

# OLD HOUSES AND WITCHCRAFT IN SALEM

By ELIOT TOZER

New York Times (1923-Current file); Aug 22, 1954;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2007)

pg. X19

## OLD HOUSES AND WITCHCRAFT IN SALEM

By ELIOT TOZER

SALEM, Mass.—To most first-time visitors Salem means Nathaniel Hawthorne and the "House of Seven Gables." With all due respect to Hawthorne, there is an irony here that might have pleased the old tale-teller himself. For he states in the introduction to the second edition of his novel that his seven-gabled Pyncheon house actually was made only of "materials of the imagination."

The irony is the more arresting when you consider all the other points of interest that Salem offers within an area of a few city blocks. For Salem once was a roaring shipping center that ranked with the ports of New York and Boston. During the Revolution both of the latter ports were blockaded and the colonies turned to Salem to keep them alive. Salem met the challenge by moving much of the colonies' commerce across her dozens of docks. She also sent out 158 privateers to harass the ships of the enemy, the greatest maritime power in the world, and took 445 of them as prizes.

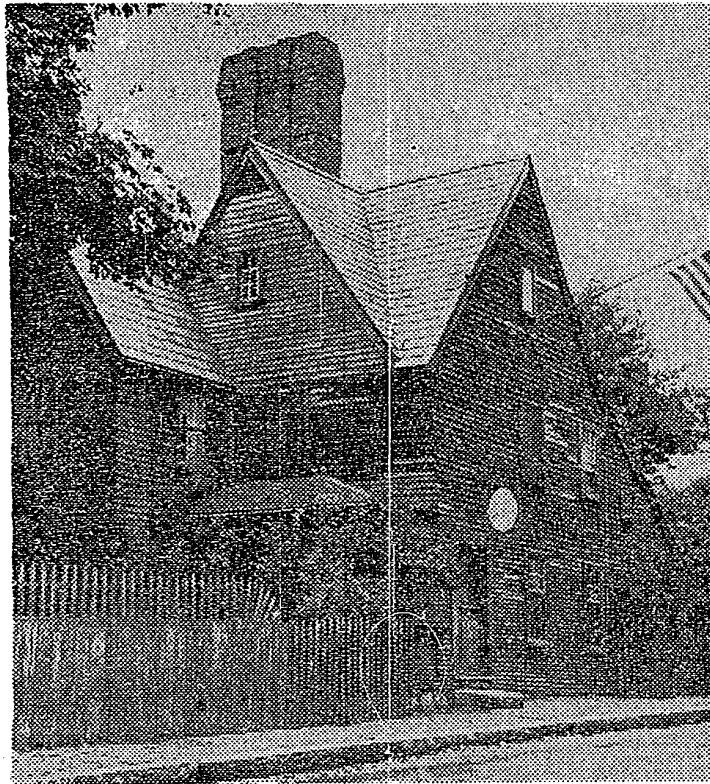
For almost a century afterward, her square-riggers regularly made the ports of the East Indies and even China. Models of these merchantmen, the actual logs of their journeys, the stuff of their daily lives, and some of the finest examples of the wealth they brought back are collected in Salem's homes and museums.

### Records of Witchcraft

And, of course, Salem had witches, nineteen who died as martyrs to an early American hysteria. It seems hardly a subject for the vacationist to contemplate, but the Essex Institute reports that most visitors try to decipher some of the original depositions and trial records it has on display and on leaving the institute more than half the sight-seers ask for directions to Gallows Hill.

The point of all the foregoing is that Salem is worth more than a visit to "The Gables" and that it is particularly worthwhile for sight-seeing by family groups. Take Route S-1 out of Boston, then 107 out of Revere. Salem's narrow streets twist with almost as much irresponsibility as Boston's do and parking can be a problem, but try the streets near the Salem Common for a parking place; they're less crowded and you'll be within a short walk of a good starting point for your tour, the Pingree House.

Two of the characteristics of the Pingree House are typical of much that you will see in Salem. First, it looks lived-in; you get the feeling that you have been ushered into the home of a gen-



Charles Phelps Cushing  
Salem's "House of Seven Gables."

tleman of another day, in this case a day when Salem was the maritime queen.

The other characteristic is that the house is oddly early American and Oriental: the mantels and a dining-room sideboard were carved by Salem's own Samuel McIntire, a protégé of Bulfinch and very much a New England craftsman, while the closets are full of Canton, Nanking and Oriental Lowestoft china as were many Salem closets 250 years ago. The third-floor children's room and boy's room are filled with toys, games and models that are also reminiscent of both the new and ancient worlds.

### Old Costumes

Right next door is the Essex Institute, where the New England and Oriental aspects of Salem's tradition are even more apparent and where time is kept by ship's clocks—whose bells, by the way, all strike at the same time. Here are 400 costumes including the handsomely embroidered crimson robe that Chief Judge Samuel Sewall wore at the witch trials, silver and pewter from Old and New England, English and Oriental china, witchcraft documents and personal belongings of the accusers and the accused.

Two doors down the street is the Peabody Museum, essentially nautical with its huge but delicately fitted models of Salem's greatest privateers and merchantmen, figureheads from the ships, and a full-scale model of

the saloon on Capt. George Crowninshield's eighteenth-century Cleopatra's Barge.

For children with an interest in animals, stuffed New England mammals, birds and reptiles glare out of dusty glass cases. Oriental ethnological collections fill three of the other main halls.

Two blocks north, toward what is now Danvers (where the Rev. Samuel Parris first noticed the strange behavior of his daughter Elizabeth and her cousin Abigail, who were "bewitched") is the Old Witch Jail. There today's owner, 77-year-old Alfred P. Goodell, white-haired but a most vigorous guide, daily pours forth a torrent of information on the witches, the hysterical accusations and the moral to be drawn therefrom, complete with an imitation of the stammering denial of her guilt by Alice Parker at her trial, and her final death cry as she swung from the oak tree for the edification of all of Salem's Puritans, young and old.

### In the Dungeon

Mr. Goodell will take you down narrow stairs to the dirt-floored dungeon—illuminated only by the tiny light he holds in his hand—and show you the curios found there by his father: bones ("They're not human bones, though"—the women accused as witches threw the scraps from their meals to one side so the rats would leave them alone); the Devil's Candles which, being spots of phosphorous in the solid rock wall, glow as he passes his light

over them, and the Wishing Stone.

For the longest walk on the tour, strike eastward to the Common (also called Washington Square), where there are some excellent examples of eighteenth-century New England homes, and then down the hill toward the waterfront. On Derby Street at Derby Wharf is the Salem Maritime National Historic Site, administered by the National Park Service.

Here are the Custom House, where Hawthorne worked as Collector of the Port (subject of the famous description in the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*) and the Derby House.

The latter was built in 1761; it has been restored as faithfully as scholarship and Park Service funds will permit. Here again you get a strong feeling of intrusion into the personal lives of a very real family. On a chair-back in a second-floor bedroom a bonnet has been casually hung; the closets are filled with gowns; tables are set, and one bed is "turned down."

Three blocks farther to the east is the House of Seven Gables, where visitors may climb the secret staircase and gaze at the chair "in which Judge Pyncheon died." The Gables, too, looks "lived in," and for those who have read or who are about to read any of his novels or short stories it is a trove of colorful Hawthorne treasures.

### Meals and Rooms

The Gables serves meals, as does the Haller-Daniels House five or six blocks away. The Hathaway House, next door to The Gables, has rooms for overnight guests from \$3.50.

With time, and possibly unlimited energy, the excursion might be extended to include the Charter Street Burying Ground, resting place of one "witch," Mary Corey, two of her judges and of Nathaniel Richardson, whose death, according to his epitaph, "was instant from the pressure of a building he was assisting to remove."

Gallows Hill stands black and empty today. The Witch House is the completely restored and authentically furnished home of Judge Corwin. Chestnut Street, known for its Colonial doorways, is often called the "finest street, architecturally, in New England."

On the way back to Boston via U. S. 1A, a short detour leads to Pioneer Village, a three-acre reproduction of Salem as it looked when Governor Withrop arrived with the Charter from Charles I. It is complete with pillory, stocks and thatch-roofed houses. The tools and materials of the blacksmith, the sawyer, and the candle-stick-maker lie "as if they had just been put down."