

## The Skipjack SIGSBEE

The historic Chesapeake Bay skipjack, SIGSBEE, was a well known oyster dredging boat. The historic boat was built in 1901 and continued to dredge commercially until 1993.

The first Skipjacks were known to have appeared in the late 1800's with the main purpose to dredge for oysters. "skipjacks evolved to exploit the shallower beds that had only been available before to watermen using long-handled tongs from small fishing boats". Skipjacks had a lot of qualities that assisted in oyster dredging that other boats didn't have. Such as, its single main mast this placed to hold its enormous mainsail. Its huge mainsail is built to catch as much wind as possible to drag the dredges across the bottom of the bay. Skipjacks were built like this to have as much power as possible. When dredging for oysters the most important thing is power not speed.



The Sigsbee became the first skipjack captained by a woman, Leigh Huntman, in the early 1980s. It was later sold to Doug West and sunk during a skipjack race in 1991. In 1994, the boat was rebuilt to carry passengers across the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays. The Sigsbee currently "sails as part of the Living Classrooms Foundation's educational fleet, serving thousands of students per year today, sailing trips in the Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware



river, where participants learn the history of skipjacks and the oyster industry, marine and nautical science". The Living Classroom Foundation now owns the boat and teaches students about ecology, history of the Chesapeake, and the importance of taking care of our waters. The Living Classroom Foundation wants to ensure we preserve Skipjacks so they can continue to teach kids in the future about the rich maritime history surrounding the harbor. To make sure this happens, they conduct educational trips to teach youth how to properly sail traditional sailboats.

The sailors aboard Sigsbee even still dredge for oysters, but only for educational purposes. Overall, the sigsbee was a powerful ship that committed to many years of oyster dredging and now serves as a classroom to teach future generations about the history of the beautiful ship.

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References:

[The Last Skipjack Project](#)  
[Historical Marker Data Base](#)