

“The manner of making their boats,” a circa-1590 Theodor de Bry colored engraving after a John White painting, shows how Powhatan Indians hollowed a log by burning, then scraping out coals and ash.

Indians used fire to fell and hollow out their dugouts by slowly burning the wood and scraping out the coals and ash. Imported metal hand tools reduced the time necessary to build a canoe.



The use of the hand adz, a European metal tool, streamlined canoe construction.

Economics Shape the Canoe

Increasing world demand for the Chesapeake’s bounty of tobacco, fish and oysters led to a need for larger workboats. The development of the tobacco canoe and multi-log hulls allowed for larger cargoes to be transported more efficiently. The tobacco canoe was created by lashing two hulls together by crossbeams, providing a catamaran with a steady platform to carry multiple hogshead casks of tobacco.

Shortages of suitable large trees by the late 1700s made single-log construction impractical. Pine pitch, used in creating waterproof seals along a hull, was becoming more available. The multi-log canoe – in which two or more logs were aligned next to each other, hollowed out as a single unit, and then fitted tightly together – was a uniquely Chesapeake Bay invention. The expanded width improved carrying capacity while maintaining the durability of whole logs.

The high point in the evolution of the Chesapeake Bay log canoe was the five-log hull. A trio of designs – the Poquoson log canoe of riverine Virginia and the



Log canoes on the James River in 1906.

Pocomoke and Tilghmans Island log canoes of Maryland’s Eastern Shore – shared a common form but differed in important hull details and rigging.

Bateaus, Brogans & Bugeyes

Other Chesapeake Bay workboats grew out of the log canoe tradition. A punt was a simple craft for fishing and hunting. The James River bateau was the successor to the tobacco canoe. Designed to carry even more hogsheads, the single-log hulls were replaced with sawn planks.

By the mid-1800s, larger and more seaworthy vessels were needed to keep up with demands of a growing oyster industry. The addition of a keel, a tiny cabin, and side decks to a five-log hull resulted in a brogan, which moved this workboat beyond the definition of canoe. As a final evolutionary leap, the brogan evolved into a bugeye, regarded by some as the finest Chesapeake Bay sailing vessel, as the log hull was replaced with framing and planking that supported a cabin and extensive decking.

The story of the Chesapeake Bay log canoe is a reflection of the environment of the bay, the needs of the communities served, and evolutionary changes to the construction and shape of the vessel. For more than three centuries, the log canoe was essential to life on the Chesapeake Bay, the United States’ largest estuary, for travel, harvest and trade. The log canoe evolved and thrived on the bay until it was eventually replaced by other watercraft. Today, a few log canoes still remain as racing boats.

The log canoe – methodically fashioned from single trees by Powhatan Indians – was the dominant watercraft at the time English colonists arrived at Jamestown in 1607. The open, shallow-draft vessel was practical for navigating and fishing along the Chesapeake waterways, including the James River, the meeting place of the Old and New Worlds. The suitability of the log canoe led to its adoption by European colonists using imported tools and technology. Log canoe construction was the embodiment of traditional boatbuilding. American



This cypress dugout canoe, measuring 17½ feet in length, was built in the late 19th century and used to navigate the shallow waterways of the Dismal Swamp. This view of the canoe shows how it was adapted over time to fit an outboard motor.

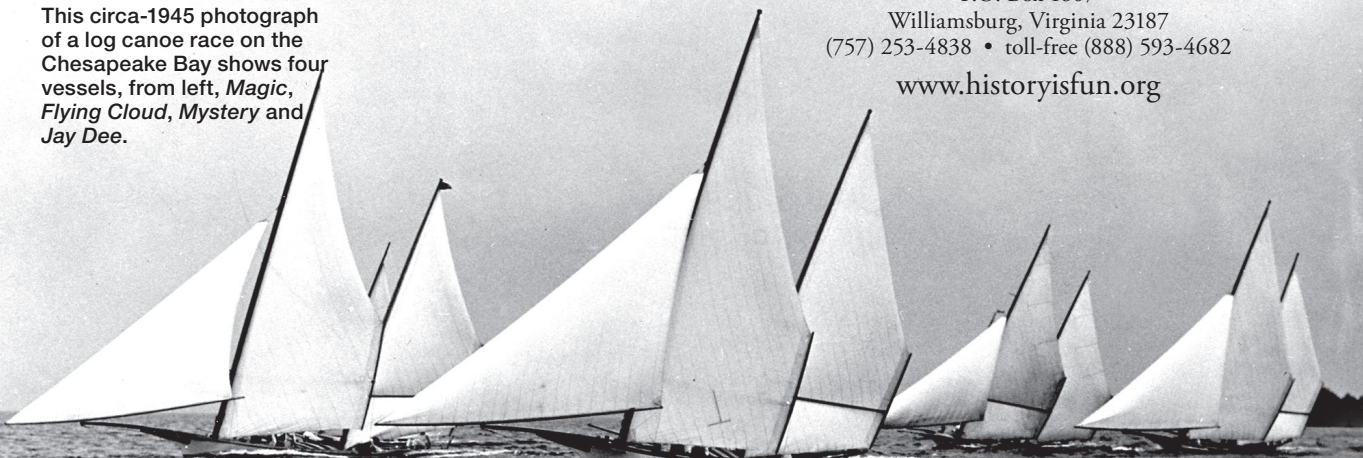
Racing on the Bay

Beginning in the 1840s, log canoe racing was a spin-off from workboats racing one another between oyster bed and market to get the best price for their goods. A massive sailing rig was added to a Tilghmans Island canoe hull, thinned to reduce weight, transforming the workboat into a racing vessel. The outrageous amounts of canvas necessitated hiking boards upon which a canoe's crew could sit to counterbalance the craft. The early 20th century saw the construction of purpose-built racing boats as well as organized racing competitions in the northern Chesapeake Bay that still continue today.

Dugout Canoes in North America

Beyond the Chesapeake Bay, log canoes were important watercraft in other indigenous regions of North America. The Seminoles in the Florida Everglades utilized sturdy cypress dugouts. In the Louisiana bayous, the pirogue resulted from combining native cypress dugouts and French carpentry skills. Large log canoes of Haida Gwaii, straddling British Columbia and Alaska, were elaborately decorated yet sturdily built to handle swift currents. The Hawaiian koa wood canoe had an outrigger to balance the narrow canoe across a lagoon or in rough surf.

This circa-1945 photograph of a log canoe race on the Chesapeake Bay shows four vessels, from left, *Magic*, *Flying Cloud*, *Mystery* and *Jay Dee*.



All artifacts and photographs shown are from the collections at The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Va.

On the cover, detail from Theodor de Bry engraving, "The manner of their fishing in Virginia," circa 1590 after a John White painting.

"Working and Racing on the Bay: The Chesapeake Log Canoe" at Jamestown Settlement is presented through the collaboration of The Mariners' Museum and the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation. The special exhibition is funded in part by a grant from James City County with additional support from Mr. and Mrs. E. Peter Meekins, Altria Group and Dominion Resources, Inc.

About The Mariners' Museum

The Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Va., an educational, non-profit institution accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and designated by Congress as America's National Maritime Museum, is dedicated to the story of mankind's relationship with the sea. It is home to an international collection of art and artifacts, the largest maritime library and archives in the Northern Hemisphere, and the USS *Monitor* Center.

About Jamestown Settlement

Jamestown Settlement, a museum of 17th-century Virginia history and culture, features expansive exhibition galleries and historical interpretation in outdoor re-creations of a Powhatan Indian village, the three ships that brought America's first permanent English colonists to Virginia in 1607, and a 1610-14 colonial fort.

Jamestown Settlement, along with the Yorktown Victory Center, is administered by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, an educational institution of the Commonwealth of Virginia accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.

Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation

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