

ABOUT SKIPJACKS



Oysters to the north, west, and south



OYSTER BEDS AT LOW TIDE were hazards to navigation



OYSTER SPAT

While oysters still naturally produce in the wild, today Horn Point lab supplies over 600,000,000 young oysters each year.



Oyster Employment in 1880's

- 700 large sail powered dredge boats (Pungys, Brogans and Schooners) employing 5,600 men
- 1,900 smaller boats using hand scrapes employing 3,000 men
- 1,825 log canoes employing 5,145 tongers
- Well over 300 packing houses employing over 20,000 seasonal workers
- At least 3 freight cars full of shucked oysters left Cambridge every day
- "Fresh" oysters were shipped as far as Colorado
- 15 million bushels of oysters harvested
- Shell rarely returned to beds

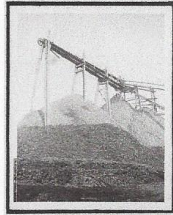
SHUCKING HOUSES

Shells have valuable commercial use



Oyster Shell

Used to pave roads, ground up for chicken grit, burned to make lime for cement. Prehistoric beds are still mined for shell today.



Shuckers ca. 1890

There were over 100 packing houses in Dorchester County. Today only 3 or 4 still exist. Oyster workers could earn a year's pay in 5 months



Hand Tonging ca. 1890

Shallow oyster beds were reserved for tongers. Larger dredge boats invaded tonger's beds

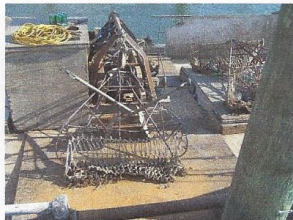


Hand winding a dredge 1890

Large boats depleted deep water oyster beds in 1880's.



Modern dredge and winders (engine powering winders are in the box)

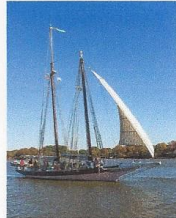


Oyster Dredge Schooner

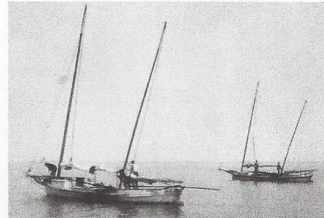
were used to dredge for oysters in deeper waters
Carried a crew of 8 to 10



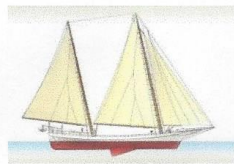
Oyster Dredge Pungy
Schooner rigged made from 5-7 carved logs for bottom heavy boats required a crew of 6-9



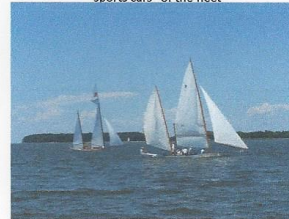
Lighter 5 log canoe for hand scrape dredge or tonging
(tongers shown here)



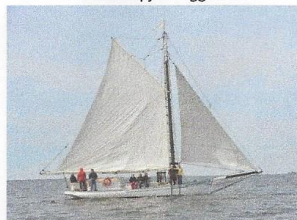
Bugeye or 3 sail bateau
7-9 log canoe used to dredge with a crew of 5 to 7



Tilghman Island Log Canoes
3 to 5 logs
Originally used to hand tong for oysters. Today, Log Canoes are the "sports cars" of the fleet



Oyster Dredge Sloop
fore and aft planked, soft chine, crew 5 to 7. later boats were skipjack rigged



Pressure on Oyster industry

- By the late 1880's, deeper water oyster beds were overharvested and depleted
- Dredgers invaded "forbidden ground," beds reserved for scrapers and tongers.
- Open warfare broke out: the Chesapeake Bay oyster wars.
- There was a growing need for new vessels to dredge shallower beds

Why Skipjacks?

- Cheaper to build than sloops or bugeyes
- Smaller crew, Simple rig, Self tending jib
- Mainsail attached by hoops, can be dropped quickly
- Severely raked mast requires less trim as sails are reefed to control speed when dredging
- Shallow draft and big sail area lets boat dredge in light winds

SKIPJACK

Shallow draft, lower cost replacement for deeper draft boats crew 3 to 5

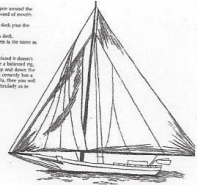


Skipjack Formula

The Skipjack Formula

This is something our forefathers did upon around the year of the century. The point is to make it simple. The mast is the length of the boat or find your own. The boom is the length of the boat or find your own. The skipjack is a simple formula for making the mast and boom.

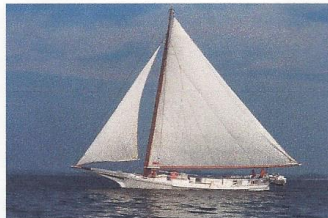
When you get all of these things combined to make a skipjack, you will find that the skipjack is a simple formula for making the mast and boom. The skipjack is a simple formula for making the mast and boom. The skipjack is a simple formula for making the mast and boom.



Skipjacks

- 600 to 800 built between 1880's and 1950's most built before 1920
- No agreement on origin of "Skipjack" name. Commonly known as "2 sail bateau" until late 1930's
- Size ranges from 30 to 70 ft. on deck
- Hard chine, shallow vee bottom, herringbone pattern bottom planking, simple sail plan.
- Built by eye without plans along Eastern Shore creeks using native pine and white oak

Raked mast, shallow draft, clipper bow, large sail, and push boat identify skipjacks



The Law

- Maryland watermen and packing house interests controlled Maryland legislature and changed laws to favor dredgers.
- 14 Eastern Shore senators represented 316,000 citizens. 13 Western Shore senators represented the remaining 873,000 Maryland citizens.
- Laws prohibited leased bottom (aquaculture) until recent times
- Maryland was last place in the world to legalize more efficient aquaculture on leased bottom

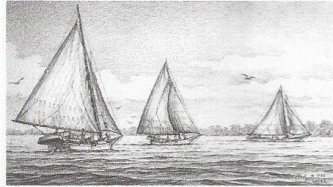
OYSTER REGULATIONS STILL PRESERVE THE SKIPJACK

- Skipjacks are the last sail powered commercial sailing vessels in the US fleet. A skipjack can harvest 125 bushels a day whether under power or under sail. (commercial Skipjacks rarely dredge under sail)
- Modern power dredge boats can harvest up to 25 bu. per day
- 4 or 5 Skipjacks still have dredge gear installed and actively dredge (to maintain family tradition)

Outbound using push boat power



The Fleet "Drudgin"
Over 100 sailing dredge boats once converged on a single active oyster bed. Today only a few boats work active beds



More than one skipjack is a rare sight these days



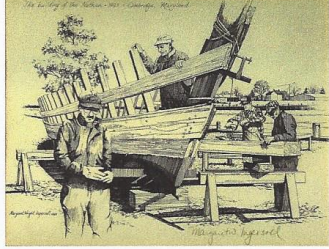
Nathan crew hauling a dredge (handscape)



Oysters and spat



SKIPJACK PRESERVATION
Nathan was last skipjack built in 20th century



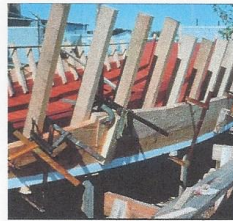
Nathan's Construction

- Local yellow pine and white oak timbers
- Old growth loblolly pine keelson, mast, and boom
- LOD 45 ft., LOA 63 ft.
- Mast height 61 feet. Boom 45 feet.
- Sail Area 1,500 sq. ft.
- Davits and Dredge from *Susan May* 1901, Windlass from *Clarence Crockett* 1908, Wheel and gear box from *Wilma Lee* 1940
- Stainless steel fittings were hand forged on site during construction
- *Nathan's* hull lines are similar to *Willie Bennett*

Built upside down, hull is tipped for remaining hull and deck work



Side planks are bent to oak frames



Long scarf joints provide strength



Deck beams and carlins are in place
log rail, cabins and deck go on next



Nathan is hauled out every summer for bottom maintenance and hull inspection



Some work is done dockside



Racing for "show up money" provides maintenance money to preserve the fleet. Nathan sponsors a skipjack race every September. There is also a Labor Day race at Deal Island.



Even well maintained wooden boats need repairs
This example replaces 10 feet of log rail and decking



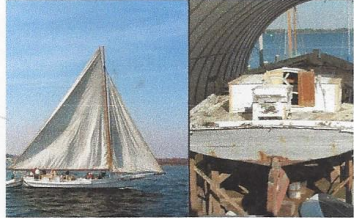
First and only bottom plank replaced in 26 years.
6 inch stainless steel ring nail fasteners are hidden behind the wooden plugs



Local old growth loblolly pine logs are being prepared to replace Nathan's 27 year old mast and boom.



Fate of Skipjacks
wooden workboats were built to last 20 to 25 years



Boats were abandoned when repairs became too extensive



Anna McGarvey being stabilized in Cambridge.
Now at Deal Island for extensive repairs



George W Collier at Deal Island
Oak frames are holding the boat together.
95% of the boat will have to be replaced



Too late for the *Flora Price!*
Towed to Cambridge for restoration, *Flora* sank 3 times.
Finally came up in pieces and was burned in 2014.



Some of the Skipjack Survivors



Dorchester Skipjack Committee

- Nonprofit volunteer organization built, owns, and operates Skipjack *Nathan of Dorchester*
- *"Preserves the Skipjack Nathan of Dorchester to promote Cambridge and Dorchester county's maritime history by offering educational on-the-water experiences on an authentic work boat"*
- We work to preserve maritime culture and remaining Skipjacks