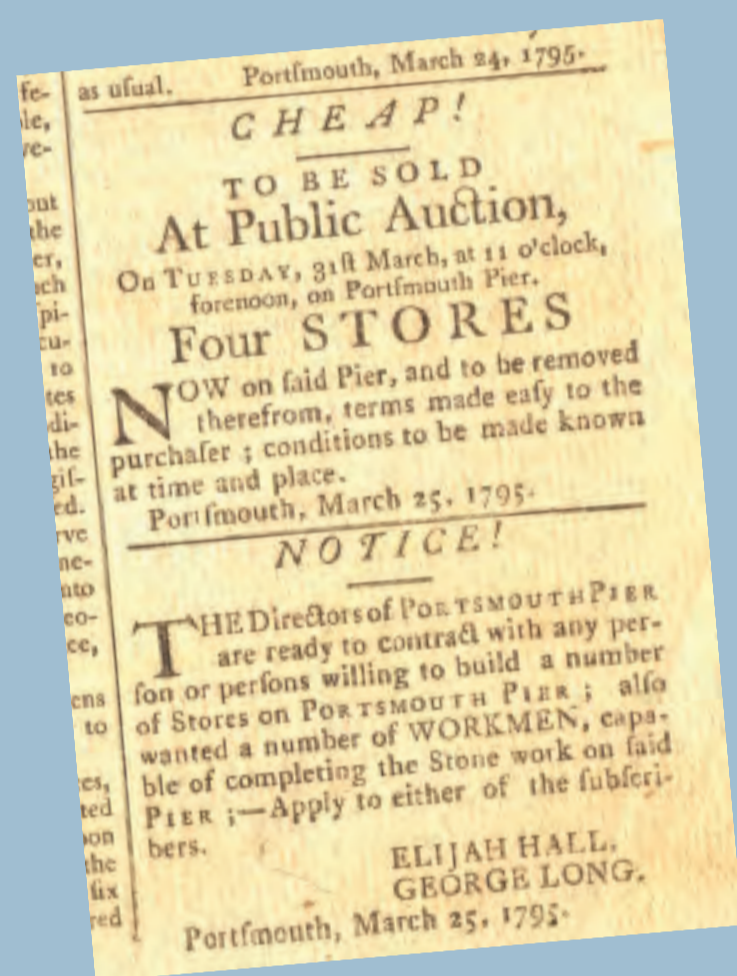




PORTSMOUTH PIER & WHARVES

THE REVIVAL OF PORTSMOUTH'S COMMERCE after the American Revolution spurred the development of new roads, bridges, and wharves. In 1795, several leading merchants incorporated as the Proprietors of the Portsmouth Pier. This private company extended a huge wharf lined with stores and warehouses far out into the Piscataqua River. This allowed ships of large tonnage to tie up and discharge their cargoes at the doors of the merchant warehouses. The pier, the buildings on it, and an adjoining hotel were all destroyed in the great fire of 1813. A smaller version of the pier was rebuilt; it and several other adjacent wharves contributed to the vibrancy of the waterfront during the first half of the 19th century.



ADVERTISEMENT for GOODS to BUILD PIER

In 1795, the Proprietors advertised in *The New-Hampshire Gazette* seeking bids for "building the stone work of the wharf next year" and constructing the stores on it. Earlier advertisements sought "Beech and Pine wharf Timber" to construct the pier itself.

New Hampshire Gazette, March 24, 1795. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenæum.



PORTSMOUTH PIER and WHARVES in 1813 (above)

The Portsmouth Pier extended 340 feet into the river and averaged 65 feet in width. A three-story, 320 foot long warehouse containing offices, storerooms, and a sail loft stood on one side of the pier, while opposite it was another large three-story structure used for counting rooms and storage. At the time of the 1813 fire, the pier's stores were filled with molasses and liquor that virtually exploded with the heat of the flames.

Map of the Compact Part of the Town of Portsmouth in the State of New Hampshire, 1813, J.G. Hales, cartographer. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenæum.



1904 MAP (left)

The Portsmouth Pier Company continued to run a smaller pier until it sold the property in 1879. Samuel Adams and J.H. Broughton purchased one side for their lumber businesses and the Walker Brothers used the southern part for one of their coal wharves.

Sanborn Map of Portsmouth, N.H., 1904, Sanborn Map Company, New York. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenæum.



VIEW of STORES and SHIPS

The Portsmouth Pier was rebuilt after the fire (though most of the structures on it were not) but it never again enjoyed its former prosperity nor its early distinction as New England's greatest single mercantile edifice. By the 1820s, it was just one of several commercial wharves along the river where cargo was loaded and from which coasting vessels set sail. Moreover, after one of the warehouses collapsed in 1842 "between fifty and sixty feet of the wharf sailed away into the river" and "within three minutes the whole was a complete wreck."

Page from Blunt 1821 Sketchbook, John Samuel Blunt (1798-1835), Private Collection. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenæum.



TODAY (left)

The Portsmouth Pier, as originally built, extended about twice as far into the river as the pier that stands near this marker today.

Aerial photo courtesy of the City of Portsmouth.

1850 MAP (right)

By 1850 Portsmouth's maritime economy was in a decline from which it never recovered. The wharves depicted in this map—over thirty in number—stood as symbols of a once-vibrant shipping commerce that had brought wealth and power to many of the merchants for whom the wharves were named.

Map of the City of Portsmouth, 1850, H.F. Walling, cartographer. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenæum.



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