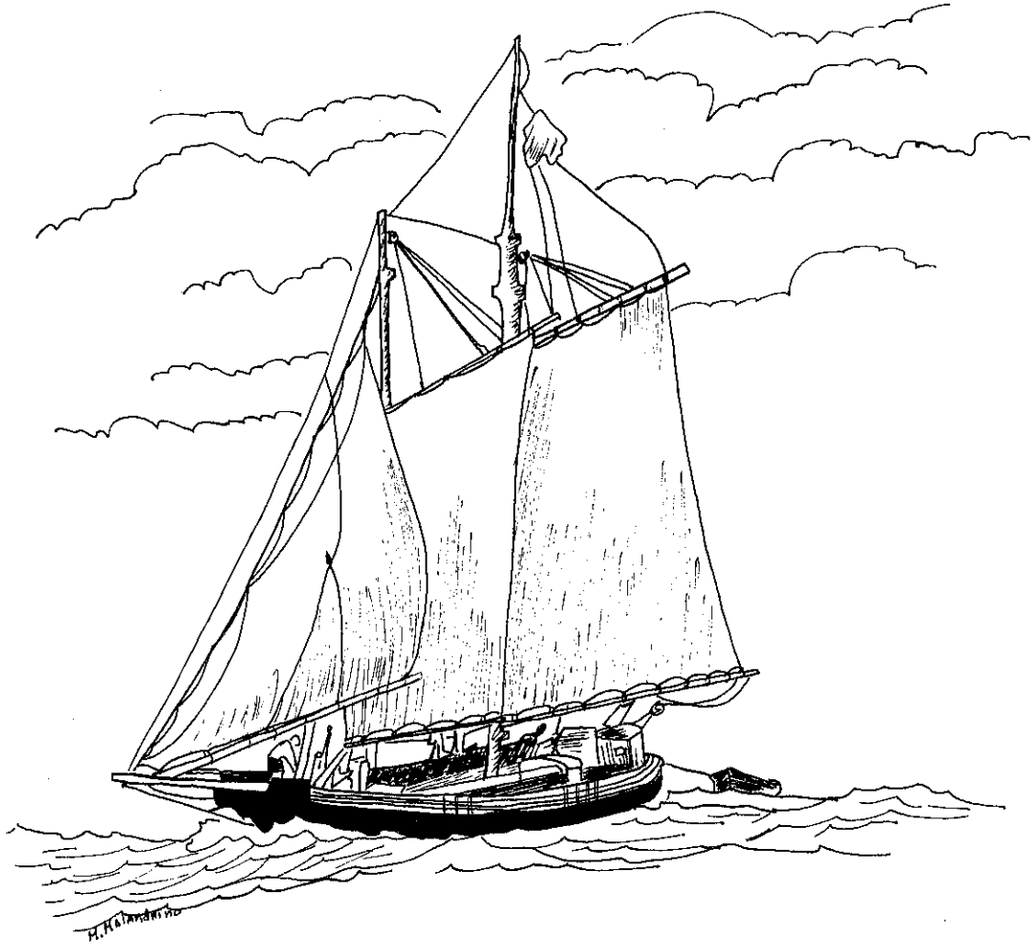
SHIPPING IN YORK

PRIOR TO 1875



By: Laurie Carpenter

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HISTORIC LANDMARKS AWARD PROGRAM

Historic Landmarks, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of our colonial heritage. The society maintains Jefferds Tavern, the Marshall Store, the John Hancock Warehouse, the Elizabeth Perkins House, and the Old Schoolhouse as historical museums. Landmarks such as the Old Burying Ground, Maude Muller Spring and Snowshoe Rock are cared for by the Society. Funds are used to purchase books for the York Public Library, to arrange lectures on historical subjects, and to place markers in areas of historical significance.

The Award Program was planned to serve the student, the society, the school and the community by encouraging high school students to do research on problems relating to the colonial heritage of York, Maine. This paper, a product of such research, was submitted in April, 1964.

John D. Bardwell,
President
Society for the Preservation
of Historic Landmarks in
York County, Inc.

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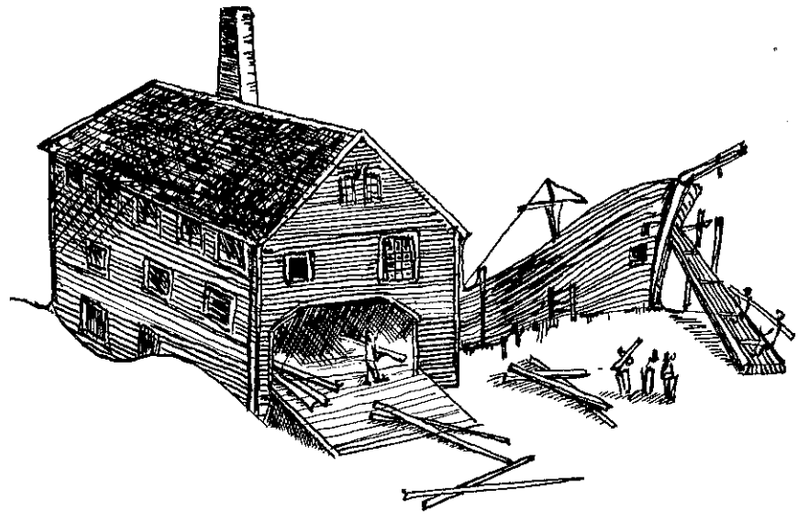


SHIPPING IN YORK PRIOR TO 1875

Shipping played an important role in the development of the town of York from the time the area was first settled in 1624 until the latter part of the nineteenth century. For nearly two hundred and fifty years, vessels sailed in and out of York Harbor and the Cape Neddick River, supplying the area with goods from all over the world. York Harbor was the major port with other facilities at Cape Neddick and Scotland Bridge. The northern shore of York Harbor was lined with wharves, and there were warehouses and wharves along the river side of Point Bolleyne to Sewall's Bridge. Mills and a shipyard were located above Sewall's Bridge.[1] The wharves, warehouses, and mills increased gradually as shipping became more important.

In 1632 there were less than one hundred settlers in Agamenticus, as York was then called. The people of Agamenticus did not own large trading vessels,[2] but vessels from English and Atlantic coast ports were sailing into the York River to trade useful items for such local products as furs, fish, and grain. As early as 1634 there was a wharf located near Stage Neck.[3] The market place was that area on the northern shore of the harbor between Clark Lane and the Sayward mansion until 1737.[4] John Davis, the first merchant of York, owned a store, a wharf, a warehouse at the market place, and a vessel by 1650.[5] George Penniwell, another York man, was the owner of a vessel, *True Dealing*, in 1670.[6]

It was about this time that the people of York began to build their own ships. The first coaster to be built in York was probably built before 1670, although there is no definite record of this event.[7] In 1675 Benjamin Johnson came to build at Cape Neddick,[8] Samuel Banks acquired 48 acres of land on the Cape Neddick River and he established a shipyard in 1689.[9] Other shipyards were located on York River and at Braveboat Harbor. In 1681 George Norton built a sloop and, later, two vessels of about fifty tons, *The Beginning* and *The Lenham*. Although Norton had a shipyard on the Piscataqua River, he launched all three of these in York.[10] According to the

1 George Ernst, *New England Miniature*, pp. 230-234.
2 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
6 Charles Edward Banks, *History of York, Maine*, vol. II, p. 285.
7 *Emerson Family History*, p. 213.
8 Ernst, *"op. cit.,"* p. 241.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 242.
10 Banks, *"op. cit.,"* p. 285.

records of the Old Gaol Committee, ten vessels were built at York between 1689 and 1732. The sloop, *The Marys*, was the first vessel on record to be built on the York River, but other ships were probably built here before 1732.[1]

Most of the ships built in York were rigged as brigs, brigantines, or schooners. The brigs and brigantines, each requiring a crew of seven or eight, were faster than the schooners. The slower schooners, with a crew of two or three, were more economical and more reliable. All three types of vessels had shallow hulls so they could sail over the Bahama reefs, instead of having to sail around them.[2]

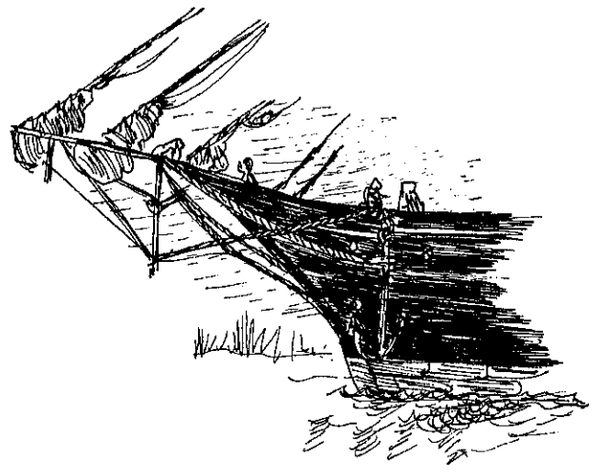
By 1743 York was a busy port, with twenty coasters and five fishing boats owned by local men.[3] York men sailed along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Georgia, and a few York vessels ventured to the West Indies.[4] Some shipbuilders and shipowners held shares in sawmills,[5] and their ships carried products from sawmills located in the area. One shipwreck occurred in the vicinity during these early days. Daniel Moulton of York recorded that on December 7, 1752, a schooner, *Charming Molley,* was wrecked off York Harbor.[6] Between 1763 and the Revolutionary War, York had several prosperous merchants trading with the West Indies. Jonathan Sayward and Edward Emerson were among the more notable. Edward Emerson, who had come to York in 1750, acquired shares in several vessels and cargoes. His investments were successful and he soon had his own fleet.[7]

Shipping in York was seriously effected by the Revolution. York lost so many ships early in the war that by 1778 a large number of York seamen were forced to ship out of other ports.[8] Many local men were involved in privateering, and most of them were captured several times by the British. They were usually held at Halifax to be exchanged for British prisoners. It was recorded that in February of 1774, there were thirty-four men from York and the surrounding towns imprisoned at Mill Prison in England. There was a shortage of seamen in the area because so many sailors were either captured or hesitant to ship out. A Salem man, Captain Jacob Wild of the schooner *Greyhound,* solved this problem by entertaining some York seamen at a local tavern one evening. After several rounds of drinks, he persuaded them to sign on with him.[9] The York privateers brought in many prizes and several local men made large profits on captured goods and vessels.[10]In fact, many of them did so well that they continued privateering after the war ended.[11]

York had its own Tea Party on September 28, 1774, when Captain James Donnell brought a small load of tea into York Harbor. The tea was moved from the vessel and stored in Captain Grow's warehouse. That evening, the "Sons of Liberty" dressed as Pickwacket Indians, broke into the warehouse and removed the tea. It is rumored that the Sons of Liberty and their descendents were well supplied with tea for decades.[12]

During the period following the Revolutionary War, York rapidly recovered from the damage to its shipping. To avoid British restrictions on trade with the West Indies and certain European ports, Americans often registered their vessels in foreign countries. This enabled them to trade legally in those forbidden ports.[13] Some York merchants did not take this precaution, but preferred to risk loss of their vessels and cargoes by sailing to the closed ports, as they had done before the war. Ships and cargoes were captured, but when a ship did make a successful voyage, the profits

1 Ernst, *"op. cit.,"* p. 60.
2 *Emerson Family History,* p. 114.
3 Ernst, *"op. cit.,"* p. 72.
4 *Ibid.,* p. 60.
5 *Emerson Family History,* p. 117.
6 L. W. Jenkins, *The American Neptune,* 236.
7 Ernst, *"op. cit.,"* p. 72.
8 *Emerson Family History,* pp. 38-40.
9 *Ibid.,* pp. 40-41.
10 Ernst, *"op. cit.,"* p. 80
11 *Emerson Family History,* p. 43.
12 George Ernst, *"op. cit.,"* p. 76.
13 *Ibid.,* p. 84.



were high. On November 27, 1788, Jonathan Sayward noted in his diary that he had seen thirteen vessels in York Harbor, the most he had ever seen there at one time.[1] The shipping industry grew rapidly during the next few years. In 1789 the federal government named York a port of delivery for the first district of Maine. Captain Richard Trevett, who had been involved in privateering during the war, became the first collector of the port.[2] The chief exports were lumber, dried fish, staple commodities, some flour, potatoes, tallow, and cattle.[3]

It was during this period that Edward Emerson, Jr., became one of the wealthiest ship owners in York. In 1789 he launched a brigantine, *Clarissa,* at his shipyard on the York River. Between 1789 and 1802 his fleet grew to include seven vessels which he had built and two which he had bought. There is some evidence that he may have owned four other vessels. According to some reports, Emerson built two of the largest vessels in York: *Gladiator,* two hundred six tons burthen, and *Circumnavigator,* three hundred nineteen tons burthen. In 1792 Captain Chase, master of the *Fancy,* a vessel owned by Edward Emerson, Jr., lost the cargo on a voyage. He sold the ship and bought sugar and molasses, which he shipped to Newburyport in another vessel. Since this was long before modern methods of communication, the captain had the owner's permission to act as his agent. During the undeclared war between France and the United States, four of Emerson's vessels were lost to the French: *Clarissa* and *Sebatus Neptune* in 1798, *Friendship* in 1800, *Caroline* in 1802. When the treaty was signed in 1803, the French government agreed to reimburse the United States for these and other losses. It was not until one hundred years later, in 1902 and in 1905, that the government of France made restitution to Edward Octavius Emerson, a descendant of Edward Emerson, Jr., for a part of the losses. The sum was divided among fifteen heirs.[4]

Trade between York and the West Indies reached its peak by 1795. Due to the old navigation methods, trips to these islands varied in length. Usually, a vessel made two voyages a year, one in December and another after it returned late in February or early March. This enabled sailors to work their farms during the summer and avoid the hurricane and yellow fever seasons. Other sailors worked on coastal vessels during the summer months.

Ship owners had to rely on reports, their own judgment, and their experi-

1 *Ibid.,* p. 85.
2 *Ibid.,* p. 199.
3 *Emerson Family History,* p. 118.
4 *Ibid.,* pp. 118-119, 123-124.

ence in selecting cargoes to send to the West Indies. It was not uncommon for an owner or a merchant to send a load of lumber or potatoes to the islands and then find that there was no market for his cargo.[1] Vessels returning from the West Indies usually stopped at New York or Boston to sell some or all of their cargo of molasses, rum, sugar or coffee. Then they would return to York with cloth, china, or other goods.[2]

In 1795 Captain Joseph Tucker replaced Richard Trevett as collector of customs for the port of York, a post which Tucker held until 1804.[3] York merchants continued to prosper until around 1801. The war between France and England created a ready market for York products in Boston, for Bostonians were busy shipping their goods to the warring nations and could not supply their own needs. Trade with the West Indies quickly began to decline around 1800, when both France and England put embargoes into effect.[4] Trade with Boston also declined, for with peace in 1801, Boston no longer needed local products.

Samuel Bragdon recorded the arrival and departure of local ships during the early nineteenth century. In 1801 most of the seventeen ships that he listed were involved in the West Indies trade. The same was true of the fourteen recorded there in 1802 and of the twenty-three in 1803. On December 7, 1805, Samuel Bragdon recorded that Isaak Lyman and Company launched "the handsomest and best built ship ever built in this town." In the following year, 1806, only six vessels were mentioned. The effect of the embargo may be seen in 1807, for in that year, only two ships were noted. The War of 1812 damaged local shipping even more and trade was limited to Canadian or American ports.[5] In spite of the general decline in shipping, a busy trading center was established at Scotland Bridge during the nineteenth century. Sylvester McIntire owned a store and seven wharves. Other stores and warehouses were built on both sides of the river.[6]

In 1820, York merchants owned less shipping tonnage than any of the leading ports of Maine. There were occasional trips to the West Indies, but most York ships sailed along the Atlantic coast. One of the West Indies voyages was recorded in the logbook of the schooner *Enterprize*, of which Timothy Grow was the master. The vessel sailed from York on December 31, 1820, and arrived in Martinique on January 17, 1821, but found no buyer for its cargo of potatoes, lumber, fish, and hoops until a month later. The *Enterprize* had stopped in several ports and by the time its cargo was sold, many of the potatoes were rotten. The vessel sailed from Martinique on April 21 with a cargo of molasses. Samuel Lindsay's account book listed the transactions on the brig *Oliver* in September of 1820. Its cargo, consisting of eight barrels of beef, thirteen barrels of mackerel, several thousand feet of boards, fourteen thousand-five hundred shingles, fifteen hundred hoops, sixteen hundred staves, and other items, was sold. Several thousand pounds of sugar, nine hogsheads of molasses, ten empty hogsheads, and one puncheon of rum were bought as cargo. According to the logbook of the brig *Hannah and Mary*, on two voyages in 1834, cargo was stored on deck. An account of the cargo taken aboard at Jeremie, Santo Domingo, showed six hundred-ninety-five bags of coffee, and almost fifty-nine thousand pounds of logwood. On a voyage earlier that year the vessel took on a similar cargo of coffee and logwood at Aux Cayes, Haiti.[7]

Between 1820 and 1870, York-owned shipping tonnage was less than any other chief port in Maine, except in the year 1850 when Saco owned less than York. Only seven hundred-eight tons were registered in York in 1870, and as the century wore on, only a few coasters were sailing out of York.[8] In 1850 only four merchant captains made their homes in the community.[9]

1 *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
3 Ernst, "*op. cit.*," p. 119.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 234.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 86.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
7 Records of the Old Gaol Committee
8 William Hutchinson Rowe, *The Maritime History of Maine*, p. 317.
9 Banks, "*op. cit.*," p. 287.

Local seamen were forced to sail out of other ports by 1875, for shipping in York was part of the past.

The town of York had been an active port in shipping for nearly two hundred and fifty years. The first vessels to carry local products were registered from ports in England and the Atlantic coast. By 1670, York men were building their own ships and sailing them to Canadian and American ports. The West Indies trade which flourished from 1763 to the early nineteenth century brought prosperity to the town, In the new century, vessels of York registry began to decrease, as local vessels were forced to turn from the West Indies to ports nearer home. The great era of shipping in York had come to an end by 1875.

Ruins of the wharves, warehouses and mills can still be found along the river banks, and the magnificent homes of York's successful merchants serve to remind us of the York seamen who carried local products to the ports of the world.

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