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# Building Peapods

Eric Dow

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Story: "Building Peapods"

Story Teller: Eric Dow

Town: Brooklin, ME

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Collector: Pauleena MacDougall

Date: March 2, 2004

Eric Dow is one of many boatbuilders, not only in the State of Maine, but more specifically in the town of Brooklin. In the clip heard here, he talks about how he came to build the type of boat known as a "Peapod." Peapods were invented along the Maine coast, with some evidence suggesting the island of North Haven (circa 1870) as the point of origin, though other Maine islands and coastal communities have been important to its evolution. The peapod is a double-ended row boat (and they were originally known as "double-enders" with "peapod" developing later because of their appearance) usually made of wood, though fiberglass models have been available since the early 1980s and the boat can be equipped with a sail. This basic design developed differently along the coast with slight variations in the lines and shape of the hull. This was sometimes done intentionally and at other times (as Dow explains here) the result of other factors.

Peapods were designed for inshore lobster fishing, as their shallow draft and easy maneuverability allowed them to travel in the rocky Maine waters where larger boats could not go. With two ends, they were easily rowed in both directions, and lobstermen commonly rowed while standing. Their remarkable seaworthiness and strength made them popular among more than just lobstermen: lighthouse keepers, anglers, those in need of a tender for a larger ship, and even people looking for a pleasure boat (which is largely how they maintain their popularity even today).

The following transcript is a short segment of a much longer and wider-ranging interview. The full transcript is available on the Maine Folklife Center's website along with two more interviews about Maine's boatbuilding tradition at <http://umaine.edu/folklife/research/maine-boatbuilding-traditions/>. A few details will help explain the conversation. Jimmy Steele was a very well respected and influential boatbuilder in Brooklin until he passed away March 1, 2007. Naskeag Point is located just south of Brooklin on the end of Blue Hill Peninsula. It was the site of a 1778 Revolutionary War battle.

Eric Dow: ...as far as anything like the peapod that I was mentioning is, is a Maine coast invention; to pin it to one particular place would be hard to do.

Pauleena MacDougall: Yes, there were people making peapods in different parts of the coast.

E.D.: Yes, there were.

P.M.: And they are all pretty much the same.

E.D.: No they vary. Jimmy Steele has a shop down the road from here and builds a thirteen and a half foot peapod, which is the length of mine, but they're completely different.

P.M.: Really? How are they different?

E.D.: Just the shape of the hull. You wouldn't think a double-ended boat of a given length could be as different, but mine has more, the ends come up more plum, just not as wide. The whole shape, all the

lines are quite different.

P.M.: Where did you get your lines for your boat?

E.D.: I took the lines off of an old Deer Isle peapod that would be probably close to a 100 years old now. It belonged to a man down in Naskeag Point here in Brooklin and his neighbor wanted one built like that. He was really struck by the looks of that boat so I took the lines off it as best as I could. This was early on in my boat building and now I can take a very accurate set of lines, but at that point by the time I got done taking lines it was a slightly different boat and built that one for him and then decided I wanted to stay building peapods for a time. Every year I would set up to build, I would make some changes, refinements.

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Sources and more information: *Maine Boats, Homes, & Harbors* "Evolution of the Maine Lobsterboat" feature: <http://www.maineboats.com/online/boat-features/evolution-maine-lobsterboat>; Eric Dow's shop: <http://www.dowboats.com/>; & Jimmy Steele's shop: <http://www.downeastpeapods.com/index.php>.

Maine Folklife Center