

The Parade – A TIMELINE

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The Parade – a large open area just above the shores of the Thames River has played a critical role in all of New London's economic and social activities throughout its history

1660 New London's highly lucrative trade with the West Indies began in 1660 and continued as a major economic activity through the early 1800s.

The Parade, just above a fine deep anchorage, provided an assembly place for the horses, mules, other cattle and goods being shipped to the West Indies, and especially to Barbados from New London. Returning ships brought rum, sugar and molasses – and the economy of the entire region radiated out from this site.

Ferries across the Thames were vital to the trade from the east side of the river (the early landing was at Winthrop's Neck) and all roads from the west led to the Parade creating the economic center for the region.

1691 A fort and battery was constructed at the eastern border of the Parade area

1732 An Episcopal Church was on the site of the Parade along with the original Court House. Other early buildings included the Jail & jail house, a magazine (next to the fort), and the town pump.

The Parade was a gathering place for soldiers marching off to fight in the Revolutionary War

East of the Fort a "strop" of sand extended in a northerly direction. It enclosed a narrow salt water pond which, when filled in and protected by a sea wall, became Water Street in 1733.

1781 The raging fire of September 8, 1781 cleared considerable space when much of New London was burned by the British – Benedict Arnold.

The city voted to lay out an area as highway reserving space from the corner of Bradley Street to Bank Street to be left open to form a public square or parade. The church property was purchased leaving a beautiful, open ground. (A plaque remains on the site and will be re-installed during the Parade project) (The Court House re-built at the upper end of State Street in 1784)

1786 The city reconsidered and decided to lease out a portion of this land for shops

1794 A Wharf was built at the end of the Parade for modern ferry service to Groton.

The Parade continues to be the center of life for the city – “a bustling place, day and night” as residents commuted to and from Groton and all the activity of the waterfront spread along the river from the Parade landing

War of 1812 and the embargo established by the British disrupted commerce and the port was nearly extinguished.

1805 Whaling began in New London and by 1819 the whaling industry was well underway.

1815 By 1815 steamships were making two trips a week from New York to New London. The Sound steamers were known as one of the wonders of America for their unsurpassed comfort, safety, speed. Traffic increased rapidly and by the time railroads arrived the well-established Steamboat, Ferry and commercial shipping connections created an economic boom for the city.

1845 Approximately the peak of the whaling industry

1850's The first rail road station was south of Ferry Landing when railroads arrived in 1850. Tracks ended there and until the first bridge was build, train cars were loaded on ferries for transport across the Thames.

1880's Six rail companies vied for service in New London. Hotels and restaurants around the Parade were filled with travelers.

1881 – Report from New London DAY

The view of the river from the Parade was unobscured in 1881. At the right facing east on the water front were two low wooden buildings containing oyster and fish markets conducted by G.M. Long & Co. and Hamilton Powers & Co. The Parade became as the city's public square, filled with a wonderful variety of public activities:

- A huge Liberty Pole in the center was surrounded by a wooden feed trough for oxen and horses
- Every town in the region had a Liberty Pole
- The Liberty Pole served as the city's public sign post, whereon, by ancient law, public documents had to be attached to complete required legal procedure
- A public scale was located on the east end of the Parade where loads of hay or coal or other material could be weighed.
- To the left of the Liberty Pole a circular iron water basin accommodated horses and cattle
- Public Hacks and express or delivery wagons had a place in the center of the Parade
- The Parade was used by itinerant vendors, mountebanks, Punch and Judy shows
- Peddlers had to pay a fee to the city for the privilege of plying their trade, and the Parade was one of the few sources of city revenue in those days that wasn't derived from direct taxation on property
- It was utilized almost nightly by street fakery - some of them were decidedly entertaining as singers
- Sleight of hand men had the art of coaxing dimes and quarters out of unwilling pockets finely developed

- Orators harangued the crowds here in political campaigns
- Evangelists exhorted lustily on many occasions

1886 The city commissioned Henry Hobson Richardson to build Union Station at the edge of the Parade area to be the centerpiece for the most modern transportation facilities.

Union Station The old railroad station had been destroyed by fire in 1883 and the two local railroads combined to purchase a site and erect a union station. They succeeded in acquiring the foot of the Parade, and erected the present structure, leaving a narrow passageway at the southern end to permit approach to the ferry across the railroad tracks. The price paid was \$15, 0000, a sum decidedly small, but the citizens no doubt were willing to accept any amount providing the new station would be erected that would be an improvement over the old one.

1889 First Railroad bridge across the Thames creating a direct link through New London from New York to Boston.

1892 Trolley lines begin operation
The Parade was the terminal for all trolley lines

1896 from the New London DAY

- As time went on, space on the Parade became too valuable to be given up to the old purposes.
- The feed troughs were used till the adoption of motor cars for transportation, when they gradually disappeared
- In **1896** Sebastian Lawrence presented the city with a handsome granite monument to commemorate the soldiers and sailors who had perished defending the nation in the Civil war, and with befitting ceremony this was located near the center of the square. This replaced the flagpole, the watering trough for animals and the big scales; so no encumbrances remained.

1901

- To make the place more attractive an oblong curbed park was laid out back of the monument in 1901, but the flowers planted there couldn't survive the blasting heat of automobile exhausts when cars backed up to the curb for parking.
- Then the parklet was obliterated and the space given over to parking cars.

20th Century

100 years of extraordinary change! More different ideas that you could believe have been developed by those who had various visions for the city.

From an outrageous early plan for rail road bridges over roof tops and tunnels beneath the street in the early 1900s ideas changed with the decades.

1928 Four Trolley lines operated in New London: The Ocean Beach Line; The Broad Street Line; The Jefferson Avenue Line; the Norwich Line ran all the way to Norwich and Willimantic

1967 Neptune Building demolished

1968 - 1969 Union Plaza constructed - concepts of a pedestrian mall emerged:

Ideas included:

- A waterfront section in the Parade reminiscent of famous piazzas
- Restore the seascape value to the heart of New London
- Uplifting the lower Parade
- Demolition of Union Station
- A terraced rock garden and seating at the foot of the Parade
- A major retail complex joined to State Street by a covered mall running through Union Plaza

1970s

- State Street was largely closed down to create Captain's Walk
- Union Plaza was developed on the Parade, eliminating the slope down to the river and creating an upper level open space with a pedestrian bridge connecting Union Plaza with the parking garage.

1973 Captain's Walk opened

1974 The Parade was up-graded to the space we are familiar with – but small trees in 1974 have become the large trees that helped to block view of the city and the river

1976 Halcyon Development had grand plans following the rehabilitation of Union Station.

- Develop a major residential community capitalizing on seafaring heritage
- Harbor as active yachting haven
- Develop food and entertainment market
- Develop the waterfront from Union Station south to Sparyard Street as a public activity area
- Union Station area a transportation center
- Captain's Walk mall continues
- Raised boardwalk along the rear of Bank Street overlooking the river
- Esplanade along the waterfront
- Concentrated development around Union Station

1976 – August Cross Sound Ferry moves its shipyard operation near the Coast Guard Academy to property north of Union Station.

1977 Eugene O'Neill Drive expanded from State to Tilley Streets

1988 Nathan Hale Schoolhouse moved to the Parade

1991 Captain's Walk was closed and traffic returned to State Street

1997 - 2000

- Major planning began to build a pedestrian bridge from the Water Street Parking Garage to Union Station and Cross Sound Ferry
- Planning at that time included various ideas for a re-design of the Parade and the whole area around the Parade

2000 Waterfront Park was built and OpSail 2000 was a major New London Celebration

2000 – 2009 Controversy continued

- **2005** - the bridge idea was rejected
- **2006** City Center District began planning a redesign of the Parade
- **April, May, 2006** Public Forums were held at Union Station to get community ideas

2007 - Wilbur Smith Associates was hired to turn concepts into reality

2008 – Ground breaking for new Parade



the Future Parade, by architect Sam Gardner