

**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

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)**

**Page 1**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

Historic Name: Stephen Taber

Other Name/Site Number: Two-masted Schooner Stephen Taber

**2. LOCATION**

Street & Number: Rockland Harbor

Not for publication:       

City/Town: Rockland

Vicinity:       

State: ME County: Knox

Code: 013 Zip Code: 04841

**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

  1  

       sites

  1  

       structures

       objects

  0   Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register:   1  

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A





**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 4**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**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 X   D    

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

NHL Criteria:   1, 4

NHL Theme(s):   XXI. Business  
                   L.   Shipping & Transportation  
  
                   XIV. Transportation  
                   B.   Ships, Boats, Lighthouses & Other Structures  
  
                   XXXIII. Historic Preservation  
                   G.   Federal Gov't Enters the Movement 1884-1949  
                       5.   Growth in Professionalism & Technology  
  
                   XXXIV. Recreation  
                   E.   General Recreation  
                       3.   Other

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
Architecture (Naval)	1871-1935	1871
Maritime History	1871-1940	1871
Transportation	1871-1940	1871
Historic Preservation		1946
Recreation	1892-1940	1892

Significant Person(s):   N/A

Cultural Affiliation:    N/A

Architect/Builder:    Bedel Shipyard, Glenwood Landing, New York

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 5**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

The most common American vessel type was the two-masted coasting schooner. Developed in the mid-to-late 18th century, these vessels reached a more or less standard form by the mid-19th century, a design that continued to be built into the first decades of the 20th century. The only variation of note in the two-masted schooner, aside from the underwater form of the hull, or the lines, was the presence of a centerboard. Tens of thousands of these vessels were built and operated on the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf coasts, and on the Great Lakes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The "freight trucks" of their time, the coasting schooners carried coal, bricks, iron ore, grain, oysters, and numerous other bulk products between ports.

There are now only five surviving two-masted coasting schooners in the United States--Lewis R. French (1871), the subject of this study; Stephen Taber (1871); Governor Stone (1877); Grace Bailey (1882); and Mercantile (1916); all the subjects of separate studies.

Taber's significance lies in several areas: for her design and association with maritime history, including the fact that she is one of three remaining two-masted centerboard cargo schooners; as an example of the preservation of such vessels by adaptive use; and through maintaining a number of maritime-related skills.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statement which follows.

**CONSTRUCTION AND CAREER OF STEPHEN TABER**

In October 1871 Stephen Taber was launched into Long Island Sound from the Bedel Shipyard in Glenwood Landing, New York. Named for Stephen Taber, a banker in nearby Roslyn, Taber was built for the firm of Cox Brothers.<sup>1</sup> One brother was a merchant, the other a captain. In 1892, she was purchased by Captain Bryan Hallock of East Setauket, New York. In 1900 and 1902, apparently when the coasting trade was slow, Captain Hallock fitted out passenger accommodations belowdecks, with "ladies' accommodations" in the forward hold and chartered her to two wealthy families for the summer season.

From her launching until 1920, Taber plied the waters of New York Harbor and its environs, carrying a variety of cargoes: coal, seed oysters, brick, and lumber. Sold "downeast" to Maine in 1920, Taber operated with similar cargoes for Captain Eaton of Deer Isle in the Penobscot Bay area. She was subsequently sold to Captain Wood of Orland, Maine, and continued in the coasting

---

<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Dean, interview with Captain Orville K. Barnes, Camden, Maine, May 1990.

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 6**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

trade until 1946, when she was purchased by Captain Boyd Build of Castine, Maine, and converted to a passenger vessel.<sup>2</sup> She continued in that trade under the present ownership of Captains Orville Barnes and Ellen Barnes. She is apparently the oldest documented American sailing vessel to have seen continuous service.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent owners in the passenger trade were Captains Havilah Hawkins, Cy Cousins, Jim Sharp, Orville Young, Mike Anderson, and finally, in 1979, Captains Orville K. and Ellen Barnes.

In 1981, at the close of the summer season, the Barneses hauled Taber for a major refit. She had been rebuilt in 1900 and in 1930. Using early photographs on Taber as a guide to her original sheer, with David Johnson as foreman, the Barneses sought to do away with the "hog" which had developed over the years. Captain Orville Barnes forged much of the necessary new ironwork for the project at his Camden, Maine, forge. In mid-April 1983 the refitted Stephen Taber was relaunched.

**TABER AS A COASTING SCHOONER**

Taber is an example of the two-masted schooner used for "coasting," i.e., the transport of cargo from one Atlantic Coast port to another from the early 19th century to about the outbreak of World War II. Coasters were once "so common that nobody paid much attention the them."<sup>4</sup> However, before examining their development and function, it should be clear what these small vessels were not. Designed to run fairly close to shore, these schooners were neither fishing vessels with the ability to ride out a gale on offshore fishing grounds, nor did they ever approach the scale of the four-, five-, and six-masted great coal schooners which arose to transport that commodity from southern to northern seaports. While the occasional multi-master even made a trans-Atlantic crossing, the coasters stayed close to home. "Deepwater men often accused coastwise sailors of setting their course by the bark of a dog."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Technically speaking, Taber is the second-oldest schooner in the windjammer fleet, Lewis R. French being several months older. There is apparently some confusion over the matters of "continuous service," French having been at one time laid up, and to the extent to which French, as restored, conforms to her configuration as built in 1871.

<sup>4</sup>Nicholas Dean, interview with Captain W.J. Lewis Parker, Camden, Maine, May 1990.

<sup>5</sup>Polly Burroughs, Zeb: A Celebrated Schooner Life (Riverside, Connecticut: The Chatham Press, 1972), p. 33.

One of the earliest depictions of a schooner appears in an engraving by the Dutch artist Van de Velde, who died in 1707, which shows a two-masted vessel with a gaff-rigged sail on each mast. By 1780, Falconer's Universal Dictionary of the Marine defined a schooner as:

A small vessel with two masts, whose main-sail and fore-sail are suspended from gaffs reaching out below by booms, whose foremost ends are hooked to an iron, which clasps the mast so as to turn therein as upon an axis, when the after-ends are swung from one side of the vessel to the other.<sup>6</sup>

The origin of the term "schooner" is itself obscure. The Oxford Universal Dictionary assigns it a date of about 1716 and suggests an American origin,<sup>7</sup> while Webster's declares the word of "origin unknown."<sup>8</sup> It has also been noted that in Scotland, "to schoon" is to skim along the water.<sup>9</sup> There is a persistent bit of American folklore which attributes the word's origin to Marblehead, Massachusetts, about 1721, but later scholarship has thrown significant doubt on this theory.<sup>10</sup>

"Coasters, in the United States," according to the late Howard I. Chapelle, "have been schooners since 1800, if not earlier. The early coasting trade was carried out in vessels of all types... but the schooner gradually monopolized the trade."<sup>11</sup> It is said that "the straight fore-and-aft-rigged schooner is decidedly a coastwise vessel, and attempts to use such craft for long voyages on the high seas have invariably been disappointing and disillusioning, if not disastrous to the adventurers."<sup>12</sup> However, coasters occasionally ventured as far as the Caribbean,

---

<sup>6</sup>William Falconer, A Universal Dictionary of the Marine (London: T. Cadell, 1780), p. 257.

<sup>7</sup>The Oxford Universal Dictionary (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, third edition revised, 1955), p. 1806.

<sup>8</sup>Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield, G. & C. Merriam, 1981), p. 2031.

<sup>9</sup>Eric Partridge, Origins (New York: Greenwich House, 1983), p. 594.

<sup>10</sup>E. P. Morris, Fore-and-Aft Rig in America, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 174ff.

<sup>11</sup>Howard I. Chapelle, The National Watercraft Collection (Washington: United States National Museum, Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 258.

<sup>12</sup>William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, 1945-1955), Volume IV, p. 2608.

the American schooner Success being reported in Jamaica, bound for San Domingo in 1801.<sup>13</sup> Other surviving accounts from the later 19th century describe a considerable Caribbean trade.<sup>14</sup>

The schooner supplanted the square-rigged vessels in the coasting trade for very practical reasons:

The fore-and-aft rig came to be preferred for coasting vessels for several reasons. Fewer sailors were required to handle the vessel, and a schooner could be worked into and out of harbors and rivers more easily than any square-rigged craft. Her trips could also, as a rule, be made in quicker time, as she could sail close into the wind, and it was hardly necessary for her to sail from Maine to New York by way of the Bermudas, as some square-rigged vessels have done during baffling winds.<sup>15</sup>

Another student of schooners has comment:

Such vessels were handy, economical, and easily built of readily accessible materials, perfectly suited to their task, and their number was legion. They were the errand boys, the short-haul freight droghers, and the passenger buses for many a year, and their contribution to the coastal community life, especially in New England, was substantial.<sup>16</sup>

They were unromantic little vessels, described by a man who spent his youth in them as "no more than sea-going tipcarts, hauling their prosaic cargoes from one coastal port to another."<sup>17</sup> He added, however, that "without them the country could hardly have been settled."<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Charles S. Morgan, "New England Coasting Schooners," in E. W. Smith, ed., Workaday Schooners (Camden: International Marine Publishing, 1975), p. 158.

<sup>14</sup>Ralph H. Griffin, Jr., ed., Letters of a New England Coaster 1868-1872 (no place of publication, Ralph H. Griffin, Jr., 1968), passim.

<sup>15</sup>Henry Hall, Report on the Ship-Building Industry of the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), p. 93.

<sup>16</sup>C. S. Morgan, "New England Coasting Schooners," p. 156.

<sup>17</sup>John F. Leavitt, Wake of the Coasters (Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1970), p. 17.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 9**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The centerboard coasting schooner of Taber's type emerged in response to Atlantic Coast geography, in which most of the small ports served by the coasters required shoal draft vessels capable of getting over harbor sand bars or lurking rocks and, in the absence of elaborate wharfage, the ability to ground out at low tide.

A centerboard vessel... was designed to sail up into small harbors and coves, creeks and inlets and, with her board up, to ground out at low tide, discharge and take on cargo. Sometimes this was done via wagons across the mud flats, sometimes lying nicely against a quay or pier. With the flood tide floating her once again... (she) would be on her way... There were many such schooners in New England's harbors and roadsteads--coasting schooners, so called because of their coastwise trade routes. Unlike big corporate-owned vessels, the smaller coasters were usually owned by just one or two people, often brothers, or perhaps just a family unit, the owner and the captain one in the same man.<sup>19</sup>

Though they were the pickup trucks of the New England coast in an era before the advent of good, all-weather highways which made land transportation practical year round, and although, being ubiquitous for several generations, were largely uncommented-upon, the coasters were far from inelegant. In his 1882 Report on the Shipbuilding Industry of the United States, Henry Hall described them as "centerboard vessels with flat bottoms. In all cases, however, the models are full, the beam large, the bow sharp and long, the run clean and the sheer considerable forward." To Hall such schooners had "the jaunty air of a yacht." He observed that "schooners with sharp bottoms do not pay, and few are built."<sup>20</sup> Chapelle described them as "2-masted fore-and-aft rigged schooners 50 to 75 feet long, having short, high quarterdecks with bulwarks or turned-stanchion rails."<sup>21</sup>

Photographs of Stephen Taber towards the end of her career as a coaster show her deck piled high with cordwood, possibly delivering it to a Bucksport, Maine, paper mill.<sup>22</sup> One of the few surviving individuals who worked as a deckhand in the coasting trade, Charles Sayle, Sr., recalls hauling coal, cordwood, coke, oyster shells, and drums of oil in the 1940s aboard the two-masted Alice Wentworth under Captain Zeb Tilton. Each year Wentworth made a run across Nantucket Sound from the

---

<sup>19</sup>Orville K. Barnes, "The Stephen Taber," Sea History, No. 30 (Winter 1983), p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>H. Hall, Report, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup>H. I. Chapelle, National Watercraft Collection, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>Nicholas Dean, Barnes interview.

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 10**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

mainland to Nantucket with a load of 100 tons of coal. As Sayle recalls, approximately eight tons of coal were loaded aft for proper trim, while the remainder was carried on deck inside boards which fitted into metal stanchions. Going across the shoal by Tuckernuck Island, Wentworth's centerboard was used as a primitive depthfinder: If the centerboard "bounced," it was time to get the Wentworth back into the channel, though they "had to be careful not to twist the centerboard" in the process.<sup>23</sup>

Wood, Sayle remembers, was loaded both on deck and below, with the foresail reefed to accommodate the deck load. Loading and unloading cargo was accomplished with a boom "rigged abaft the foremast." Wentworth averaged 12 to 15 trips a year from Fairhaven to Nantucket and back.<sup>24</sup>

There was a time when spars and rigging made a commonplace pattern against the Maine sky. It was in 1938 when the last cargo-carrying schooner was launched in the State of Maine, yet today there seem to be very few who remember when the reaches and thoroughfares swarmed with coasting schooners. Perhaps that is because the sight was so taken for granted.<sup>25</sup>

Nine years after John F. Leavitt wrote the passage quoted above, there was an attempt to revive the working cargo schooner on the Maine coast. Launched in 1979, the 97-foot, two-masted John F. Leavitt obtained a cargo for the Caribbean--and was lost on her maiden voyage. In addition, though subsidized by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, in that same year students at the Maine Maritime Museum's Apprentice shop built a smaller schooner, the 42-foot Vernon Langille, and began a program of freighting firewood out to offshore islands. Langille is still afloat, but the experiment was ultimately abandoned.<sup>26</sup>

**TABER AS A MAINE WINDJAMMER**

All but three of the coasters of which Taber is an example have disappeared, the other two being Grace Bailey and Mercantile. That these have survived and earn their keep is due to the fact that in 1936, Captain Frank Swift conceived the idea of converting small two-masted cargo schooner to passenger vessels. In an early brochure, undated but probably from near the beginning of his venture, Swift offered a one week cruise for \$32 or a two week cruise for \$60 and described the trips as follows:

---

<sup>23</sup>Nicholas Dean, interview with Charles Sayle, Sr., Nantucket, Massachusetts, 8 August 1990.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>J. F. Leavitt, Wake of the Coasters, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>Jane Day, "The Return of Working Sail" Wooden Boat, No. 31 (November/December 1979), pp. 18-23.

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 11**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

These schooners are not yachts--just picturesque down-east sailing vessels, clipper bowed and able, with billowing sails and hempen rigging.

Each Monday, from July 4th until September 10th, the Annie Kimball and the Lydia Webster will sail from Camden, Maine, for a week's cruise--not to follow an exact itinerary but to use the winds and tides to make the cruise most interesting.<sup>27</sup>

There are today some 15 "windjammers," including Taber, operating along the Maine coast. They no longer carry loads of wood or granite, but, as one owner/captain remarked, "the only cargo that loads and unloads itself."<sup>28</sup> Some, like Taber, are 19th or early 20th century vessels, little changed from their original appearance and construction, while others are modern replicas. In terms of the preservation of skills in addition to the preservation of the fabric itself, a considerable infrastructure has grown up in the Camden/Rockport area. For example, Taber's refit employed an average of 10 artisans. The recent refit of the schooner Grace Bailey employed another ten over a 13 month period. During the summer months Taber employs three crew members in addition to her owners, thus aiding in preserving the skills of seamanship.

It must be emphasized that the passengers aboard Taber are not receiving "sail training" as such. They are encouraged, but not required to lend a hand as needed. It should also be emphasized, however, that whatever better understanding of their maritime heritage they may receive during their cruise, they are also helping to maintain Taber.

---

<sup>27</sup>Brochure in possession of Nicholas Dean, Edgecomb, Maine, n.d.

<sup>28</sup>Nicholas Dean, interview with Captain Douglas Lee, Rockland, Maine, May 1990.

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

A 19 491310 4883390

Verbal Boundary Description:

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

Boundary Justification:

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

**STEPHEN TABER (Schooner)****Page 13**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: Nicholas Dean; edited by James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian

Organization: National Park Service

Date: 31 October, 1990

Street &amp; Number: P.O. Box 37127

Telephone: (202) 343-9528

City or Town: Washington

State: DC

ZIP: 20013-7127