

# CHESAPEAKE BAY SAILING CRAFT

By M. V. BREWINGTON



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Maryland Historical Society *and*  
Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum

## CHESAPEAKE SAILING CRAFT

**T**HE vessels here described were the common types on Chesapeake Bay when sailing craft reached the height of their development. In 1910 farm, sawmill and fishery products, even a few passengers were being transported by sail. The internal combustion engine was just appearing as the wind's competitor.

Then well over three thousand sail still graced the Bay's waters: today less than a hundred remain. The pungy is no more; gone are the schooner and the work canoe. One sloop, a single bug-eye and one ram (but she is a Maine cruise-boat) are alive. Skipjacks only are built now and their launchings are far fewer than the losses. The end of work sail is near.

The illustrations, accurate in every detail of hull and rig, were especially drawn for me by Louis Feuchter of Baltimore, the Bay's most knowledgeable, most skilled and most unappreciated artist.

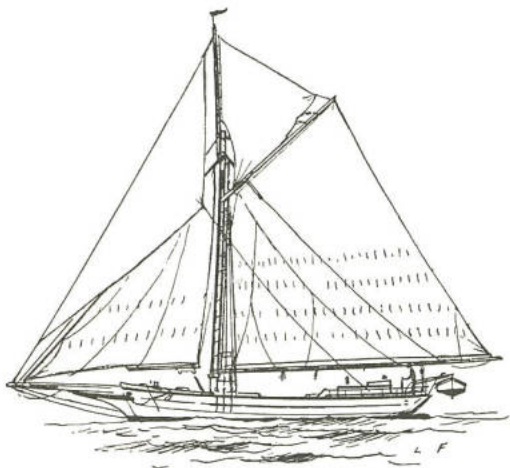
M. V. B.

1 June 1966



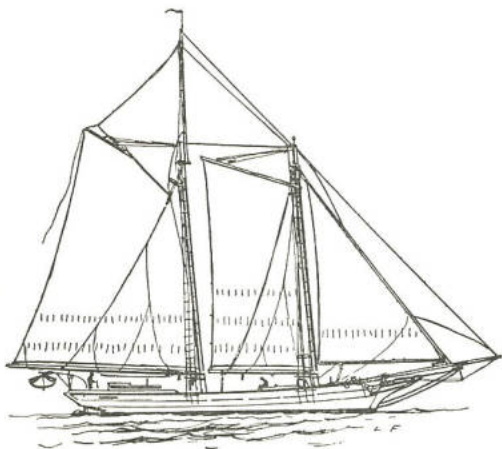
### THE LOG CANOE

WHEN the white man reached the Chesapeake Bay he soon adopted the watercraft he found the Indians using: great logs hollowed by fire and stone tools. Two and a half centuries of development, including improved shaping with metal tools, combining several logs into one "chunk," and the addition of sails and centerboard brought the canoe to perfection. The result was an undecked hull, twelve to forty feet long, composed of from one to seven logs, perhaps with the topsides framed and planked, sharp at each end, and depending upon the locality, rigged with one or two sharp-headed spritsails with or without a jib set on raking, unstayed pole masts. The canoe was the craft most used for oyster tonging until gasoline motors began to be produced cheaply. Today canoes are sailed only for pleasure.



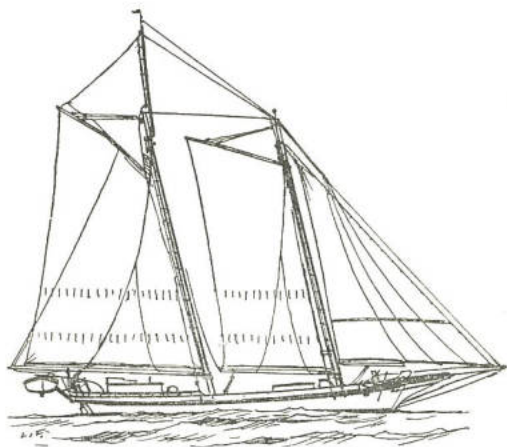
## THE SLOOP

OLDEST of all European vessels on the Bay is the sloop: it was here by 1646. Its framed hull, twenty-five to fifty feet long, is round bottomed with sharp bow and square stern. Sloops carry one nearly plumb fidded mast with one or more jibs, a gaff-headed mainsail and topsail. Originally they were commonplace in the deep-sea trades, and became numerous as Baycraft only after the arrival of the centerboard about 1820. Then the old deep draft vessels became known locally as "he-sloops." Although a few sloop hulls with skipjack rig are in use, only one is working under its proper rig today.



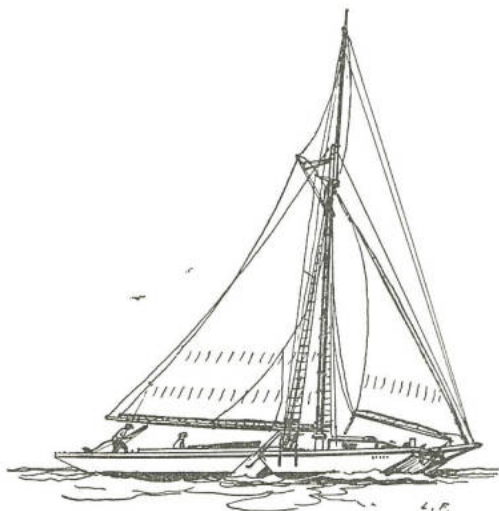
## THE SCHOONER

SOON after 1700 a sail plan which had been evolving in Europe for a century or more was adopted in America as the *schooner* rig. It consisted of gaff-headed fore- and mainsails with jibs and sometimes topsails on a hull like that of a sloop, thirty to eighty feet long. After the centerboard reached the Bay, the name schooner was applied only to shoal draft craft using that device, while to the deep draft vessels were given other or modified names. The Bay schooner usually had a shorter sail plan than the deep variations with heavier, less raking spars, and only a main-topmast. The schooner was the most frequently found type in the Bay and coastal trades.



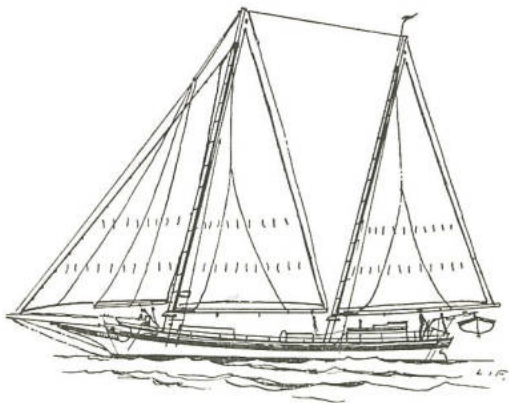
## THE PUNGY

ALTHOUGH strictly a schooner, the pungy had several points of distinction from the Bay type. Its hull, thirty to eighty feet long, was much deeper at the stern than at the bow, the bottom had more dead rise, the greatest beam further forward, the ends raked more, a log rail rather than bulwarks, and the transom hewn from solid timber rather than planked over frames. The sail plan was the same as the schooner's but taller, the spars lighter and more sharply raked. A variation, the *she-pungy*, or *square-sterned bug-eye*, was a shoal draft vessel with a centerboard, but otherwise all the pungy peculiarities of hull and rig were present. The pungy had a distinctive style of painting: the bottom, copper; the boot-top, "flesh" pink; the bends, bottle green; and the bead, scarlet. Pungys were used in Bay trades, and were considered the best of all the craft native to the Chesapeake.



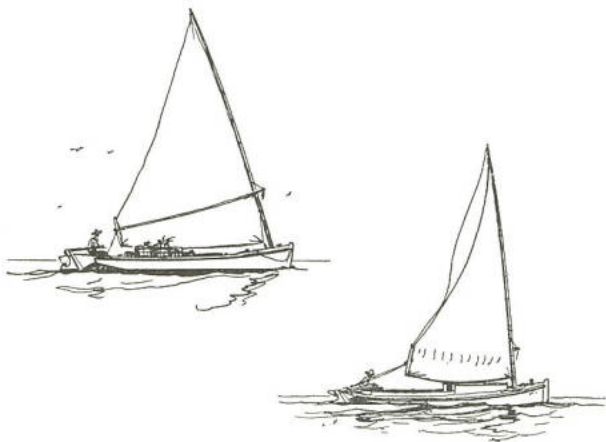
### THE SCOW

By 1752 sailing "flats" or scows were in use on the Bay; the last ended her days about 1945, when the *Elsie* was purposely destroyed. They had square, raked ends, wall sides, hard chines and flat-bottomed hulls with sloop or schooner rigs. Instead of keel or centerboard the scows used leeboards, the only native craft known to have done so. They ranged from thirty to fifty feet in length. Scows found their principal work at the Head of the Bay, hauling pig iron, salt, fish, grain and as houseboats for gunners on the Havre-de-Grace flats.



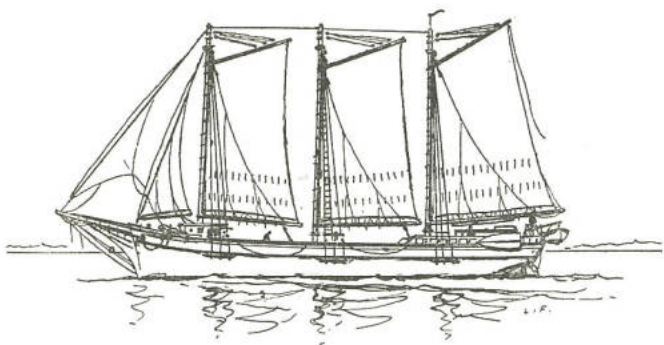
## THE BUGEYE

SOON after the Civil War ended the demand for a large but cheap-to-build vessel for dredging oysters brought the development of a new type, the *bugeye*. At first it was no more than an enlarged log canoe, decked, with living quarters for a crew and a fixed rig. Later the majority were built by conventional frame methods, ranging in length from thirty to eighty feet. The sail plan was that of a canoe with modifications, but occasionally it was that of a schooner. Hull variations to gain deck space aft produced in the 1880's both round- and square-sterned bugeyes, and in 1908 the "patent stern," an outboard projection of the deck on sharp-sterned craft. No bugeye has been built since 1918. The origin of the name "bugeye" is obscure; it may perhaps be a corruption of the Scotch word for oyster, "buckie."



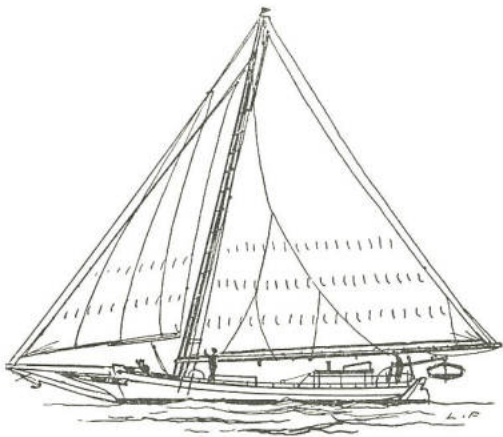
## THE SKIFFS

ABOUT fifteen variations developed on the Bay for oyster tonging, crabbing and fishing. All were plank-built with a sharp bow but the stern might be round, sharp or square. Bottoms ranged from flat to full V, though the gilling skiff had a framed round bottom. Rigs were one- or two-masted with sharp or goose-wing sails. Lengths varied from twelve to twenty-odd feet. Many were beautifully built, handsome craft, fast, weatherly and when capably handled, able in their home waters.



### THE RAM

DEVELOPED about 1873 for the lumber trade the ram was little more than a sailing barge. Its hull had a full, pointed bow, a square stern, straight wall sides, a rounded bilge and a center-board always. The rig was that of a baldhead (i.e., no topmasts) three-masted schooner. Size was controlled by the lock chambers of the old canals leading into the Bay, approximately 110-135 feet long by 24 feet wide.



## THE SKIPJACK

ABOUT 1890-1900 shipbuilding costs increased so much around the Bay that many watermen found they could no longer build or operate their older types of craft profitably. A new type, based on the ordinary unframed, square-sterned row skiff, was devised by giving to a greatly enlarged (twenty-five to sixty feet long) skiff hull a dead-rise bottom, a deck, a cabin, and one, occasionally two, sharp-headed sails with a jib on raking pole masts. A few with round, staved sterns, called *nancies*, were built along the Potomac. Most skipjacks had outboard rudders, but many were built with rudders inboard. The skipjack, or *bateau* as it is also named, proved to be very successful as an oyster dredger and is the only large type of sailing craft being built today.

FOR MORE DETAILED READING, CONSULT:

*Chesapeake Bay: A Pictorial Maritime History.*

By M. V. Brewington. 238 pp., illus.

*This Was Chesapeake Bay.*

By Robert H. Burgess. 210 pp., illus.

*Chesapeake Bay Log Canoes and Bugeyes.*

By M. V. Brewington. 171 pp., 25 plans, illus.

*Chesapeake Circle.*

By Robert H. Burgess. 211 pp., illus.

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