

**“COLLECTING AND ARRANGING...A HISTORY OF THE GLOBE”:
A RECONSIDERATION OF THE SALEM EAST INDIA MARINE SOCIETY
AND ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN MUSEOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

The Salem East India Marine Society Museum was one of the most influential collecting institutions in the antebellum United States. From 1799 to 1867, it was considered a model organization in the Union, and visitors were a reflection of American society. Though it continues today as the Peabody Essex Museum, which garners increasing national and international attention, the Society’s museum is surprisingly unrecognized, understudied, or missing from contemporary scholarship.

This dissertation is the first comprehensive work on the East India Marine Society Museum since 1949. To date, no scholar has made more than a cursory examination of the Society’s substantial institutional archive and few individuals have recognized the significance of this museum to antebellum American culture. By applying critical museological, historical, art historical, and material culture analysis, this study will demonstrate how the Society used objects collected via international exchange to support an American identity tied to the sea. Visitors to the museum, therefore, could

circumnavigate the globe, gaining both an understanding of the world and their place within it.

Chapter 1 traces the East India Marine Society's history while contextualizing their museum within the landscape of American collecting institutions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Chapter 2 provides an understanding of the origins and evolution of maritime charitable societies and the influence of the Society's benevolent mission on the institution as a whole. Chapter 3 explores the Society's scientific accomplishments and its effect on the collection and display of curiosities. Chapter 4 takes an in-depth look at the men who built and maintained the Society in the nineteenth century and the development of the museum's collection through global trade. Chapter 5 examines the Society's exhibition strategy and the impact of outside consultants on the organization and display of objects. Chapter 6 focuses on nineteenth-century visitor accounts of the museum. This study concludes by illustrating how the Society and its mission remained visible through the museum's various incarnations to date, demonstrating that it was not simply a Salem institution but rather a symbol of the antebellum United States.