

PENOBSCOT MARINE MUSEUM

Evolution of the Maine Lobsterboat

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As I have been researching the evolution of the Maine Lobsterboat in preparation of this summer's new exhibit, I have been drawing heavily from C. Richard K. Lunt's 1975 PhD Dissertation *Lobsterboat Building on the Eastern Coast of Maine: A Comparative Study*. We are lucky that in 2017 Professor Lunt donated this collection of notes, oral histories, and boat plans he compiled to write his dissertation. Take a peek at the [finding aid](#) to see an overview of the collection.

Lunt makes the argument in his dissertation that two colonial boats were the ancestor of the modern day lobsterboat: the fishing shallop and the wherry. In the 19th century, the shallop evolved into the Moosabec Reach Boat and the Friendship Sloop, while the wherry evolved into the peapod or double-ender. All these boats were powered by human strength, through the use of oars, or by the wind, through the use of sails. With the advent of motors at the turn of the 20th century, boatbuilders adapted the design of these boats to accommodate the heavy engines and maintain buoyancy and working room. Today's lobsterboats continue to evolve to accommodate the powerful engines, and, in some cases, get farther offshore to find the lobsters.

As we do more research, some of Lunt's 1975 arguments will be challenged and updated. I welcome feedback on this article to deepen our understanding and add more perspectives. Please email me at cgood@pmm-maine.org with your comments. Here are some images of the various type of lobsterboats in action.



The English ships bringing passengers and cargo to and from America had double-ended tenders and service boats. The double-ended boats were easy to sail or row through the water and were soon adopted by fishermen left at the American fishing stations and colonial outposts for near shore fishing. The Colonial wherry, although it had a wine-glass stem, was virtually a double ender below the waterline. National Fisherman Collection, LB2012.15.9394.

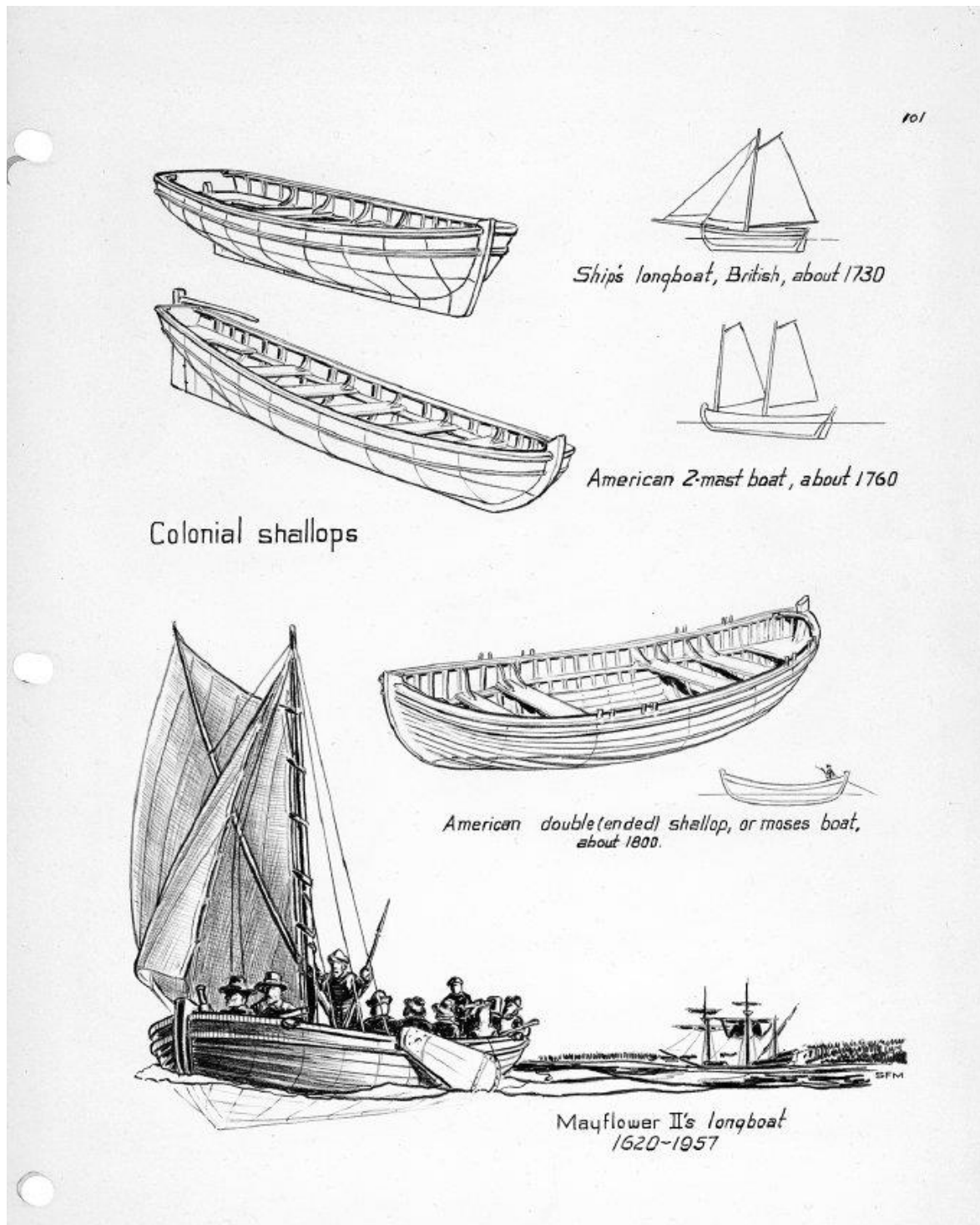


By the 1880s, the wherry had been adapted by fishermen in the Penobscot Bay region into the peapod or double-ender. Used in the general fishery for cod-lining, herring fishing, and lobstering, the double-ended design allowed fishermen to get into all the nooks and crannies of the ledges where lobsters like to hide, while still being able to row back out without having to turn the boat. The 15' boat could either be rowed or sailed with a spritsail, like the one seen in this picture. Coffin Collection, LB2013.21.435.



With the advent of motors, the peapod design needed to change. The heavy motor needed to be centered in the boat to maintain buoyancy and stability. However, this crowded the lobsterman's working space and created dangerous conditions. When the peapod was pushed over 8 knots, the stern would suck down. In 1915, boatbuilders came up with the solution to widen the stern to create more buoyancy aft so the motor could move there and free up space for the lobsterman. By decking over the stern, the lobstermen now had a platform for piling traps and gear, a feature still common on lobsterboats. Atlantic Fishermen Collection, LB1992.301.41

As I mentioned earlier, the other colonial boat type that evolved into the modern day lobsterboat was the shallop.



The Colonial shallop filled the gap between small rowing craft and an off-shore fishing and shipping craft. As you can see in Sam Manning's illustrations from the book [Ships Through History](#), it was undecked, with removable spritsails to be rowed when necessary. The shallop was either double-ended or had a wineglass stem that made it (like the wherry) double-ended under water. Samuel F. Manning Illustration Collection, LB2016.25.78.



By the 1820s near Hampton Beach, New Hampshire, the colonial shallop had evolved into the Hampton Boat. The Hampton had a long sharp bow and a flat, straight underbody near the stern that formed a double-wedge hull. The double-wedge hull is a feature still found in modern-day lobsterboats.

Atlantic Fisherman Collection, LB1995.72.100.

The Hampton was used instead of dories as the small fishing boats serving the motherships in the Newfoundland fisheries. When the mothership was ready to return to New Hampshire, the Hamptons were sold off in the Canadian Maritimes. By the 1840s, a Canadian version of the Hampton was trickling down into the coast of Maine as adaptations of the original New Hampshire version moved north. Both versions had a spoonbow, which has a nearly vertical stem profile that gently curves inward at the waterline. The spoonbow is still the standard for a Maine lobsterboat.



The Jonesporter Lobsterboat of today descends from a combination of design features of the Reach Boat and the peapod. The lobstermen of Jonesport and Beals Island still love to race each other in the afternoon after a morning of hard work, so they value a boat design that is fast. Fast motorboat displacement hulls have a low width to length ratio, with a flatter bottom that transforms a slow-speed displacement hull that planes at higher speeds.

Jonesporters have a skeg-keel, basically a shallow fin to support the propeller shaft and keep the boat running straight. The skeg-keel is easy to timber and plank, and most importantly for speed, lighter in weight.

Photo of GENEVIEVE working before it was donated to the Museum, 2000.5.1.

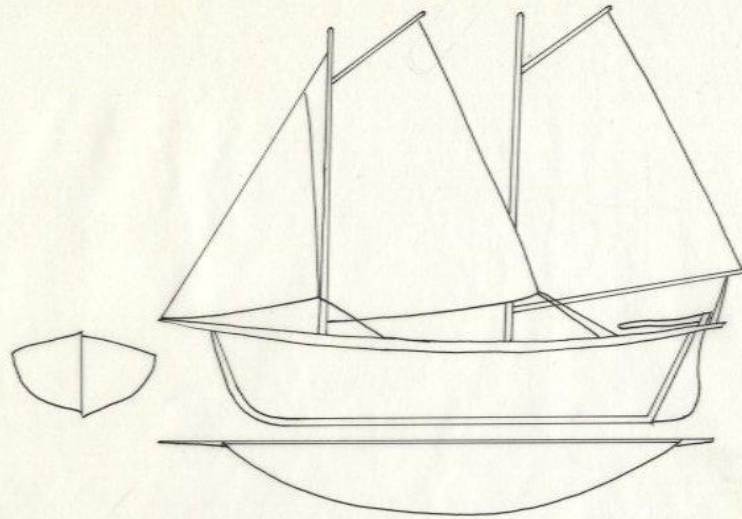


Fig. 1 Reach boat of Eastern Maine (1870-1890's)

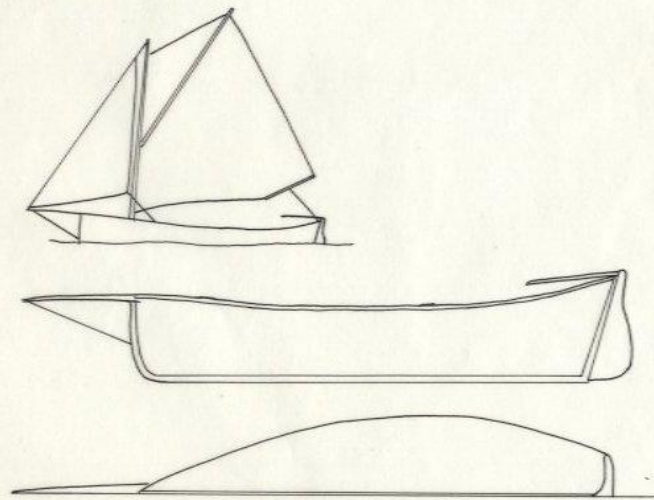


Fig. 2 Square Sterned Hampton of Western Maine (1870-1890's)

The Reach Boat (there is a debate as to whether the "Reach" was Moosabec or Eggemoggin) is the descendent of the Canadian version of the Hampton Boat. Beginning in the 1870s, Jonesport lobstermen built the Reach Boat over the winters, and by the 1880s, they performed the principle share of the lobster fishery on the Eastern coast of Maine. The boats had twin spritsails and an outboard rudder. One crewman hauled, baited, and serviced the traps while the other tended the sails. These swift, light, and able sailing boats were double-ended versus the New Hampshire version which was square-sterned, heavier, and slower. Sailing the Reach Boat was so much fun, that after a morning of lobstering, the lobstermen would spend the afternoon racing each other. The Reach Boat, in the advent of engines, was easily adapted to bearing the engine's weight by building stronger cross sections or scantlings. Richard Lunt Collection, PMM 42-41.



As the New Hampshire version of the Hampton Boat came up the coast, it evolved in the 1850s to the Muscongus Bay Sloop, a centerboard sailboat with permanent masts carrying a gaff-rigged mainsail and double jibs. The further evolution in the 1880s was the Friendship Sloop, with its washboards, foredeck, and cuddy cabin. The Friendship became the prime lobstering boat of the Maine coast west of Mount Desert Island. Adding a motor required boring a hole for the propeller shaft through the hull on one side of the deep solid oak keel and off-setting the motor. Paul Stubing watercolor painting of "Friendship sloop under sail off of Eagle Island c.1898-1902," 1996.31.



As opposed to the Jonesporter Lobsterboat builders, the boatbuilders of Mount Desert Island and the Western coast of Maine created a design that takes features from the pumpkinseed and Friendship Sloop. The racing craze did not reach the fishermen of Mount Desert Island who worked hard on the water while the wealthy summer folk raced for pleasure; strength and beauty were the priority. This resulted in built-down hulls that formed a graceful curve from hull to keel that required heavier, wider ribs, thicker stock for keels, more planking, and thick floor timbers. As opposed to the Jonesporter with a sheer (curve from bow to stern along the top rail) that creates a flat stern section, a Mount Desert Island boat has more curve to its sheer. Another curve to these boats, is the stern profile, which has a tumblehome or slight curve inward along the upper corners.
Atlantic Fisherman Collection, LB1992.301.265.

Again, I am grateful to Professor Lunt for donating his dissertation research to the Museum. This wealth of information is invaluable as we research content for our upcoming exhibit *Powering Up: The Evolution of the Maine Lobsterboat*. We hope to see you this summer to view and learn from the small boats, models, boat plans, and photographs we have assembled to tell the story of the Maine lobsterboat from colonial times to the present.