

....This remarkable little boat has a history which does not reach very far back into the present century....I have been able to rescue from oblivion and bring to the light of day a correct history of the Barnegat sneak-box.

Captain Hazelton Seaman, of West Creek village, New Jersey, a boat-builder and expert shooter of wild-fowl, about the year 1836, conceived the idea of constructing for his own use a low-decked boat, or gunning-punt, in which when its deck was covered with sedge, he could secrete himself from the wild-fowl while gunning in Barnegat and Little Egg Harbor bays.

....During the Winter months, when the great marshes were at times encrusted with snow, and the shallow creeks covered with ice, -obstacles which must be crossed to reach the open waters of the sound, -it would be necessary to use her as a sled, to effect which end a pair of light oaken strips were screwed to the bottom of the sneak-box, when she could be easily pushed by the gunner, and the transportation of the oars, sail, blankets, guns, ammunition, and provisions(all of which stowed under the hatch and locked up snugly as if in a strong chest)became a very simple matter. While secreted in his boat, on watch for fowl, with his craft hidden by a covering of grass or sedge, the gunner could approach within shooting distance of a flock of unsuspecting ducks; and this being done in a sneaking manner....the baymen gave her the sobriquet of "SNEAK-BOX".

....The boat has no sheer, and sets low in the water. This lack of sheer is supplied by a light canvas apron which is tacked to the deck, and presents, when stretched upward by a stick two feet in length, a convex surface to head a sea. The water which breaks upon the deck, forward of the cockpit, is turned off at the sides of the boat in almost the same manner as a snow-plough clears a railroad track of snow.

....The peculiar advantages of the sneak-box were known to but a few of the hunting and shooting fraternity, and with the exception of an occasional visitor, were used only by the oysterman, fisherman, and wild-fowl shooters of Barnegat and Little Egg Harbor bays, until the New Jersey Southern Railroadpenetrated to the eastern shores of New Jersey, when educated amateur sportsmen from the cities quickley recognized in the little gunning-punt all they had long desired to combine in one small boat....

1879

FOUR MONTHS IN A SNEAK-BOX

NATHANIEL H. BISHOP

