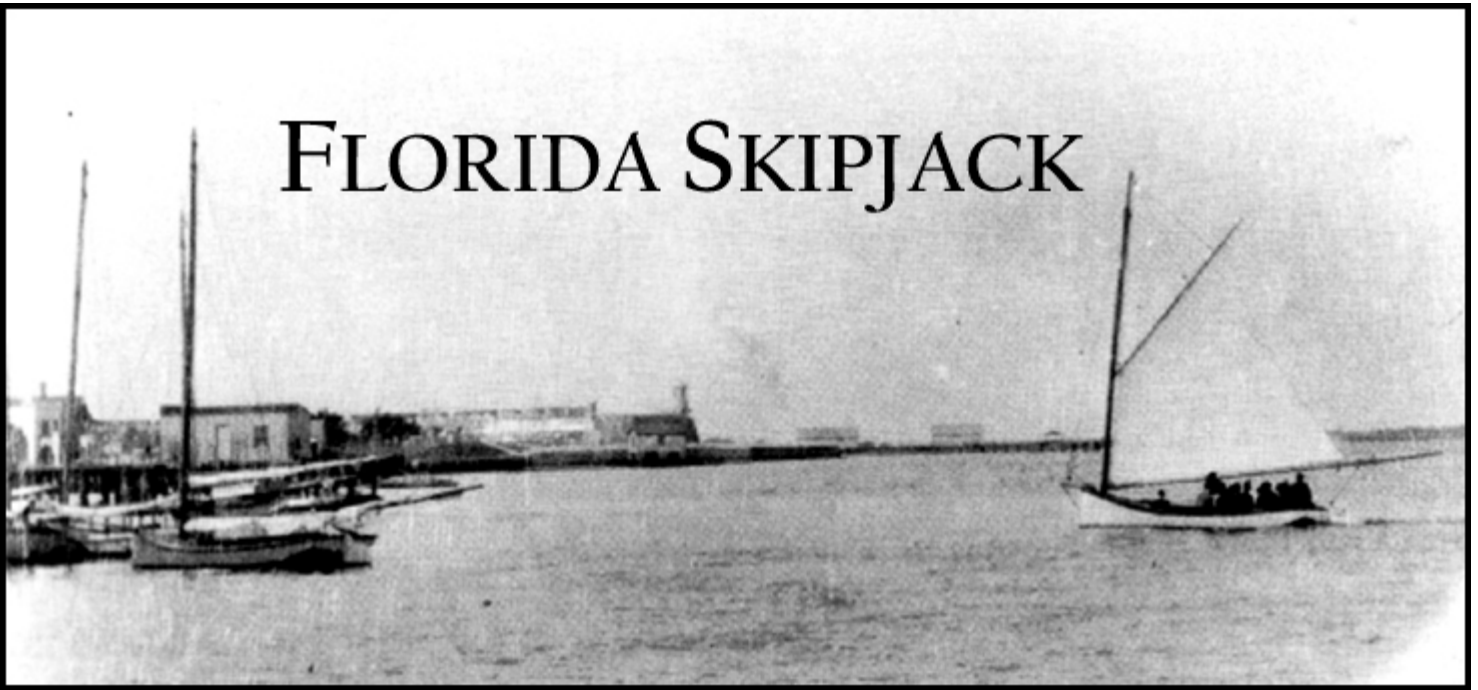


FLORIDA SKIPJACK



Florida Skipjack, 1870 - 20th Century



Taken circa 1884, this Florida skipjack is tied up in the St. Augustine municipal boat basin. The basin was located where the western terminus of the Bridge of Lions is currently located. This boat was used to haul produce and oranges to the city from outlying farms and groves. Note the forward-stepped mast and long boom, typical of the skipjack. She is also outfitted with a plank bowsprit to carry a jib. Her deck carries a small cabin, seen on some of the larger skipjacks.

Florida skipjacks were first built and used by commercial shad fishermen on the St. Johns River. These centerboard sailing vessels were characterized by a V-shaped, chine-built, sawn-frame hull with a sharp bow and with the chine rising very high on the stern. With their hull planks (cross planking) running lengthwise rather than side-to-side and lacking the Baltimore clipper bow, they differed markedly in construction and shape from the more famous Chesapeake skipjack. In addition to being swift and handy craft, they were able to handle a heavy deck loads for cargo service. By the 1880s, Florida skipjacks dominated the St. Johns shad fishery and had become the most common type of small sailing craft in Northeast Florida other than the bateau. In addition to their use as rugged working craft, skipjacks were prized as pleasure and racing yachts and they are the most frequently seen type in historic photographs of the St. Augustine Yacht Club. Similar craft were used on Long Island Sound and the sound country of coastal North Carolina and this style may have migrated south from one or both of these areas. Florida skipjacks lasted well into the 20th century and many were converted to power. A typical skipjack, such as this one pictured in the top photo, sailing off St. Augustine's waterfront in the late 1800s, was gaff-rigged and might measure 18 to 20'

long, 7 to 8' wide, and draw as little as 15" when fully loaded. Top photograph courtesy of the [St. Augustine Historical Society](#), lower photograph courtesy of the [Florida Memory Collection](#).