



# Quincy History

Quincy, Massachusetts

Quincy Historical Society

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## South Shore Maritime—A Brief History

By H. Hobart Holly\*

The Quincy South Shore area is noted for the richness and diversity of its history. Of this great heritage, maritime activity has not received due recognition, although from the earliest times it has been an important factor in the life of the six towns on the south shore of Boston Bay. It is because it was so much a part of their lives that its history was not recorded.

The story that follows is largely the result of research in compiling a record of around twelve hundred commercial vessels that were built in or hailed from Milton, Quincy, Braintree, Weymouth, Hingham and Hull prior to 1900. The records show vessels built in five towns at one time or another, but none in Hull. In addition we have records of around four hundred yachts and other smaller crafts built in Quincy, mostly in the twentieth century. There are also complete records of the vessels built at the Fore River, Squantum and Hingham shipyards.

The prime importance of our maritime heritage is two fold. First, shipbuilding was for many years our area's largest industry. Second, within a one-mile radius of the present shipyard there has been important shipbuilding activity since early colonial days. This continuity of activity through times that have seen vast changes in types of vessel, shipbuilding practices, and virtually all aspects of people's lives and the economy, is most unusual in this country and most significant to us and the history of our area.

Why did shipbuilding start here? It was because the people here needed ships in order to live; and available here were good shore, the

needed materials, and men with the required skills. This situation was not unusual but true all along the New England coast. In colonial days and for many years after, the sea was their life. All the settlers came by sea, as did the later immigrants down to the present century. The sea was their contact with the other coastal settlements and the rest of the world, and also their principal means of livelihood.

The early settlers of Massachusetts were not basically maritime people. They settled along the coast because the sea was their major artery of transportation and remained so until the railroads came in the mid-1800s. They soon found that the New England soil gave a living very grudgingly; so they turned to fishing and trading rather than starve. Massachusetts was

well located for fishing activity, and it had good timber for shipbuilding in the early days. Beyond that its competitive advantages were few. Massachusetts men competed successfully with other ports by their enterprise and hard work, and by engaging in high-risk, high-profit ventures like privateering and the oriental trade. When in the 1850s the Gold Rush called for speed at all costs, the most famous clippers were Massachusetts vessels including two built right here in Quincy. Even the Quincy granite industry was dependent on the sea. It was cheap saltwater transportation by sloops and schooners that gave Quincy a competitive advantage over its inland competitors. The Granite Railway ran not to a market for stone but to

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## When Abigail Returned To Quincy\*

By Maura E. Crowley

Much has happened in Quincy since Abigail Adams lived here. What would she think if she returned to her city today? The following is a possible scenario.

When Abigail Adams came to Quincy the other day, she came as a result of a great deal of persistence. She really wanted to see how her city had changed so she begged Saint Peter to let her return for an afternoon. She begged and pleaded until Saint Peter finally gave in. Abigail was given a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt, and some Reebok sneakers. She was told she would

be set down somewhere near her old farm home.

Suddenly she found herself on the sidewalk in front of CVS. She tried to hide her alarm, since other people hurrying by seemed not to notice anything strange, but there were monsters zooming down the road. Even the road was different, hard and gray with a line down the middle instead of the packed earth that she had known.

"I must think," she said to herself. "Before I take another step, I must think. There are no such things as monsters. I must think about this." Then she noticed that there were people inside the monsters. "Why it is some kind of riding beast! The horse has evolved to hold more people and to keep out the rain." She was pleased with her discovery.

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\*Historian, Quincy Historical Society, and maritime historian.

\*This is a portion of a paper on Abigail Adams by a 5th Grade student in connection with the Elementary Laboratory Center program of the Quincy Public Schools in cooperation with the Quincy Historical Society. Eighty selected students from various schools prepared papers on chosen historical subjects based on supervised research of primary and secondary sources in the Society's library.

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tidewater whence it was shipped by sea to its destination. The Quincy Canal too was part of this saltwater granite transportation system.

### Wooden Ships

Especially in the earlier times, shipbuilding was not an organized industry concentrated in a small number of large shipyards. Yards were small and simple. A man with shipbuilding skills, but another regular trade like housewright, might borrow space and build a vessel or two at a time. While the shipbuilding activity was generally concentrated in certain areas, shipyard facilities were not a critical factor.

The first requirement was timber and this was plentiful in the early days. When timber in the immediate area became depleted, nearby sources like Abington and Hanson were utilized. By the mid-19th century it was being brought in from the Chesapeake, the Carolinas, Georgia and Maine. Oak frames were natural curves. Bending through heating timbers in a steambox did not become general practice until along in the 19th century.

Convenience to sources of timber were the first consideration in locating a shipyard. Around here the tide range gave enough water for launching, so yards could be located well up small streams. The North River is a prime example. The tidal portion of little Smelt Brook

between Braintree and Weymouth was an early and long-active site. There were ship blacksmiths in the larger centers but the local smith often provided the iron fittings. There were itinerant specialists like treenailmakers, and there were sailmakers and blockmakers in the area.

In viewing ship construction activity, let us not overlook repair work. This never made the history books but was very important economically, especially in a location like ours on an active harbor. The builder commonly kept a financial interest, usually one-eighth, in a vessel he constructed which gave him an in on the repair work.

Most vessels constructed in this area were for the local market. There were many large vessels built here. These were generally for Boston registry and Boston-owned although local people frequently held an interest in them. The great majority, however, were sloops and schooners; the work horses that did fishing and were the trucks, freight cars and buses of their day. They also engaged in foreign trade when the opportunity offered. Collectively these smaller vessels were the backbone of the colonial and American merchant marine. Almost all of the hundreds of vessels that hailed from our South Shore towns were sloops and schooners, the majority locally built. Most famous were the granite sloops, a type of vessel indigenous to Quincy and as already mentioned highly important to our area.

Vessel sizes did not increase appreciably until after the War of 1812 when the new demands of foreign commerce called for increased tonnage in both size and numbers. This marked the end of major ship construction on the North River and other sites with limited water, and the migration of shipbuilders primarily to Quincy. The demand was not only for larger vessels but for more and faster. Accordingly the yards established in Quincy tended to be larger operations than those that the builders had left; also they were now in the area for repair work. And so wooden shipbuilding prospered in

the Quincy area until the later years of the nineteenth century.

The continuity of this historic shipbuilding activity, which ended in most old shipbuilding centers, was preserved here by the transition from wood to steel construction. This was not a planned or gradual change but rather one that came about through the back door. Wood construction was still the order of the day here (the largest yard was Keen's in North Weymouth) when Watson and Wellington started the Fore River Engine Company with a small machine shop in East Braintree and a Weymouth address. Their product was marine steam engines for commercial vessels and yachts built in many yards including Mr. Keen's. In the 1890s they started building some small wooden hulls for their engines, and eventually included some fair sized vessels. Then came the Spanish American War, and the Government was looking for yards to build steel vessels; and so it happened. Three steel hulls, a lightship and two destroyers were launched at the East Braintree Yard, but subsequent contracts were more than those limited facilities could handle. So the whole operation was moved to Quincy Neck taking one of their buildings with them. The name was then changed to Fore River Ship and Engine Company. The factors that favored this transition to steel were basically the same that brought wooden shipbuilding here earlier—good shore, access to ship materials and components, and men who knew how to build ships.

People are apt to forget that the Yard started as an engine company and that until after World War II it was one of the country's largest builders of marine propulsion machinery. It is to be noted also that during this period the Yard not only built hulls but the engines, boilers, auxiliaries, and even many fittings. At the end it had become more of a giant assembly job with components coming from all over the country. Thus shipbuilding here has adapted to still another change in the industry.

It was not until after the Civil War that pleasure boating really became

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popular. Quincy Yacht Club, the first in our area but not by much, was founded in 1874. About this time men with skills from building small commercial craft went into the pleasure boat field. In Quincy this became an important industry. It started at Quincy Point in the 1870s with A.B. Lelois and W.F. Maybury building chiefly racing boats for Quincy Yacht Club members. In 1898 the great boat designer and builder, C.C. Hanley, moved here and operated his yard for 27 years. Here he built MEEMER, still known nationally as "the queen of the cats". The Quincy Adams Yard in the 1930s, '40s and '50s built many fine boats including well-known class boats and the famous ocean racers TICONDEROGA in 1936, BARUNA in 1938 and GESTURE in 1941. Many other yards located generally on Town River Bay and the Neponset built fine boats mainly in the 1920s and 1930s, chiefly power yachts. And of course Lawley's at Neponset was one of the foremost yacht builders in the world. While building has virtually ceased in the Quincy area, boat business and activity continues very active.

### South Shore Shipbuilders

As mentioned, the local shipbuilding activity in which we are interested relates to the six towns on the south shore of Boston Bay. Of these towns Hull had fishing and trading vessels hailing from there but did not have a shipbuilding industry; it was not convenient to early timber sources.

Milton had shipyards at the Landing Place from very early colonial days. Enoch Badcock built the ship MARY AND SARAH there in 1693, and the family continued the yard for two generations after him. Vose and Fenno also had a shipyard there before the Revolution. By far the most important yard, however, was operated by Daniel Briggs from 1786 to 1815. His old wharf still remains in the Neponset River below Forbes Road. Here he built 33 vessels of which sixteen were ships of up to 395 tons. These large and important vessels of their day were built for foreign trade and whaling.

Hingham was a mackerel port

with its own Deputy Collector of Customs. The town's activity, including the shipbuilding and repair work centered on this fishing industry. Most of the vessels built were sloops and schooners for the local trade. Supplementing the shipyards were blockmakers, sailmakers, coopers, bucket-makers, a rope works, and ship blacksmiths. The most important yard was at the foot of Ship Street. Francis Barker operated here from 1750 to 1792 when it was taken over by John Souther who, followed by his son Leavitt, operated the yard until the mid-1800s. There are records of 59 vessels built there including 4 ships, 2 barks, and 22 brigs. A short distance to the east was the Bassett shipyard where five members of the family built here for nearly a century starting with Joseph Bassett before the revolution.

Charles Keen built six schooners near the mouth of Broad Cove in the 1830s. In the southeast area of the Harbor near where the old steamboat wharf may still be seen, William Hall built 11 vessels between 1838 and 1846, the largest being the ship WALDRON of 546 tons. There was also shipbuilding activity on the Weir River. Here Jeremiah Stodder and his son of the same name operated a yard from the early 1700s until after the Revolution. Here too was built in 1859 the 719-ton ship SOLFERINO whose fate is a mystery. She disappeared during the Civil War.

The Landing area of Weymouth and East Braintree was a maritime community from earliest times. Here was carried on shipping and trading with other coastal points and the West Indies. Here too was shipbuilding activity well within the one-mile radius of the Fore River shipyard. The activity centered in little Smelt Brook, now in a pipe but then with a sizable tidal portion up as far as Commercial Street. We believe that the 35-ton brigantine WILLIAM & MARY of 1693 was built here. There are records of over a dozen shipbuilders in this area over the years, the most important being located where Rhines Lumber Company was located in the 1960s. Here Samuel Arnold, who was also

a mariner, merchant and tavernkeeper, and his son Samuel, Jr. had a shipyard from the time of the Revolution until 1816. They built important vessels including some ships and brigs. In the same location was the yard of Atherton W. Tilden who came from Marshfield and built here from 1838 to 1847. His vessels included six barks and two brigs. At the foot of Sea Street in North Weymouth was the yard of N. Porter Keen who moved here from Duxbury in 1875. For the next ten years particularly he was very active building schooners, including the 1294-ton, four-masted HAROLD-INE, barks, fine pilot boats and large yachts.

On the Braintree side, Edmund Soper had a shipyard and shipping business at the foot of Mill Street. Stephen Lovell built sloops in the early 1800s at his yard on Smelt Brook near Commercial Street. In the 1780s there was a yard on the point where the gas company is now located operated by Daniel Briggs who came from Pembroke and then moved on to Milton. In 1798 Nathaniel R. Thomas from Marshfield took over this location and for ten years had a large shipbuilding and trading activity there. His largest vessel was a 367-ton ship. Increase Clapp and Judah Loring built mainly sloops and schooners in the Smelt Brook area starting in the early 1800s. Loring later moved his yard to the foot of Shaw Street where it continued until 1854. In East Braintree too, where the Braintree Yacht Club is now located, was the site of the Fore River Engine Company in 1884 and the location of its shipyard until 1900.

Traditionally the first vessel built in what is now Quincy was the ketch UNITY constructed in 1696 at Ship Cove on Quincy Neck. The basis for this tradition is unclear, but unquestionably the most important 18th century vessel built here was the ship MASSACHUSETTS of 1789. Constructed at Philips Head in Germantown by Daniel Briggs, she measured 137 feet, 7 inches in length and 791 tons, the largest vessel built in this country up to that time and for some years after that.

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Built for the China trade her career was not a successful one. The demand for more and larger vessels that grew after 1800 started the migration of shipbuilders to these deep waters. In 1811 William James and David Torrey came from the North River and operated a yard on Town River Bay at the foot of Follett Street until 1822. Their largest vessel was a brig of 234 tons. In 1815 John Souther came here from Hingham and founded the yard on Town River where Quincy Lumber Company was later located, which he and his son John L. Souther operated for nearly 50 years. They built many vessels of all types, did extensive repair work, engaged in granite shipping, operated the gates of the Quincy Canal and had a tidemill. Nathan Josselyn came from Pembroke and worked for John Souther. In 1820 he opened his yard on Quincy Point just above the bridge. Over the next 20 years he built 3 sloops, 4 schooners, 6 brigs, 2 barks, 6 ships including the 512-ton ARAB, and the NEPONSET the first steamboat built in Massachusetts south of Boston, for the Granite Railway Company.

Peleg F. Jones came from Marshfield in 1835 and operated his yard on Quincy Point where the tankfield is now located for over 30 years. He was the principal designer and builder of the famous Quincy granite sloops. Deacon George Thomas moved here from Rockland, Maine where he had built the famous clipper ship RED JACKET. Between 1854 and 1877 he built at his yard at Quincy Point where Proctor & Gamble is now located, 1 sloop, 7 schooners, 1 brig, 1 bark and 22 ships. Among the latter were the clippers KING PHILIP and LOGAN, and the 2208-ton ship RED CLOUD.

Then in 1900 the Fore River Ship and Engine Company operations were moved to Quincy Neck where the skills of the shipbuilder continued the South Shore shipbuilding industry that started in early colonial days. The Yard truly carried on the long shipbuilding heritage of our area employing

shipbuilders from all of the South Shore, and utilizing products and services of the area.

The Fore River Shipyard made history as one of the foremost shipbuilding facilities in the country. Its shipbuilders could and did build almost every type of vessel from the simplest to the most innovative and sophisticated— barges, trawlers, cargo ships, tankers, passenger liners; naval vessels from landing craft, submarines and destroyers to battleships and aircraft carriers. In a number of cases the Yard was the pioneer including the building of the Navy's first nuclear-powered surface vessel. The supertanker was developed here and included the SS MANHATTAN, this

country's first 100,000 ton vessel. In World War I the main yard facilities were augmented by the Squantum Yard, and in World War II by the Hingham Yard.

In 1963, Bethlehem Steel Company closed the old Fore River Shipyard and sold the property to General Dynamics which started a new shipbuilding operation in 1964. Between that date and 1986 a number of types of large vessels were built for both the Government and for private interest, the most notable being the giant LNG carriers.

There are today shipbuilders and shipbuilding facilities in our South Shore area. It is hoped that the long shipbuilding heritage may continue.

## When Abigail Returned To Quincy

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Abigail looked across the street and saw the house where she and John had lived. It didn't look quite right so close to a busy street. She came to the conclusion that everything had evolved. She saw a plane above her in the sky and thought that it was a bird. Then she saw a real bird and was at a loss for an explanation. "But what difference?" she thought. "I am here to see my city, not to puzzle out the mysteries of the universe." She walked and walked, past Star Market and up to Burger King. She went in and stood in line. Abigail read the menu but could not understand a word of it. Whopper? Coke? What did it all mean. Abigail watched and listened and learned that a coke was a drink, a hamburger was some kind of meat sandwich, and french fries were long thin things dipped into some sort of red sauce. She ordered and then sat down to eat. She found coke to be the sweetest drink she had ever tasted, and the hamburger and fries, although somewhat greasy, to be delicious.

She finished her food and walked outside. After a short walk, she found herself in front of the First Parish Church, her Church but not the same building. "Wonderful," she thought, "now I know where I am." She looked across to city hall. She went inside the church. Abigail did

not realize that the following day was Martin Luther King Day, but as she entered she realized that some sort of meeting was being conducted to honor a man held in high esteem. As she walked toward a seat, she was handed a program. She looked at the picture on the cover; she opened it and scanned the names. Someone named Maura Crowley was listed as one of the participating students. Abigail was amazed! An Irish girl was paying homage to a black man in a church founded by Yankees so many years ago!

After the ceremony, which Abigail found enthralling, she left the church and walked briskly down the side street to the library. It was exhilarating! Women reading! Shelves of books written by women! She could not wait to tell John. Women were really free to use their minds as God had intended them to do.

But Abigail was tired. Her mind was in a turmoil over all the things that she had seen. Looking skyward she shouted "Show me something that has not changed!" In an instant she found herself standing on the shore of Wollaston Beach, looking out over the ocean, the same ocean that her ancestors and John's had crossed so many years before. Abigail smiled and felt content. At that moment she found herself back in heaven, holding hands with John.