

Maine Vessel Types (1700s-1930s): Complete Guide

1. SCHOONERS (Most Popular - Multiple Variants)

Two-Masted Schooners

Description: Fore-and-aft rigged vessels with foremast generally shorter than mainmast. The most common variants were gaff-rigged and staysail schooners. Used extensively for fishing offshore banks and carrying catches to West Indies. Dominated Maine's coasting trade, particularly in coal.

Size: 50-200 feet **Crew:** "Just a captain, a cook, and one sailor per mast" **Primary Use:** Fishing, coastal cargo transport, lumber trade

Multi-Masted Schooners (3-6 masts)

Three-Masted: Introduced around 1800. **Four-Masted:** First built on East Coast at Bath in 1880. **Five-Masted:** First East Coast vessel built at Waldoboro in 1888. **Six-Masted:** Nine of eleven built in US came from Maine, seven from Percy & Small yard in Bath.

Notable Example: The 3,730-ton Wyoming (1909) - largest wooden sailing craft to operate in commercial service, built by Percy and Small in Bath

Lumber Schooners

Description: Coastal schooners of about 100 tons that carried everything from timber and coal to bricks, general cargo, and hay to offshore island communities **Size:** 100-500 tons **Primary Use:** Timber transport from Maine forests to urban markets

2. DOWNEASTERS

Description: A modification of the clipper ship using similar bow but with better cargo handling. Achieved balance between speed and tonnage for California grain trade. Most associated with Maine - became the ship type most identified with the state.

Rigging: Later vessels rigged as 4-masted barks, with fore-and-aft rigged fourth mast called the jigger **Size:** At the limit of wooden ship construction **Primary Use:** Long-distance cargo, particularly California grain trade **Notable Example:** Ship Henry B. Hyde built at Bath in 1884, considered the finest American full-rigged ship of the post-clipper era

3. BRIGS

Description: Two-masted vessels with both masts square-rigged. Common smaller merchant vessels and warships from late 18th through 19th centuries. Seen as more maneuverable than schooners, with superior windward performance.

Size: 75-165 feet length, tonnages up to 480 **Crew:** Required larger crews relative to size **Construction:** Pine brigs designed to last about twenty years **Primary Use:** Coastal trading, naval service

4. PINKIES

Description: Small fishing schooners with distinctive "pinked" (pinched and upturned) bow. Evolved from Chebacco

boats with larger size and schooner rig. "These little vessels from their extreme buoyancy and offering so little resistance to ocean waves, would make comparatively good weather when larger ships would be laboring".

Size: 50-60 feet on deck by the 1820s **Crew:** Could be manned by only a couple of men **Primary Use:** Coastal fishing, venturing offshore to work on banks in Gulf of Maine pursuing cod **Notable Example:** Pinky Summertime built in 1986 using traditional methods, part of Maine Windjammer Fleet

5. SLOOPS

Description: Single-masted vessels with mainsail, some rigged with topmast carrying triangular topsail. Have bowsprit carrying fore-and-aft jib sail. Among oldest vessel types in American fishing industry.

Size: Small, typically under 50 feet **Primary Use:** Near-shore fishing for lobster and other species **Special Type:** Friendship sloops appeared around 1880 in Friendship, Maine

6. BARKS/BARQUES

Description: Three or more masts with fore mast, mainmast square-rigged, only aftmost mast (mizzen) rigged fore-and-aft. Rigged same as ship except bark has fore-and-aft sails only on mizzen mast.

Advantages: Downwind, can outperform schooner or barkentine, easier to handle than full-rigged ship **Size:** Generally ran smaller than ships, but some larger vessels used bark rig as money-saving measure **Primary Use:** Deep-sea cargo transport

7. STEAMSHIPS

Description: Maine transitioned to steel steamships when wooden sailing proved unprofitable. Thomas W. Hyde began constructing steel steamships at Bath Iron Works. 1890: Bath Iron Works became Maine's first steel shipyard.

Notable Examples:

- 1898: Steam freighter Winifred built at Bath, first steel tramp steamer built in US
- Side-paddle wheel steamship Portland (1889) - one of largest, most palatial vessels in New England
- 1885: Steam mackerel seiner Novelty built at Kennebunkport, first steam vessel in New England offshore fisheries

8. PACKET BOATS

Description: Medium-sized boats designed for mail, freight, and passenger transport with regularly scheduled services. Often schooner-rigged. Built for fast conveyance of passengers and goods.

Variants: Various rig configurations including schooners, brigs, brigantines, barques **Primary Use:** Scheduled mail and passenger service between ports **Era:** Extensive use during 18th and 19th centuries

9. BARQUENTINES/BARKENTINES

Description: Three or more masts with square-rigged foremast and fore-and-aft rigged main, mizzen and other masts. Foremast rigged square, other masts rigged fore-and-aft.

Notable Example: Maid of England of 750 tons built at Grosses Coques in 1919, last Canadian commercial vessel to carry square rig, abandoned at sea in 1928 **Size:** 500-800 tons typically **Primary Use:** Long-distance cargo transport

10. PINNACES

Description: Versatile vessels that could serve various purposes. The 30-ton pinnace Virginia was built in 1607-1608 at Popham Colony. Almost any vessel might serve as pinnace - Discovery under other circumstances might have been called a bark.

Historical Significance: Virginia sailed to England carrying colonists, then crossed Atlantic again to Jamestown - first English ocean-going vessel built in Americas **Size:** 20-30 tons typically **Primary Use:** Colonial exploration, transport, multi-purpose vessel

SPECIALIZED FISHING VESSELS

Chebacco Boats

Description: Early fishing vessels designed for near-shore fishing, sturdy with high-stemmed and sharp-sterned design. Predecessor to pinkies, some converted by giving them schooner rigs.

Dogbodies

Description: Chebacco boats with square sterns (pointed stern versions called different names). Featured two masts and crude cabin with bunks and brick cooking stove.

Maine's Maritime Leadership: Of vessels built on East Coast between 1870-1899, Maine built 70% of ships, barks and barkentines. Of East Coast vessels: 50% of three-mast schooners, 71% of four-mast schooners, 95% of five-mast schooners, and 90% of six-mast schooners.