

The South Danvers Observer

South Danvers in 1828

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South Danvers in 1828

—The painting, *South Danvers in 1828*, hangs near the Circulation Desk in the Peabody Institute Library. Because nearly two centuries divide us from the world mirrored in the painting, it is hard to realize that the scene depicted took place less than half a mile from where it hangs today.

The South Church

When studying the painting, the eye is first drawn to the church positioned nearly dead center. The South Church had its beginnings in 1710, when residents of the Middle Precinct of Salem, which Peabody was then known as, organized to form their own parish. The church was completed by Nov. 16, 1711. With only approximately 80 families living in the Middle Precinct at the time, it was an effort for the members to raise the money to pay for their first minister, Benjamin Prescott. It took them several more years before they

could gather enough funds to add the tower and steeple to the Meeting House. While the South Church Records don't report on the actual date of the construction, by 1720 a bell was in place and a bell-ringer selected.

Though the Witch Hysteria of 1692 was over and those executed had been recognized as innocent victims, many people at the time continued to look to demonic forces to make sense of strange storms or unusual events.

It is because of these superstitions that tales of the *Haunted Steeple* began. When the members of the parish scheduled a day to begin construction of the tower (or so the story goes), a "sudden tempest arose and so powerful was it, that it scattered about the lighter materials of the building and sent the men of the village back to their homes." [SDW, 3-21-1860] Under ordinary circumstances, such a tale might

have faded with time. But when another day was selected to attempt to build the tower, "a tremendous thunderstorm, attended by hail and rain, again interrupted their labors." [SDW, 3-21-1860]

To add insult to injury, it was said that the minister's cow was found dead that same day. Instead of looking to obvious causes (the storm), tales began to circulate that the steeple—when it was eventually completed—must be either cursed or haunted.

The Town Well

To the right of the South Congregational Church is present day Central Street. At the head of the street stands the town flagstaff and well. A town well was a fixture in just about every Massachusetts town in the in the early 19th century.

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"At a meeting of ye inhabitants of ye middle precinct in Salem Legally Warned November ye 16th day 1711. Whereas through ye good providence of God ye inhabitants of this precinct have bult [sic] a meetinghous [sic] for ye publick worship of God amongst themselves which is finished. . . ."

From the South Church Records, 1711-1739

The History of the Painting, *South Danvers in 1828*, and the Story of Gideon Foster Jr., 1782-1836

—Two years after General William Sutton's death in 1882, his Peabody residence was sold to the Old Ladies Home, later known as the Sutton Home for Aged Women. Following the sale a painted firescreen was discovered inside the building.

The event was reported in the April 26, 1884 *Peabody Press*.

"An ancient picture belonging to Gen. Wm. Sutton has been unearthed by George Holman, Esq., and all day Saturday attracted considerable attention in the windows of Hazen A. Spaulding's drug store. The picture was painted by Gideon Foster in 1828 for Gen. Sutton and represents the Square at that time—there being a muster of the Danvers Light Infantry."

The assumption, that Gideon Foster Jr. had been responsible for the painting had some basis in fact. Gideon Foster did, indeed, work as sign painter and artist in Salem from 1824 until 1827 when debts forced him to sell his business. While the difficult economic times might have been partly to blame for his troubles,

it seems that Foster himself was his own worst enemy. Stories circulated in town regarding the quality of the supplies he employed for his business. One tale told of a sign he prepared for Goodrich's Tavern. The paints he used for the sign washed away in the first rain.

Gideon Foster Junior was born April 23, 1782, the son of Gideon and Mercy (Jacobs) Foster. There had been a previous Gideon Jr., born in 1774 but he died shortly after his birth in 1775. Gideon and Mercy had three other children, two daughters, Lydia, born in 1780 and Mercy born in 1788 and another son, John, born in 1785.


Gideon Foster Jr. married Eliza A. Peirce on August 24, 1806 in Salem. Troubles must have begun soon after their wedding because just six years later Eliza filed for divorce from Gideon. William Bentley, Pastor of the East Church of Salem, recorded in his diary on Sunday November 8, 1812 *"At the Court this sitting At Salem were two divorces obtained. . . The other of a son of Gen. Foster, now in prison & who has been in the penitentiary, from his wife, daughter*

of Pierce of Salem. The very bad habits of this young man & the good hopes of his wife justify this lenity of the law."

Bentley doesn't elaborate on Gideon's crimes. Whether he was jailed for debt, which, at the time, was viewed as a moral failing on par with theft, or for other crimes is not known. That his wife filed for divorce in an era when she would have lost all property brought to the marriage suggests far greater failings on Gideon's part than being unable to manage his finances

There is no record of Foster returning to the area until 1824 when he advertised the opening of his new business, located on present day Washington Street in Salem. Just three short years later his business closed, apparently because of debts. While it is certainly possible Foster knew of Sutton, it is doubtful a working relationship ever developed between them.

Only nine years later, Foster died. He was buried from the Foster Street home of his sisters, Mercy and Lydia's, on November 1, 1836.



Gideon Foster, jun.
RESPECTFULLY informs the public, that he has taken the Room formerly occupied by Mr. George Ropes, near the Court House, where he continues the business of
PORTRAIT, ORNAMENTAL AND SIGN PAINTING.
 April 27.

From the April 27, 1824
Salem Gazette

NOTICE.
I WISH those who have had work done at my chambers, to call and take it; those whose work is not finished, are requested to call and have it completed—as my engagements are such that I cannot attend to my present customers after the last day of November.
 Oct 13. **GIDEON FOSTER Jr.**

From the *Essex Register*
 October 18, 1827

In Danvers, Mr Gideon Foster, eldest son of Gideon Foster, Esq. aged 54. Funeral this afternoon at 3 o'clock, from the residence of his sisters in Foster street.

Death Notice for Gideon Foster Jr.
Salem Gazette, November 1, 1836

Nathan Lakeman, 1804-1835

Painting.
THE subscribers respectfully inform their friends and the public, that they have formed a connexion in business under the firm of
LAKEMAN & HOOPER,
and have taken rooms in the building on the corner of Essex and Washington streets, where they will execute *Masonic, Portrait, Sign, Fancy and Glass Tablet Painting* with neatness and despatch.
**NATHAN LAKEMAN,
STEPHEN HOOPER.**
Feb. 20.

From the Feb. 20, 1824
Salem Gazette

MILITARY. Ensign **NATHAN LAKEMAN** has been chosen Lieutenant, vice **S. W. WISWELL**, resigned, and **Mr. FITCH POOL, Jr.** Ensign, vice Lakeman, promoted,—of the Danvers Light Infantry.

From Salem Gazette
May 13, 1831

Danvers Bank.
AN adjourned meeting of the Stockholders of the Danvers Bank will be held at the Bank Room on **MONDAY**, the 13th day of August next, at 4 o'clock, P. M. for the purpose of considering and determining upon the act of the Legislature, passed March 7th, 1832, authorizing an increase of the Capital Stock of said Bank. Also to act upon any other business that may legally come before them.
A general attendance is requested.
Per order. **N. LAKEMAN**, Cashier.
Danvers, July 31, 1832.

From the Salem Gazette
August 3, 1832

"... the writer was told by the late Nathan Lakeman, that his father, also Nathan Lakeman, painted the picture. At that time, Mr. Lakeman was a young man employed as a clerk in the old South Danvers National Bank, of which William Sutton was the president. Young Lakeman was known to be somewhat of an artist and there are portraits in existence which he painted."

From the Salem News
January 30, 1923

—Although it is unlikely that Gideon Foster Jr. painted *South Danvers* in 1828, it is understandable why his name remained linked with the painting for so long. His famous father was reason enough.

While this painting depicts South Danvers in 1828, its main focus were the activities of the Danvers Light Infantry as well as those of Captain William Sutton, pictured riding the white horse at the head of Central Street. With this in mind, there are several reasons to suspect that another local artist, Nathan Lakeman, was responsible for this painting.

First, Lakeman served with Sutton in the Danvers Light Infantry. In addition, Sutton and Lakeman were members of the same Jordan Masonic Lodge. When Sutton formed the Danvers Bank, he hired Lakeman as his cashier. And after the painting was discovered in Sutton's home in 1884, Lakeman's son, Nathan Jr. (1833-1913) insisted to many in town that his father had painted the work.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, there is at least one record of Lakeman giving a gift to Sutton and the Danvers Light Infantry.

Nathan Lakeman was born in Manchester, Massachusetts on August 3, 1804, the son of Nathan and Mary Lakeman. Little is known of his early years, but he seems to have received more than the typical education for the time. He settled in South Danvers in the early 1820s and around the same time enlisted in the Danvers Light Infantry. He rose quickly through the ranks, becoming a full Lieutenant by 1831.

In 1824, Nathan entered into a

In Danvers, on Saturday last, **NATHAN LAKEMAN**, Esq., Cashier of the Danvers Bank, aged 31. Mr. Lakeman discharged with great faithfulness and ability, the duties of his office till a few weeks ago, and rode out the very day before his decease. Consumption, that insidious and flattering disease, which selects for its victims so many of the young and virtuous, has hurried him, in the vigor of his years and the fullness of his usefulness, to an early grave. A wide circle of acquaintance lament his death—the aching hearts of more intimate friends are the melancholy testimonies of his worth.

With sorrows and tears we have committed the body of our friend, for a while, to the keeping of the silent tomb—but flights of rejoicing angels, we trust, have borne his pure spirit to a permanent residence in the happy mansions prepared for those who love God.—*Comm.*

From the Salem Gazette
November 3, 1835

partnership with Stephen Hooper. Their business was located a short distance from Gideon Foster's, on the corner of Essex and Washington Street. Their first advertisement appeared in the *Salem Gazette* on Feb. 20, 1824 listing Masonic paintings or symbols as one of their artistic specialties. When Hooper withdrew from the partnership in 1825, Lakeman continued the business on his own for several more years, expanding his work from portraits, glass and other fancy painting into preparing Masonic aprons, Knight Templar and Masonic symbols.

As drawn as Nathan was to the principles of the Masons, it is no surprise that shortly after his arrival in town he joined the Jordan Lodge and was raised to a full member in 1827. When Nathan was elected Secretary of the Lodge, Lewis Allen served as Senior Warden, William Sutton as Junior Marshal and Fitch Poole as Senior Steward.

Nathan's enthusiasm for the Light Infantry, as well as his involvement in town was revealed in a July 15th, 1824 article in the *Essex Register* reporting on the gift Nathan presented to Captain William Sutton for the Infantry on the 48th anniversary of American Independence.

"The usual salutes were fired at intervals during the day. In the morning the company was presented with an elegant Standard, painted by Mr. N. Lakeman, of this town; after which they encamped in the rear of the meeting house, and at 11 o'clock a procession was formed at the encampment and escorted to Goodridge's Hall. . ."

This gift to Sutton and the Danvers Light Infantry doesn't seem to be Nathan's last. Just when he completed *South Danvers* in 1828 is unknown. But his previous gift to Sutton makes the possibility of his painting another gift for a man who seems to have become a close friend all the more likely. Because it was painted on wood, William Sutton used it as a firescreen until his death.

In 1830, Sutton hired Lakeman as the Cashier for the Danvers Bank which he'd just formed.

Lakeman married Elisabeth Poor on November 15, 1831. They had one son, Nathan Jr. on December 21, 1833. Unfortunately, Nathan didn't live to see his son grow up. He died from tuberculosis on Oct. 31, 1835.

South Danvers in 1828, continued

(continued from page 1)

While most of the townspeople relied on either the town well or wells dug in their own property for water, Danvers (which Peabody was still a part of) was also a member of the Salem and Danvers Aqueduct Company.

The Salem and Danvers Aqueduct was incorporated in 1796 and was one of the first Aqueduct systems in the state. The first pipes were constructed from hollowed-out logs, which were then connected and laid underground, much as present day pipes are. However, the water received wasn't delivered inside the homes but to a spigot located near the house.

During the first few decades of the company, only a few households were wealthy enough to be hooked up to the aqueduct. And those that were often complained of insufficient water pressure and high prices. It wasn't until decades after 1828 that the system began to work as hoped.

The town well and flagpole remained in the square until November 1880 when the foundation for the Civil War Soldiers' Monument was begun.

Dustin's Hall or Tavern

The large building on the far right, with the tall signpost erected before it, was known the Dustin Hall and later Dustin's Tavern. It was also called the Sun Tavern because of the sun emblazoned on the tavern's sign.

Jonathan Dustin, father of Eliza Dustin Sutton, built the tavern either in late 1823 or early 1824, not long before this painting was completed.

The FEDERALISTS of DANVERS are reminded that their meeting "to make arrangements for the ensuing elections" was adjourned to Monday Evening, the 29th inst. at 7 o'clock, then to meet at Dustin's Hall. A general attendance is requested.
DANVERS, March 26, 1824.

From the Salem Gazette
March 26, 1824

Allen Home and Gardner's Bridge

The building to the right of the tavern belonged to Lewis Allen, for which Allen's Block is named. Lewis Allen ((1794-1886) was born in Weston and moved to Salem in 1807 to learn the shoemaking trade. Ten years later, he moved to South Danvers to open his own business, which thrived beyond the limits of the town. Just a decade later, he opened businesses in New York and Ohio. He became active in many town affairs. Allen served as director and president of the Warren National Bank, as a Library Trustee, town selectman and as State Representative. In 1830, he began what is now Allen's Block and extended it to Mill Street in 1871.

Looking straight down Central Street one can make out Gardner's Bridge, located at what is present day Walnut Street.

The tiny building to the left of the South Church is the schoolhouse for District #11, which was built in 1766. George Peabody attended school there for three years. Behind the schoolhouse, in the distance, is Buxton Hill, formerly known as Read Hill.

Danvers Light Infantry

On the green before the South Church are erected a number of tents. These belonged to the

REMOVAL.
LEWIS ALLEN respectfully informs his friends and the public, that he has removed from Salem to Danvers, near the South Meeting-House, where he offers for sale
Ladies blk morocco walking Shoes, with and without heels,
Leather do. do.
Village Ties do. do.
Kid do. do.
Gentlemen's Boots & Shoes
Boys Boots & Shoes
Misses and Childrens do. do.
N. B. Wanted—2 Journeymen Boot-Makers to which liberal wages will be given.
Danvers, Dec. 22.

From the Essex Register,
December 30, 1818

Danvers Light Infantry which used this common area for training. The Danvers Light Infantry remained active in town and the area from 1818 to 1850.

The man riding the white horse at the head of present day Central Street is Captain (later General) William Sutton. He was in command of the Light Infantry from 1823 until 1836.

When the Civil War began in 1861, about one hundred former members of the Danvers Light Infantry were called upon to serve in the war for nine months. In 1863, after their service was completed, the Infantry was permanently disbanded.

Hawes's company of the line. On Thursday, the Danvers Light Infantry (whose formation we have heretofore mentioned) under Capt. Daniels, honored the town with a visit; as the Danvers Light Infantry, under Capt. Bennett, had done some days before. Next Tuesday (as mentioned in our last) is intended as a splendid field day, when to all the troops of this town will be annexed a company of cavalry from Ipswich, and

From the Salem Gazette
October 2, 1818

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