

**SELECTED INTERIORS OF OLD HOUSES IN
SALEM AND VICINITY, ED. AND PUB. WITH THE
PURPOSE OF FURTHERING A WIDER
KNOWLEDGE OF THE BEAUTIFUL FORMS OF
DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE DEVELOPED
DURING THE TIME OF THE COLONIES AND THE
EARLY DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC**

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Selected interiors of old houses in Salem and vicinity, ed. and pub. with the purpose of furthering a wider knowledge of the beautiful forms of domestic architecture developed during the time of the colonies and the early days of the republic by Albert J. MacDonald

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ALBERT J. MACDONALD

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WINDOW ON STAIR LANDING, "THE LINDENS," DANVERS, MASS.
BUILT IN 1770



INTERIORS OF OLD HOUSES *IN SALEM AND VICINITY*

THE only style of architecture to which we as Americans can refer in order to find established national precedent is the so-termed colonial, or, to be more accurate, the architecture which was developed during the time of the colonies and the early years of the republic and of which there are several variations, due to the particular locality in which the work was done—New England, Pennsylvania or Virginia, as the case may be. The early architecture in the colonies was, of course, primitive, expressing simply the demands of protection from the elements and providing a few conveniences. It is in the later work, that which was executed after the middle of the eighteenth century and during the early years of the nineteenth, that there is to be found architecture which is expressive of a life becoming cultured and comfortable, and to which we may refer with real pride.

The houses of New England built at this time reflected the precedent to be found in the contemporaneous Georgian period of English architecture. The owners and builders were almost all from England and it was, therefore, but natural that when building their houses they should turn to their mother country for their inspiration.

Undoubtedly the most interesting development is that which took place in Salem and the surrounding towns. As Hallam once stated: "No chapter in the history of national manners would illustrate so well, if duly executed, the progress of social life, as that dedicated to domestic architecture." It is interesting to see how clearly this relation between social and architectural life is shown by the early mansions of New England.

During the eighteenth century, Salem was one of the most prosperous towns in the colonies. It was the home of many sea captains at a time when shipping was the principal business. Its wharves were usually crowded with ships and its streets were traveled by foreign sailors and townsmen alike. The people lived in a cosmopolitan atmosphere and their life was influenced accordingly. As usual, in the course of events, certain members of the community gradually acquired a social position somewhat above that of the average townsmen and, in a human way, desired to express this difference, at the same time affording themselves some of the more unusual comforts of life. The expression of this wealth and dignity is to be seen in the stately houses which they built, where the excellent workmanship and well considered design produced comfortable mansions of real distinction.

The interiors of these old houses are particularly fine, expressing the same dignity and refinement that is to be seen on the exterior. The typical plan is quite axial; a large stairhall extends from the entrance through to the rear of the house and is flanked on either side by an almost symmetrical arrangement of rooms, the whole house being square.

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The most interesting feature of the interiors, however, is the remarkable craftsmanship shown in all the woodwork. The stairways with their carved newel posts and balusters, the finely proportioned paneling and the delicately detailed mantels, all show the work of real artiste artisans. Few of them had traveled, but their native ingenuity, combined with their knowledge of books showing European architecture, afforded them many ideas for their work.

Samuel McIntire was undoubtedly the foremost of these craftsmen of Salem. Besides being a carver, he was an architect of considerable distinction and to him must be credited almost all of the best work done in Salem between 1782 and 1811. Born in 1757, he was the son of a joiner and learned his father's trade while still a youth. He later became well known because of his unusual skill at joinery and at carving, even having executed unusually good pieces of sculpture. He never traveled abroad, but spent his whole life in Salem, dying there in 1811, so that all of his work was done in this immediate vicinity. Although an architect, his greatest fame justly rests on the exceptional beauty of the interior woodwork which he executed and which with its symmetry and balance and use of simple paneling and classic mouldings, well shows the spirit of the Renaissance, but with a purely local and individual flavor.

"The Lindens," at Danvers, is one of the important houses of the period. It was built in 1774 and, judging from the character of the wood carving to be found there, it seems quite certain that McIntire was definitely connected with the work, although it is believed that the house was designed by an English architect. The house was built for a Mr. Hooper of Marblehead as a summer home and is frequently called the King Hooper House, "King" being a name given to Hooper by the fishermen of Marblehead because of his position of leadership among the merchants.

The stairway is a very fine example of the early work. The newel post is of mahogany elaborately carved, while the balusters of various patterns also show great ingenuity. It seems very probable that many of the rope-like effects seen in the carved balustrades of these houses were the result of the artisans' previous work on ship interiors where simulations of ropes and hawsers were frequently used. At the second-story level the wall is covered with old pictorial paper, which in this case depicts scenes in the adventures of Telemachus. Indications of the paper may be seen in the frontispiece illustration. The drawing room is paneled in mahogany and, with a marble-faced fireplace, is full of dignity and charm. The other illustrations are of rooms executed in white pine.

In Marblehead, there are two of the famous Lee mansions, one of which was the home of Col. William R. Lee, an officer of the Revolution, and which stands opposite Abbott Hall. This mansion and over one hundred other houses in the vicinity were erected by Samuel Lee—Builder, who brought over from England in his sailing vessels all the brick, timber, and other materials used in the construction. The rear wing of the mansion was part of Samuel Lee's home and was built about 1743. The front portion was erected later, between 1780 and 1790, by Colonel Lee when he purchased the estate, and, according to old correspondence, for proportion and comfort it was considered one of the best examples of Bulfinch's art and was probably executed early in his career, shortly

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after his return from study in England. The marble mantel shown in the illustration and which replaced some simple wood mouldings was brought from Italy. The pictorial paper in the drawing room has a peculiar interest in that it was hung for a visit made in 1789 by General Washington, who held Colonel Lee in high esteem.

The other Lee mansion at Marblehead was built in 1768 for Col. Jeremiah Lee and was among the most costly of the time, \$50,000 having been spent in its construction, a sum then considered very large. The view of the end of the drawing room, with its beautifully proportioned Corinthian pilasters and Georgian paneling is indicative of the character throughout the house.

The view of the parlor in the Salem house, at 94 Boston Street, shows well the use of pictorial wall paper and its highly decorative effect in a room.

The Cabot house was built by Joseph Cabot in 1748, a date which places it among the earlier ones of this general period.

One of the finest examples of the architecture of this time of commercial prosperity is the Pierce-Johonnot-Nichols house, generally known simply as the Nichols house. Erected in 1782, it has many excellent examples of McIntire's carving, which are today in a very good state of preservation. Additional woodwork was placed in the house in 1800, but the doorway-illustrated here is coeval with the house.

The house now occupied as the Home for Aged Women is a brick mansion built about 1775 and contains some beautiful delicate details of the character so frequently executed at the time.

Perhaps the most famous example of early architecture ever erected in Salem was the Elias Derby house, built in 1799. McIntire was the architect for the building and with \$80,000 to be expended he was able to put such care and labor on the carving and the general embellishment of the interiors that the work was undoubtedly the best that ever came from his hands. Unfortunately this house was demolished in 1814; but at that time Captain Cook was building a home, and, realizing the beauty of the McIntire details, obtained many of them for himself, including gateposts and mantels. The illustrations show the best of these details and also the interesting scenic wall paper which was made in Paris.

While we know today who the architects were for some of these houses, many of them were undoubtedly designed not by any especially trained man but by the master carpenter. Frequently, too, the owner played a very important part in the designing, since a certain amount of architectural appreciation, if not professional ability, was supposed to be part of the culture of every gentleman of that time. It was such general realization and appreciation of good architecture which made possible the high quality of all the work of the period.

The interiors shown within these pages are from some of the best houses in Salem and vicinity. They offer, by their adherence to the fundamental principles of design and by the good taste in their detail, examples of precedent which may serve as inspiration at any period, while the thoroughness with which the work was done has fortunately made them enduring monuments of the life and culture of the eighteenth century in New England.