice, "Brice's Revenue Laws, a Source of all the Laws of the United States Now in Force Relative to Commercial Subjects," p. 50.

information can be found on the upper-ranking officials and next to none on the laborers.

1. Collectors.

At the time of customs reorganization in 1789, the districts of Salem and Beverly were established as one port. A collector, a Naval officer, and a surveyor were assigned by the Federal government to Salem, while an additional surveyor was to reside in each port of entry at Beverly and at Ipswich.¹⁴

Before this reorganization and during the Revolution the collector was a man named Warwick Palfrey. He was born in Salem in October of 1715, attended Latin Grammar School, and became a successful merchant. In addition to holding various public trusts, he was a member of the Committee of Safety and Correspondence in 1774-5, and a Deputy or Representative to the General Court in 1776. Palfrey died on October 10, 1797.

His successor, Major Joseph Hiller, was born in Boston on March 26, 1748. In early life, he was a silversmith.¹⁵ Hiller came to Salem in 1770 and served as an officer in the Revolutionary army. He was master of Essex Lodge of Freemason in Salem and held the collector's office from 1784 through the reorganization until 1802. Hiller died in Lancaster, Massachusetts on February 8, 1814.

Colonel William Raymond Lee replaced Hiller in 1802. He was born in Manchester in 1744, but moved quickly to Marblehead, where he started a fishing business.¹⁶ Lee was

¹⁴Unless otherwise noted, all information on high-ranking Customs officials was obtained from David Mason Little's "Documentary History of the Salem Custom House." Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 57, January, 1931.

¹⁵"Portraits in the Essex Institute," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 71 (1935), p. 154.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 154.

regarded by his community as a "brave soldier, an accomplished gentleman and a highly esteemed merchant and citizen."¹⁷ He also served 6 years as a selectman. Lee died, while collector, on October 26, 1824.

Next in office was General James Miller, born April 25, 1776 in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He studied law with the Honorable James Wilson at Amherst and Williams College and was admitted to the New Hampshire bar.¹⁸ He served with brilliant distinction in the War of 1812, became governor of the Arkansas Territory in March of 1819 and was elected to Congress in 1824. Miller was collector from 1825 until 1849. He died in Temple, New Hampshire on July 7, 1851.

He was followed by William Baker Pike, 1857-61; Willard Peele Phillips, 1861-65; Honorable Robert Samuel Rantoul, 1865-66; Charles Warwick Palfray, 1869-73; Captain Guilford Parker Bray, 1886-94; William Crowninshield Waterman, 1894-98; Captain John Daland, 1898-1903; and the Honorable David Mason Little, 1903-13.

2. Deputy Collectors.

The first deputy collector following the departure of the British officers was Charles Cleveland. He was born in Norwich, Connecticut on June 21, 1772, but moved to Salem at age eleven to become a merchant's apprentice and sailor. In addition to holding the office of clerk and deputy collector from 1789 to 1802, he was the owner of the ship "Rajah."¹⁹

¹⁷David Mason Little, "Documentary History of the Salem Custom House," Essex Institute Historical Collections.

¹⁸"Portraits in the Essex Institute," p. 154.

¹⁹George Granville Putnam, "Salem Vessels and their Voyages," Essex Institute Historical Collections, April 1921, p. 84.

William Oliver was born on December 10, 1778. He came into the Custom House at 14 as an office boy, clerk, and then as deputy collector, from 1803 until 1839. He was known throughout Salem as a walking enthusiast, had a wonderful knowledge of Salem commerce, and was very minute in the details of local history.²⁰

Oliver was replaced by John B. Knight, deputy collector from 1839 until 1843. He was a mariner and merchant born in Salem, August 1, 1803.²¹ Knight was also owner of the "Blanchard," and a member of the Salem Marine Society.²² He died June 7, 1846.

Knight was succeeded by Ephraim F. Miller, 1843-49; J. Linton Waters, 1849-54; Henry E. Jenks, 1854-57; Chipman, 1864-73; and J. Frank Dalton, 1873-81.

3. Naval Officers.

It was previously explained that the Naval officer functioned as an accountant or comptroller. All information indicated that this responsibility was in effect from the reorganization of 1798 until the office was abolished in 1865. It is the opinion of the National Parks Service that during one period, the Naval officer's room functioned as a "waiting room" for captains whose vessels were awaiting customs clearance. We found no data to support this theory, unless this usage occurred after the abolishment.

The first non-British Naval officer was assigned during the reorganization of 1799. William Fickman was born March 12, 1746, was a graduate of Harvard and a merchant. He died

²⁰George Granville Putnam, "Salem Vessels and their Voyages," Essex Institute Historical Collections, April, 1921, p. 21.

²¹"Portraits in the Essex Institute," Vol. 71.

²²"Ship Registers of the District of Newburyport," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 70, (1934), p. 19.

November 5, 1815.

Succeeding Pickman were Samuel Ward, 1803-12; Henry Elkins, 1812-29; John Swasey, 1829-42; Abraham True, 1842-46; John D. Howard, 1846-49; William Brown, 1849-53; Charles Millet, 1853-58; John Ryan, 1858-60; and Joseph Dalton, 1861-65. At the end of Joseph Dalton's term, the position was abolished.

4. Surveyors.

As with the Naval officer, the first American to be Surveyor was appointed at the reorganization of 1789. Bartholomew Putnam held the office from then until 1798. All that is known about Mr. Putnam is that he owned the ship "Jason," and died on April 17, 1815, at the age of 73.²³

George Hodges held the office until 1817. He was known as a "respectable and thrifty man."²⁴ He died on July 28, 1827, when he was still the owner of the ship "Ceres."²⁵

Mr. Hodges was replaced by Colonel John Saunders, who held the office until 1830. He was born September 15, 1760, received degrees from Harvard and Dartmouth, in 1781 and 1791, respectively, and was a successful merchant. He commanded the Corps of Cadets in 1789 and was captain of the Salem Infantry in 1805. Before he died in 1845, he was a brigade major and inspector. While employed by the Custom House, he and Perley Putnam were responsible for the general construction of the present-day building.

James Dalrymple held this office until 1834. He was born in 1766 in Belfast, Ireland, came to Salem August 8, 1795, and died March 24, 1839. He was known as a highly respected and

²³"Portraits in the Essex Institute," Vol. 71.

²⁴Benjamin F. Browne, "Youthful Recollections of Salem," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 49, p. 56.

²⁵George Granville Putnam, "Salem Vessels and their Voyages," Essex Institute Historical Collections, April, 1921, p. 30.

useful citizen.

His successors were: Joseph Noble, 1834-38; Edward Palfray, 1838-41; Stephen Daniels, 1841-43; and Nehemiah Brown, 1843-46.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was next to hold the surveyor's office. Born in Salem, July 4, 1804, Hawthorne graduated from Bowdoin in 1825, and was a weigher/gauger in Boston from 1834 to 1841 before becoming surveyor from 1846 until 1849.

He accepted the office to provide financial security and to allow himself plenty of leisure time to write. However, while employed by the Custom House, he was mentally or emotionally unable to complete any full-length works.

His dismissal was brought about by a political scandal between "Whigs" and "Democrats." Hawthorne's removal was due to a change in the political party ruling the country, not because of his job performance or literary ability, as the scandal attempted to prove. He later died in Plymouth, New Hampshire on May 19, 1864.

Succeeding Hawthorne was Allen Putnam, an experienced shipmaster and president of the East India Marine Society. Putnam died on September 5, 1868, at the age of 74.

His successors were: Lewis Jesselyn, 1868-70; Ebenezer Dodge, 1870-71; William C. Waters, 1871-73; Charles F. Williams, 1873-75; Joseph Mosley, 1875-77; and Charles D. Howard, 1877-79. The office was then abolished.

5. Summary.

From the above character sketches, it is apparent that collectors were chosen from learned, respectable men who, at one time, were merchants and displayed distinguished military service. The only prerequisite for a deputy collector seems to be a knowledge of commerce. Several deputies were also owners of ships. Little is known about the Naval officers, but due to the nature of their work, it can be assumed that they would need reasonable literary ability and knowledge of

the trade industry. Surveyors were mostly merchants and shipowners experienced in trading, although a few, such as Hawthorne and Colonel John Saunders, were college graduates.

As the workers' rank in the Custom House is decreased, the amount of information available is proportionately reduced. All that is known about the extensive lists of weighers, gaugers, measurers, and inspectors is that they were almost universally connected with shipping. They were either owners of ships, masters of vessels or private merchants. They apparently were educated by experience.

E. Government Relations and Control.

Information concerning relations between the Federal government and the Custom House was obtained from reading letters exchanged between them. It must first be emphasized that the collector, deputy collector, and surveyor are all appointed by the Federal government. Men of literary attainments and distinguished military service were much appreciated for these appointments and often encouraged to public office. Custom officials were often members of the same political party as the President in office. All other employees of the Custom House were hired and dismissed by the highest ranking employee, the collector.

During Nathaniel Hawthorne's appointment as surveyor, April 3, 1846 to June 7, 1849, there was a typical example of political partisan favoritism. Hawthorne and other Custom House officials were Democrats appointed by President Polk, also a Democrat. When President Zachary Taylor (Whig) took office, he replaced collector Ephraim F. Miller (Democrat) with a Whig, General James Miller. All other high-ranking customs officials were also replaced with Whigs, with the exception of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Collector Miller was in favor of keeping Hawthorne because of his excellent literary ability. Local Whig party officials were violently opposed to Hawthorne's being surveyor, and made their grievances known

to President Taylor and Collector Miller, who finally succumbed to public pressure. Hawthorne's removal was a scandal based on discrediting Hawthorne's reputation rather than his political affiliations.²³

The relations between the Custom House and the Federal government are best noted from the reprints of letters that were exchanged between them at the time when the Custom House was constructed in the period from 1818-1819.²⁴ In 1818, negotiations were made between the Federal government and a committee of five of the most eminent merchants in Salem about selecting a suitable site on which the Custom House was to be built. An easily adaptable site was chosen that had a price tag of \$5000, and a report was submitted by the committee to the authorities at Washington, D.C. through the collector of customs, William R. Lee. On June 2, 1818, William R. Lee received a letter of authority to purchase the land as recommended by the committee from the Secretary of the Treasury, William H. Crawford.²⁵

On June 10, 1818, the lot was bought by the Federal government for \$5000, and plans for the Custom House building were approved by the Secretary of the Treasury Crawford, so long as the cost of the building did not exceed \$10,000. After a period of work at the Custom House building, Collector Lee wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury requesting an additional \$3000 to complete the construction. The following are excerpts from that letter:

²³Stephen Nissenbaum, "The Firing of Nathaniel Hawthorne," The Essex Institute Collections, Vol. 114, pp. 57-86.

²⁴David Mason Little, "Documentary History of the Salem Custom House," The Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 67, p. 17.

²⁵*Ibid*, pp. 12, 17-19, 152-155.

I herewith transmit for you consideration a statement of the expenditures on the new Custom House and publick stores authorized to be built for the use of the U. states and also an estimate of the probable cost of so for finishing the Custom House as to be enabled to occupy it the ensuing spring . . . it will be seen that the expenditures has created an excess beyond the sum appropriated . . . I am under necessity of soliciting the further aid of Gov. and requesting you to make me such an appropriation as will be necessary to enable me to effect the object of the establishment--26

Secretary Crawford wrote a letter in answer to Lee's request, expressing his displeasure on the outcome of the business, but no further argument was made about the matter. Secretary Crawford agreed to give additional aid of \$2000 to Salem on the condition that the bills for the rest of the construction be sent to the Federal government instead of putting the \$2000 into Collector Lee's account. The following are excerpts from that letter:

Your letter postmarked February 22nd has been duly received.

Considering that the sum to be expended in constructing the Custom House and stores was expressly limited in my communication to you the 7th of July, and that in your letter to me of the 24th of July you advised me that you were acting in conformity with my instructions contracted for erecting the necessary building; it is rather surprising that you should now apply to the Treasury for more than three thousand dollars, to enable you to complete the object . . . At all events, no deviation from the original plan involving additional expense ought to have been attempted without previous approbation of this Department; and as I am by no means satisfied with the result of this business . . .27

²⁶David Mason Little, "Documentary History of the Salem Custom House," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 67 p.18.

²⁷Ibid, pp. 152-155.

Note: The present Custom House is the first, and in fact, the only public building that was ever erected in Salem by the Federal government.

F. Taxes and Duties.

Duties on goods were levied according to their measurement (weight, volume, size), to the public need, or according to where the goods came from. All changes of the rates of taxation were made by the Federal government. Below is a list of goods and their duties that were common cargo at the port of Salem. The years of the various taxes are also listed:

CUSTOM TAXES AND DUTIES²⁸

sugar, white	3¢ per lb.	1792
	2¢ per lb.	1794
	2½¢ per lb.	1804
taffeta, Indian	12½¢ ad valorem, 2½¢ for fund	1790
tea, Bohea	6¢ per lb.	1790
gunpowder	12¢ per lb.	1803
hyson	32¢ per lb.	1801
	20¢ per lb.	1790
	20¢ per lb.	1793
	32¢ per lb.	1804
souchong	10¢ per lb.	1804
wine, red	23¢ per gallon	1789
	10¢ per gallon	1790
	18¢ per gallon	1791
	20¢ per gallon	1793
	40¢ per gallon	1791
madeira	30¢ per gallon	1793
	40¢ per gallon	1793
malaga	40¢ ad valorem	1790
sherry	25¢ per gallon	1792
	31¢ per gallon	1791
	25¢ per gallon	1791
mackeral	5¢ ad valorem	1791
matts, duck	10¢ ad valorem	1790
molasses	2½¢ per gallon	1790
muslins	5¢ ad valorem	1790
nails, sheathings	\$1.00 per ton	1794
nails	2¢ per lb.	1801
wankeens	12½¢ ad valorem	1791

²⁸"Goods and their Duties" (unpublished) SHX-3.

osnaburg	5% ad valorem	1791
	10% ad valorem	1804
	12% ad valorem	1791
platilla	12% ad valorem	1802
quills	15% ad valorem	1802
raisins	10% ad valorem	1792
rum	22% per gallon	1791
	28% per gallon	1793
	13% per gallon	1791
salt	6% per bushel	1790
	12% per bushel	1791
sheepskins	10% ad valorem	1792
sheeting	12% ad valorem	1804
	7% ad valorem	1793
silks	15% ad valorem	1800
soap	2% per lb.	1805
	2% per lb.	1790
sugar, brown	2% per lb.	1805
	2% per lb.	1799
	1% per lb.	1790
	1% per lb.	1792
cocoa	2% per lb.	1793
coffee	5% per lb.	1804
	2% per lb.	1790
	4% per lb.	1790
	5% per lb.	1805
cordage	75% per hundred weight	1789
	\$1.00 per ton	1792
duck ravens	5% ad valorem	1789
fish, pickled	75% per barrel	1789
gin	25% per gallon	1804
	8% per gallon	1790
	12% per gallon	1791
	23% per gallon	1792
	20% per gallon	1793
	20% per gallon	1791
	33% per gallon	1793
glass, window	15% ad valorem	1793
handkerchief	12% ad valorem	1802
	7% ad valorem	1792
herring	5% ad valorem	1791
hoops, iron	10% ad valorem	1792
indigo	25% per lb.	1804
	25% per lb.	1793
	15% per lb.	1824
iron	7% ad valorem	1792
iron, bar	5% ad valorem	1790
	7% ad valorem	1792
ivory	7% ad valorem	1792
linens	5% ad valorem	1792
	7% ad valorem	1792
	5% ad valorem	1793

Salem has often been referred to as a "busy seaport." During its prime years, the early nineteenth century, the port of Salem was one of the most important in the world. This feat of establishing a center of commerce was accomplished through the ambition of Salem's private merchants who recognized quality merchandise at low prices and potential markets where the goods were high in demand. But, as in all business, the government took its share.

In the December quarter of 1807, the total duties that were collected at the Port of Salem were \$513,000. For the year 1808, the duties collected at Salem totalled \$504,326.82; but the Custom House did not only collect duties: an amount of \$559,000 was paid to the Custom House for debentures, bounties, and other demands, and also \$11,557.99 was paid for expenses in the same year. The total amount of transactions that took place at Salem was \$1,074,884.81. From 1852 to 1857, inclusive, the total revenue was \$1,017,543, and for the same time period the expenses of the Custom House were \$137,146.²⁹

C. A Day's Work at the Port of Salem.

"A typical work day" at the Salem Custom Service was a topic for part of the project work and was to be presented on a posterboard at the Salem Custom House. "A Day's Work" posterboard was an aid for the National Parks Service in its efforts to present to the public additional insight into the nation's historical past.

The events that occurred on a "typical day" at the Salem Custom House were recorded from the information that we obtained by extensive research. This information contained descriptions of the jobs of all the employees at the Custom House, the relation between each others' duties, the goods that were imported and exported from Salem, the ships

²⁹George Granville Putnam, "Salem Vessels and their Voyages," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 59, pp. 196-200.

that carried these cargoes, and the taxes levied on the goods. The resources that the project group used contained records of people who worked at the Custom House and records and manifests of all the ships that entered the Port of Salem. For a typical workday, a date was picked in a period when Salem was a busy port. A ship entering Salem which operated at that time period was chosen as an example. From this material, "A Day's Work at the Port of Salem" was narrated in the following paragraphs:

On January 18, 1805, the ship "Good Hope," captained by George Cleveland, entered the Port of Salem from Sumatra in the East Indies.³⁰ The vessel carried a cargo of coffee, tea, pepper, indigo, molasses, and rubber, all of which were to be sold in the United States.³¹ After entering the harbor, the "Good Hope" anchored and waited for its cargo to be inspected by Custom House authorities.

An inspection of a ship, such as the "Good Hope," took place in three steps. In the first step, a Custom House inspector was rowed out to the ship by boatmen. His duty was to examine the cargo as a whole (no. of pieces) and to check if his count agreed with the count of the ship's manifest. A manifest, a record book containing a list of the ship's cargo, told what each package, bundle, or barrel contained and how much material was in each item. If everything was properly checked, then the inspector would allow the vessel to dock.

Once the ship docked, the second step began with the actual weighing, measuring, and gauging of the cargoes. The

³⁰Memorandum of Prices of Houses, Vessels, and Goods Sold in Salem, 1621-1826," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 64.

³¹George Granville Putnam, "Salem Vessels and their Voyages," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 59, pp. 196-200.

weighers, measurers, and gaugers had certain duties:

Weighers--mathematically figured out the amount of goods that were to be weighed and taxed by weight.

Gaugers---figured out mathematically the amount of goods that were to be taxed by volume. He was usually a cooper (barrel-maker).

Measurers--mathematically figured out the amount of goods that were to be valued and taxed by size.³²

These workers used the following equipment:

Six-man scale--used by weighers. Two men would hold the weighing arms. Two men would load the cargo onto the cradle. One man moved the weights until the scale balanced. The last man recorded what the cargo was and its weight.

Caliper gauges--used by gaugers. This instrument was used to measure the diameter of barrels, kegs, or casks. The depth of the two ends, and the depth in the middle were measured and from the formula the amounts were calculated.

Hydrometer--used by surveyors. It was used to measure the proofs of distilled spirits.

Diosticks--(gaugers' spears) used by gaugers. They were used to measure the amount of liquid in barrels and kegs.

Rules and scales--used by measurers. These were used to measure the amounts of material in the same manner as using a ruler or yardstick.

The purpose of weighing, gauging, and measuring these goods was to levy duties and taxes on them. Figuring was not the job of a single man, the weigher. The amount of goods was figured out according to the form in which they were brought to Salem. Weighers worked with items such as pepper, brown sugar, coffee, tea, indigo, cloves, cocoa, soap, and nails. Gaugers figured out volumes of barrels which contained liquids, such as rum and

³²"Custom Service Officials and Employees," (unpublished) Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

molasses. Measurers handled items by size, such as bushels of salt and yards of cloth.

A typical cargo entering the port of Salem consisted of one item or a variety of goods. The ship "Good Hope" carried six different goods to be sold in the United States. Some items that frequently came into Salem during the early 1800's and the duties levied against them follow:³³

pepper	6¢ per lb.
salt	6¢ to 12¢ per lb.
cloves	24¢ to 42¢ per lb.
cocoa	2¢ per lb.
coffee beans	2¢ to 5¢ per lb.
tea	20¢ to 32¢ per lb.
brown sugar	2¢ to 2½¢ per lb.
indigo	15¢ to 25¢ per lb.
molasses	2½¢ to 5¢ per lb.
rum	13¢ to 28¢ per lb.
soap	2¢ per lb.

Items were taxed according to their value as necessities. Salt was considered a necessity, and pepper was valued as a luxury. In this manner, items were taxed at different rates. Different rates for the same goods depended upon the location from which each item came.

After everything had been weighed and recorded, the officers of the Custom House did their work. This was the last step for the ship and its cargo. The surveyor reviewed the total amounts of all the cargoes and levied taxes, accordingly, to the ship's master. He also measured the proofs of the distilled spirits, when were taxed according to their proofs. For example, the ship "Good Hope" was assessed total duties of \$19,195.40³⁴ When he finished his work and saw that the duties

³³"Custom Taxes and Duties," (unpublished) Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

³⁴George Granville Putnam, "Salem Vessels and their Voyages," Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol. 59, pp.196-200.

had been issued and collected, he gave the ship its Permit to Proceed, which was a clearance to move on to its next destination. This step ended the work of inspecting a ship.

H. Inspector Henry Prince Narration.

Another aid to the National Parks Service was an audio tape. The tape was designed to be used in conjunction with the poster board. Its purpose was to bring a character to life from the past history of Salem. The character was to speak about his profession and how he came about his job.

Specifically, the tape used Inspector Henry Prince of the Salem Custom House. He gave the listeners a brief description of his job and its duties. Then Prince went on to tell of his past working experience as seaman, ship's captain, trader, and importer. Henry Prince's dialogue is as follows:

Hello, my name is Henry Prince. The year is 1837, and I am an inspector for the Salem Custom House. When a ship, loaded with cargo, enters the harbor, I am one of the first people to make contact with it. Before the ship will dock, I will go to the anchored ship, where I am responsible for checking the cargo with the ship's manifest and checking the crew for disease. A manifest is just the ship's record book, which shows what cargo should be on board. If everything is all right, I give permission for the vessel to dock, so that unloading can begin.

I became an inspector at Salem after having a number of jobs, all of which were involved with business and shipping. When I turned 14, I came to Salem from Ipswich where I was born and raised. My first job was an apprentice to a barrelmaker.³⁵ I did

³⁵ Charles W. Snell, "Historical Structure Report Derby/Ropes/ Prince House Data," Salem National Historic Site, March, 1976.

this until I was 21, and decided to go to sea. Over the next 7 years, I worked my way up through the ranks, and finally captained my first ship, the schooner "Betsey." Later, I was allowed space on the ship "Henry" so that I could try my own trading. This I found to be quite profitable. After 3 voyages, I had saved enough money to buy my own ship. Some of the ships I owned were the "John," the "Golden Age," and the "Montgomery."³⁶

Since I was getting too old for sailing, I ended my career as a sea captain and went into the trading and importing business. During this time, my son and I established the West Indies Goods Store, and for a while I was a Salem selectman. After some financial difficulties, I left the trading and importing business, and in 1830, I was hired by the United States Customs Service. So, here I am, inspector for the Port of Salem.

³⁶ Charles W. Snell, "Historical Structure Report Derby/ Prince/ Ropes House Historic Data," Salem Maritime National Historic Site, March, 1976.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

During the early nineteenth century, Salem was one of the most prosperous seaports in the United States. We've used this period with its abundance of commerce for Salem and tried to show the actual role of the Custom Service during this time. By explaining its functions and those of the people who worked there, we hope that we have explained this role.

In our effort to provide this idea, we have used three or four major sources for our research. They were: The Essex Institute Historical Collections, government studies on location at the Salem Custom House, Salem and the Indies, by James Duncan Phillips, and unpublished reports also located at the Salem Custom House. Each set of works had a specific amount of information on the subject matter. Salem and the Indies was used mainly for background material. The Essex Institute Historical Collections were used for gathering information on specific characters and ideas in the report.

Also, in our research we uncovered two or three areas that may be used as possible topics in future studies at the Custom House. We briefly touched upon these areas, but there is enough information for these topics at the site, the American Antiquarian Society, and Essex Institute Library. Some of them are: the removal of Nathaniel Hawthorne from the Custom House; the relations between the Federal government and the local government that ran the Custom House; and research on the panoramic view of the harbor.

The objectives of the project were probably three in number. We wanted to supply both the Salem Maritime National Historic Site and Worcester Polytechnic Institute with written

documentation describing the project, its undertakings, and those results. Secondly, we wanted to aid the Custom House by supplying them with the information for the audio tape and the posterboard. Finally, we have achieved a satisfaction for ourselves knowing that we benefited in increased knowledge and responsibility by carrying out this Interactive Qualifying Project.

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