

Boats Along the Connecticut Coast



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Whaling Ship



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What were these boats used for?

Whaling ships were specialized in their design for whaling; the industry of hunting of whales. Whaling was an important business in New England and many coastal towns prospered from it. Whale oil and blubber were used extensively in oil lamps and machinery. Whaling ships were able to withstand extended voyages, attacks from war enemies, and were equipped with harpoon cannons, try-pots for rendering whale oil, whaleboats for hunting, and storage holds for the captured whales.¹ Whaling ships were also outfitted with sleeping quarters and kitchens. On average, whaling ships undertook 6-month voyages, while longer journeys went on for three to four years. Launched on July 21st, 1841 the Charles W. Morgan is the oldest surviving American whaling ship. It made 37 whaling voyages in its 80 year career. From 1841 to 1921, the Charles W. Morgan was one of a fleet of 2700 ships that docked and sailed from the New London, CT port.²

Who used these boats and where?

Whaling ships were used by the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, Japan, and other countries who engaged in whaling. Connecticut was an active participant in the American whaling industry. Coastal towns such as Mystic, New London, and Stonington were home to numerous whaling fleets and shipyards.³

When were these boats used?

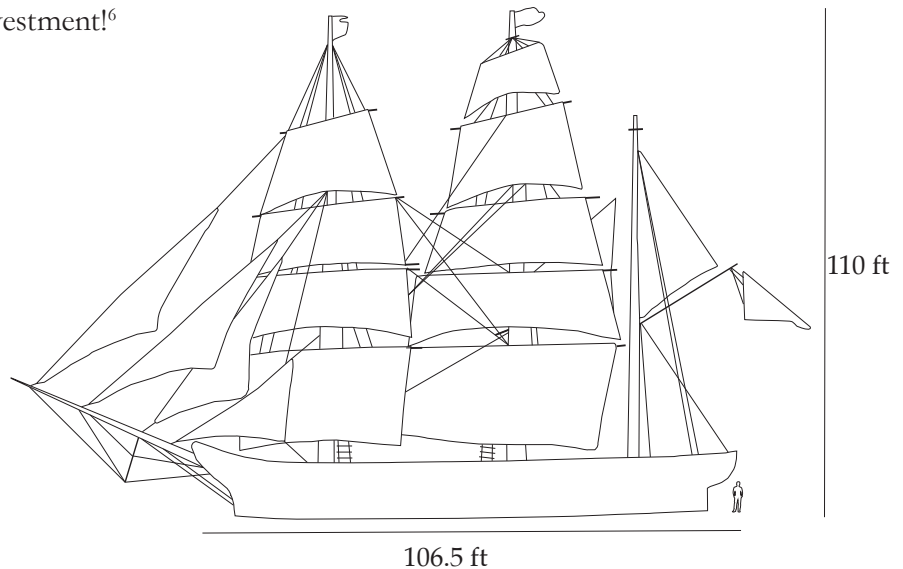
Whaling ships were used in Connecticut primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries, when commercial whaling flourished. Towards the end of the 19th century, however, the practice of whaling began to slow due to the declining whale population, rising costs, and emergence of alternative energy sources like petroleum.⁴

How were these boats made?

Whaling ships built during the height of the industry were most commonly constructed out of hardwoods like oak, elm, or pine for the ship's frame, hull, and decks. Iron and metal components were used to reinforce parts of the ship. After the structure of the ship was complete, the construction crew added the mast, sails, rigging lines, anchors, winches, and whaling specific equipment.⁵ Due to the large size of the ships and the necessary skilled craftsmanship, construction costs varied from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars in the 1800's. This translates to a range of \$300,000 to \$3,000,000 in today's dollar value - a significant investment!⁶

Where to Visit:

Visit the Charles W. Morgan whaling ship at the Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Connecticut. After its career, it was preserved by Whaling Enshrined, Inc. until November of 1941, where it was moved to the Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, CT.⁷



1. <https://www.whalingmuseum.org/learn/research-topics/whaling-history/yankee-whaling/>
- 2, 6, 7. <https://mysticseaport.org/explore/morgan/>
3. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/whaling-history-whaling-america/>
4. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/big-fish-history-whaling/>
5. <https://www.nps.gov/nebe/learn/historyculture/whaleship.htm>