

Lesson: Fells Point's Role in Shipping and Trade

Objective: Students will use copies of primary source documents to analyze the trade and military advantages of ships built in Fells Point.

Voluntary State Curriculum Correlation:

Grade Four:

- 3.A.1.a Interpret a variety of maps using map elements
- 3.B.1.c Explain how geographic characteristics affect how people live and work, and the population distribution of a place or region
- 3.C.1 Explain how transportation and communication networks link places through the movement of people, goods, and ideas
- 5.C.2.a Explain Maryland's role in the War of 1812, such as the Battle of Baltimore, the Battle of Bladensburg, and the burning of Washington
- 6.F.1 Interpret information from primary and secondary sources

Grade Eight:

- 2.C.1.f Analyze factors that contributed to armed conflicts, such as the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, border disputes and freedom of the seas
- 3.B.1.a Analyze how geographic characteristics influenced the location and development of economic activities, such as farming, lumbering, fur trading, whaling and the rise of industry in the early national period
- 4.B.1. Describe the effects of political hostilities on supply and demand
- 5.C.3.b Explain how the continuing conflict between Great Britain and France influenced the domestic and foreign policy of the United States
- 6.F.1 Interpret information from primary and secondary sources

Estimated Time

Two or three 45 minute class sessions

Advance Preparation

(Note: The links below are in PDF format and may take a few minutes to open.)

1. Make an overhead transparency of the [map of trade routes](#).
2. Make an overhead transparency of a map of the Caribbean. Color code the islands according to the countries that own them.

Islands and Governing Countries (c. 1805):

Great Britain - St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Bonaire (Netherlands pre-1800 and post-1815), Grenada, Turks and Caicos, Bahamas, Jamaica, Aruba (1805-1815 only, owned by Netherlands at all other times), St. Vincent

Spain - Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico

France - Hispaniola (Haiti), St. Maarten/St. Martin (also claimed by Netherlands), St. Lucia

Netherlands - St. Maarten/St. Martin (also claimed by France)

3. Make copies of the worksheet "How to Interpret a Document" for each student group (<http://www.mdhs.org/teachers/documt.html>).

4. Make copies of the primary sources:

- [Bill of Lading](#) for the Schooner *Ethan Allen*. Shipping Papers, 1793-1829. MS 1754. H. Furlong Baldwin Library. Maryland Historical Society. [Transcription of Bill of Lading](#).
- [Thomas Boyle's Proclamation](#) of the Blockade of the United Kingdom. MS 1846. H. Furlong Baldwin Library. Maryland Historical Society. [Transcription of Thomas Boyle's Proclamation](#).

5. Provide copies of the new vocabulary words & definitions to each student group.

New Vocabulary:

bill of lading (or laden): a list of goods or cargo that a ship is carrying

blockade: the isolating of a port by ships and troops to prevent entrance or exit

cargo: the load of goods carried by a ship

draft: the depth a loaded ship is immersed; for example, a ship with a seven foot draft needs to be in at least seven feet of water or else it will run aground

Fells Point: a deep water harbor in Baltimore that once had a thriving shipbuilding industry

hogshead: a large barrel

impress: the act of taking sailors by force to work on ships owned by other countries

letter of marque: a government document giving permission for a civilian (non-military) ship's captain (master) to capture enemy ships

mercantile: relating to trade

primary source: a first-hand account of something or someone from the past

proclamation: an official or public announcement

privateers: civilian (non-military) ships carrying letters of marque

schooner: a sailing vessel having two or more masts and fore-and-aft sails (sails in the front and back)

sharp hull: when a ship has a narrow bow (or front)

trade: exchange of goods

War of 1812: a war between the United States and Great Britain about America's right to trade freely

Historical Background:

Tensions between England and the newly established country of America were running high after the Revolutionary War. Americans knew that a firm economic foundation was vital if their fledgling country was to survive and prosper. The key to a successful economy was trade, and international trade depended on shipping.

At the start of the Revolutionary War, the Continental forces did not include a formal navy. Privateers, ships owned by individuals who had been granted letters of marque, were relied upon to keep the Americans supplied with wartime necessities. Shipbuilders began to design lighter, swifter vessels with shallow drafts that could outrun bulkier British warships. The birthplace of these sharp-hulled fast ships was the deep water port of Fells Point in Baltimore.

Even after the Revolutionary War ended, there was a market for Baltimore's schooners. Large mercantile houses began regular trade with Europe and the West Indies. There were profits to be made by neutral shipment of cargo via fast ships.

The British and the French were at odds with each other. England could not forget that it was French support that helped the Americans defeat the mother country. The British continued to harass American shipping by capturing and impressing American sailors. The upheaval in France caused by the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars had eroded the relationship between France and the United States. The West Indies became an important part of Baltimore's developing trade patterns. As a result of European demand, the plantation and slave labor systems of the islands were specializing in such high-priced and easily marketed crops as sugar, coffee, cocoa, rice, and tobacco so they had to look elsewhere for their food supplies. Baltimore, as the closest foodstuff-producing North American port to the islands, quickly capitalized on this rapidly expanded market.

Two-masted schooners built by Chesapeake shipbuilders carried flour, bread, livestock, and barrel staves to the Caribbean. They returned with sugar, rum, molasses, and coffee for local sale or export to Europe. Ranging in size from 40 to 70 feet, an average vessel might carry 100 barrels of flour.

France had restricted trade between her West Indies colonies and foreign countries. Maryland merchants began to look to Spanish colonies in the Caribbean as markets for their wheat flour, corn, surplus beef and pork, and iron, and as sources for coffee, sugar, and molasses. (This irritated the French, who were at war with Spain at the time.) They needed fast ships that could carry cargo and outrun British and French vessels. What was a Maryland merchant to do? Why, go to one of the many shipyards in Fells Point and commission a fast ship, of course!

Motivation:

Ask students to pretend that they are Baltimore merchants in 1805 who trades with the Caribbean islands. Their ships take flour, corn, and other food to the islands and bring back coffee, sugar, and molasses. Unfortunately, Britain and France are at war, and their ships control the seas. They are restricting trade with their Caribbean colonies, and their ships are attacking American merchant ships. Ask students to think about some of the precautions and measures they might take as merchants at this time. (Trading only with neutral countries' colonies, using fast ships, arming ships, etc.)

Procedure:

1. Put the transparency of the trade routes to and from Maryland up on the overhead. Briefly discuss the concept of trade and Maryland's major trading partners. Emphasize the importance of trade with the Caribbean islands.
2. Put the transparency of the Caribbean Islands up on the overhead. Name the colonial power that controls each major island / island groups. Remind students that, as a result of the war between France and Great Britain, Americans were restricted from trading with colonies owned by either of these two powers. Ask the students to identify which islands U.S. merchants could legally trade with circa 1805.
3. Break the students up into four groups. Tell the students that today they will be looking at a document related to trade between a Baltimore merchant and the Spanish colony of Trinidad. Locate Trinidad on the map of the Caribbean.
4. Distribute copies of the worksheet entitled "How to Interpret a Document."
5. Distribute copies of the bill of lading for the schooner Ethan Allen.
6. Give the students time to complete the worksheet.

7. Provide the student groups with a copy of the following questions:

Questions for Group #1:

What is a bill of lading?

What kind or style of ship is carrying the cargo?

Questions for Group #2:

Who was the ship's master (captain)?

Why was the ship in Trinidad?

Questions for Group #3:

Who had commissioned this voyage of the *Ethan Allen*?

What might the phrase "the danger of the seas only excepted" refer to?

Questions for Group #4:

What kind of cargo was loaded onto the *Ethan Allen*?

Where was the cargo to be delivered?

When did this transaction take place?

Closure/Assessment:

At the end of the document interpretation session, have a member of each group report the answers to their assigned questions. Allow time for discussion and questions as each group makes their report. After each group has made their report, distribute a 4"x 6" index card to each student. Ask them to answer the following questions on their card:

1. Why do you think this document, the bill of lading for the ship *Ethan Allen*, July 25th, 1806, was saved?
2. Why was there a market for the fast ships of Fells Point in Baltimore during the period between 1790 and 1811?

Extension #1:

Tensions between England and the United States continued to deteriorate. More and more American ships were being captured by the British Navy. America soon became engaged in a second war for independence, the War of 1812, with the British. Shipbuilders in Fells Point began to arm their swift ships with cannons. The focus was still on speed and maneuverability, sleek privateers that could outrun heftier British ships that tried to blockade American waterways. One such ship was the *Chasseur*, built by Thomas Kemp of Fells Point and captained by Thomas Boyle. In 1814, Boyle dared to proclaim that he had blockaded the entire United Kingdom. His proclamation was posted in Lloyd's Coffee House in London. It alarmed British merchants and sent shipping and insurance rates soaring to new heights.

Procedure:

1. Distribute copies of the worksheet entitled "How to Interpret a Document."
2. Distribute copies of Thomas Boyle's proclamation of the blockade of the United Kingdom. Read the proclamation aloud to the class with EXPRESSION.
3. Divide the class into three groups and assign them the following roles:
 - a) a group of British merchant ship owners



- b) members of the British Parliament
- c) citizens of Baltimore

4. Have the groups work together to create a brief skit or political cartoons that depict the reaction to Boyle's proclamation by the three groups named above.

Extension #2:

Have students create a Fells Point encyclopedia using the vocabulary words from this lesson. Students can generate pages for a class encyclopedia that includes definitions, example sentences, and illustrations for each word.

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