Gardner-Pingree House, 1804-1805
Samuel McIntire (1757-1811)

Peabody Essex Museum
Salem in History, 2006
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Historical Context
The Federal Period in architecture ranged from about 1780 to 1830 during the first decades of the new Republic. Political leaders who drafted foundation documents and who led the country were heavily influenced by classical values and writing. Their education would have included reading Greek and Roman authors (often in their original languages). George Washington, for example, was often compared to the Roman hero, Cincinnatus, who accepted power in order to defend Rome, and then returned to farming. Similarly, Washington served as a general during the Revolutionary War, and then returned to his home at Mt. Vernon.

Another early leader, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and the third President of the United States (1801-1809). Jefferson admired classical architecture and thought, which he researched in depth. When Jefferson turned to designing public buildings and his own home, Monticello, he continued to use his classical “vocabulary.”

Art Historical Context
This Federal-period home was designed by Samuel McIntire (1757-1811) for John Gardner (1771-1847), who made his fortune in maritime trade (particularly pepper trade) with the opening of new markets after the close of the Revolutionary War. Like many maritime traders, however, Gardner’s fortunes declined when Jefferson’s passed the Embargo Act in 1809. Gardner faced additional losses to pirates, particularly on the eve of the War of 1812, which ruined many merchants, including Gardner. He moved from Salem to his family farm in Danvers, where he remained until his death in 1847. Salem’s trade never recovered.

Born in Salem, MA, architect Samuel McIntire began his career as a woodcarver and eventually turned to building homes for the wealthy elite of Salem. McIntire was heavily influenced by Britain’s Robert Adam, who published designs that featured symmetrical façades and neoclassical ornamentation. It is during the Federal era in the U.S. that builders first consistently created domestic architecture that was fully conceived and executed when erected. Previously, it was typical to build a room or set of rooms with the expectation that the house would grow with the family’s needs and means. McIntire designed both the exterior and interior of homes, and adorned rooms with carved swags, rosettes, garlands, and sheaves of wheat. The exterior ornament on the façade is largely focused on the portico, or entry porch, which features columns, pilasters (flat columns), and a decorative fanlight over the door.

Sample Guiding Questions
• What culture or time period do you think inspired this architect?
• What ideas or contributions do you associate with classical Greece and Rome?
• Why might an architect or an owner want to include classical details in a home?
• Can you think of other ways that the United States was influenced by classical ideals following the Revolutionary War?
• How is this building evidence of Salem’s economy in the late 1700s-early 1800s?

Suggested Learning Activities
• Compare this building with an actual ancient Greek or Roman building. Consider what elements Federal architecture does and doesn’t adopt from the classical world. Why might this be? For higher-level students, you might continue this theme by considering what constitutional ideas were drawn from Greek or Roman models, and some ideas that were abandoned.

2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks: 3.6, 3.9, 3.12, 4.13, 5.18, USL.13, USG.1.9, USG.2.4

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