

The Fair-Haven Sharpie

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A hardy breed of men fished New England waters in those days. The craft they sailed were equally hardy, for commercial fishing in New England in the days of sail gave rise to a wide variety of small sailing craft, distinctive, able, and sturdy, to serve those who made their living exploiting the rich fisheries.

John M. Leavens

A good boat doesn't come about overnight. It is seldom, if ever, the brain child of just one man, and it might take decades of experimentation and change to evolve a boat that is able in any weather or sea.

Thomas H. Baldwin III

Light boats sail swift, though greater  
hulks draw deep.

Shakespeare  
Troilus and Cressida, Act I, Sc. 3  
Line 165

## The Fair-Haven Sharpie

The Fair-Haven or New Haven sharpie was one of more than 200 small boat designs employed by American fishermen during the last sixty years of the 19th century<sup>1</sup>. The place that it occupied within the oyster industry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was an important one as it was used in almost every eastern oyster fishery from Cape Cod to Florida. It was the functionalism of the sharpie- its ability as a work-boat coupled with that graceful simplicity that characterized so many designs of the period- that made it one of the few American designs to gain a wide regional, and global acceptance. The directions that small boat design took during these years may be distinguished into three distinct schools: European, modified European, and native American or original design- all facets and expressions of regional, cultural, and traditional tastes.

The European designs adopted in America are exemplified by the Friendship Sloop, the Cape Cod Catboat, and the flat-iron skiff. All three designs evolved from a distinct European form, yet all must be considered modified European due to the changes that make them distinct types and not simple copies. Small boat researchers have debated the existence of a purely European design in late 19th century America, pointing to the

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1. Howard I. Chapelle, "The Migrations of an American Boat Type", United States National Museum, Paper 25, pages 133-154 from, Contributions From the Museum of History and Technology (U.S. Govt., 1961), p.135.

countless regional modifications that each fishery demanded. European designs were introduced by the earliest settlers and remained in use up to the 1830's when improved shipping forced the fishermen of America to shift from a subsistence level of fishing to large scale production.

This shift in the industry saw the introduction of the Grand Banks Schooner and the gradual consolidation of family operations into town cooperatives. Yet up until this change in economic attitudes, American fishermen were content to use the same designs that were brought over in the 17th century.

Knowing of the traditional conservatism of fishermen around the world there can be little doubt that the settlers constructed locally the type of boat that they had employed at home. Once this type was established on the western side of the Atlantic, this same conservatism would have retained it for a considerable period. Local conditions of use-wind and sea conditions, location of fishing grounds, and the species of fish caught- plus the inevitable effects of whim and fashion were responsible for changes in type.<sup>2</sup>

European influence is manifested by the reluctance of early shipbuilders to employ modification in such designs as the chebacco and sloop. Rigs such as the sloop and schooner were direct carryovers from European designs, designs used by the settlers forefathers- the retention of which paralleled the early settlers desire to impart some Old World order and tradition to the new frontier.

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2. William A. Baker, Sloops and Shallops (Barre: Barre Publishing co., 1966) p.27.

Modified European designs such as the Friendship Sloop, are the result of specific regional needs. Weather conditions, and particularly water depth set the criteria for modifications. The Friendship Sloop was the result of Maine fishermen coming to the realization that their classic Muscongus Bay Boats- 26 foot long, centerboard sloops- were simply too sluggish and unseaworthy for the deepwater conditions along that coast. The fishermen discarded the incongruous centerboard for the more stable deep keel and began to search for a deep hulled design that would have an increased cargo capacity while at the same time demanding less of the fisherman's attention during net setting. The Friendship Sloop is not, as Maine tradition would have, a modified Portugese shallop, but instead a scaled down version of the Essex Sloop.<sup>3</sup> This design was a 45 foot long descendant of the Galway Hooker, an Irish fishing smack introduced to the Boston area in 1830 by Irish immigrants. The fishermen of Maine adopted the Essex built version of this craft, preferring that design over the Boston version because of personal whim. The Friendship Sloop is simply a miniature version of the Essex Sloop, a version that cost only \$780.00 to build in 1899.<sup>4</sup>

It was the Maine coast's deep water and rocky bottom

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3. Howard I. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft (New York: Kennedy Bros., 1936) p.27.

4. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.42.

that persuaded the fishermen to switch from a shoal draft centerboard design to the more stable deep keel. The bulbous midsection of the craft dramatically increased cargo capacity, and it was because of this midsection- a difficult and time consuming aspect of construction- builders were forced to economize on deck fittings and fastenings, usually using iron instead of bronze.<sup>5</sup>

The Cape Cod Cat boat is an example of an European design modified to fit not only the rigorous demands of Nantucket Sound, but the requirements imposed by the user's livelihood. While H. Manley Crosby (Son of Horace Crosby, the man who introduced the catboat to Cape Cod.) claims that the boat is a direct descendant of a Dutch design, such noted historians as Howard Chappelle maintain that the Cape Cod Cat was the final step of a coastal progression that began in New York City during the 1840's<sup>6</sup> The New York cat was a small, lowsided design that could only be sailed in calm water. Built by a famous builder of the time, Thomas Fish, these cats gained some notice in England where the design was named after a Fish built craft imported there in 1845- the Una.<sup>7</sup> As the New York cat became popular up the coast of Long Island Sound, Connecticut builders

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5. Chappelle, American Sailing Craft, p.41.

6. Chappelle, American Sailing Craft, p.47  
John M. Leavens, "Nine Lives of a Yankee Catboat", Yankee Magazine; contained in Yankees Under Sail (Dublin, N.H.: Yankee, 1968) p.60.

7. Leavens, p.61.

began to adapt the boats to the choppy sea conditions that are common place from New Haven northwards. The Newport, Rhode Island version was noted for its ability in the rough waters off of Point Judith, a treacherous area due to it's exposed position on the Atlantic.<sup>8</sup> Crosby brought the design to Osterville, Massachusetts in 1861, where it was ridiculed for its strange appearance. Chapelle and C.P. Kunhardt claim that the hull form the Cape Codders found so strange was in fact a distant descendant of early Dutch canal barges, a design noted for it's beam, and large, blunt bows.<sup>9</sup> Crosby moved the mast forward in an effort to enhance the handling and quickness of the squat hull. Manuel Swartz Roberts, "The Old Sculpin" of Edgartown described the rig as follows. "From the center of the stem to the center of the mast was sixteen inches. That shows how far forward the mast can go in a cat."<sup>10</sup>

The extremely shallow draft of the catboat- as little as seven inches with the centerboard pulled up- coupled with it's wide beam made it perfect for the shallow choppy waters of Nantucket Sound (The deepest part of Nantucket sound(80 ft, at low tide) is only  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile from the shallowest-six inches at low water.). After stories of it's remarkable exploits in

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8. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.48.

9. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.47.

10. Leavens, p.61.

all kinds of weather spread, shellfish and net fishermen quickly adopted the catboat, and by the 1870's the design was proudly known as the Cape Cod Catboat.<sup>11</sup>

The factors that force change into a design are numerous but can be summed up as being the result of enviromental demands, availability of building materials, economic status of the fisherman, and most importantly the aesthetic whims of the region and culture.

The demands imposed by a specific region's weather and geography are extremely important in considerations such as rig and hull design. Kunhardt emphasizes that the only place for a centerboard are areas with extremely shallow water. He adds that centerboards give a boat much more delicacy than a keel, and therefore better handling characteristics. but where- as a keel boat is almost immune to capsizing, a centerboard craft is almost sure to tip-over at least once a season.<sup>12</sup> Areas known for high winds and rough seas are perfect for deep hulled keels as they stabilize the boat and give it more momentum against oncoming seas. Rigs must be designed with

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11. Leavens quotes H. Manley Crosby on pg.63 of his article on the Cape Cod Cat. Crosby related an incident in which he rode out a storm in a cat of his own design.

"The whole gale made it impossible to carry sail and as night came on we anchored in mortal terror of the wildly tossing waters about us. Dawn however, found Mblem still riding safely to her anchor, but the breaking seas had washed the varnish off the sides of the cabin trunk and cockpit combing."

12. C.P. Kunhardt, Small Yachts: Their Design and Construction, Exemplified by the Ruling Types of Modern Practice (New York: Field and Stream pub. co., 1891) p.107.



simplicity in mind as most fishermen worked alone and were usually too busy with the tending of nets or hooks to worry over the trimming of sails. Self-tacking rigs, and easy reefing systems could prove invaluable in rough weather. Chapelle emphasizes the importance of simplicity in a boats rig by asking the reader to "...Imagine what it must have been like to beat home against a shrieking winter nor'wester in a small sloop. The deep reefs were put in the mainsail for a real purpose, not for the sake of appearance."

The factor that influenced most fishermen in adopting a design during the latter half of the 19th century was invariably cost. Deep-hulled boats are much harder to construct and repair than flat-bottomed craft, therefore those boats usually sacrificed quality in construction in an effort to reduce cost.<sup>13</sup> Flat-bottomed boats do not require any special techniques other than steam bending, and if the bottom should become holed, or rotten, new planks can be used as quick beachside replacements. Flat-bottomed boats are easy to haul out of the water for painting and maintenance, but are useless for deep water conditions.<sup>14</sup> Therefore it can be assumed that the pros and cons of an individual design were left wholly up to the needs and means of the individual fisherman. The depression of 1880 saw fishermen change from complex hull designs to more simple forms,

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13. Chapelle, *American Sailing Craft*, p.41.

14. Eric Ball in an interview on November 29, 1977

thus supporting the effect the economic picture can have on boat preferences.

Native American design or original design can be viewed as that facet of small boat design that incorporates Indian, or totally original designs that stem from a specific job's demands. The Gloucester or Cape Ann Dory is a classic example of Yankee ingenuity in small skiff design. Although these cheap (\$14.00 in 1902) boats were designed for mass production and utility rather than form or speed, the design became one of the best known and successful ones ever to be created in America. The remarkable seaworthiness of these small boats, their capacity of two tons of wet fish, and the fact that a small boy can stand on one gunwale or side without capsizing it, is in itself a testimony to the Lowell family of Amesbury, Massachusetts.<sup>15</sup> The Lowells first produced the dory during the Revolutionary War as a rowing and fishing skiff, yet their strange appearance and flat sides were too radical for the fishermen of the region to accept.<sup>16</sup> It was the advent of the Grand Banks Schooner and the subsequent necessity for a small boat capable for deep-sea fishing that allowed the dory to come into its own. The added bonus of strict production techniques allowed the dories to be stacked within each other, thus saving valuable deck space for other activities.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Samuel T. Williamson, "The Dutiful Dory", Yankee Magazine, contained in Yankees Under Sail, p.244.

16. Williamson, p.244.

17. Williamson, p.246.

Indian influences on design are exemplified by the New Haven Dugout, a large canoe used for small scale fishing and oystering. This design is believed to have originated in the northern lake region of New York, where Iroquois indian's fashioned them out of immense pine logs. New Haven shipbuilders used logs from inland Connecticut and New York, fashioning canoes that ranged from 28 to 35 feet in length. These canoes were only 15 to 20 inches deep, and were believed to have been able to float in as little as three to four inches of water. They were rigged with leg-of-mutton sails, and fitted with a single lee-board that could be shifted from side to side on every tack. Production of these canoes ceased in 1879, but some remained in use well into this century.<sup>18</sup>

The Fair-Haven or New Haven sharpie is a member of the flat-iron skiff class.<sup>19</sup> In their final Fair-Haven version they ranged from 28 to 45 feet in length. Like the canoe they were extremely narrow with only a 3 to 7 foot beam or width. (For a complete list of proportions, C.P. Kunhardt gives a concise table of specifications in his pioneering study of small boats.<sup>20</sup>)

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18. Henry Hall, Special Agent, 10th U.S. Census, Report on the Shipbuilding Industry of the United States (Washington:1880-1885) pp.29-32.

19. The flat-iron skiff was so named because of its curved sides that were joined together by a pointed bow and a square stern. This shape resembles an old flat-iron when viewed from the bottom. Also in this class is the punt and scow, both blunt, rectangular shaped hulls, the former having curved sides and curved ends, the latter with square sides and ends that angled inwards from the beak to the bottom.

20. Kunhardt, p.288.

The boats were flat-bottomed and had a large centerboard trunk than ran along the middle third of the keelson or centerline. They were usually rigged with a single mast in the smaller versions, but all versions were built with three mast steps.

The sharpies were extremely heavy in construction, and consequently very durable. Kunhardt estimated the weight of a 35 foot sharpie to be between 2,000 and 2,500 pounds.<sup>21</sup> The sides of the boat were usually made from a single white pine plank with oak framing. Spars were spruce, although some fir was employed in the smaller models. Fastenings were cheap iron, giving the sharpie an annoying tendency to spring planks due to the nails rusting away.

Construction was simple and a son of Lester Rowe, the foremost builder of sharpies, told Chapelle "that it was not uncommon for his father and two helpers to build a sharpie, hull and spars, in six working days, and that one year his father and two helpers built 31 sharpies."<sup>22</sup> The boat was built bottom up with the sides usually constructed out of single planks. Eric Ball, expert on the New Haven oyster fishery thinks that as large planks became unavailable,

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21. Kunhardt, p.295.

"From 150 to 175 bushels of oysters can be carried in a boat of above size (35 ft.) and she will sustain 5 tons weight. The weight of her hull is 2,000 to 2,500 lbs., and it takes ten good men to end her up. The cost of one of these boats, with working sails, is about \$250."

22. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.147.

two planks were joined together by oak cleats.<sup>23</sup> These two planks were beveled and fastened to the stem, and then bent around a rough template by a spanish windlass.<sup>24</sup> The bottom was crossplanked and reinforced by a three plank lamination that formed the keelson. The middle strip of the keelson was omitted amidships for a centerboard slot, and the trunk for the centerboard used the keelson as a firm base, taking it's weight off of the bottom planking.

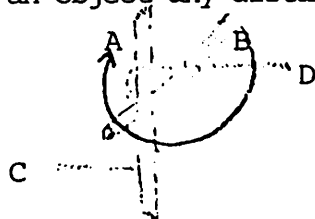
The stern was square in the first versions, but later a rounded transom was offered for an additional \$15.00. Chapelle states that "...the round stern was favored because tonging (the method used in that time for harvesting clams) from it was easier; also when the boat was tacked, the round stern did not foul the mainsheet..."<sup>25</sup> Eric Ball related an incident when he poled a sharpie down the Quinnipiac River, stern first at night. The sharpie he was in had a square stern and he said

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23. Eric Ball on 11/29/77

24. A spanish windlass is a device used for exerting power. Cyrus Day in The Art of Knotting and Splicing (Annapolis:Naval Institute Press, 3rd ed., 1970) p.144.-describes a typical example.

"One end of the rope (C) is tied to the object that is to be moved, the other end (D) to a fixed anchorage, such as a tree. The bar (B) is then rotated round the upright (A). This device can be used to loosen or start an object that is stuck, but not to pull an object any distance."



25. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.141.

it was constantly fouling mooring stakes in the dark.<sup>26</sup>

The deck covered approximately one-third of the boat, leaving a large open cockpit.<sup>27</sup> 1½ inch thick pine planks were used in a fore and aft arrangement and these were sometimes covered with painted canvas. The cockpit extended from the front of the centerboard trunk to about four feet forwards of the stern, and it was surrounded by a low combing, or splash guard.<sup>28</sup> Some sharpies had a small hatch on the foredeck along with two mastholes, one at the stem or prow, the other at the head of the centerboard trunk. Another step was fashioned out of a steel hoop fastened to the aftermost part of the centerboard trunk with a separate heel fastened to the keelson.

The capacity of the sharpie was 75 to 100 bushels of oysters in the 26 to 28 foot model, and 150 to 175 in the 35 foot version.<sup>29</sup> Kunhardt states that the total capacity of the 35 foot type was five short tons, and that when empty the fore and aft camber of the bottom was such that the stem and rudder post rose a few inches out of the water.<sup>30</sup>

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26. Eric Ball on 11/29/77

27. The cockpit of a boat is simply that open space in the deck which either opens up into the interior of the hull, or is a self-contained, self-bailing space in which the sailor and crew may sit.

28. A combing is a thin (5/8") strip of oak or spruce that is fastened along the inside of the combing to the deck. It deflects any waves that may sweep over the foredeck of the boat over the side. The Fair-Haven sharpie had a rounded combing, although the Chesapeake and other versions sometimes used the cheaper "V" style.

29. Kunhardt, p. 295.

30. Kunhardt, p. 294.

The hull design is an exceedingly simple one, with straight sides and of course a flat bottom. Mr. Ball claims that the later version of the sharpie which featured sides that sloped out and upwards from the bottom was not a New Haven innovation, but rather one initiated by Guilford oystermen who found that the change allowed the tongs to be pulled up from the beds without hitting the sides.<sup>31</sup> A profile view of Fair-Haven sharpie shows the bottom sloping upwards from amidships to the stern and bow, in a graceful curve. The deck is pretty much horizontal from the stern to the head of the centerboard trunk where it begins to slope upwards.<sup>32</sup> The lack of curves in the hull is made up for in appearance by the graceful sloping of the deck and the rakish appearance of the vertical bow. It is this stilleto shape that gives the sharpie it's name, one that has caused all boats of a similiar design to go by the same.<sup>33</sup>

The centerboard is justified by the shoal waters of New Haven harbor. Like the dugout, the sharpie only draws a few inches of water with it's board up, thus enabling the oystermen to work on beds close to the surface. The only drawback of this shoal design is that it pounds up and down in any head sea, an irritating tendency that could stop the boat completely.<sup>34</sup>

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31. Eric Ball on 11/29/77

32. Amidships is the exact center of a boat's overall length.

33. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1956) defines the sharpie as "A long, sharp, flat-bottomed boat, with one or two masts each carrying a triangular sail."

34. Eric Ball on 11/29/77

The leg-of-mutton rig used in the Fair-Haven sharpie was a simple one that economized on spars and reduced weight aloft. A design's stability depends entirely on how low the craft's center of gravity is.<sup>35</sup> In a keel boat, the large amount of mass beneath the surface drops the boat's center of gravity below the water's surface- however in a flatbottomed design that can float in only a few inches of water- the center of gravity is a few inches above the surface. This necessitates the use of movable ballast (Crew members or sandbags) and gives the centerboard design its unnerving tendency to capsize. Light spars become valuable in reducing the amount of force exerted by the boat as it begins to heel or tip in a wind.

The leg-of-mutton rig consists of a revolving mast, a thin sprit, and a large loose footed mainsail.<sup>36</sup> The mast of the Fair-Haven sharpie was five inches wide at the deck, tapering off to 1½ at the head or top. The sails were raised by a single block or pulley at the mast head and were attached to the mast by metal or wooden mast hoops. The mast revolved in its step in order to prevent the sprit from binding on every tack. Thus the butt or bottom of the mast and the step's socket were both covered with sheet metal.<sup>37</sup>

Sidestays were omitted on the sharpie, thus giving the boat more stability in a heavy wind. On every puff the

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35. For a more detailed explanation of the physics involved in small boat stability, refer to Kunhardt, p.64.

36. A sprit is a thin pole used instead of a gaff or boom. These were used in rigs that had a loose-footed, or free bottomed sail.

37. Chappelle, American Sailing Craft, p.12.



tapered masts would flex, spilling wind from the sails and reducing the boat's tendency to head into the wind.<sup>38</sup> During the winter and early spring the oystermen would leave the foremast ashore, stepping the mainsail forward of the centerboard trunk. This allowed them to concentrate more on tonging and staying dry than simply trying to stay afloat. The light weight of the sprit removed any danger of spars snapping during a gybe, thus making the sails almost self-tending under a good helmsman.

The origins of the Fair-Haven sharpie have been the subject of some debate ever since the design began to catch the public's eye. Kunhardt guesses that the sharpie was a direct descendant of the dugout canoe, and was the result of a gradual decline in the lumber supply in the immediate New Haven region.<sup>40</sup> Chapelle disproves this theory by referring to a debate that took place in the pages of *Forest and Stream* magazine during January of 1879- a time in which the dugout was still in strong use.

The claims of the "invention" of a boat type are usually without the support of contemporary testimony. In the case of the New Haven sharpie two claims were made, both of which appeared in the sporting magazine Forest and Stream. (cont.)

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38. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.140.

39. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.136.  
Kunhardt, p.294.  
Eric Ball on 11/29/77

40. Kunhardt

(cont.) The first of these claims, undated, attributed the invention to a boat carpenter named Taylor, a native of Vermont. (41) In the January 30, 1879 issue of Forest and Stream there appeared a letter from Mr. M. Goodsell stating that the boat built by Mr. Taylor, which was named Trotter, was not the first sharpie. (42) Mr. Goodsell claimed that he and his brother had built the first New Haven sharpie in 1848, and that, because of her speed, she had been named Telegraph.<sup>43</sup>

Goodsell's design quickly spread to Long Island where Thomas Clapham of Roslyn, New York began constructing a version with a dramatic increase in deadrise.<sup>44</sup> By angling the bottom into a cambered prow- one that carved through the waves rather than over them- his modification reduced the New Haven sharpie's tendency to pound in a headsea. This type was known as the nonpariel or Roslyn type- one which never attained much popularity in the New Haven fishery.<sup>45</sup> Clapham's design preceded the V-bottom or Skipjack type- one that became popular in the Chesapeake Bay region. The skipjack is still used by Maryland oystermen due to a state law that forbids the use of power vessels in clamming. Chappelle explains that Clapham's design was the first real modification to be built into the sharpie design, one that proved very popular

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41. Forest and Stream, January 23, 1879, vol. 11, no.25, p.504.

42. Forest and Stream, January 30, 1879, vol. 11, no.26, p.500.

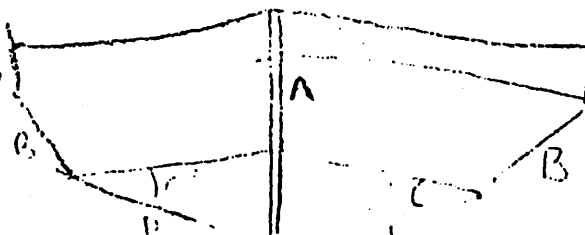
43. Chappelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.136.

44. Deadrise is basically the angle the chines of a boat's bottom makes in flowing into the stem or bow of the boat.

a=stem, b=chines

c= angle of deadrise.

45. Eric Ball on 11/29/77



amongst the designers of cruising and racing sharpies in the 1890's.<sup>46,47</sup>

In the 1890's Larry Huntington, also of Long Island, began experimenting with the Fair-Haven type; rounding the bottom athwartships, while preserving the flat sides and chines of the Fair-Haven type. C.G. Davis considered Huntington's design to be a true sharpie save for the slight arc in the bottom- or that dide to side curve one would perceive in the boat's bottom by looking at it from the bow, facing towards the stern.<sup>48</sup> The change in design dramatically increased the sharpie's speed in light wind, and it was after Huntington's racing sharpie- the Question- dominated the Sound's open class racing fleets that yachtsmen and some oystermen of the Bristol, Rhode Island area adopted the design.<sup>49</sup>

The leading New Haven builder was Lester Rowe, whose boats have been accepted as the authoritative sharpie in it's most prolific form. Rowe's shop was located on the banks of the Quinnipiac River in Fair-Haven. He built most of the sharpies used in the New Haven oyster fishery, offering for a number of years, single planked sides and the choice between round or square transoms. Because of Rowe's reticence to add any changes to his design, his sharpies became the cheapest and best constructed ones available to the Long Island Sound oystermen. A fierce sense of attachment grew amongst the New Haven

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46. C.G. Davis, How to Design a Yacht (New York: Rudder, 1906), p.21.

47. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.5.

48. Davis, p.19.

oystermen towards Rowe's sharpies; an attitude reflected in their disdain for the Guilford, Rhode Island, and Long Island versions as being tainted copies of New Haven's original design.

The sailing characteristics of the sharpie type when rigged with both masts were akin to those experienced in a centerboard sloop with a large jib- mainly because of the jib effect that the sharpie's foresail had on the boat's sailing.<sup>50</sup> In a strong breeze the foresail was slacked before the helm might have to be put over on a severe puff. If the boat was headed into the wind hard enough, the hull would slew around and ship a good deal of water, usually swamping it because of the cargo of heavy oysters.<sup>51</sup> The flexibility of the masts, due to their lack of rigging, played an important role in the sharpie's ability to work efficiently within the harbor on a windy day. This leg-of-mutton rig could carry sail longer than most other boats, and reefed long after conventional rigs were forced to take in sail.

The oystermen would pole their sharpies down the Quinnipiac at low tide, sometimes leaving the Fair-Haven landings at three in the morning. Once into the harbor they would unfurl one sail, most preferring to sail the boat with one mast rather than two.<sup>52</sup> The oystermen usually worked alone, and harvested

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50. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.15.

51. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.15.  
Eric Ball on 11/29/77

52. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.8.

private rather than cooperative beds.<sup>53</sup> They would sail to their assigned claim, a section of water defined by bamboo stakes, and anchor by driving two pointed stakes into the mud about ten feet apart from one another.<sup>54</sup> Then the sail was dropped and the sharpie-tied bow and stern to the two stakes-provided the oysterman with a stable platform to tong from. The large cockpit allowed the oysterman to walk around the boat and thus cover a large amount of area before the tide rose.

Tonging was a method of harvesting the oysters that is rarely used in today's fishery. The tongs were up to 25 feet long and consisted of two rakes mounted on long square poles. These poles were joined together about 12 feet below the handles, forming a scissor-like contraption. The oysterman would stand inside of the cockpit and lower the tongs to the bottom, where by moving the handles back and forth, would loosen the oysters from the mud or rocks of the bed. The loosened clams would be caught inside of the rakes and lodge inside of a metal basket. Every minute or so the oysterman would haul the tongs into the sharpie and clean the basket of any oysters or dead shells that may have collected there. Live clams were then stowed in wicker baskets in the bottom of the boat. At high tide the oystermen would sail back up the Quinnipiac River where they unloaded the oysters at any one of the several oysters companies

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53. Eric Ball on 11/29/77

54. Eric Ball 11/29/77

that lined the river. Sharpies would tie up alongside the small buildings and then unload onto a conveyor belt that carried the clams into the shop where they were opened and packaged by women.<sup>55</sup>

It was the sharpie's incredible speed, simplicity of design, and distinct lines that made it so popular in the eastern seaboard's oyster fisheries. In "Migrations of an American Boat Type", Chapelle uses the sharpie as a drastic example in the spread of one design amongst the fishermen of a specific fishery. According to him, the sharpie was the only design used by oystermen to the east and west of New Haven along the Connecticut shore. Most of these sharpies were sloop rigged and had an increase in the amount of proportionate beam for more stability in the unprotected waters of New London and Bridgeport.<sup>56</sup> Since oystering ceased in heavy weather the ultimate seaworthiness of the sharpies was never put to a strong test. Eric Ball can remember seeing only one sharpie capsize, and that he thinks, was done on purpose during a race up the Quinnipiac.<sup>57</sup> Chapelle claims that a tonging sharpie rescued the crew of a coasting schooner that had run aground off of Branford, Connecticut in a gale.<sup>58</sup> This rescue took place only after

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55. Eric Ball-11/29/77

56. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.144.

57. Eric Ball-11/29/77

58. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type", p.145.

several other craft failed in attempting to reach the wreck.

The speed of the sharpie was impressive. Kunhardt remarks on their quickness, citing the example of a sharpie reported to have gone 11 nautical miles in 34 minutes.<sup>59</sup> Eric Ball spoke of a friend who claimed to have passed a steamer outside of the harbor in a sharpie on a fairly calm day.<sup>60</sup> A tongign sharpie sailed with both masts- one in the foremast step, the other aft of the centerboard trunk- was reported to have attained speeds of up to 16 knots.<sup>61</sup> Chapelle is skeptical of these claims but admits, "Although such reports may be exaggerations, there is no doubt that sharpies of the New Haven type were among the fastest of American sailing fishing boats."<sup>62</sup>

The sharpie spread to Chesapeake Bay during the 1870's and was rapidly changed into what is known as the Tangier Bay Skiff. Local tradition claims that a New Haven sharpie -the Frolic- was found adrift on <sup>the</sup> bay near Tangier Island. The lines of this sharpie were copied and modified into what resembled a sharpie above the water line but was

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59. Kunhardt, p.295.

60. Eric Ball on 11/29/77

61. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type.",p.156.

62. Ibid, p.146.

V-bottomed below. These sharpies used a daggerboard instead of a pivoting centerboard, a cheaper although more difficult board to use. A flat-bottomed design saw some use in the region but was quickly discarded after V-bottoms became accepted in the late 1880's.<sup>63</sup> The v-bottomed sharpies were expanded into the Skipjack, a large, cutter-bowed, sharpie schooner that appealed to the fishermen of the area; most of whom were familiar with the schooner rig from past experience. Chapelle explains how such publications as Forest and Stream, Rudder, and Yachting, may have influenced the Chesapeake type's modifications. All the magazines described the state of the art in small boat designs-both pleasure and working boats alike. For several years Rudder offered a wide selection of boat plans for 25¢ a copy.<sup>64</sup>

After the Civil War the oyster beds of the North Carolina sounds were opened, thus offering the devastated economy in that region a chance to rebuild itself. How the sharpie design migrated to that area is not explained by Chapelle, however he does discuss the Carolina oystermen's modification of the New Haven design into large 45 foot versions. This was necessary due to the lack of markets and shipping services in the area, a deficiency that forced the oystermen to build oceangoing schooners.<sup>65</sup> These large sharpies were very durable, with several seeing reconversion into yachts during the 1920's and 30's. The Carolinas were the last oyster fishery to adopt the sharpie before the influence of steam doomed all sailing craft on the eastern fisheries. In 1876 a sharpie was introduced to Florida

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63. Chapelle, "Migrations of an American Boat Type."

64. Ibid, p.149.



a Mr. R.M.Munroe. Munroe's sharpie was built by Brown of Totten-ville, State Island- it gained some popularity in Florida as a fishing boat and coastal shipper. In 1880 a columnist of Forest and Stream introduced a New Haven design to Lake Champlain where several yachts were built and modified into a sleek racing class.<sup>66</sup>

Sharpie yachts were popular for a number of years as recreational boating began to assert itself along the New England coast. This emergence of pleasure boating, and racing as an outdoor sport, paralleled American desires to return to the outdoors as a balm against an increasingly urban society. The first sharpie yacht was built in 1855 and named the Lucky. This was the largest sharpie ever built up to that date, yet it was severely criticized for being too tender in a moderate breeze, thus making it an oddity more than a functional design, Kunhardt describes several yachts and their cabin arrangements, recommending the sharpie type for the single-handed sailor.<sup>67</sup> All of these yachts were centerboarders, a nuisance because of the intrusion they made in the cramped, narrow cabin. Despite their cramped cabins, contemporary descriptions praise the sharpie yacht for their speed and beauty.<sup>68</sup>

Sharpies were extensively raced by New Haven oystermen, who either held impromptu match races after a days work, or took place in events sponsored by the New Haven Canoe Club. These races took place north of the Grand Avenue bridge in Fairhaven on weekends and holidays such as Labor Day and the fourth of July.<sup>69</sup>

Lester Row built several special racing sharpies in the 1880's. The popularity of these hybrids is reflected in the enormous racing cats of Massachusetts Bay, and the New York sandbaggers. All three: sharpie, cat and sandbaggers were distinctive because of their oversized mainsails and crews of up to eighteen men. These were extremely dangerous, tender designs that quickly waned in popularity due their prohibitive cost and frightening tendency to run amuck. The J-boats, incredible America's Cup defenders in the 1890's have been called the renaissance of American boat design, their immense sail area and beautiful hulls are indicative of the radicalism that swept an industry transformed by technology.

Perhaps the strangest use the sharpie type ever saw was as French patrol boats. Twice during the 1870's a frenchman named More visited Lound Island Sound, each time returning to France with a small sharpie. On his final visit he returned with a nonpariel or Clapham design- and it was this version that attracted a great deal of attention in Europe.<sup>70</sup> The French government built several 40 foot sharpies, equipping each with a small revolving cannon and using them as patrol boats in their colonial prisons: Chapelle described these craft as exact copies of the Fair-Haven sharpie.<sup>71</sup>

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66. Ibid, p.152.

67. Kunhardt, p.296.

68. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.70.

69. Eric Ball-11/29/77

70. Chapelle, American Sailing Craft, p.4.

71. Ibid, p4.

-vived by Herreshoff of Rhode Island, both designs have been extremely popular amongst a new generation of small boat sailors- people interested in form and function over strange hull designs and a lot of chrome. The revival in small sailing skiffs, and classic designs is shown in several magazines such as Rudder and Yachting. Soundings has devoted a full section in it's format to classic designs, and the builders who are resurrecting them. The Fair-Haven sharpie, due to it's reputation as an boat only for the experienced, has attracted little interest lately because of it's apparent lack of ornamentation—and "flavor". Yet one can argue that the original Friendship Sloops, and Catboats were examples of quick, strong construction techniques, not prescision and teak. The sharpie is not a cruising design because of it's narrow beam, yet as a harbor daysailer the boat might find some following.