

### 3

## **The Community and You: Learning Your Way Around Fair Haven**

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The seagulls were making sweeping spirals against the blue sky; it was a quiet summer day along the river in the Fair Haven section of New Haven.

The old man gazed into the distance. “You know,” he said, “Dover Street was named for a famous seaside resort in Dover, England, with its white limestone cliffs. In Fair Haven, the street used to end at the Quinnipiac River. There used to be a sandy beach where swimmers came; it was called Dover Beach. There were bathhouses—not enough for men and women at the same time, so the men would use them one day and the women the next.”

“You went swimming there?” the young boy asked.

“No, that was even before my time, back in the early 1900s. Later, when Clinton Park was built, Dover Street just ended there and a few years later the bathhouses burned down . . . around 1925. People stopped swimming soon after when the river got polluted.”

A moment passed. “What about Chatham Street?” the boy inquired. “That sounds like English, too.”

“Chatham in England was a naval base and ship-building town; most likely, one of the Fair Haven property owners had come from there and Fair Haven being a ship-building center . . . well, what better name!” he replied.

“There must be lots of streets in Fair Haven that have a history to them,” the boy stated.

“Yes, there’s history here. Fair Haven is a special community with an interesting past . . . very interesting,” the old man responded as he looked out over the river . . . and beyond.

Street names, places, events . . . recollections of a neighborhood, an area, a community . . . clear memories of a past often transmitted by stories told by an older generation. For them, there exists a real connection of sight, sound, smell,

and feeling for a place that became woven with their human life experience. In time, the young may come to develop this connection with what was before, and it will make their lives richer. But for many of my students, there is no human connection with their present community. For this reason, the unit will focus on their community, Fair Haven, within New Haven.

## **TEACHER NOTES**

Within two years of the founding of the New Haven Colony in 1638, farmers were using the arable land in the so-called Neck, a flat area, east of the colony's center between the Mill and the Quinnipiac rivers, now called Fair Haven.

While Fair Haven is the focal point of this unit, the topic of community is an important concept for students to understand. Wherever people reside, there exists a community in its broadest definition. The richness of any community can be translated by studying its common interests, unique heritage, geographical location, historical development, work, or social interaction. No matter its accident of location, a community shares a spirit of togetherness. Thus the goal of teaching about community can create in students a spark of interest that can ignite a curiosity in a larger world, both past and present.

This unit is designed to be used with eighth grade social studies classes at Fair Haven Middle School in New Haven, Connecticut. The school is located near the center of the community close to the crossroads, Grand Avenue and Ferry Street, about a mile and a half from New Haven's commercial center. This unit should serve as an introductory activity early in the school year in American history or Western Hemisphere courses. The unit is aimed at low and middle achievers to get them located in place geography and make them aware of the history of their community.

The unit's objectives are:

1. to understand the concept of community.
2. to become aware of some of Fair Haven's heritage.
3. to learn place geography through mapping activities.

Because the study of a community can be complex and involved, especially over the course of time, this unit presents three topics that illustrate historical development and change—the role of oystering, the influx of immigrants, and industrial growth. Through teacher discussion, Fair Haven may become more than a place in which to live, work, and recreate; it may become a community with a past. Slices of the past, through the related fictional stories, will provide

the needed sense of change over time. The stories which I have written show that stress and change are common in any community. They can be duplicated and read by the students with the follow-up questions used as evaluation. The series of mapping activities will illustrate Fair Haven's street geography and its place relationship to the area around it. The length of teaching time for this unit may be from five to ten class periods.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As American society is changing, faster and faster, children no longer live in the same kind of community that their parents and grandparents inhabited. For centuries, children grew into adulthood in a world much like that of their parents; ideally, they were raised in a consistent pattern of life and maintained a basic familiarity with place and family.

Today, our society and its communities reflect change almost by decades rather than over the course of generations. The world is more accessible; there is a desire for what is new, more experiences and heightened sensations. The result may be disorientation and an erosion of traditions; contemporary life places stress on human communities and on the individuals' search for meaning. Values become lost without the roots of the past and a continuity of time.

The nature of the family as a social and economic unit has changed especially in urban settings such as New Haven. Once, the family was the center for social, recreational, educational, and religious teachings. In many ways, many of the functions that were once performed mostly by the family as a unit are now being performed mostly by other institutions in our society. Today, the family may only fill psychological and emotional needs, and not always in all cases.

Once traditional neighborhoods, schools, and churches served as extensions of the family and provided the additional security to the individual. People have always worked in groups; sometimes the group was the community and sometimes it was based on nationality or culture. The Puritan John Winthrop foresaw a society in America as a community in which each person put the good of the whole community ahead of private concerns. Benjamin Franklin's eighteenth century America, by contrast, viewed the individual free to make choices about his future and not be a submissive, unquestioning creature.

America was transformed by new types of communities that influenced tastes and opinions; the meaning of community took on new dimensions as America became a mass society. Modern life presents greater opportunity to be yourself, to be mobile, and offers a range of choices. The concept of community is placed

in conflict with the drive to be an individual. As communal forms of togetherness break down, especially in the family where there is little effective ethnic influence to restrain excesses of conduct, individuals feel less sense of belonging.

This unit is about community in the sense of locale, an awareness of its past and its place. The fact that the community has changed should not negate an attachment to it and its heritage. The struggle to be an individual is a given in our complex mass society. The trick is to balance community and person.

The teaching of the concept of community is important for the Middle School age group as they are maturing and socially expanding their experiences. To concentrate on their community will provide a deeper connection, a sense of belonging and pride. It is good to know where things are located. But it is more important to know why those places influence our lives. Knowing your community can be a step towards participation in one's community. Supported with knowledge of its location in relation to the surrounding local region, students may take a step in building a personal bridge to the larger world.

At the beginning of the new school year, eighth graders re-enter the school community. Some students are multi-year building registrants, some are only recent members of the student body, while others are new to the school. The start of the year may bring mixed feelings: insecurity, hesitations, loneliness, confusion, renewal, confidence, and eagerness. Soon the majority adjust, relax, and get on with school life. The attachment of belonging may develop and even a sense of pride may grow; this is healthy and could be used to promote learning, social growth, and self-esteem. The students can directly feel the connection between themselves and the school; they can be a part of it.

The relationship with the family exists as well, good or bad; it is real and shapes attitudes and values before school years begin. The family, for most students, is their first community, a gathering of people with a common bond. It's the most familiar, often the safest, and an ideal growing ground for an individual's personality; it can be a community of love from which the individual ventures into ever-widening communities.

Thus, the community of the family and that of the school are known entities to students; they feel comfortable in relation to them for the most part. In their short lives, these groupings form the student's major framework for reference to the larger world; in a sense, the family is the nest of nurturing and the school provides the first branch beyond to the outside. But what of the other tree branches and the directions to which they stretch? What of the trunk of society's tree that is rooted in the immediate environment?

The local community is another branch to the greater world; *Learning Your Way Around* is thus the direction in which this unit points.

## “CLAMTOWN”

Fair Haven is a unique community located approximately two miles from the New Haven Green. Early references cite “Dragon Point,” “Dragon River,” and “Dragon Town,” so called, no doubt, because of the harbor seals that inhabited the banks of the river when sailors first visited the area. Although a part of the New Haven Colony, its original farmers formed a separate village in 1679. The first wooden bridge across the Quinnipiac River in the late 1700s brought together both sides, helping the “Farmes” develop independently until 1784 when the areas between State Street and Mill River became part of New Haven. This area was called “New Township”; as the settlement of Fair Haven grew near the river, it again separated from New Haven in 1837 and boasted of a population of 1000.

Oystering and the advantages of the Quinnipiac River gave Fair Haven reason to exist and earned it the nickname, “Clamtown.” Almost all of the inhabitants were in some way involved with the oyster industry—building sharpies, manufacturing kegs, cultivating and harvesting oysters, or buying and selling the natural resource. By the middle of the 1800s, Fair Haven’s oyster trade ranked second to Baltimore’s in volume.

During the early years, Fair Haven proper was little more than a cluster of fishing huts along the Quinnipiac River. But by the mid-1800s, it was thriving, and “Fair Dragon” began to be called by its proper name. A sea captain who visited the place in 1747 was so impressed by its beauty that he referred to it as “Fayre Haven.” Besides the oyster boats, the river was the home to large vessels which carried on a trade with the West Indies, bringing sugar, molasses, and fruit to New England. Seafarers made Fair Haven their home port. The First Church on Grand Avenue had forty-eight ship captains among its congregation. The 237 foot spire of the church was a landmark for many returning sailors until one hundred feet were removed in 1877 after a storm.

With access to New Haven harbor and bordered by two rivers, Fair Haven developed a maritime industry. It was the oyster industry that played the dominant role as the major economic factor until the eve of the twentieth century. The oysters were plentiful in the beds at the bottom of the rivers and along the shores of Long Island Sound. The oystermen gathered the oysters with rakes and tongs, and when their boats were full, headed to the shore. There, the oysters were wheelbarreled into houses along the river through an entrance in the high stone cellar. Here, the oysters would be measured, opened, washed, and packed. Later, large shops were opened for the marketing process. Boys and women labored from September to April opening the oysters on a piecework

basis. An expert could open one hundred quarts a day; the average was about sixty-five quarts at two and one half cents per quart. Once packed in kegs, they were surrounded with ice to await shipping.

Secondary businesses grew as a result including those of barrels and boxes but boat building became Fair Haven's second industry. Originally, dugouts were used but as oystermen ventured farther out into the Sound the addition of a sail became necessary. The next major improvement was the development of the Fair Haven "Sharpie." It was a long (twenty-five to sixty feet), narrow sail boat designed to carry two men. With a flat bottom, the "Sharpie" provided steady footing for the oystermen as they scraped the bottom for oysters. For speed, two masts were used with triangular sails; this provided the speed needed to get home quickly with the catch. By the 1880s, two hundred "Sharpies" could be found along the Quinnipiac River. It was economical to build, easy to sail, and sea worthy. Its speed made it a popular racing boat into the twentieth century.

In 1858, two million bushels of seed oysters (smaller than three inches) were shipped on two hundred and fifty schooners for use to replenish the oyster beds in Fair Haven. The natural New Haven beds had been over fished and the oyster was almost extinct. From then, oystering—the seeding and breeding—changed from a simple gathering process to an organized, scientific farming process. Expanding oyster planting moved the growers farther off shore, and eventually the oyster companies moved to Long Island where the water was cleaner and they were closer to the New York market. Fair Haven waters were left solely as a breeding ground for the oysters up to the age of two or three. The shells of the opened oysters are dumped onto the river and harbor bottoms so that the young oysters can cling to them and mature.

Pollution and the oysters' natural enemies, the starfish and marine snails called "drills," brought the industry to its low. By 1930 only one oyster company remained, the Long Island Oyster Company, which still operates today out of the Quinnipiac River.

The original flat farm land had lent itself to supporting the early colonial settlers but development of the natural oyster industry had made Fair Haven a prosperous and busy place. With the oyster's decline, another economic base was needed to maintain the inhabitants. The natural resources of the Mill and Quinnipiac Rivers along with the harbor remained. They offered the promise for new businesses and the necessary transportation that would expand and continue Fair Haven's growth and development into the twentieth century. As craft shops and small industry developed in the early 1800s, the farmland was already disappearing around the edges of Fair Haven especially along the sides of the Mill River. The Farmington canal and then the railroad brought new workers

and their families to the area. The railroads, by increasing coastal and inland transport, resulted in a practical advantage that would attract new industry. Fair Haven was ready to be carried along by the second Industrial Revolution. Its maritime heritage would remain, but a new chapter was to be written in the community's history.<sup>1</sup>

## **THE RIVER AND THE OYSTER**

The sounds of their skateboards made the old man turn. He watched and admired the ease of the riders as they rode into the new park along the river. Turning back to his grandson, he was about to speak when he heard a slap and grinding noise. Again, he turned his attention to the young skateboarders.

"What are they doing?" he asked.

The small boy answered, "Oh, they're just practicing 'ollies' and that's a 'grind.'"

The boards seemed to leap under the riders' feet and then slam down on the metal trucks between the board's wheels sliding along the outside rail of a park bench. Off into the air and down onto the sidewalk, they skated away.

"Always something new," the old man said. "This park has seen a lot in its time . . . well, it wasn't always a park, you understand. Not long ago there were docks for oil tankers . . . iron and steel was brought to the Schiavone scrap yard to be shipped to New York. Before the 1930s, South Front Street was boat docks and wharves where large schooners and sloops anchored with their bowsprits reaching over the street."

"What's a schooner?"

"It's a sailing ship with two or more masts that was used to haul cargo to distant ports; the sloops were smaller with only one mast."

The old man looked out across the Quinnipiac River towards the Heights and East Grand Avenue; he seemed to be transported back into the past . . . lost in his thoughts.

Then he said, "Front Street is probably the oldest road in Fair Haven; in colonial times, it was just a path used by fishermen. As time passed, the oyster helped make Fair Haven a prosperous community; the oyster, ship building, and trading ships with crews and captains made their homes along the river. One of the first settlers, Herman Hotchkins, owned a lot of property on both sides of the river; he built wharves for ships to tie up along, a store, and even a tavern. Exchange Street, behind us, got its name from an exchange office on the corner where oystermen could trade their oysters for merchandise or for money. When

oystering was big business, you would have found oysterbarns and the oyster-men's houses on one side of Front, and their sharpies or oyster boats and dugouts along the river banks."

"Sharpies! . . . What did they look like?" the boy wanted to know.

"They were long, narrow, and flat bottomed with a centerboard and one or two masts, each rigged with a triangular sail. They were stable enough in water for two men to stand and rake oysters from the river bottom. At first the oyster-men used dugouts which were a lot like canoes, but they were heavy and didn't hold a lot of oysters. The dugout was replaced by the Fair Haven Sharpie . . . built right here; it was perfect for working the shallow river beds. They were called 'sharpies' because of their sharp looks and being very fast. When I was a boy, I remember them racing on the river."

"Oysters? They're fish?" the grandson asked.

The old man replied, "Yes, shellfish, and you can find them all along the shallow coastal waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Baby oysters, called 'spats,' need to be attached to a solid object in order to grow. That's why the old, empty shells are dumped back onto the bottom of the oyster bed. The shells are dumped back onto the bottom of the oyster beds. The shells are mostly made of limestone; the early settlers used to break up the shells and mix them with cement to make mortar. East Pearl Street got its name from the oyster, clam, and mussel shells which were spread over the dirt road as a topping."

"So where are all the Sharpies now?" the boy wanted to know. "What happened to the oysters?"

There was a pause as the old man decided how to answer. He remembered when he was young, his father used to work on an oyster boat during the harvest season to get extra money. He only worked on his days off from the railroad; the money was good but his father never liked the river much. His real love was the train . . . the noise and power of the steam locomotive . . . the adventure of travel to distant towns and different places. The old man himself had not gone oystering; when he was young, oystering was disappearing and since he was good at working with his hands, he had become a mechanic working at the Bigelow Company making steam boilers.

He pulled his thoughts back to the present and the sunny day along the river and answered. "There's only one oyster company left here in Fair Haven," he pointed, "across the river. Most of the companies moved to Long Island, but they still own or rent the oyster beds and use them for raising the spats. Times change, you know, and so did Fair Haven. The oyster business saw hard times when I was young. The oysters had been over fished, pollution from the factories spoiled the water, and the oyster's natural enemies, like the starfish, made



profits drop, and the businesses moved. The old docks and storehouses were used for other things.”

“And what happened to all that stuff?”

“It got torn down. All those new houses were built and recently this new park. Sometimes it’s hard to see the past.”

The sounds of the skateboarders returned. “Things change,” the old man said . . . “What are they doing now?”

“Nose wheelies,” the boy answered.

## **CHANGE AND COMMUNITY**

Time wouldn’t let Fair Haven remain a rustic sea-going community. By the 1860s, it was a streetcar suburb with the Fair Haven and Westville Horse Railroad traveling along Grand Avenue. Its carbarn, on Grand and Fillmore Streets, stabled four hundred and fifty horses; in 1893, they would be replaced by trolleys. The New Haven and New London Railroad built a bridge across the Quinnipiac River north of the Grand Avenue bridge and sliced Fair Haven from its depot in New Haven into East Haven. Now physically connected, Fair Haven, once referred to as “The Neck,” merged again politically with New Haven in 1870.

The almost four thousand Fair Haveners witnessed new streets and in 1876 its ferry was replaced by a bridge across the Quinnipiac River, providing greater access and continued expansion. The earlier rural estates began to disappear. Among them was the thirty acre Maltby property which was subdivided into building lots. Elegant mansions with stables and greenhouses were transformed into low priced housing convenient to the developing factories. As developers built eastward across the Mill River, the farms began to disappear. Yet the ridge along the Quinnipiac River, Fair Haven Heights, flourished with new mansions with views of the river, East Rock, and Sleeping Giant. This area was becoming one of the city’s affluent suburbs. The streets boasted of imposing Victorian Gothic, Greek Revival, Italianate Villas, and Queen Anne style architecture. These were the fashionable homes of the rich sea captains, merchants, and new entrepreneurs adding their touch to the landscape.

Grand Avenue and the adjoining streets became a melting pot of people packed into three- and four-story tenements along with new businesses and stores. The New Township section was the first to attract Irish immigrants after the Civil War. They were drawn by the railroads and growing industries; they were also employed in the genteel homes of wealthy New Haveners as servants.

Along with the Irish, an influx of Germans found their way to Fair Haven followed by Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Russian Jews. Many worked in garment factories and at the New Haven Clock and Watch Company, New Haven Quilt and Pad, Sargent's Candee Rubber, and in many other manufactories.

The river village was being surrounded by industry and was expanded by the people it attracted. Work brought people and the people formed ethnic communities connected by Grand Avenue which ran from New Township at State Street to the Quinnipiac River and the Heights. The Avenue, whose horse drawn streetcars ran every five minutes, connected people both rich and poor for work, play, and worship. The inhabitants developed a sense of identity with Fair Haven, of belonging to a neighborhood that became increasingly diverse after the Civil War, but united by shared hopes in a promising future on "The Neck."

The greatest concentration of people was from State Street to East Street. At the corner of Grand and Artisan Street, named for the artisans who lived there, a hotel with two hundred guest rooms and one hundred baths was built in 1870. The Avon Hotel, later the Milner, was the guest home for traveling salesmen. Indeed Grand Avenue was a thriving thoroughfare; its four movie theaters indicated the size of the neighborhood. Bakeries, butcher shops, fish markets, bars, and more than twenty furniture stores lined the Avenue.

Fair Haven had a Post Office and its own fire house on East Pearl Street with over sixty firemen with red and black uniforms. Each Fourth of July, the company celebrated with a clam bake. The unification with New Haven brought the building of new schools: Woolsey grade school on Poplar Street, the Lloyd Street School, Ferry Street School and Cheever School, named for Ezekiel Cheever, the first schoolmaster in New Haven. St. Francis R.C. Church held its first service in 1867 and by 1881, the church had been completed along with a school and rectory. Episcopalians built Grace Church at Blatchley and Exchange Streets and the Baptists constructed a church at Grand and Poplar in 1885. Churches seemed to be going up on every corner and not to be outdone, the Congregationalists redesigned their Grand Avenue building in a Romanesque style. Fair Haven activities centered around church, school, or some social society where people gathered to work and have fun.

Along Grand Avenue, a large variety of businesses made their appearance. At the foot of the Grand Avenue Bridge, William Warner opened a hardware store in 1883. Four drugstores could be found mixed in with food stores, a livery and the largest laundry in New England when it opened in 1891. That same year, Smith T. Bradley opened a florist's shop at 133 Grand Avenue; his greenhouses were on his father's land on Atwater Street with its barn that housed its delivery

wagon. The 1870 merger with New Haven prompted businesses and industries to settle and expand in Fair Haven; during the following hundred years, they would arrive and depart, change and renew, and provide jobs for the many new arrivals in the area.

By 1913, the center of Fair Haven would move from the river to the intersection of Grand and Ferry Streets according to the census. The inhabitants were no longer dependent upon or content with oystering as a principal source of economic support. Second and third generation Irish chose government jobs and politics. The Italians chose to work in construction or in the shops and factories. As immigration increased in the 1900s, new schools were needed. Clinton Avenue School's cornerstone was laid in 1911, and Fair Haven Junior High was erected in two stages beginning in 1927. Two Roman Catholic Churches opened, St. Rose's in 1908 and St. Donato's in 1915. Three fire stations existed and a police station was located in 1895 on Grand Avenue. Fair Haven had been transformed from a small community based upon waterfront activity to a busy, vital, and diverse area with a population of 23,960 in 1930.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE IMMIGRANTS**

"How old are you?" she asked. "I'm thirteen."

He had almost tripped over her sitting on the last step; he was running down the front stairs from his uncle's flat, the rooms in the house on Wolcott Street.

He mumbled and started to walk away. He was on his way to the Chinese hand laundry, Church Lee's on Grand Avenue, to get his uncle's and father's shirts. His mother wanted them picked up before closing, so the men could wear them on Sunday. He had no time for talking . . . especially to this girl.

"Mind if I come along?" she said smartly and fell into step with him. "My name's Cathy McDonald . . . I live across the street. You got a name?"

"Ignore her," he thought, "walk faster." His uncle had warned them about the Irish; they didn't like new people moving into their Fair Haven neighborhood. "'Fraid we're gonna have their jobs," were his uncle's words.

But she didn't quit. "You and your family just got here, huh."

He guessed that this wasn't a question; "What does she want?" he thought and began to walk even faster as he crossed Exchange Street. His family had arrived in New York Harbor only a week ago from Sorrento on the Italian coast. His uncle had met them and took them on the steam train to New Haven. Just a few days ago, he remembered riding along Chapel Street in the wagon loaded

with his father, mother, two sisters, little brother, and all their belongings. He remembered how excited he was . . . new places, big factories, crowds of people, strange words . . . a different world . . . a new home.

They had reached Grand Avenue with its food markets, bakeries, butcher shops, bars, clothing stores; people hurrying home on this late Saturday afternoon. He saw the laundry and quickly headed toward it.

"I'll wait here," she said.

Glad to be free, he went in, handed over the ticket and money, "Maybe there's a back door," he thought. The old Chinaman then gave him a wrapped package and he had to return outside. She was not there . . . gone.

He started to retrace his steps thinking that all the things that his uncle had written in his letters were true. America was fast moving, busy, a growing place; a land of opportunity and if you wanted to work, a promise to all people of becoming wealthy and being free. He was glad that they had left the farm in Italy; he didn't like it and didn't want to farm as his father and grandfather had done. 1902 was going to be a new beginning for him.

Lost in his thoughts, he was startled by the sound of her voice again.

"Way down Grand, my father runs Clerkin and McDonald; it's a plumbing and heating business. They sell stoves, steam heating, and 'sanitary plumbing'—that's indoor bathrooms. He came over to America in 1852 from Newmarket in County Limerick, Ireland," she said proudly. "Came steerage, like you folks probably, all squeezed into the bottom of the boat. His uncle had a place for him here to live. Father worked on the railroads for a while but then started selling stoves; after mother came over, she worked as a maid in Mr. Lancraft's house on Lenox Street across the Quinnipiac River. Anyway, they saved and with Mr. Clerkin opened their business. Got a couple of delivery trucks now."

He wondered if she ever stopped talking.

"Your uncle works at Mr. Wilton's folding box company on James Street; got a good job, my father says."

Her voice was a jumble of sounds to his ears. They had recrossed Exchange Street and turned onto . . . "Wolcott Street was named for the Yale graduate, Oliver Wolcott; he was active in the American Revolution and governor of Connecticut. But that's history," she stated.

They were now in front of his uncle's place. A few more steps and he would be inside, safe.

"You didn't tell me your name," she said and looked him in the eye. "Your name?" she repeated slowly.

He hesitated.

“What’s your name . . . n-a-m-e?” she said pointing at him.

“Michael . . . Michael Longobardi,” he said as his face blushed a bright red.

“Welcome to Fair Haven, Michael,” she said turning to cross the street.

## **CHANGE AND INDUSTRY**

Street names often provide clues to the history of a community; they can serve as a touchstone with the past. Running along Mill River can be found a street by that name so called because of the eight colonial gristmills that existed along the river by 1780. River Street was named for the Quinnipiac River that parallels on the southern edge of Fair Haven. It runs eastward from the site of the 1859 J.M. Wiswell Carriage factory at the end of James Street to the former Gesner and Baldwin shipyard site where the old ferry crossed the river to East Haven. The open land, the harbor and rivers, the existing fishing wharves, and railroad connections, coupled with Yale University’s presence, a history of invention, skilled workers, and entrepreneurs, made the New Haven area a natural place for the new industries in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, as oystering was peaking and declining, Fair Haven would enter the era of industrialization.

From Bristol, Connecticut, Chauncy Jerome sent his nephew in 1845 to supervise the building of a new clock factory. Five years later, the nephew, Hiram Camp, opened his own company, New Haven Clock. Camp, an inventor, engineer, and businessman, built the company into the world’s largest by his death in 1893. His home, an Italian Villa on Ferry Street, had formal gardens and property reaching to Peck Street. During World War I, clock and watch making was suspended in order to make marine and bomb fuses. Two million fuses were produced. With peace time, the expense of retooling and competition, the company could not return to its former profitable levels, and under the control of Swiss watch brokers, it closed. This would be the fate of many Fair Haven industries as the decades passed during the twentieth century. But for many years before, Fair Haven and its community witnessed a remarkable period of great industrial pioneers.

Moving from New Britain, where there was a shortage of workers, Joseph Bradford Sargent with his brothers established their hardware manufacturing business in 1864. They located at Water, Wallace, and Hamilton Streets and housed several hundred workers, whom they had brought with them from New Britain, to the nearby Pavilion Hotel. The company produced tools, safety exit devices, twine holders, letterdrops, hardware of all sorts including cow bells. In 1884, the J.B. Sargent Company began to manufacture locks, and it would

become the largest lock producer in the United States. Its 1894 catalogue showed forty-three pages of padlocks in over 300 styles.<sup>3</sup>

Near the tip of Fair Haven's peninsula, an area called Grapevine Point, carriage companies could be found before the Civil War on the flat land along River Street. It was here that Hobart Bigelow moved his machine shop in 1869 to land that he bought and set up operations in the abandoned former Civil War barracks of Camp Terry. The company grew and soon needed a three-story brick factory.

The Bigelow Company produced portable engines sent westward to the gold mines and oil fields in Pennsylvania, as well as cutters and milling machines for the sugar cane plantation in the Caribbean. The founder's son, Frank, decided to concentrate on one product after his father's death; the entire plant was given over to making boilers. A new factory covering many acres was built in 1905 and the Bigelow Company would become the largest manufacturer of steam boilers in New England.

National Pipe Bending Company adjacent to the Bigelow Company on River Street was the sole manufacturer of the National Feed Water Heater, an appliance for heating feed water for boilers. Besides the new industries of the later 1800s, Fair Haven still retained some older ones. On Grand Avenue, James McLay, Jr. specialized in business wagons and on Ferry Street could be found a shop producing carriages, wagons, and carts. Scoville and Peck manufactured coach and carriage lamps on Grand Avenue. Old industries and new ones, such as the Strouse-Adler Company and shirt makers, created a greater demand for dry-goods containers. In 1906, the National Folding Box Company moved into its plant at James and Alton Streets near Mill River. The company's new plant covered an entire block. The business had been created by David Wilton of New York, who unified eight small folding box companies and merged with two New Haven ones in 1891. Within fifty years, it had become the world's largest plant devoted completely to the making of folding boxes employing one thousand workers. National Folding Box was bought out by Federal Paper Board Company in 1953, and in 1957 operations closed in Fair Haven as the company moved to Virginia.

Started in 1880 by Adelbert W. Flint to make lawn and porch furniture, the A.W. Flint Company is still in business on lower Chapel Street. Its specialty is a complete line of ladders and scaffolding. Still visible, but now an example of modern adaptive use, found at the corner of Ferry and Front Streets, is a towering brick monastery-like structure; it was the Quinnipiac Brewery in 1892; later called the Yale Brewery, it was a financial success in bottling and brewing beer. Today it has been converted into apartment housing. Another, yet luckier survivor, is the Roland T. Warner Company at the corner of Grand and Front

Streets. Started in 1883 as a hardware store catering to marine trade, it still serves the community.

Special in Fair Haven's industrial and business history was the world famous A.C. Gilbert Company. Raised in Oregon, Alfred Carleton Gilbert studied medicine at Yale, but with his mechanical genius and a desire to instruct the young Gilbert first turned to a career in magic. Married and living in Westville, he began to manufacture boxes of magic tricks. The Mystro Manufacturing Company soon was so successful that Gilbert bought an old carriage factory in New Haven. A natural athlete, who had won a gold Olympic medal in 1908 for pole-vaulting, he merged energy with an inventive mind. While traveling to New York, he observed the steel girders being erected to carry power lines; the idea occurred to him that young boys would like to build such things on a smaller scale. In 1913, his first Erector Sets were displayed at the New York Toy Fair and were a success.

The following year, Gilbert bought a piece of land on Fox Street in Fair Haven and built a factory to make the Erector Sets. The educational toys ranged in cost from a dollar up to twenty-five with small electric motors available. Business soared, and a larger plant was needed; so the A.C. Gilbert Company moved into the former Maxim Munitions Works at Blatchley and Peck Streets. To make year round employment, Gilbert began to manufacture rotary fans. Of his 150 patents, his most important contribution to the industry was enameled wire for small electric motors. Gilbert expanded his business to produce chemistry sets, radio sets, electrical toys, and later in 1938 bought the rights to manufacture American Flyer trains. The factory employed thousands of Fair Haveners, many of whom worked at home doing piece work, like assembling set screws on Erector gears and pulleys.

In 1920, radio station WCJ began transmitting from Erector Square. Gilbert himself did a sports review which was the first such program on radio and also interviewed sports personalities of the day. A.C. Gilbert was a self-made and many-sided man. He enjoyed big game hunting and photography; he was a leader in business and community life as well as an inventor and a salesman.

During World War II, the toy manufacturing company adapted by producing parachutes, flares, and small motors for fighter planes. The company made ninety percent of all the firing devices used by the Allies in land mines, anti-personnel devices, and explosives used in sabotage. After the war, beside the toys, electric drills, portable mixers, and hair dryers, microscopic kits and atomic Geiger counters were produced at A.C. Gilbert's. The company at one time was the world's largest toy manufacturer and once again had made Fair Haven

famous. Unfortunately after A.C. Gilbert's death in 1961, the company disintegrated and the Blatchley Avenue factory closed in 1967.<sup>4</sup>

## **FAIR HAVEN INDUSTRY AND CHANGE**

"I remember the days when the trolley cars used to be pulled by horses," Grandpa said for no special reason. I looked up at him from the step of the front porch; he leaned back in his rocking chair and continued. "The two track railroad went along Grand Avenue to Olive Street and then to Chapel . . . You could ride from the Quinnipiac to the Green and on to Westville on Whalley Avenue. Hundreds of horses were stabled in barns near the Grand Avenue bridge. What a smell! The whole ride took over an hour, just to cover the six miles to Westville."

"That was over fifty years ago," my father said as he reached for the lemonade and poured himself another glass. It was red hot this summer evening. There was no breeze, even on the front porch, but the lemonade was cold.

My father looked down at me and said, "They made the trolleys electric in the 1890s when electricity became more available. I remember them putting in electric street lights and people having their homes wired . . . At first, we only had electric service between three in the afternoon and midnight; a lot of people kept their old-fashioned, smelly gas lights. When the U.I. Company opened English station on the Mill River in 1899, service improved."

"Made a mess," Grandpa snorted. "All them wires, hundreds, crisscrossing over Grand Avenue on all them poles . . . telephone lines too . . . ruined the view. And the coal! Barges going and coming with coal for the power plant . . . the smell of the sulfur from the burning coal . . . ruined the air."

"Without burning the coal, they couldn't make the steam that ran the turbines that produces the electricity," my father stated. "That's progress . . . things gotta change."

"Change!" Grandpa almost shouted. "Before that change, Fair Haven used to be a quiet place. Now we got all these factories making smoke and noise, railroads cutting across Fair Haven, trolleys every five minutes, automobiles honking . . . and all kinds of new people. . . ."

"The factories make jobs, Pa . . . the work helps us afford new things," my father replied seriously.

"Job! You call where you work making toys a job?" the old man said.

I looked at my father; I knew he worked at A.C. Gilbert's over on Blatchley near Peck Street. I had thought that he made electric motors.

"Some people at the company make toys," he answered. "That's how Gilbert started. He made magic tricks after graduating from Yale. He was going to be a



doctor, but liked magic and teaching people to think; so he started a business that sold boxes of magic tricks in New Haven. One day while on a train to New York, he saw men putting up steel girders for power lines and got the idea that children also would like to build such things, but it would have to be on a smaller scale. So in 1913, he made the Erector Set . . . strips of metal with lots of holes that could be easily assembled into buildings, machines, trucks, anything that you could imagine with nuts, bolts, pulleys, and wheels which came with the set. They came in different sizes, some having little electric motors. They were sold for a dollar up to twenty-five. Gilbert made lots of money and moved his company to Fair Haven and a bigger factory. Later he bought the right to make American Flyer trains and produced other educational toys such as chemistry and radio sets."

"Toys," Grandpa interrupted. "I told you."

"Not only toys," father continued, "in my section of the factory, we make small electric motors for rotary fans. Gilbert wanted year-round work for his employees, so more things than toys are now produced. Gilbert invented an enamel wire that insulates the wires that get hot. He has over a hundred and fifty different patents. He's quite a genius. From his factory, he started the WCJ radio station; it broadcasted the first sports program in the country . . . right here from Fair Haven. The A.C. Gilbert Company is the world's largest toy manufacturer, but now with another war coming in Europe, we are going to make our electric motors for airplanes . . . and parachutes . . . and firing timers for explosives in anti-tank mines."

Father reached for more lemonade . . . Grandpa stayed silent with his thoughts.

This summer of 1939 had been very warm but exciting for me. New Haven's Tercentary was going on . . . It was New Haven's three hundredth birthday and people were celebrating with festivals, concerts, parades, and the play at the Yale Bowl, "Through Many Generations—A Pageant of Old New Haven."

And the "Progress Exposition" . . . I remembered seeing so many Fair Haven manufacturers and industries showing their products—Sargent's, the world's largest hardware company; the Bigelow Company with its huge steam boilers; National Pipe Bending; National Folding Box from James Street; the Flint Ladder Company from Chapel Street; and of course, the A.C. Gilbert Company was there showing off its specialty—the toys. I was proud that Fair Haven had such a large part in the history of New Haven.

I wondered, "What progress will I see when I grow up? How will Fair Haven be changed?"

"Time for bed," father said over my thoughts . . . and we left Grandpa with his memories.

## THE RECENT PAST AND FUTURE

The industrial age in Fair Haven provided work for the many immigrants that poured into the area. As the older river dwellers before them, these factory workers developed their own sense of belonging to the neighborhood and their own pride in being a Fair Havener. The Irish and Germans had come first between the 1830s and 1850s living in the cheapest housing that was available. Italians began arriving during the closing decades of the 1800s and lived close to the factories that gave them employment. East Europeans followed and settled in the oldest and poorest sections. As time passed, the next generation would move according to their economic means usually farther from the centers of manufacturing. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, many third generation families moved into New Haven's suburbs. Only blacks were an exception to the economic and geographic pattern. As their number increased, the areas in which they lived just spread out in size.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the factories were busy meeting the demands of the war, but thereafter, the economy began to change. The industry that had contributed to Fair Haven's growth now contributed to its post-war deterioration. The industry moved from urban settings into the suburbs and to rural areas. Fair Haven's prosperity faded as the factories became empty through relocation or closing; workers moved or remained behind to find work elsewhere outside of Fair Haven. The 1950s began for New Haven and its neighborhoods a flight by whites to the suburbs and an in-migration of blacks and Hispanics. Unfortunately, what had attracted earlier immigrants—jobs—declined during this period from 34,500 manufacturing jobs in 1947 to 14,500 in 1980. What new industries did open were highly automated and required a relatively small number of skilled workers. Job opportunity shifted from manufacturing to such service occupations as health care, finance, real-estate, retail, and government jobs.

From studying Fair Haven, the student can learn that change is constant. Many of the abandoned factories are gone, either torn down or converted to smaller, more diverse uses, such as Gilbert's Erector Square. Old tenement housing have been replaced with condominiums and single or duplex houses. Preservation efforts and gentrification, especially along the river and main streets, have renewed the visible facade. From nineteenth-century-like street lights and trash containers to architectural renewal, Fair Haven has attempted to recapture its past heritage. New immigrants have arrived and have rekindled a spirit of vitality. Since the 1970s, a new chapter in Fair Haven's history is being written, titled "restoration."

Many students in Fair Haven are first or second generation residents and have no concept of their community other than as a place to live. To them, it has no past and may present a bleak future. The students, in a sense, are as much

immigrants to Fair Haven as the late eighteenth century foreign immigrants or southern migrants who sought a new life in this coastal setting. They face the stress of re-settlement and the process of change. They must recognize their responsibility as members of this community to its families, neighbors, environment, and their role in the larger society.

In the first act of the Broadway musical, “Into the Woods,” the fairy tale characters are granted their greatest wish as they journey through the woods. The second act reveals how each wish had a significant effect on the well-being of the community. The musical’s theme deals with how the individual affects society. Like Cinderella, Jack, or Little Red Riding Hood in the play, students must realize that their lives are a part of a community. They are connected to their community’s past and will make an impact on its future. Only with a sense of belonging, can they develop the security which will allow them to grow, contribute, and have a sense of civic pride.

## **THE COMMUNITY AND YOU: LEARNING YOUR WAY AROUND FAIR HAVEN**

The fictional stories are best read orally by the students with the characters assigned as parts including the narrator. In this way, the students become part of the action and may develop a feeling of belonging.

The following classroom activities are designed to help the students visualize Fair Haven; they will become acquainted with its location within New Haven and the surrounding area. The activities provide for practice in geography related skills and may give students a sense of place. The mapping activities may be used after each of the topics in the unit’s content, after a fictional story or independently.

### **Activity I: Fair Haven, 1856**

Note: the shape of Fair Haven (define “peninsula”), the railroad lines, open spaces, and the relationship of Fair Haven to the rivers.

### **Activity II: Fair Haven and New Haven**

Note: the advantages of being near the harbor (trade, sailing, and fishing), New Haven as a transportation center (roads, harbor, airport, rivers), the cardinal and

intermediate directions, and reference a road map for finding where Routes 91 and 95 lead.

### **Activity III: Fair Haven's location within New Haven and area cities**

Note: color in water areas blue; trace over broken lines to illustrate boundary locations; print names of the cities on the lines.

### **Activity IV: Fair Haven Street Maze**

Note: an exercise in careful reading of directions.

Extended activities may be added to engage students in collecting oral histories of a family or other personal recollections; compiling lists of community institutions, businesses, and professional services; visiting local burial sites. As well, students should be encouraged to use the resources of the local historical society or preservation group. An ongoing activity could be the collecting of local newspaper articles which deal with the community.

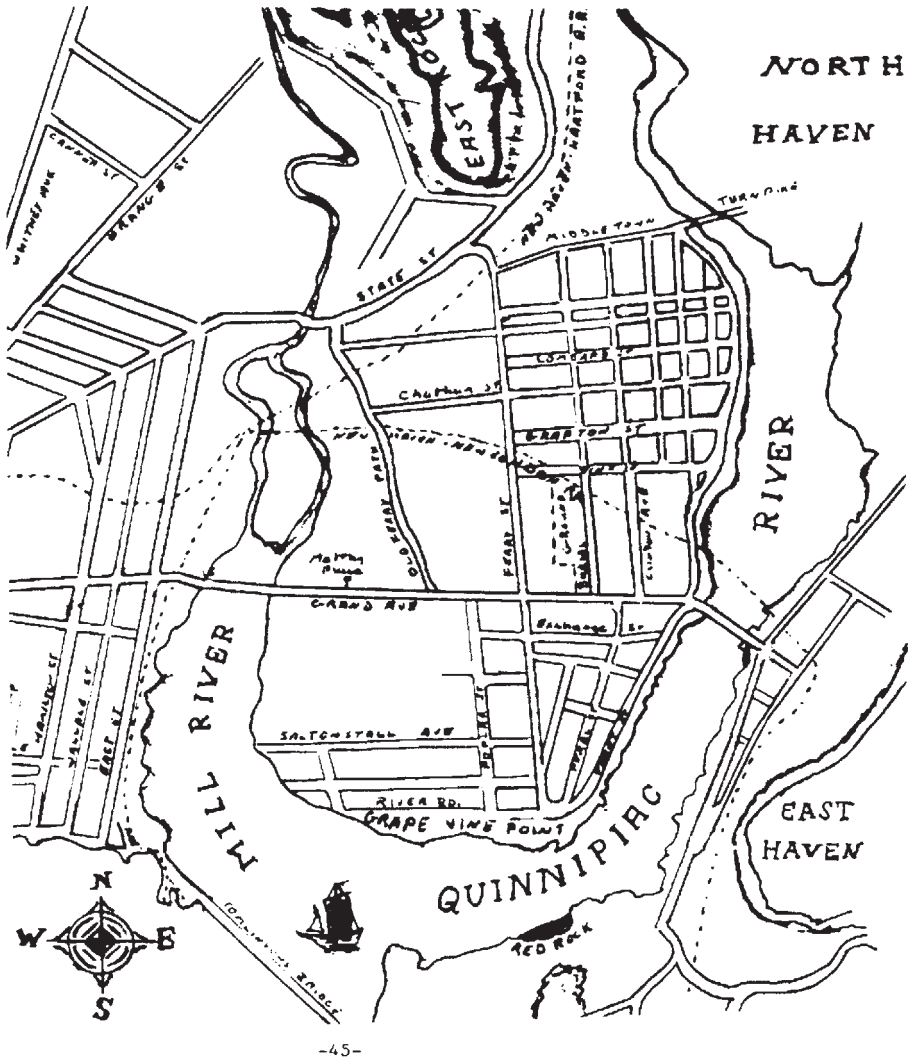
Upon completion of these activities, the students should then be exposed to Fair Haven's and New Haven's place in Connecticut, the state in the New England region, and so on. Regions are often blends of human and physical characteristics—communities within communities.

### **Activity I**

#### *Fair Haven Map, 1856*

1. Grand Avenue runs in an \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ direction.
2. Ferry Street runs in a \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ direction.
3. Exchange Street is \_\_\_ (direction) from Grand Avenue.
4. Along the Quinnipiac River, most of the streets are on the \_\_\_ (direction) side.
5. What street runs parallel to the Quinnipiac River?
6. Put an "X" where the school should be located.
7. Shade in an island on the map.
8. Put an "T" where the railroads intersect.
9. Outline a peninsula on the map.
10. Put an "H" where your house is located and draw on your route to school.

Fair Haven 1856

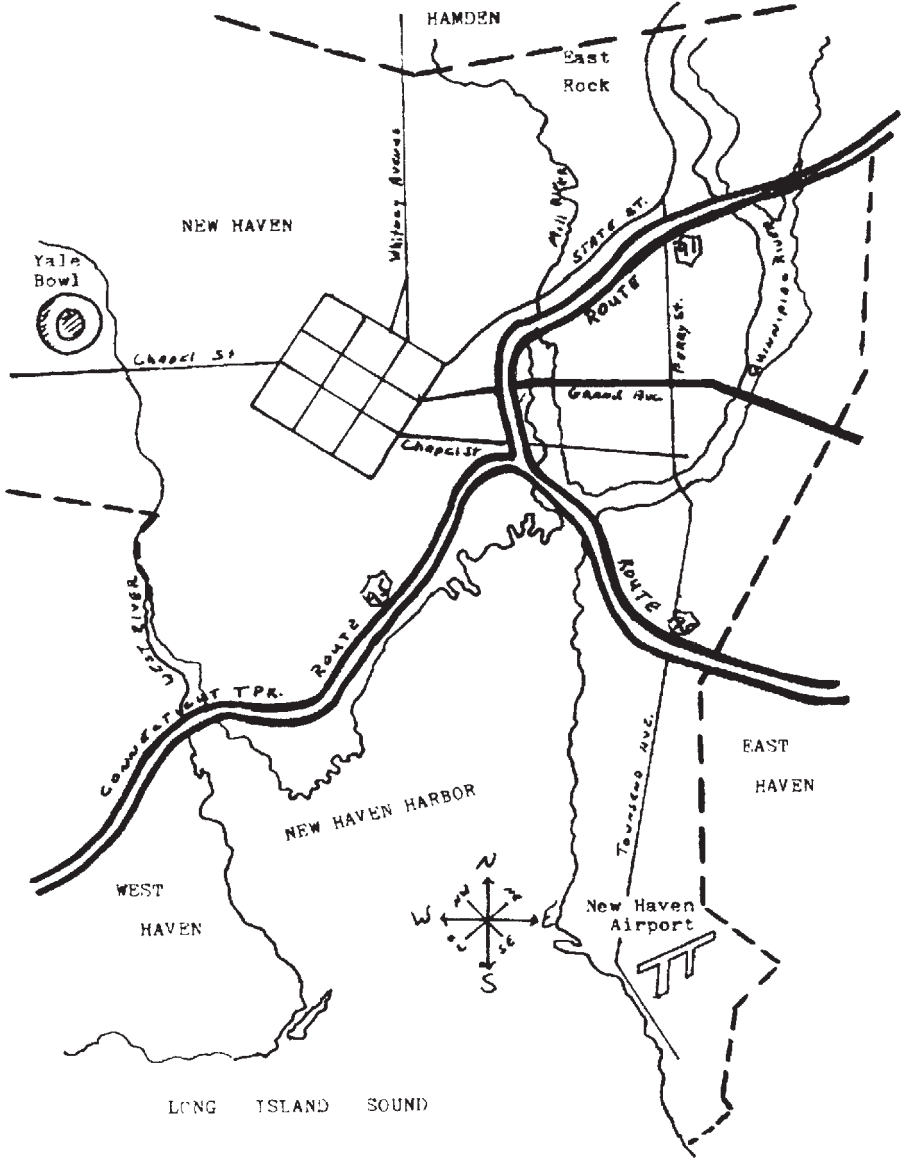


(1856 map drawn with modifications from New Haven county map, published by H. & C. T. Smith, Philadelphia.)

**Activity II: Fair Haven and New Haven***Learning Your Way Around*

1. Name the three cities on the map that the Connecticut Turnpike (Route 95) goes through: \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_.
2. Downtown New Haven is shown by \_\_\_\_ squares on the map.
3. New Haven is bordered by what city on the east?
4. New Haven Harbor is part of what larger body of water?
5. Name three rivers that appear on the map: \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_.
6. What is the largest river in New Haven? \_\_\_\_.
7. New Haven Harbor borders New Haven and \_\_\_\_.
8. Grand Avenue crosses two rivers, the \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_.
9. The city of Hamden is located \_\_\_\_ (direction) of New Haven.
10. Route 91 goes in a \_\_\_\_ direction after \_\_\_\_ crossing the Mill River.
11. The airport is \_\_\_\_ (direction) from Yale Bowl.
12. East Rock is \_\_\_\_ (direction) from Yale Bowl.
13. The best route to East Rock from downtown New Haven is on \_\_\_\_ Street.
14. Fair Haven is bordered by what two rivers?
15. The fastest route to West Haven from East Haven would be on Route \_\_\_\_.
16. From Ferry Street, the best route to downtown is on \_\_\_\_.
17. From Fair Haven, you would travel along \_\_\_\_ Street to get to the Yale Bowl.
18. Crossing the Ferry Street bridge, you can get to the airport along \_\_\_\_ Avenue.
19. From Fair Haven, you could take \_\_\_\_ Street to get into Hamden.
20. Chapel Street ends at the \_\_\_\_ River.

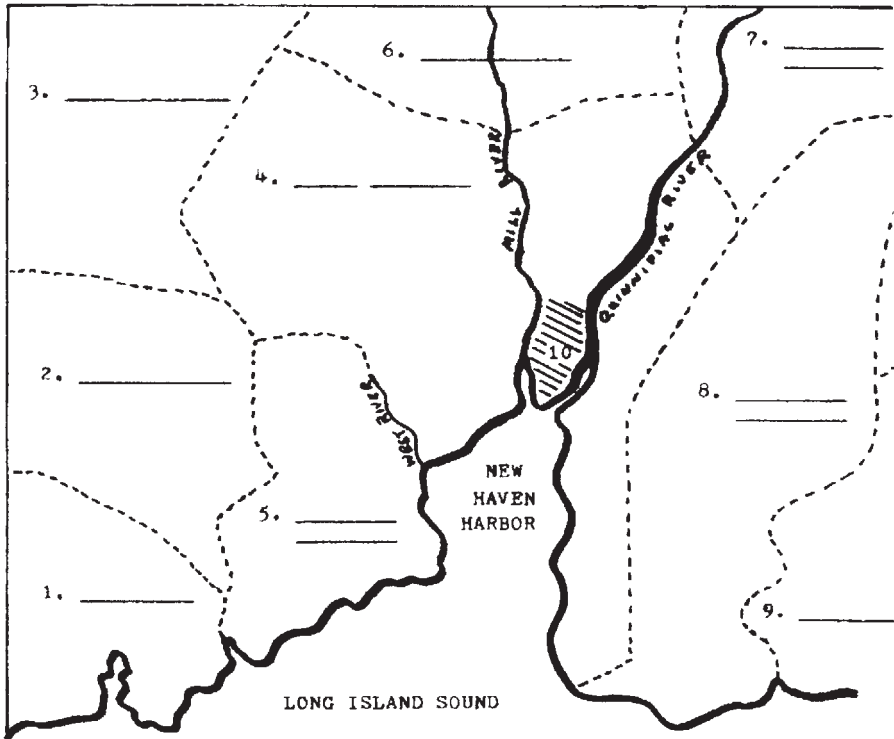
Fair Haven and New Haven



### Activity III

#### *Fair Haven's Location Within New Haven and Area Cities*

Print the city's name on the line.



1. Milford
2. Orange
3. Woodbridge
4. New Haven
5. West Haven
6. Hamden
7. North Haven
8. East Haven
9. Branford
10. Fair Haven

Can you spell the cities' names?



*Fair Haven's Location Within New Haven and Area Cities*

1. Name five shoreline cities that appear on the map.
2. New Haven Harbor is part of \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Sound.
3. What city is west of Branford?
4. What river forms part of the border of two cities?
5. Name the largest river in the area.
6. New Haven is bordered by how many cities?
7. Mill River flows south into New Haven from what city?
8. What direction is the Harbor from Fair Haven?
9. Orange is what direction from West Haven?
10. Fair Haven is what direction from the Quinnipiac River?

Supply the missing letters:

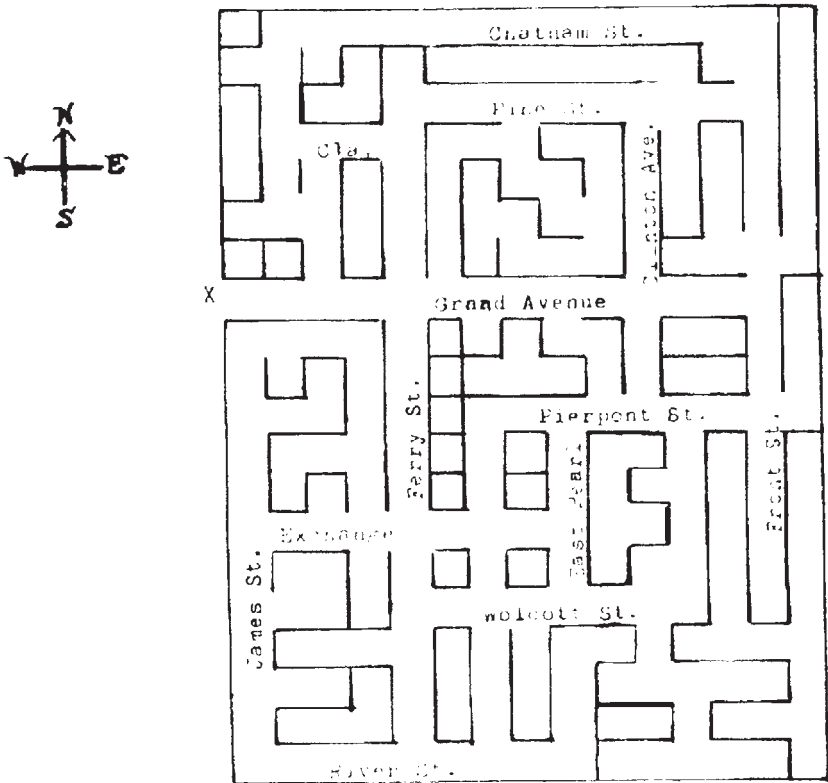
1. \_RAN\_O\_D
2. WO\_\_B\_\_DGE
3. H\_MD\_N
4. \_A\_R\_A\_E
5. \_U\_N\_\_I\_C

**Activity IV: Fair Haven Street Maze**

Draw your route on the map by following the directions.

1. Start at X and go East on Grand Avenue for 5 blocks.
2. Turn South onto Ferry Street and go 8 blocks.
3. Travel on Wolcott Street for 2 blocks.
4. Go South to River Street, and West to James Street.
5. Turn North for 6 blocks and then East to East Pearl Street.
6. Go North 3 blocks and East to Front Street.
7. Travel North to Pine Street.
8. Go West to the corner of Ferry and one block South to Clay Street.
9. Continue West on Clay to the end, go North 3 blocks and
10. You are on \_\_\_ Street.

Find the letters "F" and "H" in the maze and shade them in.



*Follow up questions for fictional stories:*

*The River and the Oyster*

1. What is this a story about?
  - A. State Boarding
  - B. Schooners
  - C. Change over time
  - D. Oystering
2. Which pair of boats were used for oystering?
  - A. Canoes and schooners
  - B. Sharpies and sloops
  - C. Sharpies and dugouts
  - D. Sharpies and schooners
3. Oysters are?
  - A. Found on East Pearl Street
  - B. Found on Long Island
  - C. Starfish
  - D. Shellfish
4. “Spats” are?
  - A. Baby oysters
  - B. The oyster’s enemy
  - C. Nickname for “Sharpies”
  - D. A skateboard trick
5. Along Front Street used to be found?
  - A. Steam boilers
  - B. Oystermen’s houses
  - C. The railroad
  - D. A park

*The Immigrants*

1. This story takes place
  - A. on Sunday afternoon.
  - B. on Saturday morning.
  - C. in 1902.
  - D. in 1852.
2. The word “steerage” means?
  - A. Kind of stove
  - B. Section of a boat
  - C. Place on Fair Haven
  - D. Type of factory work

3. Which of the following pairs does not belong?
  - A. Italian—Italy
  - B. Chinese—China
  - C. Irish—Ireland
  - D. Fair Haven—Connecticut
4. Choose the best reason why Michael does not talk to Cathy until the end of the story.
  - A. Michael probably doesn't understand much English.
  - B. Michael was told not to talk to strangers.
  - C. Michael is afraid of girls.
  - D. Michael probably is too tired from walking fast.
5. Which of the following is true?
  - A. Immigrant families had no relatives in America.
  - B. Immigrant families traveled by train to America.
  - C. Immigrant families sometimes had a relative living in America.
  - D. Immigrant families all came from Europe.

*Fair Haven Industry and Change*

1. The year of this story is
  - A. 1890
  - B. 1899
  - C. 1913
  - D. 1939
2. Which came first in time?
  - A. Erector Sets
  - B. New Haven's Tercentenary
  - C. Electric trolleys
  - D. American Flyer Trains
3. What is the difference between the Quinnipiac River and the Westville Section of New Haven?
  - A. About 1 hour
  - B. About 6 miles
  - C. Less than 4 miles
  - D. Not given
4. Which of the following would not describe A.C. Gilbert?
  - A. Inventor
  - B. Medical doctor
  - C. College graduate
  - D. Businessman

5. What is a negative effect of industry?
- A. Makes noise and pollution
  - B. Provides jobs
  - C. Brings change
  - D. Promotes progress

**Answers:**

*The River and the Oyster:* 1.C 2.C 3.D 4.A 5.B

*The Immigrants:* 1.C 2.B 3.D 4.A 5.C

*Fair Haven Industry and Change:* 1.D 2.C 3.B 4.B 5.A

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>D.B. Townsend, *Fair Haven*, pp. 1-66. The historical material is based on this rich narrative of Fair Haven.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 67-126.

<sup>3</sup>*The Completion of Independence in New Haven*, pp. 28-29 and 35-37.

<sup>4</sup>Added insight gained from conversations with Charlton Gilbert (A.C. Gilbert's grandson).

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Note: A general bibliography is provided without division because student readings are limited.

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