

LIFE IN A SEAPORT TOWN

Itinerary for a Teacher-Led Tour

Many things about life in a seaport town in the nineteenth century were different from your life today, and some things were the same. Look for those differences and similarities as you tour the village exhibits at Mystic Seaport. Think about what was happening in our country. Factories and businesses were growing and providing jobs beyond farming and the sea. The population was growing and diversifying as people came from other continents to work and seek out new opportunities. The transcontinental railroad and canal system took goods and services inland and brought them out as the west was settled. Can you find clues to these changes in the buildings you visit? Is your home town a coastal or inland town?

Teachers, you may want to have students work in teams and gather information, making notes, sketches, charts, and writing their questions down for further research. Help them take time to really look at each exhibit or object as they gather information from many sources. One member of each team might read the labels aloud. Be sure to spend time on our waterfront overlooking the Mystic River estuary. Some busy seaports were on rivers. Ask your students to think about how a seaport community orients itself.

Buckingham-Hall House

Most of our village shows what life was like in the 1870s. This farmhouse shows life as it was in the 1830s when things were still being done the “old” way. What changes in technology have happened since then?

- As you approach the house, guess what the stone “steps” and curb-side posts were used for.
- Inside the house, notice how low the ceilings are. Think about it: what do ceilings have to do with keeping warm in winter?
- Go into the kitchen and look around. Now close your eyes, and think of what your kitchen at home looks like. Open your eyes. What’s different? Make a chart, if you like, of then and now.
- As you walk through the house and its yard, discuss with your team what chores each family member might have had in 1830.
- Go upstairs and look at the beds. Talk with your team about reasons for the curtains hanging from the bedposts - how many can you think of?
- Look at the kitchen garden, which is only a sample of the large garden needed to feed the family. What do you think the two outbuildings near the garden were used for? What makes you think so?

Seamen's Friend Society Reading Room

Many seaport towns had Reading Rooms like this staffed by volunteers who were members of the Seamen’s Friend Society.

- What things do you find that might be comforting to a sailor far from home?

- Can you find a very unusual "basket" in the tall bookcase? Where is it from and how do you think it got here?
- If there is a roleplayer in the Reading Room, you might ask about life at sea.
- Discuss some of the dangers sailors faced.

You might be surprised to learn that in large seaports today, there are Seamen's Friend Societies. There may be computers and air-conditioners instead of wood stoves and oil lamps, but their role is the same--to be a Friend to sailors from around the world.

Drug Store

The druggist or apothecary was necessary to those who lived in the community and to those who went to sea as well.

- Go up the ramp and look at the bottles of colored water in the window. With your team, think of several reasons for them. Hint: Do you think they serve the same purpose as the carved wooden Indian in front of Stone's Store? You may want to make a sketch of these objects.
- Inside, look over the counter at the wooden chest full of small medicine bottles.
- Imagine being on a whaleship with the captain as your doctor and this chest as his only supply of medicine. Discuss the illnesses or injuries that could happen on a ship. What kinds of medicines would you want the captain to have?
- Look around and list the things you could have bought in a store like this long ago. Is there anything beside medicine? Do modern drugstores sell things beside medicine?

School House

The School House gives you a chance to observe changes in technology over hundreds of years.

- Compare the size of this schoolhouse with the one you go to. This is the "one room school house" in America's past. How many results of that can you list?
- Discuss possible reasons that each student had a slate. Can you determine what the teacher's blackboard is made of?
- What do you notice is "missing"? Brainstorm ideas of how the teacher and students managed with no water fountain, bathroom, cafeteria or library. You might make a chart of Then and Now.
- Discuss the pros and cons of teaching and learning in a one-room school house.
- Think about some of the famous authors, inventors, scientists, and artists who lived in the 1800s.

Mystic Press

By the 1870s color presses had been invented. People of average income could afford periodicals. Magazines, especially for kids, were very popular!

- Discuss reasons why a print shop would be important in a seaport town.
- Can you see evidence of shop printed things beside the newspaper? Does this shop need a color press? Why or why not?
- Look around and hypothesize! Without a typewriter or computer, how was the type set? What was meant by "upper case" and "lower case"?

- Can you estimate how long it would take to set and print the weekly newspaper?
- Do you think printing presses like these are still used outside of museums?

Burrows House

This 1870s house is small but comfortable. It was moved here from downtown Mystic.

- What kinds of workers might have been able to afford to live in this house?
- Look in the kitchen. What “modern conveniences” made meal preparation easier than in the Buckingham-Hall House? Make a sketch of this kitchen if you like.
- Do you know anyone with a home office? Did Mrs. Burrows have a home office or shop? What business was she in?
- Go into the backyard. List the ways this backyard looks different from the Buckingham House backyard. Sit under the grape arbor and discuss who might have sat there long ago. What did you see in the house that made you reach your conclusion?

Learn More About Coastal Communities in these Exhibits:

- Chandlery
- Bank
- Chapel
- Fire Engine
- Scale Model
- Thomas Greenman House

Vocabulary

apothecary	one who prepares compounds for medicinal use.
canal	a man-made waterway used for navigation.
diversifying	adding elements that are different from one another.
outbuildings	buildings that are separate from the main house but used by it.
periodicals	printed materials published at regular intervals such as weekly or monthly transcontinental going from one coast to the other.

Further Reading

Conway, Celeste. *Where is Papa Now?*

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *The Little House Series.*

education@mysticseaport.org

Mystic Seaport

75 Greenmanville Avenue

Mystic, CT 06355

860.572.0711