



# The Thetean: A Student Journal for Scholarly Historical Writing

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Volume 51 | Issue 1

Article 10

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2022

## The Becket Family of Salem, Massachusetts

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### Recommended Citation

Richardson, Kaitlyn (2022) "The Becket Family of Salem, Massachusetts," *The Thetean: A Student Journal for Scholarly Historical Writing*: Vol. 51: Iss. 1, Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thetean/vol51/iss1/10>

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Article

## The Becket Family of Salem, Massachusetts

Kaitlyn Richardson

**T**HOUGH NOTORIOUS FOR THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS OF THE 1690s, history moved on in Salem after the trials. During the eighteenth century, Salem grew increasingly prominent in the seafaring trade, and by 1800 had a population of 9,400, making it the sixth-largest city in the United States and the second-busiest port in Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Salem and her trade contacts are considered by historians to be integral in the beginnings of United States international relations during the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> This port town had contacts with such far-flung places as other North American Colonies, the Caribbean, Asia, Europe, and the West Indies, and thrived on a maritime and trade-based economy.

While most of the historical scholarship about Salem has focused on the Salem Witch Trials and Salem's inhabitants during the Witch Trials, Salem still had a rich history after the Witch Trials, a history that has often been ignored. This paper seeks to fill that gap by applying a genealogical and historical examination of a

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1. Shastri, Vanita. *The Salem-India Story: Maritime Trade between Salem, Massachusetts, and India 1788–1845* (Lexington: Meru Education Foundation, 2009).

2. Shastri, Vanita. *The Salem-India Story: Maritime Trade between Salem, Massachusetts, and India 1788–1845* (Lexington: Meru Education Foundation, 2009); James Duncan Phillips, *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), 175, 272; William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley* vol. 2, 363.

three-generation family that lived in Salem between 1710 and 1839. This paper examines the contours of these individuals' lives, which can then be applied to the lived realities of Salem's everyday people during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Combined, this study reveals that people's lives were largely shaped by Salem's maritime community and economy, international trade networks, and the broader circumstances of American history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, this paper demonstrates that the rapid expansion of Salem during this time period is reflected in the circumstances of each generation's life experiences. The biographies of multigenerational members of the Becket family demonstrate Salem's evolution and expansion between 1710 and 1839, as they both shaped and were shaped by trends in Salem, New England, and the new nation at large during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## William Becket

*William Becket was the son of John Becket and Susanna Mason, born in about 1710 in Salem, Essex, Massachusetts Bay Colony. William married Susanna Fowler on 6 April 1745 in Salem.*

William was the oldest child born to John and Susannah Becket, and was followed by four younger siblings. As a boy growing up in colonial New England, William likely engaged in household chores such as farming or gardening, chopping firewood, and caring for livestock.<sup>3</sup> Around the age of ten to fourteen, boys were expected to select their occupation and start training in that field. Often, boys either learned the trade of their fathers or learned a field through an apprenticeship.<sup>4</sup> It appears that William inherited his father's trade as a shipbuilder, and learned the trade from him. John Becket's will in 1763 left his shipbuilding yard to William and to William's brother, John.<sup>5</sup> A 1761 land grant from John Becket Sr. to William Becket and John Becket Jr. describes the location of his shipbuilding yard and wharf. The description is as follows:

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3. Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).

4. Beales, Ross W., Jr. "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England." *American Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 379–98.

5. "Essex County, Massachusetts, probate records and indexes 1638–1916," testate will of John Becket 29 December 1763, citing *Old Series: Probate records, vols. 339–341, Book 39–41, 1762–1764*, FHL microfilm 007704824, image 561.



“All that my Wharfe with the Land and Platts thereto adjoining and belonging in sd. Salem (being the westerly half or part of what formerly belonged to my Father Willm. Becket deceased)

Bounded Westerly on Land formerly belonging to Abraham

Purchase since decd. Northerly on a Way Easterly on the other half or part of the said Wharfe Land and Platts which did belong to my Brother Retire Becket deceased now owned by his son William Becket jun. & Southerly By the Harbour or however otherwise the same is bounded with the Priviledges and appurtenances thereof”<sup>6</sup>

This yard and wharf sat on an ideal location on Salem’s coastline, and was a significant amount of land for the area and time period. Shipbuilding was an especially lucrative business in Massachusetts during the colonial era, with miles of coastlines, harbors and bays, and with rich natural resources.<sup>7</sup> Salem, in particular, featured many shipbuilding yards. In the early colonial period, people built their own boats for fishing and transportation. By the late 17th century, experienced shipbuilders built a new vessel each winter, fished in it during the summer, and then sold the vessel during the fall.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to his work as a shipbuilder, it appears that William at least dabbled in innkeeping: in 1749, he applied for an innholder’s license in Salem.<sup>9</sup> In eighteenth-century New England, inns were used for both lodging and for food and drink. They also provided an important gathering place for the community: frequently, court sessions were held in taverns, and political matters were often informally discussed there.<sup>10</sup> Though it is unknown if William ever actually opened an inn, he surely frequented the local inn to participate in the political discussions, and to hear the news and gossip of his community.

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6. “Deeds, 1639–1866; index to deeds, 1640–1879 (Essex County, Massachusetts),” deed from John Becket to William Becket 28 July 1761, citing Deeds, v. 106–107, 1757–1762, FHL microfilm 866062, image 505.

7. Pitt, Steven J. “Building and Outfitting Ships in Colonial Boston,” *Early American Studies* 13, no. 4 (2015): 888.

8. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 242.

9. “Essex County, Quarterly Court of General Sessions of the Peace,” Court records 1749–1778, entry for William Becket December 1749, citing FHL microfilm 007842330, image 581 of 1093.

10. Sabin, Douglas B. “The New England Tavern: A General Study,” *Minute Man National Park Information Services* (October 1982).

William Becket married Susanna Fowler on 6 April 1745 in Salem.<sup>11</sup> She was the daughter of Philip Fowler and Susanna Jacob and was born on 14 May 1723 in Ipswich, Essex, Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup> William and Susanna were the parents of William, their eldest, born in about 1745,<sup>13</sup> followed by Susanna<sup>14</sup> and Samuel<sup>15</sup> who were born in 1747 and 1749 respectively.<sup>16</sup> Puritan men were instructed to govern firmly, wisely, and gently within their households.<sup>17</sup> William's roles within his family likely consisted of providing for his family through his shipbuilding business, providing religious instruction to his children, especially by teaching them the catechism, representing his family to the outside world, and presiding over household affairs.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to the image of the somber Puritan, many Puritans believed in pleasure in moderation. They

11. "Massachusetts Marriages, 1695–1910, 1921–1924," Salem, Essex, marriage of William Becket and Susannah Fowler 6 April 1745, digital images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org: accessed 29 January 2021); citing FHL microfilm 007821604, image 56.

12. "Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001," Ipswich, Essex, baptism of Susannah Fowler 19 May 1723, digital image, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org: accessed 29 January 2021), citing births, marriages, deaths 1663–1739, image 75 of 352.

13. "Tree of William Becket." Database. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *FamilySearch*. familysearch.org: 2021.

14. "Massachusetts Marriages, 1695–1910, 1921–1924," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org: accessed 29 January 2021); citing FHL microfilm 007821604, image 478; "Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org: accessed 29 January 2021), citing Marriages 1738–1848 vol 5, image 18 of 263. (Her birthdate was calculated from a marriage record which stated her age at marriage to be 18).

15. "Family Tree of Samuel Becket." Database. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *FamilySearch*. https://familysearch.org: 2021.

16. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785–1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 152, death of Susanna Becket 21 April 1817, digitized book accessed via *HathiTrust* (https://babel.hathitrust.org: accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 166 of 204. The record states Susanna had eight children. Documentation has been found for their children William, Susanna, and Samuel. Additionally, a son named Philip appears with the family on FamilySearch Family Tree. No documentation appears for Philip on FamilySearch, and no documentation was found for him over the course of this project. According to FamilySearch Family Tree, Philip was born in about 1749 in Salem and died in about 1809.

17. Westerkamp, Marilyn. "Engendering Puritan Religious Culture in Old and New England," *Pennsylvania History*, Pennsylvania State University Publication, 1997.

18. Morgan, Edmund S., *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).



would allow themselves pleasures in eating, relaxing, and socializing in the community.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps William engaged in such activities, taking time to enjoy this life while still ensuring that he was well-prepared for the life to come.

William Becket was a member of the East Church in Salem. He regularly paid rates and donations to the church<sup>20</sup> and was voted as a committeeman on multiple occasions as well.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that William was involved in the church and community, and was devout enough to be so involved. Several beliefs separated Puritans from other Christians: Puritans believed in predestination, the idea that belief in Jesus and participation in the sacraments could not alone determine one's salvation. Instead, all features of salvation were determined by God's sovereignty, including choosing those who will be saved and those who will receive God's irresistible grace. They distinguished between "justification," the concept of God's grace being given to the elect, and "sanctification," evidence of one's salvation. The concept of being a covenant people pervaded especially heavily in Puritan thought, determining religious and social behavior. Thus, Puritan congregations were considered to be congregations of individuals who had entered into covenants with God.<sup>22</sup> Church leaders were elected to their positions by the congregation members; thus William had to be elected as a committeeman, instead of appointed.<sup>23</sup>

The year 1754 ushered in the French and Indian War, an armed conflict within the colonies due to French expansion into the Ohio River Valley, but also part of a larger imperial conflict between Great Britain and France.<sup>24</sup> Two regiments of colonial troops were enlisted in Massachusetts, among whom were

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19. Daniels, Bruce C. "Did the Puritans Have Fun? Leisure, Recreation and the Concept of Pleasure in Early New England." *Journal of American Studies* 25, no. 1 (1991): 7–22. Accessed March 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27555420>.

20. Salem East Congregation, Church Records; entry for Wm. Becket rate payer 1757, online images, *New England's Hidden Histories* (<https://neh.com>: accessed 21 February 2021), citing Church records, 1757–1792, image 9.

21. Salem East Congregation, Church Records; entry for Wm. Becket committeeman election 3 March 1757, online images, *New England's Hidden Histories* (<https://neh.com>: accessed 21 February 2021), citing Church records, 1757–1792, image 127.

22. Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).

23. Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).

24. "French and Indian War," online database, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (<https://britannica.com>: accessed 7 April 2021).

Salem residents.<sup>25</sup> Though William did not serve in these regiments, he likely provided a crucial resource in the conflict by providing ships. Ships were needed to transport men from the English colonies north into Canada,<sup>26</sup> and William's shipyard likely supplied at least some of these ships. The war created a population of displaced French Acadians, two hundred of whom settled in Essex County. Among the refugees was Thomas Rue, who would go on to marry William's daughter Susanna.<sup>27</sup> The year 1763 marked the end of the conflict, which exacted a far greater toll than the colonists expected upon its outbreak nine years ago. As a result, New France was firmly held by the British, and France ceased to be a significant colonial power in the New World. Salem celebrated the end of the war by reading Thanksgiving sermons at church and in public.

Through the course of William's life, Salem expanded from a mere village to a major shipping and exporting town.<sup>28</sup> In 1750, Salem primarily consisted of a town square, with a couple of tight streets stemming out from it. William likely lived along Becket Street,<sup>29</sup> which was only a few paces away from his shipyard. Shops primarily existed for the shipbuilding business, with many including hardware, ropes, and navigation tools in their stock. By the 1770s, Salem expanded to become a major international port. In some senses, it was more important than Boston: though ships would unload their goods in Boston, many of them had to reload with lumber, dried cod, and furs in the port of Salem.<sup>30</sup> This meant that Salem attracted new people, goods, and ideas, and thus expanded from its humble roots into a major economic hub with shops selling international luxury goods, academic societies, and new churches to accommodate the larger population.<sup>31</sup> William saw this expansion take place

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25. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 198.

26. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 198.

27. Bentley, William. *The Diary of Rev. William Bentley D.D., Volume 1: April 1784–December 1792* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1905), 13.

28. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 168.

29. His father and daughter lived on Becket Street, so it would make sense for William to have lived there too.

30. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 340.

31. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 342.



over the years, perhaps speculating on the quieter Salem of his childhood during his later years. Though the year of William's death is unknown, historical records indicate that he died sometime after 1770.<sup>32</sup>

## Susanna Becket

*Susanna Becket, the daughter of William Becket and Susanna Fowler, was born in approximately 1747 in Salem, Essex, Massachusetts Bay Colony.<sup>33</sup> Susanna married Thomas Rue on 24 January 1765 in Salem.<sup>34</sup> She died on 1 November 1805 in Salem.<sup>35</sup>*

Susanna Becket was born in approximately 1747 in Salem, Massachusetts. According to her mother's death record, Susanna had seven siblings.<sup>36</sup> In Puritan New England, children were christened within days of his or her birth in the local church. It appears that Susanna's parents attended the East Church in Salem, a congregational church that was formed in 1717 after some of the parishioners split from the First Church of Salem,<sup>37</sup> so this church is likely where Susanna was christened.

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32. "Church records, 1757–1792," Salem East Congregation, entry for Wm. Becket rate payer 1770, online images, *New England's Hidden Histories* (<https://nehh.com>: accessed 21 February 2021), image 170.

33. Her birthdate was calculated from a death record which stated her age at marriage to be 18.

34. "Massachusetts Marriages, 1695–1910, 1921–1924," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* ([familysearch.org](https://familysearch.org): accessed 29 January 2021), citing FHL microfilm 007821604, image 478; "Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch*; (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 29 January 2021), citing Marriages 1738–1848 vol 5, image 18 of 263.

35. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785–1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 91, death of Susanna Rhue 1 Nov 1805, digitized book accessed via *HathiTrust* (<https://babel.hathitrust.org>: accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 105 of 204.

36. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785–1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 152, death of Susanna Becket 21 April 1817, digitized book accessed via *HathiTrust* (<https://babel.hathitrust.org>: accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 166 of 204. The record states she had eight children, though additional documentation has been found for only three of the children.

37. "Salem, Mass., East Church," online database, *Congregational Library & Archives* (<https://congregationallibrary.org>: accessed 18 February 2021).



Children were primarily taught by their parents in their homes: fathers were expected to teach their children the catechism every week, and children were expected to be literate so that they could read the Bible.<sup>38</sup> Many children attended local dame schools, schools that were taught in the home of a local women's home for a small fee.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps Susanna attended one such school, and given the Puritan tradition of childhood education, it can be fairly certain that she knew how to read.<sup>40</sup> Children were also expected to work to contribute to their family household: children often began working as early as age four or five with small, menial tasks like weeding or sweeping, and then worked up to more difficult tasks as they grew. Girls' work was closely related to the work of their mothers: they learned to sew, prepare food, and care for younger siblings.<sup>41</sup> All of this was intended to prepare girls for when they would be wives and mothers in their own households.

At the age of eighteen, Susanna married to Thomas Rue,<sup>42</sup> a French Acadian refugee who had fled from New France to Salem during the French and Indian War.<sup>43</sup> Within her husband's household, Susanna was likely expected to engage in running the household, especially while her mariner husband<sup>44</sup> was

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38. Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).

39. Higginson, J. H. "Dame schools," *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 22, Issue 2 (1974): 166–181.

40. Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).

41. Beales, Ross W., Jr. "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England." *American Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 379–98.

42. "Massachusetts Marriages, 1695–1910, 1921–1924," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org: accessed 29 January 2021); citing FHL microfilm 007821604, image 478; "Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 29 January 2021), citing Marriages 1738–1848 vol 5, image 18 of 263.

43. Bentley, William. *The Diary of Rev. William Bentley D.D., Volume 1: April 1784–December 1792* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1905), 13.

44. "Massachusetts Marriages, 1695–1910, 1921–1924," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org: accessed 29 January 2021), citing FHL microfilm 007821604, image 478; "Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001," Salem, Essex, marriage of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket 24 Jan 1765, digital images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 29 January 2021), citing Marriages 1738–1848 vol 5, image 18 of 263.

away at sea. She likely was involved in crucial household labor activities such as food preparation, weaving and sewing clothing, and household maintenance. Given her husband's frequent absences, she may have had an expanded role, taking care of things that might normally be in his charge such as engaging in commerce and managing household finances.<sup>45</sup> In many situations, the wives of mariners even worked in separate businesses themselves to ensure that ends were met. Activities commonly undertaken by women included keeping taverns, running boarding houses, doing laundry, and distilling molasses.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it is likely that Susanna participated in similar activities to maintain her household economy and provide for her family.

When Susanna was 28 years old, the United States declared its independence from Great Britain, ushering in the American Revolutionary War. When soldiers from Salem left to join their regiments, people flooded into the streets to wish their soldiers victory as church bells rang throughout the town.<sup>47</sup> Among those soldiers was Susanna's husband Thomas, who served as a private in the Tenth Massachusetts Regiment during the war.<sup>48</sup> With her husband away at war, Susanna likely continued as she would while he was away at sea. Additionally, Susanna may have participated in the war effort in a multitude of other ways: during the war, it was common for Patriot women to boycott British goods, sign pledges in colonial newspapers, and knit clothing for the soldiers.<sup>49</sup> As the war pressed on, fewer and fewer ships came into Salem port, cutting the trading town off from much-needed supplies. The price of food and fuel inflated to unaffordably high prices, and bread was scarcer than anything

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45. Vickers, Daniel and Walsh, Vince. "Young Men and the Sea: The Sociology of Seafaring in Eighteenth-Century Salem, Massachusetts," *Social History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Jan 1999), 17-38.

46. Vickers, Daniel and Walsh, Vince. "Young Men and the Sea: The Sociology of Seafaring in Eighteenth-Century Salem, Massachusetts," *Social History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Jan 1999), 17-38.

47. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 353.

48. "Revolutionary War Service Records," entry for Thomas Rue private in the Tenth Massachusetts Regiment (Revolutionary War), online image via Fold3, accessed 30 March 2021, citing NARA Publication M881.

49. Damiano, Sara T. "Writing Women's History Through the Revolution: Family Finances, Letter Writing, and Conceptions of Marriage." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2017): 697-728. Accessed April 7, 2021. doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.74.4.0697.



else because shipments of flour from the Middle Colonies had been completely cut off.<sup>50</sup> Susanna was undoubtedly impacted by this: especially with a husband off fighting, she probably wondered how she could feed her family. On 26 October 1783, relief finally came to Salem, when the news of Washington's success at Yorktown finally reached Salem. Salem citizens celebrated by filling the streets with the noises of cannons, small arms, bells, and clattering pots and pans.<sup>51</sup>

The end of the war ushered in a movement known as “republican motherhood.” This movement esteemed that women must revere republican values, virtues, and morals and teach those things to their children so that they would go on to be good citizens. Thus, as wives and mothers, women were seen to have a profound, albeit indirect effect on the political well-being of the nation as a whole.<sup>52</sup> Susanna herself was the mother of at least seven children,<sup>53</sup> and perhaps this newfound emphasis on republican motherhood influenced the way that she raised her children. Many of her duties and responsibilities likely revolved around her children.

Delivery took place in the home, where midwives and other experienced women would assist the mother. After birth, the mother and child remained in the bedroom until the mother was well enough to move about the house. It was common for mothers to swaddle their children tightly as infants, breastfeeding them and going about their daily chores with them.<sup>54</sup> Once a child learned to walk, he or she wore a shorter dress which allowed for movement. At about age seven, boys were “breeched” and sent to work with their fathers.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, most of Thomas and Susanna's sons went on to be mariners like their fathers.

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50. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 374.

51. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 379.

52. Zagarri, Rosemarie. “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother.” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1992): 192–215. Accessed April 7, 2021. doi:10.2307/2713040.

53. Documentation has been found for seven children. It can be assumed that there are some missing children: Thomas and Susanna were married in 1765 and their first documented child was born in 1773. Multiple searches were made to find these missing children, but these searches were largely unsuccessful.

54. Beales, Ross W., Jr. “In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England.” *American Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 379–98.

55. Beales, Ross W., Jr. “In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England.” *American Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 379–98.



Mothers knew the risk that their sons took in embarking on such journeys: the potential for storms and the looming threat of foreign diseases made seafaring a dangerous trade.<sup>56</sup> Tragically, two of their sons died on seafaring journeys at young ages: Philip died at sea when he was 22,<sup>57</sup> and Samuel died of yellow fever at age 14 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.<sup>58</sup> Girls stayed in their dresses, learning the household chores and duties from their mothers:<sup>59</sup> Susanna's own daughters went on to marry and create families of their own. Republican motherhood and family-centered New England society meant that Susanna was likely an invested mother who played a crucial role in her children's lives.<sup>60</sup>

Susanna and her husband evidently owned a house on Beckett's Lane within the East Parish of Salem. In 1784, however, Thomas Rue sold that house to Joseph Lambert and Nathaniel Silsbee, and the family moved to another home in Salem.<sup>61</sup> Susanna and Thomas attended the East Church in Salem, a Puritan and Universalist denomination, where several of their children were christened. Church membership provided women with a social distinction and an important role in their society. Though men were the ones appointed to offices in the church and made the ultimate decisions regarding the management of funds, women were the force behind all of it, attending to the needs of the poor and needy in their church community, participating in church meetings (at least to an extent), and teaching religion to their children.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, due to the large number of Salem's men who were at sea, the majority of church attendees were

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56. Vickers, Daniel and Walsh, Vince. "Young Men and the Sea: The Sociology of Seafaring in Eighteenth-Century Salem, Massachusetts," *Social History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Jan 1999), 17–38.

57. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785–1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 53, death of Philip Rhue Dec 1799, digitized book accessed via HathiTrust (<https://babel.hathitrust.org>: accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 67 of 204.

58. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785–1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 26, death of Samuel Rhue 1795, digitized book accessed via *HathiTrust* (<https://babel.hathitrust.org>: accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 36 of 204.

59. Beales, Ross W., Jr. "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England." *American Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 379–98.

60. Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Harper and Row, 1966).

61. "Deeds, 1639–1866; index to deeds, 1640–1879 (Essex County, Massachusetts)," deed from Thomas Rue to Joseph Lambert & Nathaniel Silsbee 24 April 1784, citing *Deeds v. 136–137, 1776–1785*, FHL microfilm 866077, image 526.

62. Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650–1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 218.

women. For Susanna, the church was a place of community and solace. On October 17, 1800, Susanna requested her church congregation join her in praying for the death of her sons at sea.<sup>63</sup>

Susanna died at the age of 58 of a fever in Salem. According to her death record, she “had been faltering throughout the summer.” She was survived by five of her seven or more children (two sons and three daughters), and by her husband Thomas.<sup>64</sup> She was buried in the cemetery of Salem’s East Church.

## William Rue

*William Rue, the son of Thomas Rue and Susanna Becket, was christened on 27 August 1786 in Salem, Essex, Massachusetts<sup>65</sup> William married Helen Tytler on 21 August 1808 in Salem.<sup>66</sup> He died on 14 March 1839 in Salem.<sup>67</sup>*

William Rue was born into a newborn nation: only five years prior to his birth, the colonies won their independence from Britain at the decisive Battle of Yorktown. As such, much of William’s own childhood mirrored that of a growing and developing nation. The United States Constitution was signed in 1787, when William was only a year old. William’s father, Thomas Rue, fought for American Independence in the Revolutionary War,<sup>68</sup> so it must have been especially satisfying for Thomas to see his young son grow up in a newly freed

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63. Bentley, William. *The Diary of William Bentley* vol. 2, 60.

64. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785–1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 91, death of Susanna Rhue 1 Nov 1805, digitized book accessed via HathiTrust (<https://babel.hathitrust.org>: accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 105 of 204.

65. Emmerson, James A. *Eighteenth century baptisms in Salem, Massachusetts, hitherto unpublished* (Salem: Salem Press, 1886), p. 99, baptism of William Rue 27 Aug 1786, digitized book accessed via *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 18 February 2021), citing image 100 of 127.

66. “Massachusetts, U.S., Compiled Marriages, 1633–1850,” Salem, Essex, index entry for marriage of William Rue and Eleanor Tytler 21 August 1808, index accessed via Ancestry, citing FHL microfilm 0761210.

67. “Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records 1620–1988,” Salem, Essex, death of William Rue 14 March 1839, compiled source via Ancestry, accessed 17 March 2021.

68. “Revolutionary War Service Records,” entry for Thomas Rue private in the Tenth Massachusetts Regiment (Revolutionary War), online image via Fold3, accessed 30 March 2021, citing NARA Publication M881.



nation, one in which “the blessings of liberty” were to be secured for their posterity.<sup>69</sup>

As was typical of the time period,<sup>70</sup> William eventually adopted his father’s occupation as a mariner. The first known journey that William embarked on was aboard the ship Harper bound from Salem for the West Indies when he was eighteen.<sup>71</sup> Due to its strategic position, by 1790 Salem Harbor was the sixth-largest port in the United States.<sup>72</sup> During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, international trade was conducted from Salem “to the farthest ports of the rich east,” importing such goods as ceramics, furniture, decorative arts, textiles, spices, and dye.<sup>73</sup>

Going to sea offered young men the opportunity for several years of steady work and an opportunity for promotion, in addition to the exciting adventure of experiencing new cultures, seeing new things, and mixing with strangers.<sup>74</sup> Because of the insulated community of Salem, these young men often embarked on seafaring journeys with people they already knew: their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Single and still based at home, young men divided their time between sea and shore; sailing abroad, fishing, doing odd jobs, helping out at home, and waiting for their next adventure.<sup>75</sup> William likely enjoyed the thrills that seafaring provided, and for a Puritan-stock boy who grew up in a relatively small town in New England, the exposure that he had to nations, peoples, and cultures flung across the globe was significant. William continued as a mariner for the rest of his life, and over the

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69. “The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription,” online database, *The National Archives* (<https://archives.gov>: accessed 6 April 2021).

70. Beales, Ross W., Jr. “In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England.” *American Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1975): 379–98.

71. “Massachusetts, Essex County, seamen’s records: crew lists and shipping articles for Beverley and Salem, 1797–1934,” entry for William Ruee 1804 online images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 18 March 2021), citing NARA NAID 1600758.

72. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), 175, 272.

73. Phillips, James Duncan. *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937).

74. Vickers, Daniel and Walsh, Vince. “Young Men and the Sea: The Sociology of Seafaring in Eighteenth-Century Salem, Massachusetts,” *Social History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Jan 1999), 17–38.

75. Vickers, Daniel and Walsh, Vince. “Young Men and the Sea: The Sociology of Seafaring in Eighteenth-Century Salem, Massachusetts,” *Social History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Jan 1999), 17–38.



course of his travels visited such destinations as Calcutta,<sup>76</sup> Cayenne,<sup>77</sup> Surinam,<sup>78</sup> Martinico (in the present-day Dominican Republic),<sup>79</sup> and Martinique.<sup>80</sup>

On 21 August 1808, William married Helen (alias Eleanor) Tytler in Salem.<sup>81</sup> Helen was born in about 1788 in Edinburgh, Scotland.<sup>82</sup> Though William was married, he still embarked on many seafaring activities. Despite that, William still had a family with his wife, Helen. William and Helen had at least three children: William Rue, Susan Rue, and Judith Rue.

Tragically, their oldest, William Rue, died of atrophy when he was only fourteen months old. The description of young William's death reads, "Oct. 2 [1810] William, son of William and Helen Rhue. Atrophy, 14 months. Only child. The mother a daughter of the celebrated James Tytler, who emigrated from Scotland. Married three years. [Of] Webb street."<sup>83</sup> The "celebrated" grandfather, James Tytler, was a Scottish scholar and the chief editor of the second edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1776. He was the first Briton to make a successful ascent in a hot air balloon, embarking on his journey on 27 August 1784 in Edinburgh. Using his political connections, he moved to London in 1792

76. "Massachusetts, Essex County, seamen's records: crew lists and shipping articles for Beverley and Salem, 1797-1934," entry for William Ruee 1817 online images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>; accessed 18 March 2021), citing NARA NAID 1600758.

77. "Massachusetts, Essex County, seamen's records: crew lists and shipping articles for Beverley and Salem, 1797-1934," entry for William Ruee 1825 online images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>; accessed 18 March 2021), citing NARA NAID 1600758.

78. "Massachusetts, Essex County, seamen's records: crew lists and shipping articles for Beverley and Salem, 1797-1934," entry for William Ruee 1825 online images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>; accessed 18 March 2021), citing NARA NAID 1600758.

79. "Massachusetts, Essex County, seamen's records: crew lists and shipping articles for Beverley and Salem, 1797-1934," entry for William Ruee 1827/1828, online images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>; accessed 18 March 2021), citing NARA NAID 1600758.

80. "Massachusetts, Essex County, seamen's records: crew lists and shipping articles for Beverley and Salem, 1797-1934," entry for William Ruee 1832/33, online images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org>; accessed 18 March 2021), citing NARA NAID 1600758.

81. "Massachusetts, U.S., Compiled Marriages, 1633-1850," Salem, Essex, index entry for marriage of William Rue and Eleanor Tytler 21 August 1808, index accessed via Ancestry, citing FHL microfilm 0761210.

82. "Genealogy of the Descendants of Richard Man of Scituate, Massachusetts," entry for Susan F. Ruee, p. 199, entry 57, digitized book, Ancestry; "Biography of James Tytler," online database, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<https://oxforddnb.com>; accessed 6 April 2021).

83. Bentley, William. *Record of the Parish List of Deaths, 1785-1819* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1882), p. 116, death of William Rhue 2 October 1810, digitized book accessed via HathiTrust (<https://babel.hathitrust.org>; accessed 8 March 2021), citing image 130 of 204.

to mingle with the capital's political circles. His essay "*To the people and their friends*" was decried as an attack on members of Parliament, Prime Minister William Pitt, and King George III. He was arrested and charged with seditious libel, after which he fled to Salem to avoid imprisonment with his wife, Jean, and their twin daughters, Helen and Grace.<sup>84</sup> James Tytler and his family lived in Salem for the rest of their lives.

On 12 June 1812, Congress declared war on Great Britain. This war was largely provoked by American frustration with economic sanctions against the United States (within the larger scheme of the Napoleonic Wars) and outrage over the British practice of impressment.<sup>85</sup> At the time, Great Britain was the largest naval power in the world, largely due to the fact that it had such a widespread, global empire to attend to. Thus, the United States responded by bolstering up a navy of its own.<sup>86</sup> William Rue joined in the United States' efforts by embarking in the United States Navy aboard the U.S.S. *Rattlesnake*.<sup>87</sup> The ship primarily cruised back and forth from the New England area to the Caribbean, successfully capturing multiple British merchant ships.<sup>88</sup> William served onboard the U.S.S. *Rattlesnake* from 8 July 1813 to 31 December 1813.<sup>89</sup> His skills as a mariner likely served him well in this endeavor. Shortly after William left the ship, it was captured by the H.M.S. *Leander*.<sup>90</sup>

William divided his time for the rest of his life between Salem and the sea: Salem crew lists indicate that William embarked on a multitude of seafaring journeys, and he only appears in Salem in the 1820 census,<sup>91</sup> likely because he was at sea for the others. These crew lists provide a physical description of him,

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84. "Biography of James Tytler," online database, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<https://oxforddnb.com>: accessed 6 April 2021).

85. "War of 1812," online database, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (<https://britannica.com>: accessed 6 April 2021).

86. "War of 1812," online database, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (<https://britannica.com>: accessed 6 April 2021).

87. "War of 1812 Pension Files," entry for William Ruce and Helen Tytler Ruce, online image via Fold3, accessed 30 March 2021, citing NARA roll RG15-1812.

88. "Rattlesnake," online database, *Naval History and Heritage Command* (<https://history.navy.mil>: accessed 6 April 2021).

89. "War of 1812 Pension Application Files Index, 1812-1815," file of William Ruce, pension no. WO 815, Roll number 81, digital image via Ancestry, citing NARA microfilm M313.

90. "U.S.S. Rattlesnake," online database, *Naval History and Heritage Command* (<https://history.navy.mil>: accessed 6 April 2021).

91. 1820 United States census, Salem, Essex, Massachusetts, household of Wm Reue, digital image, *Ancestry* (<https://ancestry.com>: accessed 12 March 2021), citing NARA microfilm publication M33, roll 49.



and stated that he was five feet and six inches tall, with dark hair and a dark complexion.

William Rue died at the age of 52 of stomach cancer in the Salem Almshouse,<sup>92</sup> an institution designed for housing Salem's residents who could no longer provide for themselves. Though William worked as a mariner for his entire life, his trade evidently was not a stable enough income to support him and his family in his old age. He was likely buried in the burial ground of the Almshouse since a gravesite in Salem was too expensive for his family to afford. He was survived by his wife, Helen, and by their daughters Susan and Judith.

## Conclusion

History is made by individuals—individuals with unique life circumstances and experiences. Thus, the history of a place and time period is defined by its inhabitants. The biographies of William Becket, Susanna Becket, and William Rue provide insight into the lived history of Salem, Massachusetts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period of rapid growth and expansion for Salem. As suggested by primary genealogical sources and supplementary scholarly historical work, the Becket's and Rues' lives were largely shaped by Salem's maritime community and economy, international trade networks, and the broader climate of American history.

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92. "Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records 1620-1988," Salem, Essex, death of William Ruee 14 March 1839, compiled source via Ancestry, accessed 17 March 2021); "War of 1812 Pension Files," entry for William Ruce and Helen Tytler Ruce, online image via Fold3, accessed 30 March 2021, citing NARA roll RG15-1812.