

NEW HAVEN HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY  
PHASE I: CENTRAL NEW HAVEN

LONG WHARF

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Boundaries

Starting at the Brewery Street/Oak Street Connector overpass, the boundaries are as follows:

North: The Oak Street Connector to Interchange 47; around the block bounded by Hamilton Street, Water Street and East Street; East Street to the harbor.

South: Harbor; and continues north to the rear lot lines of the east side of Hallock Avenue (not including the Broadway Sewage Treatment Plant).

West: Rear lot lines of the east side of Hallock Avenue to the railroad lines; the railroad lines to Brewery Street; Brewery Street to the Brewery Street/Oak Street Connector overpass.

## LONG WHARF

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### Historical and Architectural Summary

#### I. 1638 - 1784

The shore between east and west creeks (which ran approximately along the present State Street and the bed of the Oak Street Connector) the site of original the Long Wharf area, seems to have been open for general use until the town sold water lots and granted wharf rights, some decades after the founding of the colony. The off-shore part of the present Long Wharf lot itself was granted in 1663 to Samuel Bache and fell later to Jonathan Atwater. The land end of the Long Wharf site, then at the foot of Union and Fleet Streets, with rights to the wharf, was granted in 1682 to Thomas Trowbridge who built a wharf and warehouse there shortly after. Soon various other commercial wharves were constructed in the vicinity between 1682 and the 1730's, at which time several proprietors, David Wooster and his associates, joined together in building up the limited wharf facility and developing the adjacent area with warehouses and offices. However, marsh and mud deposits in the harbor tended to deepen with time, making the docking area difficult, particularly at low tide. Public lotteries were held to raise construction funds to extend "David Wooster's wharf" in 1754 and 1772, organized by the General Assembly (the 1772 lottery was granted with the provision that any excess funds go to Yale College).

Long Wharf was used by the British during the invasion of 1779 for mooring ships and as a point from which to cannonade the town. After the Revolution, the wharf facilities in this area were a natural concern of the municipal government. New warehouses sprung up in the area in the 1780's along with additional small piers east of Long Wharf. Weekly packets connected New Haven with New York and London. The first meeting of the New Haven Common Council on October 5, 1784, established the need either to extend Long Wharf further out into the harbor, or to build a new wharf from Ferry Point (now the area around Bridge Street, east of the present Teletrack, see Item #612). The decision was soon made to extend the original wharf, then known as Union Wharf, to an 80-foot square embankment of wood and stone previously constructed on the west side of the channel (see below). The council also requested terms for the private proprietors of the Wharf to grant it to the City.

#### II. 1784 - 1825

The peak of Long, or Union, Wharf's development naturally came during the years of New Haven's maritime heyday, ca. 1784-1812, ending with the Embargo Act. By the early 1800's it was lined with commercial houses responsible for New Haven's major trade with the British and French West Indies, exporting grain, butter, meat, vegetables, cattle, horses, lumber, and importing sugar and molasses used in manufacturing rum. The final 1,500 foot extension previously suggested by the Common Council was constructed in 1810,

## LONG WHARF

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resulting in a grand, auspicious scale of the wharf which far outstripped its actual importance during its declining years.

After the War of 1812, the development of the Long Wharf commercial community began to drop off and some businesses began to abandon the area due first to the restriction of mercantile trade with the 1807 embargo, and later as the result of an extensive fire in October, 1820, which destroyed nearly 30 stores and warehouses, many of which were never rebuilt. The U.S. government erected a new Custom House at the base of Union Wharf, at the juncture of Union and Fleet (now State) Streets, but already by 1859 it was moved to a new location, combined with the post office and court house between Center and Crown Streets.

Of the early history of Long Wharf, only fragments of the tip of original Union/Long Wharf itself, embedded in the present pier on Long Wharf, still exist. Early maps illustrate stages of development of this once principal commercial area. The 1748 Wadsworth map (engraved by Thomas Kensett in 1806) shows two or three large but simple structures on a single, major wharf. The Daniel Bowen woodcut view of New Haven from the Harbor, published in 1786, shows the wharf structures as among the tallest in the City, three and four stories high, gable roofed, and with large open areas in the first stories. By the time of Amos Doolittle's 1812 "Plan of New Haven", the newly extended wharf, reaching well out into the sound, is indeed shown lined with numerous commercial establishments, drawn schematically.

III.-V.    1825 - 1845  
          1845 - 1865  
          1865 - 1900

The three historical periods representing the mid and late 19th century are consolidated here: it was a long term of inactivity for the mercantile Long Wharf area. The opening of the Farmington Canal in 1835, and the railroads from the 1840's and 1850's, turned the City's interests to internal trade with other parts of Connecticut. Long Wharf facilities seemed increasingly outdated as the century progressed and smaller wharves built further east in the early and mid-19th century, such as Basin Wharf, Heaton's Wharf, Belle Dock, Sheffield Warf and Tomlinson's Bridge Pier, served most of the City's shipping industry.

However, maps show that Long Wharf did maintain a number of large industries in the 19th century, aided, no doubt, by the proximity of expanded railroad facilities near Long Wharf in the middle of the century, with tracks laid out onto the wharf itself, as well as onto Canal Dock, a pier with no buildings, adjacent to Long Wharf on the east and stretching nearly as far into the harbor. By the middle of the century Brewery Street was extended out to Long Warf, intersecting it half way. A list of major businesses operating on Long Wharf itself in the 1880's includes:

## LONG WHARF

Bright & Brothers, rag and paper stock wholesalers,  
Clark & Ives, roof slate and coal dealers,  
Sperry & Barnes, pork packing establishment,  
Starin's Transportation Line,  
Strong, Barnes & Hart Co., wholesale meat dealers.

Fish and oyster dealers, such as Crowell Nickerson, Fuller & Foot and J.G.H. Smith, supplemented those at Oyster Point and Fair Haven. In addition, the area was dotted with numerous coal and lumber yards. In the 1860's Sargent & Co., a successful New York hardware manufacturer, constructed a large factory complex which included its own pier east of Long Wharf near Hamilton Street. In 1890, landfill adjacent to Sargent & Co. became Water-side Park, a recreational and bathing area designed by New Haven's park system pioneer, Donald Grant Mitchell.

### VI.-VII. 1900 - 1970

The wharf facilities in the area from Long Wharf east to Tomlinson's Bridge continued to decline in the early 20th century. The 1910 report, prepared for the New Haven Civic Improvements Committee by Cass Gilbert and Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., advocated developing new, modern port facilities in the area, along with a grand new railroad station nearby, to be connected with downtown by a grand avenue. But the plan was set aside and had almost no impact on the Long Wharf area.

In 1941 Maurice Rotival, a French planner, developed a plan for New Haven while he was on the Yale faculty which would form the basis for a more elaborate City plan in the 1950's. Rotival projected New Haven's future direction as a traffic distribution center, advocating the construction of high-speed highways, suggesting a reflection of Le Corbusier's 1922 Ville Radieuse. But in doing so he addressed the timely issue of the relocation of old Route 1 nearer the harbor. Rotival also proposed the revitalization of the harbor facilities as well as the improvement of the City's deteriorating produce market area, then located around South Orange Street, which would eventually be resolved by its removal to the Long Wharf area.

By 1948 the New Haven City Plan Commission under Director Charles Downe drew up several plans moving the projected alignment of Route 1 closer to the harbor, and earmarking the harbor for industrial use. By 1949, the harbor was dredged to improve its access for large ships. The landfill which resulted on the west shore, for the base of the new highway, I-95, finally obliterated the old wharf area and effectively created a new Long Wharf district on new ground.

In 1953 the City employed Maurice Rotival and Lloyd Reid (traffic engineering consultant) to assist City Planning Director Norris Andrews in developing a comprehensive development plan for the City. The 1953 Short

## LONG WHARF

Approach Plan agreed with the 1948 plan in the general locatin of I-95, and the development of the adjacent area for industry. It also proposed the relocation of the old produce and wholesale market facilities in the new Long Wharf area.

The Long Wharf Redevelopment Project took shape in the 1950's, under the administration of Mayor Richard C. Lee (1954-1970). I-95 was under construction, completed in 1958. However, Sargent & Co., one of the City's oldest major industries, threatened to move out of the City in 1956. After failing to acquire Federal urban renewal funds for a new plant for Sargent by grafting it onto the Wooster Square project, Lee and Development Administrator Edward Logue proposed to relocate the plant to the new Long Wharf area, aided by funds from Public Act 8. The legislation, which Logue and Lee had helped write and pass in 1958, provided for state financial assistance to non-residential urban renewal projects. With State aid, eventually amounting to some \$3.2 million, it was possible for soil conditions in the landfill area to be stabilized through a process of compaction, drained by drilled sand drains. It was then possible for the City to offer Sargent & Co. a new site, as well as the purchase of its old site, with aid from State funds, at an attractive figure. The new plant on Long Wharf was completed in 1964 (see Inventory Item #841).

Public Act 8 also made it possible to relocate the wholesale market to the Long Wharf area. The State aid enabled the City to cover the soil stabilization costs while giving merchants, organized into a private cooperative corporation, a reasonable long-term loan for the land and improvements. In addition, the City could buy out equities in the old market area via the Church Street renewal project. The New Haven Food Terminal, completed in 1965, became the second new building erected in the new Long Wharf industrial area (Inventory Item #843).

By 1970 six more new buildings were at or near completion along the new Sargent Drive; three of them industrial, the Gant Shirt Factory, Blakeslee & Co., and the Armstrong Rubber Company; three accessory use facilities, Howard Johnson's Motel/Restaurant, a gas station, and a bank and office building; and two community service facilities oriented more to the nearby residential neighborhoods to the west, Albie Booth Boys' Club and the Connecticut Health Care Plan Center (Inventory Item #'s 839, 840, 844, 838 and 842). While displaying a variety of approaches to modern design, all the new buildings present effective, high speed-scaled facades to the highway while providing user access to the side or rear from large parking areas interspersed with landscaping.

### VII. 1970 - 1981

The Long Wharf Redevelopment Project, although one of the earliest begun under the Lee administration, only around 1970 achieved the appearance of the

## LONG WHARF

full-size modern industrial park originally planned, and there have been a few additional changes in the last decade. One new building, among the last to be planned during the previous decade and completed in 1971, actually occupied a site slotted, in the original development plan, for a highway connection with the railroad station (Inventory Item #842). Long Wharf Park has provided a needed recreational area and cleared the harbor view from the highway, underlining the harborside I-95 as a gateway to the City, a conception of the Lee administration.

The industrial orientation of the strip along Sargent Drive has not, in the long run, been successful in revitalizing the older large industries or keeping them from moving away -- the Blakeslee and Gant firms are gone. The last 10 years have seen the gradual influx of more social and community oriented enterprises in the area. To the already existing Albie Booth Boys' Club, Community Health Care Center and Long Wharf Theater in the market building were added a public utility, the New Haven Water Company, which moved into the Blakeslee building, renting out a new south wing (converted from a former shed) to Southern Connecticut State College; and the former Gant factory has become the headquarters of the New Haven Register. A new addition, at the extreme north end of the sector, is Teletrack, a unique recreational facility designed to harmonize with the surrounding highway and oil tanks. The City now plans to complete the development of Long Wharf Park, plans which include expansion of the municipal pier to accommodate local fishermen and marine education organizations. More than ever, the area relates to both the highway and the community, to both visitors and residents. It is, in retrospect, one of the best conceived renewal projects of Lee's administration, affecting little pre-existing urban fabric, yet successfully transforming the new land area into a vital component of the city.

## LONG WHARF

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### National Register Recommendations

All structures are less than 50 years old and therefore not eligible for National Register listing at this time. An exception is the wharf itself, of which, however, very little original material exists. Because of the importance of the Long Wharf area within the urban redevelopment program of Mayor Richard C. Lee, the modern structures along Sargent Drive may possess potential eligibility as part of a National Register District at some future date.

LONG WHARF

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New Haven City Planning Department. Drawings for Long Wharf projects.

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New Haven Redevelopment Agency and New Haven City Plan Commission. "Redevelopment Plan for the Long Wharf Redevelopment Area." Unpub. report, 1958 with Amendments 1 - 13, 1963-1976. New Haven City Plan Department.

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Still a good historical essay on the early history of Long Wharf.