



THE BEGINNING OF SEAPORTS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The concept of a seaport started long ago, when people realized that moving goods on water was a lot easier than moving goods across land. People had been trading items with each other for thousands of years. They realized that many of the products they needed or wanted could be obtained easily by trading products they had and didn't want or had in abundance. Even now, trading helps people get products they cannot or will not produce themselves or get products at a cheaper cost. Today, we rarely make the items we use everyday. After all, when was the last time you grew your own cotton, weaved your own cloth and sewed your own shirt? Almost everything we use, eat or wear is a product of trade. We go to the store when we need cereal for breakfast, a computer for work, or a radio to listen to music. Some of these products may have been made in the U.S. however more than likely most of them were produced in other countries and traded for money or other goods that we make or have in the U.S.

From ancient times to the early 1900's, ships were owned by merchants or trading companies. They would buy products from local businesses to ship and sell or transport their goods for a fee. Before the mid 1800's, ships were powered by sails and wind. That made travel time very slow compared to today's speed of ocean travel. Up until the 1950's, cargo was placed in small wooden crates or pallets held together with burlap and rope. The process was hard and messy. One by one each crate was loaded and unloaded by hand. This was difficult especially with heavy, awkward cargo. Cargo was easily damaged too or worse yet stolen or lost overboard. These problems all caused delays. Sometimes it would take up to a week to unload a cargo ship!

Ports Today

Today's ports have systems designed to efficiently transport goods in an organized and efficient manner. Goods on ships can be received and sent off again 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Billions of dollars worth of goods are received or transported around the world in very little time compared to the past.

Ships today are designed for speed and mobility, and fueled by gasoline with large turbine engines. The shipment of goods is more standardized too with cargo ships carrying goods in packages that are sealed and waterproof, sometimes with a number of items consolidated into one large shipping unit. The shipping unit used most often in the Port of NY/NJ to store and receive goods is called a container. Containers are large, strong, waterproof metal boxes that can be stacked on a ship, and when taken off the ship, pulled away on truck trailers or trains. Containers keep goods dry and safe with each shipment stored in its own individual box or container. Containers come in standard sizes to help shipping companies keep track and measure how many loads of cargo is being shipped at a time. The invention of the container by New Jersey resident Malcom McLean just about 50 years ago has revolutionized ocean shipping. Now practically anything can be shipped around the world in a container on a ship from candy to computers to tennis shoes and more!