

MARITIME HERITAGE OF THE UNITED STATES NHL THEME STUDY--LARGE VESSELS

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

CHRISTEEN (Oyster Sloop)

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Christeen

Other Name/Site Number: Oyster Sloop Christeen

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Essex Harbor

Not for publication: _____

City/Town: Essex

Vicinity: _____

State: CT County: Middlesex

Code: 007 Zip Code: _____

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Category of Property

Private: X

Building(s): _____

Public-local: _____

District: _____

Public-State: _____

Site: _____

Public-Federal: _____

Structure: X

Object: _____

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing

Noncontributing
_____ buildings
_____ sites
_____ structures
_____ objects
0 Total

1

1

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- _____ Entered in the National Register _____
- _____ Determined eligible for the _____
National Register
- _____ Determined not eligible for the _____
National Register
- _____ Removed from the National Register _____
- _____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Transportation

Sub: Water-related

Current: Transportation

Sub: Water-related

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:

N/A

Materials:

Foundation: Wood

Walls: Wood

Roof: Wood

Other Description: Wood

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The one-masted oyster sloop Christeen, official number 126208, is a historic vessel homeported in Essex, Connecticut, and moored in front of the Connecticut River Museum. The vessel is undergoing restoration and rehabilitation by the Tradewinds Educational Network, Inc., for use in educational programs to inform the public about the oyster fisheries and the reasons for their decline, as well as providing other environmental programs, while cruising under sail on Long Island Sound.

CHRISTEEN AS BUILT AND MODIFIED

As built in 1883, Christeen is a wooden-hulled shoal draft vessel with a low freeboard, beamy hull, and a clipper bow. Christeen was and remains a single-decked centerboard sloop 38.4 feet long between perpendiculars, with a 15.1-foot beam and a 3.9-foot depth of hold. The sloop is 48 feet long overall. Christeen has a 3-foot draft. The sloop was originally registered at 11.45 gross and 10.88 net tons when admeasured during the 19th century. She is now registered at 12 gross and 11 net tons, and displaces 11 tons.¹ The increase in tonnage is because the deck was raised 6 inches, thus increasing the hold capacity, upon which tonnage measurements are determined. The ship has double-sawn oak frames on 16-inch centers, and is planked with 2-inch thick oak. Christeen's decks are longleaf pine. The deck beams rest on clamps.

Christeen was built as a one-masted, gaff-rigged sloop. The vessel remained rigged as a sloop without auxiliary power until

¹ License No. 45, Port of Cold Harbor, New York, May 10, 1884. National Archives Record Group 36, Records of Merchant Vessel Documentation, Washington, D.C. Also see the Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States for 1884 and for subsequent years up to 1914, when Christeen changed to a motor vessel.

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1914, when a small gasoline engine was installed that drove a single screw.² This engine was later replaced by a 24-horsepower engine. Christeen currently retains an engine and two other 1914 modifications for motor power, namely a shaft log and stern or "prick" post. Other modifications done prior to 1914, which were retained in the last restoration of the vessel (when all post-1915 modifications were removed) include the raised maindeck and a raised foredeck, which includes a slight shift of the foredeck and bowsprit forward.³ The centerboard trunk was removed around 1965. The bed logs mark its location, and current restoration plans include the restoration of the trunk and centerboard. The sloop has retained her mast throughout her career, and is currently traditionally rigged. The mast shrouds are wire rope reeved through turnbuckles and attached to strap iron chainplates. The mast mounts a boom that extends aft beyond the transom, and a gaff.

The broad deck is interrupted by a large cargo hatch amidships that leads below to the hold. The hold, once separated by the centerboard trunk, is now open. A low deckhouse aft leads into the cabin/engineer room. The wheelbox and helm are aft of the deckhouse. Forward of the hatch is the samsonpost, with two side stanchions. Forward of the samsonpost, the bowsprit is stepped inboard and secured by wire shrouds. A single chain bobstay passes up from the gripe to the end of the bowsprit, and passes to the wire forestay, which runs up to the mast.

Despite a 107-year career, repairs, maintenance, and some modifications through time for different trades, recent surveys of the vessel note a high level of integrity of form, materials, and workmanship. "The primary form has been retained--the essence of the shape is readable....Hull planking, probably keel, keelson and some frame remnants remain of the original. The early clamp is also remaining, so that one can pick up the early deck beam scantlings and locations from that clamp. There are remains of old fastenings...."⁴ Another surveyor notes that Christeen, although in need of repairs to rotten topsides, "remains very largely as built in 1883."⁵

² Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), entry for Christeen.

³ Richard A. Fewtrell, consulting shipwright, Lyme, Connecticut, report of survey of Christeen, October 3, 1990, pp. 2-3.

⁴ Letter, Nancy d'Estang, Shipyard research, Mystic Seaport Museum, to Benjamin T. Clarkson, October 1, 1990.

⁵ Fewtrell, op.cit., p. 3.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B C D X

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 1, 4

NHL Theme(s): XII. Business
 A. Extractive or Mining Industries
 5. Fishing & Livestock
 L. Shipping & Transportation

 XIV. Transportation
 B. Ships, Boats, Lighthouses & Other Structures

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
Maritime History	1883-1940	
Commerce	1883-1940	

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

From the 1880s through the 1930s oystering was a national industry with thriving centers on San Francisco, Mobile, Chesapeake, Delaware, Narragansett, and Great Sound Bays, as well as on Long Island Sound. At the turn of the century, oysters were the chief fishery product of the United States. The most common large vessel type built to harvest oysters was the oyster sloop, a generic craft with some regional variation.

There are now only three oyster sloops known to survive in the United States--Christeen (1883); Modesty (1923); and Hope (1948). Christeen is the oldest surviving working example of an oyster sloop in the United States and an outstanding representative of the early form of oyster sloop, a type that dates to the 1830s. Of all these vessels, Christeen best exemplifies the type and its employment. In her career Christeen fished, clammed, scalloped, freighted potatoes and furniture, and was a chartered excursion and sightseeing vessel, in short, "she did almost everything these ubiquitous sloops had done" in their long history.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statements that follow.

THE AMERICAN OYSTER INDUSTRY UNDER SAIL AND OYSTER SLOOPS

The harvesting, and later the cultivation of the oyster was one of the earliest fisheries industries in North America. Native Americans harvested the rich oyster beds that proliferate along the coast from Texas to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as well as on San Francisco Bay. Colonial interest in oystering led to widespread and intensive harvesting, and ultimately, by the 18th century, to government efforts to regulate the industry and conserve and nurture oyster beds. Oyster cultivation began in the 1820s, and gradually reinvigorated a flagging industry at a time when demand for oysters was increasing.¹

As early as 1800, "the widespread desire for oysters on the half shell at home or in public eating places kept the shell trade alive."² A century later, oysters were "the chief fishery product of the United States and the most extensively eaten of all shellfish Everyone, especially those living along the shore, knew all about this wholesome, nutritious bivalve and the multimillion dollar industry it spawned."³ Millions of acres of seabed were cultivated and harvested--on New York's Great South

¹ John M. Kochiss, Oystering from New York to Boston (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), pp. 8-14, pass.

² Ibid., p. 48.

³ Ibid., p. xix.

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Bay, for example, 50,000 acres alone were under cultivation in 1916.⁴ Fleets of hundreds of schooners, sloops, and oyster boats worked the beds, and thousands of men and women were employed afloat or ashore, tonging, dredging, shucking, canning, or serving oysters.

The oyster industry reached its peak in the 1880s, when demand was highest, the largest area of submerged bottomlands were being harvested, and the greatest number of vessels was engaged in the trade. The vessels used to harvest and bring oysters to market generally fit into three categories: 1) the oyster tonging boats, usually canoes, skiffs or sharpies in which one man used wooden tongs to pluck the oysters from the seabed; 2) the oyster sloops, round-bottomed, gaff-rigged, centerboard one-masted vessels that pulled oyster dredges or served as platforms for tonging, and; 3) the sailing oyster freighters, the two-masted centerboard schooners.

As shallow-water oyster beds were fished out, tonging for oysters became difficult, if not impractical, for beds at depths greater than 12 feet. The solution was the dredge, "essentially a kind of rake with a bag attached and long rope, cable, or chain replacing the wooden handle....A sailboat pulled the dredge along the bottom...when full, the dredge was hauled aboard by hand, dumped, and then thrown overboard again."⁵ The vessel type developed for dredging, and operated under sail until the development of powered dredge boats, was the oyster sloop, the "typical" oyster boat type...Shell-Fish Commissioners Reports and Custom House Records consistently verify the sloop's preeminence from the 1860s on."⁶

The vessel type was developed in the 1830s and was, throughout its long employment, simple. The rig consistently remained "the job and gaff mainsail sloop...After 1900, when auxiliary power appeared, the useful main gaff topsail was eliminated, which left a very simple, efficient rig."⁷ Hull form basically remained the same, with "subtle regional variations." According to the late maritime historian Howard I. Chapelle, the expert on the subject, the oyster or "New York sloops"

were developed sometime in the 1830s, when the centerboard had been accepted. The boats were all built about New York bay, particularly on the Jersey shore. The model spread rapidly, and by the end of the Civil War, the shoal centerboard sloop of the New York

⁴ Ibid., p. 28

⁵ Ibid., pp. 85.

⁶ John M. Kochiss, "Comparative Analysis of Five Oyster Sloops," (1968) manuscript on file, Mystic Seaport Museum. Page 6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

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style had appeared all along the shores of Western Long Island Sound, in northern New Jersey, and from thence southward into Delaware and Chesapeake waters."⁸

Thus the sloop became the generic type for the nation's principal oyster fisheries. Its form was distinctive--"a wide, shoal centerboarder with a rather wide, square stern and a good deal of deadrise...." with "husky proportions, clipper bows, square sterns and the cabin aft and hold forward arrangement...."⁹

The oyster sloops remained in use well into the current century, some continuing to oyster dredge under sail or auxiliary power after conversion to motor power took place after 1900. The number of vessels sharply declined, however. From the heyday of the 1880s, when more than 300 boats fished the Connecticut beds alone, to the 1930s only two dozen sailing boats were employed. A number of modern, motor-powered vessels, different in form and use than the old sloops, took their place in a dwindling market, the result of decreased demand and pollution. By 1958 "no sailboat oystered. Sail and the oyster succumbed together."¹⁰

In 1968, Mystic Seaport Museum, in Mystic, Connecticut, undertook a survey of the surviving oyster sloops to find the ideal candidate for preservation in the museum's nationally-important collection of American craft. John Kochiss, a research associate in the curatorial department, with a long history of interest in and study of the sloops, conducted the survey. Kochiss found four surviving sloops of the "classic" style--Ideal (1878); Nellie A. Ryle (1891); Eaglet (1900); and Modesty (1923). Mr. Kochiss did not include the last sloop built, Hope (1948) because her form was anomalous and vastly different from her predecessors. Mr. Kochiss selected Modesty as the candidate for preservation by Mystic Seaport "because she was in good condition [and] representative of her type" despite her late (1923) construction.¹¹ His recommendation was not acted upon. Of the four sloops he evaluated, only Modesty survives to this day in a museum collection.

Christeen, unknown to Mr. Kochiss, had also survived. Now rescued and under rehabilitation, this sloop was recently selected by Mr. Kochiss as the most significant of the surviving representatives of the type. Mr. Kochiss wrote of Christeen, "She is as typical a working sloop in hull and rig as one would desire....Christeen not only looks right but she played the part

⁸ Howard I. Chappelle, American Small Sailing Craft (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1951) pp. 245-246.

⁹ Ibid and Kochiss, "Comparative Analysis of Five Oyster Sloops," p. 9.

¹⁰ Kochiss, op.cit., p. 4.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 20.

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remarkably well....She did almost everything those ubiquitous sloops had done. But to top it off, Christeen is uniquely the oldest working example of those historic 19th-century working sloops."¹²

CAREER OF CHRISTEEN

Christeen was built in 1883 at Glenwood Landing on Long Island, for oysterman William W. Smith of Oyster Bay, New York. The vessel was licensed to work the offshore oyster beds of Long Island and to participate in the coasting trade in 1884.¹³ The sloop worked the oyster beds and carried occasional bulk cargoes, as did others of her type, through the 19th century. In 1894, then owned by Henry W. Schmeelk, Jr. of Greenwich, Christeen was licensed to work the Connecticut Oyster beds.¹⁴ The sloop continued to oyster and carry cargoes under sail until 1914, when a small engine was added and she was converted to an auxiliary-powered motor vessel, retaining her rig but working primarily under power, occasionally oyster dredging and carrying cargoes between Connecticut and Long Island for Capt. William Bond of Southold, New York.

In 1936, Christeen was sold on the occasion of Capt. Bond's death. The sloop worked in the New Jersey fisheries, occasionally serving as a "liveaboard" when laid up for periods of time. After a brief service as an excursion and sightseeing charter boat in the 1970s, Christeen was sold again and became a live-aboard at New London, Connecticut, when discovered and purchased by her present owners, who have restored the vessel's 1914 appearance and are now rehabilitating her to return to sail, and occasionally dredge for oysters, by the Spring of 1991.¹⁵

¹² Letter, John M. Kochiss to James P. Delgado, October 17, 1990.

¹³ License No. 45, Port of Cold Harbor, New York, May 10, 1884. National Archives Record Group 36, Records of Merchant Vessel Documentation, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴ Annual Report of the Shell-Fish Commissioners, State of Connecticut (Hartford: Fowler & Miller Co., 1894) p. 31.

¹⁵ Tradewinds Education Network, Brochure, "Oyster Sloop Christeen, 1883: A Restoration Project." (1990)

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Footnotes in text.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # _____
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other: Specify Repository: National Maritime Initiative

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than one (1) acre.

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

A 18 718815 4580795

Verbal Boundary Description:

All that area encompassed within the extreme length and breadth of the vessel.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary incorporates the entire area of the vessel as she lays at her berth.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian

Organization: National Park Service

Date: 31 October, 1990

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