



courtesy of Essex Shipbuilding Museum and Historical Society

OH HOW SHE 'SCOONS!

A PEEK AT CAPE ANN'S SCHOONER HERITAGE

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CAPT. ANDREW ROBINSON OF GLOUCESTER BUILT AND LAUNCHED THE first American fishing schooner in 1713. As she slipped into the water, legend tells us that a spectator cried, "See how she 'scoons!" In response, Capt. Robinson shouted, "A schooner let her be!" The word "scoon" has several possible origins including from the Scottish word "scon," which means "to send over water, to skip stones."

WHAT IS A SCHOONER?

A schooner is a vessel with a bowsprit—which is the spar mounted on the bow, one or more headsails, and two or more

masts, each carrying sails attached to the back. There was a variant, the Topsail Schooner. She carried a square sail at the top of the foremast.

WHY WERE SCHOONERS POPULAR?

From the mid 1700s to late 1800s schooners were popular amongst privateers, coastal tradesmen, and fishermen. They were the fastest and leanest vessels available, reaching the Grand Banks in record time and returning with their large holds packed with salted, iced, or fresh fish.

Schooners also maneuvered coastal winds better and required smaller crews than other types of vessels. They could glide through shallow waters, making it easier to enter Gloucester Harbor and

Above: The Schooner *Adventure*, built in 1926 in Essex, cuts a path in rough waters in 1980. Yes, 1980; the schooner was renovated in 2012 and still operates in Gloucester today

Cape Ann's inlets and rivers. At the time, all of these attributes made the schooner the most valued vessel for fishermen and North American coastal trade.

ORIGINS OF RACING FISHING SCHOONERS

The tradition of racing fishing schooners was borne from the public's demand for fresh fish in the 1800s, and the need to get back to port quickly. Once a schooner was full, she raced home to preserve the freshness of the fish, and to reap the financial rewards gained from customers who wanted the freshest (first) catch of the day.

The push for speed resulted in a demand for longer and wider schooners. The depth of the hull would remain unchanged because of the shoal (shallow) harbors of Gloucester and other ports. The changes in width and length of the schooner would prove to be dangerous as they led to many tragic losses of vessels and their crews.

In the 1870s, there was a push for increased safety on schooners. First, Gloucester's wharves were lengthened into deeper water. Then, builders and designers began to modify their hulls, making them deeper (lowering the center of gravity) so they resisted capsizing.

The second big change towards safety was the "Knockabout" schooner introduced in 1902. This style had an extended pointed bow that eliminated the need for a bowsprit, also known as "The Widow Maker." Gloucester's historic Schooner *Adventure* is a classic example of a Knockabout.

ESSEX

As the fishing industry grew steadily in the 1800s, so did the need for schooners. By 1850 there were 15 shipyards on the Essex River and the town was America's leader in fishing schooner construction. By the time the shipyards of Essex closed in 1948, one of every 28 wooden vessels that flew

the American flag was built in Essex.

Prominent Essex historian Lewis Story felt confident estimating that as many as 3,600 vessels may have been built in Essex between 1650 and 1940. The Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum also maintains a list of 2,838 named vessels built in Essex between the years of 1714 and 1948.

FAMOUS LOCAL SCHOONERS

Among the more famous schooners built in Essex for the Gloucester fishing fleet were the schooners *Gertrude L. Thebaud* (launched in 1930); the *Effie M. Morrissey* (launched in 1894), now known as the *Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey*; and the *Schooner Adventure* (launched in 1926).

The *Gertrude L. Thebaud* was built for speed, and she was the last American schooner built specifically to race against the famed Canadian Schooner, *Bluenose*. To qualify, all *Thebaud* needed to do was



Families of shipbuilders gather together for the launch party of the Schooner *Rhodora* in Essex, 1919.

take part in one fishing expedition, so on April 29, 1930 she left Boston for her first fishing trip to the Banks.

In October, the *Thebaud's* first race against the larger *Bluenose* was for the Lipton Cup held off Gloucester. The *Bluenose* suffered her first defeat in nine years. The *Thebaud* continued to compete in other races including the International Fisherman's Cup—the workingman's version of the America's Cup—and was conceived to match the best of the Massachusetts fishing fleet against the best of Nova Scotia's. The next International race was not until 1938, and it was held off Gloucester. *Thebaud* won three out of five races.

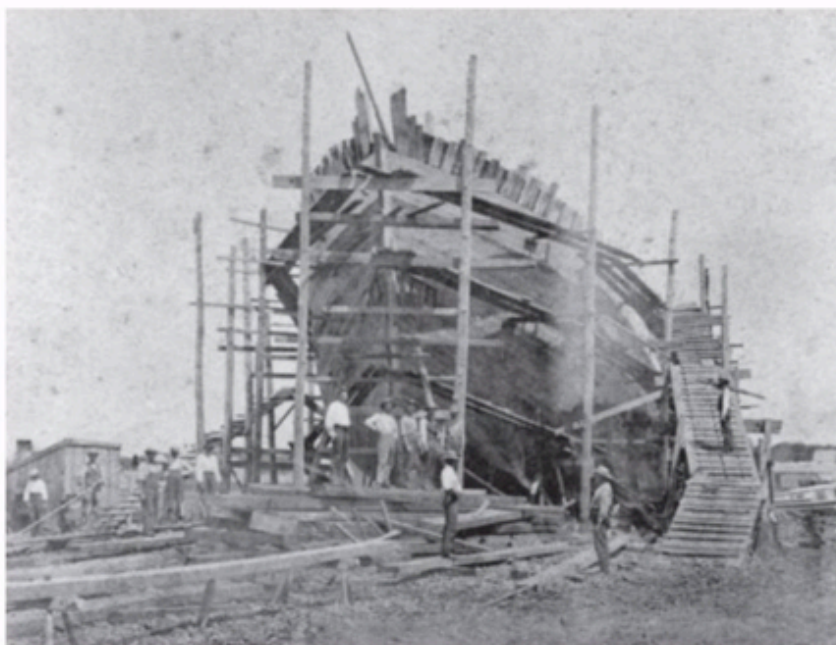
A great source of pride for Cape Ann is that today, the *Ernestina-Morrissey* is the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' official vessel. The schooner, originally named the *Effie M. Morrissey* is a National Historic Landmark with 120 years of experience in Gloucester's fishing industry, and even Arctic exploration. She was built in 1894 and is currently undergoing repairs at Boothbay Harbor Shipyard in Maine under the supervision of Harold Burnham. Burnham is a modern-day shipbuilder and designer whose family dates back to the 1630s in Essex, MA.

The Schooner *Adventure* was built in 1926. She provided 27 years of lucrative catches of halibut, cod and haddock off Georges Bank. She is one of only two surviving "knockabouts." *Adventure* was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1994, and underwent a substantial restoration in 2012. Enjoy a sail on her today out of Gloucester.

Eventually new fishing methods, including dragging open nets behind diesel powered vessels, closed the book on the schooner's long history. Yet, the love for the beauty and speed of schooners never faded.

TODAY

The Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum is the best resource for learning more about Cape Ann's schooner and shipbuilding heritage. Here, at this living museum, classic wooden ves-



courtesy of Essex Shipbuilding Museum and Historical Society



Len Burgess

The Schooners *Ardelle* (left) and *Thomas E. Lannon*. Top: Essex's oldest known photo shows the *Maggie Attwood* under construction in 1872.

sels are still being built and launched in the Essex tradition, including the Schooner *Thomas E. Lannon* (1997) and the Schooner *Ardelle* (2011).

During your time here, sail through history on *Adventure*, explore Gloucester Harbor with the Ellis family on the *Lannon* or cruise around the Cape with ship-

wright Harold Burnham on the *Ardelle*. Perhaps you'll catch a magnificent sunset along the way. There's nothing like the rush of the wind, the salt spray from the waves, and the sound of the gulls to take you back in time. This is where you and history intersect—for an extraordinary Cape Ann experience. 