

A historical sketch from *The New Jersey Mirror* of Toms River, 1866
by Selah Searcher¹

The Coasting Trade
Ocean County Vessels in Ancient and Modern Times

The establishment of sawmills in ancient times rendered it necessary to have vessels to carry lumber to market; these vessels were generally sloops. This was about the beginning of the coasting trade, for which our country has since been so noted. After a time the vessels found additional employment in carrying cedar rails to market; this business was quite extensive at one time. After a while both of these branches ceased to be remunerative, and the coasters feared they would have no employment; but at a time when everything seemed hopeless to their business prospects, the world was startled with the invention of steamboats. Probably no class of people more than old seamen ridiculed the idea of "driving a vessel by a kettle full of boiling water," yet the thing was done, and not only done, but the new fangled invention proved the salvation of our coasters, for heavy demand was created for pine wood for the use of the steamboats. Since that time, a large number of vessels owned and manned in Ocean County, have been engaged in the wood trade; when the supply of wood failed in our county, larger vessels were built which proceeded to Maryland and Virginia, to obtain it.

When the largest of the timber, such as was fit for marketable wood, was cut off in our county, the charcoal trade next furnished employment for many of the smaller class vessels. This trade was commenced about thirty years ago; at one time it drew into our county a large number of French Canadians who aided in its manufacture.

At the present time, most of the vessels owned by our citizens, are of too large a size to enter our waters loaded; they are generally engaged in the coasting trade between New York and Southern and Eastern Ports. A large amount of capital is invested by our citizens in these vessels, a much larger amount than custom house records would show, as most of them take out papers at New York, Perth Amboy, Little Egg Harbor and other places and are not credited to our county. The names of all vessels owned wholly or partly in our county, names of their owners and amount of capital invested might be easily ascertained and published, as was done in Atlantic county, a few years ago. We have heard it said that our citizens had at least a half million dollars invested in vessel property, and we should not be surprised if this was the case.

Transcribed by Steve Dodson
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¹ Selah Searcher was the newspaper pseudonym of Edwin Salter, author of "A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties.