

GUIDE TO THE PEABODY MUSEUM

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Guide to the Peabody museum by Peabody Museum of Salem

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PEABODY MUSEUM OF SALEM

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PEABODY MUSEUM (EAST INDIA MARINE HALL)

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SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS
1916

THE PEABODY MUSEUM.

The Peabody Museum of Salem owes its name to George Peabody of London who in 1867 gave the funds by which the museum of the East India Marine Society founded in 1799 and the natural history collections of the Essex Institute were combined in an institution in the hands of trustees conducted for the "Promotion of Science and Useful Knowledge in the County of Essex.*

The first act of the newly appointed trustees was the purchase of the East India Marine building, the large hall on the second floor of which was immediately remodelled and refitted for the reception of the combined collections. This work and the arrangement of the objects of the natural history and ethnological departments occupied nearly two years. The rearranged and greatly augmented museum was dedicated to public uses and opened during the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held in Salem in August, 1869, many eminent scientists taking part in the exercises, including Prof. Louis Agassiz, the founder of the Harvard University Museum at Cambridge.

It may be said that three dates just a generation apart mark the periods of development of the present museum: 1799, the founding of the Salem East India Marine Society; 1834, the formation of the Essex County Natural History Society†; and 1867, the establishment of the Trustees of the Peabody Museum, and a fourth date again a generation later, marks the greatly extended development of this institution.

The Salem East India Marine Society was an unique institution,

* George Peabody was born in South Danvers,—named Peabody in his honor in 1858.—February 18, 1795. He died in London, November 4, 1869 and was buried in Harmony Grove cemetery in Salem in February, 1870. The institution was originally incorporated as the "Peabody Academy of Science", a misleading name changed by act of legislature to the "Peabody Museum of Salem."

† This society and the Essex Historical Society united in 1848 to form the Essex Institute, whose natural history collections were permanently deposited with the Peabody Museum in 1867.

its membership being restricted to "any persons who shall have navigated the seas near the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn, either as Masters or Commanders, or (being of the age of twenty-one years) as Factors or Supercargoes of any vessels belonging to Salem." The objects of the organization were:—First, to assist the widows and children of deceased members who may need it; Second, to collect such facts and observations as tend to the improvement and security of navigation and, Third, to form a Museum of natural and artificial curiosities, particularly such as are to be found beyond the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn." The first gift to the museum was from Capt. Jonathan Carnes, a number of objects from Sumatra, several of which are still preserved and treasured as the nucleus of the Peabody Museum.

The East India Marine Society at first occupied rooms on the third floor of the Stearns building, which formerly stood at the northeast corner of Washington and Essex streets, but, in 1804, the Society moved to rooms expressly fitted for the purpose in the then new Pickman building, which occupied the present site of the Downing block, 173 Essex street. It is an interesting fact that these rooms were later the home, successively, of the Athenæum, the Historical and Natural History societies, and the Essex Institute. Between the years 1804 and 1820, the collections rapidly increased, the museum became crowded and, in 1824, the East India Marine Hall building was erected. The lower floor was occupied by the Asiatic Bank, the Oriental Insurance Office, and the U. S. Post Office, while the large hall above, one hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, was devoted to the museum and the social meetings of the organization. The dedication, a great event at the time, took place October 14, 1825, John Quincy Adams, then President of the United States, delivering the opening address.

During the years which followed, accessions to the ethnological department of the museum, from China, India, the Pacific Islands, Africa and South America, were numerous and valuable, while at the meetings of the society there came together, socially, the travelled merchants and ship-masters of Salem; elegant suppers were

served on the great crescent shaped table which formerly occupied the center of the hall, and many distinguished guests were entertained.

As early as 1821 the society printed a catalog of its museum which, even then, was arranged as a scientific collection. It is interesting besides to record that, during the entire century and more of its existence, no admission fee has ever been charged visitors to the museum. At first, members' cards admitted to the hall which was kept open during the warmer months and since the museum has been in the hands of the Peabody Trustees its doors have been constantly open, free to all. The East India Marine Society exists today as a board of trustees acting solely under the first clause of its organization, distributing the income of its fund among the families of its members "who may need it".

The Peabody Museum now occupies the East India Marine Hall building erected in 1824, the Ethnological building erected in 1885, with the lecture hall (Academy Hall) on the lower floor, and Weld Hall, with work rooms and offices on its lower floor, built in 1906, the gift of Dr. Charles G. Weld, a benefactor of the institution in many other ways. The museum has published memoirs, reports and pocket hand books on natural history and other subjects. It conducted one of the first summer schools of biology and maintains lectures and classes in natural history and cooperates with local school boards and with private schools in class work at the museum.

The work of the institution is conducted and its museum is maintained entirely from the trust funds and the contributions of generous friends; it has no other source of income. The annual expenses have increased with the growth of the museum and the demands of the times and its work and usefulness could be greatly advanced by additions to its fund and income. The publications, photographs of objects in the collections, etc., may be obtained of the constable in the museum. Those who desire information regarding the specimens, or in relation to scientific subjects should make inquiries at the offices or on request the constable will call some officer of the museum.



PEABODY MUSEUM MARINE ROOM—TWO VIEWS.

THE MARINE ROOM.

The Marine Room collections occupy the large front room and the corridor cases and walls on the lower floor of the East India Marine Hall building directly at the public entrance. The collection includes the portraits of prominent Salem merchants, members and officers of the Salem East India Marine Society, together with many interesting relics connected with the early social character of that institution; a large collection of paintings and full-rigged and builder's working models of old types of sailing vessels and objects of every sort illustrating the life of a sailor. It forms a fitting memorial of the commercial-marine history of Salem and the shipmasters and merchants who, — as indicated in the motto of the city seal,—brought to Salem "the riches of the Indies" and carried her name and fame "even to the remotest ports".*

In the corridor case next the main entrance are arranged the objects illustrating the whaling industry; also the nautical instruments. The whaling collection begins with the natural history of whales and continues with harpoons, bomb-lances, shoulder guns, used in their capture and a huge Norwegian bomb harpoon fired from a cannon on whaling steamers. On the wall opposite are hafted implements ready for use,—harpoons, old and recent forms, lances, cutting-spades and "grains". In another section of the case are the products of the industry,—oils, spermaceti, whalebone, tooth ivory and ambergris, the last a product of disease of the sperm whale and varying in value from two to four hundred dollars per pound. There are full-rigged models of the whaling bark "Sea Fox", a whaling brig from Provincetown and a whale-boat, besides several paintings, eight half-hull models of old-time whaling vessels and many souvenirs made on long voyages by sailors.

Among the nautical instruments are quadrants from 1750 to 1860, sextants, circle of reflection, half-circle, nocturnal of 1724, implement for drawing curves, of 1693, logs, artificial horizons,

* The city seal was designed by Col. George Peabody in 1839. The original sketches may be seen at the Essex Institute.