

Southeastern New England

Historical Calendar



Small craft near West Wharf at Westport Point, circa 1900. Westport Harbor was ideal for privateers during the American Revolution and later for rum-runners during prohibition. The maze of peninsulas, islands and eddies formed at Westport Point—where the two branches of the Westport River merge—so misled and confused the British warships during the Revolution, that it gained the name of the “Devil’s Pocket-Hole.” Friendly vessels could enter, sail up the river a short distance and drop their sails at the wharves of Westport Point, leaving the enemy open for ambush by rebel forces. Fishing, whaling and coastal trading were the primary industries of the Point in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The earliest commercial trade was likely associated with the codfish industry. Large drying platforms were laid out on the docks to process fish caught between Nantucket and Newfoundland. A saltworks located on the east side of the Point produced the salt for curing. Whaling became the main focus in the early-to-mid-19th century, with as many as 30 vessels sailing out of the harbor. By 1900, cat boats (as seen here), were particularly popular in Westport, making excellent inshore fishing, lobstering and shellfishing vessels as well as pleasure craft.