

A Field Guide to Salem's Architecture

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A Field Guide to Salem's Architecture

When walking around Salem, you will notice the wonderful architecture that graces the many older homes and buildings throughout the area. The purpose of this Field Guide is to assist students, tourists, and residents in understanding and appreciating the architecture of Salem. The architecture of Salem is fascinating in and of itself. Moreover, the architecture serves as a historical window through which we can understand the people and the place of Salem.

This Field Guide includes information about the different historical eras and how the buildings relate directly to Salem's history. The Field Guide illustrates each architectural era with pictures of homes throughout Salem. General information about the many architectural styles is discussed, including information about the form, style, and details of the buildings in each era.

For the most part, the buildings are all located within easy walking distance of the Washington Square and the Derby Wharf area. Because of the close proximity of all the buildings, this guide can be a great supplement for students and/or tour groups to use when visiting the historical areas in Salem. (A map showing the location of each illustrated building is included at the back of the field guide). Please note that the eras often overlapped, therefore the dates given for each architectural style are approximations.

This field guide is organized according to the time period and architectural styles most prevalent throughout Salem's history, including the following eras:

| <u>Time Period</u> | <u>Architectural Style</u> |
|---------------------------|--|
| Early 1600's | Primitive shelters of the first settlers |
| 1626-1725 | First Period Colonial |
| 1725-1780 | Georgian |
| 1780-1825 | Federalist |
| 1825-1850 | Greek Revival |
| 1850-1900 | Victorian (Gothic, Italianate, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne) |

Understanding the architecture of the time will lead to a greater comprehension of the people, culture, and history of Salem. The growth of Salem and of the nation can be viewed by simply comparing the primitive style huts to the Federal period mansion. This growth occurred within two hundred years! This field guide will enable students, tourists, and residents to gain a better sense of what the place of Salem was, continues to be, and may be in the future.

Primitive Shelters of the First Settlers: the Early 1600's

The history of Salem's architecture begins in 1626, when the first English settlers came to the area from Cape Ann (after leaving the area further up the coast because of poor soil conditions). These settlers, and the ones that continued to arrive during the first few years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, came to an area that was wild and undeveloped. While the settlers began to build and develop the area, they had to build temporary shelters in order to survive the harsh New England conditions.

The settlers built several different styles of shelters, including dugouts, wigwams, and cabins. While the settlers were courageous for leaving England for lands unknown, they did not have the time or energy to invent new ways of building. It is interesting to note that the English settlers did not build log cabins, with round logs and notched corners. The log cabin would have been easier and superior to these temporary shelters, but it was a form of construction unknown in England.ⁱ Instead, they used what was known at the time. For instance, the wigwam hut was borrowed from the Native Americans and the dugouts and cabins from shepherds in England.ⁱⁱ Reconstructions of these primitive shelters can be seen at Pioneer Village (at Forest River Park).

Dugouts

These were the most primitive, with pits partially dug into the ground and roofed over by wooden poles, bark, and sod.



Photo by Aaron Toleos

Wigwams

Borrowed from the Indians, the frames were built of slender wooden poles lashed together to form an oblong roof, and twice as long as wide. They were easier to build than the dugouts and were more weatherproof and spacious.



Photo by Aaron Toleos

Cabins

The cabins were flimsy structures built of vertical wooden poles and sometimes clay. The roof was built of wooden poles and thatch.



After establishing themselves in the temporary shelters, early settlers began to build more permanent structures. Within a year or two, the first frame style houses were being built, which is the beginning of the next architectural style.

First Period Colonial: c. 1626 - c. 1725

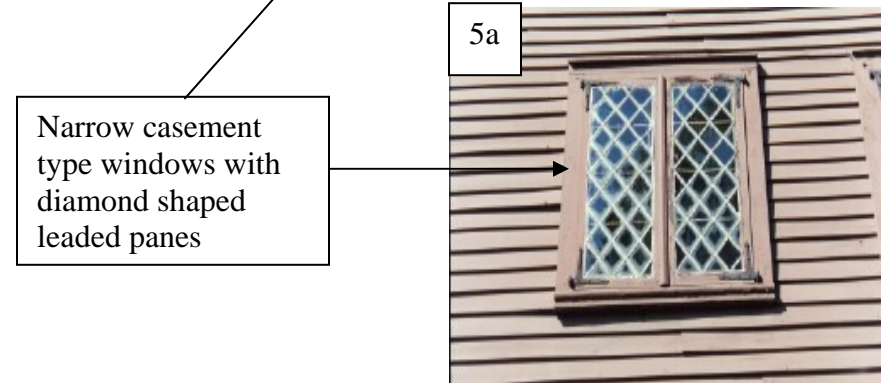
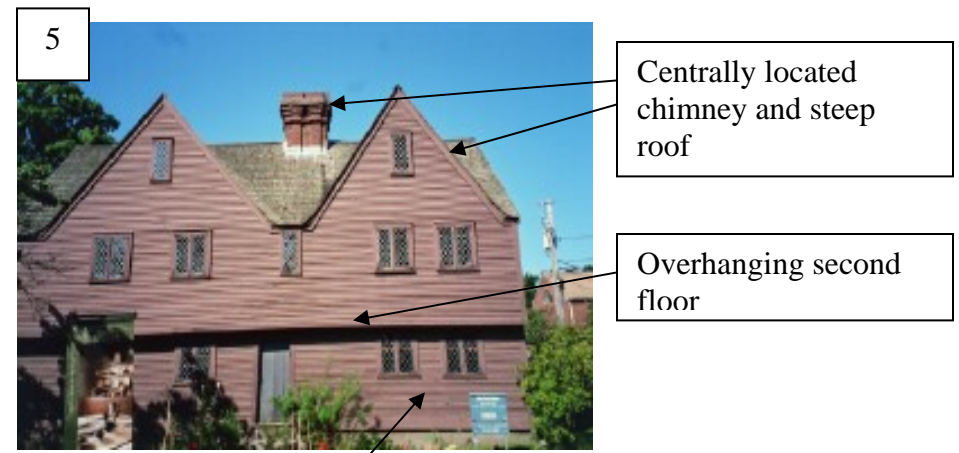
The first permanent structures that the settlers built in this region were modeled after what they had left behind in England, both in structure and in style.ⁱⁱⁱ The houses in this era were built with massive timber frames that were designed to last for a very long time. These homes helped to convey a sense of permanence for the settlers and symbolized the building of a new community. Utility and function were more important than looks. Therefore, the houses have very few decorative elements.



The first houses were built without a foundation, small in scale, and usually consisted of one room on the first floor and one on the second. The roofs had very steep pitches because the majority of them had thatch roofs. The steep pitch was needed so that the rain or snow would roll off instead of seeping into the thatch. Hand split wooden shingles were added at a later time.

The houses faced a southerly direction so that the sun could heat the house. The houses have very large chimneys that are centrally located. On the inside, there were few hallways and/or doors because the warm air needed to circulate throughout the house.^{iv}

The walls and studs of the homes do not serve any structural purpose; instead the massive beams hold the house together (similar to a box). Instead of using nails, most of the house is put together using hand cut mortise-and-tenon joints.



At a later time, many of the earlier settlers added more rooms to the houses as their families grew or simply because they had the time and energy. A lean-to was often added to the back or side of the house (which was usually turned into the kitchen area). Because the lean-to usually had a different roof pitch than the main house, they became known as ‘saltboxes’ after the shape of old salt boxes.



Lean-to or ‘saltbox’ addition at the rear of the house



The doorways were simple board and batten doors held on by wrought-iron strap hinges

One interesting myth about the First Period Colonial houses concerns the second floor overhang, or jetty as it was called at the time. Some people believe that the overhang was built to help defend against the Native Americans. However, this is not true for several reasons. First, the overhang is only on the front of the house and the Native Americans would have attacked from all sides. Second, there are no doors or slots from which to shoot the Native Americans from, so they would not do any good for defending against an attack. In fact, the overhang was a feature that the colonists brought with them from England. Nobody knows for sure the reason why, however, the overhang may have gone over the street to provide more living room. Or it may have been that it was simply easier to build the frame with the overhang in place.^v

Although the early settlers were making bricks, the houses were built out of wood because there was not enough good quality lime to use as a mortar. What little lime they had was used to make the massive chimneys. The chimneys were so big because of the cold New England winters. However, the big chimney flues actually lost lots of warmth. Several smaller chimneys with smaller flues would have conducted heat better.^{vi}

During this era of building, no new architectural advances were made. All of the construction that occurred was based on ideas that the settlers brought with them from England, without any changes in style. In fact, the style was often simpler than what was found in England because of the tough conditions in which the settlers were living. However, after they become settled in the area, communities started forming. Then more time, energy, and money could be put into their homes. As a result, the architectural style began to change.

Georgian: c. 1725 -c. 1780

In the first half of the 18th century, England was controlling the region. It was a time when class distinctions were forming and the ship owners and merchants were making a lot of money. The wealthy looked to England for inspiration in terms of costume, culture, and architecture. Society was becoming more traveled, with the English coming to America and with Americans visiting England, both for pleasure and trade. Salem was one of the most affluent communities of the time, with the shipping trade to England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the West Indies providing an enormous amount of wealth for the merchants and ship owners (with the trade of codfish and timber, the ship owners were called “codfish aristocrats”).



Classic Georgian style house with clapboard siding

During this time, the homes were no longer built solely for functionality, but also for style. The houses were larger in scale and became much more symmetrical. There were larger and more rooms on the inside, bigger staircases, and the chimneys were often placed on the outside of the house (and many times there were more than one chimney).

Georgian style houses continued to use clapboard siding in New England because wood was so abundant. Instead of leaving the wood bare, homeowners began to paint their houses. However, the big advancement in this era was with the use of brick for the exterior.^{vii}

Other distinguishing features from this area include a lower pitched roof (either gambled, gabled, or hipped) and the use of dormers to make up for the missing attic space.

Lower pitched roof, two side chimneys, and the use of dormers

Double-hung windows



Classic Georgian style house with brick

A classic feature of the Georgian style is the formal front entryway. Notice that this house (and the house on the preceding page) has a paneled front door with Doric columns, transom lights, and closed pediments.

Because homes built during this period had much more style, they featured decorative molding and trim, both on the inside and out. In addition, the decorative features extended to the front door.

Cornice molding

Corner quoins



8

Enclosed front entrance porch with Doric pilasters, sidelights, and closed pediment.

Double hung windows and graduated window height.



9

On many Georgian homes, the roofline was cut off at the top to form a flat roof deck. The roof deck was surrounded by balustrades to form a ‘captain’s walk’. Many people have a misconception that ‘captain’s walks’ and cupolas were invented in Salem so that sea captains could go up to the top of their houses and watch for their returning ships. Although they may have been used on occasion for watching for returning ships, this idea that they were invented in Salem or for watching ships return is a myth. There are examples of these architectural features even on houses in England. And some of these houses were many, many miles from the ocean.^{viii}

Many houses during this time feature an addition off of the side of the house called a ‘beverly jog’. It is not entirely clear where they name came from or to what purpose they served. Many of the ‘beverly jogs’ enclose stairways to a second floor to free up room inside the main house. Some people believe that because there is no living space attached, there were no additional taxes as a result of the addition. Others believe that it kept the service stairs separate from the main stairs, or to keep tenants out of the main part of the house.



6a

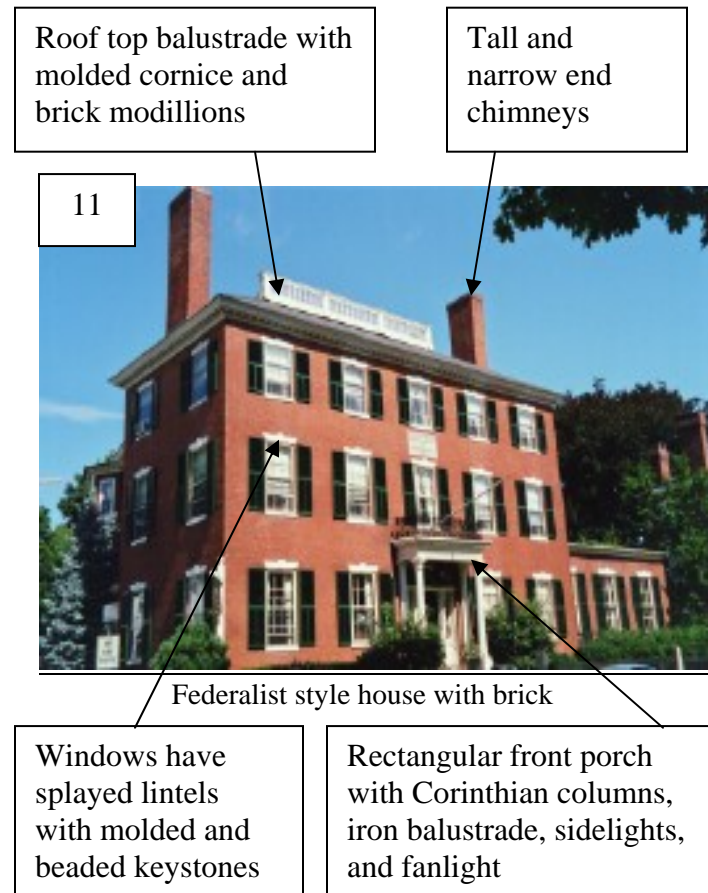
Beverly jog addition

Many of the homes being built during this time had low rooflines and were built right on the street to maximize the visibility of the house. People were proud of their homes and they wanted to show them off. The style continued up until approximately the Revolutionary War. As America was entering a new era as an independent country, the architecture of the times was also changing to reflect the new sentiments of the people.

Federalist: c. 1780 – c. 1825

As the country won its independence from England, the people were proud of what they had achieved. This was reflected in their architectural style. The new buildings incorporated native material into the buildings, such as granite foundations. Many of the homes were built on grand scales and built for generations, similar to the philosophy of the Romans and the Egyptians.^{ix} The Federalist buildings have a greater sense of permanence attached to them.

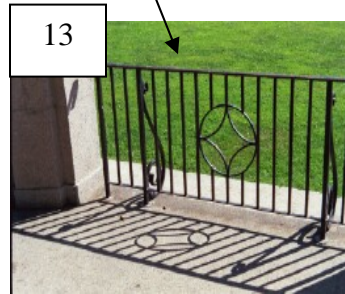
The Federalist style of architecture is similar to the Georgian style in many ways, however, there are also many differences. They are similar because both have similar styles and use columns, pilasters, and pediments. The major differences are in the porticos, the balustrades on the roof eaves, and the Federal period doorways with sidelights and fanlights.^x



During this era, the Federalist architecture took on a style that was becoming uniquely American. Salem was at the forefront of this new period. In fact, many of the architectural features of this period originated in Salem. During this era, Salem's merchants and ship owners were making vast sums of money from the China Trade. Not only were they making lots of money from trade with the East Indies, they were bringing back Chinese influences that they used in the building of new Federalist style mansions throughout Salem.

There are several examples of the Chinese architectural influences. One of the most prevalent examples found in many of the Federalist period homes in Salem derives from the “China coin”. These round and oval designs can be seen on the sidelights and fanlights of many homes. The “China coin” is a Chinese symbol for prosperity and the ship owners and merchants brought the images home with them after returning from overseas.^{xi}

A picture of Chinese coins and three examples of the “China coin” influence



Because of the vast sums of money being made by Salem merchants and ship owners, many of the Federalist mansions were magnificent and extraordinary. One of the finest examples is illustrated below.

Roof deck and lower roof balustrade with fan design

Narrow and tall end chimneys



Front entrance porch with Corinthian columns and massive fluted columns on the side of the house

Sidelights and fanlight with “China coin” influence



Greek Revival: c. 1825 – c. 1850

America was continuing to grow as an independent country, and the citizens were increasingly proud of their democracy. The American people looked to the ancient republics for inspiration. They associated with the political, cultural, and moral ideals exhibited by the ancient Greeks. The architecture from this time reflected this association.

The Greek temple became the inspiration for many new buildings. To mimic the shape of the Greek temple, the short side of the house with the gabled end became the focus. In addition, rooflines had a twenty-degree pitch, a band was used around the eaves, and the window lintels had a peaked shaped, all to replicate the shape of the Greek temple. When compared to the Federalist style, the houses were more masculine.^{xii}

A major difference from the Federalist time period was that the doorways were recessed with sidelights and a transom. A white portico was often included, along with Doric or Ionic columns. Further, a triangle-shaped pediment was used to give the illusion of the Greek Temple.^{xiii}



14a

Recessed front doorway framed by Ionic columns and a cornice with modillions



15

Doric corner pilasters and a cornice band under the eaves



14

A band around the eaves

Peaked shape window lintels and molded window frames



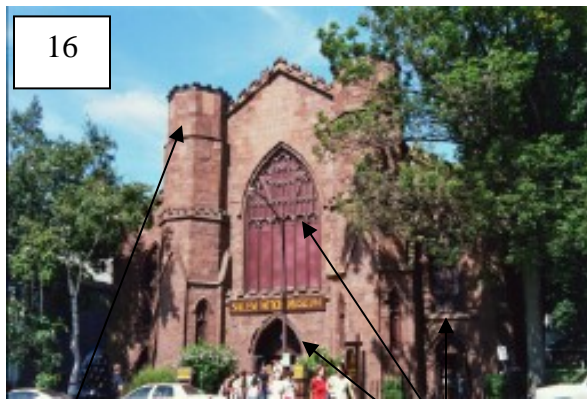
15a

Recessed doorway with thick border molding and columns with corner blocks

Victorian (Gothic, Italianate, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne): c. 1850 - 1900

In looking at the architecture of Salem throughout the 17th, 18th, and first half of the 19th century, it is easy to see many fine examples of the different styles that are exhibited just around the Washington Square and the Derby Wharf Area. If you keep your eyes open, you can also find some excellent examples of architecture from the later half of the 19th century, including the Victorian era Gothic, Italianate, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne styles. As the country grew, the tastes and styles continued to grow and vary with it. It was also at this time that people started to copy American architectural styles from the past, especially with regards to the Colonial Revival style that celebrates America's heritage.^{xiv}

Gothic



Stone castle version with octagonal towers and corner buttresses with battlements

Large pointed arched doorway and windows. Matching smaller pointed arched windows on the sides

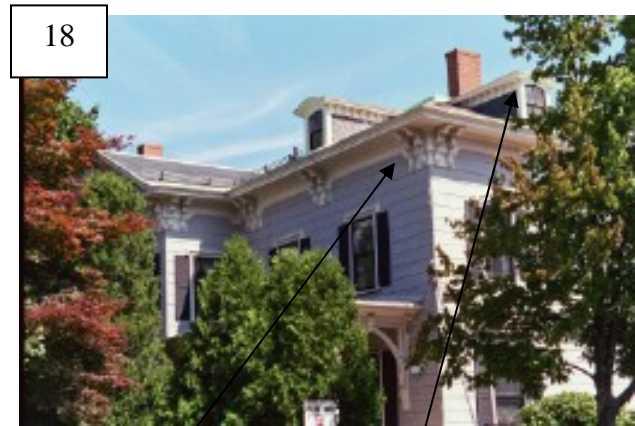
Italianate



Porch with Corinthian columns and a Palladian window above

Use of both arched windows and flat windows

Bracketed cornice and rusticated corner quoins



Projecting eaves with scrolled cornice brackets

Cornice molding on dormers and varied window trim

Colonial Revival

Combines the Georgian and Federal styles.



- Detailed cornice, frieze, and beltcourse
- Rectangular porch with Ionic columns
- Fanlights above doorway and attic

Queen Anne



- Asymmetrical and uses different textures and colors
- Conical tower, multi gables, and a veranda
- Columns, pilasters and cornice modillions

Summary

Understanding architecture helps us to get a better sense of our past. One can get a sense of the people and the place of America by looking at the architecture of Salem. It is truly amazing that there is so much living history in such a small area (the Washington Square and Derby Wharf area).

By studying the primitive shelters from the early 1600's, you get a better understanding of what the first settlers had to endure just to survive for the first few years. Looking at the First Period Colonial houses it is clear that these people were struggling to build a new community, (while using the architectural styles they knew in England).

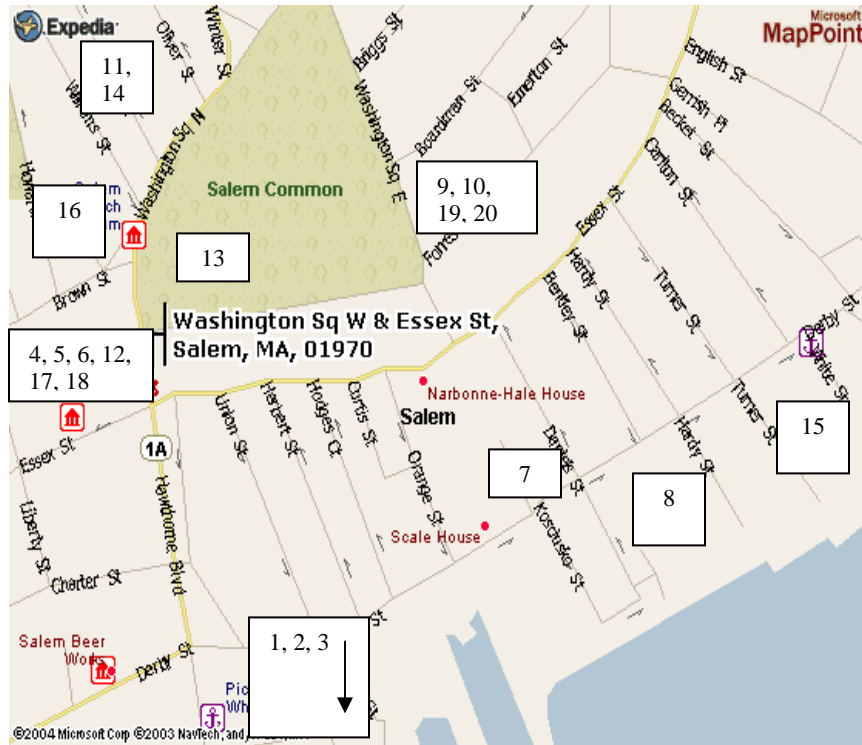
Moving into the Georgian and Federal periods, you can see that people were getting established in the new land and that money was being made, especially by Salem's merchant elite. Looking around the Washington Square and the Derby Wharf areas, you see the China Trade influence on the designs of the windows, railings, and balustrades. At this point in Salem's history, the people, especially the wealthy merchant class, had the time, energy, and money to build magnificent homes that would last for generations.

In looking at the architecture of the Greek Revival era, you notice that people were proud of their democracy and looked to the ancient Greeks for inspiration. These feelings were captured by the use of the Greek temple form in their homes. In the Victorian era there were many different styles, including the Gothic, Italianate, Colonial Revival, and Queen Anne styles. The Colonial Revival style is interesting because it copies the older styles of the Georgian and Federal style, indicating that the people were proud of their history.

In looking at the architecture of Salem, it is clear that architecture is an art form that reflects the ideals, philosophy, ideas, and aspirations of the people and their time.^{xv}

Map

Starting from the parking garage and the visitor center, use the map below to follow along with *A Field Guide of Salem's Architecture*. Each house listed in the brochure is numbered so that you can easily find it on the map.



List of Houses and Pictures

Primitive Shelters

1-3. Replica of primitive shelters located at Pioneer Village in Forest River Park off of Lafayette St. and West Ave.

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First Period Colonial

4. Quaker Meeting house on Brown St. opposite Howard.
5. John Ward house on Brown St. opposite Howard.
- 5a. Casement Window on the John Ward House.
- 5b. Batten Door on the John Ward House.

Georgian

6. Crowninshield-Bentley house at 126 Essex St.
- 6a. 'Beverly-jog' at the Crowninshield-Bentley house.
7. Derby House at 168 Derby St.
8. Capt. Edward Allen house at 125 Derby St.
9. Webb-Briggs-Whipple house at 1 Forrester St.

Federalist

10. Clifford Crowninshield house at 74 Washington Sq. East.
11. Forrester-Peabody house at 29 Washington Sq. North.
- 11a. Side door with fanlight at the Forrester-Peabody house.
12. Andrew-Safford house at 13 Washington Sq. West.
- 12a. Front entrance with fanlight at the Andrew-Safford house.
13. "China coin" railing at Washington Square Park gazebo.

Greek Revival

14. Nathaniel Perkins house at 5 Oliver St.
- 14a. Doorway at the Nathaniel Perkins house.
15. Jonathan Whipple house at 49 Turner St.
- 15a. Doorway at the Jonathan Whipple house.

Victorian

16. East Church (Salem Witch Museum) at 191/2 Washington Sq. North (*Gothic*).
17. John Tucker Daland house at 132 Essex St. (*Italianate*).
18. Ives-Webb House at 18 Brown St. (*Italianate*).
19. Dr. Hardy Phippen house at 84 Washington Sq. East (*Colonial Revival*).
20. Charles E. Fairfield house at 9 Forrester St (*Queen Anne*).

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Ideas for Teachers and Students

The *Field Guide to Salem's Architecture* can be used by itself while studying the architecture of the region or as a supplemental source while studying the history of Salem. The Field Guide can also be used in conjunction with other disciplines and with a variety of teaching methods.

Here a few ideas of different activities that a teacher may want to incorporate into a lesson on the history of Salem.

1. While on a field trip to visit the House of Seven Gables and the Derby Wharf area, use the Field Guide as a precursor about the history of Salem and the influence of the China Trade. While on the field trip, complete a walking tour of the different architecture styles.
2. After completing the walking tour, have the students participate in a scavenger type hunt to find other houses that are not listed. Have them identify the architectural style and list the key features of each. For safety concerns, this could be conducted from the Washington Square Park.
3. Have the students complete a short report on one of the architectural periods, or write an essay that compares and contrasts two periods, and present the results to the rest of the class. This could be done while sitting in the Washington Square Park to heighten the experience.
4. Conduct a geometry lesson using the different architectural shapes. The Greek Revival and Queen Anne styles could be incorporated into a geometry lesson very easily.
5. Have the students pick a house and write a creative short story from the perspective of a person who lived in that house at the time.

Notes

ⁱ Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 12.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., 15.

^{iv} Ibid., 21-22.

^v Ibid., 29.

^{vi} Ibid., 97.

^{vii} Ibid., 293.

^{viii} Ibid., 307.

^{ix} John V. Goff, lecture notes from IDS763 Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory Institute, SSC, July 26, 2004.

^x Morrison, 574.

^{xi} John V. Goff, "Salem As Architectural Mecca", in *Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory*, edited by Dane A. Morrison and Nancy L. Schultz (Northeastern University Press: Boston, 2004), 188.

^{xii} John V. Goff, lecture notes from IDS763 Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory Institute, SSC, July 26, 2004.

^{xiii} Morrison, 575.

^{xiv} Goff, 212.

^{xv} John Poppeliers, Allen Chambers, Jr., and Nancy Schwartz, *What Style Is It?*, (The Preservation Press: Washington D.C., 1983), 10.

Other Sources

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