



The Chebacco Boat

The first settlers of Mount Desert Island and the outer islands were fishermen who came from the area around Gloucester, Massachusetts in "Chebacco" boats, or "dogbodies," a modified version of the Chebacco. For this reason, we have chosen the Chebacco boat as a logo for our new *History Journal*.

The first Gloucester fishing vessels worthy of the name were the thirty-foot Chebaccos. They boasted two masts stepped well forward, a sharp stern, and cabins fore and aft. The bow rode the seas well, and the high stern kept out a following sea. Into the fo'c'sle were squeezed a couple of bunks and a brick fireplace where they smoked trashfish for the crew to eat while at sea.

Each spring the Chebaccos were scraped and caulked and tarred and sent out to the fishing grounds. Once there, the boats were anchored, and the men hand-lined over the side from the low midship rail. Each man had his spot, called a "berth," which was chosen by lottery and held throughout the trip. They fished two lines at twenty-five to sixty fathoms (150-360 feet) with a ten pound lead weight, which they hauled up dozens of times a day. The shoulder muscles that resulted from a lifetime of such work made fishermen easily recognizable on the street. They were called "hand-liners" and people got out of their way.

The boats were built at Cape Ann, Massachusetts and sometimes spelled "Jebacco" boat. Chebacco was the old name for what is now the village of Essex where the boats originated. As far as can be determined, this type of boat was a development of the old colonial "double shallop" early employed in the coastal fisheries of New England. After the American Revolution and into the first two decades of the 19th century the Chebacco boat and her companion type, the dogbody Chebacco, were very popular with New England fisherman.

The Chebacco boat developed in two models: the sharp-stern hull with a pink, always called Chebacco, or Jebacco, boat and the square-stern variant called dogbody Chebacco or just dogbody. As a general rule the square-sterned Chebacco dogbody was smaller than the pink-sterned Chebacco boat, as the square stern gave the same deck area in a smaller boat. The dogbody was apparently replaced by small schooners in the first decade of the 19th century, at least at Gloucester, but the pink-sterned boats were built for some years after 1800 in Massachusetts and much later than the War of 1812 in Maine and in the Maritime Provinces.*

* The information contained in the above description was taken directly from *The Perfect Storm* by Sebastian Junger, (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1997), pps. 22-23 and from *The National Watercraft Collections* by Howard I. Chapelle, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), pps 179-180, with some minor changes for readability and clarification.