

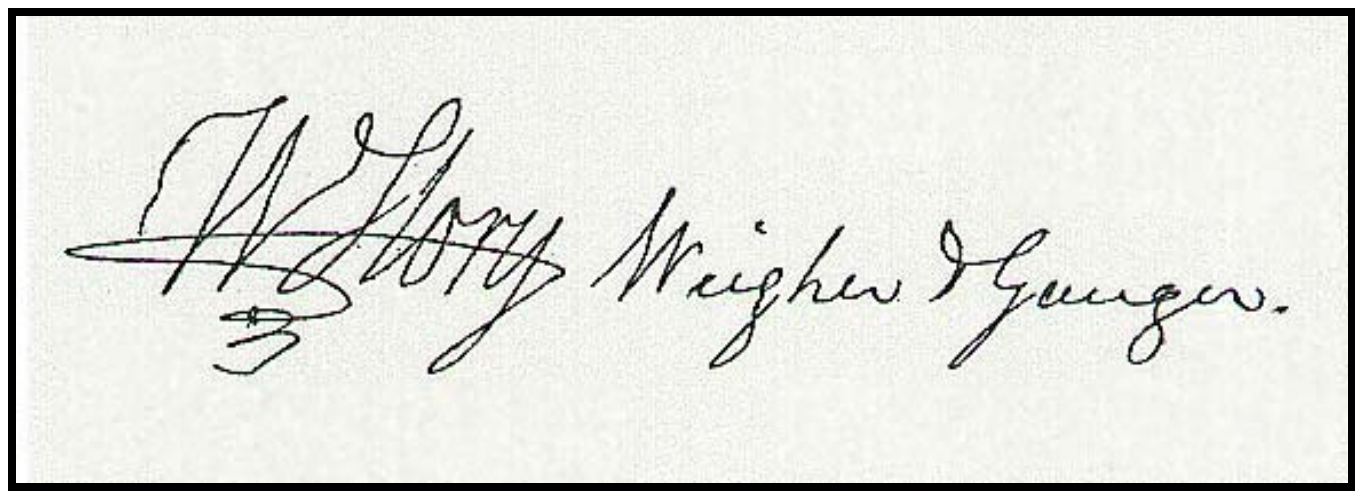
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Salem Maritime National Historic Site
Salem, Massachusetts

Retired on the Fourth of July

By John Frayler, Historian



∞ Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions ∞
Historical musings from Salem Maritime NHS
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Readers of the introductory chapter to *The Scarlet Letter* will remember Nathaniel Hawthorne's recollections of his experiences while working at the Salem Custom House. Hawthorne, in this biting segue into the main story line of the novel, presents his fellow employees in a less-than-favorable light. One of the stereotyped hapless recipients of Hawthorne's stinging imagery would have been, though not identified by name, Captain William Story. The acquisition by the National Park Service this year of a structure slated for demolition provides us with an opportunity to look more deeply into the life of a man who deserves better from posterity than the blanket accusations of incompetence by an angry author.

The National Park Service recently obtained from the Town of Marblehead the colonial period waterfront structure most recently called the "Tucker's Wharf" building. The building has a history dating back to 1770, when Captain Thomas Pedrick (1736- 1802) built it as a warehouse. There have been a number of owners since

Captain Pedrick died, and one of them was Captain William Story. The National Park Service's goal is to preserve the structure due to its historical value as one of the few surviving examples of an eighteenth century waterfront building and re-erect it on Derby Wharf at Salem Maritime National Historic Site. The disassembled building will be stored until re-assembled in Salem. Although the acquisition is certainly within the theme of the park, it is the connection with Captain Story that gives undisputed validity to the project.

Captain William Story was the son of Dr. Elisha and Ruth (Ruddock) Story of Marblehead, born August 18, 1774. He was one of eighteen Story siblings¹ and older half-brother of the future United States Supreme Court Justice, Joseph Story.

William is less well known than his brother Joseph, but his life was interesting, productive, and very long.

¹ Leon Friedman and Fred L. Israel, *The Justices of the United States Supreme Court 1789- 1969*, vol. 1, (New York and London, 1969), p. 435.

There seems to have been a lot going on in William Story's life in 1797. It appears that at some point in 1797 he was Master of William Orne's brigantine *Mars*, his first command.² He married Elizabeth Patten of Marblehead on August 6. A few weeks later, William was on his way to the East Indies.

According to his longtime associate, William W. Oliver, Deputy Collector of Customs for the District of Salem and Beverly, William Story served as First Officer aboard the ship *Friendship* of Salem during her first five voyages, commencing in August 1797, before taking command in February 1801.³ The first of his voyages as Master was to Hamburg, Germany, and St. Petersburg, Russia, from mid-February to August 1801. The second, from early November through April 1802, visited the Mediterranean ports of Alicant (Alicante) and Taragora (Tarragona), Spain, and Leghorn (Livorno), Italy. The third, and longest, voyage aboard *Friendship*, to Sumatra

² Walter Muir Whitehill, *Portraits of Shipmasters and Merchants in the Peabody Museum of Salem*, (Salem, 1939), pp. 123, 124.

and Canton, lasted twenty-six months. Although the whereabouts of Captain Story's logs for *Friendship's* voyages is unknown, part of the Canton and the previous two voyages have been reconstructed from other sources. *Friendship* was at Canton from October 10 through November 5, 1803,⁴ and home again by the end of August 1804.

In January 1806 Captain Story took command of the 359-ton ship *Marquis De Someruelas* (named after Salvador del Muro y Salazar, Marquis de Someruelas, the Governor of Cuba), owned by Richard and John Gardner, Jr., of Salem. Disaster was soon to overtake Captain Story in the East Indies. On September 18, 1806, the vessel was loading a cargo of pepper near the village of Chitcher, some seventy miles up the Jamba River on the East Coast of Sumatra. Pirates attacked the ship, one crewman was killed and others wounded, but the pirates were finally repulsed. In *Pepper and Pirates*, James

³ George Granville Putnam, *Salem Vessels and Their Voyages*, Series II (Salem, 1924), p. 54.

Duncan Phillips addresses the incident in detail, primarily based on Captain Story's account published in the *Salem Register* shortly after his return (March 19, 1807). The *Marquis De Someruelas* returned to Salem by way of Europe. Phillips adds another bit of information about the voyage from a book of the ship's accounts, quoting the value of the cargo sold in Hamburg and Russia at \$126,875.51. The net cost of the voyage was \$27, 123.81 leaving a balance of \$99,937.70 to be shared between Richard and John Gardner, Jr.⁵

Following the harrowing experience of the Sumatra voyage, Captain Story chose to follow a less exciting path and more actively pursue the life of merchant and ship owner in his hometown of Marblehead (he was already part owner of the brigantine *Ruthy* in 1805).⁶

During the years leading up to the War of 1812, Captain Story owned the schooners *Robert* (1809), *Sally*

⁴ Rhys Richards, *The American Neptune*, Special Supplement to Volume 54,

"United States Trade With China, 1784- 1814," (Salem, 1994), p. 40.

⁵ James Duncan Phillips, *Pepper and Pirates* (Boston, 1949), pp. 54- 62.

(1809), and *Union* (1810), and the brig *Oriental* (1810).⁷ In 1809 he also appears on Customs records as owner of two schooners named *Polly*, one of 63 tons built at Ipswich in 1786 and owned with Stephen White, the other of 114 tons, built at Marshfield in 1800.

William Story's ownership of the "Tucker's Wharf" property began on August 11, 1809. He purchased the western half of the wharf, building, and land from Captain Joseph Proctor for \$425. Products consigned to Captain Story during the years he operated his business at this location included wine, oranges, raisins, almonds, oil (presumably olive oil), figs, salt, ochre, glassware and mirrors, saffron, and bags of feathers.⁸ Evidently he was operating a general merchandising enterprise.

The War of 1812 brought lean times to New England commerce, and it was slow to recover. Long a highly

⁶ Francis B. C. Bradlee, *Marblehead's Foreign Commerce 1789- 1850* (Salem, 1929), p. 55.

⁷ Robert A. Booth, Jr., "*Transportation*" A study of the history & significance of the building formerly the office & store of the Marblehead Transportation Company (Marblehead, 2003), p.22.

regarded citizen of Marblehead, in 1817 Captain Story found it necessary to mortgage his Washington Street house and his mercantile property. He continued unable to re-pay his debts and finally sold his property rights to Salem merchants Stephen White and William Fettyplace (Story's brothers-in-law), and relocated to Salem. He soon returned to the sea for a living. In 1821 he was Master of Stephen White's brig *Eliza & Mary* and made voyages to Pernambuco (Recife, Brazil) and St. Petersburg, Russia. He left the ship at Gothenburg, Sweden, on the return voyage. The Mate, Nathaniel Griffin, continued the voyage to New York.⁹ Captain Story assumed command of Stephen White's brig *Cygnets* in May 1822, and in 1823 sailed for his brothers-in-law's firm as Master of the brig *Franklin*. 1824 found him owner and Master of the 129-ton brig *Susan & Sarah*. This vessel was lost in a gale at Gibraltar in 1825. In 1826 he was owner and Master of the 164-ton schooner *Sally*.

⁹ Marblehead Returns of Cargoes by Inspectors November 25, 1805- April 5, 1817. Custom Service document in Salem Maritime NHS collection.

Captain Story retired from the sea once more in 1827 when, at age 53, he secured an appointment as a Weigher and Gauger at the Salem Custom House, a position that paid very well. Between April 2 and June 30, 1827 he earned \$437.91, quite a lot of money at that time.¹⁰ Interestingly, this was not the first time that a Story family member considered a career with the Customs Service. William's brother Joseph declined an appointment as Naval Officer at the Salem Custom House in 1803.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's caustic comments in the introductory chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* concerning the men who he worked with as Surveyor of the Port of Salem from 1846 through 1849 did them great injustice. Although intended as a sarcastically humorous depiction of life at the Custom House, his former associates and their families found the remarks far too personal. It is true that many of the staff were old, retired sea captains and not in the best of health, but deeper exploration of

⁹ George Granville Putnam, *Salem Vessels and Their Voyages*, Series I (Salem, 1924), p. 57.

¹⁰ Customs Service records for Salem and Beverly, microfilm reel # 170.

the subject points to the fact that the Customs officers were not always, as Hawthorne said, "asleep in their accustomed corners."

Hawthorne was upset at being singled out for removal from his position as Surveyor for political reasons in 1849, and the accompanying loss of his \$1200 annual salary, while his associates continued in their jobs. In *The Scarlet Letter* he railed on about how little they actually accomplished, but the records indicate that some of them were actually very busy. In 1851 Captain Story (age 77) and his fellow weighers and gaugers, Perley Putnam (age 73), and young William B. Pike (age 41) each earned just over \$1400. The salaries of weighers and gaugers were augmented with an amount paid for each item processed. For the sake of comparison, in the same year the Collector was paid \$2002.64, the Deputy Collector \$1000, and the Inspectors were entitled to \$3.00 per day when called in to work and averaged \$710

for the year."¹¹ It seems that some among the "excellent old persons" were not quite as torpid as Hawthorne would have us believe.

George Granville Putnam personally remembered Captain Story. "He was a tremendously powerful man, and it was said of him that he could lift a ship's anchor. He lived on Bridge Street in his latest years, next to the present Calvary Baptist Church. He was the father of the late Augustus Story, who was president of the Holyoke Fire Insurance Company."¹²

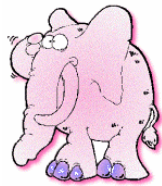
Putnam gives an insight into Captain Story's character with a quote from the *Salem Register* at the time of Story's death, March 17, 1864: "He was the oldest citizen of Salem, in his 90th year, and one of the noblest specimens of the distinguished class to which he belonged. He contributed his full share to the services rendered by that class to the commercial prosperity of

¹¹ List of all persons employed in Collecting the Revenue in the District of [Salem and Beverly] on the 30th September, 1851. Customs Service document in the Salem Maritime NHS collection.

¹² Putnam, Series I, p. 30.

this city and the whole country, in the period of his early manhood and during his prime. In private life he was as tender, affectionate and true, as he was faithful, fearless and conscientious and energetic in his professional and public conduct....His voice, which was in grand accordance with his herculean strength and generous nature, will be ever heard cheering, animating and rousing all to every duty, as when, in times of yore, its tones were heard in the assemblies of the people, and rose above the storm from the tempest- tossed deck." ¹³

Seventy- nine year old Captain Story retired from the Customs Service after twenty- six years at the Salem Custom House on the Fourth of July, 1853.



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¹³ Ibid.