

# Robert Salmon's Boston Patrons

By JOHN WILMERDING

ROBERT SALMON'S patrons give a clear idea of his reputation in Boston. As one reviews the list of those who acquired his pictures, he becomes conscious of the many names then and still prominent. Of the thirty-two individuals whom Salmon himself records as customers, almost all were engaged in Boston's prosperity as a seaport. Some were makers of boats or sails. Among others interested in his work were Thomas Handasyd Perkins and his son, T. H. Perkins, Jr.; R. B. Forbes and J. P. Cushing, his nephews; and Samuel Cabot, his son-in-law. Together, these men begin to provide a picture of contemporary tastes in Boston collecting. In this respect Salmon's catalogue is the most detailed continuing record over a period of time which tells us who collected in Boston in the first half of the nineteenth century, what they bought, and what they paid.<sup>1</sup>

The artist could hardly have found a more distinguished customer than the elder Perkins. A native of Boston, one of her most famous merchants, philanthropists, and a prominent member of the Federalist Party, Perkins was elected to the United States Senate eight times between 1805 and 1829, besides being a presidential elector in 1816 and 1832. He generously supported public institutions as well as individuals like Salmon. Obviously this marine painter could produce the

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kind of ship and harbor portrait with a polish that Perkins could appreciate. Salmon had not been in Boston a year when his discriminating patron made the first of what would be several purchases.

Samuel Cabot, Perkins' son-in-law, was in 1837 the director of the Boston Bank and the year after president of the Port Society of the City of Boston and its Vicinity. John Perkins Cushing, a nephew of Perkins, was similarly engaged in Boston's mercantile affairs. Beginning as a clerk in the firm established by his two Perkins uncles, James and Thomas H., Cushing soon became interested in the company's trade with China and the Northwest Coast. In 1803 at the age of sixteen he went to China, where he remained for nearly thirty years, a highly respected foreign merchant known as Ku-Shing. Enormously wealthy but broken in health by 1830, Cushing returned to Boston. He built himself a handsome mansion on Summer Street, acquired a splendid estate in Watertown, and erected one of the finest conservatories in New England. He also constructed the sixty-foot pilot schooner *Sylph*, which in 1832 won the earliest American yacht race on record. A collector as well, he would have naturally found appealing the marines of Boston's best practitioner of the day. Like Cushing, Captain Robert Bennet Forbes was also a Perkins nephew. According to Morison, Forbes "had the most original brain, and the most attractive personality of any Boston merchant of his generation . . . [He] was also one of the pioneer yachtsmen of New England."<sup>2</sup> Entering employment in the Perkins ship-

ping firm at thirteen, Forbes embarked on a colorful career in which he succeeded as sea captain, China merchant, ship owner, and writer. The catalogue of the 1834 exhibition of paintings at the Boston Athenæum lists six paintings owned by Forbes which were the work of Salmon. Since some of their titles do not plausibly match the sketchy descriptions in Salmon's catalogue, Forbes may have owned even a larger group of paintings than the nine that Salmon mentions.

Other noted Boston names were among Salmon's clients in the 1830's. Henry W. Sigourney was one of the directors of the ferry company operating between Boston and Chelsea. Benjamin Fullerton was a boat builder at 24 Charter Street. Josiah Putnam Bradlee was a merchant and also at one point a director of the Boston Bank. He headed the firm of Josiah Bradlee and Sons, a business with offices on India Wharf engaged both in the Russia trade and the whale fishery. As described by those who remembered him, Bradlee was "a cheerful, old-school gentleman . . . who wore small clothes and white-topped boots." Samuel Hooper was a junior partner in his father-in-law's shipping firm, Bryant, Sturgis & Co. He subsequently organized his own company, and went on to be elected to the Massachusetts and to the United States House of Representatives. Harrison Gray Otis was another distinguished figure in Boston commerce and philanthropy. In an earlier age Otis had commissioned three successive houses from the noted architect, Charles Bulfinch. James Trecothick Austin was an accomplished Massachusetts lawyer and politician, and from 1832 to 1843 state Attorney General. Timothy Williams was another merchant with offices on India Wharf.

One interesting collector's note is re-

corded by Charles Francis Adams, one of the most illustrious members of that family, a distinguished U. S. statesman and minister to Great Britain. Although Salmon did not himself record selling a painting to Adams, the latter set down in his diary, in rather Yankee fashion, his acquisition of a picture by the marine painter.

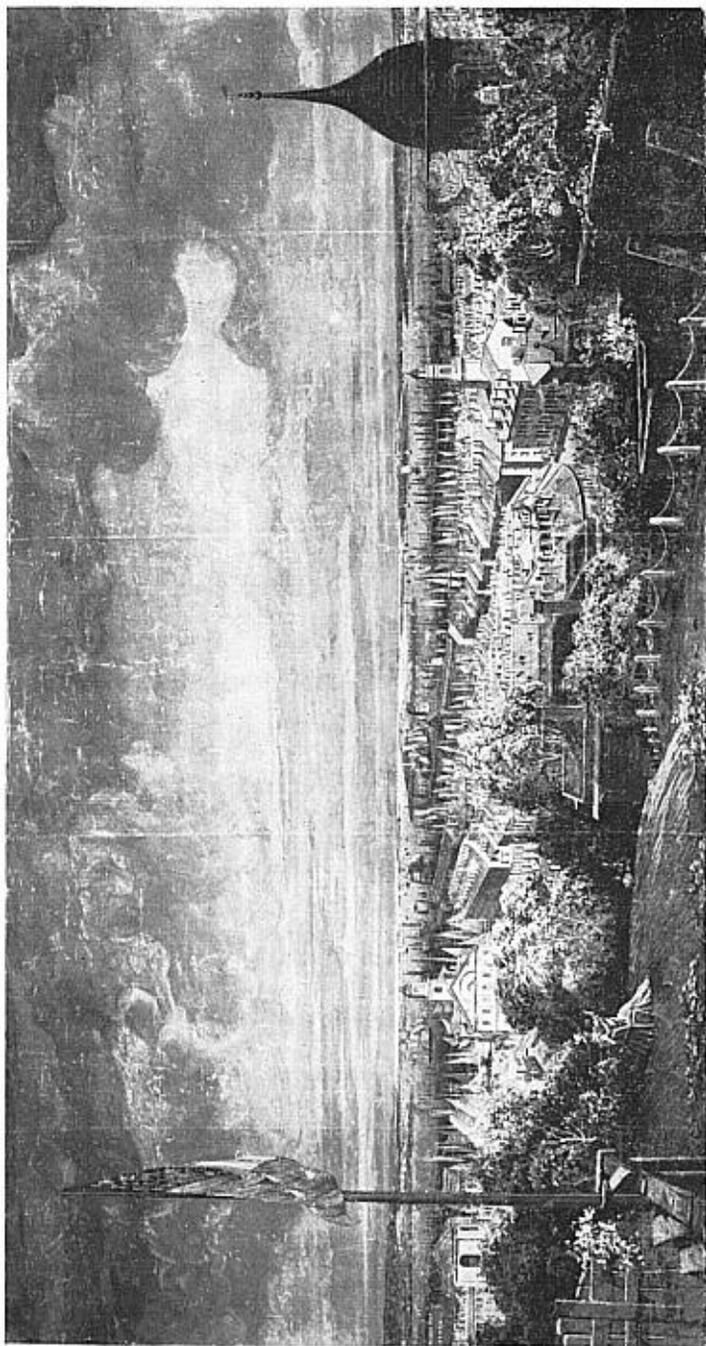
On 5 August 1830 he wrote:

Having done all my usual duties at the office I thought I would go down to see how the pictures of Salmon would sell. They are all of them very pretty and went so very reasonably that I felt very much tempted to purchase. But I held in exceedingly well until the close, when one came up which I could not resist and immediately repented of the act. But it was too late.

He appended a footnote over a month later, on 24 September:

My picture came home today and I was confirmed in my opinion of it's merit.<sup>3</sup>

Boston's first generation of yachtsmen was also its first generation of art collectors. A number of the men who gave their patronage to Salmon, including Thomas Perkins Cushing and Robert Bennet Forbes, were among the first people in Massachusetts to have yachts built for themselves. When the Bostonian Society held a large and popular exhibition of ship paintings in 1894, a painting by Salmon brought interesting information with it. Loaned by Thomas B. Winchester, the picture was of the *Yacht "Northern Light,"* "painted by R. Salmon for Mr. Stephen Winchester Dana, and by him given to Col. Wm. Parsons Winchester, the owner of the yacht, representing it passing down the harbor." Salmon's catalogue does not record the sale of any paintings to a Mr. Dana, but a "Mr. Winchester" did purchase a "loch Lomond sun sett" in 1830 and "an Ameri-



BOSTON FROM PEMBERTON HILL, BY ROBERT SALMON  
Collections of the Society.

can Sloup" in 1831. The picture of the *Northern Light* would have been painted no earlier than 1839, when this smart schooner was built for Colonel Winchester. The description of Salmon's painting has additional interest, for the *Northern Light* was the subject of the only painting which Fitz Hugh Lane is known to have based on a picture by Salmon.

Salmon also painted, in 1839, the *Dream*, a schooner yacht owned by the Boat Club, of which R. B. Forbes was first commodore. The artist's interest in yachts and yachting seems to have been of long standing; among the pictures he exhibited at Liverpool in 1824 was one of a "Pleasure Yacht." In view of his interest in yachts on both sides of the Atlantic, it is interesting to recall a detail from A. T. Perkins' letter of 1881 concerning the four paintings by Salmon which he owned. The red cutter in three of the pictures had belonged, he remembered, to an English nobleman with whom his father, T. H. Perkins, Jr., and Salmon both had sailed.

Through such associations as these Salmon seems to have had wide acquaintance with the men and affairs of maritime Boston. But Lucius Manlius Sargent also demonstrated that Salmon's patrons were all not of a mold. Sargent was a man of strong opinions and a tireless writer whose leisurely, contentious, antiquarian articles, "Dealings with the Dead," ran for years on the back page of the *Boston Evening Transcript* and were published in book form in 1856. Several other individuals are associated with paintings of special interest.

The "J. P. Davies" who purchased No. 857 was apparently Isaac P. Davis, a trustee of the Boston Athenæum, where the painting now hangs. It depicts the

*Seizure of a French Ship by Boats from the U. S. S. "Constitution,"* and involves not only Davis but his brother John as well as the first lieutenant of the *Constitution*, Isaac Hull. John Paul Russo has sorted out the facts related to the incident and to the painting's subsequent presentation to the Athenæum.<sup>4</sup> John Davis had distinguished himself in Boston as United States District Judge for Massachusetts, founder and early officer of the Athenæum, Fellow of Harvard College, and President of the Massachusetts Historical Society. He evidently commissioned Salmon's painting as a present for the now Commodore Hull, commander of the Boston Naval Shipyard and hero of the famous battle of the *Guerrière*. Probably his brother, Isaac Davis, then an Athenæum trustee and member of the Fine Arts Committee actually purchased the painting. After receiving the painting from John Davis, Commodore Hull in turn gave it to the Athenæum in 1835.

Salmon's paintings of Boston harbor and shoreline were among his best, and doubtless had an impact on other younger artists. His *Wharves of Boston*, now in the Bostonian Society, is one of his finest in quality and execution, with a sharpness of light and a clarity of form seldom surpassed anywhere else in his work. Coming but a year after his arrival in Boston, it must have won him immediate respect. The Boston wharves were, in these years, undergoing continual expansion in order to accommodate the increased volume and tempo of shipping activity. Central Wharf was completed in 1819, and during Mayor Josiah Quincy's tenure as Mayor (1823 to 1828) the two-story granite market building designed by Alexander Parris went up on land filled in near Long Wharf. In the spacious rotunda above, Salmon exhibited his

paintings a few years later. Visitors to Boston's harbor were naturally impressed with all these facilities.<sup>5</sup>

The presentation of Salmon's *Wharves of Boston* in 1894 to the Society occasioned a brief account in the *Proceedings* of that institution published the next year.<sup>6</sup> The Society had held an exhibition of ship paintings, which had stimulated Dr. Henry P. Quincy to make a gift of the Salmon painting in memory of his late brother, Edmund. Efforts to identify the ship and its strange sunburst emblem on the foretopsail have been unsuccessful. The painting held obvious historical interest in 1895 for Bostonians who had witnessed "the waters of our harbor . . . encroached upon, by the extension of wharves and the laying out of marginal streets, during the last half century."<sup>7</sup>

Salmon's work, however, was not merely "an object of fashionable patronage," as one newspaper put it, but was equally known to his fellow artists and friends. Once settled in Boston, Salmon found himself virtually the only marine painter in the community. Aside from Washington Allston, moreover, he was the only man in Boston at that time who had devoted his life to painting for many years. It is not surprising that aspiring young artists like Henry Hitchings visited him and valued the opportunity to talk to him and see his work. The frequent newspaper notices of his work, and the number of his patrons who belonged to Boston families of substance, reinforce the impression that his talents were widely noticed and admired.

The smallness of the artistic world of Boston in that day can be glimpsed in the autobiography of Benjamin Champney, who came to the city in 1834 to work in a shoe store, soon found an opportunity to serve an apprenticeship to Pendleton

the lithographer, and in this way commenced a long career as an artist:

At this time there were few artists in Boston. Alvan Fisher and Thomas Doughty were painting landscapes; Salmon, marines; and Geo. L. Brown was exhibiting landscapes and marines painted in his early manner. Gerry & Burt had a place where they painted banners and signs. . . . Both these artists were painting landscapes when possible. Harding was the principal portrait painter. Albert Hoyt came to the city about this time, as did also Henry Willard, Joseph Ames was just beginning his work, as were also Thomas Ball, and George Fuller a little later on. They were all struggling young men, experimenting as they could in colors, and looking up to Washington Allston as the great master, as indeed he was.<sup>8</sup>

Almost alone among the artists named, Salmon and Chester Harding were not "struggling young men." Harding, however, was a self-taught native American painter; Salmon was one of the handful of British painters of this era who brought to America a different kind of skill, and a fresh link to long-established traditions.

Whether that link was continued in the errant career of Salmon's nephew is unknown. The facts about him and his work are few. In the *Boston Almanac* for 1841 the two marine painters listed are F. H. Lane, 17 School Street, and Robert Salmon, 16 Marine railway. One of the six "Coach and Chaise Painters" is John M. Salmon, Marlboro Place. In the *National Academy of Design Catalogue* of the Eighteenth Annual Exhibition, 1843, entry number 345 was: "Landscape from Nature, for Sale . . . J. Salmon."<sup>9</sup> Recently three watercolors of beach scenes turned up in the collection of Dr. J. B. Penfold of Colchester, Essex, England; on the reverse of each is written: "Lowestoft Beach. J. Salmon." They are charming and competent watercolors in horizontal formats that are proportionately longer than any of

Robert Salmon's. Each depicts a lighthouse just above the beach from opposite angles. A shipwreck is just visible off shore, and men are attempting to land the lifeboats while avoiding the ledges beneath the breaking waves. The painting of the water is nicely handled; the slabs of rocks, the details of the ships, and the figures collected on the beach are all reminiscent of Robert Salmon's style. But aside from stylistic similarities further documentation is missing. If these airy little scenes are by the nephew, they testify to good instruction and example set by his uncle. London Directories for 1865 through 1868 list under Artists, "John Salmon, 156 Camden Street, Camden Town, N.W." It is possible that the nephew returned with Robert Salmon to London, but there is no way of verifying this. If this elusive nephew were as talented as Hitchings suggests, he may have produced at least a few works that rival Salmon's own, and it may well be that some unsigned paintings today attributed to Salmon are in fact by the forgotten student.

Although the record of his activities is incomplete after 1842, Salmon's influence did not end so mysteriously or abruptly, contrary to popular thought. He is now definitely known to have had a pupil in Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-1865), as well as probable imitators in William Bradford (1823-1892) and Albert Van Beest (1820-1860). Lane was a cripple from youth who had early turned to pencil sketching and lithography. He left his native Gloucester in 1832 to become an apprentice at William Pendleton's lithography shop and remained in Boston doing prints and later oil canvases until 1848.<sup>10</sup> As previously mentioned, Salmon made note of doing on commission several small sketches for Pendleton between

1831 and 1833. At Pendleton's shop he may also have known John W. A. Scott, who later went into business with Lane as lithographic publisher, becoming an accomplished painter in his own right after Lane returned to Gloucester.<sup>11</sup> About 1835, Benjamin Champney also was working for Pendleton; his mention of Salmon as one of the comparatively few artists then living in Boston has been quoted earlier. Other details, small in themselves, contribute to the picture. Salmon's lodgings for one year, 1834, are listed in the Boston City Directory as being at the rear of Pendleton's shop on Washington Street. All that is known of the commissioning of Salmon's painting on the fire at the Old State House, and the making of the engraving based on it, suggests a close relationship in the project between Salmon, W. S. Pendleton, and the engraver, James Eddy. Incidentally, Eddy, like many others associated with W. S. Pendleton, had an interesting career which contributed to the development of an audience for art in America. For Pendleton, in the eighteen thirties, he did detailed work on stone as well as copper, producing many lithographed maps. At one point in his career he earned a living in New York City as a portrait painter and art dealer, and imported made-to-order copies of old masters—an activity characteristic of the time and of the awakening of taste and of interest in the arts which was taking place.

Salmon records the purchase of three pictures (No. 557 and Nos. 616 and 617, all in his list of "Special pictures") by the Boston portrait painter, Francis Alexander. A respected member of Boston's artistic community, Alexander was already becoming a collector as well as a successful artist; in mid-century he was to become one of the first Americans—as

James Jackson Jarves was also—to collect Italian primitive paintings. He, too, could have met Salmon through W. S. Pendleton, for he drew a number of portraits on stone for Pendleton in the years around 1830.

Another younger artist who took note of Salmon was the sculptor William Rimmer, who in 1865 bought the view of *Sunderland Bridge* now in the Boston Public Library. Rimmer was born in Liverpool in 1816 but left as a child of two with his father for Nova Scotia. In 1826 he moved with his family to Boston, two years before Salmon arrived. By 1830, at the age of fourteen, he was earning money working variously as a draughtsman, sign painter, typesetter, and lithographer. One wonders whether his path may have coincidentally crossed Salmon's, who also occasionally turned his hand to sign painting and lithography at this time. For his few surviving sculptures, pent up with passion and energy, Rimmer is best known today. But his own skill as a draughtsman must have led him to respond to a similar ability in Salmon's painting.

Craftsmen of other callings were also among Salmon's acquaintances. In part payment for sails Salmon had painted the portrait of John Lothrop, a sail maker with a shop at 113 Commercial Street. Another painting was a gift to Joseph Francis, a boat builder, perhaps as a part of a similar business arrangement. Francis was a native of Boston whose reputation was founded on his successful experiments in building unsinkable lifeboats. He was the designer of the barge which Salmon had painted for him. Francis began his experiments in the corner of a relative's boat-building plant. By 1819 he had succeeded in building a fast rowboat with supposedly unsinkable features. The boat

was exhibited at the Mechanics Fair in Boston that year and received "honorable recognition." The following year Francis went to New York in search of orders and financial support, but without success. At last in 1838 he produced a wooden boat that was capable of withstanding the severest tests that shipowners could devise. He patented his idea in 1838, and within fifteen years practically every vessel sailing out of New York carried a Francis lifeboat. By using paintings as payment for Lothrop and possibly for a boat from Francis, Salmon could neatly offer his talents in exchange for those of his friends.

As the painter records several times at the end of his catalogue, a number of his pictures were to have Doggett frames. The reference was to John Doggett, a native of Dedham and by 1818 Boston's most eminent frame maker. Known for a high standard of craftsmanship, the Doggett firm experienced steady prosperity through the 1820's and thirties. Besides frames, Doggett also made furniture and for Simon Willard several clock cases. In later years the firm added imported looking-glass plates and carpets to its inventory. Doggett's frames were on paintings by Washington Allston, Gilbert Stuart, and William Dunlap. The latter noted in a letter of 1812 that he was shipping his *Christ Rejected* to "Doggett's great room, a noble place." When the Boston Athenæum ordered from Stuart a portrait of T. H. Perkins for which the artist was to receive \$200, they ordered a frame from Doggett at \$60.64. This enterprising frame maker was also a collector. For \$500 he bought Thomas Sully's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, and from Stuart he ordered a set of portraits of the first five Presidents. He exhibited the set, known as the "American Kings," in

various cities, and it was on exhibition in the Library of Congress when a fire there destroyed most of the group.

A final word must include mention of the Darracott family. Miss Darracott, of course, owned the copy of Salmon's catalogue in 1881. About her there is little information, although a few pertinent facts about the family have emerged. The Rev. Edward G. Porter published in 1887 his *Rambles in Old Boston, New England*, in which he had a chapter describing Charter and adjacent streets in the North End:

On the east corner of Henchman's Lane, in the large wooden house built by his father, lived George Darracott, a prominent citizen, who was identified with many public interests, such as the Marine Railway, the Boston Gas Works, and the new Fire Department. The latter was organized largely through his influence, and he was appointed second in command, with William Barnicoat chief. Mr. Darracott's family numbered eight sons and eight daughters, many of whom are still living.<sup>12</sup>

Darracott was probably Salmon's landlord during the time he had his studio at the end of Marine Railway. When Salmon returned to Europe in the summer of 1842, he entrusted Darracott with the settlement of his affairs in Boston. Moreover, Darracott's connection with the fire department suggests that he was instrumental in obtaining for Salmon another commission. This was to make a painting that could serve as a basis for an engraving on a fire department certificate in 1833. It is also more than likely that the "Miss Darracott" of 1881 was one of George Darracott's numerous children.

Together, these various associations of Salmon's help to give us a picture of the artist's world in the Boston of the 1830's. Salmon seems to have been very much a part of the active and wide circle of collectors, artists, and craftsmen who were leaving their imprint on the city at this time.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Catalogue of Robert Salmon's Pictures, 1828 to 1840, from his own notes, now in possession of Miss Darracott, 1881." Manuscript, Boston Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, 1921), p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> C. F. Adams, *Diary* (24 Sept. and 5 Aug. 1830), Reel No. 60 of the microfilms of The Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> J. P. Russo, "Hull's First Victory. One Painting: Three Famous Men," *The American Neptune*, XXV (Jan. 1965), pp. 29-34.

<sup>5</sup> *Proceedings of the Bostonian Society at the*

Annual Meeting (8 January 1895), pp. 37-40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> B. Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists* (Woburn, Mass., 1900).

<sup>9</sup> *National Academy of Design Catalogue of the Eighteenth Annual Exhibition* (1843), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Fitz Hugh Lane, American Marine Painter* (Salem, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Rev. E. G. Porter, *Rambles in Old Boston, New England* (Boston, 1887), pp. 241-242.