

A Story of Shoal Waters

Sharpies in the Carolinas

by Michael B. Alford

Midway down the coast of North Carolina, tucked behind a chain of low, sandy islands, lies the Colonial village of Beaufort. In summer, its harbor and neighboring anchorages are havens for a mix of gunkholers, offshore voyagers, and a resident population of local fishing craft and cruiser/racers.

In the fall, the anchorage fills with south-bound transients. Sometimes they are seeking shelter from an early winter blow, but more often they are taking on provisions, making repairs, or simply sleeping over. Voyagers and hard-core sailors find the mild winters pleasant, and often linger to enjoy a welcome respite from their visceral urge to press on.

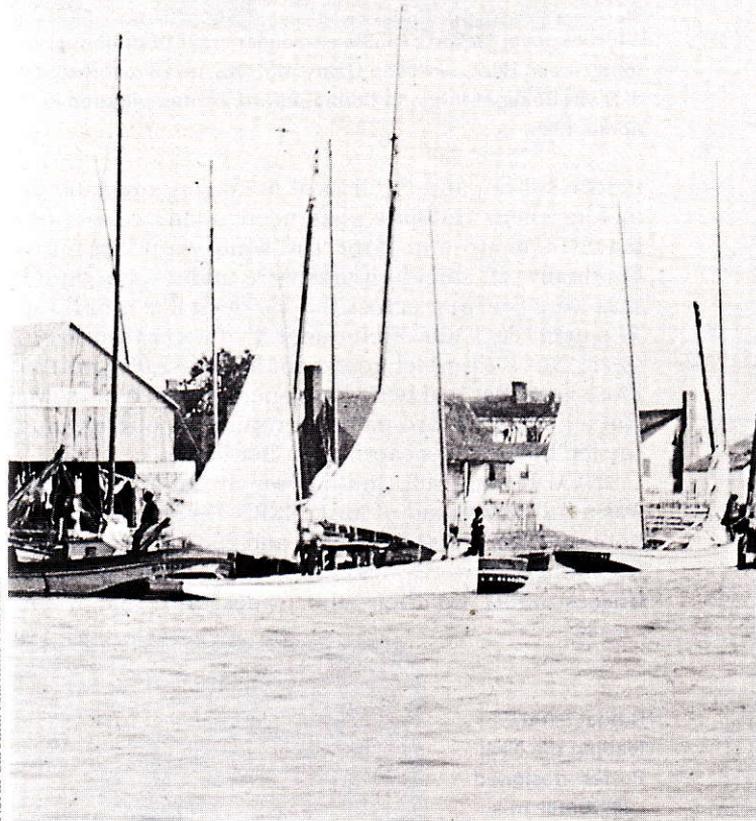
Historically Beaufort's strategic position made the little port one of three in North Carolina that provided economic stability for the young colony. Naval stores, shingles, and lumber products were major exports in the 18th century. Imports from the Caribbean islands included rum, molasses, salt, and fruit; from England came manufactured goods.

A peculiar aspect of North Carolina's complex coastal geography gives its maritime development a curious twist. The major coastal rivers flow from origins high in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. On their way to the sea, they cut across the rich industrial and agricultural Carolina piedmont, meander through the broad agrarian/sylvan coastal plain, and empty, not directly into the sea, but into wide, shallow sounds. Only the Cape Fear River flows directly into the sea, creating the state's only natural deep-water harbor at Wilmington. Rivers of the western part of the state are mostly navigable only in South Carolina.

Between the mainland on one side and the famed Outer Banks on the other, lie the expansive, shoal sounds. They meet the sea in turbulent, unstable inlets between the fragile barrier islands. Three major capes and associated offshore shoals further complicate North Carolina's extraordinary shoreline.

The vast inshore network of sounds, bays, rivers, and creeks has served as waterways for transportation and a bountiful source of food for over four centuries. In Colonial times, stout trading sloops and brigs, many locally built, negotiated the tricky inlets. Vessels too deep to clear the bar lay offshore and lightered their cargoes in specialized sloop- and schooner-rigged craft. In the harbor, smaller oceangoing brigs and schooners mingled with inshore craft, the all-important links between them and the communities along the sounds and up the rivers.

Small sloops and a type of dugout-log craft known in the Carolinas and Georgia as *periaugers* worked the sounds, along with smaller logboats, known locally as *kunners*, a corruption of the term *canoe*. On the rivers,



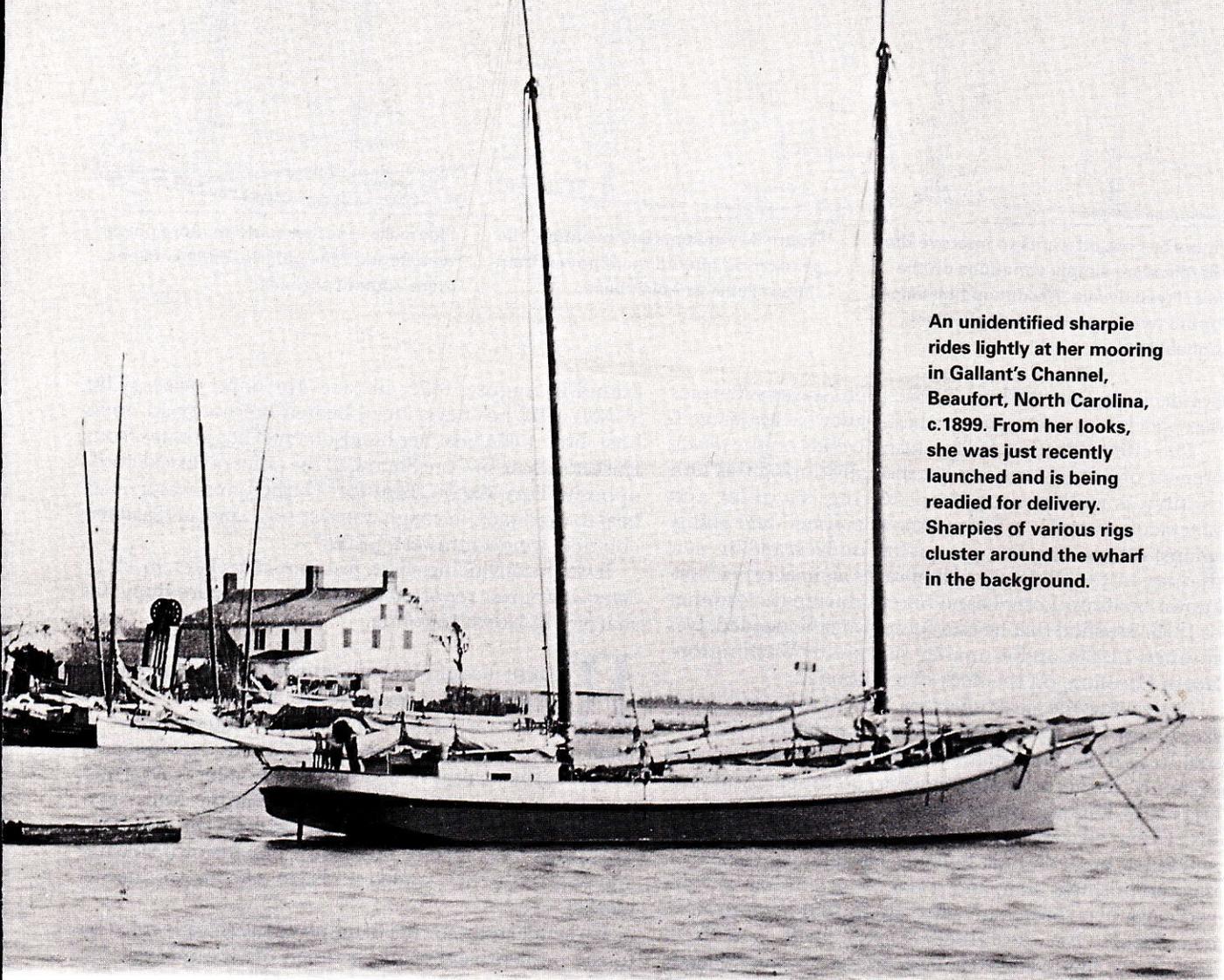
North Carolina Maritime Museum

periaugers were joined by flatboats in the enterprise of ferrying produce, livestock, and goods to and from the plantations. By the second quarter of the 19th century, steamboats began plying both the sounds and the rivers.

Before the Civil War fishing was mostly for subsistence, and there was only a limited local demand for commercial activities. Beaufort was one of the few regional centers where fish was marketed. The most common boats that fished from North Carolina's remote communities were variations of the *kunner*. These craft were far more sophisticated and capable than we commonly consider canoes to be. Relatively broad of beam, square-sterned, and rigged for rowing and sailing, they were, in every sense, proper boats, often exhibiting fair lines and attractive sheers. But in the decade following the war this venerable standby was gradually obsolesced by new and improved craft.

The year was 1874. The Civil War was history, but its terrible aftermath dominated daily life in the South. Despite being blessed with great resources, the

and a Connecticut Yankee



An unidentified sharpie rides lightly at her mooring in Gallant's Channel, Beaufort, North Carolina, c.1899. From her looks, she was just recently launched and is being readied for delivery. Sharpies of various rigs cluster around the wharf in the background.

South lay in economic ruin, seemingly unable to rebound from a tragic depletion of manpower and treasury.

That year George N. Ives, whose family was prominent in business and agriculture in Connecticut, came to Morehead City, North Carolina, to establish a wholesale fishing business. He would stay and become a leading citizen, distinguishing himself with numerous contributions and reforms in fisheries and related trades, and in fishery management.

One of Ives's first concerns was the lack of a local boat

that could support his business needs. The log-built craft were, he wrote in *Forest and Stream* in 1881, "strong and serviceable boats admirably suited for their purposes...." About the boats that were used for "business and pleasure," he noted that they were "deep, sharp, clinker-built; fast sailers, but totally unfitted for shoal water navigation."¹

In the sharpie of his native state, Ives perceived characteristics that he thought would be ideal for the Carolina sounds. He placed an order with George M. Graves, a sharpie builder in Fair Haven (now a part of New Haven),

¹ The lapstrake sloops in Ives's reports remain an enigma. Nothing has been found to document their appearance, and photographs from the 1880s and '90s affirm only the popularity of sharpies and flatbottom skiffs on the sounds, along with a few lingering logboats. It is tempting to conclude that by the end of the decade following its introduction into North Carolina, the sharpie had become so popular that locals had virtually abandoned the older types—but it seems unlikely. If the logboat survived, why not a hint of the lapstrake sloop in at least one or two photographs?

The survival of the kunner is partly attributable to the durability and practicality of a seamless, or nearly seamless, shell made from cypress, a very enduring wood. The sheer number of logboats must also be a factor.

Very likely the lapstrake boat was a "rich man's" boat. It is described as a boat for "business and pleasure," and most of the coastal fishermen are unlikely to have been men of "pleasure," especially in the lean times following the Civil War. Certainly these were not the boats that Ives had to convince the locals to replace. The logboat was the fisherman's craft. Ives probably reasoned that if he could out-sail this fancy sloop with its unbeaten record, the superiority of his sharpie would be undeniable.

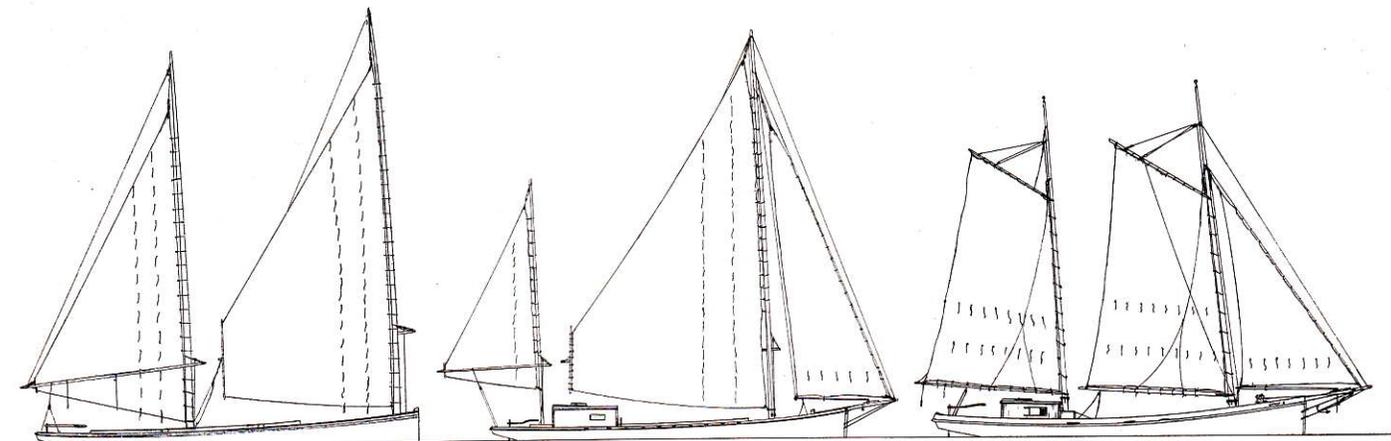


Figure I—First attempts to improve the sharpie were simply variations on the Fair Haven design. Maximum hull length for the two-masted sharpie rig was probably 48'.

Figure II—An apparent invention, the spunker rig offered more power from the available sail-plan base.

Figure III—Another route to more power was through the gaff rig. Early versions were without shrouds.

Connecticut, for a 34' boat. At the time Graves's sharpies were widely regarded as the very best—just what Ives wanted.

The effect of racing and yachting trends on the development of fishing-boat types, especially during the 19th century, is widely recognized. Racing is a quick and spectacular way for a boat to show its speed and ability against others. This fact was not lost on Ives, and his new sharpie, LUCIA, did very well in races against other well-known boats on Long Island Sound during the summer of 1875. Satisfied that he had found what he needed, Ives shipped LUCIA and a smaller sharpie to Washington, North Carolina, on the deck of a schooner.

At Beaufort the local fishermen reacted with predictable skepticism. The typically conservative watermen thought that Ives's flatbottom craft would not go to windward, and certainly was not a boat in which to go to sea.² After several weeks, however, Ives managed to get up a race between his LUCIA and a Morehead City boat, SUNNYSIDE, owned and sailed by Dank Bell. Bell was a well-known local fishing and business man, and it was reported that his boat had never been beaten in a race. In his 1881 letter to *Forest and Stream*, Ives described SUNNYSIDE as a "keel boat...deep, sharp, and 28 ft. long overall." Ives confidently put up a stake of \$25, to Bell's \$15, that his LUCIA would outsail SUNNYSIDE on a beat to windward, Bell's best point of sailing, in a "heavy weather race of wind and sea." Furthermore, Bell could name the day and course.

On July 6, 1876, Bell and Ives matched their boats. *Forest and Stream* (Volume 6, 1876) carried the following report: "Yachting in North Carolina.—An interesting and exciting race for a purse of \$50 [it is not reported how the purse reached \$50] was sailed on Thursday, July 6th, in Core Sound, between the LUCIA a Fair Haven sharpie belonging to Mr. Ives, of Beaufort, and the SUNNYSIDE, a clinker built, open boat, sloop rigged, owned and sailed by Dank Bell, of Morehead City. The LUCIA was built by George M. Graves, of Fair Haven, Conn., and beat the famous Law sharpie, one or more races on Long Island

Sound in August, 1875, in races for hotel prizes. The SUNNYSIDE has never been beaten before by an open boat, but LUCIA beat her handsomely. The race was from Harker's Point, in Core Sound, to the point of Shackelford, opposite Fort Macon, Beaufort Harbor, and was a dead beat to windward, in rough water, strong wind, and against ebb-tide; wind southwest. J.E.W."

It was a convincing show. Just four years later, in 1879, *Forest and Stream* reported that there were more than 500 sharpies in North Carolina.

Because it could be built quickly and inexpensively, the sharpie was accessible to many who could not afford a vessel of conventional construction. A small operator with a sharpie could vie with the schooners owned by the wealthy or by shipping companies. A farmer could contract with an independent sharpie owner at a rate significantly lower than that asked by the schooner operators. Or a farmer might just buy his own sharpie and not have to hire someone else to take his produce to market.

No small credit for the triumph of the sharpie must go to the perceptiveness and acumen of George Ives. He assured success of his endeavors by having his boat built by a top-notch builder and then testing its mettle against the home fleet in its native waters of Long Island Sound. He was well prepared when he made his case for the sharpie with the Carolina boatmen. He knew the local boats and their capabilities and limitations. His thoroughness gave him the confidence to challenge the fastest boat in the area.

After the race, the pressure was on to get more of the new boats into local service. Ives had shipped his two boats on the deck of a schooner, but for the average fisherman, ordering a boat from New England was not an option. Even if one were to sail the new boat south to avoid shipping costs, there were risks. We might also assume that many Carolina sailors still had some mistrust of flat bottoms on seagoing boats.

The early proliferation of sharpies in North Carolina is difficult to document. A search through the records of sailing vessels built in the state in 1876 reveals only a single vessel with dimensions that suggest a sharpie. Extending the search over the next five years, through 1880, just after *Forest and Stream* reported more than 500 sharpies

²The term *flatbottom* is used here to distinguish boats built bateau style and slab-and-post style from other boats that might be described as "flat-bottomed," or having "flat bottoms." *Flatbottom* defines a style of construction, while the latter two refer to shape and may be associated with other construction methods; for example, round-bilged vessels with flat floors.

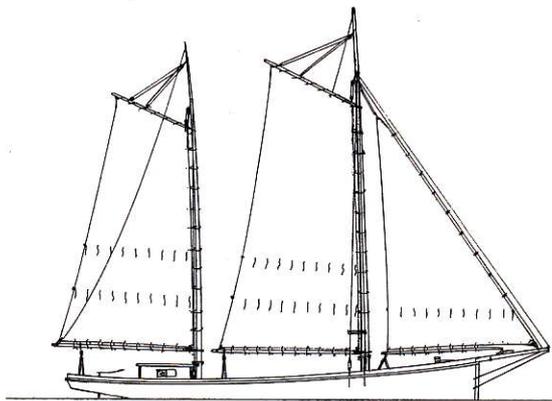


Figure IV—Later pre-schooner gaff-rigged models carried shrouds allowing for increased spar lengths and hull dimensions.

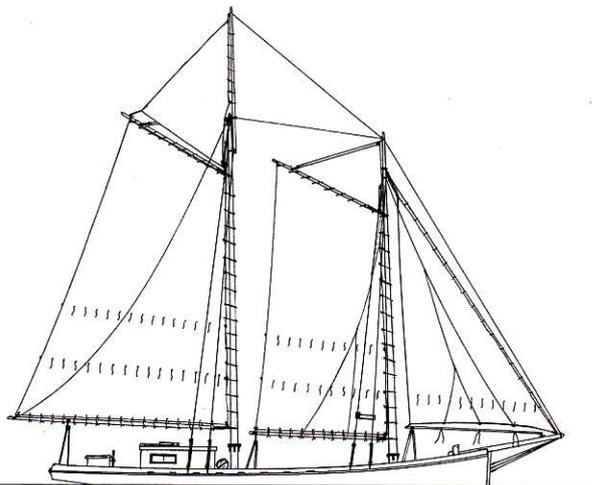


Figure V—Increased tonnage demanded more sail power, and the schooner became the rig of choice.

in North Carolina, there are still no likely candidates recorded. The implication is that the early North Carolina sharpies were relatively unchanged from the New England type and therefore were too small to be listed in the Annual List of Merchant Vessels (ALMV). Ives says he ordered one of Graves's "best 34 ft. sharpies." The standard 34' sharpie had a beam of 7' and a depth of just under 2', making it a little over four tons, below the minimum of five required for inclusion in the ALMV.

It makes sense that local Southern builders, many of whom only built boats for their own use, would not stray very far from the proven proportions of the prototype when taking up an unfamiliar boat type. Indeed, there would be no significant changes to the basic style until experience gained in sailing and maintaining the boats gave builders and owners the confidence to experiment.

Inevitably the sharpie did eventually change and take on characteristics reflecting its new employment and environment. Whatever similarities Ives had observed between Long Island Sound and North Carolina waters, the two environments were certainly not identical. Prevailing wind direction and force, summer squalls, and wave conditions in the Southern waters eventually wrought changes in sail plans and basic hull proportions. Differences in fishing methods and gear had their impact on the size and configuration of the Carolina sharpies.

North Carolina-built sharpies begin to appear in the ALMV for the early 1880s. They range from 39' to 44' in length and show greater-than-expected increases in beam and depth, resulting in ratings of 5 to 7 tons. (In half-decked sailing vessels of this period, net and gross tonnage is often the same.) Photographs from the period show boats very close in appearance to the New Haven style, but generally larger. At this early date, their construction likely differed little from their Northern counterparts.

Much of the energy of sharpie development in North Carolina was directed at increasing capacity and power. The rich oyster beds in the Carolina sounds were mostly harvested by dredge, and the early sharpie, which in Long Island Sound had been used for tonging, did not have the power to haul a dredge over submerged beds. Also, dredges accumulate large amounts of oysters, sometimes rapidly, and dredge boats consequently have more hold capacity than tonging boats.

But photographs from the 1880s and 1890s show the greatest divergence from the parent type appearing in the rig of the sharpie. The basic two-masted leg-o'-mutton spritsail rig of the New Haven type prevails on boats up to about 45' in length, but the foresail is distinguished by a large club at the clew, similar to the racing rig used in the North, and a shorter club on the main.

The effect of this modification is a gain in sail area, suggesting that something about either the function of the boat, or the Carolina environment, dictated an enlarged sail plan. The question arises, however, whether the configuration was a local innovation, or simply a reflection of Ives's sharpie as imported. Ives gives us no hint in his *Forest and Stream* letters, but it is not unlikely that he might have fitted LUCIA with a racing rig—i.e., one of significantly greater sail area than the working version—in order to further ensure a favorable outcome to his scheme.

The need to increase *relative* sail area can be accounted for by the laws of similitude that govern the properties of similar physical bodies of different sizes. For instance, a new sharpie that is 20% larger than an existing 34' prototype would be 1.2 times longer, 1.2 times wider, and 1.2 times deeper. The resulting displacement (weight) is increased in proportion to the *cube* of 1.2, which is equivalent to a value of 1.78 times. However, lengthening the mast and sail dimensions by factor 1.2 results in an increase of sail area proportional to only the *square* of the factor, or 1.44 times. The new sail plan, simply enlarged by 20%, will be inadequate relative to the displacement of the new boat. To put it in sailors' terms, the new boat will be undercanvased, because the mass of the vessel has increased by a quantity relatively greater than the sail area.

One solution to this quandary is to increase the mast heights by a factor greater than 20% to gain the needed sail area. However, an upward extension of the sail plan could increase the heeling moment, with an undesirable effect on both stability and the ability to carry sail, and might introduce structural problems with the rig and hull. It seems more probable that the extra area would be sought with lower rig profiles, something that a club achieves very simply.

The typical triangular leg-o'-mutton sail was retained on the run-boats, or carry-away sharpies, associated with

SAMUEL W. BUCKMAN,
45' x 11'6" x 3',
coming about in
Beaufort Harbor,
1890s.



Jean Keil Collection, NCM

the purse-seine fisheries conducted in the sounds in the 1880s. These boats, whose work demanded swiftness under sail, appear to be about 40' in length (Figure I).

SAMUEL W. BUCKMAN (above), a very large sharpie of the New Haven type, built in 1889 in Smyrna, North Carolina, carried a very large club on the foresail. About 48' long overall, her registered dimensions are given as 45.6' in length, 11.5' in the beam, 3' depth, and 7 tons net/gross. Two vertical sets of reefpoints are provided to reduce sail area and enable the sharpie to cope with the summer squalls that could arise with alarming violence. A number of photographs show sharpies working under reefed sails. The severity of these squalls calls for a sail plan that can be quickly reduced.

In New England the principal and almost exclusive use for sharpies had been in the oyster industry. In North Carolina they were employed not only for oystering, but also in the seine fishery as run-boats, and for general transportation. For a time, sharpies even served in the particularly demanding service of pilot boats at Beaufort Inlet. Such diverse employment naturally contributed to differentiation within the type.

Photographs show that by the 1890s specialization and significant development had occurred. The latitude inherent in dating photographs makes it difficult to establish an exact chronology, but a logical sequence and approximate dates can be pieced together using other information.

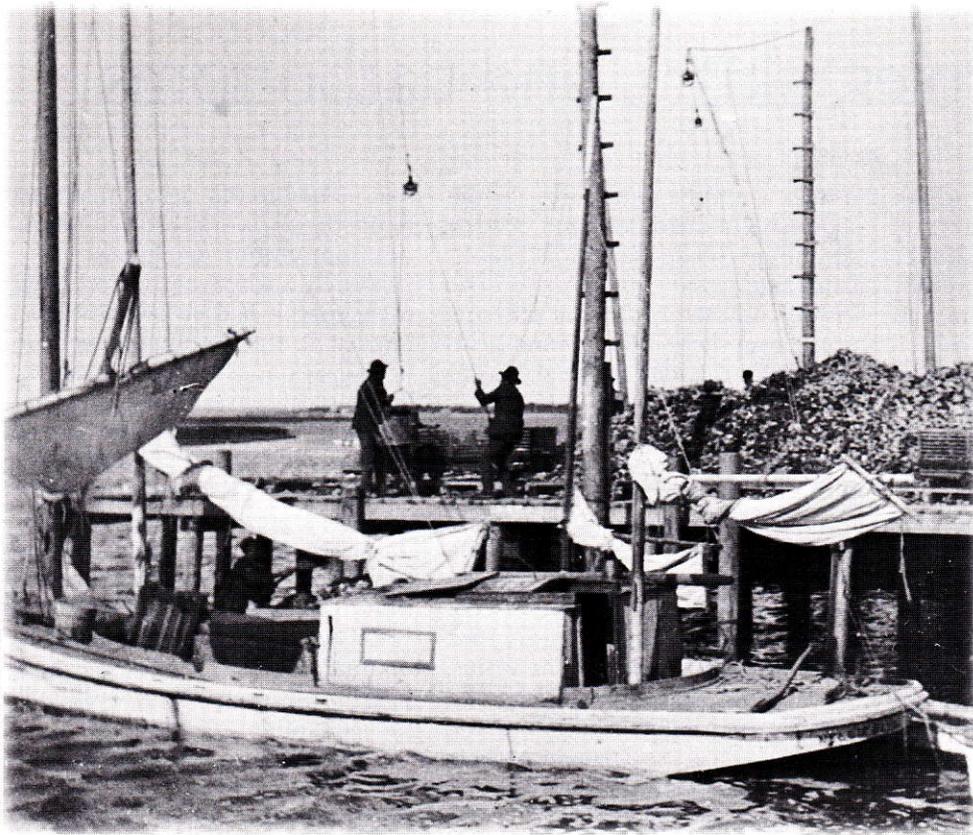
By 1880 larger sizes had brought about major experimentation with rigs. The addition of a jib, set on a short bowsprit and balanced by a small mizzen stepped some distance aft of where the mainsail once stepped, was an early development. What had been the foresail then became the mainsail with a lengthened boom fitted with a substantial club. This rig was known locally as a "spanker," an apparent allusion to the fore-and-aft sail on the mizzen

of square-rigged vessels (Figure II). Photographs show boats of this type unloading oysters, lying at a produce wharf, and operating as buy-boats. The small mizzen usually was stepped just aft of the house and could be easily unshipped, transforming the rig to a sloop.

Increasing the amount of sail carried on a single spar emphasized the rig's major limitation—the mast. The common local practice of making spars by skinning the bark from pine saplings resulted in a limber mast that suited the early sharpie, even if it wasn't very straight and true. However, it was a mast that would not stand up to shrouds and stays. A supported rig requires spars of different proportions and brings into play a whole new set of structural considerations in the hull. Adding shrouds transforms the spar from being a simple beam to being a compression-loaded column.

Forward cuddies appear on the carry-away sharpies of seine-fishing operations, but the house on the spanker-rigged sharpie (see photograph of NELLIE BLY on facing page) was located well aft and had a sliding companion hatch, movable side windows, and often a galley stack. Sharpies of this rig were often used for hauling perishables, such as produce and farm products, and for freighting between market towns like New Bern, Washington, Elizabeth City, and the far-flung villages on the sounds and Outer Banks. This was often a more lengthy voyage than the typical fishing trip, and the cabin would make longer, overnight passages more comfortable for the small crew of one or two.

The configuration of these boats suggests a handy and capable craft of very shoal draft and moderate capacity. They are not vessels for ocean voyaging, and could not be built much larger than NELLIE BLY without creating an unmanageably large mainsail, and introducing other structural problems.



Many sharpies were operated on a shoestring budget. NELLIE BLY, a spanker, looks rough and is probably representative. Here she unloads oysters at the dock.

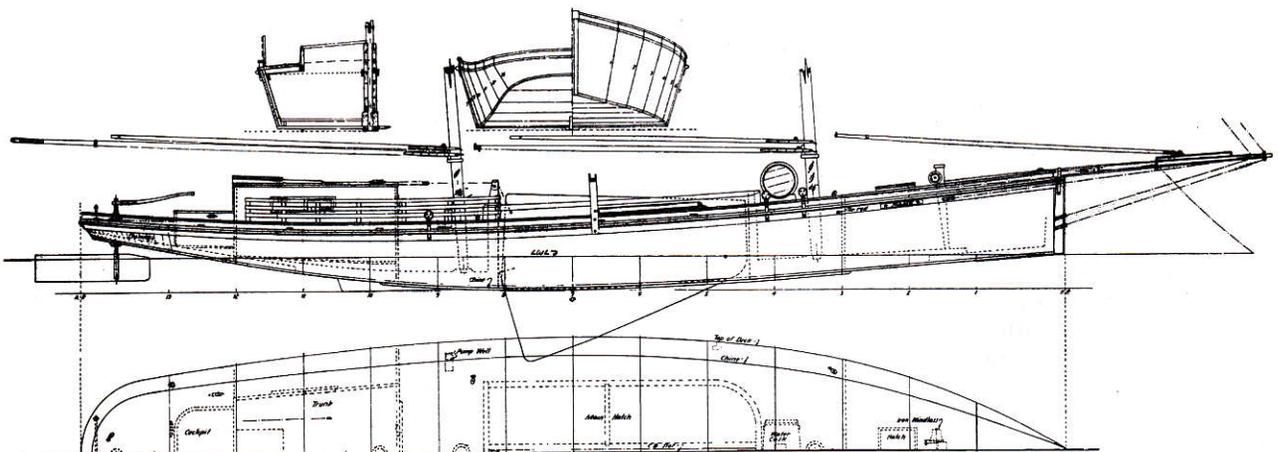
Photographs taken throughout this period indicate that sharpies rigged as sloops were extremely unusual, although the rig would seem a natural outgrowth of the spanker rig. Of the single-masted sharpies in photographs studied in collections at the North Carolina Maritime Museum, almost all seem to be pleasure craft or are skiffs built on the sharpie model. The one example that is undoubtedly a working boat is a vessel about 45' long, lying at the wharf of an oyster house in Washington, North Carolina, and this is probably a spanker with its mizzen unshipped (see photograph, page 69, top).

BESSIE D, built in 1891 at Smyrna, North Carolina, was a remarkable departure from the norm of the day (Figure III). Her jib is set on a short bowsprit, and two unstayed masts are rigged with gaff sails. The sail proportions and relative mast heights are technically those of a ketch, but

locally the type was known as a *yallowicker* and it is from this that the highly regarded sharpie schooners sprang.

The schooner rig represents an interesting development in the evolution of the North Carolina sharpie. Curiously, the rig also appeared on sharpies in Florida at about the same time, but differences in the boats of the two regions are sufficient to warrant considering them distinct, even though the possibility of a connection should not be lightly dismissed. The North Carolina form is sufficiently recognized that Howard Chapelle described it under the epithet "Carolina sharpie-schooner," in *Migrations of an American Boat Type* (see drawing, below).

The schooner may be the single most important development of the sharpie in North Carolina because



Chapelle's lines are not typical for a sharpie schooner, lacking both beam (10' 2" at deck) and depth (2' 9 1/2" to top of deck) for a 44-footer. This sharpie has been identified as CHASE, a seven-tonner built at Morehead City in 1910.

Of sharpies, skiffs, and flatbottoms

Flatbottom boat construction derives from neither the carvel (skeleton-first) nor clinker (skin-first) traditions. It is technically a misnomer to call a flatbottom skiff with smooth-planked sides “carvel-built,” or “clinker” if the side strakes are lapped. Although there are probably hybrids or crossover exceptions, this observation is true more often than we like to think.

There are two basic kinds, or traditions, of flatbottom construction. In one the bottom planks run lengthwise. Often called “bateau style,” the sequence of construction begins with the bottom, to which the sides are fitted and attached. In the second type, the bottom planks run athwartship and the sequence is reversed—the sides are made, set up, sprung into shape, and the bottom is attached, plank by plank.

The sharpie falls in the latter category. No satisfactory evolution or relationship between the sharpie and other recognized boat types in its own region have been established, and no specific European heritage has been proved. Is it an American invention? Chapelle thought so. Like any invention, however, it does have roots, and its roots are the same as those of the slab-sided, cross-planked-bottom skiffs, the origin of which also remains undetermined.

The sharpie’s *functional* antecedent was the class of large dugout canoes used at New Haven and Fair Haven. A few of these survive in museum collections, and at least two have had their bottoms replaced with planks running athwartship. Bottoms in oyster boats suffered fierce attrition, both on the inside from using shovels to unload the oysters, and on the outside from groundings. In the early days a bad bottom might have meant a new boat, but in time it grew more difficult to obtain proper logs, and inexpensive repairs became the order of the day. A new bottom planked lengthwise, in the conventional manner, was impractical: it required a system of transverse frames for support—not only an undesirable complication and added expense, but the

frames would be a nuisance for the shoveler. On the other hand, it was a simple matter to nail short planks from side to side, and that left the inside completely clear of obstruction. From there it was a minor leap to transfer the idea to the slab sides of a skiff.

New England sharpie construction undoubtedly grew out of this tradition, and may be the source of the technique in America. Furthermore, the sharpie may have been the vehicle that introduced cross-planked bottoms to the southeastern U.S. Ives as much as says so. In his 1881 letter to *Forest and Stream*, he writes, “At least 500 sharpies and *flat bottom skiffs* have been built...” (the emphasis is mine). Of course, it would be inappropriate to claim that no boat had ever been built in North Carolina with a cross-planked bottom prior to 1876. Events surrounding the introduction of the sharpie, however, are the sort of thing that stir people’s interest and spur popular acceptance of an idea.

A relatively primitive environment for boat and ship building in North Carolina resulted from its geographical makeup and related development patterns, and fostered logboat and similar “rough-boat” building traditions. There is evidence enough that these craft were not necessarily crude, but that they were built under rough circumstances. The concept of “river-bank” shipbuilding, or the practice of building sizable hulls on remote, woodland sites, near to the timber source, applies as well to these small craft. Logboats were often roughed out in the swamp, where the prized cypress trees grew and were felled. In its hollowed, rough form, the boat could be towed afloat, or paddled to a more convenient finishing site closer to home.

As sawn planks became more available, boats were likewise roughed out with local artisan techniques. They often emulated craft seen in the ports and on trips “up north” to Norfolk, Virginia, or perhaps Baltimore, Maryland. Never was boatbuilding an established trade in rural North Carolina, or most of the South for

that matter, to the degree that it was in the big ports or coastal communities from Virginia northward.

Which is why Ives’s introduction of the sharpie had such a tremendous impact. To the Carolina waterman’s world, lacking that basis in classical boatbuilding traditions, but very adept at making boats, the sharpie presented a huge opportunity—the golden egg, as it were. It out-sailed, or at least performed on an equal basis with, all other vessels—regardless of sophistication—and at a fraction of the cost. Moreover, sharpies could be built by people with average manual skills and reasonably good sense. House carpenters could build them—and did.

Transverse bottom planking was certainly a key element in the sharpie’s impact in North Carolina. Lengthwise planking requires transverse frames, and making and fitting transverse frames is time-consuming, requires skill, and is an added expense. Transverse bottom planking put the building of sizable boats in the hands of everyday fisher-farmers.

—MBA

For this article and sidebar the author drew on his own original research conducted during his time as Curator of Maritime Research at the North Carolina Maritime Museum, 1981–95, and also made use of the following sources:

General and specific sharpie history

American Sailing Craft (1936); *American Small Sailing Craft* (1952); *Migration of an American Boat Type* (1961); all by Howard I. Chapelle.

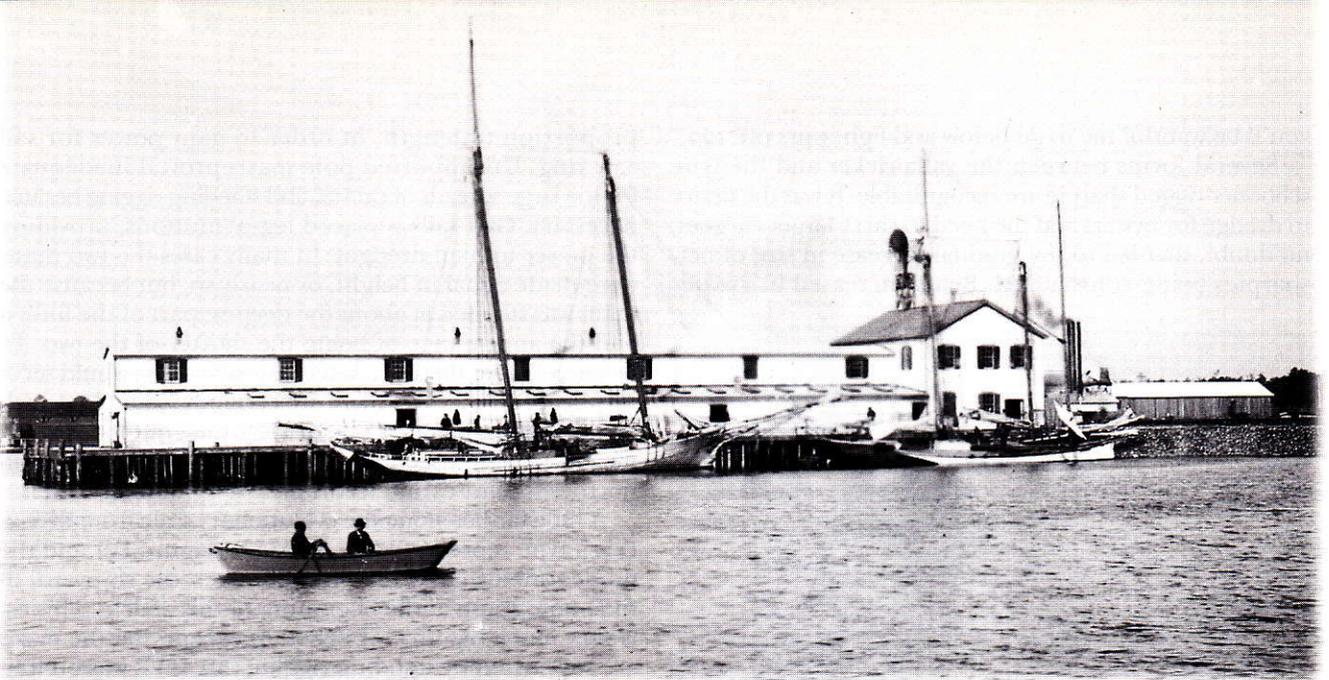
The Bill Reaves Collection at the Department of Cultural Resources’ underwater archaeology facility at Fort Fisher, North Carolina.

George Ives biographical information and sharpie activities

Forest and Stream, Vol. 6, (1876) p. 388; Vol. 12, (1879) p. 876; and Vol. 16, (1881) p. 137.

Eminent and Representative Men of the Carolinas of the Nineteenth Century (1892), by Brant & Fuller.

A History of New Bern and Craven County (1987), by Alan D. Watson.



A spanker with unshipped mizzen, and a schooner lie at the oyster cannery wharf near Washington, North Carolina.

of the economic edge these vessels provided to business operators who had low capital and attempted to operate from small, remote ports along the Carolina sounds. Local watermen recall the boats as Core Sound sharpies or, simply, sharpies. Several distinct variations can be identified in photographs made in the 1890s through the 1930s, and a pattern of development can be traced.

Carolina sharpie schooners were known to take to the high seas and indulge in a little West Indian trade when not otherwise employed. Chapelle found this surprising, but when pressed, latter-day watermen recall stories attesting to this fact. One such story goes like this: The best sharpie sailor had been a man by the name

of Tom Day. Captain Day made frequent trips to the islands in the off-season—when it wasn't oyster season. Captain Bloodgood, another local, was keen to sail in company with Day and thereby enjoy the advantage of Day's experience. On one particular occasion the two boats were returning from the West Indies, nearing home just off Swansboro. Bloodgood had been adamant that his mate keep an eye on Captain Day's boat and alter course, trim sail, or do exactly whatever Day did. The mate had become very weary of this nonsense when suddenly he realized there was smoke curling up from Day's cabin. "Well, Cap'n Bloodgood," the mate observed with acerbity, "I see Cap'n Day's set far to 'is galley. Reckon



BESSIE D ghosts along in what, to date, is the only known photograph of a sharpie rigged as a "yallowicker," an apparently whimsical name used colloquially for this ketch-like rig, characterized by the absence of standing rigging and spring stay.

you'll be wantin' me to go below and light ours off, too."

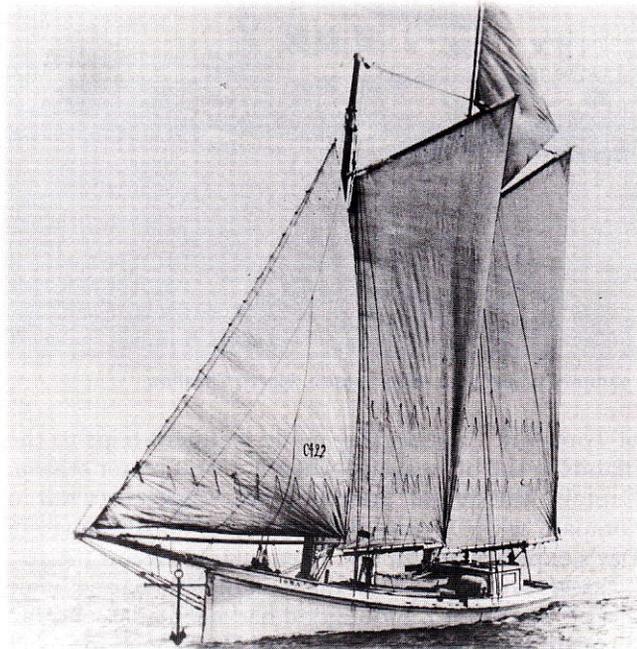
Several forms between the yallowicker and the true schooner-rigged sharpie are recognizable. It was the desire to dredge for oysters and the need to carry larger cargoes, no doubt, that led to the gradual increase in size of new sharpies being constructed. Beam increased in greater

proportion to length, in order to gain power for sail carrying. Unsupported pole masts proved inadequate for the large spreads of canvas, and standing rigging became necessary. Gaff sails replaced leg-o'-muttons, providing the power to haul dredges. In many cases the two masts were made equal in height, or nearly so, but because the main was stepped at about the deepest part of the hull, it had the appearance of being the shorter of the two. To debate whether these are ketches or schooners would serve no purpose. As a class, there are certainly examples which could be designated as one or the other, but local watermen historically used their own terminology derived from borrowed phrases and terms picked up in their travels.

A little farther along the evolutionary scale from BESSIE D is a type represented by BIVALVE (Figure IV) and the unidentified sharpie moored out from the shipyard, in the photograph at the beginning of this article. This rig is very much like that of BESSIE D except that the masts are supported by standing rigging. BIVALVE was built in Beaufort in 1892. She was 55' long, and her 11 tons make her appreciably larger than the BESSIE D.

Photographs of BESSIE D and spanker types do not show these boats fitted with dredging gear, although there is plentiful evidence that vessels of both types were involved in oyster fishing. Too small to drag a heavy dredge over the oyster beds, they were employed primarily as buy boats, carry-away boats, and tonging boats.

Dredges are typically seen on sharpies carrying the true schooner rig, usually the largest boats and represented here by IOWA (Figure V). This rig is virtually indistinguishable from that of the coasting schooners of the day. PRINCE (1899, Beaufort, pictured below) carries the mimicry even further, displaying a billethead, trailboards, and an attached



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IOWA is typical of the big sharpies that carried schooner rigs. This class was capable of offshore voyages in all but the worst weather. Like any schooner, the rig required a good deal of running and standing rigging, and other gear.



Jean Kell Collection, NCMM

PRINCE sailing in Beaufort Inlet. No reports of her ability under sail have been uncovered.

rudder. Her registered dimensions of $63 \times 19.5 \times 4.6'$, and 31 gross tons, make PRINCE the second largest sharpie yet found in the records. Only ENTERPRIZE, built in Wilmington in 1898 and lost in a collision the following year, was larger, at $66 \times 18.9 \times 5.1'$ and 40 tons gross.

Unfortunately, the lack of surviving sharpie hulls makes it very difficult to evaluate construction methods, and photographs of sharpies under construction have not come to light. ALFONSO (below) lay on the beach in the 1970s, having undergone numerous alterations during her long and illustrious career. Crawling through her bilge revealed a hodge-podge of construction elements that often defied classification as either original or introduced. The evidence was convincing, though, that local building practice differed from that of New England.

For instance, the sawn, vertical backbone found in Northern-built sharpies was absent. The Southern version was flat, sprung, and made up of three layers amidships, two near the ends. In smaller flatbottom vessels, saw kerfs across such heavy members ease the bending resistance. Bilge debris and paint buildup over the years would have masked their presence in ALFONSO.

The sharpie schooner was indeed an able vessel, though with the limitations of any flat-bottomed hull. Ultimate stability was lacking and the hull structure was not long-lived. Skill and good judgment were the order of the day, and no doubt many a young, inexperienced skipper learned the hard way when he should luff, reef, or strike sail to avoid catastrophe. But the weakness of the structure was due to its simple geometry and accounts for the lack of surviving examples.

Claims of "sharpies" existing in North Carolina prior to the Ives account are persistent but unsubstantiated.

One boat that deserves mention, GOODWIN ($40.3 \times 12.7 \times 3.6'$), built at Cedar Island in 1867, has interesting dimensions, but they don't fit either the New England form or later North Carolina derivatives. Most critical is GOODWIN's length/beam ratio, which at 3:1 would make for a clunky sailer in a flat-bottomed model. Even if GOODWIN were flatbottom-built, and it could have been, what we know about boatbuilding at that time suggests that the bottom would have been planked lengthwise rather than transversely.

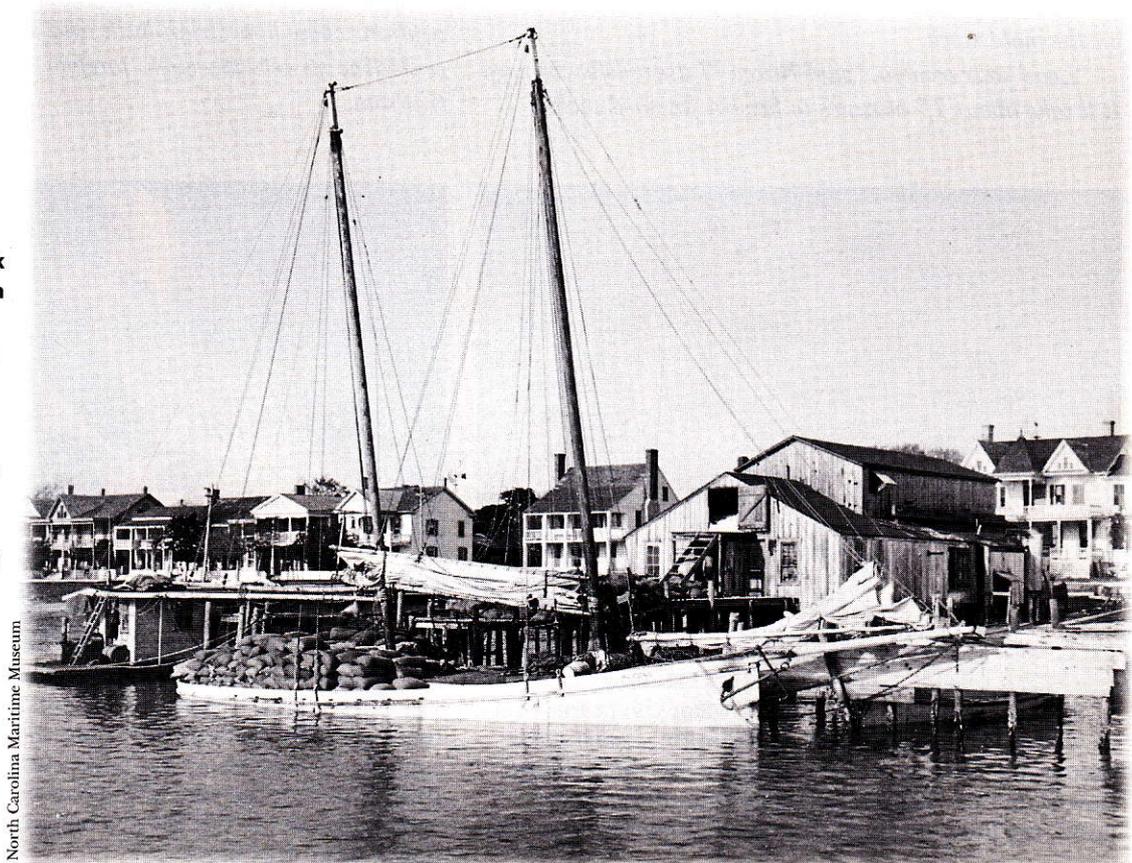
From about 1910–15, gasoline engines began to be used in workboats. By the 1930s many sharpies were converted to motorized trawlers, menhaden boats, and small freighters. But it was the hurricane of 1933, infamous in local history for its devastation, that probably sealed the fate of sailing sharpies as viable workboats. In the aftermath of the storm, the masts of untold numbers of sharpies protruded truck-down, step-skyward, from the shallow sounds like a forest of limbless trees.

Despite acknowledged detractions, the sharpie's size and otherwise sound ability made it a highly useful and adaptable vessel. The ease and low cost of building and owning a sharpie brought it within reach of a significant portion of the populace in the economically modest agrarian-maritime society in eastern North Carolina.



Michael B. Alford recently retired as Curator of Maritime Research at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort. Previously, he had worked as a naval architect specializing in small craft for sail, oar, and paddle, and in fuel-efficient powerboats. He is currently researching and writing on topics relating to the early history of boats and boatbuilding in the southern U.S.

ALFONSO heavily laden—"to the gunnels"—at a dock in Beaufort. Built in 1911 by T.K. Davis of Lewiston, North Carolina, ALFONSO had a long and colorful life, and spent her last days grounded on the Beaufort shore as a whaling museum in the 1970s.



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