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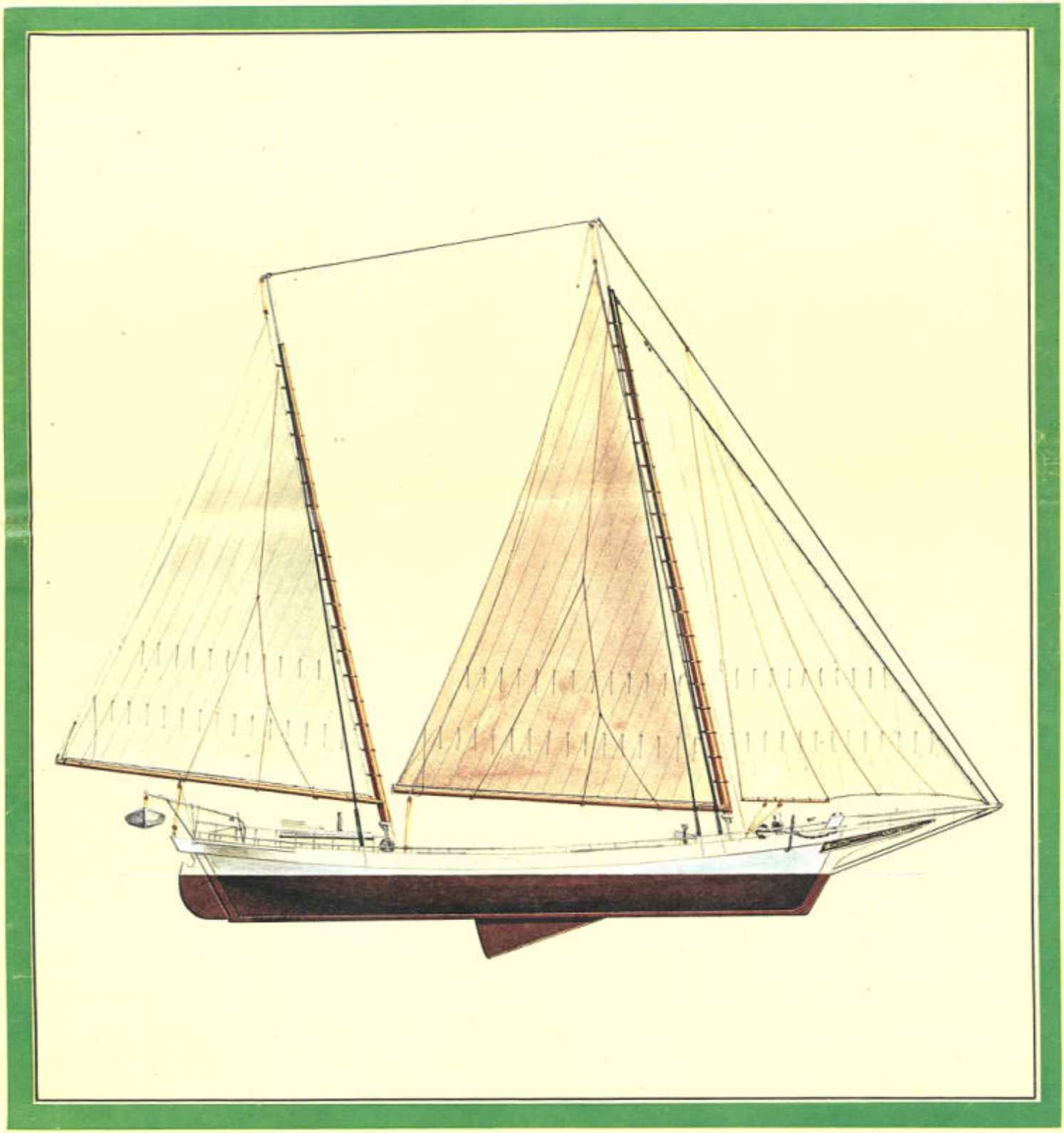
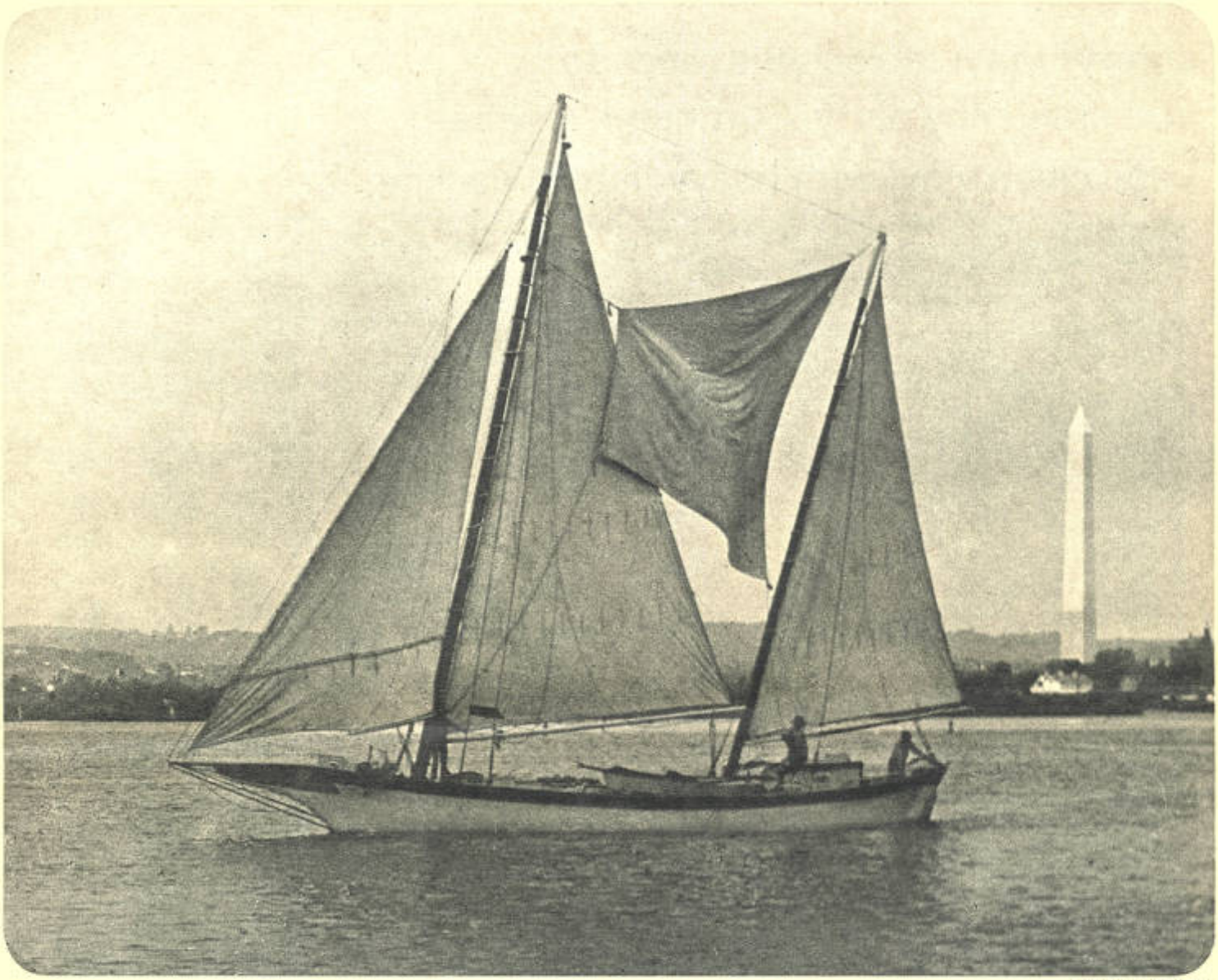


BUGEYE LIZZIE J. COX

This bugeye was built in 1905 by John Branford, of Fishing Island, Md. Illustration: Melbourne Smith.



With the Washington Monument evident in the background, a small bugeye sets her staysail in the Washington Channel. The photograph was taken in the 1880's.

Photo by Mathew Brady

THE CHESAPEAKE BUGEYE

it evolved from the Indian log canoe and is the most distinctive and perhaps the only purely American vessel

By ERIC J. STEINLEIN

THE most distinctive and perhaps the only purely American vessel is the bugeye schooner of the Chesapeake Bay.

All other American types of vessels show their European ancestry; the bugeye only her aboriginal origins. As a type, it lasted little more than 90 years, from about 1860 to 1950. The last one was built about 1920.

Because of the comparatively recent life span of the bugeye, it is easy to trace its evolution from the Indian log canoe through the various local types of standing rig canoes to its final form as a fully decked and rigged vessel.

The final phase of the canoe with its fixed and stayed foremast and partially decked hull was in effect a small bugeye save for the lack of a complete deck and an after house. Multiple log canoes had long since proven that greater length and beam were limited only by the available time.

When the deep-water oyster dredge became legal in the 1870's and the market for oysters expanded with the depletion of the northern supply, pungies, sloops and centerboard schooners were fitted with dredge gear. Canoes worked the shallow bars with hand tongers, as standing rig canoes mounted small dredges or "scrapes" or the deepwater patent tong after it was developed about 1880.

The need for a fully decked vessel for convenience and safety in handling and

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Bugeyes of the Chesapeake

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towing oyster dredges was most probably an important factor in the final step from large canoe to small bugeye schooner.

Shortly after the Civil War, the first such vessel was built, though the name "bugeye" did not come into use until the early Eighties. The origin of the name, like so many others in marine nomenclature, cannot be traced. The most plausible explanation depends upon the appearance of the vessel when viewed bow on; then the prominent hawse timbers with hawspipe trim painted in contrasting color do suggest a bug.

THESE hawse timbers, or more correctly knightheads, seem to have been adapted from the most common type of bay schooner of the time, the pungy, as were the low log rails and many other deck fittings of the bugeye.

Log hull construction continued throughout the life of the type. Some, like the Lemuel Kerwan, built in 1901, were over 75 feet long on deck and had a bottom of 21 logs. The log bugeyes had some advantages over those built of frame and planks. The most important was lower first cost; another was the great weight of the thick log bottom which provided stability without ballast.

Frame and planked bugeyes were built by many professional builders on the Bay: Brooks on the Little Choptank, John B. Harrison at Tilghmans, Kirby at St. Michaels, E. J. Tull at Pocomoke City, Branford at Fairmount, Lloyd of Wicomico, and on the Western Shore Marsh & Son and M. M. Davis at Solomons. Many of these yards were sizable business operations for their time and built wooden vessels of all types: sail, steam and gasoline powered.

The best kept abreast of the latest developments in naval architecture and marine engineering. Wooden shipbuilding yards located where material and skilled labor were available.

SOME of the larger building yards turned out both log and frame bugeyes. Many small yards, some practically one-man operations, turned out log bugeyes only. Power tools and machinery were not essential; nor were draftsmen and mould loftsmen. One man with an image in his mind could translate it into a reality with hand tools, skill and a modest amount of help.

Bugeyes were efficient vessels, as demonstrated by their popularity as oyster dredge boats and local freight carriers. It seems probable that about 1,000 were built on the Bay.

They were practical in all sizes from less than 10 tons register to nearly 60 tons. Their length ranged from 40 feet to 85 feet on deck. The long period of their evolution from canoe to the final

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Unlike those on this vessel (the Colonel Robert Johnson Colton), hause pipe rings of some bugeyes were of a contrasting color, suggesting a bug's eyes.

Photo by Eric Steinlein

Bugeyes of the Chesapeake

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form permitted a thorough trial of all its characteristics.

Although there were many variations in hull shape, most of them retained the double ended canoe style hull about four times as long as it was wide. Some did have round sterns but generally retained the same length to beam ratio. The round stern may have been used to cure the one serious defect of the double ended hull—the inability to fit stern davits for carrying the small boat.

THIS fault was eliminated by the invention of the "patent" stern in 1908 by J. E. Robbins, of Cambridge. A frame work of timber was fitted over the stern wide enough to support davits. This rig was soon fitted to most all sharp stern bugeyes and many of the larger canoes. It was soon improved by the addition of decking which provided useful deck room aft.

The rig of three working sails and one light staysail set flying between the masts was as simple as could be devised. One halyard and one sheet for each sail, with lazy jacks for all three, made easy work for a small crew. The absence of gaffs made it possible to lower the fore and main by casting off the halyard and letting sails down by the run. The jib might require a pull on the down haul, but that was all.

Large bugeyes were often sailed by a two-man crew and could be handled by one man in favorable weather. Three working sails of nearly equal area arranged so that almost any combination had its center of effort in the same place made reduction of sail area simple without reefing. All sheets were self-tending when going to windward; nothing need be done when coming about except put the helm down. Sail area was proportionately less than for other schooners of similar lengths. This was compensated for by the lighter displacement of the average bugeye.

SPEED and handiness varied within the type; some were bulky and slow sailers but carried large cargoes, others were fast and good at maneuvering. Maryland's Oyster Navy had one: the Brown, Smith and Jones (named after the Governor, comptroller and treasurer), which was sold to a northern yachtsman. He was amazed to find that she logged a steady 11 knots all day on her way north off the coast of New Jersey.

In the days of the pineapple trade between Baltimore and the Bahamas a few bugeyes made the trip. They were said to be wet vessels when at sea. Low freeboard and the lack of bulwarks can easily account for a wet deck. The best of them would work to windward better than the gaff rigged schooners. The Joseph S. Faulkner, built by John B. Harrison of Tilghman's in 1891, was said to be the fastest on the Bay. It was claimed that she would make "square" tacks, that is from full and by to full and by in 90 degrees.

Capt. Bob Leatherbury, who sailed her a few times, agreed that she was the fastest in his time. He did not approve of her because she was tender. He related the story of a trip from Galesville to Baltimore with a load of tomatoes in baskets. She left the docks under full sail in a fresh southerly breeze, when off Curtis Point and into the full strength of the fair wind she shook herself and took off up the Bay. In the process she managed to tumble a half dozen baskets of tomatoes out of the deck load and down the cabin companionway. This grieved Captain Bob as much as it must have the cook who was under the tomatoes. □

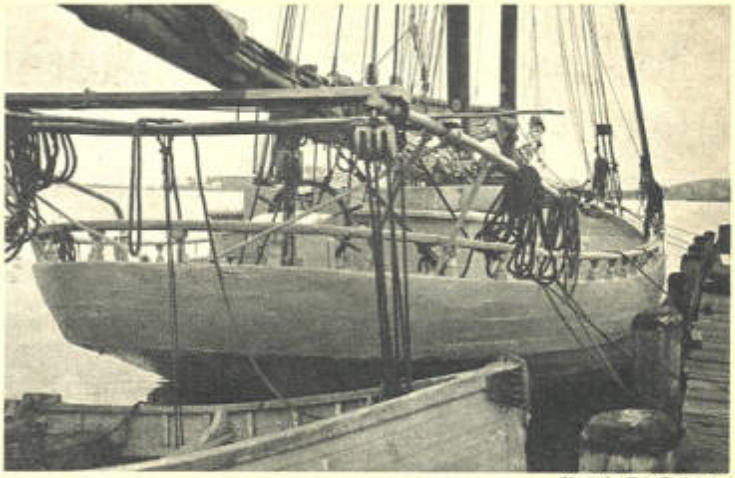
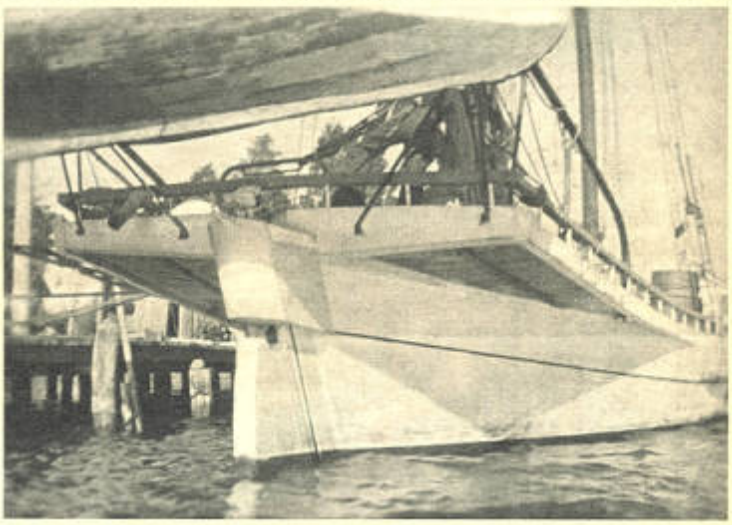


Photo by Eric Steinlein

The Catherine had a round stern and was gaff or "square" rigged, but she was still called a bugeye. As a type, bugeyes lasted little more than 90 years.



The bugeye Majestic, right, and a quarter view of her "patent" stern. Below, the same bugeye under sail. Last one was built about 1920, our writer says.

Photos by Philip Sawyer