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INTERIM
INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS

SALEM MARITIME
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

1984

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INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS
SALEM MARITIME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
MASSACHUSETTS

Approved:

Steven H. Lewis

3/7/84
Date

for Herbert S. Cables, Jr.
Regional Director
North Atlantic Regional Office

United States Department of the Interior/National Park Service

God performed no miracle on
the New England soil. He gave
the sea. Stark necessity made
seamen of would-be planters.

The ocean knows no favorites.
Her bounty is reserved for
those who have the wit to
learn her secrets, the courage
to bear her buffets, and the
will to persist, through good
fortune and ill, in her rugged
service.

-- Samuel Eliot Morison, The
Maritime History of
Massachusetts: 1763-1860,
1921

INTERIM
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SALEM MARITIME
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DIVISION OF INTERPRETIVE PLANNING
HARPERS FERRY CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

Spanning a period of two and one-half centuries, the story of maritime Salem is a stirring saga of men against the sea. This is the story of merchant adventurers and mariners whose enterprise and daring transformed a tiny, uncertain settlement into a major international seaport.

During the American Revolution, Salem was the leading privateering port and as such greatly aided the colonial effort for independence. Again in the War of 1812 the cause of the young Republic was furthered by Salem privateers.

Between the two wars and after, Salem merchants helped make America a great nation. Their ships opened new trade routes. Their cargoes brought needed money to the Federal treasury. Their capital was the basis of the American economy for several decades and contributed to the beginning of America's industrial might.

Salem's foreign trade reached its height at the strategic time when the United States was an "emerging nation." Customs revenues aided the Federal budget; indeed, without these revenues it is hard to imagine how the new Government under the Constitution could have survived financially.

The prestige which the ships of Salem and its sister ports brought to the fledgling Nation was important in the young country's image building process. Salem's ships sailed to Madagascar, Zanzibar, Cayenne, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and so many other exotic places across the seas.

Through the last century and a half, Salem evolved from a seafaring town into a diversified modern city that retained its seafaring tradition, and this is another important part of the story.

But for almost 200 years, Salem depended on the sea. Morison wrote, "God performed no miracle on the New England soil. He gave the sea. . ." The efforts of almost everyone in the community were needed to support the specialized maritime activity of foreign trade/shipping. Almost everyone made their living from it. Their achievements and contributions to our national development have withstood the erosion of time, and merit commemoration for the benefit of present and future generations.

THE PARK

Salem Maritime National Historic Site faces Salem Harbor in what was once the main waterfront section of the city and is now a densely settled residential/commercial area.

Nearby utility and industrial buildings intrude on the historic scene. A busy city street separates the park's historic buildings from the open space and wharves along the waterfront. The traffic and noise detract from the historic scene and its interpretation. Potential park visitors pass through without stopping, seeking either the House of the Seven Gables on one side or Pickering Wharf on the other. With all of this, it is not surprising that the park lacks identity and definition. It is possible for visitors to stand in the middle of the park and not be able to find it. The park blends well with its urban environment.

In all of this, the park's historic structures constitute an impressive historical entity:

Central Wharf was constructed about 1791 and operated by Simon Forrester, who served on ships during the Revolutionary War and was later an influential merchant. In the 19th century, Central Wharf was operated by John Bertram, a significant figure in the maritime trade with Zanzibar and East Africa.

Central Wharf Warehouse (c. 1815) contains the park's visitor contact facility.

Derby House, an excellent example of colonial period architecture, is the oldest brick residence remaining in Salem. It was constructed in 1761-62 by Richard Derby for his son Elias. A new kitchen was added later, around 1790. The house has been restored and is furnished to reflect the way of life of a wealthy Salem merchant.

Bonded Warehouse, at the rear of the Custom House, focuses attention on the warehousing aspect of the Customs Service and the cargoes imported through Salem. Its spacious size is indicative of the volume and nature of Salem's trade.

Scale House (1829) served as a storage place for the weighing apparatus and represents another technical aspect of the Customs Service. This building was restored in 1965 and is in excellent condition.

Hawkes House, named for Benjamin Hawkes, a prominent local shipbuilder and entrepreneur, was begun in the mid-1770s and was remodeled and completed in 1801. Restoration was partially accomplished during the 1938-39 and was completed in 1959. The house is in good condition.

West India Goods Store, an authentic physical reminder of Salem's historic waterfront, is typical of the commercial buildings that lined the harborside streets in the beginning of the 19th century. It was built before 1815. The structure is in good condition and is currently operated as a store carrying items representing the great days of Salem's worldwide shipping.

Narbonne-Hale House, still a rare example of 17th century architecture although altered somewhat in detail, is one of the oldest houses in Massachusetts. The original portion, erected about 1670, reflects the way of life of a family of modest means. Later occupants expanded the house to its present size. Stabilization has been completed.

Derby Wharf, started in the 1760s by Richard Derby and enlarged and operated by his son Elias H. Derby, was an important center of world trade during Salem's heyday as a port. The wharf was lengthened to its present size about 1806. During the Revolution, privateers probably used this wharf more than any other port facility in the colonies. The wharf has been restored and is in fair condition.

Lighthouse, built about 1871, occupies the extreme tip of the wharf. It was restored and is operated by the National Park Service.

Custom House was erected in 1819. Here were collected the duties on imports--the all-important revenues that financed the operations of the Federal Government. The building is also significant for its architecture and for Nathaniel Hawthorne's presence as an employee from 1846 to 1849. He described the Custom House in his novel, The Scarlet Letter. The building shows the changes made by the Customs Service, ending with exterior work done in 1922. It is in good condition.

INTERPRETIVE OBJECTIVES

Taken together, Salem Maritime's structures provide a place where Americans can come to learn about and appreciate the importance of shipping and foreign trade to the new United States, and the importance of the port of Salem, once the sixth largest in the United States.

The Master Plan, Salem Maritime National Historic Site (1978) presents one overall interpretive objective:

To ensure effective visitor orientation and participation, principally through imaginative interpretation, thus fostering understanding and appreciation of Salem's maritime history.

This Interim Interpretive Prospectus considers a few objectives that are more specific:

To improve park visibility and image with attractive signs.

To interpret the visible scene and link the present with the historic past with wayside exhibits.

To provide effective visitor information/orientation services with a visitor contact facility and bulletin boards.

To interpret Salem's maritime history with historic objects and graphics.

Perhaps the best interpretation is provided with personal services. Personal services are not considered in the Interim Interpretive Prospectus because this effort is best planned and implemented by the park staff, changing the program from year to year according to size of staff, skills and special interests of staff members, and what worked and did not work last year.

INTERPRETIVE PROPOSALS -- SIGNING

Existing Conditions

Salem Maritime National Historic Site lacks identity and definition. Existing park signs and the lack of signs contribute to the problem:

Park Entrance Sign -- This sign is an intrusion in the historic environment. It is huge and modern. It is the initial park experience for most visitors. As such, it should point toward an early American rather than a 20th century image. It does tell visitors that there is a park; it does not tell them where it is. The list of structures on the back of the sign is not helpful because the names mean nothing to first time visitors.

Menu Board -- The menu board in front of the Custom House is neither historic nor modern. It is out of step with everything else in the park. It provides information only to those visitors who have found their way to the Custom House.

West India Goods Store Sign -- The Chinese red and gold sign for the West India Goods Store has a historic flavor and is very attractive. However, the sign separates the store from the rest of the park. The sign (and the store) have more in common with other stores on Derby Street than with the rest of the park.

Signing Proposals

A parkwide sign program is recommended to provide needed park identity and definition. It should be the first priority for upgrading interpretation, even though the signs would not provide interpretation. Visitors need to be able to locate the park and its significant historic structures.

Park Entrance Sign -- To be more compatible with the historic scene, the park entrance sign should be repainted in Chinese red and gold to match the West India Goods Store sign. On the front of the sign the size of the lettering and perhaps the size of the Arrowhead Emblem should be reduced. This could be done by using a portion of the vast available space to display a graphic -- a black and white line drawing of sailing ships lined up at Derby Wharf would provide the proper message.

The reverse side of the sign should carry a message rather than a list. Perhaps:

SALEM MARITIME
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

"God performed no miracle on the
New England soil. He gave the sea . . ."

Perhaps a better or more appropriate message can be found. In any case, better use can be made of the reverse side of the entrance sign.

The services of an artist/designer should be obtained to get the best possible layout. Because a graphic is recommended, the park may wish to make this sign a part of the wayside exhibit program. The work would be accomplished faster if done by the park.

Menu Boards -- The menu board in front of the Custom House should be upgraded. Menu boards are available with colored (green, blue, red) backgrounds and one should be provided. It should be framed in wood painted Chinese red. The wood should cover rather than replace the aluminum frame.

A similar menu board should be provided outside the Central Wharf Warehouse visitor contact facility -- either free standing or wall mounted.

Identification Signs -- Chinese red and gold signs similar to the West India Goods Store sign should be provided for all park buildings and structures to further the unity of the park and to locate the park. It is important to avoid the appearance of oversigning, so these signs need not be as large as the one at the West India Goods Store. Visitors do not need to be able to read the signs from a distance. New signs could be rectangular, rather than following the ornate outline of the West India Goods Store sign. Recommended:

CENTRAL WHARF WAREHOUSE
c. 1815
INFORMATION

DERBY HOUSE
1761-62

CENTRAL WHARF
1784

SCALE HOUSE
1829

DERBY WHARF
1760s

BONDED WAREHOUSE
1819

HAWKES HOUSE
1770s

NARBONNE-HALE HOUSE
1670

DERBY WHARF LIGHT
1871

CUSTOM HOUSE
1819

INTERPRETIVE PROPOSALS -- WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

Proposed wayside exhibits would interpret visible and historic scenes and would relate Salem to the sea and to the world. Existing historic graphics (prints, paintings, and photographs) supported by labels would provide the on-site interpretation. The exhibits would not bring the Salem Maritime wharf area to life. They would depict the vibrant life that was here.

Wayside exhibits would consist of panels mounted in aluminum frames. Some would be two-color, others would be full color, depending on the graphics chosen. (A wealth of historical materials is available in Salem in the Essex Institute and the Peabody Museum.) Easel mounts would slant the exhibits toward the reader. The front edge of the exhibits would be about 30 inches high. Panels would be either 24" x 36" or 24" x 42".

Exhibits will be designed and mounted at a height and angle accessible to all visitors, including those in wheelchairs. All will be accessible to the mobility impaired. Type faces and sizes would be designed to be easily read by all except those with severe visual impairment.

The number and content of wayside exhibits may be changed during detail planning. If a sailing ship is permanently moored at the park, this would be an excellent wayside exhibit subject. In the future the historic structures section of the park should be examined for wayside exhibit possibilities. At this time twelve wayside exhibits are recommended for the harbor side of the park:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Interpretive Objective</u>
Orientation/significance	To locate park features with a map. To tell the significance of the park: For two centuries Salem looked to the sea. The men of Salem built and manned their vessels, sailing around the world in pursuit of trade goods and wealth.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Interpretive Objective</u>
Derby Wharf	To use historic graphics to show Salem's ships at Derby Wharf and in foreign harbors. To list a few of Salem's maritime firsts and show that Salem related more directly with the rest of the world than with the young United States.
Salem's ships	To use historic prints or paintings of Salem sailing ships and photographs of some of the valuable items brought back to Salem during its "golden era" to point out that many Salem ships traded for high value, low bulk commodities (luxuries) in quantity, increasing the net worth of the emerging Nation.
Salem at work	To use historic graphics depicting workers on land accomplishing some of the tasks necessary to send ships around the world: sailmaking, shipbuilding, ropemaking, coopers, food preparation, etc. (Graphics need not be directly related to Salem.) To show that the maritime industry is much more than ships and the men who sailed them -- the ships and the town supported one another.
Evolution of Salem	To contrast historic graphics with current graphics depicting Salem's fishing, lobstering, tourist, and pleasure craft. To show that while the town evolved from a seafaring into a diversified modern city, the seafaring tradition continued.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Interpretive Objective</u>
House of the Seven Gables	To point out the house. To use graphics (a close-up photo of the present day house, a portrait of Captain John Turner, a historic print or painting of the house, and one or two interior views to depict the House of the Seven Gables as an example of the impact of shipping wealth on Salem).
Derby Street	To use historic graphics to show the Derby Street waterfront in the 1700s and in 1854. To link existing park buildings along Derby Street with the waterfront and the maritime trade.
Crowninshield's Wharf	To compare the 1806 scene with today's and tell how the town was enlarged at the expense of the harbor as Salem's shipping industry declined. Graphics used would be the 1806 Ropes painting of Crowninshield's Wharf (now occupied by a large power plant) and a historic graphic or modern photograph of the Crowninshield House -- an example of the creation of wealth through commercial shipping.
Warehouse	To interpret Salem warehouse activities, a close-up view of a warehouse from a historic graphic and interior view(s) of warehouse activities would be used. (The interior graphics need not be directly related to Salem.) On the ground, the four corners of a former warehouse are located with marker stones; the exhibit would help visitors find them.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Interpretive Objective</u>
Derby Wharf light	A historic graphic would show the light at the end of the wharf. A contemporary graphic (photo or original art) would locate and identify the three visible Salem Harbor lights. Labels would tell some of the history of the Salem lights -- why they were needed and when they were built.
Ship launching	A historic painting showing a ship launching at Salem would show the importance of Salem shipbuilding. Labels would provide information on number of ships and tonnage.
Privateers	Historic graphics would show individual Salem privateers in battle. Labels would tell of the importance of Salem privateers in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

INTERPRETIVE PROPOSALS -- VISITOR CONTACT FACILITY

It is recommended that the Central Wharf Warehouse be modified for use as a visitor contact facility. The facility would serve three major functions:

1. To arouse the interest of visitors
2. To tell visitors how their interest can be fulfilled
3. To display some of the outstanding historic objects and graphics that are available.

The building is ideally located for these functions, standing by itself at the park entrance.

Exterior

During busy summer days a severe bottleneck exists at the entrance to the visitor contact facility. Three groups of visitors interfere with one another: those trying to get into the facility, those trying to get out, and those standing still while they discuss what they are doing. From the sidewalk all of this appears very confusing and many visitors decide to continue down Derby Street without stopping. Improved signing would alleviate the situation somewhat, but to get Salem Maritime's visitors started right, this facility must operate as efficiently as possible.

The condition can be alleviated by providing a second handicapped access ramp so that there are ramps on both sides of the entrance, and by doubling the size of the entrance door. Historic preservation clearance would be required.

For aesthetic reasons, the existing concrete handicapped access ramp should be covered with wood and the metal railing replaced with a wooden one. If safe footing is a problem, sandpaper treads could be used.

Interior

Information/Orientation -- Cooperating Association Sales -- The front room of the Central Wharf Warehouse would be used, as now, for these functions.

Furnishings would consist of an information counter large enough to accommodate two interpreters and a cooperating association cash register. There would be

a large sales display and some bench seating as space permits. A number of graphics are available as sales items and these would be displayed on walls at eye level.

A menu board or write-on-wipe-off board would be used to advertise tours, other interpretive events, and special events.

Interpreters would use a public address system to announce tours and audiovisual programs. The AV program would have remote starting capability from the information counter.

Museum Exhibits -- Interpretive Prospectus (1971):

The site . . . must cast its glance toward the sea and those great days when sailing vessels and worldwide trade and privateering and shipbuilding and customs collections made Salem one of the world's most important ports.

The rear portion of the Central Wharf Warehouse would be used for museum exhibits and the audiovisual program. There are three possible space arrangements:

1. Divide the rear room in half -- one half for museum exhibits; one half for the audiovisual program
2. Utilize the total rear area of the warehouse as a combined AV and museum exhibits area
3. Remove the wall separating the front and rear portions of the building and have a combined information/orientation-museum exhibits area and a separate room for the AV program.

No matter which configuration is chosen, there is not a lot of space. While a wealth of historic objects and graphics are available for display, it is essential that careful choices be made. The quantity of exhibitry must be small, so the quality must be high.

Exhibits would focus on "those great days" of Salem's maritime history. Display of historic imported objects would link Salem with ports around the globe. Display of tools and belongings would interpret the life of Salem's seafarers and landsmen. If there is space, the model of the sailing ship Leander would be displayed here.

Exhibit themes would be limited to:

1. Salem was more closely related to foreign lands than to the emerging Nation.
2. Doing their daily work, the people of Salem helped to build the new Nation.

Audiovisual Program -- The existing slide/sound program would be shown in the visitor contact facility. It is essential that this program be moved out of the Custom House. In the Custom House it is an intolerable intrusion on the historic scene, which otherwise has high integrity, is seen by many visitors in the middle of their visit rather than at the beginning, and is seen by too few visitors.

The existing program covers Salem's past and its significance very well. It makes no effort to tie it into today's world with weak associations or exaggerated themes. The program's limited interpretive objectives are achieved very well. It does not try to provide orientation -- something that audiovisual programs do very poorly.

For the future, a new audiovisual program should be produced, using better graphics and giving visitors a clearer picture of Salem's significance. In the context of Salem Maritime's other interpretive needs, this program is more than adequate. Production of a new audiovisual program would be low on the list of interpretive priorities.

INTERPRETIVE PROPOSALS -- AUDIO MESSAGE STATIONS

In the future the use of wayside exhibits for interpretation of historic structures should be considered. It might be that better interpretation could be provided with audio message stations. There are at least two possibilities:

Bonded Warehouse

To explain the use of the warehouse -- what was stored here and why, ultimate destinations of stored cargoes. Background noise (working sounds of cargo being stacked, men working, pulleys creaking, etc.) would add to the historic interpretation.

Scale House

To explain the Scale House and its equipment. Again, background noise would add to the interpretation (merchants yelling weights and prices, sounds of cargo being moved about).

ACCESSIBILITY

The major accessibility problems at Salem Maritime relate to the historic buildings. Because personal services and the historic refurnishing and restoration programs provide high quality interpretation in these structures, they were not considered in the Interim Interpretive Prospectus. There should be a study of access problems at these buildings to see if they can be solved.

Proposed wayside exhibits will be designed with mobility and sight impaired visitors in mind.

Museum exhibits in the Central Wharf Warehouse would also be designed with accessibility a strong design component. On busy summer days, the entrance to the visitor contact facility is a challenge to all visitors, in spite of the handicapped access ramp.

The park should consider providing hearing impaired visitors with a script for the audiovisual program.

PRIORITIES

1. Redesign and repaint park entrance sign.
2. Produce identification signs for historic structures; purchase menu boards for outside Custom House and Central Wharf Warehouse.
3. Plan and produce wayside exhibits for harbor side of park.
4. Provide complete visitor contact facility in Central Wharf Warehouse.
5. Plan and produce visitor activated audio message stations for Bonded Warehouse and Scale House.

Note: If the park accomplishes item No. 2 and enlarges the entrance to the Central Wharf Warehouse, then all other items might be accomplished under Harpers Ferry Center's 5-Year-Program to Provide Interpretive Programs at Standard. (\$250,000 per park ceiling -- if a lesser amount is made available, then items would be dropped off the bottom of the priority list.) Item No. 1 will be accomplished sooner if done by the park.

6. New audiovisual program.
7. Possible wayside exhibits for historic buildings section of the park.

Non-priority items to be accomplished by park and region:

Accessibility study for historic buildings.

Mooring of historic ship at the park.

COST ESTIMATES -- HARPERS FERRY CENTER

The following items should be programmed for inclusion in Harpers Ferry Center's 5-Year Program to Provide Interpretive Programs at Standard:

<u>Interpretive Proposal</u>	<u>Cost Estimates</u>	
	<u>Planning</u>	<u>Production</u>
<u>BRANCH OF WAYSIDE EXHIBITS</u>		
Twelve (12) wayside exhibits -- estimate does not include installation	\$ 7,000	\$ 30,000
<u>BRANCH OF EXHIBIT PLANNING AND DESIGN -- BRANCH OF EXHIBIT PRODUCTION</u>		
Visitor contact facility -- Central Wharf Warehouse -- estimate includes installation	35,000	125,000
<u>BRANCH OF AUDIOVISUAL ARTS</u>		
Two (2) visitor activated audio message repeaters		
Hardware		3,500
Software		1,000
TOTALS	42,000	159,500

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