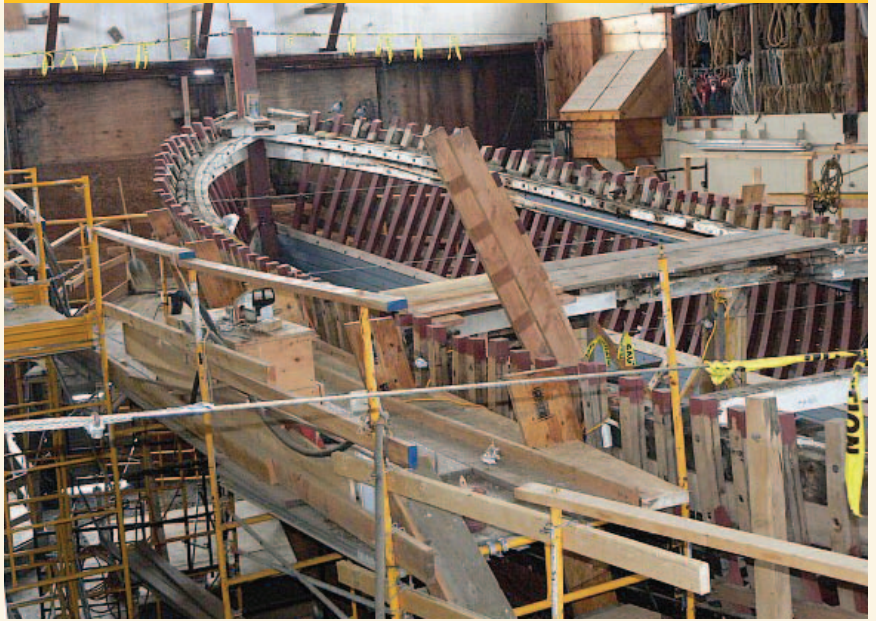


Throughout the 19th century, tall ships plied coastal waters along the eastern seaboard of the United States just as tractor-trailers now lumber *en masse* up and down Interstate 95. Pillars of commerce, these fine sailing vessels all but vanished during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when steam power gained prominence. Many of the requisite skills needed to operate and maintain these ships were also driven to extinction. Two historic seaports: South Street Seaport in New York City and Mystic Seaport in Mystic, Connecticut, came to the rescue, preserving this seafaring heritage for posterity and showcasing it for visitors to experience. We visited both seaports to visualize what it was like to live on board these ships and witness their current preservation.

On the shores of Manhattan's East River, monolithic skyscrapers would have gobbled up South Street Seaport, a historic community that hosted the golden age of the clipper ship, if it weren't declared a historic district in 1967. Along the waterfront, the Peking stands tall among other historic ships open for tours. One of the largest sailing vessels ever built and the largest preserved by a museum, this circa-1911, four-masted barque was a Cape Horn trade route veteran.

We climbed aboard this ship with a steel hull as long as a football field and stood on deck, gazing up at masts as tall as an 18-story building covered with fully restored wire rope rigging. We admired the sweeping views of lower Manhattan's skyline over the bow and the Brooklyn Bridge off the stern. Below deck, we toured the restored galley, Captain's Saloon, and seamen's "foc'sles," which were accompanied by vintage photos depicting and explaining their use. We viewed a 10-minute film, "Peking at Sea," which was shot aboard as it rounded Cape Horn. Narrated by Captain Irving Johnson, who took part in the voyage, the film includes footage taken during a storm as well as showing crew members getting haircuts, and repairing and unfurling the sails.

## visitor's view



## South Street Seaport & Mystic Seaport

New York, New York & Mystic, Connecticut

Only by seeing crew members climbing the masts to spread the cloth without any safety harnesses could we perceive the sheer monstrosity of these sails. The camera also showed the ocean whizzing past below, making it hard for us to believe that wind was the sole mode of propulsion.

Approximately 130 miles up the coast in Connecticut, we visited Mystic Seaport nestled among small hills fringing the Mystic River in a New England village setting. In the bustling Henry B. duPont Preservation Shipyard at the south end of the seaport's 17 acres, the nearly lost art of wooden shipbuilding and preservation thrives. An overhead gallery gave us a view of carpenters' shops containing a large collection of tools, lathes, a rigging loft, and a large, open area where the museum's vessels are brought indoors for repair by skilled craftspeople using traditional shipbuilding methods. One photo display compares hand tools from the 19th century to hand tools of today, and

explains that many restoration tasks are still done without the assistance of power tools. A video display in the gallery offers a photomontage depicting each stage in the life of the Charles W. Morgan, a circa 1841 whaling ship that was restored and now remains the only wooden sailing whaler in the world.

The video demonstrated that during the heyday of wooden clipper ships, repair and restoration were interchangeable. Today, many of these techniques are documented as carefully adhered preservation standards.

After our visits to Mystic and South Street Seaports, we were impressed by the irony that technological advancement, which came so close to decimating this vital heritage, now keeps the knowledge of seafaring duties, shipbuilding, and maintenance alive.

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