

The Open Suitcase Series – Program Description

Wow! It Happened in Summerside – The Era of Shipbuilding

This program reveals what the shipbuilding industry was like on Prince Edward Island, and particularly in Summerside from 1851 to 1895. This part of history richly influenced the Summerside area, and though there are few hints remaining of the construction activities that once took place on the shores of Bedeque Bay, the importance of the industry cannot be underestimated.

A description of the topics covered and the contents of the chest are listed below. Each topic in the program is followed by a section entitled “Beyond the Basics: Things to Ponder, Research, and Discuss,” which encourages critical thinking from the students as well as providing ideas for activities and topics for discussion.

The written material covers the following topics:

Setting the background

Ships are used as both a means of transporting goods and people. Ships were also used to discover new lands such as North America. Read about the importance of ships in our world history, and how the shipbuilding industry influenced Prince Edward Island.

The origins of the Town of Summerside

What was Summerside first called? Who were the United Empire Loyalists? When did the shipbuilding industry peak? What caused the industry to die?

A typical shipyard in Summerside

Why were shipyards situated near a shoreline? Discover the answer to this question and learn about the different components of a shipyard such as the blacksmith shop, cookhouse, company store, barracks, etc.

The craftsmen needed to build a ship

It took many different skills to build a ship, and craftsmen of all sorts would be employed. Learn about the shipbuilder, the master shipwright, ship designer, ship carpenters, joiners, caulkers, blacksmiths, sail makers, riggers, and block makers.

The materials needed to build a ship

Discover the different types of wood used to build ships along with a variety of other required materials such as canvases, metals, ropes, etc. From where were these materials coming? For what parts of the ship were they being used?

Types of ships built in Summerside

Discover the difference between a Schooner Rig and a Square Rig and the different types of vessels that were constructed on Prince Edward Island. Examine the seven main vessel designs – Sloop, Schooner, Brig, Brigantine, Barque, Barquentine, and Ship.

Some Summerside shipbuilders

Summerside had a number of very successful shipbuilders. Discover where their shipyards were located along the waterfront. Are any of the family names still around today?

Profile of Summerside shipbuilder John Lefurgey

John Lefurgey was a very prominent shipbuilder and politician. Learn about his life during the shipbuilding era, how he got started in the industry and where it took him.

The story of the *Charles E. Lefurgey*

Explore the life of one of John Lefurgey's greatest ships. Examine newspaper articles to discover some of its adventures and learn some interesting facts about this famous barque.

Items in the Chest

Mallet: A hammering tool used in shipbuilding.

Square: This handmade tool was used for drawing or testing right angles. Precise measurements were essential in building a good ship.

Protractor: Used to measure and construct angles, this tool was handmade by a blacksmith.

Tie Down Ring and Metal: Used in a variety of places on a ship. This tool was handmade by a blacksmith.

Chisel: This tool has a sharp, beveled edge. It is used to cut and shape wood and iron.

Wood: The chest includes samples of seventeen different types of wood. Students will be able to learn about the different types, and visually see the difference between them by looking at both the tree bark and cut wood. As students learn which woods were used in shipbuilding, this will help them to see and feel the wood, and discover why certain woods were chosen over others.

Hemp: There are several samples of hemp in the trunk. Students can see the different thicknesses and discover the various uses of rope on ships.

Canvas: Sails were made using a thick canvas. This sample allows students to actually feel what a wooden sailing ship's sails would have been like.

Down at the Shore – A History of Summerside, Prince Edward Island (1752 - 1945): Written by Robert Allan Rankin, this book extensively covers the history of Summerside including an entire section on the shipbuilding industry. Learn of the Napoleonic Wars and their influence on the timber trade, creating an economic opportunity for Islanders

and the beginning of the shipbuilding industry. See pictures and drawings of early shipyards, shipbuilders, and ships themselves.

Shipbuilding in the Maritimes: Written by Eric Allaby, this easy to read book is full of pictures and describes all aspects of the industry including its beginnings, golden age and decline. The book also has information about how to build a ship and an explanation of the various components of a shipyard.

Lefurgey Ships: Learn the details of John Lefurgey's ships through the vessel records from the Canadian Heritage Reference Library. These records have been printed out and placed in a duo-tang for easy access.

Newspaper Ads: Provided through the MacNaught History Centre and Archives, these excerpts from Summerside newspapers feature ads relating to the shipbuilding industry including, among others, the sale of canvas from Holman's department store, the opening of a sailmaker's new shop, and a boat-builder looking for work.

Pictures and Photographs: Provided by the MacNaught History Centre and Archives, these images of shipbuilders, ships, and shipyards allow students to have a look at Summerside during the shipbuilding era. Pictures are on laminated 8½" x 11" sheets.