



THE SAWMILL

Early Industries of Amesbury MA

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amesbury
carriage
museum

community stories start here

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WHO ARE WE

The Amesbury Carriage Museum is a small history organization in Amesbury, Massachusetts. Our mission is to champion the history of Amesbury's industry and people through programs and events for adults and families.

JOIN US

If you enjoy these materials, we invite you to join other community members in supporting our vital, growing organization.
Become a member or make a donation!

CONTACTS

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Time Travel

Hi kids:

Imagine going to a park with the biggest swing set ever. Exciting, huh? Now imagine that the swing has magical powers. Once you begin to pump your legs, you get higher and higher.... and soon you zoom into the past, more than 300 years ago into early Amesbury.

As you look around from the magic swing, you see distant forests on the horizon. Along the Powow and Merrimack Rivers, you see a village where people live and work. You see small family farms over the landscape, where trees had once grown. Amesbury was very different from today.

Now, look really hard with your imagination. See kids your age. Just like every member of their family, children had to help with whatever work needed to be done: caring for the livestock, working in the vegetable garden, or doing chores around the house. Young girls helped with sewing, weaving, making soap, and preparing food.



The boys joined their fathers in hunting and fishing. The boys also went into the forests with the men to split and carry cord wood. They helped their fathers with small construction projects around the farm.

Our focus today is on how the Natives and Settlers harvested the forests and turned the logs into finished products that they needed.

Stay tuned!

Your friends,
Eileen and Ben Dover

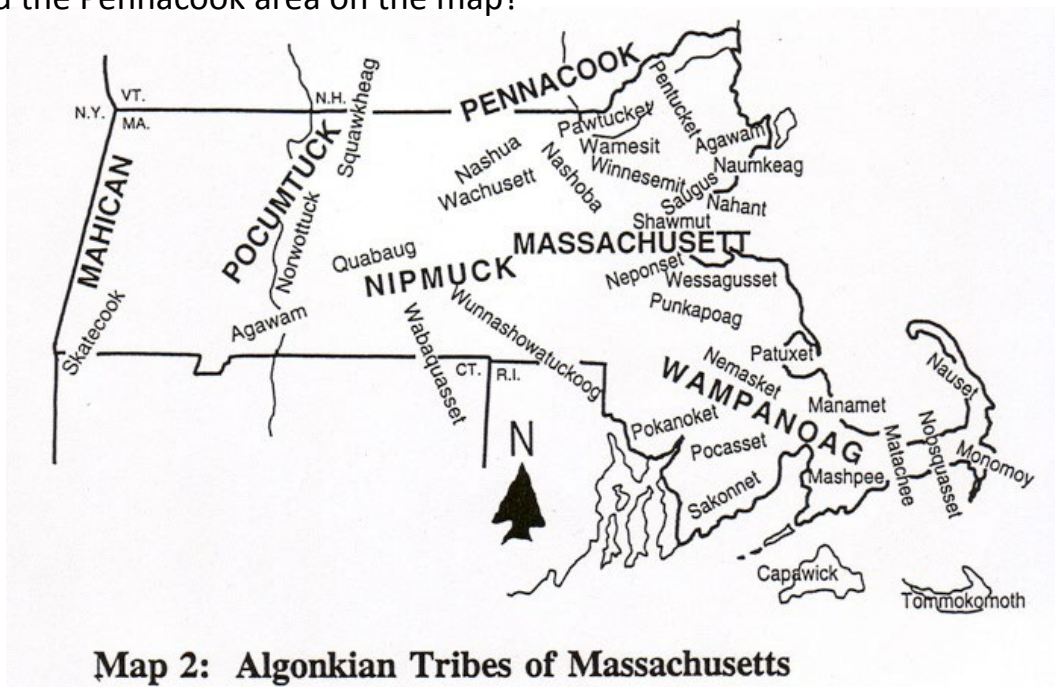
Home Sweet Home

Who lived here first?

Native people lived in separate tribes all across North America. Their life was guided by where they could find their next supply of food.

Did you know that Natives lived in this region for thousands of years? The Pennacook Nation fished, hunted, farmed, and lived in villages in the Eastern Woodlands of North America, in the area we now call Amesbury.

Can you find the Pennacook area on the map?



When did the colonists arrive?



People from England settled here nearly 400 years ago. Like Native peoples, they wanted to be close to dependable water supply, like the Powow and Merrimack Rivers.

The colonists set up a village on land that the natives had cleared. They built homes and used their skills to create a town.

Our Massachusetts Forests: Yesterday and Today

Over 300 years ago when the settlers came to this area, most of MA was woodlands. First growth hemlock, white pine, red oak, white oak, maple, ash, and birch trees covered the landscape.

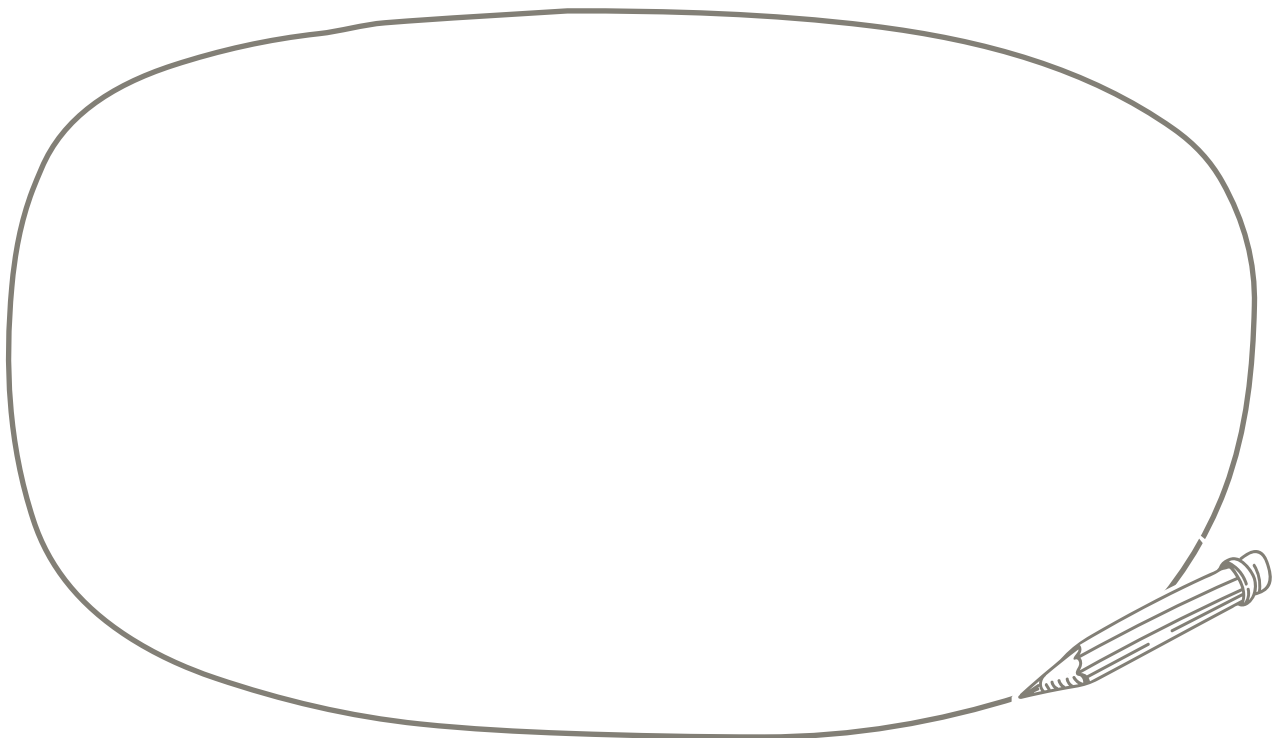
Before the settlers came, Native people had cut some trees, planted crops, and settled in villages throughout what we now call Massachusetts.



Today, over 60% of Massachusetts is forested. There are few places on earth where so many people live among so many trees. We're very lucky!

You might know that our health is linked to the health of our forests. Our forests provide clean water, wildlife habitat, scenic backdrops, recreational opportunities, and wood products.

ACTIVITY: Draw a picture of your favorite tree.



Cooperation Works Best

The early English settlers cooperated with each other to build a village in what we now call Amesbury. They truly relied on each other to survive. They traded work and food and products.

Here are some of the chores they did:

- Chopped wood into logs.
 - Built a sawmill to cut wood into lumber.
- Built homes, shops, and fences with local lumber.



- Grew corn, wheat, barley, and oats as well as squash and beans
- Raised farm animals for meat, milk, wool, and labor.

- Built boats to transport people and items.
- Built a blacksmith forge to make horseshoes, tools, and nails.
- Built a gristmill, where grains were ground into flour for baking bread



Harvesting the Wood

To establish a village, the settlers first cleared the thick forest. The farmer would look for trees that had long straight trunks to generate long straight lumber. Next using a sharp ax, strong muscles, and lots of energy the farmer would cut down the tree.

Then the farmer would cut off the branches for firewood, and cut the trunk for lumber.

Before a water-powered sawmill was invented, there were two very difficult ways to turn the trees into lumber.

1. A pitsaw: Using a long saw, one man would stand on top of a deep pit, and another man would stand in the pit. Then, working together, they would saw through the tree lengthwise. Can you imagine this dirty, slow, back-breaking labor?

2. An adze: To flatten the sides of the tree and make it into a beam, the farmer used an ax and an adze. Adzes have been used for thousands of years for shaping wood.

FARMERS USING PITSAW



FARMER WITH AN ADZE



Hurray! Amesbury built a sawmill

By 1700 a sawmill had been built in the Amesbury area. Powered by the Powow River, the sawmill sped up the process tremendously. It enabled one man to do the work of many. The wonderful thing about the sawmill was it turned rotary power from the waterwheel into the up and down motion of the saw blade. This turned logs into piles of flat boards.

SEE FOR YOURSELF!
A colonial sawmill

Search on YouTube:
Sawing Lumber with Water Powered Saw Mill
for a great video of a working sawmill.



This is a picture of a Sawmill at Old Sturbridge Village.
Maybe you and your family can visit Sturbridge to see it in action.

ACTIVITY: Wood in Your Home, part 1

Walk around your house.

**Make a list of 10 things
that are made of wood.**



Home-made Homes

Many years ago, almost everything the early Amesbury settlers used was made of wood!

If a person had enough money, they might hire a skilled carpenter to build what they needed. Many people, though, made what they needed.

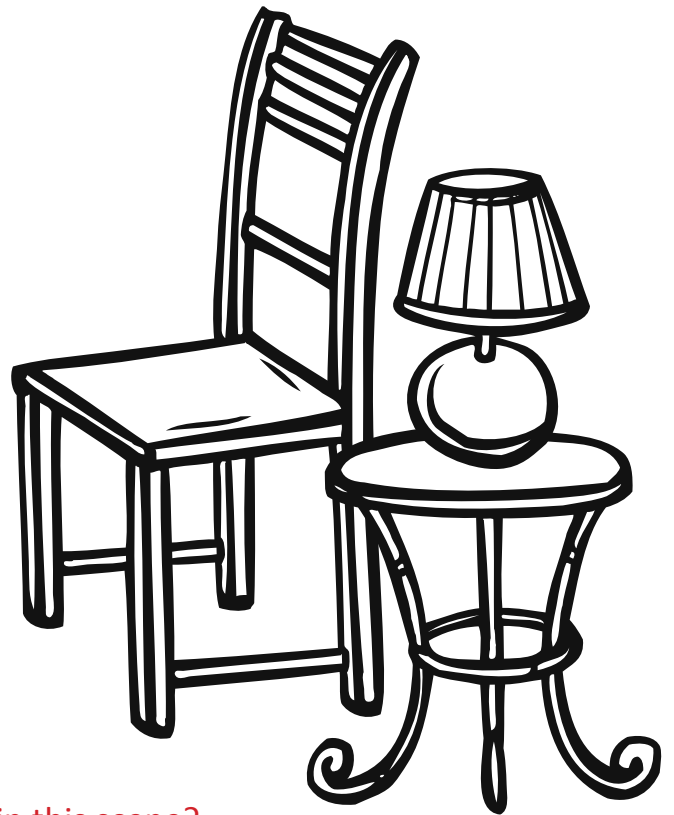
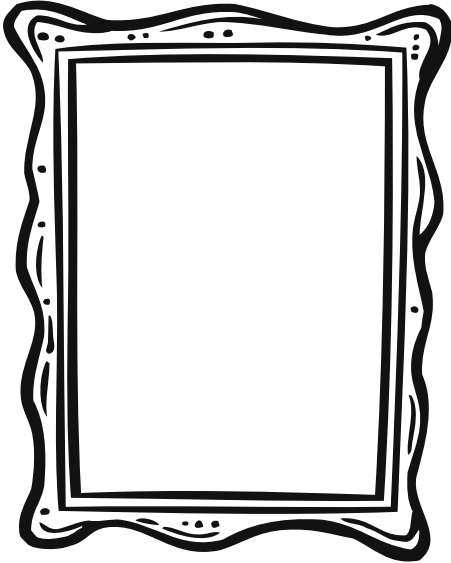
Using wood they had harvested and converted into lumber at the sawmill, the farmers built their home, barn, furniture and beds. They crafted bowls and kitchen utensils. For the farm animals they built shelter, fences, and feeding troughs. Farmers also built wooden carts and barrels, needed for storage and transportation.



Having to work hard to survive, the settlers were resourceful. They wasted nothing and lived by an old motto: Make it. Use it up. Wear it out. Make it do. Or do without.

ACTIVITY: Wood in Your Home, part 2

Go back to your list. Put a check beside anything that's store-bought.
What do you notice? Compare and contrast your home
with a "home-made home" of over 300 years ago.



Why don't you color in this scene?
Add in some things that might be in a home today.

Boat Building

For all their industry and ingenuity, there were some things that the local farmers needed to get from elsewhere. There were no roads, and of course.... no trains, trucks, or planes that we rely on today.

Both the settlers and the natives used the Powow and the Merrimack Rivers as their main highway. Everything was shipped over water.

The natives used the bark from birch trees to make canoes for trading and travel. Some were large enough to hold 16-18 adults.

The settlers used the local wood too. They created a form of boat known as a gundalow, which was a large barge that went up and down the river with the tide and carried bulk cargo.

Much of the coastal trade and off shore fishing was done in wooden ships known as schooners. The schooners were two-masted sailing ships

NATIVE AMERICAN BIRCH CANOE



COLONIAL SCHOONER



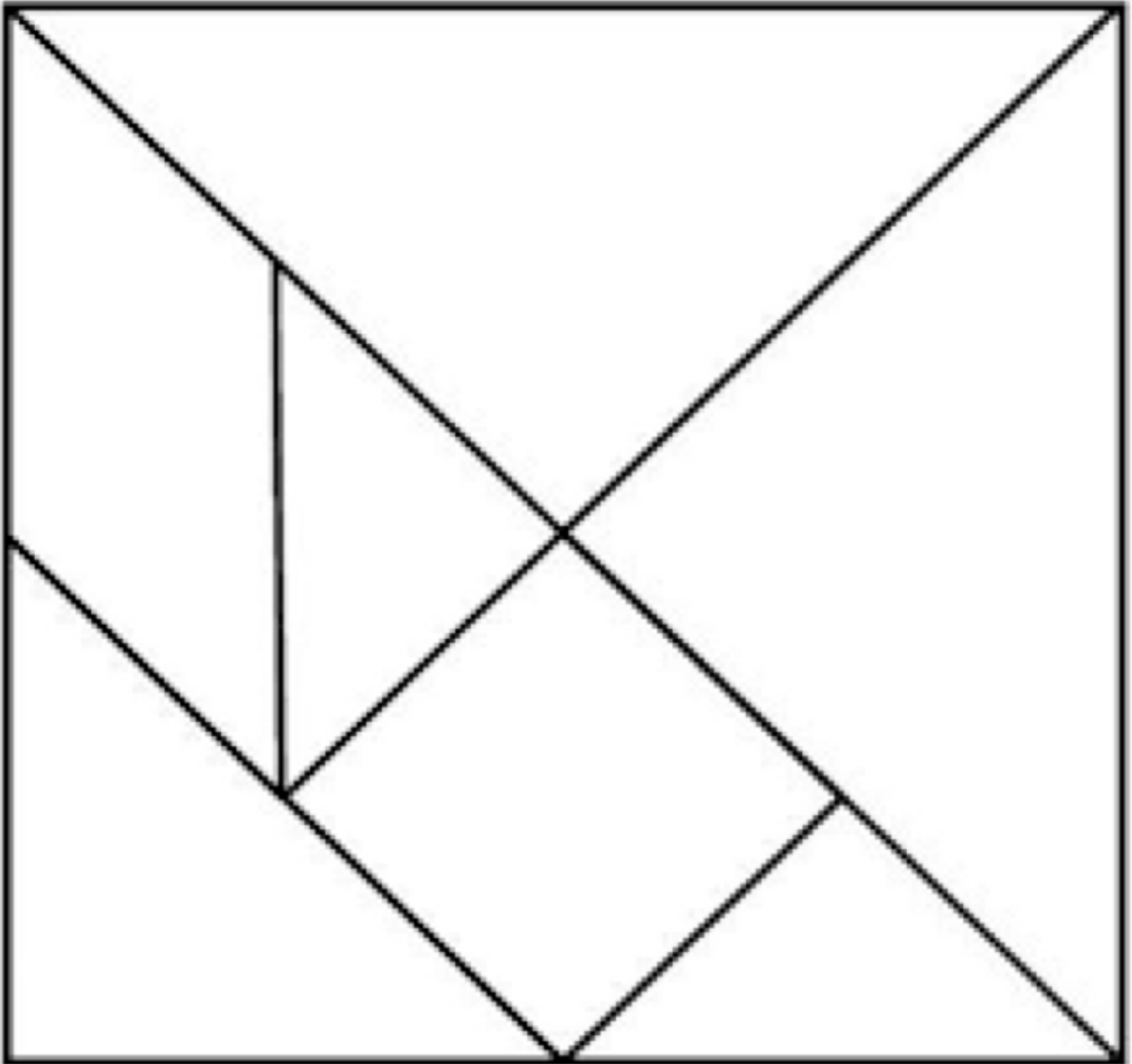
COLONIAL GUNDALOW



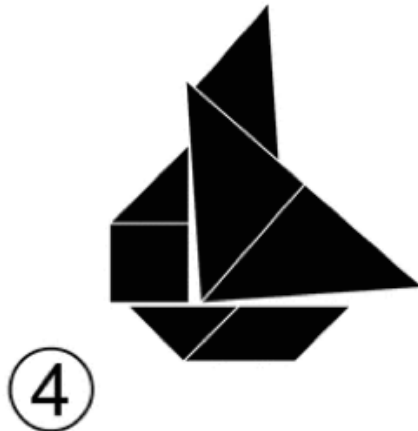
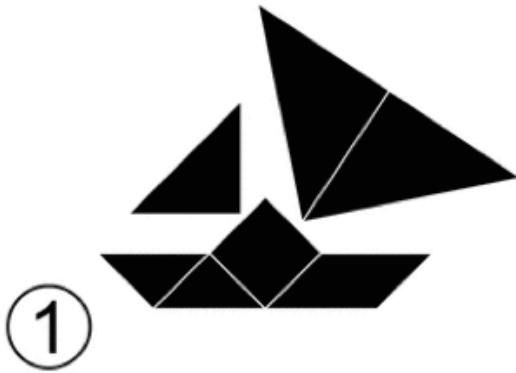
ACTIVITY: Tangram Boat

Directions:

1. Cut the square into 7 pieces.
2. Use all the pieces to make the image of a sailboat.
3. See some possible sailboats on the next page.



Answer Key



Boats

ACTIVITY: Build a Schooner

Here's your chance to build a model schooner like the early Amesbury settlers used on the Powow and Merrimack Rivers.



Some key words

- ★ **Schooner:** A type of sailboat, and the only one of its kind, to have two or more masts with the one in front being the shortest of all.
- ★ **Mast:** a tall upright post on a ship or boat, generally carrying a sail or sails.
- ★ **Sail:** a large piece of cloth that is attached to a boat. Sails move boats forward by catching the wind. Sails are different sizes and shapes.
- ★ **Sail Rig:** The number of masts, and the layout and shape of sails
- ★ **Keel:** a long piece of wood or metal that runs down the length of the bottom of a boat or ship. The keel makes a boat or ship stable in the water.

Materials

In the Kit

- Wooden boat
- Dowels (for masts)
- Screws and washers (for keel)

You supply

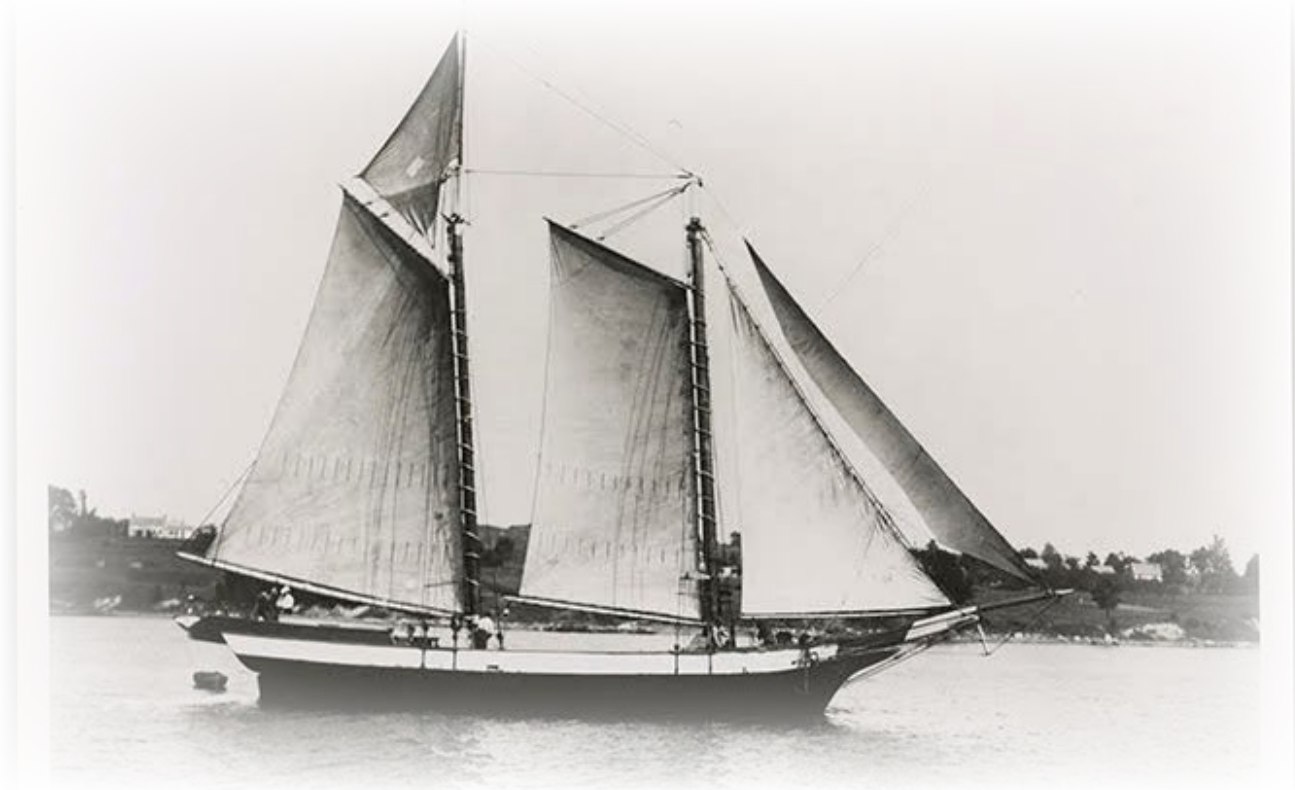
- Your creativity
- Decorations- markers, paint, glue, glitter or whatever you have
- Scissors
- Sails- Use paper, cloth, or whatever you have at home.

Some kids cut up paper cups (Slit it down the side with scissors, cut out the bottom, and cut the cup into 2 pieces. It's fun to see how many different arrangements of sails you can make)!

When you finish

- Try your boat in some water
- Send a picture of your creation to amesburycarriagemuseum@gmail.com

A Story for You



This late in the fall, when the sun set, it provided more light than heat. As Gideon and Sarah Webster looked over their farmstead, they had reason to be satisfied. They had six cords of hardwood split and dried to feed the fireplace. The root cellar was filled with turnips, squash, potatoes, carrots, and onions. They had ample silage for their cow, their six sheep, and their team of draft horses. Their four daughters were all healthy, and Agnes, the oldest, had a real talent for working with the horses.

In the spring and summer, Agnes worked the fields with the horses. In the winter, she helped her father log with them. They logged in the winter for a number of reasons. The logs skidded more easily over the frozen ground. There was less moisture in the logs, making them lighter. There was no farming to be done, so there was less competition for their time.

This year Gideon was cutting mostly white pine, to use for building projects around the farm, and white oak and black locust for sale to one of the shipwrights located on Webster's Point (now known as Point Shore). The shipwrights had a contract to build a 95 foot two masted schooner for a captain who sailed out of Newbury (now Newburyport). The ship would be used for coastal trading, but had the flexibility to be converted to a fishing ship, if the economy made that a more profitable activity.

Gideon thought about all that, and he thought how lucky he was.

AUTHORS

This booklet and activity kit were created by the Amesbury Carriage Museum's Youth and Family Committee: Ruth Boehl, Pat Boyle-Steed, Greg Noyes, and Lindsay Pouliot. These volunteers collaborated with John Mayer, Executive Director of the Museum.

We developed these resources for the Early Industries of Amesbury Program, September 2020. Our goal was to excite children's interest in the life and work of Amesbury's early settlers through information and hands-on experiences.

JOIN US

Additional parents or educators are warmly welcomed to join this creative, dedicated group in connecting Amesbury's history and community to today's families.

SOURCES

We consulted a number of resources for this booklet including *Water Power* by Tea Benduhn, 2009; *Early American Villages* by Raymond Bial, 2004; *Colonial People. The Carpenter* by Michael Burgan, 2015; *Life in a New England Mill Town* by Sally Isaacs, 2002; *Mill* by David Macaulay, 1989.

Many online resources helped with our research including *Native American Tribes in Massachusetts* by Rebecca Brooks, 2019; *Native American Tribes in Massachusetts* by History of Massachusetts; *Colonial America's Pre-Industrial Age of Wood and Water* by Penn State University NEH Project; *Early Sawmills of New England 1600-1900* by Ledyard Sawmill; *New England Colonies and the Native Americans* by National Geographic; *Massachusetts Forests* by UMassAmherst; *Eastern Woodlands Peoples* by Wikipedia; *Massachusetts* by Wikipedia; *Early America* by Alicia Spooner; *Northeastern Coastal Forests* by World Wildlife Foundation; and many more.

Amesbury Carriage Museum's website was a much used source of valuable information including *Powow River Industries* by Charles Pettingell, *Essex Institute Historical Collections, 1946*; *Amesbury History from 1836*, by Essex Memorial Report; *Amesbury's Industrial History—A View from the Millyard*, by Gray Fitzsimons and John Mayer; *Five Artist's Views—The Amesbury and Salisbury Millyard from 1792 to Today*, by John Mayer, 2019; and *A Chronological Record of the Principal Events that Have Occurred in Amesbury, Massachusetts from 1638-1930*, by Township of Merrimack, 1901.

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amesburycarriagemuseum@gmail.com.

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Your comments will help us create more at-home activities for you.