



A Genealogical Puzzle

THE above cut represents an iron fireback, cast probably in the Saugus Ironworks, which will occupy a prominent place in the Society's architectural museum scheduled to open at the time of our Anniversary Annual Meeting. It was taken some forty years ago from a fireplace in the mid-eighteenth-century Phippen-Smith House, then located at 9 Elm Street in Salem. As a 1660 fireback it had obviously been salvaged from an earlier house, and the initials and date should offer a clue to the original owners. Normally such a combination of initials indicates the husband's and wife's given names with their surname. Thus the initials $I^P A$ on a similar fireback at the Essex Institute can be

identified with John and Alice Pickering of Salem.

In the fireback from the Phippen-Smith House the matter is complicated by the wife's initial. It is clearly a G . But the letter has been inverted both times it appears. Was this an error or did the caster, lacking the letter D for his mold, invert a G to obtain the closest approximation? At any rate, the combination $B^H G$ or $B^H D$ does not suggest the commonest of names and should be identifiable. A search of early vital statistics has so far failed to reveal a pair of likely candidates for these initials. Can any of our members with Essex County antecedents settle this question?