

After 1500, a web of maritime trade linked Western Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

Thousands of ships carried explorers, merchants, and migrants from Europe to the Americas. They also transported millions of enslaved men and women from Africa. Vessels bound back to Europe carried gold, silver, sugar, tobacco, rice, and other cargoes, along with returning travelers. Every crossing brought new encounters between people, customs, and ways of life, ultimately creating entirely new cultures in the Americas. The maritime web connected the lives of millions of people on both sides of the Atlantic.



The Atlantic World

Trace the web of maritime connections between western Europe, western and central Africa, and the Americas that made up the Atlantic world.

Details from "The Western Ocean," a map published in *The English Pilot*, the Fifth Book, 1720

Courtesy of the Mariners' Museum

A World of Watercraft

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Ships, boats, and sailors tied the Atlantic world together. Native peoples and colonists depended on boats for fishing, communication, and trade with the wider world. Warships, merchant ships,

and the thousands of sailors who sailed them allowed European nations to manage their empires and profit from the far-flung lands they controlled. These models represent some of the many types of watercraft people used in commerce around the Atlantic world.



Birchbark Canoe

Native Americans depended on North America's rivers and lakes for food and transportation. They fashioned tough, lightweight bark canoes for fishing, hunting, fur trading, and warfare. By the early 1600s, the French had adopted Indian canoes for their own fur trading.

This model, made by an unknown native maker around 1803, represents the type of canoe built by the Micmac people in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Canada.

Lent by the Peabody Essex Museum



South American Canoe

Native peoples in coastal South America and the Caribbean made canoes of logs, bark, and reeds. This model shows a type of canoe used by the Akawai Indians on the Demerara River, which empties into the Atlantic in Guyana.

Lent by the Mariners' Museum



Náo (round ship) *Santa María*

Built in Galicia, Spain, before 1492

Crew: 40

Gift of Lawrence H. M. Vineburgh

The *Santa María*

Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic in 1492 hoping to find a shorter route to the riches of Asia. Instead, he found the islands of the Caribbean Sea, which he claimed for Spain, though they were already inhabited. Waves of conquerors and colonists—both free and enslaved—followed. What was a triumph for Spain was a catastrophe for native peoples. New livestock, plants, diseases, and beliefs unsettled centuries-old communities and ecosystems, changing and destroying the lives of millions of native people.

Ship Model, *Santa María*

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed a small fleet of three small ships west from Spain across the Atlantic Ocean, hoping to find a shorter route to the riches of Asia. Before his voyages, Chinese and Indian luxuries for European markets were transported over the long and hazardous overland route through Arabia.

The three-masted vessel *Santa María* was the largest of Columbus's expeditionary vessels and his flagship. Measuring around 70 feet in length, it carried a crew of 40 men. The *Santa María*

and Columbus's other fleet members the *Niña* and the *Pinta* were older ships used for coastal trading rather than vessels designed for ocean crossings. Nine weeks after the little fleet left Spain, land was sighted in the Caribbean on 12 October 1492, but exactly which island Columbus's crew first spotted remains disputed.

The fleet went on to explore the north coasts of the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola (now Haiti). On Christmas Day 1492, the *Santa Maria* ran aground on a reef off Hispaniola and was declared a total loss. The ship's timbers were salvaged and used to build a small fort on shore. Fortunately for Columbus, he was able to return to Spain on the *Niña*.

Instead of Asia, Columbus had landed in the Caribbean islands on his first voyage. Although they were already inhabited, he claimed them for Spain. Columbus made three more voyages to the western hemisphere between 1493 and 1504.

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This model was built at the Museo Maritimo de Barcelona, Spain, under the supervision of museum director Jose Maria Martinez-Hidalgo y Teran, who published a book on the *Santa Maria* in 1964.



Bark *Susan Constant*

Built near London, England, about 1605

Gift of John W. Chapman

The *Susan Constant*

In May 1607, men from the *Susan Constant* and two other ships founded Jamestown, Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in North America. They made the dangerous 3,000-mile

voyage in slow, uncomfortable cargo vessels, hoping to find gold and spices. The next month, when they sent the ship home, it was filled with timber.

Ship Model, *Susan Constant*

On April 26, 1607, three passenger ships reached the shores of modern-day Virginia. The largest, named the *Susan Constant*, carried 54 members of a 105-man colonization mission. Arriving thirteen years before the Pilgrims landed at what is now Plymouth, Mass., this group of Englishmen came in search of gold and glory in the New World under the direction of the Virginia Company. Their founding of Jamestown began a long and checkered chapter in American colonial history.

Built in 1605 near London, and leased from Dapper, Wheatley, Colthurst and Partners, the *Susan Constant* was barely a year old when the Jamestown passengers spotted land near Cape Henry at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Under the command of Captain Christopher Newport, the journey from London to Virginia took approximately four and a half months. Following its departure on December 20, 1606, the *Susan Constant* spent six weeks floating idly in the English Channel, waiting for the right winds to carry the passengers to their new lives. Unlike the colonists, the *Susan Constant* did not stay in Virginia, but sailed back to England filled with timber.

In the past, there has been some confusion over whether the ship's name was *Susan* or *Sarah Constant*. According to a 1625 manuscript transcribed by Rev. Samuel Purchas, when discussing the journey of the Jamestown settlers, His Majesty King James I's Council on Virginia referred to a ship named *Sarah Constant*. However, multiple accounts given by the original colonists, as well as the leasing companies, identify the ship as *Susan Constant* or, more simply, *Susan*. No record of a *Sarah Constant* has ever been found in sources from the time period, and historians have since chalked the confusion up to a clerical error on the part of the Council.

In 1991, the Commonwealth of Virginia financed a \$2.14 million life-sized reproduction of the *Susan Constant*. The ship took a short tour of the Chesapeake Bay area in 2007 as part of Jamestown's 400th Anniversary Celebration, and can now be seen in the Jamestown Settlement National Park.

This model of the *Susan Constant* was given to the Smithsonian in 1998 as a gift from its builder, John W. Chapman.



Ketch, name unknown

Built in the 1600

Ketch

Magnificent catches of fish drew colonists to New England's shores, and some made their fortunes selling fish in overseas markets. Salt-preserved cod was the region's main product. It fed plantation slaves in the West Indies and was traded there for molasses. During the 1600s, New England fishers set out in small boats like this two-masted vessel called a ketch.



Sloop *Mediator*

Built in Virginia, about 1741

The *Mediator*

Coastal commerce linked North America's largest cities and towns. Fast Chesapeake Bay sloops such as the *Mediator* regularly called at ports from New Hampshire to Georgia, and in many

British, French, and Dutch harbors in the Caribbean. The sloop's design was adapted from small, swift vessels developed in the West Indies.

Ship Model, Sloop *Mediator*

During the period of North American colonization and early settlement, coastal commerce linked North America's largest cities and towns. Fast Chesapeake Bay sloops such as the *Mediator* regularly called at ports from New Hampshire to Georgia, and in many British, French, and Dutch harbors in the Caribbean.

Dating from around 1741, the sloop's design was adapted from small, swift vessels developed in the West Indies. These maneuverable little shallow-draft vessels carried general cargoes, ranging from dried fish, timber products, slaves, rum, mail, wines, tobacco, sugar, molasses, and whatever paid the owners to transport.



Square-topsail schooner *Chaleur*

Built in New England, before 1764

Purchased by the British Royal Navy, 1764

The *Chaleur*

Great Britain was often at war in the 1600s and 1700s, and Britain's enemies attacked ships from the American colonies. To outrun danger, New England shipbuilders developed fast-sailing schooners. The *Chaleur*, a Marblehead schooner, represents a common type in the Massachusetts fishing fleet.

Ship Model, *Chaleur*

In the mid-18th century, little sloops, brigs, and schooners were the small craft of choice for use in local coastal trade along the shores of North America. In the early 1760s, the British Royal Navy produced a list of six vessels it intended to purchase in the New England area for use in the North American Squadron. The *Chaleur* was one of these vessels, possibly purchased in Boston in May 1764. Its original name and home port are unknown.

Originally, the *Chaleur* is believed to have been rigged as an armed sloop. In 1768, records indicate that it was re-rigged as a two-masted schooner, as shown by the model. The *Chaleur* was sent back to England, where the hull shape was documented at the Royal Navy's Woolwich Dockyard, London. The schooner's hull was found to be rotten, so the Navy recommended that it be sold. It dropped out of the record at that point, and at present nothing is known of its later history.



Colonial sloop, name unknown

Built in Virginia, about 1768

Sloop

Sloops formed the backbone of the trade along the coasts and to the West Indies. They often sailed as smugglers and warships, too. This armed example from the 1760s, with oars to maneuver in calms, is similar to craft used by Caribbean pirates a century earlier.

Ship Model, Colonial Sloop

During the period of North American colonization and early settlement, sloops formed the backbone of the trade along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and to the West Indies. They often sailed as smugglers and warships, too. This armed example from the late 1760s, with oars to maneuver in calms, is similar to craft used by Caribbean pirates a century earlier.

Little coastal sloops were the tractor-trailers of the colonial period, populating the waters along the eastern coast of North America right down to the Caribbean islands. Heavily built for bad weather and rough sea conditions, they were simple to sail, roomy for lots of cargo and passengers, easily handled by small crews, relatively swift, and usually armed for self defense wherever they might sail. They were also simple to build and inexpensive, so that if one were lost, it might not cause a crippling financial loss to its owners.



Ship *London*

Built at New York, 1770 or 1771

The *London*

Settlers exported vast amounts of timber cut from forests in the Americas, and such naval stores as turpentine and tar. With so much wood close at hand, colonial shipbuilding prospered, and American ships sold well overseas. English owners ordered the *London*, a fast-sailing general-cargo ship, directly from builders in New York.

Ship Model, Ship *London*

The three-masted square-rigged ship *London* was built at New York in 1770 or 1771 for English owners. With so much good, close-grain wood at hand in the colonies, colonial shipbuilding prospered, and American ships sold well overseas.

Measuring 92½ feet long by 26½ feet in beam, the vessel was known as a well-built, fast-sailing merchant vessel with good cargo capacity for its size. In 1776, it was purchased by the British Royal Navy as an armed ship, renamed the *Grasshopper* and used as a convoy escort protecting groups of British ships against their enemies.



Brigantine, original name uncertain

Built in North America, 1778

Taken into British Royal Navy, 1779, and named *Swift*

The *Swift*

The *Swift* was designed for speed and had little cargo capacity. The vessel may have been a packet, which carried mail and government dispatches.

Ship Model, Brig *Swift*

The *Swift* was originally built as a two-masted schooner in North America in 1778, during the American Revolution. Lightly built and with very little cargo capacity, the fast little 75½ foot vessel may have been a coastal packet ship, carrying mail and government dispatches.

Captured in 1779, the *Swift* was taken into the British Royal Navy until 1783. Shortly before sale out of the Navy in 1783, the shipmaster exercised his prerogative and had the vessel re-rigged as an armed brigantine, with square sails on the foremast, fore and aft sails on the mainmast, and ten 3-pounder deck guns. Around the same time, the hull shape was recorded at the Deptford Royal Dockyard, London. This model of the *Swift* was made from those British Admiralty design drawings.



Schooner, original name unknown

Built in North America, before 1780

Captured by the British, 1780, and renamed HMS *Berbice*

The *Berbice*

Connected by the sea, farmers and fishermen in the continental colonies fed the residents of the Caribbean islands in exchange for molasses, sugar, and rum. The British captured this merchant vessel in the West Indies during the American Revolution.

Ship Model, Schooner HMS *Berbice*

This model represents a large American schooner of the late 18th century. At the time, farmers and fishermen in the continental colonies fed the residents of the Caribbean islands in exchange for molasses, sugar, and rum. The schooner was a very popular design in North America, as it was versatile, roomy, durable, inexpensive to build, and its peculiar rig was easy for a small crew to handle. This example portrays a typical schooner measuring 72 ft. 9 in. long by 20 ft. 8 in. in beam.

This ship was built in the Northeast sometime before 1780. That year, it was captured in the West Indies and bought by the Royal Navy for use as an armed tender operating out of Antigua, British West Indies. Renamed the HMS *Berbice* after capture, the schooner had a reputation as a fast sailer. It was condemned and sold by the Royal Navy on 12 September 1789



Slaver brig *Diligente*

Built in United States, before 1839

The *Diligente*

The slave trade created vast misery and wealth. For nearly 400 years, merchants in Europe and America financed slaving voyages, some African peoples sold their enemies into bondage, and American planters exported valuable crops without paying their workers. Even after international treaties banned slave importing, vessels like the *Diligente* continued this lucrative, inhuman trade.

Ship Model, Brig *Diligente*

This model represents the brig *Diligente*, a two-masted sailing vessel used in the last days of the transatlantic slave trade. Begun in the sixteenth century, this trade was fueled by the demand for human labor in the New World. Enslaved people were forced to work in gold and silver mines as well as on plantations producing valuable crops like sugar, coffee, rice, cotton and tobacco. The ships that delivered cargoes of these products to European markets also carried millions of enslaved people from their African homelands to the Americas.

By the early nineteenth century, several nations had outlawed the slave trade. As a result, slave ship owners regularly changed the names of their ships and sold them frequently in an attempt to remain active in the lucrative trade without getting noticed. Because accurate records of these ships are difficult to find, the date and place where the slaver brig *Diligente* was built cannot be confirmed. Still, it is thought to be American-built, as the ship's design is similar to that of ships built along the east coast of the United States, specifically vessels built in Maryland.

In the early 1800s, Lloyd's of London auctioned off old slave ships, which allowed condemned ships like the *Diligente* to return to the slave trade. In 1837 Parliament outlawed this practice, making the *Diligente* one of the last slave ships to be sold by auction. On January 12, 1837, the HMS *Scout* captured the slaver along the coast of Africa. At this time, the *Diligente* was sailing under the Portuguese flag and used the name *Paquete de Cabo Verde*. It was condemned to

Sierra Leone, where it was sold to an American named Lake. Records indicate that Lake resold the ship to Miguel Bentinotte, a known slave trader, for the price of 1,000 British pounds.

After changing owners and names twice more, the *Diligente* soon re-entered the slave trade with a license from the Portuguese government, only to be captured by the HMS *Pearl* on April 24, 1838. The British government sent the nine crewmen to Portugal to be tried, while the *Diligente* was condemned to Bermuda. Although there is some indication that the *Diligente* was caught again in 1839 near Cuba, it was probably broken up after its arrival in the Caribbean.